AD 79: THE OTHER ACCOUNTS.∗

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Students sitting the NSW HSC Ancient History examination in 2006 will be mightily familiar with Pliny the Younger’s two letters to Tacitus on the subject of Vesuvius’ eruption and of his uncle’s death (Letters 6.16 & 20). There are, of course, other accounts. Paleogeologists and volcanologists have now essayed a narrative of events which can even distinguish a different sequence of events in different districts of Pompeii.1

Suetonius’ Life of Pliny

Amongst the other literary testimonia, however, two authors stand out. Both will be found in the convenient source collection of Alison and M.G.L. Cooley, Pompeii. A Sourcebook (35, 38–39, 40 [C 11, 14, 17 & 18]). The first is a contemporary of the younger Pliny, C. Suetonius Tranquillus.2 His offerings may, in turn, be considered as two separate items: a brief reference to the disaster and its aftermath in the Life of Titus (8.3); and another in what appears to be a fragment of his De Viris Illustribus — a survey of individuals distinguished in the field of literature.3 We may question whether the two items are to be lumped together. The 92-word Life of Plinius Secundus survives in various manuscripts of Pliny dating from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries, and may derive from a Suetonian original. It is unlikely to have preserved Suetonius’ work in that original form; and the extent of abridgment

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1 Luongo et al. 2003a & b (I am grateful to Dr Dale Dominey-Howes, Risk Frontiers, Department of Physical Geography, Macquarie University, for drawing these items to my attention.) Sigurdsson and Carey (2002) have also produced a reconstruction of the sequences of the eruption. It is a reconstruction quite different to the older well known one which assumed that disaster came ‘out of a clear blue sky’. Archaeological evidence, or indeed the very lack of it (the absence of artefacts which it might have been expected would have been found on the site) also adds to the story. It tells of a partial evacuation of the cities (or at least of the preparation for such flight) in the days leading up to the eruption. This phenomenon has been brought to the scholarly world’s attention particularly in the works of Penelope Allison listed in the bibliography (see most recently 2004:14–21).

It was probably now [August 22nd], as people piled everything from silver plate to garden tools together and hastily sorted them to decide what to take and what to hide away, that the displacement of belongings occurred that has so mystified some contemporary interpreters of domestic life in Pompeii (Butterworth and Laurence 2005: 295, drawing upon Sigurdsson and Carey — and, of course, the work of Allison cited above; cf. Laurence 1994: 5)

2 On the relationship of Suetonius and Pliny the Younger, see by way of introduction Rolfe’s introduction to the Loeb translation of Suetonius (1951: vol. 1, x); and Sherwin White 1966: 127

— or even of interpolation — is unknown. (This is discussed further below.) But it preserves an alternative version of the elder Pliny’s final moments — that he, at his own request, was killed by a slave. This is an item which the younger Pliny seems to have chosen not to transmit. It may or may not be true, but will highlight for students one of the sad uses to which slaves were put in antiquity: voluntary assisted deaths.


5 The De Viris Illustribus has been thought to have been one of Suetonius’ earlier published works. If the conjecture is correct that Pliny the Younger makes reference to this work in his letter to Suetonius (Ep. 5.10), then Pliny was well aware of this tradition but chose not to retail it. It is not agreed that this chronology of composition is correct; indeed, Sherwin-White [1966: 337–38] and Wallace-Hadrill [1983: 7–8; 59] argue against it. The fact remains, however, that Pliny the Younger is likely to have known of any general tradition known to Suetonius.) Would Pliny have considered this version ‘unpleasant’? See the following note.

6 Was there something infra dignatum about this? The answer is not clear. (This is a discussion which could fill a book in its own right. The present discussion will have to scratch the surface only.) The termination of one’s life to escape what could not otherwise be avoided was not in Roman culture weighted with the moral opprobrium that Christian Rome attached to suicidium. Indeed, the latter word (with its core suggestion of murder) was not even used. And slaves were such an ubiquitous but in a sense invisible element of Roman life that it is easy to imagine their assistance being seen as nothing more than the instrument of choice (the modus moriendi), an extension of self. Embracing that spirit, a modern study of autothanasia in antiquity (van Hooff 1990) omits any extended discussion of slave-assisted deaths — within an extended discussion of modes of death (40–78) — while including within its register cases of such. In one extreme case, albeit putative (and to that extent fictional), a rhetorical exercise envisaged a slave-owner desirous of death, whose slave refused to assist, leaving instructions in his will that the unhelpful slave be crucified! (van Hooff 1990: 142). By the time of Pliny’s death, those who had fought in vain for the Free Republic had left a legacy, much vaunted in the first century AD, of the worthiness of assisted suicide. Cassius presented his neck to the sword of an ex-slave (Velleius Paterculus 2.70.2); Brutus prevailed upon Strato of Aegaeae, ‘one of his intimate associates’ to hold the sword upon which he ran (Vell. Pat. 2.72.1). Plutarch (Brutus 43) gives Cassius’ freedman a name: Pindarus — and tells us that the man had been specifically trained, over the past decade for just such an emergency. Yet uncertainty arises: Plutarch, heir to more hagiographical sources, muddies the waters at Brutus 52. Here it is suggested that Brutus approached a number of his companions (including his slave Cleitus) for such assistance, but was refused. Such is the hint; but it is not spelled out. The source would seem to be Brutus’ companion Volumnius, who was one of those in this final circle and who is known to have been one of Plutarch’s sources on Brutus. Plutarch says that Brutus walked aside, with two or three of his companions (one of whom was Strato), and there ran himself through. Plutarch continues (as if picking up another source or sources) “Some say that it was not Brutus himself but Strato who at his insistence held the sword in front of him.” Could it be that the ‘friendlier’ source chose not to have the hero assisted? Likewise, traditions varied on Cassius’ death. Since Pindarus was never seen again, some suggested that he had acted on his own initiative, and then escaped.

Marc Antony also had a slave trained for the purpose. The sources which relate Antony’s botched attempt at self-inflicted death are not altogether sympathetic (Plut. Ant. 76–77); the
It is worth citing this brief document in full here, because it will provide the context of the half of it translated by Cooley and Cooley.⁷ (The other relevant passage — from Suetonius’ *Life of Titus* — will be discussed below.)

Plinius Secundus of Novum Comum, after performing with energy the military service required of members of the equestrian order, administered several important stewardships (*procurationes*) in succession with the utmost justice. Yet he gave so much attention to liberal studies, that hardly anyone who had complete leisure wrote more than he. For instance, he gave an account in twenty volumes of all the wars which were ever carried on with Germany, besides completing the thirty-seven books of his “Natural History.” He lost his life in the disaster in Campania. He was commanding the fleet at Misenum, and setting out in a Liburnian galley during the eruption of Vesuvius to investigate the causes of the phenomenon from nearer at hand, he was unable to return because of head winds. He was suffocated by the shower of dust and ashes, although some think that he was killed by a slave, whom he begged to hasten his end when he was overcome by the intense heat.

*The Life of Pliny the Elder* (trans J.C. Rolfe)

Suetonius was of equestrian rank, probably born in Rome around ten to perhaps as little as two years before the eruption itself⁸ — though one scholar would have him about seventeen at the time.⁹ He was favoured by the emperor Trajan, even though he avoided political and military life. He held a secretarial position under Hadrian, which may or may not explain his access to archival material used to good effect especially in the earlier of his *Lives of the Caesars*. His falling out with the emperor may explain a decreased access to such material.¹⁰ Certainly by the time we get to the *Life of Titus*, Suetonius

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7 Another translation of part of this passage can be found in Cooley and Cooley 2004: 35 (C11).
8 Equestrian rank: Suet *Otho* 10.1 His birthplace is unknown; that he was born in Rome is the argument of Macé 1900: 33–34 Mommsen (1868: 43) had argued that Suetonius had been born in AD 77; Macé argued for AD 69 (1900: 35ff); others for 67 to 72, 70, and even 62 (references in Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 3, n.4). An outline of Suetonius’ life can be found in Schwabe 1900: 197–98 [347, 1]; Sherwin White 1966: 127; Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 2–8; Baldwin 1983: 1–65.
9 Baldwin (1975) places his birth in 62.
10 The gossip concerning Suetonius’ fall from grace is retailed in the Historia Augusta *Life of Hadrian* 11.3. For modern speculation on the nature of Suetonius’ disgrace, Wallace-Hadrill (1983: 6, n.9) gives references to the relevant scholarship. Suetonius’ use of documents is thought to “betray signs of his official activities” (Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 88; cf 88–91). But Suetonius’ official position (and his loss of it), it has been argued by Wallace-Hadrill (91–95), should not be overplayed. He may have had “some sort of privileged access to some letters” but his interest in, say, the authentic letters of Augustus (a singular service of his to posterity) was that of an antiquarian and philologist.
is a far less satisfactory source in this regard. Indeed, his later Lives are generally considered to be significantly weaker.\textsuperscript{11} The Life of Titus is fairly judged "one of the weakest" of the Lives.\textsuperscript{12} But he was a man of standing, a close friend of the younger Pliny; and his accounts of the Flavian period, especially where he is not recounting salacious court gossip or urban myths, are likely to be sound.\textsuperscript{13} Nor should the picture of Suetonius as the retailer of gossip be overplayed.\textsuperscript{14} His aim was to inform, and that is what he does. His purpose was not didactic in the sense that Roman historiography had a utilitarian and moral purpose.\textsuperscript{15} Editorial comment is rare in Suetonius.\textsuperscript{16} In some ways that makes his databank all the more 'safe' to draw upon.\textsuperscript{17} The reader does not have to be on his or her guard against the 'moulding' of the record such as serves the historian's recasting of the past (through selectivity, value-laden vocabulary and other rhetorical ploys).\textsuperscript{18}

The question is: does the above extract come from Suetonius? Remember that it is found in the manuscripts of Pliny. It is clearly, as mentioned above, highly selective — even if it was derived from Suetonius' De Viris Illustribus, it surely does not replicate all of it. Barry Baldwin, after a detailed analysis of the document (which focusses particularly on the divergent account of Pliny the Elder's death — and is thus of special interest to us in

\textsuperscript{11} The decline has often been noted. It was observed by Macé 1900: 361ff. And it is often associated with his dismissal from office; cf Townend 1959: 286–288; 290. Macé had argued simply for a declining interest on Suetonius' part. (Wallace-Hadrill [1983: 62, n.14] provides references to other scholarship.) All such theories would be overthrown if it was to be proved that Suetonius had written his 'last' six Lives first, cf. Baldwin 1983: 49. But such a theory is not popular.


