

Zeitschrift: Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Vereinigung für Altertumswissenschaft

Band: 61 (2004)

Heft: 3

Artikel: Tacitus, Histories 2,4,4 and Mucianus' Legions in 69

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-47114>

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Tacitus, *Histories* 2,4,4 and Mucianus' Legions in 69

By Gwyn Morgan, Austin

This paper has two purposes: first, to revive a conjecture advanced by Georg Andresen a century ago as the likeliest solution to a locus desperatus in Tacitus' comments on the legions commanded in 69 by the governor of Syria, C. Licinius Mucianus; second, to offer historical and literary reasons that support this conjecture, reasons ignored by Andresen since he was concerned solely with textual and contextual aspects¹. In essence, the two emendations most widely accepted today may look obvious, but they require Tacitus to talk nonsense. If we take into account the record and reputation of these legions, however, we can arrive at a reading that not only allows Tacitus to say something sensible, but also produces a sentence the substance of which is confirmed by three more details in his narrative of the Flavian uprising against Vitellius.

Commenting on the situation that prevailed supposedly at the start of 69², Tacitus sets up a contrast between Mucianus' legions and those of Vespasian. He stresses the experience of the latter and the envy or rivalry felt by the former, and what he seems to have wanted to say is that this envy or rivalry galvanized Mucianus' troops into activity, and that their vigour was increased by the absence of distractions and by some kind of emotional response, itself prompted by or resulting from their own inexperience of war:

tres, ut supra memoravimus, ipsi Vespasiano legiones erant, exercitae bello; quattuor Mucianus obtinebat in pace, sed aemulatio et proximi exercitus gloria depulerat segnitiam, quantumque illis roboris discrimina et labor, tantum his vigoris addiderat integra quies et inexperti belli †labor†.

labor M, *labores* L, *fabor* U, *ardor* Rhenanus, *amor* Orelli, *rubor* Andresen, *alii alia*

- 1 G. Andresen, *In Taciti Historias studia critica et palaeographica*, II (Berlin 1900) 3; cf. *WklPh* 31 (1914) 1059. His enthusiasm waned later ("zu Tacitus", *WklPh* 32 [1915] 526, "noch nicht sicher emendiert", and below, note 9). The only editor to follow Andresen, so far as I know, was F. G. Moore, *The Histories of Tacitus, Books I and II* (New York 1910), and he gave no reasons for doing so.
- 2 In our passage, as at *Hist.* 1,10,1, Tacitus makes Mucianus commander of four legions (III Gallica, IV Scythica, VI Ferrata and XII Fulminata). These were the units he took over from his predecessor, C. Cestius Gallus, late in 67, but III Gallica was transferred to Moesia *sub exitu Neronis* (Suet. *Vesp.* 6,3). Tacitus reports not only its successful campaign against the Rhoxolani in the winter of 68/69 (*Hist.* 1,79), but also that Vespasian continued to count it as his own (*Hist.* 2,74,1). Hence the *nine* legions at *Hist.* 2,76,4, a passage to which we shall return.

Of the three options open to us³, the first – to defend one or another of the manuscript readings – is impossible. So far as concerns the Mediceus' *labor*, there is no point in trying to minimize the awkwardness of the word's repetition after the preceding *discrimina et labor*⁴. Nor need we dismiss *inexpertus belli labor* as "an oxymoron scarcely to be tolerated"⁵. What precludes our accepting this text is the fact that *labor* fails conspicuously to generate an antithesis of the kind the rest of the sentence demands. Just as *quantumque illis roboris* is picked up by *tantum his vigoris*, and just as *discrimina* is picked up by *integra quies*, so the first *labor* needs to be picked up by something less feeble than *inexpertus belli labor*⁶. The antithesis is no plainer if we use a plural form instead of a singular, and that disposes of the Leidensis' *labores*. And while we could regard *labor*, the reading of Urbinas Latinus 412, as a scribal error for *favor*, that too solves nothing⁷. Tacitus does not talk elsewhere of *favor* for anything inanimate, certainly not for war, only of *favor* felt by people or towards people⁸. Unless we settle for obelizing *labor*⁹, we must seek a solution elsewhere.

