



RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The Envy of Asinius Gallus

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### Abstract

This paper explores the career and fall of Gaius Asinius Gallus. It argues that Gallus supported Tiberius and worked to increase the Senate's dignity, and that he mediated between the Senate and emperor. It explains Gallus' downfall in light of his career: he resented Sejanus as a threat to the Senate, and he envied his role as Tiberius' *adiutor*. His efforts to honour the prefect in 30 CE were not enough to save him.

**Keywords:** Asinius Gallus; Tiberius; Sejanus; Velleius Paterculus; φθόνος; *invidia*

Asinius Gallus appears more times in Tacitus' Tiberian books than anyone besides Sejanus and members of the imperial family.<sup>1</sup> He acts as a foil to Tiberius, bringing out his worst qualities of dissimulation and tyrannical control. Tacitus sets up the conflict at the beginning of the *Annals*: Gallus had married Tiberius' beloved first wife Vipsania Agrippina, and he had inherited the *ferocia* of his father Asinius Pollio (Tac. *Ann.* 1.12.4). Before Tiberius assumed power, Augustus had warned him about Gallus: he was *avidus et minor*, a man of great ambition but unequal to the task of ruling (Tac. *Ann.* 1.13.2–3). Although he survived for almost 20 years after Tiberius became *princeps*, his cruel end seems inevitable in Tacitus' account. Imprisoned in 30 CE, Gallus suffered a deadly neglect. After three years awaiting a trial that never came, he died of starvation.<sup>2</sup> *Damnatio memoriae* followed, and it was only under Caligula that his reputation was restored.<sup>3</sup>

Tacitus depicts Gallus as a longtime enemy of Tiberius, treading a slow but direct path toward a brutal death.<sup>4</sup> This depiction has shaped the modern view

<sup>1</sup> Woodman (2004) 6 n. 21.

<sup>2</sup> On Gallus' death, see Tac. *Ann.* 6.23.1; Cass. Dio 58.23.6.

<sup>3</sup> On the *damnatio memoriae* against Asinius Gallus, see Flower (2006) 143–8.

<sup>4</sup> Cassius Dio's account is similar. Like Tacitus, Dio introduces Gallus as a romantic and political rival to Tiberius; see Cass. Dio 57.2.5–7. Goodyear (1972) 179–80 suggests that Dio has used Tacitus for the story of Tiberius' accession or that they share a common source.

of Gallus. But decades ago, Bosworth called Tacitus' portrait into question.<sup>5</sup> Not only is it inconsistent – Gallus oscillates between flattery and hostility – but it is also implausible. Can we really believe that he worked to undermine Tiberius for 16 years with impunity, or that Tacitus had credible sources for deep hatreds harboured in secret or furtive looks that exposed the emperor's hidden fury? Or that a man who owed his position to the principate and whose sons received numerous honours during Tiberius' reign was an unflinching enemy of the emperor?<sup>6</sup> Bosworth argued that this conflict was invented by Tacitus or his sources, owing to the fates of Gallus and two of his sons (the younger Gaius Asinius Gallus was exiled for conspiring against Claudius in 46 CE; his brother Servius Asinius Celer was killed under Claudius, though the reason is not known).<sup>7</sup> He suggested that if we examine Gallus' actions without Tacitus' bias, we are left with a completely different view of the senator, not as an enemy of the emperor, but as an ally.

Bosworth's theory is compelling and, I think, correct. But there is one event that he does not adequately explain: if Gallus supported Tiberius, why was he imprisoned? The portion of Tacitus' narrative dealing with Gallus' downfall is no longer extant; we must rely on Cassius Dio, as preserved in Xiphilinus and the *Excerpta de virtutibus et vitiis* (EV). Dio tells us that, while Gallus was dining on Capri with the emperor, a letter from Tiberius was read in the Senate denouncing him, and a praetor was sent out immediately to take him into custody. A passage from the *Excerpta* provides some context:

ἐπειδὴ γὰρ τὸν Σεϊανὸν ἦτοι καὶ ἀληθῶς ὡς ἀνταρχήσοντα ἢ καὶ τῷ τοῦ Τιβερίου δέει θεραπεύων, ἢ καὶ ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆς, ἵνα καὶ αὐτῷ ἐκείνῳ διὰ κόρου γενόμενος φθαρῆ, τὰ τε πλείω οἱ καὶ τὰ μείζω ἐσηγήσατο καὶ ἐν τοῖς πρεσβευταῖς γενέσθαι ἐσπούδασεν, ἐπέστειλε περὶ αὐτοῦ τῇ βουλῇ τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ ὅτι τῷ Σεϊανῷ τῆς πρὸς ἑαυτὸν φιλίας φθονοίη, καίπερ αὐτὸς Συριακῶ φίλῳ χρώμενος.

Cass. Dio 58.3.1–2

For [Gallus] was at that time paying court to Sejanus, either genuinely because he thought Sejanus would rule someday or because he was afraid of Tiberius, or as a plot to make Sejanus hateful to the emperor himself and ruin him. Thus he proposed more and greater honours to Sejanus

<sup>5</sup> Bosworth (1977).

<sup>6</sup> Asinius Pollio had been a *novus homo* who refused to take part in the Battle of Actium despite Octavian's request (Vell. Pat. 2.86.3), and thus Gallus' promotion was by no means guaranteed by his birth.

<sup>7</sup> On Gallus' sons, C. Asinius Gallus and Ser. Asinius Celer, see Cass. Dio 60.27.5–6; Suet. *Claud.* 13.2; Sen. *Apocol.* 13.5. In the case of the elder Asinius Gallus, we should note that persecution under Tiberius is by no means a sign of long-standing enmity with the emperor. Several of Tiberius' friends were executed, including Vesularius Flaccus, Julius Marinus, and Curtius Atticus (Tac. *Ann.* 6.10.2). For Curtius Atticus as one of the emperor's companions on Capri, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.58.1. Junius Gallio, likewise, seems to have been a friend of Tiberius; on their friendship, see Sen. *Suas.* 3.6–7; Woodman (2016) 101. Tiberius denounced Gallio to the Senate in 32 CE because he had proposed that members of the praetorian guard who had completed their service should be seated in the Fourteen Rows in the theatre (Tac. *Ann.* 6.3.1). Like Asinius Gallus, he was sentenced to *libera custodia* ('house arrest'). On this punishment, see Garnsey (1970) 147–9.

and jockeyed to be part of the embassy. Tiberius sent a letter about him to the Senate that said, among other things, that Gallus begrudged Sejanus his friendship with the emperor, even though Gallus himself had Syriacus as a friend.<sup>8</sup>

The accusation recorded here against Gallus – ‘that Gallus begrudged Sejanus his friendship with the emperor, even though Gallus himself had Syriacus as a friend’ – has confounded scholars. Mallan describes it as ‘A sentence which, as it stands, defies logic, and textual corruption may be suspected.’<sup>9</sup> Bosworth argues that Gallus had grown too close to Sejanus and that the emperor was threatened: ‘During the twenties [Gallus] drew closer to the rising star of Sejanus, participating in the attacks upon Agrippina and her faction. Finally he miscalculated, arousing Tiberius’ suspicions by the very intensity of his overtures. It is even possible that Gallus’ arrest marked the first stage in Tiberius’ moves against Sejanus. . . . The whole episode served as a warning to other eminent consulars not to attach themselves too closely to Sejanus.’<sup>10</sup>

However, this interpretation is too difficult to reconcile with the events that followed Gallus’ imprisonment. Dio tells us that Vallius Syriacus was killed because of his connection to Gallus, and Seneca that several men shared this fate.<sup>11</sup> Can we really believe that Tiberius punished these men for favouring Sejanus over the emperor, then allowed Sejanus not only to live, but to go to Rome as consul in the following year? Tiberius was known for playing the long game, but would he have played such a dangerous one?<sup>12</sup> When Julius Caesar divorced his wife, he famously proclaimed, ‘Caesar’s wife must be beyond reproach.’<sup>13</sup> This must have been even truer for Caesar’s *adiutor* or right-hand man; Sejanus could not have escaped unscathed if a consular and others were plotting to put him into Tiberius’ place.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the Senate continued to grant excessive honours to Sejanus after Gallus’ imprisonment.<sup>15</sup> If Gallus were imprisoned and other elite men killed for their overtures to Sejanus, surely the Senate would have taken the hint and backed off.