\textsuperscript{13} Pliny and Suetonius: see note 2 above. For further Plinian references, see Plin. Ep 1.18, 1.24; 3.8; 10. 94–95

\textsuperscript{14} Cf Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 24

\textsuperscript{15} Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 23.

\textsuperscript{16} Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 23.

\textsuperscript{17} Whereas other authors carefully selected their material to suit the purpose of their writing, Suetonius was ready simply to present information. This does not only distinguish him from the historians. Contrast the ways in which he and Plutarch present information about the physical appearance of the individuals they are profiling. Plutarch only provides that information if it serves a particular purpose. Suetonius provides it as a matter of course; cf. Wardman 1967.


That said, Suetonius saw the reign of Titus through rose-tinted spectacles (of which more will be said below). Did that affect his account of happenings during that reign?
the present instance), is not prepared finally to assert one way or the other that the source is Suetonius. It may contain elements that are Suetonian, and others that are not. In any case, Baldwin is scathingly dismissive of the item’s worth, finding it “at best incompetent.”\(^{19}\) I have retailed Baldwin’s analysis of the text in an appendix below, both for the content of its argument and because it provides an interesting example of source criticism (which is of the essence here). I would not, however, be so ready to dismiss the *Life* altogether. One thing is certain. It provides information, as was noted above, that Pliny may have chosen not to transmit, and which (possibly) Pliny would not have been keen to see preserved.\(^{20}\) That means that we have here an independent source.\(^{21}\) It should be judged on its merits. Baldwin’s critique will help students argue the point.

Cassius Dio

The other literary account to which I was alluding was the longer narrative of Cassius Dio’s *Roman History* (66.21–23 & 24.1, 3–4), providing a parallel narrative to that of Pliny the Younger. This is the account on which I wish to concentrate. Students, after all the detail provided by Pliny may be tempted to bypass Dio. That would be a pity. He supplies details not found in the fuller (and earlier) source. For those who do read Dio, however, there may be an instinctive inclination to add Dio and stir. That would not be best practice. His work needs to be read in context (the context of his times, his personality, his intentions and the genre).

There are reasons for relegating Dio to the second rank of interest. Pliny is, to a large extent, a primary source; Dio, though ancient, very much a secondary source. This fact is worth emphasising, because so many students speak of all ancient writers as primary sources. It is a practice of which they must be dissuaded; it is the very lack of primary sources which weighs so heavily upon the study of antiquity. Moses Finley, in a provocative study of what we can know about the ancient world and, more importantly, what we can not know, draws attention to the pronouncement of Arnaldo Momigliano on the subject of source-criticism. It is, says Finley, “a point so elementary that it borders on the commonplace”\(^{22}\) — but it is one that has to be made with force. “The whole modern method of historical research is founded upon the distinction between original and derivative sources.”\(^{23}\) It is a stricture not

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19 Baldwin 1983: 405
20 This has been discussed above in nn 5 and 6
21 I taken at face value, the source is not claiming singular authority It purports to convey an alternative tradition broadcast by others (“some think”).
22 Finley 1985: 7.
only to be underlined for students; some of our colleagues need also to be reminded of it from time to time. Finley illustrates the point by taking devastating aim at one of the outstanding modern historians of Rome’s early history: “It is then a strange aberration when a reputable Roman historian, writing the volume on the early Romans and Etruscans (down to 390 BC), in a series edited by an equally reputable colleague, prints an appendix headed ‘primary sources’ which consists of thumbnail sketches in four to ten lines each of a dozen writers, ranging in time from Timaeus, whose long career spanned the end of the fourth century BC and the first half of the third, to Festus, who flourished about AD 150. I cannot imagine that, even as a slip, a Renaissance historian [sc. a modern historian writing about the Renaissance] would compile a list of primary sources made up of John Addington Symonds, Burckhardt and Chabod. I suspect that Ogilvie’s slip reflects, no doubt unconsciously, the widespread sentiment that anything written in Greek or Latin is somehow privileged, exempt from the normal canons of evaluation.”

By the bye, it follows also, applying the rules of source criticism as strictly as they should be applied, that only parts of Pliny’s account can be classified a primary source (in the sense of eye-witness); other parts, for example, his account of his uncle’s last hours, must be derivative. Still, it is the best we have, and we ought to be grateful for that much. He was recording what he professed to know and (we hope) what he believed to be true, and he was writing to a discerning and demanding historian.

Dio’s account, with all its circumstantial detail, must be treated very differently. When using his material, we must know our source. Traditionally, Dio’s stocks have not been high. And Dio was a secondary

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24 Finley 1985: 10 The reference is to Ogilvie 1976: 174–76.
25 We have a hint of his sense of the demands upon him when he says at the close of his first letter to Tacitus (6.16.21) that he enquired into those things which he had not witnessed himself and that he did so while memories were fresh (He was a prescient seventeen-year old.)
At the same time we are left with the hope that he was rigorous (rather than the certainty) Cf. Allison (2004: 20), drawing attention to the argument of Helmut Wilsdorf (1979: 40–41) “that, being a literary man and not a scientist like his uncle, Pliny had based his account of the eruption on the Etna Poem rather than on actual observation”. It makes one draw breath, doesn’t it?
26 Elsewhere in the same study, Finley asks if there has been ‘progress’ in historiography (and if there was such progress in antiquity) His answer is that historiography changes with ideology and that the writing of history undergoes constant transformation: “in antiquity itself one need only remember the sequence Herodotus-Thucydides-Polybius-Livy-Tacitus-Dio Cassius ” (Finley 1985: 5) There is a point left unstated here, but which Finley expects to be blindingly obvious By closing that sequence with Dio, he is effectively saying,
source, twice removed. Dio was born to a distinguished Bithynian family in AD 164/165 (i.e., 85 years after the eruption). He was a bicultural Roman senator with experience in the Roman administration over an extended period of time. He was personally honoured with a second consulship by the emperor Alexander Severus, who generously picked up the tab (for the expenses usually incurred in the exercise of such office). In 80 books, his Roman History covered about 1000 years, from Rome’s origins down to his own day. He wrote when Roman domains were, to put it mildly, going through a bit of a rough patch — an extended rough patch. He himself wrote that the Roman imperium of his own day had “gone from a monarchy of gold to one of iron and rust.” (71.36.4). He himself experienced danger owing to the ill-discipline of the Roman armed forces, to the extent that he was advised to spend most of his second consulship outside Rome. He spent his later years in retreat, the uncertainties of those years exacerbated by the renaissance of a Persian empire that aimed specific claims against Rome’s eastern realms. These included Dio’s homeland! He looked back on the Roman past nostalgically, the Bithynian identifying thoroughly with Rome’s political tradition — though not through a rose-tinted haze. One must suspect, although the exercise was no superficial one (see his protestations below), that an historical interest was something of a diversion. In an age of ‘rust and iron’, the privileged classes of the faltering Roman empire, at one and the same time jaded and endangered, found distractions in a dramatic past. Dio’s History might be read in that light. (I shall elaborate on the dramatic qualities of his writings below.)

But I mentioned Dio as a secondary source at twice remove. The text of most of the Roman History has been lost. For the rest we are dependant upon Byzantine excerpts and epitomators. Whence our account of Pompeii’s destruction? The 11th-century monk Ioannes Xiphilinus made an Epitome of Books 36–80. This provides the bulk of what ‘survives’ of Dio from his book 61 onwards. On Xiphilinus’ service, it is worth contemplating Fergus Millar’s assessment of its independent worth: “Xiphilinus’ work is not so much a précis of Dio as a rather erratic selection from his material, substantially, but not invariably, in Dio’s order and often keeping very close

‘Enough said’. He goes on: “But progress is a value-judgment, which in this instance rests on one’s judgment of the historian’s ideology.”

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27 He served under emperors from Commodus to Alexander Severus
28 Dio 80.5.1 For as much as can be known of Dio’s life, see Millar 1964: 5–27. A useful chronological table will be found at 193–94. We are lucky that Dio himself leaves so much information.
29 Dio 80.4.2–5.2.
30 Dio 80.3.1–4.1
to Dio's wording. Thus a large amount of material is omitted without trace, some is given in brief, and some, especially where there is a coherent narrative or anecdote of some special interest, is reproduced in full.\textsuperscript{32} It is probable that Xiphilinus' account of the eruption replicates the flavour of Dio's original. We can say this because of its close proximity to another summary of Dio.

In the early 12th century, Ioannes Zonaras wrote an \textit{Epitome of History} from Creation to the Year 1118. He used Dio heavily, combining with Dio's material items from other authors. In this way, he often supplements Xiphilinus' work\textsuperscript{33} — though not in this case. He may have used Xiphilinus' work on the side (they share some of the same mistakes), but clearly had access directly to Dio. His work is considered more coherent in itself. He is less inclined to offer literal transcriptions of Dio and is considered a better abbreviator. That will of course often take him further from the original text of Dio, but allows him to capture the sense of Dio's narrative.\textsuperscript{34}

Bearing all that in mind, what does the account of 'Dio' have to offer? Cooley and Cooley understandably urge caution. The details, they suggest, "are far from accurate"; the author's aim, they insist, "is dramatic description rather than historical veracity."\textsuperscript{35} It will be helpful to present these passages of Dio here in the Loeb translation of Earnest Cary. (This will also afford students the opportunity to compare different translations of the same passage.)