Our second option is to tinker with the text in one fashion or another. We could change some grammatical cases, and produce formulations like Ritter's *inexpertus belli labor* and *inexpertis belli laboribus*, or Wurm's *inexpertis belli laborum*¹⁰. Not that there is any justification for doing such violence to the text. We could assume that the scribe inserted an extra syllable gratuitously and from *labores* produce *labes*¹¹. But that noun Tacitus uses only once elsewhere, when M. Antonius Primus upbraids the Pannonian legions under his command,

3 L. Valmaggi, *P. Cornelio Tacito: il libro secondo delle Storie* (Turin 1897) 192f.

4 F. Ritter, *Cornelii Taciti Annales*, vol. 2 (Cambridge/London 1848) 109f., note on *Ann.* 13,2,1.

5 W. A. Spooner, *Cornelii Taciti Historiarum Libri* (London 1891) 198, after J. G. Orelli, *Cornelii Taciti Historiae* (Zürich 1848) 86.

6 It might be objected that *discrimina et labor*, itself a combination favoured by Tacitus (cf. *Agr.* 8,2), parallels his tendency to combine *labor* with *periculum* or *pericula* (cf. *Agr.* 18,5; *Germ.* 18,3; *Hist.* 1,51,1; 2,69,2; 3,84,1), and so constitutes a hendiadys. It does not follow that one word or phrase must respond to it. Similarly, to discern a chiasmus here (below, note 17) throws off the overall balance of the sentence.

7 Fr. Jacob, *Observationes Taciteae* II (Programm, Lübeck 1842) 2 first proposed *favor* (non vidi). He was followed by F. Ritter, *P. Cornelii Taciti Opera* (Leipzig 1864) and *Philologus* 21 (1864) 645f., and by E. Koestermann in his Teubner editions of 1936, 1950, 1957 and 1961. There is no warrant for changing the first *labor* to *favor*, as does Ingeborg Schinzel, *P. Cornelii Taciti Historiarum Lib. II, WS Beiheft 3* (Wien/Köln/Graz 1971).

8 A. Gerber/A. Greef, *Lexicon Taciteum* (Leipzig 1903) 453a.

9 So Orelli (above, note 5) 86; C. D. Fisher, *Taciti Historiae* (Oxford 1911); C. Halm/G. Andresen, *Taciti Historiae* (Leipzig 1914).

10 See respectively F. Ritter, *Cornelii Taciti Historiae* (Cambridge/London 1848) 104f. and the app. crit. to his third edition (above, note 7); E. Wurm, "Emendata in Taciti Annalibus et Historiis", *Philologus* 8 (1853) 365.

11 Andresen was aware of this possibility in 1900 (above, note 1). It was taken up in earnest by M. Lenchantin de Gubernatis (Turin 1918: non vidi). K. Büchner, *Studien zur römischen Literatur* IV, *Tacitus und Ausklang* (Wiesbaden 1964) 88 n. 6 and 157f. also adopted *labes*, but he argued for homoeoarchon from *labor*.

pointing out that *illos esse campos, in quibus abolere labem prioris ignominiae, ubi recipere gloriam possent* (*Hist.* 3,24,1). It might seem tempting to argue that the figurative uses of *labes* carry with them too strong a rhetorical colouring, as is evident from Cicero's speeches and from Livy too, but this need not be a disqualification¹². The fatal objection is that there is no discernible antithesis between *labor* and *labes*. So, one more possibility, we could excise *labor* altogether and construct a sentence out of what remains. This led Lipsius to propose *inexpertis belli*, Heinsius *ut inexpertis belli*, Acidalius *et inexperta belli*, Nipperdey *inexpertum bellum*, and Eussner *inexpertum belli*¹³. But whatever merit these suggestions may be said to possess, they founder on two difficulties. The first, pointed out by Andresen, is that such phrasings add nothing to the idea conveyed by *integra quies*, and this becomes all the more compelling if we allow that that expression denotes less "unbroken peace" than the unbroken absence of combat conditions (*discrimina*), enabling Mucianus' troops without distraction to display their vigour in drills and training exercises¹⁴. The second is a stylistic observation by Heubner, that after *integra quies* "ist ein dreigliedriger Ausdruck höchst wahrscheinlich"¹⁵.

