

## Battle of the Teutoburg Forest – Tacitus, *Annales* 1.60-62

I have annotated the text for use with a fourth- or fifth-year high school Latin class.

There is a scholarly commentary on Book One from N.P. Miller still in print (originally published in 1959, then reprinted by the Bristol Classical Press in 1992), but it would not be very accessible to high school students. The episode, as I have edited it, begins with Lucius Stertinius' discovery of one of the standards lost by Varus (1.60) and ends with Tiberius' reaction to the conduct of Germanicus at the site of the battle (1.62).

Of course, Tacitus does not tell the story of the battle itself, but he does give us a haunting glimpse of the battlefield, six years after the fact. For a more comprehensive account of the battle and its impact on the Roman Empire, I would recommend reading the ancient historians Velleius Paterculus, Suetonius, Florus, and Cassius Dio and the modern historians Adrian Murdoch (*Rome's Greatest Defeat*) or Peter S. Wells (*The Battle That Stopped Rome*). Links to the ancient texts and an annotated bibliography appear on the website.

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### A. Complete Latin Text

[60] . . . interque caedem et praedam, repperit undevicesimae legionis aquilam cum Varo amissam. Ductum inde agmen ad ultimos Bructerorum, quantumque Amisiam et Lupiam amnis inter vastatum, haud procul Teutoburgiensi saltu, in quo reliquiae Vari legionumque insepultae dicebantur.

[61] Igitur cupido Caesarem invadit solvendi suprema militibus ducique, permoto ad miserationem omni qui aderat exercitu ob propinquos, amicos, denique ob casus bellorum et sortem hominum. Praemisso Caecina ut occulta saltuum scrutaretur pontesque et aggeres umido paludum et fallacibus campis inponeret, incedunt maestos locos, visuque ac memoria deformis. Prima Vari castra lato ambitu et dimensis principiis trium legionum manus ostentabant; dein semiruto vallo, humili fossa accisae iam reliquiae consedissee intellegebantur: medio campi albertia ossa, ut fugerant, ut restiterant, disiecta vel aggerata. Adiacebant fragmina telorum equorumque artus, simul truncis arborum antefixa ora. Lucis propinquis barbarae arae, apud quas tribunos ac primorum ordinum centuriones mactaverant. Et cladis eius superstites, pugnam aut vincula elapsi, referebant hic cecidisse legatos, illic raptas aquilas; primum ubi vulnus Varo adactum, ubi infelici dextera et suo ictu mortem invenerit; quo tribunali, contionatus Arminius, quot patibula captivis, quae scrobes, utque signis et aquilis per superbiam inluserit.

[62] Igitur Romanus qui aderat exercitus, sextum post cladis annum, trium legionum ossa, nullo noscente alienas reliquias an suorum humo tegeret, omnis ut coniunctos, ut consanguineos, aucta in hostem ira, maesti simul et infensi condebant. Primum extruendo tumulo caespitem Caesar posuit, gratissimo munere in defunctos et praesentibus doloris socius. Quod Tiberio haud probatum . . .

## B. Part One – Approaching the Battlefield

[60]

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- 1 The implied subject of the first sentence is Lucius Stertinius, a Roman soldier. The year is 15 AD, six years after the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest.

*caedes, caedis* (f): slaughter

*praeda, -ae* (f): booty, plunder

*repperio, repperire, repperi, repertus*: discover

*undevicesimus, -a, -um*: 19<sup>th</sup>. The Romans lost the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> legions in the ambush.

*aquila, -ae* (f): eagle standard

*Varo* – Publius Quinctilius Varus, Roman governor of Germania. He and his three legions were ambushed by the German commander Arminius in the Teutoburg Forest in 9 AD.