\textsuperscript{32} Millar 1964: 2. Some have even suggested that Xiphilinus was following an earlier epitome of Dio. Millar finds no evidence of that (3, n 4)

\textsuperscript{33} The accounts of both Xiphilinus and Zonaras are found in the Loeb translation of Dio

\textsuperscript{34} Millar 1964: 2–3

\textsuperscript{35} Cooley and Cooley 2004: 38. The Cooleys seem to suggest a greater degree of delinquency on Dio's part for the fact that he had actually experienced another eruption of Vesuvius in AD 202. "Even though Dio himself was alive at the time of the later eruption of AD 202, the details of this passage are far from accurate, since the author's aim here is dramatic description rather than historical veracity." They do a great service in drawing our attention to that event (which they do not, however, reference): it seems to have escaped registration in Guidoboni's catalogue (1989).

On Mount Vesuvius a huge fire blazed up, and there were bellowings mighty enough to be heard even in Capua, where I live whenever I am in Italy. I have selected this place for various reasons, and particularly for its quiet, in order that when I have leisure from the offices of the capital I may write this history. In view, now, of what happened on Vesuvius, it seemed probably that some change in the State was about to occur; and, in fact, there was an immediate change in the fortunes of Plautianus [i.e., C. Fulvius Plautianus, the Praetorian Prefect under Septimius Severus] (Dio 77 2 1–2 [trans E. Cary])
Our guide is Xiphilinus.\textsuperscript{36}

Cassius Dio *The History of Rome* 66.21-23

21 In Campania remarkable and frightful occurrences took place; for a great fire suddenly flared up at the very end of the summer. It happened this way. Mt Vesuvius stands over against Neapolis near the sea and it has inexhaustible fountains of fire. Once it was equally high at all points and the fire rose from the centre of it; for here only have the fires broken out, whereas all the outer parts of the mountain remain even now untouched by fire. Consequently, as the outside is never burned, while the central part is constantly growing brittle and being reduced to ashes, the peaks surrounding the centre retain their original height to this day, but the whole section that is on fire, having been consumed, has in the course of time settled and therefore become concave; thus the entire mountain resembles an amphitheatre — if we may compare great things to small. Its outlying heights support both trees and

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The item has my thoughts heading in a different direction. It seems to suggest that Dio was excellently placed to have chased up local traditions (no guarantee of accuracy, of course). The account of Zonaras (11.18 [pp. 55–56D]) follows pretty much the same line as that of Xiphilinus — but is considerably abridged. The closeness in vocabulary and expression would seem to indicate that, in Xiphilinus, we indeed have a close approximation to Dio’s original. I offer below a working translation of Zonaras. Students might choose to discuss the manner in which Zonaras has chosen to summarize Dio. What has he left out? Has he changed the tone of Dio’s account? (Where the parallels are close, I have utilized E. Cary’s Loeb translation of Xiphilinus [given below in the text] — not always the precise translation I would have chosen — so that comparisons can more readily be made of the two accounts.)

In the first year of [Titus'] reign, a great volume of fire burst forth in Campania all at once at the end of summer. For Mount Vesuvius, near Naples, has inexhaustible fountains of fire. Only from the centre part of it have fires broken out; the outside is not burned. While the central part, then, is growing brittle and being reduced to ashes, the peaks surrounding the centre preserve their original height while the middle, having been consumed by fire, has settled and become concave. And from this is sent up fire by night and smoke by day — sometimes to a greater, sometimes to a less extent. And at times it throws up ashes, whenever there is an extensive settling in the interior, and discharges stones whenever it is rent by a violent blast of air. It also rumbles and roars, its vents not all being grouped together but narrow and open. Such is Vesuvius. Then a portentous crash was heard, as if the mountains were tumbling in ruins; and first huge stones were hurled aloft, then came a great quantity of fire and endless smoke, so that the sun was hidden and light became darkness. An inconceivable quantity of ashes was blown out, which covered both sea and land and filled all the air and destroyed fish and birds, and it destroyed two cities, Herculaneum and Pompeii, the latter place while its populace was seated in their theatre. Such were the ashes that the veil reached Africa and Syria and Egypt, and it also reached Rome. And from this later fell a pestilence. Titus accordingly sent to Campania supervisors of restoration and gave not only general gifts of money but also from the property left without owners. As for himself, he accepted nothing from anybody, although many promised large sums. Many of these public works he funded from his own fortune.

The omissions of Zonaras which mark the differences between the two accounts should make the reader glad that Xiphilinus chose to excerpt this section. Much would have been lost.
vines in abundance, but the crater is given over to the fire and sends up smoke by day and a flame by night; in fact, it gives the impression that quantities of incense of all kinds are being burned in it. This, now, goes on all the time, sometimes to a greater, sometimes to a less extent; but often the mountain throws up ashes, whenever there is an extensive settling in the interior, and discharges stones whenever it is rent by a violent blast of air. It also rumbles and roars because its vents are not all grouped together but are narrow and concealed.

22 Such is Vesuvius and these phenomena usually occur there every year. But all the other occurrences that have taken place there in the course of time, however notable, because unusual, they may have seemed to those who on each occasion observed them, nevertheless would be regarded as trivial in comparison with what now happened, even if all had been combined into one. This was what befell. Numbers of huge men quite surpassing any human stature—such creatures, in fact, as the Giants are pictured to have been—appeared, now on the mountain, now in the surrounding country, and again in the cities, wandering over the earth day and night and also flitting through the air. After this, fearful droughts and sudden and violent earthquakes occurred, so that the whole plain round about seethed and the summits leapt into the air. There were frequent rumblings, some of them subterranean, that resembled thunder, and some on the surface, that sounded like bellowings; the sea also joined in the roar and the sky re-echoed it. Then suddenly a portentous crash was heard, as if the mountains were tumbling in ruins; and first huge stones were hurled aloft, rising as high as the very summits, then came a great quantity of fire and endless smoke, so that the whole atmosphere was obscured and the sun was entirely hidden, as if eclipsed. 23 Thus day was turned into night and light into darkness. Some thought that the Giants were rising again in revolt (for at this time also many of their forms could be discerned in the smoke and, moreover, a sound as of trumpets was heard), while others believed that the whole universe was being resolved into chaos or fire. Therefore, they fled, some from the houses into the streets, others from outside into the houses, now from the sea to the land and now from the land to the sea; for in their excitement they regarded any place where they were not as safer than where they were. While this was going on an inconceivable quantity of ashes was blown out, which covered both sea and land and filled all the air. It wrought much injury of various kinds, as chance befell, to men and farms and cattle, and in particular it destroyed all fish and birds. Furthermore, it buried two entire cities, Herculaneum and Pompeii, the latter place while its populace was seated in the theatre. Indeed, the amount of dust, taken all together, was so great that some of it reached Africa and Syria and Egypt, and it also reached Rome, filling the air overhead and darkening the sun. There, too, no little fear was occasioned, that lasted for several days, since the people did not know and could not imagine what had happened, but, like those close at hand, believed that the whole world was being turned upside down, that the sun was disappearing into the earth and that the earth
was being lifted to the sky. These ashes, now, did the Romans no great harm at the time, though later they brought a terrible pestilence upon them.

Dio then went on to describe the events of the following year. Disasters continued to beset Roman society under Titus.

Cassius Dio The History of Rome 66.24.1

However, a second conflagration, above ground, in the following year spread over very large sections of Rome while Titus was absent in Campania attending to the catastrophe that had befallen that region.

He then lists (66.24.2) all the important public buildings which were destroyed in Rome.

Cassius Dio The History of Rome 66.24.3–4

3. Hence the disaster seemed to be not of human but of divine origin; for anyone can estimate, from the list of buildings that I have given, how many others must have been destroyed. Titus accordingly sent two ex-consuls to the Campanians to supervise the restoration of the region, and bestowed upon the inhabitants not only general gifts of money, but also the property of such as had lost their lives and left no heirs. 4. As for himself, he accepted nothing from any private citizen or city or king, although many kept offering and promising him large sums; but he restored all the damaged regions from funds already on hand.

The value of Dio’s account

How seriously ought we to take Dio’s offering? He insists on the seriousness of his purpose, seemingly pre-empting the expected criticism (see above that of the two Cooleys) that vivid description is antithetical to veracity.

Although I have read pretty much everything about [the Romans] that has been written by anybody, I have not included it all in my history, but only what I have seen fit to select. I trust, moreover, that if I have used a fine style, so far as the subject matter permitted, no one will on this account question the truthfulness of the narrative, as has happened in the case of some writers; for I have endeavoured to be equally exact in both these respects, so far as possible

Dio I, frag. 1. 2 (trans. E. Cary)

He is alert to the effect that his lively prose might have on the credibility of his narrative. We should not be so led to think the less of it, he says. He insists that he devoted 22 years of his life to the task: 10 years of note-taking and 12 of writing (23.5). How good were his sources? Like most Roman

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37 Millar (1964: 30) is able to calculate that the research will thus have taken place between 197 and 207, and the composition from 207 to 219 — that is, in terms of our special interests, well over a century after the destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum.
historians, he rarely cites them. And he certainly does not reveal who were his sources for the events of AD 79–80 — though some might have been local (his sometime residence in Campania had him excellently placed). We remain in the dark on this score.

What does Dio tell us that we would not have learned from Pliny? First of all, Dio gives us the year in which the disaster occurred — or seems to have. Xiphilinus in the casual way that he excerpts from Dio has not bothered to supply it. Zonaras, in his abridgment of Dio (see note 36), does: “In the first year of the reign [of Titus]”. That piece of information almost certainly came from Dio’s original (it is too gratuitous a detail to have been added by the Byzantine epitomator). Pliny had not bothered to tell Tacitus what he assumed everyone knew at the time he was writing. What Pliny has supplied is a precise date: August 24th. Dio would seem to confirm that date in a rough sense when he says that the eruption occurred at the end of summer. Both Xiphilinus and Zonaras supply that — Xiphilinus elaborating “at the very end of summer”; so we might safely imagine that this comes directly from Dio, even though Dio is generally not too fussed about dates (see below, notes 56 & 57). Since Dio was clearly following a tradition that was independent of Pliny’s letter, that confirmation is more significant than you might think. Some archaeologists, given the types of consumables found during excavation and even the type of clothing found on two of the victims, have queried the reading of Pliny’s text — and argued that the disaster must have occurred in autumn rather than summer. Dio’s evidence would seem to indicate that the August date was the generally accepted date in the ancient historical tradition.

