



the year of  
**the four  
emperors**

**3RD EDITION**

**KENNETH WELLESLEY**

## THE YEAR OF THE FOUR EMPERORS

After the death of the infamous Nero in AD 68, the Romans might have hoped that AD 69 would usher in a new era of peace and stability. It was not to be. Before January was out, the new emperor, Galba, had been brutally assassinated, and the next two successors to the imperial throne, Otho and Vitellius, were to meet with equally violent ends. This period of turmoil also saw two desperate battles at Cremona, the capture of Rome for Vespasian – fourth and final emperor of the year – and a civil war in Italy which shook the farthest reaches of the Empire.

Yet AD 69 was notable for its historical importance as well as its compelling drama. It marked the watershed between the first and second imperial dynasties and the passing of an old order. The Senate, which had long been resting on past republican glories, was shown to be petty and ineffectual in its hour of crisis, while, ironically, the battles between rival Roman armies only enhanced their endurance. The military efficiency of the empire was not impaired by the civil war, and its political structure was reaffirmed.

**Kenneth Wellesley's** gripping account of *The Year of the Four Emperors* combines an elegant and exciting narrative with sound, meticulous scholarship based on his intimate knowledge of the *Histories* of Tacitus. Now with a new introduction and bibliographical material by Barbara Levick, the book will once more be welcomed as the standard work on this turbulent period in Rome's imperial past.



Galba (top), Vitellius (bottom left) and  
Vespasian (bottom right)

# THE YEAR OF THE FOUR EMPERORS

Third Edition

KENNETH WELLESLEY

With a new introduction by  
Barbara Levick



London and New York

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*frontispiece*

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## 1. Coins of Galba and Otho

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(c) Silver denarius of Rome, Hunter Coin Cabinet, Glasgow. Obverse: A VITELLIVS GERM IMP AVG TR P Head of Vitellius; reverse: L VITELLIVS COS III CENSOR Head of Lucius Vitellius, the emperor's father, with eagle-tipped sceptre, alluding to the combined censorship (as colleague of Claudius) and third consulate of A.D. 47. cf. A. Robertson, *op. cit.* I, 177, no. 14. By courtesy of the Court of the University of Glasgow. (d) Aureus of Rome, 69/70, Hunter Coin Cabinet, Glasgow. Obverse: IMP CAESAR VESPASIANVS AVG Head of Vespasian, laureate; reverse: CAESAR AVG F COS CAESAR AVG F PR Bare heads of Titus (on left) and Domitian (on right). cf. A. Robertson, *op. cit.* I, 186, no. 2. By courtesy of the Court of the University of Glasgow.

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Fragment of papyrus, end of first century A.D., 215 × 75 mm, Cairo Museum. It appears to record an announcement by Tiberius Julius Alexander to the people of Alexandria. cf. p. 122 and V. A. Tcherikover and A. Fuks, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, no. 418a, L. Koenen, *Gnomon* 40 (1968), 256, and R. Coles, A. Giessen and L. Koenen, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 11 (1973), 235. Photograph supplied by courtesy of Dr Coles and the Palaeographic Commission of the Association International de Papyrologues, and reproduced by kind permission of the Director of the Cairo Museum.

## 7. A Roman secondary road in the Vosges

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Section of the 'Chemin d'Allemagne' recently cleared in the wooded hills near the Donon north of Raon-les-Leau (French 1:25,000 staff map 'Cirey-sur-Vezouze 3-4', ref. 3592.5378). The road leads from the south-east towards Tarquimpol (?Decempagi), where it once met the Reims-Strasbourg high road. Photograph supplied by courtesy of Monsieur G. Viard of Saint-Dié.

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The photograph was taken by the author in the month of April and looks eastwards at a point 10 miles east of Cremona. On the left the canalized Delmona follows the ditch on the north side of the road; that on the south is a slight depression or virtually non-existent.

## 9. Auxiliary infantrymen in conversation

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10. Part of the bronze facing of a gun (*ballista*) belonging to a unit of the Fourth (Macedonian) Legion, lost at Cremona on 25 October 69

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*CIL* vi, 930 = *ILS* 244 = *MW* 1; cf. A. E. Gordon in *Greece and Rome* 20 (1951), 80-2 with pl. cvi. The bronze tablet, 163 × 115 cm, in the Capitoline Museum, Rome, contains part of the text of a law reproducing the wording of the antecedent decree of the Senate passed in the last days of December 69. Photograph by courtesy of the German Archaeological Institute, Rome.

## Preface

The present work seeks to provide a plain narrative of the events of one crowded year. Interwoven by cause and effect, framed in time and space, they embraced the whole Mediterranean world and created the second dynasty of imperial Rome. The web is intricate and colourful. That an attempt to retell the story nineteen hundred years later is possible at all is largely due to the chance survival of the early books of Tacitus' *Histories*, supported by other information in as generous (or as meagre) a bulk as the historian of ancient Rome can now hope to enjoy. But the Long Year provides us with a thousand problems—dark corners into which only a dim light penetrates from feeble candles, and which we think we can explore by inference, conjecture and imagination. We dispose of no exhaustive official records or revealing memoirs. All the literary sources are liable to be rhetorical, partisan, moralizing or trivial. From the rest industry and scholarship can glean a few straws in a field whose once abundant harvest has irrevocably vanished.

It might seem an enterprise of folly and conceit to tread in the footsteps of Tacitus, whose narrative of this time often withstands the sharpest criticism. But, readers are not senators of Rome living forty years after the Long Year. Expansion or contraction is called for. Yet I have not scrupled on occasion to echo his words and emulate, if with a difference, the way in which he cunningly arranges his material. Unlike some of his successors, he is invariably an elegant writer, easier to parody than imitate. But in him drama and emotion, the sly thrust, the style that dominates the matter, above all the *studium* and *liuor* from which he imagined himself to be free—these are too overpowering for modern taste. Such elements, therefore, I have reduced, assuming that Roman politicians and leaders were no less open to cool reason than we, no less guided in their day-to-day decisions by careful calculation based on available knowledge and resources. This assumption, which is merely an act of faith, seems not infrequently to suggest verdicts and solutions rather different from those of Tacitus, and, when supported by evidence he did not use, helps to fill some of his silences.