<sup>8</sup> For the text of Cassius Dio, I have used Boissevain (1895–1901); for Tacitus, Fisher (1906); for Velleius Paterculus, Woodman (1977). All translations are my own.

<sup>9</sup> Mallan (2020) 279. See also Köstermann (1955) 359, which claims that Gallus’ ‘Verhältnis zu Tiberius und Sejan in ein merkwürdig zwiespältiges Licht gerückt wird . . .’ (relationship to Tiberius and Sejanus is presented in a strangely ambivalent light . . .).

<sup>10</sup> Bosworth (1977) 180. For Gallus as a partisan of Sejanus, see also Devillers (2009) 158; Bird (1969) 83; Seager (2005) 196.

<sup>11</sup> On Syriacus’ death, see Cass. Dio 58.3.7 (Xiph.). For the other men who died because of their friendship with Gallus, see Sen. Ep. 55.3.

<sup>12</sup> For Tiberius’ long game against Drusus Libo, see Suet. Tib. 25.3; Tac. Ann. 2.28.2; Pettinger (2012) 195–207. For Tiberius’ machinations against Sejanus, see Cass. Dio 58.6–8; Köstermann (1955) 363–9.

<sup>13</sup> Plut. Caes. 10.9; Cass. Dio 37.45.2.

<sup>14</sup> On Sejanus as Tiberius’ *adiutor*, see Champlin (2012) 370.

<sup>15</sup> Cass. Dio 58.4.4 (Xiph.): men set up bronze statues to Tiberius and Sejanus as equals, the Senate declared that they should be consuls together every five years, and they offered sacrifices before Sejanus’ images as to those of Tiberius.

We need to rethink the relationship between Tiberius and Asinius Gallus. In this paper, I will argue that there was a consistency between Gallus' actions throughout his career and Tiberius' ultimate accusations against him: a partisan of Tiberius who sought to mediate between the Senate and the emperor, Gallus resented Sejanus' status (or so Tiberius claimed). It was this alleged resentment, not a desire to elevate the prefect above Tiberius, that led to his fall.

### Gallus as a Partisan of Tiberius

This section aims to paint a more coherent portrait of Asinius Gallus' career under Tiberius. First, I will list each of Gallus' recorded actions in the Senate. Then I will summarise and deconstruct Tacitus' interpretations of these events, showing how the historian distorts Gallus' image to bring his own views of Tiberius and the Senate into sharper focus.<sup>16</sup> Finally, I will build on Bosworth's work to offer an alternative explanation of Gallus' actions. Bosworth shows very clearly what Gallus was *not* (a lifelong enemy of Tiberius), but I hope to reveal more of what he truly was: a leading consular who desired a mutually beneficial relationship between the emperor and the Senate.

The first of Gallus' recorded actions in the Senate was his proposal, after Augustus died in 14, that the funeral procession should enter the city through the triumphal gate. According to Tacitus, this was considered a most distinguished honour (Tac. *Ann.* 1.8.3). His next appearance in the *Annals* is perhaps his most famous: when Tiberius claimed reluctance (whether real or feigned) to take on all of Augustus' responsibilities, and when he suggested a new system of power sharing, Gallus responded, 'I ask you, Caesar, what part of the republic would you like to be entrusted to you?'<sup>17</sup> Tacitus writes that Tiberius' speech had been intentionally obscure, and that Gallus' directness shocked and offended the would-be emperor. Gallus elaborated that the state could not be divided, and he went on to praise Tiberius.<sup>18</sup>

In 15 CE, there was a series of destructive and deadly Tiber floods. Gallus, who was a *quindecimvir sacris faciundis* of long standing, proposed that these be considered a prodigy and the Sibylline Books consulted (Tac. *Ann.* 1.76.1). In the same year, some plebs and soldiers died in disturbances in the theatre. The actors were blamed for abusing magistrates and stirring up dissension, and it was proposed that praetors should have the right to flog actors. Haterius

<sup>16</sup> I will focus primarily on Tacitus' account of Asinius Gallus, since it is by far the fullest portrayal of the consular. But I will supplement this with the work of other ancient authors, such as Suetonius and Cassius Dio. After Tacitus, Dio is our best source on Asinius Gallus, but Gallus features far less prominently in his narrative than in the *Annals*. Mallan (2020) 109–10: 'perhaps the most conspicuous feature of Dio's portrayal of Gallus, when viewed alongside that of Tacitus, is how little Dio employs him in the extant narrative.'

<sup>17</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.12.2: *Tum Asinius Gallus 'Interrogo,' inquit, 'Caesar, quam partem rei publicae mandari tibi velis?'*

<sup>18</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.12.3. For Cassius Dio, this incident is a direct cause of Gallus' death – 19 years later! See Cass. Dio 57.2.7 and 58.3.1 (Xiph.).

Agrippa, tribune of the plebs and kinsman of Germanicus, vetoed the proposal, and Gallus attacked him violently in a speech.<sup>19</sup>

In 16 CE, when Tacitus returns to domestic affairs after a description of events in Germany, Gallus makes four successive appearances. After Drusus Libo's alleged conspiracy and suicide, Gallus and three other leading senators proposed that gifts be offered to Jupiter, Mars, and Concordia, and that the Ides of September (when Libo died) should be made a festival day (Tac. *Ann.* 2.32.2). On the next day, Tacitus writes, Quintus Haterius and Octavius Fronto proposed sumptuary legislation. Gallus spoke against it, arguing that senators' wealth should accord with their *dignitas*, and that the more responsibility a man assumed for the state, the more luxury he deserved (Tac. *Ann.* 2.33.1–4).

During the *res prolatae* that same year, Tiberius was planning to be away from Rome, and the senators did not know what to do with themselves. Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso suggested that they should continue to receive embassies from Italy and the provinces in the emperor's absence, but Gallus disagreed: 'Nothing,' he said, 'is illustrious enough or worthy of the dignity of the Roman people unless it happens in the presence of Caesar and right before his eyes' (*nihil satis illustre aut ex dignitate populi Romani nisi coram et sub oculis Caesaris*, Tac. *Ann.* 2.35.2). In the same year, Gallus suggested three changes to the electoral procedures: rather than hold annual elections, the Senate should at one time select magistrates for each of the next five years; legionary commanders who had not yet held the praetorship should be designated to it; and Tiberius should name twelve candidates to the praetorship each year (Tac. *Ann.* 2.36.1).

Gallus does not appear again until 24 CE, when he takes a hard line against Sosia Galla. Sosia's husband, Gaius Silius, had been accused of collusion in Sacrovir's revolt and extortion while governor of Upper Germany. According to Tacitus, his friendship with Germanicus was the source of his downfall: 'For this reason [Tiberius] attacked Gaius Silius and Titius Sabinus. The friendship of Germanicus was ruinous to them both' (*Qua causa C. Silium et Titium Sabinum adgreditur. Amicitia Germanici pernicioosa utrique*, Tac. *Ann.* 4.18.1). After Silius committed suicide, his wife Sosia, a friend of Agrippina, was sent into exile on Gallus' proposal.<sup>20</sup> He also suggested that half of her property be confiscated – an excessive penalty – but Marcus Lepidus successfully argued for the usual punishment: a quarter of her property should be given to her accusers and the remainder to her children.<sup>21</sup>

Later in the same year, Gallus proposed another harsh punishment for an enemy of Tiberius, Gaius Vibius Serenus. Already in exile on Amorgus for *vis publica*, Serenus was accused by his own son of conspiring against the emperor. It was a complicated trial: when the case seemed to be falling apart, the young Vibius Serenus fled to Ravenna, but Tiberius had him dragged back to Rome so that the trial could be completed. The emperor, Tacitus tells us, could not hide

<sup>19</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.77.1–3. On Haterius Agrippa as a kinsman of Germanicus, see Tac. *Ann.* 2.51.1; Shotter (1971) 449.

