In an intriguing recent article by T.T. Rapke the author argued *inter alia* that Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso (cos. 7 B.C.) clashed openly and cantankerously with Tiberius on no less than three occasions during the first two years of the new reign, and ‘nowhere in the sources is Piso found in agreement with Tiberius at any time or on any issue’. Consequently the notion (of e.g. Syme, Seager, Levick and others) that Piso was a friend and ally of Tiberius is a fiction. Piso had changed from ‘a loyal and esteemed public servant’ of the first emperor to a headstrong and intractable irritator of the second. His selection as imperial governor of Syria was brought about by the influence of his wife, Plancina, with Livia Augusta. This radical reinterpretation merits further scrutiny.

Three passages were selected by Rapke to prove his point. In the first he writes that Granius Marcellus, propraetorian governor of Bithynia, was accused of *maiestas* before the Senate in A.D. 15. Tiberius was so angry at the disrespect shown by the accused towards himself and particularly Augustus that he exclaimed he would vote openly and under oath, thus placing the senate under the same obligation. Piso, displaying one of those few *vestigia morientis libertatis*, asked the emperor whether he would vote first or last. According to Tacitus the emperor repented of his outburst and allowed Marcellus to be acquitted. Rapke adds: ‘If Suetonius (Tib. 58) is referring to the same trial, a conviction still resulted’. Why not add Tacitus’ revealing appendix? The charge of extortion against Marcellus was referred to a special commission.

This case is extremely unstable, as Bauman perceptively remarks. Miller and Seager believe that Tiberius was angry because the charges were frivolous or maliciously trivial, so his anger burst out over the mutilated imperial statue and he insisted on a formal trial to obtain a definitive verdict once and for all. Goodyear, after reviewing the literature on this case, is inclined to prefer these views. In addition, Shotter argues plausibly that Piso’s purpose may not have been malicious but rather he intended to extricate Tiberius and the Senate from a difficult position. At any rate none of these scholars feels that Tacitus is here insinuating that the emperor was angry with Piso.

In the second passage Piso allegedly inflicts on Tiberius another *species libertatis* before the Senate the following year. In the face of obsequious opposition from C. Asinius Gallus and with Tiberius observing the exchange in stony silence, Piso argued that the *decorum reipublicae* demanded that the Senate continue to meet
and transact public business during the absence of Tiberius from Rome. Strikingly, in view of the argument to follow, we find Asinius Gallus maintaining that any public business discussed without the presence of Tiberius would appear unimportant as a result’ (Rapke). Seager is then criticized for ‘misinterpreting the exchange as reflecting more credit on Piso than Gallus in the eyes of his Princeps. If Seager is correct, then either Tiberius was a poor manager of senatorial business or auctoritas principis counted for little since Gallus’ view prevailed and the Senate was adjourned’.

Unfortunately Rapke’s interpretation of audiente haec Tiberio ac silente is clearly too emotive. Indeed, Goodyear emphasizes the fact that Tacitus makes no personal comment here. Furthermore, there was clearly substantial disagreement in the Senate (magnis utrimque contentionibus), as there had been earlier during the debate on luxury, but there is no evidence of rancour on the part of the emperor against Piso. It seems rather that Tiberius deliberately chose not to interfere or cut off the discussion because he realized, particularly in the early years of his reign, that he needed the active collaboration of the Senate in governing the state and free debate in the Senate was one means of achieving this. A further example occurred the previous year when Asinius Gallus censured the tribune Haterius Agrippa silente Tiberio, qui ea simulacra libertatis senatus praebebat. Just consider the trouble Tiberius had recently taken to pacify Lucius Piso and prevent him from retiring from the Senate. Yet the emperor’s auctoritas was still upheld and the important semblance of free speech in the Senate was carefully maintained.

