

**Prof. Vicente Dobroruka**

dobroruka@pej-unb.org

Universidade de Brasília

IHD - Dpto. de História

Brasília -DF-

70910-900

---

Fonte: Tácito, *Histórias*

Origem: Roma

Período: séc.I d.C.

Edição: *Complete Works of Tacitus*. Tacitus. New York: Random House, 1942 (trad. A.J. Church, W.J. Brodribb e S. Bryant).

Seções: 4.8, 14; 5.3-8

[4.8] Marcellus declared, "It is not my opinion that is assailed; the Consul elect has made a motion in accordance with old precedents, which directed the use of the ballot in the appointment of envoys, in order that there might be no room for intrigue or private animosities. Nothing has happened why customs of long standing should fall into disuse, or why the honour due to the Emperor should be turned into an insult to any man. All Senators are competent to pay their homage. What we have rather to avoid is this, that a mind unsettled by the novelty of power, and which will keenly watch the very looks and language of all, should be irritated by the obstinacy of certain persons. I do not forget the times in which I have been born, or the form of government which our fathers and grandfathers established. I may regard with admiration an earlier period, but I acquiesce in the present, and, while I pray for good Emperors, I can endure whomsoever we may have. It was not through my speech any more than it was through the judgment of the Senate that Thrasea fell. The savage temper of Nero amused itself under these forms, and I found the friendship of such a Prince as harassing as others found their exile. Finally, Helvidius may rival the Catos and the Bruti of old in constancy and courage; I am but one of the Senate which bows to the same yoke. Besides, I would advise Priscus not to climb higher than the throne, or to impose his counsels on Vespasian, an old man, who has won the honours of a triumph, and has two sons grown to manhood. For as the worst Emperors love an unlimited despotism, so the noblest like some check on liberty." These speeches, which were delivered with much vehemence on both sides, were heard with much diversity of feeling. That party prevailed which preferred that the envoys should be taken by lot, as even the neutral section in the Senate exerted themselves to retain the old practice, while the more conspicuous members inclined to the same view, dreading jealousy, should the choice fall on themselves.

[4.14] Civilis, who was resolved on rebellion, and intended, while concealing his ulterior designs, to reveal his other plans as occasion presented itself, set about the work



of revolution in this way. By command of Vitellius all the Batavian youth was then being summoned to the conscription, a thing naturally vexatious, and which the officials made yet more burdensome by their rapacity and profligacy, while they selected aged and infirm persons, whom they might discharge for a consideration, and mere striplings, but of distinguished beauty (and many attain even in boyhood to a noble stature), whom they dragged off for infamous purposes. This caused indignation, and the ringleaders of the concerted rebellion prevailed upon the people to refuse the conscription. Civilis collected at one of the sacred groves, ostensibly for a banquet, the chiefs of the nation and the boldest spirits of the lower class. When he saw them warmed with the festivities of the night, he began by speaking of the renown and glory of their race, and then counted the wrongs and the oppressions which they endured, and all the other evils of slavery. "There is," he said, "no alliance, as once there was; we are treated as slaves. When does even a legate come among us, though he come only with a burdensome retinue and in all the haughtiness of power? We are handed over to prefects and centurions, and when they are glutted with our spoils and our blood, then they are changed, and new receptacles for plunder, new terms for spoliation, are discovered. Now the conscription is at hand, tearing, we may say, for ever children from parents, and brothers from brothers. Never has the power of Rome been more depressed. In the winter quarters of the legions there is nothing but property to plunder and a few old men. Only dare to look up, and cease to tremble at the empty names of legions. For we have a vast force of horse and foot; we have the Germans our kinsmen; we have Gaul bent on the same objects. Even to the Roman people this war will not be displeasing; if defeated, we shall still reckon it a service to Vespasian, and for success no account need be rendered."

[5.3-8] 3. Most writers, however, agree in stating that once a disease, which horribly disfigured the body, broke out over Egypt; that king Bocchoris, seeking a remedy, consulted the oracle of Hammon, and was bidden to cleanse his realm, and to convey into some foreign land this race detested by the gods. The people, who had been collected after diligent search, finding themselves left in a desert, sat for the most part in a stupor of grief, till one of the exiles, Moyses by name, warned them not to look for any relief from God or man, forsaken as they were of both, but to trust to themselves, taking for their heaven-sent leader that man who should first help them to be quit of their present misery. They agreed, and in utter ignorance began to advance at random. Nothing, however, distressed them so much as the scarcity of water, and they had sunk ready to perish in all directions over the plain, when a herd of wild asses was seen to retire from their pasture to a rock shaded by trees. Moyses followed them, and, guided by the appearance of a grassy spot, discovered an abundant spring of water. This furnished relief. After a continuous journey for six days, on the seventh they possessed themselves of a country, from which they expelled the inhabitants, and in which they founded a city and a temple.

4. Moyses, wishing to secure for the future his authority over the nation, gave them a novel form of worship, opposed to all that is practised by other men. Things sacred with us, with them have no sanctity, while they allow what with us is forbidden. In their holy place they have consecrated an image of the animal by whose guidance they found deliverance from their long and thirsty wanderings. They slay the ram, seemingly in derision of Hammon, and they sacrifice the ox, because the Egyptians worship it as Apis. They abstain from swine's flesh, in consideration of what they suffered when they



were infected by the leprosy to which this animal is liable. By their frequent fasts they still bear witness to the long hunger of former days, and the Jewish bread, made without leaven, is retained as a memorial of their hurried seizure of corn. We are told that the rest of the seventh day was adopted, because this day brought with it a termination of their toils; after a while the charm of indolence beguiled them into giving up the seventh year also to inaction. But others say that it is an observance in honour of Saturn, either from the primitive elements of their faith having been transmitted from the Idæi, who are said to have shared the flight of that God, and to have founded the race, or from the circumstance that of the seven stars which rule the destinies of men Saturn moves in the highest orbit and with the mightiest power, and that many of the heavenly bodies complete their revolutions and courses in multiples of seven.