<sup>20</sup> For Sosia's friendship with Agrippina, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.19.1. On the relationship between Sosia Galla, Agrippina, and Tiberius, see Bosworth (1977) 177.

<sup>21</sup> For Gallus' and Lepidus' proposals regarding Sosia Galla, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.20.1–3.

his longtime hatred of the elder Serenus (*non occultante Tiberio vetus odium adversum exulem Serenum*, Tac. Ann. 4.29.2). When Serenus was convicted and sentenced to exile again, Gallus suggested that he should be relocated to Gyarus or Donusa. But Tiberius refused because these islands lacked water, and Serenus was sent back to Amorgus (Tac. Ann. 4.30.1).

Gallus' last recorded act in the *Annals* was in 28 CE, two years after Tiberius had left Rome for Capri (Tacitus' narrative breaks off before Gallus' imprisonment in 30). After the execution of Titius Sabinus, Tiberius complained in a letter to the Senate that 'his own life was full of danger, that he suspected that his enemies were conspiring against him, but he did not identify anyone by name. Yet everyone knew that he was referring to Nero and Agrippina' (*trepidam sibi vitam, suspectas inimicorum insidias, nullo nominatim compellato; neque tamen dubitabatur in Neronem et Agrippinam intendi*, Tac. Ann. 4.70.4). Then Gallus, 'to whose children Agrippina was maternal aunt, asked the *princeps* to reveal his fears to the Senate and allow them to be removed' (*cuius liberorum Agrippina matertera erat, petendum a principe ut metus suos senatui fateretur amoverique sineret*, Tac. Ann. 4.71.2).

These are the eleven recorded actions of Gallus before his downfall and imprisonment, mostly stripped of Tacitus' glosses. Let us now turn to those glosses and to the portrait of Gallus that Tacitus hands down to us: an enemy of Tiberius from the beginning, an ambitious schemer, who attempts to undermine the emperor by exposing his closely guarded secrets. Tacitus' Gallus oscillates between bald flattery toward the emperor and calculated attacks against him.<sup>22</sup> Tacitus sees an ugly sycophancy in the reaction to Drusus Libo's conspiracy: 'I have recorded their proposals and flatteries so that it might be known how far back this evil went in the state' (*quorum auctoritates adulationesque rettuli ut sciretur vetus id in re publica malum*, Tac. Ann. 2.32.2). In the debate over Sosia Galla's punishment, Tacitus praises Lepidus' moderation at Gallus' expense: 'I am discovering that this Lepidus was a wise and serious man in those days, for he often steered matters away from the fierce sycophancies of others to better things' (*hunc ego Lepidum temporibus illis gravem et sapientem virum fuisse comperior: nam pleraque ab saevis adulationibus aliorum in melius flexit*, Tac. Ann. 4.20.2). He goes on to ask whether it was by fate or birth that men such as Lepidus had greater influence with emperors, or whether 'there was something in our own strategies that allows us to proceed between sheer insolence and shameful flattery down a path devoid of ambition and danger' (*sit aliquid in nostris consiliis liceatque inter abruptam contumaciam et deforme obsequium pergere iter ambitione ac periculis vacuum*, Tac. Ann. 4.20.3). Perhaps Tacitus here is contrasting Lepidus with the Roman elite as a whole, who had chosen either to flatter or to fight the emperor. But this is also an apt description of Tacitus' Gallus alone.

<sup>22</sup> Bosworth (1977) 186: 'A glaring instance is his narrative of the motions of AD 16, where he describes Gallus' opposition to Piso as an act of flattery and in the following chapter he gives the story of Gallus' electoral proposals, presented as a challenge to Tiberius. Tacitus has selected and juxtaposed the two episodes, presumably because they both show Gallus involved in a *contentio*, but there is no attempt to make the portrait of Gallus consistent.'

For Tacitus, Gallus' alleged attacks on Tiberius were all grounded in exposing lies and uncovering secrets. In the accession debate, when the emperor's speech was intentionally obscure, Gallus forced his hand and angered the *principes*. When Gallus asked to consult the Sibylline Books after the floods of 15 CE, 'Tiberius refused, concealing divine as well as human matters' (*renuit Tiberius, perinde divina humanae obtegens*, Tac. Ann. 1.76.1). According to Tacitus, when Piso proposed that Senate meetings be held in the emperor's absence, Gallus was motivated by this false display of liberty to argue against him (*quia speciem libertatis Piso praeceperat*, Tac. Ann. 2.35.2). As for Gallus' proposed election reforms, Tacitus writes that 'there was no doubt that this proposal penetrated more deeply and tested the mysteries of power' (*haud dubium erat eam sententiam altius penetrare et arcana imperii temptari*, Tac. Ann. 2.36.1). And when in 28 he asked Tiberius to reveal his fears so that the Senate could remove them, Tacitus tells us that Tiberius was outraged by his intrusion: 'Tiberius loved none of his virtues (as he saw them) more than dissimulation; so much the worse did he take it when he was asked to disclose something he was trying to hide' (*nullam aequae Tiberius, ut rebatur, ex virtutibus suis quam dissimulationem diligebat: eo aegrius accepit recludi quae premeret*, Tac. Ann. 4.71.3).

Ultimately, Tacitus' Gallus is both a villain and a victim, and Tacitus uses him above all to characterise Tiberius.<sup>23</sup> His actions bring out the emperor's worst vices: dishonest and overly sensitive, Tiberius plots and conceals and forces an anxious Senate to guess his wishes. But Gallus also stands in for the Roman Senate as a whole, as a paradigm of their many faults. He is *avidus et minor*, sycophantic and insolent, greedy and vicious. For Tacitus, Gallus' path of ambition and danger was the typical one for a senator, both under Tiberius and in his own day. He uses Gallus not only to sharpen his depiction of Tiberius, but also to comment on the role that senators played in perpetuating the principate.<sup>24</sup>

Bosworth was right to question Tacitus' portrayal of Gallus. He suggested that 'Tacitus has drawn upon two different traditions for his picture of Asinius Gallus, one a factually neutral record of his appearances in the Senate and the other a tendentious reinterpretation of his actions. Tacitus has drawn upon them indiscriminately and has left the inconsistencies unresolved.'<sup>25</sup> If Tacitus has simply superimposed his own or his sources' negative judgments on top of genuine facts, we should be able to clear away these biases to learn something about the real Gallus.

<sup>23</sup> As Cowan (2009: 181) writes in her study of Tiberius' uses of Augustan precedent in Tacitus, 'I take it as axiomatic that when Tacitus emphasizes or focuses upon something, this tells us as much (if not more) about the ideas *he* [original emphasis] was exploring as it does about the historical situation he was describing.'

<sup>24</sup> We may compare Gallus' frequent mentions in the Tiberian narrative to the repeated appearances of the Calpurnii Pisones in Tacitus. As O'Gorman (2006: 284) shows, the Pisones invoked an important theme in Tacitus' *Annals* and *Histories*: '[the principate's] emergence is not entirely contingent upon the existence and actions of the individual who happens to hold the position of *principes*, but rather it is deeply embedded as a mode of political thinking and political desire in the aristocracy and plebs of first-century AD Rome.'