‘The third clash also occurred in A.D. 16 over the question of the punishment of citizens found practicing astrology’ (Rapke). Piso recommended acquittal for all citizens charged with this and the Senate concurred, overruling Drusus and Tiberius. The decision of the Senate, however, was vetoed by an unnamed tribune. There I agree with Rapke concerning the authenticity of the incident and his explanation of Tacitus’ silence on the matter. ‘The decisive independence of the Senate did not suit Tacitus’ picture of its obsequious sycophancy. Nevertheless, if the emperor did take the Senate’s vote as a personal affront he would have been angry that day with a great number of senators besides Piso. In fact, he still had his way, whether he suborned the tribune or not, which would presumably have mitigated any resentment he might have felt. Furthermore, there is no indication from Dio that Tiberius was exasperated by Piso or by the Senate. Drusus, too, seems not to have been angered, or at least to have forgotten or forgiven. When Piso, en route to Rome from Syria, went out of his way to visit the emperor’s son, the latter stated openly that he preferred to believe that the insinuations against Piso regarding Germanicus’ death were false and empty, and that the death of Germanicus should be the ruin of no one. He was either being candid, as I believe, or obeying Tiberius’ orders, as Tacitus intimated. In either case the visit itself and the response of Drusus seem to indicate that Piso considered Drusus a political amicus whose support he should try to enlist.

Two other passages must now be addressed. In his deathbed statement, which
Tacitus paraphrased, Piso concluded by writing:

‘Per quinque et quadraginta annorum obsequium, per collegium consulatus quondam divo Augusto parenti tuo probatus et tibi amicus nec quicquam post haec rogaturus salutem infelicis fili rogo.’

In his final dying words, then, Piso claimed amicitia with Tiberius. This amicitia may not have been one of close affection, such as Tiberius enjoyed with L. Calpurnius Piso the pontifex and with Pomponius Flaccus, but simply one of political alliance such as that which existed between Germanicus and Piso and was formally renounced by the former as he lay dying in Antioch. Furthermore Tiberius himself stated, in his Senate speech before the trial, that if Piso had, as a subordinate, overstepped the bonds of duty and obedience to his commander (Germanicus) and had rejoiced in his death and the emperor’s affliction: ‘odero seponamque a domo mea et privatus inimicitias non vi principis ulciscar’. That is to say that Tiberius would formally renounce his amicitia with Piso if the charges against the latter were proven.

After Piso’s suicide Tiberius did his best for the family. He acquitted the young Piso of the charge of civil war and urged the two sons to defend their mother. The consul, Aurelius Cotta, proposed that Piso’s name be erased from the public register, half his property confiscated and the other half given to his son Gnaeus Piso, who was to change his praenomen. Marcus Piso was to be stripped of his rank, given an allowance of five million sesterces and banished for ten years. Plancina’s life was to be spared in consideration of Livia Augusta’s intercession. Tiberius, however, would not allow Piso’s name to be erased, saved Marcus Piso from degradation and gave him his father’s property. For these actions the emperor incurred substantial public odium, as he knew he would. Subsequently young Gnaeus did change his name to Lucius and attained the consulship in A.D. 27. Livia Augusta was surely not responsible alone for all the help accorded to Piso’s family: Tiberius, too, had a debt to pay.

In conclusion, then, the formal renunciation of friendship for Piso by Germanicus, the implicit readiness to renounce friendship for Piso by Tiberius, and the dying statement of Piso, in which he claimed to be Tiberius’ amicus, clearly indicate that Piso was, indeed, an amicus of the emperor in A.D. 17 when he was appointed governor of Syria. Probably Plancina’s friendship with Livia Augusta was helpful, perhaps even essential, in the ill-fated appointment: it was by no means the only major factor.

NOTES
2. Ibid., 64.
3. Tac. Ann. 1. 74. 1–6; 2. 35. 1–4; Dio 57. 15. 7–9.
4. B. Walker (The Annals of Tacitus, Manchester 1952, 266) thinks he was found guilty on this charge. For her discussion of this difficult case vid. 90–91.
NOTIZEN ZU DEN BRIEFEN DES JOHANNES VON SALISBURY


Es ist jedoch natürlich, dass bei einer so grossen Textmasse, wie es die Briefe des Johannes von Salisbury sind, ein Leser einiges zu verbessern und zu ergänzen findet. Ich wende mich zuerst dem Texte, der Übersetzung und dem Quellenapparat zu, um sodann einige Bemerkungen zur Sprache hinzuzufügen.

Nr. 166 Bd.2 S.90... ut (tam) metus quam fiduciae plurimae causae concurret ut ideantur ‘so that many reasons both for fear and confidence seem to conflict’. Die Ergänzung von tam ist unnötig: quam ohne korrespondierendes tam
Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

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