This leaves the option of substituting another word for *labor*. Here we are faced with two choices. We can contend, on the one hand, that *labor* is the result of the scribe's eye picking up the noun from two lines earlier in the manuscript (though many discussions obscure the point, it needs emphasizing that in the Mediceus a full line intervenes between the two examples of the word), and so that there is no guarantee that the word in the archetype for which the scribe substituted *labor* was in any way similar to it. If this were so, any noun thought capable of generating the requisite contrast could be advanced without a qualm. Hence offerings like *aviditas* (Koestermann), *casus* (Heraeus), *imago* (Höfer) and *commoda* (Giarratano)¹⁶. Of these, however, *commoda* alone produces a plausible antithesis of the kind needed. For *commoda* can be regarded

12 P. Flury, *ThesLL* VII 2 (1970), 768–773, esp. 771f. collects the evidence. Livy's usage is well illustrated by 4,32,7; 40,8,7; and 45,5,11. As we shall see, *rubor* possesses a similar coloration.

13 C. Nipperdey, *Emendationes Historiarum Taciti* (Diss. Jena 1855) 7 = *Opuscula* (Berlin 1877) 207, accepted by C. Heraeus, *Tacitus, Historiae, Buch 1–2* (Leipzig 1872) 125 and Ed. Wolff, *P. Cornelii Taciti Historiae, Buch I–II* (Berlin 1886) 150; A. Eussner, "zu Tacitus", *Philologus* 46 (1888) 433.

14 Andresen (above, note 1) 3. In Tacitus *quies* is a capacious word (cf. Gerber/Greef [above, note 8] 1323–1324), sometimes conveying the notion that a person is not performing his main function, to participate in public life if he is a senator (cf. *Hist.* 2,86,3), and if he is a soldier, to fight wars. For the drills to which troops could be subjected in peacetime see R. W. Davies, "The daily life of the Roman soldier under the Principate", *ANRW* II 1 (Berlin 1974) 299–338 = *Service in the Roman Army* (Edinburgh 1989) 33–68.

15 H. Heubner, *P. Cornelius Tacitus, Die Historien*. Band II: *Zweites Buch* (Heidelberg 1968) 40.

16 Koestermann proposed *aviditas* in the app. crit. to his Teubner editions of 1957 and 1961. For *casus* see W. Heraeus, *Tacitus, Historiae, Buch 1–2* (Leipzig 1899) 133f. G. Hofer's Gymnasium-Programm (Lübeck 1839) I have not seen. C. Giarratano, *Cornelii Taciti Historiae* (Rome 1939).

as the fruits of *labor*, and as any number of passages show, *labor* is contrasted often enough with its fruits, be they solid (*otium; praemia*) or intangible (*laus; gloria*)¹⁷. But presumably because such a solution looks too arbitrary, a majority of scholars have settled for a more economical conclusion, that the scribe is guilty of homoeoteleuton. That is, he misread as *labor* another third declension noun ending in *-or*, a noun denoting some kind of emotional response by the troops, caused by or resulting from their own lack of experience. Not that agreement goes further than this. Eight such emotions have been suggested, four positive (*amor, ardor, calor* and *honor*), and four negative (*angor, dolor, pudor* and *rubor*).

Of the four positive responses two can be dismissed in short order, *calor* and *honor*. Although the former is not as far-fetched as it may appear, its originator, Ritter, abandoned it after his first edition, and there is no need once again to take up the cudgels in his behalf¹⁸. Similarly, *honor* was only floated as a possibility by its originator, Spooner¹⁹. This leaves *ardor* and *amor*, both of which can be said to have the Vergilian colouring on which Tacitus dotes (see, e.g., *Aen.* 4,581 and 7,550). The former, proposed originally by Rhenanus, has won the wider acceptance²⁰. Yet Tacitus himself follows Livian usage elsewhere and talks of *ardor pugnae* (*Hist.* 2,42,1) or *ardor pugnandi* (*Hist.* 2,23,2), but when it comes to war and peace, he resorts to *amor belli* (*Hist.* 2,37,2) and *pacis amor* (*Hist.* 5,16,3)²¹. To what extent this prompted Orelli to suggest *amor* in his apparatus criticus is unclear, but it seems to have been one of the reasons why later editors took it into the text²². No doubt the preference for *ardor* owes