<sup>25</sup> Bosworth (1977) 186.

If we do this, we see two distinct and consistent trends in Gallus' actions: he advocated both for Tiberius' interests and for the *dignitas* – the status and authority – of the Senate. He encouraged Tiberius to accept leadership of the state after Augustus' death and praised him as the only man fit for the job.<sup>26</sup> Time and again, he anticipated the emperor's needs, through the honours to Augustus and the excessive punishments for his enemies (Drusus Libo, Sosia Galla, and Vibius Serenus).<sup>27</sup> His proposal to consult the Sibylline Books after the floods of 15 CE was not meant, as Syme claims, to 'embarrass the government.'<sup>28</sup> A *quindecimvir* could not have used the Sibylline Books against Tiberius, who was himself a member of the priesthood. The priests were more likely to offer a positive interpretation for the flood, one that supported Tiberius in his new position.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, given the emperor's complaints, Gallus' request in 28 that he divulge his fears to the Senate was a sensible one for a leading consular to make.<sup>30</sup> An offer of help to the emperor, but also something more: a lifeline to the struggling Senate, paralysed by the realisation that Tiberius was accusing Agrippina and Nero, and unsure how to proceed against members of the imperial family. In this as in other episodes, Gallus served not only as a partisan of Tiberius, but as a mouthpiece for the Senate's interests. When he pushed Tiberius to accept the Senate's acclamation after Augustus' death, he both supported Tiberius' claims to power, and emphasised the Senate's role in confirming emperors. He defended the Senate's authority when he railed against Haterius Agrippa's veto in the controversy about punishing actors. Not only had the actors abused senators, but the veto itself threatened the freedom of the Senate in a heated debate.<sup>31</sup> In the next year, he spoke against sumptuary legislation, arguing that wealth distinguished *equites* from senators, whose labours on behalf of the state earned them greater luxuries.<sup>32</sup> His concern was the eminence of senators and the display of that eminence. Later that year, when Piso argued that Senate meetings should continue in Tiberius' absence, Gallus objected that the Senate's work could only be legitimised by Caesar's gaze. He was right. The Senate had no authority without the emperor behind

<sup>26</sup> Suet. *Tib.* 24.1 points out that it was Tiberius' friends, not his enemies, who urged him to accept leadership of the state. See Levick (1999) 248 n. 22. See also Pettinger (2012) 216: 'anything less than supreme power would have meant [Tiberius'] assassination.'

<sup>27</sup> For the role of Tiberius' supporters in denouncing Libo, see Shotter (1971) 449.

<sup>28</sup> Syme (1958) 281. See also Ripat (2011) 148; Newbold (1974) 127.

<sup>29</sup> On Gallus' proposal to consult the Sibylline Books, see Satterfield (2022). In 27 BCE, the Tiber flooded on the very night that Octavian received the title Augustus. This was interpreted as a positive sign of Augustus' power: 'the *haruspices* predicted that he would rise to greatness and rule over the whole city' (οἱ μάντιες τε ἐπὶ μέγα ἀυξήσοι καὶ ὅτι πᾶσαν τὴν πόλιν ὑποχειρίαν ἔξοι προέγνωσαν, Cass. Dio 53.20.1). Likewise, the last recorded consultation of the Sibylline Books in 17 BCE led to the performance of the *Ludi Saeculares*, a celebration of Augustus' reign and dynasty.

<sup>30</sup> As Bosworth (1977: 178) points out, Tacitus' account of Tiberius' anger toward Gallus in 28 CE is 'uncheckable'.

<sup>31</sup> Cowan (2009: 187 n. 25) suggests that Gallus was not challenging the veto, since he would have had no authority to overturn it, but only expressing frustration at its use.

<sup>32</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 2.33.3. On Gallus' speaking for the Senate's interests in this debate, see Devillers (2009) 161.



it. Gallus might have saved them considerable embarrassment; if the *princeps* left the city, some embassies would have preferred to await his return rather than address the Senate alone.<sup>33</sup>

Likewise, Gallus' electoral reforms can be understood, not as an attack against the emperor (Tacitus identifies it as a *certamen* between the two men), but as a compromise. Two years before, the Senate had requested more praetorships (Tac. *Ann.* 1.14.4). Perhaps there was a shortage of men to perform certain praetorian functions, including the legionary command. Gallus' proposal could have addressed the problem. The reform would have increased the number of praetors-elect without increasing praetorships, giving Tiberius far more men to choose from when he made legionary appointments. This would have been particularly beneficial for patricians, who tended to hold fewer legionary commands than other elite men.<sup>34</sup> The reforms would allow young patricians to serve as *legati legionum* earlier in their careers so that they were freed for more important praetorian service later on. Or they could avoid legionary command altogether, with a small group of military men holding multiple commands over the course of their careers instead, starting even before they held the praetorship.<sup>35</sup> Gallus was not criticising Tiberius for appointing some legionary commanders before they had held the praetorship; he was encouraging him to choose more. This was a compromise between Senate and emperor, one that provided more eligible legionary commanders while still maintaining the limit of twelve praetors per year, which Tiberius had shown in the first elections of his principate was very important to him (Tac. *Ann.* 1.14.4).

When we examine Gallus' actions on their own, without Tacitus' glosses, we see a consistency in his behaviour throughout Tiberius' principate. He supported the emperor and encouraged him to accept the full responsibility of government; he worked for the Senate's *dignitas*, as grounded in a strong relationship with the emperor; he praised Tiberius and his father, attacked his enemies, and anticipated his needs. In the next section, we will consider how these qualities – his support for Tiberius' power and the Senate's dignity, and his desire to position himself between the Senate and emperor – might have led to his downfall.

### Sejanus' Consulship and Gallus' Downfall

Cassius Dio's story of Gallus' downfall mimics Tacitus' characterisation of him, reminding the reader of his marriage to Vipsania Agrippina and of his outspokenness (58.3.1, Xiph.). We have already shown that the emperor's long-

<sup>33</sup> Talbert has shown that the Senate's role in diplomacy gradually decreased throughout the early imperial period. For the reception of embassies by the Senate, see Talbert (1984) 411–25; Millar (1977) 341–51, 375–463.

<sup>34</sup> On patricians and the legionary command, see Duncan-Jones (2016) 17. See also Birley (1981) 17, which claims that they 'would be virtually excluded' from legionary command.

<sup>35</sup> On Gallus' proposed legislative reforms, see Satterfield (2020). On elections under Tiberius, see Lacey (1963); Shotter (1966); Levick (1967); Frei-Stolba (1967); Astin (1969); Crook (1970); Holladay (1978).

burning hostility toward Gallus is not credible. But Dio gives one valuable piece of testimony concerning the reason for Gallus' downfall: Tiberius' letter denouncing him to the Senate. This letter, no doubt recorded in the *acta Senatus*, should be considered particularly reliable evidence of the emperor's views. Most of the details have been lost - Dio does not name the 'other things' of which Tiberius accused Gallus - but one key allegation is preserved: 'that Gallus begrudged Sejanus his friendship with the emperor, even though Gallus himself had Syriacus as a friend' (ὅτι τῷ Σεϊανῷ τῆς πρὸς ἑαυτὸν φιλίας φθονοίη, καίπερ αὐτὸς Συριακῷ φίλῳ χρώμενος).