Dio, of course, offers far more than this. After his general description of Vesuvius’ constantly active nature (66.21), he foregrounds the lead-up to the catastrophe. Pliny’s report confirms that for many days previously there had been earth tremors (6.20.3), though he relegates this datum almost to an afterthought (it appears in his second letter to Tacitus), and he undercuts its importance by observing that such quakes are common in Campania. (He is at pains to vindicate his own initial complacency.) Pliny’s account of August

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38 Millar 1964: 35
39 See above, n. 35
40 For a discussion of Dio’s sources in general, which fails to turn up any tell-tale hints in this regard (i.e., concerning the events of 79 and 80), see Millar 1964: 34-38.
41 The year is also given in the late-antique Chronicle of Eusebius, for a translation of which see Cooley & Cooley 2004: 39 [C15].
43 On the vulnerable basis that the only two surviving literary sources to offer a date, in one case precise, and in the other approximate, can be made to agree.
24th effectively begins with his mother pointing out to him “a cloud of unusual size and shape” rising above what they later discerned to be Vesuvius. In fact, much would have happened prior to this, and Dio’s account is worth following. The Pliny household, from its distance, seems to have been totally unaware of the violent activity which preceded the cloud, as loud as that activity must have been (as Dio reports). Dio, if his account is reliable (and recently scholars have entertained the thought that Dio was working from contemporary accounts here), indicates the psychological impact of these disturbances in the days leading up to the explosion: “the blurring of delusion and reality”. Men of superhuman size were reported to have walked the earth both day and night, their phantoms appearing in wisps of smoke. Thunder underground, albeit such rumblings were not infrequent in the region, disturbed the Romans and peoples of Italy, and called for contemplation of the possible divine messages. Or, at least, supernatural; those messages need not be heaven-sent. The residents of Campania had extra reason to be edgy. Old traditions told of this as the area where Hercules had brought down the Giants — the sulphur, fire and hot springs of Pozzuoli’s solfatara being thought by many to be the emissions of the thunderbolt-wounds of the fallen. Peter Wiseman imagines the locals being unnerved by the thought that the Giants were stirring in their prison beneath the earth. (It was a foreboding which would feed the terror during the actual eruption.) The unexpected drought, which Dio reports, must have added to the unease. Some people, if they did not ‘see it coming’, were sufficiently disturbed to prepare for the unknowable. This in turn will partially explain the absence of some expected artefactual evidence from the site.

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44 Sherwin White 1966: 372. “In the account of Xiphilinus (Dio 6 21–24), which gives a fair description of the first phase of what seismologists call a vesuvian type of eruption, the catastrophe begins with preliminary rumblings and a tremendous explosion, the volcano hurling out great rocks followed by torrents of flame and smoke. Pliny’s observation evidently begins at this moment, when subterranean steam has cleared the vent of the material choking it. None of Pliny’s household appears to have noticed the noise of which Xiphilinus makes so much.”

45 The quotation and the canvassing of the idea that Dio had reliable (or at least contemporary) sources here comes from Butterworth and Laurence 2005: 294. Some of his sources may have been local; see above, n. 35.

46 Strabo 5 4 4 & 6 (reporting a tradition which he did not endorse); Diodorus Siculus 4 21 5–22 2; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Roman Antiquities 1 44 1


48 With the wisdom of scientific hindsight, Butterworth and Laurence are able to add detail to their evocative account of the prelude to the ‘Apocalypse’ (2005: 293–94): “Much of [the customary agricultural work of August] would have taken place in the lower-lying areas of Pompeii’s territory, where the arable farming was concentrated. There the talk would all have been of the inexplicable drought: of the wells and springs that had run dry despite the normal fall of rain in the preceding months, and of the blanched weeds and the dead fish that floated in the Sarno, whose low summer waters carried a poisonous level of sulphuric
 Dio and ‘dramatic history’

Dio also elaborates on the psychological impact of the eruption, the panic in the streets, the chaos. Pliny vouchsafes the panic in the streets, even at a distance from Pompeii.\textsuperscript{50} It is not hard to imagine. And perhaps it was not so hard for Dio to imagine. Did he rely on sources here — or did he simply give free rein to his creative side? Here it is useful to consider the general nature of Dio’s writing. He was, as he has already warned us at the outset, given to the dramatic. Style can shape material. Genre rules. Although he identified with Rome, Dio belonged to the Greek historiographical tradition.\textsuperscript{51} In particular, he modelled himself upon Thucydides — and, as much as the latter is praised as \textit{scientific}, here alone Dio found inspiration enough for not allowing the facts to get in the way of dramatic effect.\textsuperscript{52} Rhetoric also exerted a pervasive influence on Dio. Horrors and calamities were played up to arouse the emotions of the readership or the listening audience. Fergus Millar, providing a full-scale study of Dio as historian, believes that, with reservation, this style of historiography can still be labelled ‘tragic history’.\textsuperscript{53} At the very least, we can call it theatrical. Millar draws our attention to Dio’s description of the proscriptions conducted by order of the dictator Sulla: “[this account] comes near to being a piece of great writing and shows a man who lived through a similar, if much less terrible, period in the civil wars under Severus. But, dramatic as is the detail which he uses — men rushing to look at the \textit{album} [published list of the proscribed] as if it contained good news, then killed even for frowning, or for smiling, when they had done so, and much more besides — it is conspicuous that the passage contains not a name nor a figure nor any indication of the course of events. The design is to

\textsuperscript{49} Butterworth and Laurence 2005: 295 “Finally, by 22 August, the message began to get through to at least some Pompeians. Those of a nervous disposition, or those blessed with a merely normal level of prescience, wasted no time in gathering their possessions ready for departure.” Dio himself, as we have seen above and will discuss below, did not think that such prescience applied to the theatre-going public (66 23).

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Letters} 6 20 7 and 13.

\textsuperscript{51} On this, Millar 1964: 41–42.

\textsuperscript{52} For Thucydides, I do sincerely believe, drama was intended to serve the purpose of underlining the essential truth as Thucydides discerned it. But that’s another paper.

\textsuperscript{53} Millar 1964: 43. On Dio’s style in general, 40–46. Tragic History was a term coined by Eduard Schwartz in the 1890s. Walbank (1955 and 1960) advocated the discarding of the term; Brink (1960) argued for the retention of a “trimmed and shorn” version: “a post-Aristotelian form of history in which some of the principles of tragedy as Aristotle saw them were deliberately applied to history.”
create a certain emotional climate, not to reproduce particular facts."\textsuperscript{54} Caveat lector. One is entitled to wonder, at such points, whether the writer has gone on to cruise control (if such a figure of speech was appropriate to the feverish scribbling of purple prose). It is not a problem which readers face only with the ‘lesser’ historians. Even Tacitus, when offering an emotive passage appropriate to a type of situation can be seen to borrow from his own descriptions of other occasions.\textsuperscript{55} But Dio’s general “avoidance of detail” gives pause.\textsuperscript{56}

With this in mind, it might be worthwhile considering a parallel passage in Dio which deals with the earthquake which struck Antioch on Sunday, December 13th, AD 115, “just after cock-crow.” (The date, needless to say, does not come from Dio. That is exactly the type of detail he customarily eschews.\textsuperscript{57} It comes from John Malalas.)\textsuperscript{58} This is another passage to which Millar draws our attention in his discussion of ‘tragic history’. Again, we see the same odd mixture of factual detail and dramatic elaboration. How much can be trusted?

Again, our provider is Xiphilinus.\textsuperscript{59}

\begin{center}
Cassius Dio 68.24 — 25
\end{center}

24.1 While [Trajan] was tarrying in Antioch, a terrible earthquake occurred; many cities suffered injury, but Antioch was the most unfortunate of all. Since

\begin{footnotes}
\item[54] Millar 1964: 43
\item[55] Woodman 1988: 168–179 points out that Tacitus’ description of events in Germany in AD 15 at Annals 1 60–68 is embroidered from his account of Vitellius’ visit to the site of the battle of Cremona at Histories 2.70, and that the description of the encounter with the Germans at Ann. 1 64.1–65.1 draws upon another encounter experienced by Roman forces in AD 70 at Hist. 5.14.2–15.2.
\item[56] “[It] is a characteristic of his work throughout, not merely in the rhetorical passages. It is the result of a conscious literary principle which Dio follows, that the narrative should not be overburdened with details which were trivial, tedious, or unworthy of the dignity of history. It is unfortunate that by following this principle he often deliberately leaves out just those facts which we should now wish him to have included. The most striking example is perhaps that of Caesar’s legislative programme in 59... but there are many other places where he indicates that unseemly detail is being omitted or cut short for reasons of style” (Millar 1964: 43–44).
\item[57] Millar 1964: 44: “The same stylistic considerations applied to the indication of exact dates, which he scrupulously avoids for most of his History.” The precise date which Dio offers, implicitly, at 79.25.1 (see n 71 below), is only given by way of highlighting a dramatic coincidence.
\item[58] Chronicles 11 8 (275).
\item[59] For references to other sources (all of them very brief in their offerings), see Guidoboni 1989: 667–68 [no 109]. The earthquake was indeed a terrible event. Orosius (7.12.5) reports that it “ruined almost the entire city”. A brief modern description of the quake, drawing largely upon Dio, can be found in Downey 1963: 98–99.
\end{footnotes}
Trajan was passing the winter there and many soldiers and many civilians had flocked thither from all sides in connection with law-suits, embassies, business or sight-seeing. (2) There was no nation or people that went unscathed; and thus in Antioch the whole world under Roman sway suffered disaster. There had been many thunder storms and portentous winds, but no one would ever have expected so many evils to result from them. (3) First there came, on a sudden, a great bellowing roar, and this was followed by a tremendous quaking. The whole earth was upheaved, and buildings leaped into the air; some were carried aloft only to collapse and be broken in pieces, while others were tossed this way and that as if by the surge of the sea, and overturned, and the wreckage spread out over a great extent even of the open country. (4) The crash of grinding and breaking timbers together with tiles and stones was most frightful; and an inconceivable amount of dust arose, so that it was impossible for one to see anything or to speak or hear a word. (5) As for the people, many even who were outside the houses were hurt, being snatched up and tossed violently about and then dashed to the earth as if falling from a cliff; some were maimed and others were killed. Even trees in some cases leaped into the air, roots and all. The number of those who were trapped in the houses and perished was past finding out; for multitudes were killed by the very force of the falling débris, and great numbers were suffocated in the ruins. (6) Those who lay with a part of their body buried under the stones or timbers suffered terribly, being able neither to live any longer nor to find an immediate death.