I should like to express my very sincere thanks to all who have so readily offered their assistance, especially in the matter of illustrative material, and in particular to Dr Cyril Aldred; Dr R. A. Coles; Mr Vivian Davies; Dr Karin Einaudi; Professor A. E. Gordon and Mrs Gordon; the late Dr Ernest Nash; Dr David Ridgway; Dr Anne S. Robertson; Dr E. Savova; Dr Beatrice Schneider; Dr E. Mary Smallwood; Professor Eric Turner; Monsieur G. Viard; Dr T. R. Volk; and Professor Alan Watson. To this list must be added those whom I have repeatedly plagued with sudden demands always generously met: my immediate colleagues in the University of Edinburgh, and the members of my family. Nor must I forget the University itself, which in years gone by has assisted me to travel in Tacitean territories, and more recently in respect of typing facilities. It is unnecessary to state that all errors and shortcomings in this book are due to myself alone.

If it were fashionable to observe the formality of a dedication, mine would be twofold: first, to the *manes* of Cornelius Tacitus, Roman consul, orator and historian; secondly, to the memory of a later historian of Rome, whose brilliance was equalled only by his courtesy and who many years ago suggested that this book should be written: Jérôme Carcopino.

*Edinburgh*  
*December 1974*

*Kenneth Wellesley*

### **Preface to the Second Edition**

The long interval of fourteen years and the kind observations of reviewers have allowed me to detect and correct some slips, and I have taken the opportunity in this Second Edition of supplementing the intentionally meagre annotation of the First. These years have seen the welcome appearance of the fourth and fifth volumes of Heubner's commentary (which however impinge little on A.D. 69) and the first volume (covering *Histories* I and II) of that of Chilver. These may always be consulted with profit. Add to this accumulation the new Teubner (Leipzig) text of the *Histories* (1989). Individual studies have shed light here and there, and usually confirm the excellence and reliability of Tacitus.

For technical reasons it has been necessary to place most of the new material in a fresh series of notes following the old, a peculiarity which will not, I hope, be found tiresome. I am grateful to the publisher for rescuing the book from oblivion.

*Edinburgh*  
*December 1988*

*Kenneth Wellesley*

## Sources

The principal ancient literary sources for A.D. 69 are the excerpts of Cassius Dio, Books lxiii–lxv (most conveniently in the Loeb edition, with translation by H. B. Foster and E. Cary); Plutarch, *Lives of Galba and Otho*, edited in 1890 by E. G. Hardy; Suetonius, *Galba, Otho, Vitellius* and *Vespasian*; and Tacitus, *The Histories*. In the 1972–86 re-issues of the Penguin Classics translation of the last-named will be found a fairly complete bibliography of modern studies of the period and the topics involved.

The contribution made by epigraphy and specialist studies of all kinds to our understanding of the year is sufficiently obvious. But a special mention must be made of the enormous utility of McCrum and Woodhead's *Select Documents of the Principates of the Flavian Emperors, Including the Year of Revolution: A.D. 68–96* (Cambridge, 1961) which expertly conveys the resources of many large and inaccessible *corpora* to the non-expert. But it possesses no index and provides (of set purpose) the barest minimum of comment.

PLACE-NAME EQUIVALENTS IN LATIN AND  
THE VERNACULAR LANGUAGES

Achaia	Greece	Fanum Fortunae	Fano
Adua, fl.	Adda, R.	Ferentium	Ferentino
Aenus, fl.	Inn, R.	Forum Julii	Fréjus
Albingaunum	Albenga	Forum Alieni	? Legnago
Altinum	Altino	Gallia Belgica	Belgian Gaul
Anagnia	Anagni	— Lugdunensis	Central Gaul
Antipolis	Antibes	— Narbonensis	Southern Gaul
Aquinum	Aquino	Gelduba	Gellep
Aquitania	Gaul, South- western	Hadria	Adriatic Sea
Arar fl.	Saône, R.	Haemus, Mons	Balkan Range
Aricia	Ariccia	Herculis Monoeci Portus	Monaco
Ariminum	Rimini	Hierosolyma	Jerusalem
Ateste	Este	Hispalis	Seville
Atria	Adria	Hispania Citerior	Spain, Nearer
Aventicum	Avenches	— Baetica	Spain, Southern
Augusta Taurinorum	Turin	Hostilia	Ostiglia
Baetica	Spain, Southern	Interamna	Terni
Berytus	Beirut	Leucorum civitas	Toul
Bonna	Bonn	Lingonum civitas	Langres
Bononia	Bologna	Lucania	Lucania and S. Campania
Brixellum	Brescello	Luceria	Lucera
Brundisium	Brindisi	Lucus	Luc-en-Diois
Byzantium	Istanbul	Lugdunum	Lyon
Calabria	Province of Lecce	Lupia fl.	Lippe, R.
Campania	Lazio and Campania	Lusitania	Portugal and Western Spain
Chobus fl.	Khobi, R.	Massilia	Marseille
Colonia Agrippinensis	Cologne	Mauretania	Morocco
Cythnus	Kythnos	Mediolanum	Milan
Divodurum	Metz	Mediomatrici	Metz
Dyrrachium	Durrës	Mevania	Bevagna
Emerita	Merida	Misenum	Miseno
Eporedia	Ivrea	Mogontiacum	Mainz
		Mosa fl.	Meuse (Maas), R.