As we saw above, Bosworth interprets τῷ Σεϊανῷ τῆς πρὸς ἑαυτὸν φιλίας φθονοίη to mean that Gallus was jealous of Sejanus' friendship with Tiberius, because *Gallus wanted to be closer to Sejanus*. Bosworth explains, 'Gallus was trying to monopolise Sejanus and begrudged his intimacy with Tiberius. He was driving a wedge between Tiberius and Sejanus, and by his flattering overtures was attempting to supplant Tiberius in the prefect's attentions.'<sup>36</sup> His suggestion that Gallus sought a relationship with Sejanus rather than with Tiberius is no doubt grounded in Gallus' proposal of honours to Sejanus - the 'flattering overtures' Bosworth mentions - and his endeavours to be part of the embassy reporting these honours to the prefect and emperor.<sup>37</sup> But Dio himself questions Gallus' motives and raises the possibility that the honours to Sejanus might not have been in line with his true feelings; as we saw above, he proposes a number of possible explanations for Gallus' behaviour.<sup>38</sup>

With Dio's equivocations in mind, we must look more closely at his rendering of Tiberius' letter to the Senate. What does it mean that τῷ Σεϊανῷ τῆς πρὸς ἑαυτὸν φιλίας φθονοίη? I have translated this phrase 'Gallus begrudged Sejanus his friendship with the emperor.' This is technically correct, but it leaves the sense unclear. Did Gallus begrudge Sejanus the emperor's friendship

<sup>36</sup> Bosworth (1977) 179.

<sup>37</sup> The honours and embassies to Sejanus and Tiberius are described at Cass. Dio 58.2.7-8 (Xiph.). Dio writes that 'the Senate, the equestrians, and the people each sent their own ambassadors to both men, those from the people coming from the tribunes and their aediles' (πρέσβεις τε ἰδίᾳ μὲν ἢ γερουσία ἰδίᾳ δὲ οἱ ἱππῆς τὸ τε πλῆθος ἐκ τε τῶν δημάρχων καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἀγορανόμων τῶν σφετέρων πρὸς ἀμφοτέρους αὐτοὺς ἔπεμπον, 58.2.8). Mallan (2020) 277 understands ἰδίᾳ to mean that one embassy was sent to Tiberius, and another to Sejanus: 'Dio/Xiphilinus develops the idea of Sejanus as a quasi-imperial figure: not only in terms of the honours he received, but in terms of the creation of a separate court.' But I think that ἰδίᾳ must refer to the Senate, equestrians, and people; each of these groups chose their own representatives (this is why Dio explains that the people selected ambassadors from the tribunes and aediles). The distinction is important. Gallus was not jockeying for inclusion in an embassy to either Tiberius or Sejanus alone; he was liaising with both men. For the joint presence of the emperor and prefect on Capri in 30 CE, see Cass. Dio 58.4.9; Houston (1985) 185.

<sup>38</sup> Cass. Dio 58.3.1-2 (EV), quoted and translated above. The fact that the Senate would include Gallus in this embassy is further evidence against a personal and persistent grudge between him and the emperor. Rogers (1931: 162) writes, 'And the intimate dinner which Dio describes is difficult to accept in view of Tiberius' long-standing enmity towards Gallus dating from his marriage with Vipsania, Tiberius' divorced wife.' Rogers' point is that the famous dinner in which Tiberius betrayed Gallus (Cass. Dio 58.3.2 puts the dinner in the context of Gallus' ambassadorial visit) must have been invented by the sources. But I would maintain that the fiction was instead the long-standing enmity between the two men.

because he hated Sejanus and did not want him to enjoy this good, or because he himself desired a friendship with Sejanus and did not want the emperor coming between them?

The latter interpretation, preferred by Bosworth, presents the relationship between Gallus, Sejanus, and Tiberius as something like a love triangle, with the emperor threatening the friendship of Gallus and Sejanus. The Greek verb φθονέω can be used in this way. In Euripides' *Herakles* (1308–9), Hera is said to resent (φθονοῦσα) Zeus for his affair with Alkmene: ἡ γυναικὸς οὐνεκα / λέκτρων φθονοῦσα Ζητὶ. . . . What Hera feels here is possessive jealousy, a desire to keep Zeus only to herself.<sup>39</sup> But this is an uncommon use of the word. More typically, φθονέω refers to 'begrudging envy' ('I am upset that you have something, and I want to deprive you of it') or 'covetous envy' ('I am upset that you have something, and I want to have it instead of you').<sup>40</sup>

These more typical meanings reflect Dio's use of the word. In his *Histories*, forms of φθόνος / φθονέω appear 92 times, and there is not a single use indicating possessive jealousy – a desire to keep to oneself the person toward whom he feels φθόνος.<sup>41</sup> Instead, in every instance, φθόνος implies hatred or resentment, not love or desire, against the person to whom it is directed. Dio praises characters for not feeling φθόνος and for not inciting it in others.<sup>42</sup> Φθόνος implies or begets hatred, and it destroys friendships. Several times, forms of φθόνος / φθονέω appear with forms of μισέω or ἐπιβουλεύω – 'to hate' or 'to plot'.<sup>43</sup> When one friend excels the other, Dio writes, the weaker will feel φθόνος and the stronger disdain, so that 'they come to conflict and war in place of their former friendship' (πρὸς τε διαφορὰς καὶ πρὸς πολέμους ἐκ τῆς πρὶν φιλίας ἀφικνεῖσθαι, 39.26.2). Φθόνος and φιλία are incompatible.<sup>44</sup>

Four examples from Dio and one from his epitomist Zonaras, in which the verb φθονέω is used with the dative of person and genitive of thing (as in the phrase τῷ Σεϊανῶ τῆς πρὸς ἑαυτὸν φιλίας φθονοίη), confirm that Gallus would not have felt affection toward Sejanus.<sup>45</sup> In 200 BCE, the consul C. Aurelius

<sup>39</sup> Sanders (2014: 29–30) defines possessive jealousy in this way: 'where I alone have something and do not want to lose it to someone else'. This type of jealousy may also be described by the Greek word ζηλοτυπία. On ζηλοτυπία, see Konstan (2003) 12–24.

<sup>40</sup> For these definitions, see Sanders (2014) 16. For begrudging envy in particular as the prototypical use of φθονέω, see Sanders (2014) 74. The *LSJ* defines φθονέω as 'to bear ill-will or malice, grudge, be envious or jealous'.

<sup>41</sup> This is the result of a *TLG* search for forms of φθόνος and φθονέω in Cassius Dio, including fragments and epitomes. It takes account of some doublets, as a few passages in Xiphilinus are listed twice, under both Cassius Dio and Xiphilinus.

<sup>42</sup> Scipio Aemilianus is praised for not inciting φθόνος: 21.70.9; Augustus is praised for not feeling φθόνος: 56.40.5.

<sup>43</sup> With forms of μισέω: 2.11.3, 37.23.4, 38.12.7, 39.26.2, 44.1.1, 46.8.4, 53.8.6, 59.27.4, 64.13.3, 68.6.4, 68.32.2, 78.11.5; with forms of ἐπιβουλεύω: 9.40.36, 38.39.2, 53.6.2, 53.8.6, 54.31.1, 55.15.1, 59.27.4.

<sup>44</sup> For the incompatibility of friendship / love and φθόνος, see also 9.40.15.

<sup>45</sup> Φθόνος / φθονέω is often accompanied by a dative to indicate the person envied or resented. See 9.36.1, 17.62.1, 19.63.1, 22.74.1, 27.91.2, 36.26.2, 43.12.1, 44.39.2, 44.43.1, 49.41.5, 51.12.7, 52.33.9, 53.3.1, 53.10.3, 56.35.5, 56.40.5, 64.13.3, 68.15.4, 69.4.6, 78.11.5.