- 17 Like W. Heraeus in his defence of *casus*, Giarratano assumed a chiasmus and opposed *commoda* to *discrimina*. As he put it, *commoda* would produce the effect “ut, sicut integra quies labori, commoda pacis discriminibus belli opponerentur”. But aside from any other objections (above, note 6), Tacitus uses *commoda* very infrequently: Gerber/Greef (above, note 8) 192a.
- 18 F. Ritter, *C. Cornelii Taciti Historiae* (Bonn 1836) 69. In his support Orelli (above, note 5) 86 adduced Statius, *Ach.* 2,207–208 (1,881–882) and Lucan 2,324–325. He could have added Florus’ hapax, *calor in proeliando* (1,45,13).
- 19 Spooner (above, note 5) 198, printing *dolor*.
- 20 See F. Haase, *Cornelii Taciti Opera* (Leipzig 1855); Valmaggi (above, note 3) 192f.; Ed. Wolff, *P. Cornelii Taciti Historiae, Buch I–II* (Berlin ²1914) 187; K. Wellesley, *Gnomon* 37 (1965) 702f. and his Teubner edition (Leipzig 1989); Heubner (above, note 15) 40 and his Teubner edition (Stuttgart 1978); Schinzel (above, note 7); G. E. F. Chilver, *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus’ Histories I and II* (Oxford 1979) 167; H. Le Bonniec and J. Hellegouarc’h, *Tacite, Histoires Livres II & III* (“Budé”, Paris 1989) 5 and 154 n. 8.
- 21 Though Heubner (above, note 15) 40 invokes Livy 24,45,4 and 34,1,3 for *ardor belli*, in both passages the noun denotes “heat” or “high point” (*in medio ardore belli*). In a majority of the other 39 cases where Livy uses the noun, it applies to actual combat. Hence *ardor ad dimicandum* (4,47,3; 44,36,3); *ardor certaminis* (10,41,1; 24,39,6), *ardor pugnae* (23,46,2; 35,5,5; 40,31,7 and 32,5), and *ardor pugnandi* (2,45,9). Livy nowhere employs *amor belli*, but *pacis amor* appears at 9,19,17.
- 22 See the second, third and fourth editions of the *Histories* by C. Halm (Leipzig 1863, 1874, 1883); Gerber/Greef (above, note 8) 75a, 299a and 736a; C. Heraeus, *Tacitus, Historiae, Buch I–2* (Leipzig ⁴1885) 141; H. Goelzer, *Oeuvres de Tacite: Les Histoires I–II* (Paris 1920) 183 and *Tacite: Histoires I–III* (“Budé”, Paris 1946) 81.

something to its obvious link with *vigor* (cf. *Hist.* 2,99,1), but in recent discussions it has rested primarily on the conviction that Tacitus is echoing a topos found in Pindar (frag. 110: γλυκὺ δ' ἀπείροισι πόλεμος), in Thucydides (1,80,1 and 2,8,1), and yet again in Vegetius (3,12: *inexpertis ... dulcis est pugna*)²³.

This is not to argue for *amor* rather than *ardor*. There is a more serious problem altogether, namely, that both proposals have Tacitus talking nonsense. It is one thing to observe that the historian has erred in crediting Mucianus with four legions at the start of 69 instead of the three he actually commanded. It is quite another to have him asserting that these legions were “untested in war” or “untested in a war”. Such statements are true only in the narrowest sense. The three units at Mucianus' disposal, that is, had not experienced war *recently*, certainly not in the fifteen months or so since Mucianus had assumed command late in 67. But legionaries served with the standards for twenty years or more, and Tacitus emphasizes later that a sizeable percentage of the men in all three units had been based in Syria for years (*Hist.* 2,80,3). So many of the men must have participated in the Parthian campaigns that occupied much of Nero's reign, and a somewhat smaller number must have been involved also in Cestius Gallus' unsuccessful attempt to suppress the Jewish Revolt before it got out of hand²⁴.