Mutina	Modena	Tarentum	Taranto
Narnia	Narni	Tarracina	Terracina
Novaesium	Neuss	Tartarus fl.	Tartaro, R.
Novaria	Novara	Ticinum	Pavia
Ocriculum	Otricoli	Tingitana	Morocco near Tangier
Opitergium	Oderzo	Tolbiacum	Zülpich
Padus fl.	Po, R.	Trapezus	Trabzon
Paeligni	Abruzzi	Treviri	Trier
Patavium	Padova (Padua)	Urvinum Hortense	Collemancio
Perusia	Perugia	Vascones	Basques
Picenum	Marche & Abruzzi	Vercellae	Vercelli
Placentia	Piacenza	Vicetia	Vicenza
Poetovio	Ptuj	Vienna	Vienne
Saxa Rubra	? Grottarossa	Vindonissa	Windisch
Stoechades Insulae	Iles d'Hyères	Vocetius, Mons	? near Aarau

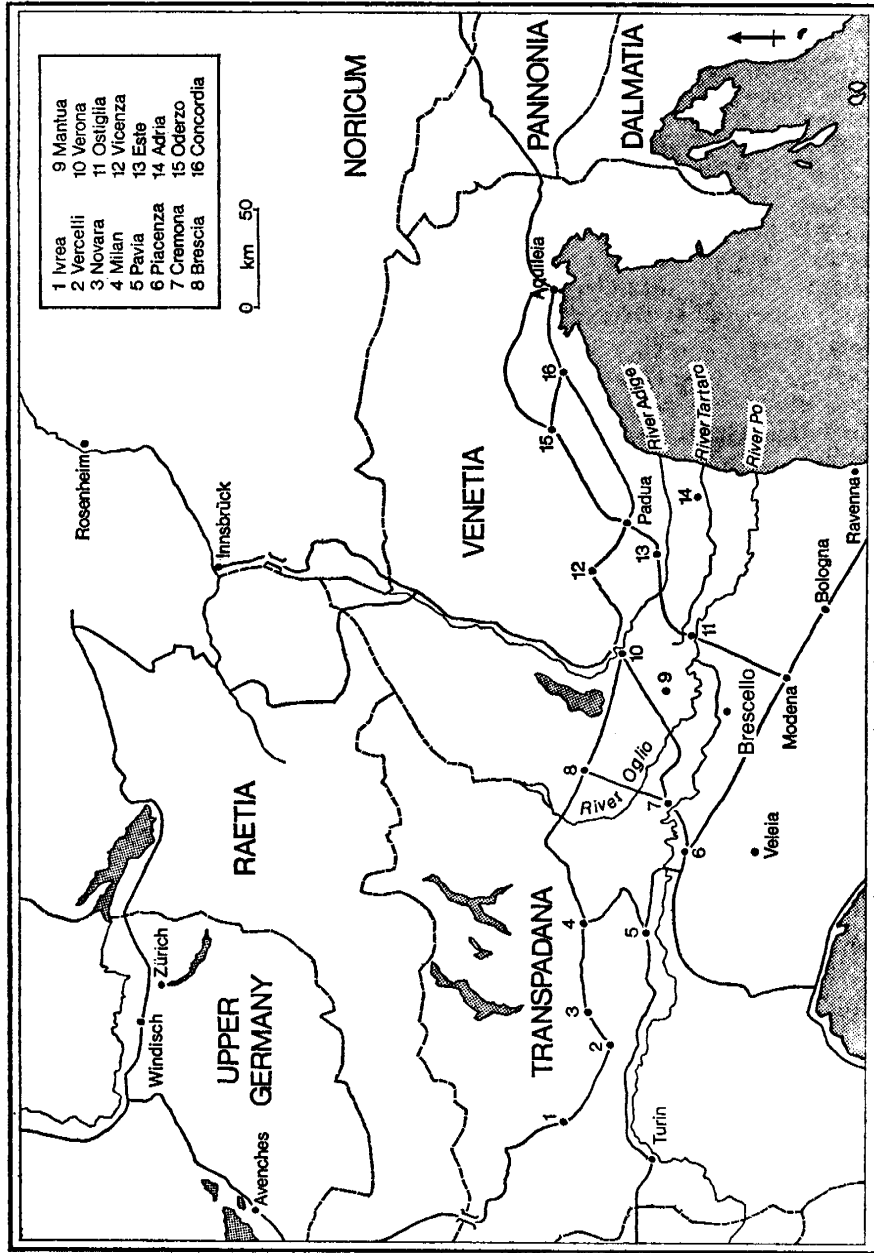


Fig. 1 Northern Italy

## Introduction

The success of Kenneth Wellesley's account of the Year of the Four Emperors, published in 1975, the same year as Peter Greenhalgh's work on the same subject,<sup>1</sup> and again in a second edition by the Bristol Classical Press in 1989, was guaranteed. The work was based on twin foundations, rather rare in combination, of a well-written, exciting narrative and sound, meticulous scholarship, the product of many years of detailed study both of the period and of the text. Wellesley also published an edition of Tacitus' text; the Penguin translation of the *Histories*; a scholarly commentary on the third book; and a number of articles dealing with the Year and with Tacitus' treatment of it.<sup>2</sup>

The merits of the book were seen at once; the comments of M. A. R. Colledge in the *Classical Review*<sup>3</sup> must have drawn a large number of potential readers to it, and his comments remain valid. He found the book remarkable and went on to explain why. His reasons were not very different from those that I have already mentioned, but they were elaborated. Above all, Colledge praised the literary merit of the work, including its structure – its departure from the order of Tacitus' narrative to make the reader wait for Vitellius' gruesome, pathetic death. Indeed, Tacitus ended his third book not at the precise end of the year 69 but with the fall of Rome to the Flavian forces and Vitellius' death and, in the very last chapter of all, the emergence of the sinister new Caesar Domitian on to centre stage as he is conducted by the soldiery into his father's house.<sup>4</sup> Wellesley, committed to 69, carries his reader on a little into the first days of the new régime.<sup>5</sup> Both approaches are valid, that of Tacitus with his sweeping history of twenty-seven years, ending with the death of that same Domitian, that of Wellesley with the dramatic slice of that history that he gives us, a monograph in another Roman style, not far removed from Sallust's *Catiline*, which ends in its turn by looking forward to the consulships, and the reigns, of Vespasian and Titus.

But M. A. R. Colledge concentrated most on what he called the fine style, telling phrase, the wit, and the splendid sweep of the narrative; it was 'convincing, informed, dramatic, and above all authoritative'. 'Wellesley manages to make the reader feel . . . that he is witnessing the events as they actually unfold, amongst men and women whom he understands only too well.' Then there was Wellesley's insight and attention to detail, over such

matters as the time of a moonrise, and on whose faces it shone,<sup>6</sup> which made it possible for him to correct Tacitus and other sources 'from his own knowledge of human psychology and his intimate acquaintance with the political and topographical setting'. 'He has not forgotten even those whom the civil wars did not touch.'<sup>7</sup> There was special praise for Wellesley's vividness: he was an enthusiastic virtuoso of the military narrative, and Colledge noted that the detailed descriptions of the fighting near Bedriacum and the two battles of Cremona that followed must have been made possible by personal reconnaissance. Wellesley's choice of plates was also warmly received.