251 Nevertheless, many even of these were saved, as was to be expected in such a countless multitude; yet not all such escaped unscathed. Many lost legs or arms, some had their heads broken, and still others vomited blood; Pedo the consul was one of these, and he died at once. (2) In a word, there was no kind of violent experience that those people did not undergo at that time. And as Heaven (lit. "the God") continued the earthquake for several days and nights, the people were in dire straits and helpless, so of them crushed and perishing under the weight of the buildings pressing upon them (3) and others dying of hunger, whenever it so chanced that they were left alive either in a clear space, the timbers being so inclined as to leave such a space, or in a vaulted colonnade. When at last the evil had subsided, someone who ventured to mount the ruins caught sight of a woman still alive. She was not alone, but had also an infant; and she had survived by feeding both herself and her child with her milk. (4) They dug her out and resuscitated her together with her babe, and after that they searched the other heaps, but were not able to find in them anyone still living save a child sucking at the breast of its mother who was dead. As they drew forth the corpses they could no longer feel any pleasure even at their own escape.

(5) So great were the calamities that had overwhelmed Antioch at this time. Trajan made his way out through a window of the room in which he was staying. Some being, of greater than human stature, had come to him and led him forth, so that he escaped with only a few slight injuries; and as the shocks
extended over several days, he lived out of doors in the hippodrome. (6) Even Mt. Casius itself was so shaken that its peaks seemed to lean over and break off and to be falling upon the very city. Other hills also settled, and much water not previously in existence came to light, while many streams disappeared.

Xiphilinus 236, 7ff. R. St.; trans. E. Cary (Loeb)

The comparison is interesting. The tendency towards drama is apparent; the details are vivid. Likewise striking is the reference to the phenomenon as an Act of God and the appearance of a supernaturally-sized being, on hand to rescue the emperor. But there is no clear overlap between the two accounts, Dio does not seem to be on ‘automatic pilot’, and the circumstantial detail seems compelling, perhaps even convincing. One has the distinct impression that the account is ultimately based upon the accounts of eye-witnesses to and survivors of the actual event. Overall, the exercise of comparing the two passages is reassuring.

Other items in Dio

What else does Dio offer us? The observation that the volcano buried Pompeii while its populace was seated in the theatre (ἐν θεάτρῳ τοῦ ὀμίλου αὐτῆς καθημένου). Here would seem to be the origin of that detail so favoured in fictional recreations of the disaster from Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s The Last Days of Pompeii (1834) to the various cinematic versions. In these, the ‘theatre’ has become the amphitheatre (hardly surprising in a genre where the arena is a staple ingredient). The item suited down to the ground a prevailing trend to depict a pleasure-loving heathen city getting its just moral deserts. The amphitheatre, holding 20,000, was more than enough to contain Pompeii’s entire population. The theatres were less capacious. The large theatre might have held up to 5,000; the ‘Little Theatre’, no more than a thousand. Should this item be discarded because only Dio offers it? I don’t think so — even if it runs counter to the now established understanding that Pompeii’s population had received due warning and that many had begun to abandon the city. If Dio can be trusted, others went about their business — and leisure. Dio’s account, however, does

60 Solomon 2001: 81, fig 48 (a photograph of Pompeii’s amphitheatre with Vesuvius in the background): “The two prime ingredients in most of the early Italian spectacles about the ancient world — the arena and natural disaster.”

61 “Within twenty to thirty years of its publication, Lytton’s The Last Days of Pompeii had become established as the canoninc narrative of the anicient city’s supposed fall from grace ” (Wyke 1997: 154) On the various modern versions, see Wyke 1997: 147–182; Solomon 89–82.

62 On its capacity, see, e.g., Nappo 1998: 38.
not sanction the notion that the crowd was diverting itself with gladiatorial spectacle.  

Dio also offers a Mediterranean perspective. Through Pliny’s eyes, we see the disaster from close-up. Dio too, as we have seen, attempts a certain immediacy; but he also steps back — in a number of ways. Obviously, from a chronological sense, he looks from afar. And where Pliny describes the mushroom cloud in great detail, he is obviously under its shadow. Dio from his distance looks at the fallout so to speak. The eruption had an effect throughout the Mediterranea.

Indeed, the amount of dust, taken all together, was so great that some of it reached Africa and Syria and Egypt, and it also reached Rome, filling the air overhead and darkening the sun.

This is not surprising. To take but one other example, the eruption of Etna in 44 BC seems to have caused widespread meteorological disruption in the northern hemisphere. The impact of its dust veil can be traced in the acidity levels in Greenland ice-cores and the frost damage in tree-rings. On that occasion too a darkened sun caused consternation in Rome. A local event quickly became a matter of Mediterranean-wide concern. Dio underlines the vast area affected by ash, and the widespread destruction to livestock and natural fauna. As Brian Jones notes, “for areas with essentially pastoral and agricultural industries, the consequences were far reaching.” The dust cloud’s appearance in many parts would have preceded report of its cause (i.e., explanatory news of the event itself).

That leads on to the psychological impact.

There, too (sc. in Rome), no little fear was occasioned, that lasted for several days, since the people did not know and could not imagine what had happened, but, like those close at hand, believed that the whole world was being turned upside down

Dio emphasises the supernatural element. It was thought that the Giants were in revolt. After the fire in the following year he adds that “the disaster

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63 On the possible functions of the theatres, Laurence 1994: 25–26
64 See the nicely framed photograph of an umbrella pine with Vesuvius in perfect place behind in Cooley and Cooley 2004: 35 (Plate 3.3).
65 Forsyth 1988: 49–57; see esp. 49, nn 3 and 4
66 Forsyth 1988: 50
67 Jones 1984: 141.
68 I drew attention above to the unease which Dio speaks of preceding the actual eruption (see n. 47) That unease perhaps fed panic on the day Individuals react differently in the face of
seemed to be not of human but of divine origin". Dio has not invented this. Pliny confirms the dread which surfaced: "Many besought the aid of the gods, but still more imagined that there were no gods left and that the universe was plunged into eternal darkness for evermore" (Letters 6.20.15). But Dio's narrative reminds us how worldly is Pliny's account. All the same, Dio has not assigned the event to divine causes. Generally, it can be seen that he was an adherent to pagan beliefs; he was cautious in his report of portents, but he believed in the powers of the old gods. Volcanic eruptions and seismic disturbances he took seriously as signs from the gods. Here, a disaster such as this, and a blanket characterization would be inappropriate; cf Allison 2004: 20 (citing modern studies of behaviour). But it is not difficult to imagine the superstitious, confronted with the death of all they understood, remembering the tales which they had been told in their cradles while the Campanian earth rumbled beneath. Wiseman captures this thought with his characteristic elegance: "Though Dio was writing more than a century after the event, his account may still have some psychological validity... Pliny describes the flames, the reek of sulphur, the black and dreadful cloud that descended to blot out everything in utter darkness, and the terrified refugees who believed that the gods were no more. Old legends can sometimes seem appallingly real. In the din and dark of terror of that day, the people of Pompeii and Herculaneum might well believe that the once-defeated Giants had broken out of their prison in the earth and were taking their terrible vengeance upon the gods and men." (Wiseman 1979: 794; cf 2004: 275)

Even the poet Martial, in his poetic allusions to the gods who once had their abode, or at least a pied-à-terre, on the mountain, seems to choose instinctively a natural interpretation of the disaster in his shuddering acknowledgement of nature's power: "the gods above would not wish they had such power" (Martial 4.44; a translation of the epigram will be found in Cooley and Cooley 2004: 41-42 [C24]) — unless that line (nec superi vellent hoc licuisse sibi) is read, as it often has been, as saying that the gods wished they had not had such power (and used it carelessly). The Cooley translation leaves it open. Wiseman (1979: 793-94) quotes the 18th-century translation of Joseph Addison: "The Gods themselves the ruin'd seats bemoan, And blame the mischief that themselves have done." Surely the Silver Latin usage of nec suggests the reading "Not even the gods above would wish for themselves to have had such license" (I acknowledge that a scholar such as Todd [1922: 91], while allowing either translation as possible, finds the interpretation I favour the 'less probable')

Millar 1964: 179-81. (In what survives of his work, he never so much as mentions the Christians; Millar, 1964: 179.)