We could keep *amor* or *ardor* by supposing that Tacitus chose momentarily to sacrifice substance to style, and so to present Mucianus' men as the rawest of recruits in order to create a forceful antithesis with Vespasian's battle-hardened veterans. But there is another, more plausible way out of the dilemma, to recognize that Tacitus is talking about a specific war. Since Latin lacks a definite article, in other words, *inexperti belli* can denote equally well “the war they had not experienced”. And if we pursue this line of thought, the war in question cannot be the up-coming struggle with Vitellius, even though that supposedly dominated everybody's thoughts at the time (cf. *Hist.* 2,6,2), and was precisely the conflict to whose successful outcome Titus would shortly contribute by bringing back from Cyprus an oracle that gave everybody great confidence (*Hist.* 2,4,2: *suspensis provinciarum et exercituum mentibus ingens rerum fiducia accessit*). On that score there was no difference between the troops in Judaea and those in Syria, as Vespasian himself would later reflect (*Hist.* 2,75, *suas legiones civili bello inexpertas*). This leaves only Vespasian's campaign against the Jewish re-

23 The point is made explicitly by Wellesley, *Gnomon* 37 (1965) 702f. and by Chilver (above, note 20) 167; cf. also Wolff (above, note 20) 187.

24 This point is in no way undermined by the likelihood that Corbulo had let go legionaries who were over-age or otherwise incapacitated from the three legions later entrusted to Mucianus, IV Scythica, VI Ferrata and XII Fulminata (for the evidence, such as it is, see L. Keppie, “Colonisation and veteran settlement in Italy in the first century A.D.”, *PBSR* 52 [1984] 81–86). If he did, he did so during the winter of 59/60, and even their replacements would have put in some eight years of soldiering by the start of 69.

bels²⁵, and for that Mucianus' legions are likely to have felt neither *ardor* nor *amor*. What they could have felt, however, is a negative emotion, spurred by the *aemulatio* Tacitus has mentioned in the preceding clause. Here it does not matter whether Vespasian had broken the back of the revolt, nor whether his army could claim much glory before they actually captured Jerusalem (*Hist.* 2,4,3: *profligaverat bellum Iudaicum Vespasianus, obpugnatione Hierosolymorum reliqua*). What counts is that not one of Mucianus' three legions had been chosen to participate in the war and to win such glory as went with the victories gained so far.

As remarked already, four negative emotions have been suggested. *angor*, *dolor*, *pudor* and *rubor*. Of these Heller's *angor* need not detain us: the noun is found not at all in Sallust, only once in Livy (5,48,3) and only once in Tacitus (*Ann.* 2,42,3), and neither passage offers a parallel for *angor belli*²⁶. Where sense is concerned, the other three suggestions look more attractive. Heinisch's *dolor*, or it may have been Meiser's ("disappointment" or "resentment"), has attracted a following of sorts²⁷. Novák's *pudor* has not, surprisingly, when it is the word Tacitus uses most frequently to describe any sense of shame among soldiery²⁸. Indeed, we could argue that it is the noun most appropriate to the context, inasmuch as it describes an emotion, felt from within or imposed from without, whereas Andresen's *rubor* (which has at least won over one editor) denotes primarily the external manifestation of that emotion²⁹. Again, *rubor* is not particularly Vergilian, but in Livy at least it possesses a rhetorical coloration that lends it more weight than *pudor* might possess³⁰. And Tacitus himself says of legion XVI that when, having surrendered to the rebels, it was ordered to Treves by a specific date, *medium omne tempus per varias curas egere, ignavissimus quisque caesorum apud Vetera exemplo paventes, melior pars rubore et infamia* (*Hist.* 4,62,1). So we cannot rule out the possibility that in our passage too Tacitus is laying stress not just on the soldiery's shame but on the visible evidence for it.

25 Cf. Ritter (above, note 18) 69; Chilver (above, note 20) 167.

26 H. J. Heller, "Beiträge zur Kritik und Erklärung der Taciteischen Werke", *Philologus* 51 (1892) 334. Glossing *angor* "Eifersucht", Heller adduced only passages with *anxius*, e.g., *Hist.* 3,50,2.

27 Usually attributed to Meiser's 1888 revision of Orelli's edition, *dolor* seems to have been suggested first by Heinisch in a Programm (Glaz 1853). I have seen neither work, gleaning these details from K. Wellesley, *Cornelii Taciti Historiarum Libri* (Leipzig 1989) 190. The reading was adopted by A. D. Godley, *The Histories of Tacitus, Books I and II* (London 1887) 62 and 197, Spooner (above, note 5) 198, and A. L. Irvine, *Tacitus: Histories Books I & II* (London 1952) 61 and 150.