One regret of the reviewer was the want of a Bibliography; an attempt is made here to mention relevant works that have appeared in the time that has passed since the second edition of the book came out. In that edition, published in 1989 by the Bristol Classical Press, Wellesley drew attention in his Preface<sup>8</sup> to editions and commentaries that had appeared since the first, including the fourth and fifth volumes of Heubner's commentary and the first volume of Chilver's, covering *Histories* I and II, as well as to the Teubner text of 1978.<sup>9</sup> Although he did not name individual studies in the Preface, some were alluded to in the Additional Notes.<sup>10</sup>

In the quarter of a century since the book first came out, and even in the past decade or so, both discovery and especially the reinterpretation of ancient authors have stimulated new writing; the period of crisis is exceptional in the detailed attention it received from ancient authors, much of whose work has survived – not only Tacitus' *Histories* but Suetonius' *Lives* of Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian; Josephus' *Jewish War*, Plutarch's biographies of Galba and Otho; and Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, in its fragmentary and excerpted form. These written works, their sources and interrelationships invite reassessment and raise innumerable issues. Changes have taken place in two interrelated areas, historical and historiographical. As to the first, archaeological and epigraphical discoveries and interpretations, and the interpretation of coinage, make an obvious impact;<sup>11</sup> the rethinking of texts is part of a slower, less perceptible process.

Any development that challenges the received status of ancient historical narrative will have particularly marked effects on the twelve months with which Wellesley was concerned, for although there are other sources than the third book of Tacitus' *Histories* to take into account they are prime for length and detail; in closeness to the events they are beaten only by Josephus and Plutarch;<sup>12</sup> in historical and literary mastery they are supreme, and accordingly they have received the greatest share of scholarly attention. Tacitus' art has continued to be scrutinized and reinterpreted. In addition the history of the period itself, as well as its interpretation by ancient historians, has continued to excite interest in the final years of the last century, even as hopes faded that such conflicts would disappear from modern experience. On the contrary civil war and nationalist struggles con-

tinue and become a characteristic feature of the last decade, to be put alongside the convulsions of 68–70 and show them in an ever new light. It is evidence of the potential hold of the subject on a wider public that it has very recently become a main theme in a novel by Allan Massie, in which an erudite and remote Tacitus is supplied with information by a disillusioned secondary (fictional) player.<sup>13</sup>

To begin with Tacitus in translation, there is the *World's Classics* version of the *Histories* by W. H. Fyfe, revised and edited by D. S. Levene.<sup>14</sup> Then, editions and commentaries on Tacitus and his fellow writers that have appeared since 1989: pride of place must go to C. L. Murison's commentary on Dio,<sup>15</sup> which tackles the patchy and heterogeneous text with determination and tells the reader all he or she wanted to know about the fragments and epitomes. Both Murison and D. C. A. Shotter have brought out editions of the lives of the failed contenders.<sup>16</sup>

Although they are distinct in form from commentaries proper, works of interpretation seek, like them, to display the intended meaning of authors as clearly as may be, and to subject them to critical scrutiny. Two years after Wellesley published the second edition of *The Long Year*, C. L. Murison offered a fresh evaluation of Tacitus' account, avowedly pragmatic and non-literary.<sup>17</sup> One of the most recent works of this kind devoted to the *Histories* in general offers interpretation at a particularly high level: it is R. Ash's *Ordering Anarchy*.<sup>18</sup> Its special value lies first in the depth of the analysis the author brings on earlier Civil War narrative, such as that of Julius Caesar, to display the distinct personalities of the Tacitean armies, and, using Flavian epic, shows how Tacitus characterizes the forces of 69, besides examining his portraits of the main individual actors concerned, notably Antonius Primus. Beyond that the author offers the historical conclusions that have to be drawn from and in spite of the slant of the narrative.

There have also been a number of studies of particular aspects of the ancient authors' works: on the landscape of civil war by E. O'Gorman;<sup>19</sup> on good and bad generals in Tacitus by M. Meulder;<sup>20</sup> on 'Foedum Spectaculum and related motifs' by E. Keitel;<sup>21</sup> on Tacitus and monuments by A. Rouveret;<sup>22</sup> on the opening of the *Histories* by T. Cole;<sup>23</sup> on Galba's speech by K.-W. Welwei;<sup>24</sup> on the death of Galba in Tacitus, Suetonius, and Plutarch by S. Frangoulidis;<sup>25</sup> on Tacitus' Otho by C. A. Perkins;<sup>26</sup> on Otho's exhortation, by E. Keitel;<sup>27</sup> on the decline of Vitellius' army by R. Funari;<sup>28</sup> Rome in 69 by Catherine Edwards;<sup>29</sup> the death of Vitellius in Tacitus by D. S. Levene.<sup>30</sup> And on detailed points M. G. Morgan has contributed a wealth of papers.<sup>31</sup>

The biographies of Suetonius and Plutarch have also attracted attention independently of Tacitus: L. Braun has written on the two emperors dealt with by both of them;<sup>32</sup> Suetonius' *Life of Galba* has also attracted attention in its own right, from D. T. Benediktson,<sup>33</sup> and the *Vitellius* from J. W. Burke;<sup>34</sup> R. E. Ash has contributed a study of irrationality in the Plutarch

biographies.<sup>35</sup> The enquiry into the sources of the extant 'authorities' still continues on foundations laid a century ago by Philippe Fabia<sup>36</sup> and built on by G. B. Townend, some of whose conclusions on Suetonius and Cluvius Rufus have been examined in turn by D. Wardle.<sup>37</sup>