Cotta begrudged the praetor L. Furius Purpureo (in the dative, τῷ στρατηγῷ) his victory (in the genitive, τῆς νίκης) over the Ligurians and Gauls (φθονήσας τῆς νίκης τῷ στρατηγῷ, Zonar. 9.15.7). He sent the praetor away and continued the war without him in retaliation for the praetor's success, and he protested to the Senate after Furius was awarded a triumph (Livy 31.49.8–11). After Cato committed suicide, Caesar complained that Cato had begrudged him (in the dative) the honour (in the genitive) of saving him (οἱ τῆς ἐπὶ σωτηρία αὐτοῦ εὐκλείας ἐφθόνησε, Cass. Dio 43.12.1). Octavian begrudged Antony (dative, ἐκείνῳ) a triumph (genitive) over Armenia (καὶ ἐκείνῳ τῶν νικητηρίων ἐφθόνει, 49.41.5). Cleopatra asked Octavian not to begrudge her (in the dative) burial (in the genitive) with Antony (πέμνον με πρὸς Ἀντώνιον, μηδέ μοι τῆς σὺν αὐτῷ ταφῆς φθονήσας, 51.12.7). Not only did each of these pairs – Aurelius / Furius, Caesar / Cato, Octavian / Antony, Octavian / Cleopatra – despise each other; most were, or would soon be, at war.<sup>46</sup> Finally, Augustus is praised for begrudging no one (dative) the glory (genitive) attached to public building (ἀλλ' οὐ τῆς ἐπ' αὐτοῖς εὐκλείας ἰδίᾳ τισὶ φθονήσας, Cass. Dio 56.40.5). To begrudge them this glory would have implied resentment and fear of their power.

Given Dio's use of φθόνος, there are two possible ways to translate the clause τῷ Σεϊανῷ τῆς πρὸς ἑαυτὸν φιλίας φθονοίη: 'Gallus envied Sejanus for his friendship with Tiberius' (i.e., he wanted Sejanus out of the way so that he could be closer to the emperor himself – Sanders' 'covetous envy'), or 'Gallus begrudged Sejanus his friendship with Tiberius' (regardless of his own standing with Tiberius, Gallus did not want Sejanus to have this friendship out of pure spite – Sanders' 'begrudging envy'). The clause cannot mean that Gallus wanted to be closer to Sejanus or to keep Sejanus to himself, as Bosworth suggests. As we have seen, φθόνος was a negative emotion in Dio, always directed toward an enemy (or, in the last example, withheld from those who were not enemies): from Aurelius to Furius, Cato to Caesar, Octavian to Antony, Octavian to Cleopatra, Augustus to the Roman elite.

This, then, is how Dio understood Tiberius' accusation: that Gallus was antagonistic toward Sejanus. But what did Tiberius himself write in his letter to the Senate? The Greek verb φθονέω and its noun φθόνος correspond to the Latin verb *invideo* and the noun *invidia*.<sup>47</sup> The root meaning of *invideo*, like the prototypical meaning of φθόνος, expresses feelings of resentment and envy: it derives from the Latin *in* + *video* and is associated with the evil eye. It means 'to look against' someone – 'to look at in a hostile manner or with hostile intent . . .'.<sup>48</sup>

Latin *invidia* can also be translated by the Greek νέμεσις, denoting a righteous anger at the undeserved success of an unworthy person.<sup>49</sup> But in this passage Dio must be right to choose φθόνος over νέμεσις; Tiberius, after all, is

<sup>46</sup> On the grudgeful relationship between Caesar and Cato, see Kaster (2005) 102–3.

<sup>47</sup> On the cognates *invideo* / *invidus* / *invidia* / *invidiosus* and their Greek equivalents, see Kaster (2005) 91–2.

<sup>48</sup> Kaster (2005) 85. The *OLD* defines *invideo* in this way: '1. To look at askance, regard with ill will or envy, be jealous of. 2. To be unwilling to give or allow, begrudge, refuse.'

<sup>49</sup> For the difference between φθόνος-*invidia* and νέμεσις-*invidia*, see Kaster (2005).

accusing Gallus of wrongdoing. Kaster explains φθόνος–*invidia* as a begrudging or covetous envy: ‘I feel *invidia* – I have an unpleasant psychophysical response to seeing your good – not with reference to some principle of justice but just because it is a *good* (“Ah, the laughter of happy children at play – I’ll put a stop to *that!*”) or just because it is *your good* (“Such a big shot, you with your promotion: I hope you choke on it!”).’<sup>50</sup>

In short, Tiberius accuses Gallus of resenting Sejanus.<sup>51</sup> This is no surprise – many senior senators must surely have hated the equestrian at the pinnacle of power.<sup>52</sup> Sejanus was second only to the emperor – ‘the main conduit between Capri and Rome’.<sup>53</sup> He exercised his authority in ways that offended and alarmed the *nobiles*. As Champlin writes, ‘by 28 the only way for a man to win the consulship was said to be through Sejanus. Juvenal likewise has him assigning curule chairs and armies, and examples of Sejanus’ influence in promoting his adherents are scattered throughout the pages of Tacitus’.<sup>54</sup> Tacitus records that in that year senators, equestrians, and plebs went out of the city to beg an audience of the prefect, but that ‘it is widely agreed that his arrogance grew as he looked out on that slavish filth in the open air’ (*satis constabat auctam ei adrogantiam foedum illud in propatulo servitium spectanti*, Tac. Ann. 4.74.4).

Tiberius had long recognised the Senate’s resentment toward Sejanus. Tacitus has him write, in a letter allegedly sent to the prefect in 25 CE,

Vis tu quidem istum intra locum sistere: sed illi magistratus et primores, qui te invitum perrumpunt omnibusque de rebus consulunt, excessisse iam pridem equestre fastigium longeque antisse patris mei amicitias non occulti ferunt perque invidiam tui me quoque incusant.

Tac. Ann. 4.40.5

<sup>50</sup> Kaster (2005) 86.

<sup>51</sup> Dio’s subsequent clause, καίπερ αὐτὸς Συριακῶ φίλῳ χρώμενος (‘even though he had Syriacus as a friend’), does not clarify anything. The allusion, perhaps obvious to Tiberius’ Senate, is lost to us. Bosworth (1977) 179 sees Syriacus, like Tiberius a former student of Theodorus, as an old friend of the emperor: ‘I don’t interfere with you and Syriacus; why are you trying to come between me and Sejanus?’ But if Tiberius were asserting an old and dear friendship with Syriacus, it certainly did little good for the man; he was executed, surely as a result of Tiberius’ letter.

Rather than an old friendship, the clause may allude to Syriacus’ status as an equestrian, and his reputation for *calumnia*, bringing false charges in court (Sen. *Controv.* 9.4.18; Levick [1999] 278 n. 126). Perhaps Tiberius was saying, ‘Gallus looks down on Sejanus as an equestrian (or one who makes false accusations), but he doesn’t mind these same qualities in Vallius Syriacus.’ Or, finally, Syriacus might have been an enemy of the emperor. In this case, Tiberius would be saying, ‘Gallus wants Sejanus out of the way so that he can be closer to me, but at the same time he is friends with my enemy Syriacus!’ Given the uncertainty here, I agree with Mallan (2020: 280): ‘a position of agnosticism is to be preferred to speculation.’

<sup>52</sup> Woodman (1975) 297.

<sup>53</sup> Champlin (2012) 364. For Sejanus’ role as intermediary between emperor and Senate from 26 BCE on, see also Sealey (1961) 111; Köstermann (1955) 360. Perhaps this helps to explain why Gallus was so desperate to be part of the embassy to Capri: it was a means of access to Tiberius.

<sup>54</sup> Champlin (2012) 363. On Sejanus’ power, see Tac. Ann. 4.2.3, 4.68.2, 4.74.3–4; Juv. 10.91–2; Cass. Dio 58.4.1 (Xiph.). See also Sealey (1961) 112 and Hennig (1975) 101–21 on the supporters of Sejanus. For the ties between Sejanus and many of his *amici*, see Köstner (2020) 238–45.