A fragment of Dio's Book VI seems to indicate that Dio was ready to believe earthquakes heaven-sent. Zonaras (7.25) glosses Dio's account of the yawning chasm which opened up in the Roman Forum in the fourth century BC, only to be closed up when Manius Curtius dedicated himself to the expiation demanded by an oracle. Ioannis Tzetzes (Schol ad Exeg. liad., p 136, 17) adds "Dio Cassius Cocceianus, the compiler of Roman history, states that as a result of the wrath of Heaven a fissure opened in the ground round about Rome and would not close." (trans. E. Cary)

For the year AD 217, Dio reports a "violent" earthquake (presumably in Rome) as a sign of the coming fall of the emperor Macrinus (79.25.1), along with a mule giving birth to a mule in Rome, a sow giving birth to a piglet with four ears, two tongues and eight feet, blood flowing from a pipe, bees forming a honeycomb in the Forum etc.; cf Guidoboni 1989: 604 [no 50]. The Colosseum was also struck by thunderbolts on the day of the Vulceanalia
however, he steps back as an historian. It will be noted immediately that such opinions are offered obliquely. "Some thought ..." And he has properly performed the historian’s task in reporting this. The popular response is historically significant. Throughout Roman history, there is evidence that disasters of various kinds led to panic and popular outcries demanding that the gods be pacified. Such signs were attended to at the highest level. Omens were reported to the Senate, registered and, after verification, referred to the priestly college so that due rituals be instituted.

Sometimes, the survivors of disaster gave thanks to the gods for their deliverance; often the call was for expiation. And the mood could turn dangerous (see note 73). Malalas reports that the survivors of the massive earthquake at Antioch which Dio describes above built a thanksgiving temple to Zeus Soteros (Zeus the Saviour). Malalas, from a Christian perspective, has no hesitation in ascribing a similar calamity which struck Rhodes on the same night to "the wrath of God" Malalas’ silence in this regard in reference to

(August 23rd) — "and such a blaze followed that its entire upper circuit and everything in the arena was consumed, and thereupon the rest of the structure was ravaged by the flames and reduced to ruin. Neither human aid could avail against the conflagration, though practically every aqueduct was emptied, nor could the downpour from the sky, which was most heavy and violent, accomplish anything — to such an extent was the water from both sources consumed by the power of the thunderbolts, and, in fact, actually contributed in a measure to the damage done ... This, then, gave an indication beforehand of what was to be" (Dio 79.25.2–3 [trans E Cary]).

We have seen that he also considered the volcanic disturbance of AD 202 as a portent. See above, n.35. It is surely remarkable that such portentous events as occurred in AD 79-80 were not painted in the literary sources as presaging the death of Titus.

Likewise he properly reports, in rather bald fashion, the earthquake that occurred in Asia Minor in 63 BC ("the greatest earthquake ever experienced [in this region?]") for its effect on the morale of Mithridates’ dwindling supporters (37.11.4). For other references to that earthquake, see Guidoboni 1989: 655 (no. 072)

In an earlier age (the late second century BC), the military reverses inflicted upon Roman forces by the migrating northern tribes — and the superstitious dread which consequently arose — are almost certainly the cause of the popular clamour that the suspect private affairs of the Vestal virgins (whose misdemeanours were thought to be prodigious) be more thoroughly investigated. The result was the execution of three Vestals. For the sources and discussion, see Eckstein 1982: 69–95, esp. 71–73. In a later age (the third century AD), natural disasters led to the popular demand that religious dissidents be sought out and publicly scapegoated. "If the Tiber reaches the walls, if the Nile does not rise to water the fields, if the sky does not move or the earth does, if there is famine, if there is plague, the cry at once arises 'The Christians to the lions' " (Tertullian Apology 40 1–2 [Loeb trans])

For the customary report of earthquakes to the Roman Senate and subsequent proclamations of expiatory rites, see Aulus Gellius, Attic Nights 4.6.1. On the earthquake as prodigy, see Traina 1989

Malalas 11.8 (275).

Malalas 11.8; trans E. Jeffreys et al. 1986
the earthquake in Antioch is surprising. Modern scholarship has seen the Christians as victims of the search for scapegoats. We know that a Jewish ‘prophecy’, the fourth Sibylline Oracle, claimed the eruption of AD 79 as “the wrath of the heavenly God” — vengeance “on those who destroyed the blameless race of the pious” (a reference to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in AD 70). Tertullian was quick to point out that the Christians had nothing to do with it.

To make things worse, disease followed. Dio ascribes the pestilence to the ashes which fell from Vesuvius. Suétionus confirms the plague (“one of the worst ever”) — but does not speak of its causes. He has it follow the great fire in Rome. Dio too allows the time lag. It is thought to be the plague which Jerome’s *Chronicle* reports as having over many days killed 10,000 people.

**The relief effort: Suétionus, Dio, numismatic and epigraphical evidence**

Titus thus had to be concerned also with the psychological fallout. Cooley and Cooley (2004: 40) suggest that the coins of Titus “commemorate attempts to assuage the gods’ wrath”. Indeed, the coins of AD 80–81 feature a certain religious consciousness — that is to say, their images have religious associations — and are quite probably to be associated with formal supplications of the gods following the disaster of 79. I provide here two, one held in the Macquarie Museum of Ancient Cultures (Nixon 1996: 58 [no. 325]) and the other part of the Gale Collection presently on loan to the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies (ACANS).

77 Downey (1963: 99) reports that the Christians were held responsible, associating this disaster with the arrest and execution of Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, and citing, at 131–32, Malalas 11.10 (276), where Malalas in fact gives another reason for Ignatius’ arrest — his abuse of Trajan.

78 Sibylline Oracle 4 130-136. (A translation will be found in Cooley and Cooley 2004: 42–43 [C28]).

79 Tertullian, *Apology* 40 8 (a translation of which will be found in Cooley and Cooley 2004: 43 [C30]) and *ad nationes* 1 9 7.

I have elsewhere argued that the fallout from the Etna eruption of 44 BC and the consequent failure of crops in Egypt renewed interest in apocalyptic visions in that country; Hillard 1998.

80 *Titus* 8 3

81 Eusebius-Hieronynus *Chron* ad ann 2093 (i.e., AD 77); cf [Aurelius Victor] *Epitome de Caesaribus* 10.13 (“and there was also a pestilence as great almost as any ever seen before”); Mooney 1930: 493.

MAC 325 Silver denarius, Jan 1-July 1 AD 80. On the obverse, is the laureate head of Titus; on the reverse, a square seat or throne, draped with cloth, its back adorned with palmettes or, as Mattingly allows and Nixon sees, corn ears Mattingly associates the series of chairs (in various types) found on the coins of Titus at this time with the depiction of pulvinaria, the sacred couches of the gods which were brought out during supplications which might have been voted by the Senate after such a disaster. The corn ears on this pulvinar, if they and it are correctly identified, would suggest the hoped-for presence of Ceres.

Silver denarius from the Gale collection [=Mattingly 1930:232 (Titus 57)], dating from the same period. On the obverse, a laureate head of Titus; on the reverse, a seat draped with a fringed cloth. Adorning the chair’s frame are three crescent-like objects, which allow Mattingly to suggest this represents the pulvinar of Apollo and Diana.

How significant (in terms of distinct) were these ‘religious’ themes is another question. Are we dealing with specifically meaningful images? As my colleague, Dr Ken Sheedy, director of ACANS, reminds me, context often supplied added meaning to familiar motifs. Iconology can deepen our appreciation of iconography here. To test the significance of these images in their contemporary setting, we might inter alia pursue a study of the relative quantity of issues and an analysis of the output from different mints. But this is research which remains to be done.

The fact that Titus ended his brief reign as such a popular leader is testament to the effort which the 35-year-old emperor immediately applied to the physical and spiritual needs of those who had suffered directly and to the much wider public which had, as it were, looked on aghast. As we have seen, a divine visitation of such dimensions might have led to widespread panic and disorder. "Titus accordingly sent two ex-consuls to the Campanians to supervise the restoration of the region, and bestowed upon the inhabitants not only general gifts of money, but also the property of such as...

83 Even Orosius, a Christian writer, having registered the fire in Rome and the eruption of Vesuvius (erroneously transcribed in the manuscripts as Bebius) with its consequent destruction "of cities and men" (7.9.14), speaks of Titus dying "to the great grief of all" (7.9.15).
had lost their lives and left no heirs.” (Dio) Titus was seen to devote himself to the minimization of the after-effects. Suetonius’ account, though it is, provides some elaboration of Titus’ relief efforts.

In the face of all these disasters (sc. the Vesuvius eruption, the three-day fire which burned in Rome in the following year and the outbreak of plague), he showed not merely the concern of an emperor, but even a father’s surpassing love, now offering consolation in edicts, and now lending aid so far as his means allowed. He chose commissioners by lot from among the ex-consuls for the relief of Campania [curatores restituendae Campaniae — Dio has shown us that these were two in number, the two accounts thus complementing each other]; and the property of those who lost their lives by Vesuvius and had no heirs left alive he applied to the rebuilding of the buried cities. During the fire in Rome he made no remark except ‘I am ruined!’ [indicating that this was a personal loss that he would make good], and he set aside all the ornaments of his villas for the public buildings and temples and put several men of the equestrian order in charge of the work that every thing might be done with the greater dispatch. For curing the plague and diminishing the force of the epidemic there was no aid, human or divine, which he did not employ, searching for every kind of sacrifice and all kinds of medicines.

Suetonius Life of Titus 8.3–4 (trans. J.C. Rolfe [Loeb])

Both Suetonius and Dio emphasise Titus’ unusual diversion of monies. Legally, the property of those who had died intestate was bona vacantia and would otherwise have flowed into the imperial treasury. Titus simply assigned the proceeds of its sale to relief work and the rebuilding program.84 Dio also makes it clear that Titus’ first response had been to visit the troubled area in person.85 He was there when news of the conflagration in Rome reached him. Titus was also keen to show, as Suetonius has indicated, that the financial burden should fall on him personally. Dio elaborates (66.24.4): “As for himself, he accepted nothing from any private citizen or city or king, although many kept offering and promising him large sums; but he restored all the damaged regions from funds already on hand.” Thus did Titus shoulder the burden of office — and make sure that this was known to the world.

Inscriptions from Campania indicate that his efforts were not restricted to the areas that had suffered direct destruction, but to the whole region. They also reflect Titus’ publicity of these efforts.