Recent works that can be described as historical rather than historiographical must begin with T. E. J. Wiedemann's contribution, which he describes as political history, to the tenth volume of the new *Cambridge Ancient History*.<sup>38</sup> On the military side they also include a passage in C. G. Starr's short book on the influence of sea power,<sup>39</sup> but Wiedemann, again partially redressing an undue emphasis on military factors in the ancient sources which he notes as followed by Greenhalgh and Wellesley, has also written on a political aspect of the reign of Vitellius.<sup>40</sup> An article by C. L. Murison has elucidated some dates in the year 69,<sup>41</sup> and his book has thrown light on some controversies about the failed contenders.<sup>42</sup> My *Vespasian*, dealing with 68–70 in three chapters as an episode in a longer period,<sup>43</sup> is dependent both on his analysis of the Civil Wars and on other works of Wellesley. Galba's *pietas* has received attention from P. Kragelund,<sup>44</sup> and on Galba's own post-mortem rehabilitation M. Zimmermann has made a valuable contribution.<sup>45</sup> With a view to what was to come and what is so clearly foreshadowed by Tacitus, P. Southern has devoted a chapter of his study of Domitian to the 'Bellum Iovis'.<sup>46</sup>

Not all the Roman world was convulsed in 69. Necessarily there was a lull in the Jewish War, and Wellesley's references to it are sporadic, but interest in the War and in Judaea generally has not declined.<sup>47</sup> The outbreak on the Rhine that was to lead to the creation of the 'Imperium Galliarum' only began in 69, to reveal its true nature in the following year, when Vespasian had been recognized as Emperor. But what was its true nature? Wellesley<sup>48</sup> described Civilis' revolt as 'a tribal uprising', but the controversy rumbles on. Only four years before the second edition of Wellesley's book there appeared a vigorous defence of Civilis by R. Urban,<sup>49</sup> but when in 1990 P. A. Brunt republished his twin papers on the Fall of Nero and on Tacitus on the Batavian Revolt he admitted changes only in points of detail – of which some were prompted by the private criticisms made by Kenneth Wellesley;<sup>50</sup> and C. L. Murison is willing to believe that problems raised by Tacitus' account 'can be and have been explained away' by Wellesley and Greenhalgh.<sup>51</sup> Brunt carried the war into the enemy camp by suggesting 'the intensity and perversity of modern scholarly attacks on Tacitus as constituting in themselves a historiographic puzzle' – to which he offers solutions. A view more sympathetic to that of Urban has now been put forward by T. E. J. Wiedemann, who sees Civilis as renegotiating the relationship of power with the centre.<sup>52</sup>

Beyond individual bibliographical items there have been the well-known changes in thinking about history to be taken into account. M. A. R. Colledge noted that Wellesley's aim was 'to provide a plain narrative',

making the important assumption that 'Roman politicians and leaders were no less open to cool reason than we . . . this assumption, which is merely an act of faith, seems not infrequently to suggest verdicts and solutions different from those of Tacitus'.<sup>53</sup> More subtle than individual theory is the change that has come over historical thinking in this country and elsewhere over the past quarter of a century. History has been assimilated to literature and indeed to historiography; history is text, and monuments are 'read'.<sup>54</sup>

Such developments may seem to have antiquated the narrative form of analysis; in particular, the principles and praxis of E. Flaig deserve close scrutiny.<sup>55</sup> But the nub of the matter is not the methodology but the quality of the analyst. Wellesley's acumen and sensitivity to the text made him uniquely well qualified to interpret Tacitus and the other sources for the Year of the Four Emperors. The depth of the scepticism expressed above is shown by passages from early articles:

In these few examples chosen from a single book, we have tried to trace the influence of style, inattention, misunderstanding and prejudice upon Tacitus' presentation of the events of history. . . . In matters of factual accuracy which can be tested Tacitus earns our esteem as an honest reporter not guilty of intentional *suppressio veri*. The other, and more dangerous device of the advocate must often be suspected. When he permits himself the clever antithesis or telling epigram, when omission causes reasonable perplexity, when motives are attributed and the emotional temperature rises, it is time to be asking questions.<sup>56</sup>

Again, and on the other hand:

The literature on the year of the Four Emperors was immense, in Greek and Latin. The reduction of many conflicting versions to a single, highly readable account demanded enormous skill and the slight inadequacies in the telling of the tale which we have noticed are venial in the eyes of the general reader. Never again, as far as we can judge, was Tacitus able to rise so brilliantly to the level of his theme in choiceness of language, effectiveness of structure and vigour of impact.<sup>57</sup>

At the end of that sentence at least Wellesley seems happily to have lighted on words that might well be used of his own book.

## Notes

- 1 P. A. L. Greenhalgh, *The Year of the Four Emperors* (London, 1975). *The Long Year* subsequently appeared in the USA (Boulder, Colorado, 1976).
- 2 P. *Cornelii Taciti libri qui supersunt*, in S. Borszák et K. Wellesley, eds; 2.1. *Historiarum libri* ed. K. Wellesley (Teubner, Leipzig, 1989); *Tacitus, the Histories: A new translation* (Harmondsworth, 1964, repr. with bibliography 1972, 1986, and with revisions 1992); *Cornelius Tacitus, The Histories Book iii*, ed. with Text, Introduction and Commentary (Sydney, 1972); articles: 'Three historical puzzles in *Histories* 3', *CQ* N.S. 6 (1956) 211-14; 'Moonshine in Tacitus', *RhM* 100 (1957) 244-52; 'Suggestio falsi in Tacitus', *RhM* 103