Indeed you want to remain in that position which you now hold; but those magistrates and nobles who burst in on you when you do not wish it and consult you about all matters do not hide their opinion that you long ago exceeded your equestrian station and surpassed the friendships of my father, and through envy of you they also accuse me.

As in Tiberius' accusations against Gallus, we see here a concern with *amicitia* and *invidia*. And here, as in Dio's account of Gallus' downfall, the nobles' *invidia* toward Sejanus is not an honourable or healthy feeling, justified by his station or character, but a hateful and unwarranted envy. The same men who seek his favour resent his power, and they resent the emperor for giving it to him: *per-que invidiam tui me quoque incusant*.<sup>55</sup> This must have been the basis of the accusation against Gallus: *invidia* toward Sejanus is an attack on the emperor, since it challenges his decision to delegate power to the prefect.

The letter of 25 CE purports to have been a private correspondence between Sejanus and Tiberius, and we cannot be certain that it was ever published; perhaps it was crafted by Tacitus himself.<sup>56</sup> But it surely reflects an official view. The relationship between Tiberius and Sejanus was recognised by the state; in 28 CE, the Senate voted to set up an *ara amicitiae* with statues of the two friends.<sup>57</sup> *Invidia* toward Sejanus was not a petty personal rivalry but a state concern – a destabilising enmity that threatened the position of the emperor. Gallus, Tiberius claimed, felt φθόνος–*invidia* of Sejanus' position, which had been granted to him by the emperor himself.<sup>58</sup> He viewed Sejanus as unworthy, or he wanted what Sejanus had, or both. Gallus, of course, would have objected to this accusation, claiming either that he felt no *invidia* at all ('Look at the honours I just proposed for your prefect!') or that what he felt was a righteous *νέμεσις*–*invidia* ('Sejanus is an equestrian who does not know his place!'). We cannot speak to the reality of the relationship between Gallus and Sejanus, and in a very important sense the facts do not matter; it was Tiberius' opinion, after all, that killed the consular.<sup>59</sup>

If Gallus was a purported enemy of Sejanus, what can we make of the honours that he proposed for the prefect, apparently just before his own imprisonment? The case of a contemporary senator, Velleius Paterculus, may help us to understand Gallus' actions. Toward the end of his *Histories*, Velleius writes

<sup>55</sup> For *invidia* against Sejanus as the cause of the prefect's downfall, see Juv. 10.56–8.

<sup>56</sup> See Syme (1958) 1.404, 2.702 and Furneaux (1884) 490 for a skeptical view of the letter's authenticity. See Levick (1999) 165 for a more optimistic one. Levick and Syme argue that the letter contains language typical of the emperor. If it is not authentic, it seems at least to reflect genuine Tiberian arguments for Sejanus' position.

<sup>57</sup> On this altar, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.74.2. See also Jeppesen (1993), which suggests that the Grand Camée commemorates this altar and the *amicitia* between Tiberius and Sejanus.

<sup>58</sup> Velleius Paterculus explains that *invidia* was the natural result of great success: 'What a close companion *invidia* is to great success, and it adheres to those who are most elevated' (*quam sit adsidua eminentis fortunae comes invidia altissimisque adhaereat*, 1.9.6; see also 2.40.4.) For *invidia* in Velleius Paterculus, see Hillard (2011) 226.

<sup>59</sup> For competing claims of *invidia*, see Kaster (2005) 100–1, which discusses the *invidia* the *nobiles* felt toward Cicero (Sall. *Cat.* 23.5–6).

the so-called panegyric of Sejanus (2.127–8). This passage interrupts the narrative; there is no introductory formula, and the following chapter (129) links to the previous one (126) as if nothing had intervened. The language of the passage does not reflect Velleius' style but seems instead to derive from official propaganda.<sup>60</sup> As Woodman writes, 'The section has clearly been inserted to meet an immediate need . . .'<sup>61</sup>

Sumner and Woodman have shown that this was not a panegyric of Sejanus at all – that the fact that Velleius does not mention Sejanus elsewhere, in events in which he played a key role, indicates that he was not a supporter of the prefect.<sup>62</sup> Instead, the praise of Sejanus here is praise of Tiberius, and of Tiberius' decision to give him a position of power. An opponent of Sejanus, Velleius is trying to redeem himself at a time when opposition to the prefect is dangerous.

What sparked Velleius' sudden praise of Tiberius' selection? Sumner suggests that it was Sejanus' election to the consulship in 30 CE.<sup>63</sup> As evidence he cites the list in section 128 of several new men who had risen to the consulship: Tiberius Coruncanius, Spurius Carvilius, the elder Cato, Gaius Marius, Marcus Cicero, and Asinius Pollio. But Woodman disagrees; he suggests that both sections of the passage deal with the same subject: not Sejanus' future consulship but his role as Tiberius' *adiutor*. The passage begins with a list of famous *adiutores*: the Laelii, Agrippa, and Statilius Taurus. Velleius' aim, Woodman suggests, is to defend Tiberius' elevation of Sejanus, who exercised great power in assisting the emperor.<sup>64</sup>

I agree with Woodman that both sections address the same concern, and the same role of Sejanus. But I think that Sumner is correct in identifying this as Sejanus' consulship. In section 127, after his list of historical *adiutores*, Velleius explains,

quibus novitas familiae haud obstitit quominus ad multiplices consulatus triumphosque et complura eveherentur sacerdotia. Etenim magna negotia magnis adiutoribus egent neque in parva paucitas ministeria deficit interestque rei publicae quod usu necessarium est, dignitate eminere utilitatemque auctoritate muniri.

Vell. Pat. 2.127.1–2

the newness of their families did not prevent them in any way from being lifted up to successive consulships and triumphs and several priesthoods. For great work needs great helpers, but in small matters scarcity does not impair labours, and it is in the interest of the state that those who are necessary for its use be eminent in rank and that their utility be fortified by authority.

<sup>60</sup> Woodman (1975) 300.

<sup>61</sup> Woodman (1977) 247. Steffen (1954) 193–5 suggests that the passage was a late addition to the text. Woodman disagrees, though see below.

<sup>62</sup> Sumner (1970) 291–4; Woodman (1977) 247–8.

<sup>63</sup> Sumner (1970) 286.

<sup>64</sup> Woodman (1975) 301–2.

How can this be applied to Sejanus, who has had none of these major honours in 30 CE, unless Velleius and his audience know that they are coming? Surely this is the point of the passage – not to excuse Tiberius’ choice of Sejanus as his *adiutor*, a role that Sejanus had played very publicly for many years, but to justify Sejanus’ coming consulship. The closing sentence of section 128 makes this clear:

Haec naturalis exempli imitatio ad experiendum Seianum Caesarem, ad iuvanda vero onera principis Seianum propulit, senatumque et populum Romanum eo perduxit ut quod usu optimum intellegit, id in tutelam securitatis suae libenter advocet.

Vell. Pat. 2.128.4

This natural imitation of *exemplum* has led Caesar to put Sejanus to the test, has propelled Sejanus to help with the burdens of the *princeps*, and has led the Senate and Roman people to the point that, as they know him to be the most useful, they gladly call him to the preservation of the state.

This ‘calling’ by the Senate and people, coming just after the list of new men who became consul, must refer to Sejanus’ consular election. The concern is not Sejanus’ fitness to serve as Tiberius’ *adiutor*; rather, his position as *adiutor* is used to justify his election to the consulship: Tiberius chose him first, and then the Senate and people follow.