84 Digest 22.5.9; cf Jones 1984: 142; Cooley and Cooley 2004: 40
85 References to direct imperial interventions in person are rare in the literary sources; cf Guidoboni 1989: 603
The inscription below with its interestingly bilingual text (with the Greek text in larger letters than the Latin), was found during the restoration of a fountain close by the Church of the Annunciation (the fontana dell’Annunziata) in Naples in 1538.\textsuperscript{86} It dates to AD 80/81.\textsuperscript{87}

\begin{verbatim}
αὐτοκράτωρ Ῥωμαίων Ἡσαύρος
καὶ ἁγίας

ΤΙΤΟΣ ΚΑΙΣΑΡΑ

Greek

ΤΙΤΟΣ ΚΑΙΣΑΡΑ

Latin

Theophrastos magistros degli
consoli

Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum 10 148\textsuperscript{88}

[Imperator] Titus Cae[sa]r Vespasian, [son of the god Vespasian], Augustus, [Chief Priest, holding the [tribun]ician power for the tenth time, [imperator for the fifteenth time, father of the father]land, consul for the eighth time, censor, [in Naples (Nea Polis), having been the demarchos,\textsuperscript{89} agon]othetes\textsuperscript{90} for the third time, and gymnasiarchos [...] restored [that which] had been destroyed by the earthquakes.\textsuperscript{91}

[Latin]

[Imp(erator) Titus Caesar], son [of the divine Vespasian], Vespasian Aug(ustus), [Pontifex Maximus, trib(unicia) potest(as) X, imp(erator) XV],

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\textsuperscript{86} It is now in the Naples Museum.

\textsuperscript{87} To be more precise, between 1/7/80 and 30/6/81, as dated by Titus’ 10th tenure of tribunicia potestas.

\textsuperscript{88} IG XIV, 729; IGRR I, 435 [= McCrum and Woodhead 1966: 54; and Guidoboni’s catalogo delle epigrafi latine riguardanti terremoti, in Guidoboni 1989: 141 (no. 05)]. It can also be found in Newton 1901: 52 [no. 101], which was not available to me at the time of writing.

\textsuperscript{89} The demarch, president of the demos, at Athens kept the registers. It is often used in Greek as the equivalent of tribune of the plebs; Mason 1974, s.v δημαρχος.

\textsuperscript{90} Classically, a judge of contests or president of the games, a judge. Perhaps (later), an exhibitor of games. Emperors sometimes took an active interest in the Neapolitan dramatic contests; cf. Suet. Claud. 11.3

\textsuperscript{91} The reference to plural earthquakes may refer to the various shocks which accompanied the Vesuvius eruption or two or more earthquakes distinct from these; cf. Burnand 1984: 174–75, n.3; Arthur 1989: 502. That the Naples area suffered in AD 79 is apparent from Plut. de Pyth orac. 9 [= Moralita 398], a translation of which can be found in Cooley and Cooley 2004: 43 (C29), and Statius 4.8.5.
co(n)s(ul) VIII, censor, p(ater) p(atriae) [...] restored what had collapsed due to the earthquakes.92

Another stone, which came from piazza Tasso, at Sorrento, and refers to the rebuilding of a horologium, thanks to the intervention of Titus, is to be dated even earlier (in AD 80).93 It is in Latin only.

The Surrentum Stone94

Imp(erator) Titus Caesar, son of the [divine] Vespasian, Vespasian, [aug(ustus)] pont(ifex) max(imus), (having) tri(ubunician) po(wer) for the [ninth95 time, imperator for the fifteenth(?) time], co(n)s(ul) for the eighth time, censor, p(ater) p(atriae) [restored] the horologium with its ornaments [which had collapsed] in the earthquakes.

The picture which thus emerges is of an emperor sparing no expense and effort.96 In terms of source-criticism, however, one other aspect of the literary testimonia needs to be highlighted. The histories are favourable, to say the least; starry-eyed is another term which springs to mind. In particular, Suetonius’ account of Titus’ reign is glowing. Coupled with the thinness of the profile, the tenor is deemed worrying. He presents ample material on Titus’ wayward youth, a performance such that people may have fairly wondered if he would match up to the imperial office — many feared that Titus would be another Nero (Suet. Titus 7.1). But the second half of the Life, the part devoted to his brief reign, leaves no doubt whatsoever that he did (sc. match up). On this score, Suetonius’ offering is judged “closer to romance or panegyric than biography”, “fairy-tale stuff”, and “uncritical panegyric.”97 “It is clear that Suetonius wanted the best for the reputation of Titus”, observes Baldwin (1983: 294). More than that, the biographer foregoes analysis;

92 Note that the author of the Latin part of the inscription does not seem to have bothered rendering Titus’ Neapolitan posts.
93 It is almost certainly to be dated to Titus’ ninth tenure of tribunician power. See the discussion of the text below (n. 95).
94 Sogliano 1901: 363 [= AE 1902: 40]; cf. Guidoboni 1989: 142 (no. 06); and 603–604. A photograph of the stone will be found in Guidoboni 1989: 143, fig. 44.
95 The text should almost certainly be restored here to read TR POT IX. The X is lost, and only the uppermost point of the I remains.
96 The program continued under Domitian. Another stone, found at Nocera Inferiore (anc Nuceria Alfaterna), in the province of Salerno, refers to the restoration of the theatre there. The Nuceria Alfaterna Stone (Johannowsky 1986; cf. Guidoboni 1989: 142–43 [no. 07]; and 603–604):

[Imp(erator Cai)es[r] son of the Divine Vespasian, [Domitianus] Aug(ustus), pont(ifex) max(imus), (having) trib(unician) po(ter) (as) [for the second time, imp(erator) for the second time, p(ater) p(atriae), co(n)s(ul) for the eighth time], designat(e) for the ninth time, [rest]ored

[the theatre which had been ruined/damaged(?) by the earthquakes]]

97 Respectively, Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 62, 114 (citing also Luck 1964), and 177
passing up, for instance, the opportunity to probe the transformation of Titus from delinquent-in-waiting to benign prince. In fact, it is to Dio that Baldwin turns “for an acute and cynical diagnosis”.\footnote{Baldwin 1983: 293.} For Baldwin, ever wary, “the very brevity of the Titus may be deemed suspicious. Its omissive techniques are clamant.”\footnote{Baldwin 1983: 293.} He does not preclude “genuine admiration” (though it is allowed grudgingly), but canvasses other motives — stylistic simplification (an exaggerated contrast between Titus and Domitian) and “personal and political pressures” (to wit, a resistance to Hadrian’s insinuations to the detriment of Titus). The latter would seem to stand in Suetonius’ favour. (He chose recalcitrant silence rather than air theories and slanders he did not believe.)\footnote{Baldwin 1983: 294.}

\footnote{Baldwin 1983: 293.}

 Dio is generally favourable to Titus — but he does pause on the contrast between Titus as princeps-designate and as princeps.

\footnote{Baldwin 1983: 293.}

Dio 66 18 [Xiphilinas (211, 12ff)] is again our guide:

Titus, after becoming ruler committed no act of murder or of amatory passion, but showed himself upright, though plotted against, and self-controlled, though Berenice came to Rome again. This may have been because he had really undergone a change; indeed, for men to wield power as assistants to another is a very different thing from exercising independent authority themselves. In the former case they are heedless of the good name of the sovereignty and in their greed misuse the authority it gives them, thus doing many things that make their power the object of envy and slander, but actual monarchs, knowing that everything depends upon them, have an eye to good repute also. It was this realization, doubtless, that caused Titus to say to someone whose society he had previously affected: “It is not the same thing to request a favour of another as to decide a case yourself, nor the same to ask something of another as it is to give it to someone yourself.” Again, his satisfactory record may also have been due to the fact that he survived his accession but a very short time (short, that is, for a ruler), for he was thus given no opportunity for wrongdoing. For he lived after this only two years, two months and twenty days — in addition to the thirty-nine years, five months and twenty-five days he had already lived at that time. In this respect, indeed, he is regarded as having equaled the long reign of Augustus, since it is maintained that Augustus would never have been loved had he lived a shorter time, nor Titus had he lived longer. For Augustus, though at the outset he showed himself rather harsh because of the wars and the factional strife, was later able, in the course of time, to achieve a brilliant reputation for his kindly deeds; Titus, on the other hand, ruled with mildness and died at the height of his glory, whereas, if he had lived a long time, it might have been shown that he owes his present fame more to good fortune than to merit. (E. Cary trans [Loeb])

Then follows (66 19 1–3) general praise for the equity of Titus’ rule. It will be appreciated that above Dio offers little more than editorial musing, with little by way of corroborative detail (though he does add an unsourced — and out-of-context — apophthegm in support of his theory). But his cynicism is obviously in tune with modern scepticism, and thus appeals to Baldwin. Is Suetonius the lesser for not having essayed such speculation? He has simply chosen to put the facts before the reader. Too few, says Baldwin (below)
This hardly affects the accounts of the disasters which struck in Titus’ reign. Indeed, the prominence of calamities in this brief period is remarkable, such information running counter as it does to the overall portrait of the times as blessed.\textsuperscript{101} The dramatic pictures provided by Dio do not serve that theme. What of the relief measures? Are the accounts ‘touched up’? The narratives of Suetonius and Dio are in essential agreement — and are to the extent witnessed above backed up by epigraphical evidence (which at least testifies to publicity, but presumably publicity which was attached to actual restoration work). At the very least Titus enjoyed extremely good press. No evidence seriously challenges the picture. To some extent, it was, as Wallace-Hadrill says, “fairy-tale stuff, the ruler who never lived to show his true grit.”\textsuperscript{102} But perhaps Titus did show his mettle in response to catastrophe. He put himself on the spot. And after the adverse news from Rome in 80, he had to be in two places at once — but he left the impression (apparently at the time — and certainly to posterity) that he had personally attended to the needs of the distressed. Good PR, yes; but perhaps based upon his rapid response and deployment of resources. Such disasters could have led to an historical tradition associating divine displeasure with the two-year reign.\textsuperscript{103} It did not. Or to charges of complacency and incompetence. Titus handled the problem well.\textsuperscript{104} What \textit{can} be registered, by way of tempering the rosy enthusiasm of the ancient record, is the modern suggestion that Titus maintained his father’s well-known economic restraint. His use of the sale of ownerless properties to finance relief was canny. His father-like concern was attended by fiscal prudence. Vacant property, it could be said, represented a

to Plutarch’s view of the Flavians will again be adduced. Yet it may be that personal and political pressures should here prevail. Dio did not believe that Titus had poisoned his father. But he mentions one of the perpetrators of such talk: the emperor Hadrian. Which urges one to leap to all manner of conclusions, given the traditional history of the relationship between Suetonius and Hadrian.” One might wish that Baldwin had chosen to be a little less elliptical here. His accompanying footnote alludes to the possibility of a ‘revised version’, a possibility he has canvassed in an earlier chapter.