28 I have not seen Novák's edition (Prague 1892). Tacitus uses *pudor* 18 times in the *Histories* (Gerber/Greef [above, note 8] 1234–1235), and in almost every instance soldiers are involved; *rubor* – as we shall see – he employs only in three other passages in this work.

29 See R. A. Kaster, "The shame of the Romans", *TAPhA* 127 (1997) 1–19.

30 For Vergil see *Georg.* 1,430; 3,307 and 315; *Aen.* 12,66 (he resorts to *pudor* nine times, eight of them in the *Aeneid*). Livy shows only five instances of *rubor* (4,35,11; 30,15,1; 34,2,8; 45,13,14 and 37,14) as against 60 of *pudor*.

Whatever explanation we adopt for Tacitus' using *rubor*, however, the fact remains that palaeographically it is the word closest to the Mediceus' *labor*, as Andresen recognized. It is not really very plausible to hold that the scribe's eye slipped two full lines: repetitions of any given word tend to occur much closer together³¹. Nor can it be contended that the scribe was unfamiliar with *rubor*. Not only had he encountered it four times already (*Ann.* 11,17,2; 13,15,2; 14,55,5; *Hist.* 1,30,1), but there is also no hint that he misread the word either in these passages or in the two that occur later in the *Histories* (4,7,1 and 62,1). What can be argued, however, is that in all the six passages enumerated the gist of the narrative is easy to grasp. There are obvious clues that the subject-matter involves shame and disgrace, whereas the point being made in our passage is anything but clear – as is demonstrated by the very glut of emendations that have been proposed. In the circumstances, it would have been much easier for the scribe to manufacture *labor* out of *rubor* than it would have been for him to produce it out of *amor*, *ardor*, *pudor* or any of the other alternatives editors have put up.

Admittedly, Wellesley declared flatly that "Mucianus' troops had no reason to be ashamed of their enforced lack of active service", while Chilver asserted that "*rubor* or *pudor* would introduce an unnecessary complication, for there was no reason for the Syrian legions to feel guilt about a war they had never been asked to join"³². This misrepresents the situation. The three Syrian legions had every reason to feel shame *because* they had not been picked for the war. During the campaigns against the Parthians both IV Scythica and XII Fulminata had been involved in the disgrace of Caesennius Paetus' surrender at Rhandaia in 62³³. Nor did Corbulo use them thereafter for his own campaigns, reducing them to a garrison force for Syria³⁴. Instead he summoned *vexillationes* not only from the legions in Illyricum but also from the two units in Egypt, III Cyrenaica and XXII Deiotariana, units whose primary function was to keep order in Alexandria³⁵.

On this disgrace there followed another. When Cestius Gallus attempted unsuccessfully to quash the Jewish revolt, he took with him XII Fulminata in its entirety and *vexillationes* of 2,000 men "from each of the other legions" (Josephus, *BJ* 2,500). Theoretically, Gallus could have called on six units in the general area, III Gallica, IV Scythica, V Macedonica, VI Ferrata, X Fretensis

31 See G. Andresen, "zu Tacitus", *WklPh* 32 (1915) 525–526.

32 Wellesley (above, note 23) 703; Chilver (above, note 20) 167.

33 Tacitus, *Ann.* 15,6,3 and 10–16; cf. Dio 62,21 and Suet. *Nero* 39,1.

34 Tacitus, *Ann.* 15,26,1; L. Keppie, "Legions in the East from Augustus to Trajan", in P. Freeman/D. Kennedy (edd.), *The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East*, BAR International Series 297 (Oxford 1986) 2,416.