- 2 *Ductum (est)* – *agmen* is the subject

*Bructeri, -orum* (m): the Bructeri, a Germanic tribe

*Amisia, -ae* (f): the Ems River

- 3 *Lupia, -ae* (f): the Lippe River

*amnis, amnis* (m/f): river; *amnis* = *amnes*

*vasto, vastare, vastavi, vastatus*: lay to waste; *vastatum (est)* – an impersonal verb construction

*Teutoburgiensi saltu* – the Teutoburg Forest

*quo* – refers to *saltu*

*reliquiae, -arum* (f): remains, remnants

- 4 *insepultae (esse) dicebantur* – The remains of the Roman soldiers were said to be unburied.

### C. Part Two – A Sad Place

[61]

- 5 Igitur cupido Caesarem invadit solvendi suprema militibus ducique, permoto ad  
miserationem omni qui aderat exercitu ob propinquos, amicos, denique ob casus bellorum  
et sortem hominum. Praemisso Caecina ut occulta saltuum scrutaretur pontesque et  
aggeres umido paludum et fallacibus campis inponeret, incedunt maestos locos, visuque  
ac memoria deformis.

- 5 *cupido, cupidinis* (m/f): desire

*Caesarem* – Here, this refers to Germanicus, the Roman governor of Germania and the adopted son of the Emperor Tiberius.

*invado, invadere, invasi, invasus*: come upon

*suprema* – funeral rites; a neuter plural accusative form, the object of the gerund *solvendi*

*ducique* – i.e., Varus, the slain leader of the soldiers

*permoto omni exercitu* is an ablative absolute (“with the entire army having been moved”). The prospect of seeing the skeletons of their neighbors (*propinquos*) and friends (*amicos*) stirs up feelings of compassion (*miserationem*) in Germanicus and his men.

- 6 *casus, -us* (m): disaster, misfortune

- 7 Caecina – Aulus Caecina Severus, an officer in the army of Germanicus. He and his men are being sent ahead (*Praemisso*) to look out for (*scrutaretur*) any hiding places in the forest (*occulta saltuum*) and to build any necessary bridges (*pontes*) and causeways (*aggeres*) over swampy ground (*umido paludum*). Germanicus wants to make sure that he doesn’t fall into the same type of trap that snared Varus six years before.

*occulta* – a neuter plural accusative; “hidden (places)”

*saltus, -us* (m): forest

- 8 *umidum, -i* (n): moist area

*palus, paludis* (f): swamp

- 9 *deformis = deformes*. It modifies the *locos* (i.e., the battlefield).

### D. Part Three – A Landscape of Carnage

[61]

- 10 Prima Vari castra lato ambitu et dimensis principiis trium legionum manus ostentabant; dein semiruto vallo, humili fossa accisae iam reliquiae consedissee intellegebantur: medio campi, albens ossa, ut fugerant, ut restiterant, disiecta vel aggerata. Adiacebant fragmina telorum equorumque artus, simul truncis arborum antefixa ora.
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- 10 *castra* – As Miller explains, “. . . the *prima castra* is not Varus’ summer camp from which he had been enticed by reports of trouble, but the ordinary marching camp pitched after his first day’s march and the initial attack. The following day they marched on, but were more seriously attacked . . . (p.184-185)” *Prima castra* is the subject of *ostentabant*.

*ambitus, -us (m)*: circumference

*dimetior, dimeteri, dimensus sum*: measure out

*principium, -i (n)*: starting point

*manus* – Miller suggests “handiwork.” The form is accusative plural.

- 11 *semirutus, -a, -um*: half-ruined

*vallum, -i (n)*: rampart

*accido, accidere, accidi, accisus*: cut down, decimate

- 12 It is indeed a gruesome landscape. Germanicus and his men discover weapon fragments and both human and horse bones scattered across the battlefield.

*ut fugerant, ut restiterant* – The antonyms illustrate the chaos of the battle. Some Roman soldiers had tried to escape (*fugerant*), others had stood their ground (*restiterant*). They were all killed by the Germans just the same.

- 13 *artus, -us (m)*: limb

*ora, -ae (f)*: skull. Arminius decapitated some of the Roman soldiers and nailed their heads to trees. He sent the head of Varus to Maroboduus, leader of the Marcomanni, as an invitation to join the fight against Rome. Maroboduus declined, forwarding the head on to Augustus, who returned it to the family of Varus for proper burial.