5. This worship, however introduced, is upheld by its antiquity; all their other customs, which are at once perverse and disgusting, owe their strength to their very badness. The most degraded out of other races, scorning their national beliefs, brought to them their contributions and presents. This augmented the wealth of the Jews, as also did the fact, that among themselves they are inflexibly honest and ever ready to shew compassion, though they regard the rest of mankind with all the hatred of enemies. They sit apart at meals, they sleep apart, and though, as a nation, they are singularly prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women; among themselves nothing is unlawful. Circumcision was adopted by them as a mark of difference from other men. Those who come over to their religion adopt the practice, and have this lesson first instilled into them, to despise all gods, to disown their country, and set at nought parents, children, and brethren. Still they provide for the increase of their numbers. It is a crime among them to kill any newly-born infant. They hold that the souls of all who perish in battle or by the hands of the executioner are immortal. Hence a passion for propagating their race and a contempt for death. They are wont to bury rather than to burn their dead, following in this the Egyptian custom; they bestow the same care on the dead, and they hold the same belief about the lower world. Quite different is their faith about things divine. The Egyptians worship many animals and images of monstrous form; the Jews have purely mental conceptions of Deity, as one in essence. They call those profane who make representations of God in human shape out of perishable materials. They believe that Being to be supreme and eternal, neither capable of representation, nor of decay. They therefore do not allow any images to stand in their cities, much less in their temples. This flattery is not paid to their kings, nor this honour to our Emperors. From the fact, however, that their priests used to chant to the music of flutes and cymbals, and to wear garlands of ivy, and that a golden vine was found in the temple, some have thought that they worshipped Father Liber, the conqueror of the East, though their institutions do not by any means harmonize with the theory; for Liber established a festive and cheerful worship, while the Jewish religion is tasteless and mean.

6. Eastward the country is bounded by Arabia; to the south lies Egypt; on the west are Phoenicia and the Mediterranean. Northward it commands an extensive prospect over Syria. The inhabitants are healthy and able to bear fatigue. Rain is uncommon, but the soil is fertile. Its products resemble our own. They have, besides, the balsam-tree and the palm. The palm-groves are tall and graceful. The balsam is a shrub; each branch, as it fills with sap, may be pierced with a fragment of stone or pottery. If steel is employed, the veins shrink up. The sap is used by physicians. Libanus is the principal mountain, and has, strange to say, amidst these burning heats, a summit shaded with trees and never deserted by its snows. The same range supplies and sends forth the stream of the



Jordan. This river does not discharge itself into the sea, but flows entire through two lakes, and is lost in the third. This is a lake of vast circumference; it resembles the sea, but is more nauseous in taste; it breeds pestilence among those who live near by its noisome odour; it cannot be moved by the wind, and it affords no home either to fish or water-birds. These strange waters support what is thrown upon them, as on a solid surface, and all persons, whether they can swim or no, are equally buoyed up by the waves. At a certain season of the year the lake throws up bitumen, and the method of collecting it has been taught by that experience which teaches all other arts. It is naturally a fluid of dark colour; when vinegar is sprinkled upon it, it coagulates and floats upon the surface. Those whose business it is take it with the hand, and draw it on to the deck of the boat; it then continues of itself to flow in and lade the vessel till the stream is cut off. Nor can this be done by any instrument of brass or iron. It shrinks from blood or any cloth stained by the menstrua of women. Such is the account of old authors; but those who know the country say that the bitumen moves in heaving masses on the water, that it is drawn by hand to the shore, and that there, when dried by the evaporation of the earth and the power of the sun, it is cut into pieces with axes and wedges just as timber or stone would be.

7. Not far from this lake lies a plain, once fertile, they say, and the site of great cities, but afterwards struck by lightning and consumed. Of this event, they declare, traces still remain, for the soil, which is scorched in appearance, has lost its productive power. Everything that grows spontaneously, as well as what is planted by hand, either when the leaf or flower have been developed, or after maturing in the usual form, becomes black and rotten, and crumbles into a kind of dust. I am ready to allow, on the one hand, that cities, once famous, may have been consumed by fire from heaven, while, on the other, I imagine that the earth is infected by the exhalations of the lake, that the surrounding air is tainted, and that thus the growth of harvest and the fruits of autumn decay under the equally noxious influences of soil and climate. The river Belus also flows into the Jewish sea. About its mouth is a kind of sand which is collected, mixed with nitre, and fused into glass. This shore is of limited extent, but furnishes an inexhaustible supply to the exporter.

8. A great part of Judæa consists of scattered villages. They have also towns. Jerusalem is the capital. There stood a temple of immense wealth. First came the city with its fortifications, then the royal palace, then, within the innermost defences, the temple itself. Only the Jew might approach the gates; all but priests were forbidden to pass the threshold. While the East was under the sway of the Assyrians, the Medes, and the Persians, Jews were the most contemptible of the subject tribes. When the Macedonians became supreme, King Antiochus strove to destroy the national superstition, and to introduce Greek civilization, but was prevented by his war with the Parthians from at all improving this vilest of nations; for at this time the revolt of Arsaces had taken place. The Macedonian power was now weak, while the Parthian had not yet reached its full strength, and, as the Romans were still far off, the Jews chose kings for themselves. Expelled by the fickle populace, and regaining their throne by force of arms, these princes, while they ventured on the wholesale banishment of their subjects, on the destruction of cities, on the murder of brothers, wives, and parents, and the other usual atrocities of despots, fostered the national superstition by appropriating the dignity of the priesthood as the support of their political power.