35 Tacitus, *Ann.* 15, 26, 2; cf. R. Saxer, *Untersuchungen zu den Vexillationen des römischen Kaiserheeres von Augustus bis Diokletian*, Epigraphische Studien 1 = BJ Beiheft 18 (Köln/Graz 1967) 12.

and XV Apollinaris, but the roster was probably much shorter. It may even have been limited to the other three legions he handed over to Mucianus late in 67, III Gallica, IV Scythica and VI Ferrata³⁶. What matters for our immediate purposes is, first, that a *vexillatio* was drawn from VI Ferrata, since it is mentioned specifically by Josephus (*BJ* 2,544), and second, that XII Fulminata lost its eagle in this affray (Suet. *Vesp.* 4,5; cf. Josephus, *BJ* 7,18). True, the latter statement has been disputed, largely on the ground that a unit suffering so signal a disgrace should have been disbanded forthwith³⁷. But though a handful of conspicuous offenders may have been cashiered, large-scale dismissals were inconceivable throughout the sixties. Whether the Roman command intended delaying punishment or putting it off altogether (to this point we shall return), it had to keep under arms as many men as possible. There was the need to ensure against any breakdown in the agreements reached with the Parthians, an issue settled only when Tiridates turned up in Rome in 66, to receive the crown of Armenia from Nero's hands. And at the same time there were the preparations to be made for the emperor's eastern expeditions³⁸.

Between 62 and 66, then, IV Scythica suffered two setbacks (one major and one minor), XII Fulminata incurred major disgrace on two separate occasions, and even VI Ferrata was not blameless. We cannot assert that this was the only reason why none of the three legions was assigned to Vespasian in 67. The record of VI Ferrata, after all, was probably no worse than that of III Gallica, and the latter was sent to Moesia to counter the Rhoxolani around the time of Nero's death. Besides, there was no virtue in moving legions around the board as an end in itself. But an awareness of their past failures – and a suspicion that they were being lumped together as second-class units – will not have comforted Mucianus' troops when they saw the *bellum Iudaicum* entrusted to V Macedonica, X Fretensis and XV Apollinaris, especially when XV Apollinaris had to be brought back from Alexandria in Egypt for the job³⁹. The result was a situation in which III Gallica covered itself with glory by defeating the Rhoxolani during the winter of 68/69 (*Hist.* 1,79), V Macedonica, X Fretensis and

36 Saxer (above, note 35) 12 gives the full roster; Keppie (above, note 34) 417 is much more cautious; and Ritterling, *RE* 12 (1925) 1258, 1574f. and 1750 rules out V Macedonica and XV Apollinaris, though he includes X Fretensis (ibid. 1672). III Gallica was definitely in Armenia under Corbulo in 64/65 (*CIL* III 6741–6743; *ILS* 232), but whether it was transferred to Syria before or after Cestius Gallus' expedition, it probably contributed a *vexillatio* to his expedition (cf. Ritterling 1520f.).

37 See Ritterling (above, note 36) 1706; A. W. Braithwaite, *Suetoni Divus Vespasianus* (Oxford 1927) 31. For the contrary view see Keppie (above, note 34) 417.

38 For the need to keep up troop strengths see W. Schur, *Die Orientpolitik des Kaisers Nero* (Leipzig 1923) 94ff., Keppie (above, note 34) 416ff., and M. Heil, *Die orientalische Außenpolitik des Kaisers Nero* (Munich 1997) 190ff. On Nero's expeditions see now Heil 159ff.

39 The argument that Titus fetched XV Apollinaris from Alexandria ad Issum has been demolished by Schur (above, note 38) 98ff., Keppie (above, note 34) 418, and A. Barzanò, "Tiberio Giulio Alessandro, Prefetto d'Egitto (66/70)", *ANRW* II 10, 1 (Berlin 1988) 573–576.

XV Apollinaris won such renown as was to be gained from suppressing the Jewish revolt, and the three legions Mucianus commanded in 69, IV Scythica, VI Ferrata and XII Fulminata, languished in their province under a civilian administrator with no worthwhile military experience⁴⁰. They could hardly fail to feel, and manifest, *rubor*. Hence, as Tacitus puts it, “emulation and the glory won by the army in Judaea had dispelled their inertia. Danger and exertion had toughened up Vespasian’s men. No less vigour had been imparted to Mucianus’ troops by their unbroken lack of active service and their shame at not having experienced the (participated in that) war”.