#### E. Part Four – The Suicide of Varus and the Arrogance of Arminius

[61]

Lucis propinquis barbarae arae, apud quas tribunos ac primorum ordinum centuriones  
15 mactaverant. Et cladis eius superstites, pugnam aut vincula elapsi, referebant hic  
cecidisse legatos, illic raptas aquilas; primum ubi vulnus Varo adactum, ubi infelici  
dextera et suo ictu mortem invenerit; quo tribunali, contionatus Arminius, quot patibula  
captivis, quae scrobes, utque signis et aquilis per superbiam inluserit.

14 *lucus, luci* (m): grove (of trees)

*ara, -ae* (f): altar. The Germans followed the battle with rites of human sacrifice.

15 *superstes, superstitis* (adj): surviving. The word is a substantive, meaning either “the surviving (ones)” or “the survivors.” *superstites* is the subject, modified by the participle *elapsi*. The main verb is *referebant* (“they were reporting”), which leads into an indirect statement (*cecidisse legatos*).

16 *vulnus, vulneris* (n): wound; the subject of *adactum* (*est*)

*adigo, adigere, adegi, adactus*: drive into, force

*infelix, infelicitis* (adj): unlucky; *infelici dextera* and *suo ictu* are both ablative phrases

17 *ictus, -us* (m): blow

*suo ictu*: As the battle was winding down, Varus committed suicide.

*tribunal, tribunalis* (n): platform

*contionor, contionari, contionatus sum*: deliver a speech. In a perverse barbarian mockery of a Roman orator delivering a speech in the Forum, Arminius is delivering a *contio* (pep talk) to his victorious soldiers.

*patibulum, -i* (n): yoke (i.e., a harness, whether literal or metaphorical, for the defeated Roman soldiers)

18 *scrobis, scrobis* (m/f): ditch. Miller writes: “As they obviously did not bury the slain, and as they displayed the sacrificial victims, these must have been used for burying yet others alive (p.185).”

*inludo, inludere, inlusi, inlusus*: make fun of, ridicule, play with (in a perverted fashion)

## F. Part Five – A Proper Burial and an Imperial Reprimand

[62]

Igitur Romanus qui aderat exercitus, sextum post cladis annum, trium legionum ossa,  
20 nullo noscente alienas reliquias an suorum humo tegeter, omnis ut coniunctos, ut  
consanguineos, aucta in hostem ira, maestis simul et infensi condebant. Primum  
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19 *sextum post cladis annum* – literally, “after the sixth year of the disaster” (i.e., “six years after the disaster”)

20 *alienas reliquias an suorum* – The soldiers of Germanicus didn’t know if they were burying the remains of strangers (*alienas*) or the remains of their own family members (*suorum*). Nevertheless, they regarded all of them (*omnis* = *omnes*) as relatives by marriage (*coniunctos*) or by birth (*consanguineos*) and approached the task of burial as such.

21 *augeo, augere, auxi, auctus*: increase, magnify; *aucta (est)*; *ira* is the subject

*condo, condere, condidi, conditus*: store up. The Romans, sad (*maesti*) and angry (*infensi*) about the Varian disaster, were storing up their anger to use against the Germans whenever the opportunity would next present itself.

22 *extruendo tumulo* – a dative of purpose; “for the purpose of building up the tomb”

*munus, muneris (n)*: funeral offering

23 *praesentibus doloris socius* – Germanicus, though a commanding officer, is a “comrade of sadness for those present.” All of the Roman soldiers are moved by the tragedy, and the grief is a shared experience.

*Quod Tiberio haud probatum (est)* – *Tiberio* is a dative of reference. Tiberius didn’t approve of how Germanicus handled this situation for two reasons: he didn’t think that it was appropriate for a military commander to pollute himself with funeral rites, and he was concerned that the sight of the battlefield carnage would damage the morale of the Roman troops.