- (1960) 272–88; ‘In Defence of the Leiden Tacitus’, *RhM* 110 (1967) 210–24; ‘Tacitus as a military historian’, in T. A. Dorey, ed., *Tacitus* (London, 1969) 63–97; ‘A major crux in Tacitus: *Histories* 2.40’, *JRS* 61 (1971) 28–51; ‘What happened on the Capitol in December A.D. 69?’, *AJAH* 6 (1981) [1984] 166–90; review of E. Aubrion, *Rhétorique et histoire chez Tacite* (Metz, 1985), in *Gnomon* 59 (1987) 450f.; ‘Tacitus’ “*Histories*”: a textual survey 1939–1989’, *Aufstieg u. Niedergang d. röm. Welt* 2, 22, 3 (1991) 1651–85 (with bibl.).
- 3 M. A. R. Colledge, ‘A.D. 69’, *CR N.S.* 27 (1977) 226–8; cf. C. L. Murison in *Aufstieg u. Niedergang d. röm. Welt* 2, 33, 3 (1991) 1689, crediting Wellesley with trying ‘subtly (and painlessly) to address many of the problems which confront the student of the period’.
- 4 Tac., *Hist.* 3, 86. The break in Dio comes with Domitian being presented to the soldiers (but by Mucianus), 65, 22, 2.
- 5 Tac., *Hist.* 4, 11.
- 6 147f.
- 7 216.
- 8 p. xiii.
- 9 P. Cornelius Tacitus. *Die Historien. Kommentar IV* von H. Heubner, und V. von H. Heubner und W. Fauth, *Wissenschaftliche Kommentare zu gr. und lat. Schriftstellern* (Heidelberg, 1976, 1982); G. E. F. Chilver, *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus’ Histories I and II* (Oxford, 1979) (vol. 2, covering Books 4 and 5 and completed and revised by G. B. Townend, 1985, dealt only with the last ten days of the year, but is worth mentioning here; P. Cornelii Taciti libri qui supersunt. 2.1. *Historiarum libri*, ed. H. Heubner (Teubner, Stuttgart, 1978).
- 10 223–7. D. Baatz, ‘Ein Katapult der Legio IV Macedonia aus Cremona’. *Rom. Mitt.* 87 (1980) 283–99; P. A. Brunt, ‘Lex de imperio Vespasiani’, *JRS* 67 (1977) 95–116; E. Fabricotti, *Galba* (Rome, 1976); B. H. Isaac and I. Roll, ‘A Milestone of A.D. 69 from Judaea’, *JRS* 66 (1976) 15–19; B. M. Levick, ‘Verginius Rufus and the Four Emperors’, *RhM* 128 (1985) 318–46; F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (London, 1977; see now 2nd edn, 1991); R. Syme, ‘The March of Mucianus’, *Antichthon* 11 (1977) 78–92 (= *RP* 3, 998–1013); K. G. Wallace, ‘The Flavii Sabini in Tacitus’, *Historia* 36 (1987) 343–58; G. Walser, *Summus Poeninus: Beiträge zur Geschichte des Grossen St. Bernhard – PASSES in röm. Zeit. Hist. Einzelschr.* 46 (Wiesbaden, 1984).
- 11 For fresh archaeological approaches see, e.g., T. Blagg and M. Millett, eds, *The Early Roman Empire in the West* (Oxford, 1990); and, for the ‘Lex de imperio Vespasiani’, see A. Pabst in W. Dahlheim et al., eds, *Xenia: Festschr. R. Werner, Konst. Althist. Vorträge u. Forsch.* 22 (Constance, 1989), 125–148 (bibl. 141 n.7). E. P. Nicolas, *De Néron à Vespasien: Études et perspectives historiques suivies de l’analyse du Catalogue et de la reproduction des monnaies ‘oppositionnelles’ connues des années 67 à 70* (2 vols, Paris, 1979) is older than Wellesley’s second edition but may be consulted for coin issues.
- 12 For the date of Plutarch’s *Lives of the Caesars* (before 93?) see C. P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford, 1971) 72f.
- 13 Allan Massie, *Nero’s Heirs* (London, 1999). Lindsey Davis, *The Course of Honour* (London, 1997) touches on the theme.
- 14 W. H. Fyfe (tr.) and D. S. Levene (rev. and ed.), *Tacitus: The Histories* (Oxford, 1997).
- 15 C. L. Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction, Galba to Domitian: an Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio’s Roman History Books 64–67 (AD 68–96)*. Vol. 9: Amer. Phil. Assoc. Monogr. 37 (Atlanta, 1999).
- 16 C. L. Murison, *Suetonius Galba, Otho, Vitellius*, edited with introduction and notes (Bristol Classical Press, London, 1992) (this work is dedicated to Wellesley); D. Shotter, *Suetonius, Lives of Galba, Otho and Vitellius*, edited with introduction and commentary (Warminster, 1993).