Three more points confirm this interpretation. First, there are the peculiar tactics Tacitus attributes to Mucianus in the speech of encouragement he addresses to the wavering Vespasian. The speaker makes much of his own willingness to undergo danger (*Hist.* 2,76,1 and 77,2), nothing of such willingness on the part of his troops or of their spirit. Although he talks of the Othonians’ *ira*, *odium* and *ultionis cupiditas* (*Hist.* 2,77,3), the comparison he draws between Vitellius’ troops and those at Vespasian’s disposal rests on a declaration that the former have lost their *ardor* and *ferocia*, whereas Vespasian’s nine legions, *e Iudaea et Syria et Aegypto*, are all alike *integrae, nulla acie exhaustae, non discordia corruptae, sed firmatus usu miles et belli domitor externi* (*Hist.* 2,76,4). This may emphasize the unity of all the forces under the Flavian’s command, but it also obscures the blemishes on the records of the Syrian units, and it leaves the addressee no opening to object that the speaker’s own men are not up to the job. With the craftiness for which he was renowned Mucianus gets away with the claim that his troops are every bit as good as the legions from Egypt and Judaea.

Second, so says Tacitus, Mucianus chose to galvanize his men by declaring repeatedly (*adseverabat*) that Vitellius had decided to transfer Rhine legions to Syria, and that the legions currently stationed in Syria were to be reassigned to the German frontier. The latter would then be faced with winter-bases, a harsh climate and hard labour (*Hist.* 2,80,3). Not unnaturally, this upset the troops, presumably because they saw no reason to question their commander’s word. But since there is no other evidence for any such plan, and not much likelihood for it either, Mucianus was surely resorting to a tactic employed earlier – with conspicuous success – on the German frontier. For the Rhine legions too had been tricked by a rumour. As Tacitus tells the story (*Hist.* 1,51,5), *accessit callide volgatum, temere creditum, decumari legiones et promptissimum quemque centurionum dimitti*. At the time these legions knew they were in bad odour with Galba, and that while the emperor had forborne to punish them for their misdeeds so far, they could not count on this situation’s continuing indefinitely. So the rumour – based on Galba’s decimating the survivors of the ex-marines’

40 See my “Vespasian’s fears of assassination (Tacitus, *Histories* 2.74–75)”, *Philologus* 138 (1994) 124f.

agitation at the Milvian Bridge – was bound to find ready credence among the men⁴¹. Since all three of Mucianus' legions had reason to fear that they might yet be punished for prior dereliction of duty, a rumour of the same kind – kited this time by their own commander – could not fail to produce a similar effect.

And third, the core of the expeditionary force Mucianus began marching westward in August 69 was made up of VI Ferrata (*Hist.* 2,83,1), of his three legions the one with the smallest blemish on its record. It had contributed a *vexillatio* to Cestius Gallus' expedition, but no doubt the men could make the same type of claim as those of XIV Gemina Martia Victrix are supposed to have advanced after Bedriacum: *se victos abnuebant, quippe Bedriacensi acie vexillariis tantum pulsas vires legionis non adfuisse* (*Hist.* 2,66,1). This again is surely no coincidence. Whatever exactly this force and its commander were expected to achieve, and Tacitus' narrative of later events suggests that Vespasian and Mucianus had very different ideas on that score, the latter set out with an army built around a legion that could be considered relatively sound. And if there was deemed to be any weakness in the *vexillationes* drawn from IV Scythica and XII Fulminata, it was more than counterbalanced by adding detachments from Vespasian's three legions as well⁴².

In short, Andresen's *rubor* is by far the best emendation for the corrupt *labor* at *Hist.* 2,4,4. Even if we look at the passage in isolation, textual and contextual arguments combine to rule out most of the other proposals scholars have made. This alone is not conclusive, of course. When we take a larger view, however, the known details of the legions' performance in earlier years confirm the view that the troops had reason to feel *rubor*. And what Tacitus says about subsequent developments, up to the point where Mucianus sets out for the West, is entirely consistent with a continuing awareness, on the part of the troops and of their commander, that the three legions in Syria were grouped together as second-class soldiers because of the blots on their records.

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41 See my "Galba, the massacre of the marines, and the formation of Legion I Adiutrix", *Athenaeum* 91 (2003) 489ff.

42 Although Ritterling (above, note 36) 1560 and Saxer (above, note 35) 19 question whether IV Scythica contributed a detachment to Mucianus' force, *vexillationes* were undoubtedly drawn from Vespasian's legions (Josephus, *BJ* 5,43).