One character is conspicuously missing in sections 127 and 128 if Velleius’ focus is, as Woodman claims, simply on equestrians who rose to power and helped great men: Maecenas. I know that an *argumentum ex silentio* can be problematic, but in this case it is supported by Woodman’s discussion of the letters: ‘The obvious analogy [to Sejanus] is Augustus’ great minister Maecenas, who never sought political advancement but remained an *eques* throughout his life.’<sup>65</sup> Why would Velleius not mention Maecenas here? Because he, unlike all the men named, had never attained the consulship. This is the concern of the passage.<sup>66</sup>

In short, I believe that Woodman is correct that 2.127–8 was ‘inserted to meet an immediate need’. But based on the men named (and not named) in the passage, and the emphasis on honours such as consulships, I believe that this need was not, as Woodman claims, driven by Sejanus’ elevation to the position of *adiutor* to Tiberius, but by the certainty (either because he had been nominated by the emperor, or after his official election) that he

<sup>65</sup> Martin and Woodman (1989) 194. See also Woodman (2018) 217.

<sup>66</sup> Though Maecenas is not named by Velleius at 2.127–8, he is still present in the passage. As Sumner (1970) 294 notes, Velleius’ description of Sejanus is reminiscent of his description of Maecenas earlier in Book 2. But Maecenas, Velleius writes, was ‘not less dear to Caesar than Agrippa, but less honoured, since he lived entirely content with equestrian status; and he might have achieved no less [than Agrippa], but he did not desire it as much’ (*non minus Agrippa Caesari carus, sed minus honoratus, quippe vixit angusti clavi plene contentus, nec minora consequi potuit, sed non tam concupivit*, 2.88.2). When Velleius wrote his ‘panegyric’ of Sejanus, the same could not be said of him.



would be consul.<sup>67</sup> This provides a *terminus post quem* for Velleius' 'panegyric' of Sejanus.<sup>68</sup> But we also have a *terminus ante quem*: since Velleius praises Asinius Pollio, it must surely date to the time before Gallus fell.<sup>69</sup> This would have been a narrow window in 30 CE, just before Gallus' imprisonment.

Why the sudden urgency to declare support for Tiberius' choice? Velleius' attempts to justify both Sejanus' election and Tiberius' backing of his candidacy – historical *exempla*, Sejanus' noble family members, his service to the emperor – tell us something about the political climate in Rome at precisely the moment when Gallus was imprisoned. Sejanus had held no magistracies before this, but he would be Tiberius' consular colleague in 31 CE – an appointment tantamount to succession.<sup>70</sup> This was a turning point, when those senators who were not in Sejanus' camp would be identified as his rivals – a most dangerous position. Those who had opposed the prefect up to that time (whether by direct action or, more likely, by withholding favour) felt a desperate need to declare their support. Velleius Paterculus was in this group.<sup>71</sup> Gallus must have been, too – a partisan of Tiberius whose feelings toward Sejanus were suspect. While he secured honours for the prefect and fought to be part of the embassy, Tiberius attacked him in a letter to the Senate for begrudging Sejanus his friendship with Tiberius. His efforts were not

<sup>67</sup> I offer no opinion on the debate over when Velleius began writing, and whether he composed his *Histories* over a period of months or years. For an earlier start to the composition, see Woodman (1975) 303; Starr (1981) 170–1; Elefante (1997) 27–8. For a briefer period of work, see Sumner (1970) 284–8; Rich (2011) 84–6. I only argue that 2.127–8 was inserted at a later stage of writing, after it was known that Sejanus would be consul – whether very early in 30 CE or later in that year (Velleius' dedicatee Vinicius was consul from January until June: Rich [2011] 75). Although the extant text (admittedly, only just more than half of the original: Starr [1981] 162) does not mention any of Vinicius' accomplishments during his consulship, Velleius must surely have waited at least until after his inauguration to publish it, since so many events in the history are dated by his consulship. On the dating of events by Vinicius' consulship, see Rich (2011) 82. On the likely publication of the work after Vinicius' consulship had begun, see Rich (2011) 85.

<sup>68</sup> There was variation in the timing of consular elections; see Rich (2011) 86. Sejanus' election was exceptional and carefully orchestrated, as it took place on the Aventine Hill. It might have been held earlier in the year than usual, and it certainly was planned well in advance. For Sejanus' election on the Aventine, see Syme (1956). Velleius might have been writing before Sejanus' election, when it was known that Tiberius intended to stand with him for the consulship. After Tiberius made his wishes known, Sejanus' election would have been inevitable.

<sup>69</sup> Bosworth (1977) 174.

<sup>70</sup> Champlin (2012) 364: 'Since his accession in 14 Tiberius has held that office only twice, each time as colleague with one of his sons and heirs presumptive.'

<sup>71</sup> Woodman (1975) 304: 'Yet the position of these chapters [2.127–8], their artificial and defensive structure, their prosaic and propagandist style – all these elements produce an awkwardness and incongruity which testify to their author's discomfort. Indeed, Velleius' active distaste for Sejanus may be deduced from the pointed absence of the *adiutor* from certain other portions of the narrative.' Velleius' defensiveness helps to explain the opacity of the passage. He is countering the typical objections against Sejanus – that he is a new man, that he has too much power – while pretending that no one objects to Sejanus. This may be why he does not explicitly mention the prefect's election to the consulship but only alludes to it; everyone knows the controversy, and thus there is no need (or desire) to acknowledge it.

enough to clear him of the charge of resenting the prefect or attempting to supplant him. As a result, Gallus fell, along with Syriacus and other men – perhaps even Velleius himself.<sup>72</sup>

We can see, then, that honours for the prefect such as those that Gallus proposed, or praise for the emperor's selection of Sejanus such as Velleius wrote, need not have indicated true support for the *novus homo*. It could have been (as we can confirm with Velleius) just the opposite, as enemies of Sejanus clambered to redeem themselves. This would explain why Tiberius accused Gallus of envy or hatred of Sejanus, precisely when Gallus had proposed extravagant honours for the prefect. It would also explain why a number of senators died in 30 CE, but Sejanus' star kept rising: they were not condemned for attempting to elevate him, but for undermining him. And, finally, how Gallus could be a supporter of Tiberius but still face his wrath. As we have seen, *invidia* of the *amicitia* between Tiberius and Sejanus was considered an attack on the emperor himself.

## Conclusion

When we compare our new reading of Gallus' fall with his other actions in Tacitus, we see a remarkable consistency. After Augustus' death, Gallus had spoken of the need for the state to be in the hands of one man: Tiberius. This is no surprise; he and his sons owed their high status to Augustus and Tiberius, and his marriage to Vipsania Agrippina linked his family to that of the *princeps*. No one stood to lose more from the rise of Sejanus than Gallus. He had anticipated Tiberius' needs, and he had worked to establish a close relationship between the emperor and the Senate, with himself as intermediary. He fought to preserve the *dignitas* of the Senate, which was threatened by the arrogance of the prefect. Senators could justify their subservience to Augustus and Tiberius, but not to the equestrian upstart Sejanus. As a leading senator, Gallus might have resented Sejanus' status, or he might have envied the power that derived from the prefect's relationship with the emperor, or both. Sejanus' rise from 29 CE was precipitous, and Gallus, like Velleius, scrambled to atone for his previous slights, and to praise the emperor for his wise choice of *adiutor*.<sup>73</sup> But Gallus' position on sharing power and his unflinching support for Tiberius were liabilities with Sejanus as heir apparent. Gallus' fall represented a change in fortune, but not a change in character.

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<sup>72</sup> Syme (1956) 265, referring to Sejanus' destruction: 'It is a fair conjecture that Velleius shared the fate of Aelius Sejanus.' Syme suggests that Velleius was a supporter of Sejanus, but, as we have seen, Woodman disproves this. If Velleius died around this time, which is not at all certain, it is more likely that he was killed as an opponent of Sejanus than as a friend.

<sup>73</sup> On Sejanus' precipitous rise, see Champlin (2012) 371 n. 26: 'In sum, Sejanus was powerful for decades, but it was only in the last three years, 29–31, that he became a true political marvel, just as it was only in 31 that he ceased to be a knight.'

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