- 17 C. L. Murison, 'The historical value of Tacitus' "Histories"', *Aufstieg u. Niedergang d. röm. Welt* 2, 33, 3 (1991) 1686–1713.
- 18 R. Ash, *Ordering Anarchy: Armies and Leaders in Tacitus' Histories* (London, 1999).
- 19 E. O'Gorman, 'Shifting Ground: Lucan, Tacitus and the Landscape of Civil War', *Hermathena* 158 (1995) 117–31.
- 20 M. Meulder, 'Bons et mauvais généraux chez Tacite', *Revue Belge de Phil. et d'Hist.* 73 (1995) 75–89.
- 21 E. Keitel, 'Foedum spectaculum and related motifs in Tacitus' Histories', *RhM* 135 (1996) 342–51.
- 22 A. Rouveret, 'Tacite et les Monuments', *Aufstieg u. Niedergang d. röm. Welt* 2.33.4 (1991) 3051–99.
- 23 T. Cole, 'Initium mihi operis Servius Galba iterum T. Vinius consules . . .', *Yale Class. Stud.* 29 (1992) 231–45.
- 24 K.-W. Welwei, 'Verdeckte Systemkritik der Galbarede des Tacitus', *Gymnasium* 102 (1995) 353–63.
- 25 S. Frangoulidis, 'Tacitus (*Histories* 1, 40–43), Plutarch (*Galba* 26–27) and Suetonius (*Galba* 18–20) on the Death of Galba', *Favonius* 3 (1991) 1–10.
- 26 C. A. Perkins, 'Tacitus on Otho', *Latomus* 52 (1993) 848–55.
- 27 E. Keitel, 'Otho's Exhortations in Tacitus' Histories', *Gr. and R.* 36 (1987) 73–82.
- 28 R. Funari, 'Degradazione morale e *luxuria* nell' esercito di Vitellio (Tacito *Hist.* II). Modelli e Sviluppi narrativi', *Athenaeum* 80 (1992) 133–58.
- 29 C. Edwards, *Writing Rome* (London, 1996) 68–95.
- 30 D. S. Levene, 'Pity, Fear, and the Historical Audience: Tacitus on the Fall of Vitellius', in S. Braund and C. Gill, eds, *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature* (Cambridge, 1997) 128–49.
- 31 M. G. Morgan, 'An Heir of Tragedy: Tacitus *Histories* 2.59.3', *CP* 86 (1991) 128–43; 'Dispositions for Disaster: Tacitus *Histories* 1.31', *Eranos* 90 (1992) 55–62; 'The Smell of Victory: Vitellius at Bedriacum. Tacitus *Histories* 2.70', *Class. Philology* 87 (1992) 14–29; 'The Three Minor Pretenders in Tacitus *Histories* 2', *Latomus* 52 (1993) 769–96; 'Two Omens in Tacitus *Histories* 2.50.2 and 1.62.2–3', *RhM* 136 (1993) 321–9; 'The Unity of Tacitus *Histories* 1, 12–20', *Athenaeum* 81 (1993) 567–86; 'Rogues' March: Caecina and Valens in Tacitus *Histories* 1.61–70', *MH* 51 (1994) 103–25; 'Tacitus *Histories* 2.83–84: Content and Positioning', *Class. Philology* 90 (1994) 166–75; 'A Lugubrious Prospect: Tacitus *Histories* 1.40', *CQ* 44 (1994) 236–44; 'Vespasian's Fears of Assassination: Tacitus *Histories* 2.74–75', *Philologus* 138 (1994) 118–28; 'Tacitus *Histories* 2.7.1', *Hermes* 123 (1995) 335–40; 'Vespasian and the Omens in Tacitus *Histories* 2.78', *Phoen.* 50 (1996) 41–55; 'Cremona in AD 69. Two notes on Tacitus' Narrative Technique', *Athenaeum* 84 (1996) 381–403.
- 32 L. Braun, 'Galba und Otho bei Plutarch und Sueton', *Hermes* 120 (1992) 90–102.
- 33 D. T. Benediktson, 'Structure and Fate in Suetonius' *Life of Galba*', *Class. Journ.* 92 (1997) 167–93.
- 34 J. W. Burke, 'Emblematic Scenes in Suetonius' *Vitellius*', *Histos* 2 (1998).
- 35 R. E. Ash, 'Severed Heads: Individual portraits and irrational forces in Plutarch's *Galba* and *Otho*', in J. M. Mossman, ed., *Plutarch and his Intellectual World: Essays on Plutarch* (London, 1997) 189–214.
- 36 Ph. Fabia, *Sources de Tacite dans les Histoires et les Annales* (Paris, 1893).
- 37 D. Wardle, 'Cluvius Rufus and Suetonius', *Hermes* 120 (1992) 466–82, reconsidering G. B. Townend, 'Cluvius Rufus in the Histories of Tacitus', *AJP* 84 (1964) 337–77.
- 38 *CAH*<sup>10</sup>: *The Augustan Empire, 43 B.C.–A.D. 69* (Cambridge, 1996) 265–82.
- 39 C. G. Starr, *The Influence of Sea Power on Ancient History* (Oxford and New York, 1989), 75.
- 40 T. E. J. Wiedemann, 'Valerius Asiaticus and the Régime of Vitellius', *Philologus* 143 (1999) 323–35 (criticism of Greenhalgh and Wellesley at n.1).

- 41 C. L. Murison, 'Some Vitellian Dates: an Exercise in Methodology', *TAPA* 109 (1979) 187-97.
- 42 C. L. Murison, *Galba, Otho and Vitellius: Careers and Controversies. Spudasmata* 52 (Hildesheim, 1993).
- 43 B. Levick, *Vespasian* (London and New York, 1999), chapter 4f. and 8.
- 44 P. Kragelund, 'Galbas's *pietas*, Nero's Victims and the Mausoleum of Augustus', *Historia* 47 (1998) 152-73.
- 45 M. Zimmermann, 'Die *restitutio honorum* Galbas', *Historia* 44 (1995) 556-82.
- 46 P. Southern, *Domitian, Tragic Tyrant* (London and New York, 1997) 13-33; cf. also E. Schäfer, 'Domitians Antizipation im vierten Historienbuch des Tacitus', *Hermes* 105 (1977) 455-72.
- 47 E.g., J. J. Price, *Jerusalem under Siege: the Collapse of the Jewish State, 66-70 C.E.* (Leiden, etc., 1992).
- 48 170.
- 49 R. Urban, *Der 'Bataveraufstand' und die Erhebung des Iulius Classicus*. *Trier hist. Forsch.* 8 (Trier, 1985).
- 50 P. A. Brunt, 'The Revolt of Vindex and the Fall of Nero', *Latomus* 18 (1959) 531-59; 'Tacitus on the Batavian Revolt', *Latomus* (1960) 494-517 = *Roman Imperial Themes* (Oxford, 1990) chapters 2 and 3, 9-52; addenda 481-7, with special nn. on *Hist.* 2, 97 and 4, 13.
- 51 Murison 1991 (n.3), 1707-9, referring to *The Long Year* 172-8. In particular, he commends Tacitus' accuracy over details, vindicated by Wellesley's reconstruction of the battles of Rigodulum and Trier, which was based on inspection of the sites.
- 52 T. E. J. Wiedemann, 'Emperors, Usurpers and Bandits: the Power of the Centre and the Power of the Provinces in the Politics of the Principate', in *Federazioni e federalismo nell'Europa antica* (Bergamo, 21-25 sett. 1992), ed. L. Aigner Foresti et al. (Milan, 1994) 425-434, esp. 427-30.
- 53 p. xi.
- 54 See A. Cameron, ed., *History as Text: the Writing of Ancient History* (London, 1989); see 1 n. 1 for basic bibliography.
- 55 E. Flaig, *Den Kaiser herausfordern: die Usurpation im röm. Reich*. *Hist. Stud.* 7 (Frankfurt a. M. and New York, 1992).
- 56 1960 (n.2), 288.
- 57 1981 (n.2), 189.

## I

# Prospect and Retrospect

On 1 January A.D. 69, in the eight-hundred-and-twenty-first year of the City, the emperor Servius Sulpicius Galba Caesar Augustus and Titus Vinius Rufinus entered office as consuls, the former for the second time.

At the start of the year a careful ritual was observed to ensure success in public and private affairs. The first words you spoke on rising in the morning, the first actions performed within the house must be happy and uncomplaining. Laurel and saffron, around the door or burning on the little household altar, would bring luck. Outside in the city, the temples, normally kept shut, were open to worship, and fire burned on the altars that stood before them. But this was no holiday. As the year started, so would it continue. One must be up and doing. By all means visit and receive your friends; exchange good wishes and little gifts of dates, figs and honey to sweeten the coming year; but then off to work. Wherever Roman citizens lived throughout the circle of the lands, everything done and said would—or might—set the pattern for the year: above all at Rome itself, head and mistress of a civilized and peaceful world. In the capital city the solemn and annual procession of Roman notables was once more to make its way up to the Temple of Jupiter Best and Greatest to seek a blessing on the community.\*

No rational observer could possibly have suspected the anger of the gods. No one could have supposed that the great triple shrine on the hill towards which the company moved would in this year sink into ashes and rubble, a symbol no longer of Rome's eternity but of its seemingly imminent extinction. That Italy should be twice invaded by Roman armies, that its cities and capital should be taken by storm, that three successive emperors should die by assassination, suicide or lynching, and that the whole empire, from Wales to Assouan and from the Caucasus to Morocco, should be convulsed and disarrayed, were matters beyond imagination or surmise. More than a century, after all, had passed since the bad old days of the republic. Yet the long and single year now beginning would provide a spectacle of calamity, endurance and survival without parallel, so far, in Rome's history.

Within the structure of the Roman principate instituted by Augustus

the ghost of the republic lived on in formalities. Annual magistrates, or magistrates in relays within the year, were still elected by, and accountable to, the whole citizen body. Occasionally, to honour his fellow-senators or a particular friend, the emperor himself, as now in 69, assumed the consulship. So early in the day the crowds had gathered in the Forum Romanum near the palace, the senator wearing his heavy, newly-fulled and pure-white woollen toga over the broad-stripe of his tunic, the patrician shod with scarlet shoes, cross-gartered. Of the total of 500 or so senators perhaps 300 were present on such a special occasion—all those not hindered by illness or absent on the public service in or outside Italy. Then there were representatives of the middle class of 'knights': men rich enough in simpler days to afford the expense of mounted service in the army, now merchants, bankers and contractors, men of solid financial status, second estate in a community where rank and privilege were not imagined to be incompatible with the liberty of the individual. These men you could distinguish by the narrow purple stripe beneath the toga. Next, the *populus Romanus* at large: artisans, shopkeepers, labourers, servants, farm folk in for the day from the nearby country; and almost as numerous and not outwardly distinguishable, the freedmen and the unfree, immigrants or indigenious, climbing to citizenship. The ceremony was rather a special one: Nero's successor, old Servius Galba, had only two months before come with Vinius from Tarragona in Spain, and the public was still curious about the newcomer.

The emperor had blue eyes, a hooked nose and a square jaw; he had lost most of his hair. Of medium height and stocky build, he walked with a limp, victim of arthritis in foot and hand, so that he found it difficult to unroll or even hold a book. After Nero, who had died at the age of thirty, an emperor in his seventies must have seemed strange. Yet, as Romans had already discovered, Galba was no weakling in character. His was the green and vigorous old age of a man who had never lived a soft life. His manner suggested the habit of authority and a capacity to rule. He was no stranger to greatness.<sup>1\*</sup>

The palace he had known from childhood, changed though it now was by the building activities of Gaius and Nero. As he emerged from it, descended the steps, and walked down the ramp leading to the Forum, he must surely have thought back over the years to the first day of his first consulship, when by favour of the dowager-empress Livia, Augustus' widow, he had been allowed, though not really a member of the imperial family, to show himself to Rome from the palace on his way to the Capitol. Now, thirty-six years later, he did so in his own right. The prophecy of Livia's son, the second emperor Tiberius, had been strangely fulfilled: he had once called the young Galba to him, asked him a number of questions and finally produced as horoscope a short sentence in

Greek: 'One day, my boy, you too shall have a brief taste of power.' This was the kind of prediction that one believed after the event; but the event, incredibly, had happened.

The procession formed up as Galba and Vinius, dressed in the purple and embroidered togas of consuls, appeared in public. Ahead moved the knights, alongside were the senators and, immediately preceding the consular pair, their lictors, each with the traditional bundle of rods strapped round an axe and supported in left hand and on left shoulder. Behind Galba and Vinius were carried the ceremonial Etruscan folding stools of metal inlaid with carved ivory, the simple thrones of Roman magistrates. The apparatus of the age-old sacrifice was there: priests, herald, flute player, *victimarius*, assistant and young boy (both his parents of course must be alive), together with the victims: white oxen from the Faliscan heights or the watery plain of Clitunno,\* their horns gilded. At the foot of the slope the company turned to the left, away from Nero's columns and the 120-foot statue of the vanished megalomaniac which stood before the Golden House, and moved north-westwards towards the Capitol, past Julius' basilica and the high podium of the Temple of Saturn, and up the steep slope of the paved, slightly curving way that led along the south face of the Capitoline Hill. Once through the gate and into the sacred area, they squeezed into position among the columns fronting the Temple of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva. Within the doorway of the central shrine, that of Jupiter, Galba and Vinius took their places for the first time upon their *sellae curules*, facing outwards to the altar, the assembly and the roofs of Rome.<sup>2</sup>

It was necessary to take the auspices and make sure, as far as possible, that heaven would accept the coming sacrifice. The cage containing the sacred chickens, kept conveniently hungry, was superintended by a special official, the *pullarius*. Gossip afterwards alleged that the birds scuttled away instead of greedily pecking at the cakes of pulse thrown to them. If true, this was a bad sign—and during the actual sacrifice Galba's laurel garland slipped from his head. But no doubt the *pullarius* was equal to the emergency. He reported in due course that the birds had fed. The altar fire crackled with saffron, casting a slight glow on the gilded coffer of the shaded pronaos. In the presence of the toga'd consuls, and of the Senate and People of Rome, keeping holy silence, the purple-veiled priest offered prayers for the state, formulae carefully repeated from a written exemplar and checked for correctness by a listener appointed for the purpose. Any slip of the tongue, any stumble or mispronunciation vitiated the proceedings; to drown unlucky noises a piper played. Then the head of the ox was sprinkled with meal by the priest, and turned sideways; the animal was felled or its throat was slit; the victim was disembowelled and the entrails laid upon the altar. Only if the ritual repeated undeviatingly that of past years could