\textsuperscript{101} It could be possibly argued that such a bleak backdrop provided a stage on which the emperor could shine. That, at least, is the way it is pitched in one modern account: “Ample scope for his generosity was soon provided by the natural disasters of his reign” (Jones 1984: 141) But that is hardly the way in which an ancient writer could have seen it. The disasters were real; and, as we have seen above, there was too much a risk of them being seen as expressions of divine ill will or displeasure.

\textsuperscript{102} Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 114.

\textsuperscript{103} Compare the opprobrium which attached to Nero on account of the fire of AD 64, driving Nero’s desperate and deadly search for scapegoats.

\textsuperscript{104} Titus’ prompt reaction is covered by Jones 1984: 141–42 Collateral evidence supports the literary testimony (Jones 1984: 142)
windfall 105 Vespasian had bequeathed his son a large reserve in the treasury and Titus passed on a well-filled one to his brother. 106

Dio is ahead of us Zonaras (11.8) preserves, presumably in gloss, his assessment of Titus:

Dio 66.19.3a (trans. E. Cary [Loeb]):
In money matters he was frugal and made no unnecessary expenditures, yet he did not punish anyone for following a different course.

Again, we see if anything Titus’ skill: fiscal responsibility — and the knowledge of how to disguise his talents. The image of liberality prevailed.

Conclusion — and epilogue

The above discussion hardly diminishes the worth of what Suetonius and Dio provide. It is to be regretted that, by the time he got to the Titus, Suetonius was neither as conscientious nor as enthusiastic as he had once been, and that Dio was the type of historian who was not going to let too much detail (in terms of historical data) get in the way of dramatic effect; 107 but there are clearly items of interest to be gleaned from these alternative accounts. A consideration of each author and the nature of their compositions alerts us to those aspects of the works where students might be encouraged to exercise caution, but overall there is nothing to excite a suspicion that would warrant the discarding of their evidence. To the contrary.

* * * *

105 “Whilst, then, the total cost of reconstruction was no doubt considerable, it must be stressed that this is not necessarily to be interpreted merely as evidence of the emperor’s generosity; his use of bona vacantia indicates that his parentis affectus (Titus 8.3) was tempered by an almost Vespasianic financial acumen and that his generosity was balanced by a desire to avoid unnecessary expenditure (Dio 66.19.3; cf Titus 7.3, 8.1).” (Jones 1984: 142)

106 “One should not, then, be confused by Titus’ official propaganda which stressed his liberality rather than his financial acumen. The latter he inherited from his father, grandfather and great-grandfather. He was well aware of the need to observe the formalities and appear to be generous, and at the same time to ensure that he had the funds to be so.” (Jones 1984: 143) On Titus’ fiscal skills generally, see also 140–143, and partic. 145

107 The names of the two curatores restituentiae Campaniae would have been helpful. Identification might have allowed us to gauge the seriousness of the appointments. But this is precisely the type of prosopographical data with which Dio (or Xiphilinus) was not going to clutter his prose. I drew attention above to the lack of names in his account of Sulla’s proscriptions; cf. Millar 1964: 43. (That is not to say that he always deprives us of such information. He provides the name of the consul killed in the earthquake at Antioch in 115 [see above].) Likewise, it has been noted that Suetonius’ readiness to provide names tails off in his later Lives (Townend 1959).
In time, the relief work bore fruit. Whereas the poet Martial, writing 9 years after the disaster, speaks of everything lying under flames and sad ash (Martial 4.44, a translation will be found in Cooley and Cooley),\(^{108}\) the local poet Statius, local in the sense that he had been born and raised in Naples and knew personally many who had suffered,\(^ {109}\) writes, fourteen to fifteen years later (in a poem which professes to be a plea to his wife Claudia that she acquiesce in his plans to return from Rome to Naples), of regeneration:

Not so utterly has Vesuvius' peak and the flaming tempest of the baleful mountain drained of their townsmen the terror-stricken cities, they stand yet and their people flourish (3 5. 72–74).\(^ {110}\)

The lines which immediately follow (74–80) indicate that Statius is thinking of the centres to the north: Puteoli, its port still a gateway to the Mediterranean world, Capua and Naples — together with the varied delights and diversions of Baiae (93–96); but he also sings of the immediate south, the hills of Sorrento (102–103) and “the health-giving lake of Aenaria and Stabiae reborn” — renatas (104).\(^ {111}\)

Appendix: Do we possess Suetonius’ Life of Pliny the Elder?
An Extract from Barry Baldwin, Suetonius (Amsterdam, 1983), pp. 401-405.

This extract deals with the possibly-Suetonian Vita Plinii Secundi. What interests us particularly is the account it gives of the death of Pliny (see above, pp. 1–3). Though it risks breaking the rhythm of Baldwin’s prose, I have for the convenience of teachers and students provided Loeb Classical Library translations [in square brackets] after the Latin. (The translations of extracts from Pliny the Younger’s Letters are those of Betty Radice, with minor alterations.) I have not provided here a translation of the actual Vita (except where few words occur as isolated phrases),

\(^{108}\) Cooley and Cooley 2004: 41 [C24]
\(^{109}\) Personal acquaintance: Statius, Silvae 4.8.3–5 (a translation of which will be found in Cooley and Cooley 2004: 41 [C22]); identification with the land: Silvae 5.3.205–208 (a translation of which will be found in Cooley and Cooley 2004: 41 [C23]).
\(^{110}\) Trans J.H. Mozley [Loeb]; an alternative translation will be found in Cooley and Cooley 2004: 41 [C20].
\(^{111}\) The places directly devastated still lay deserted, and Statius envisaged a time when regrowth would obscure the very previous existence of the sites. Future generations will not believe what lies below (Silvae 4.4.78–85; a translation of which will be found in Cooley and Cooley 2004: 41 [C21]).
\(^{111}\) In pressing his suit, Statius is to a degree disingenuous. He knows that the mountain still threatens death (Silvae 4.4.84–85).
given that such a translation is provided above on p 3. The footnotes, except for the material in square brackets, are those of Baldwin.

[The Vita Plinii Secundi] commences thus: Plinius Secundus Novocomensis equestribus militiis industriae functus procurationes quoque splendidissimas et continuas summa integritate administravit, et tamen liberalibus studiis tantam operam dedit, ut non temere quis plura in otiol scriberit.

This is a close paraphrase of: Pliny, Ep. 3. 5. 7: miraris quod tot volumina multaque in his tam scrupulosa homo occupatus absolverit? Magis miraberis si scieris illum aliquandiu causas actitasse, decessisse anno sexto et quinquagessimo, medium tempus distentum impeditumque qua officitis maximis qua amicitia principum egisse. ["You may wonder how such a busy man was able to complete so many volumes, many of them involving detailed study; and wonder still more when you learn that up to a certain age he practised at the bar, that he died at the age of fifty-five, and throughout the intervening years his time was much taken up with the important offices he held and his friendship with the Emperors."]

Not only a close paraphrase, but highly selective. The vita has nothing about the elder Pliny’s age, either at birth or death; this is unusual in a Suetonian notice. And his career is hardly done justice in the phrase procurationes quoque splendidissimas et continuas ["several important stewardships (procurationes) in succession"], albeit lauded for having been undertaken summa integritate ["with the utmost justice"]. The omission of amicitia principum ["friendship with the Emperors"], stressed more than once by the nephew, is signal. For this was a theme that Suetonius could have exploited in either of two ways, both congenial to himself: another dig at patronage, or commendation of Vespasian.

The vita continues: itaque bella omnia, quae unquam cum Germanis gesta sunt, XX voluminibus comprehendit, itemque Naturalis Historiae XXXVII libros absolvit.

Of these two items, the first is registered by Pliny in almost identical terms: Bellorum Germaniae viginti; quibus omnia quae cum Germanis gessimus bella collegit ["The German Wars — twenty volumes, covering all the wars

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112 Pliny amplified and repeats all this at 3 5 9, 18.
113 Procurations are picked up from Pliny Ep 3 5 17: cum procuraret in Hispania ["when he was serving as procurator in Spain"] See Sherwin White (1966:219f.), for details and controversies regarding the career of the elder Pliny.
114 The noun does not recur in Suetonius. But the cognate adverb is used of Vespasian's administration of Africa (Vesp 4.3)
we ever had with the Germans" (Plin. Ep. 3.5.4)). The similarity may be caused either by the author of the *vita* copying from Pliny’s letter, or by the fact that the relative clause in each passage represents part of the full title (or subtitle) of the elder Pliny’s German narratives. Also, notice that the biographer’s phrase *libros absolvit* ["he completed (x number of) books"] could have derived from the nephew’s *volumina absolverit* ["he will have competed (so many) volumes"].

A bibliographical register is, of course, an integral part of a Suetonian biography. But the present one is very strange. It is no depreciation of the elder Pliny to remark that the two titles offered in the biography hardly justify the conclusion *ut non temere quis plura in oto scripsert* ["that hardly anyone who had complete leisure wrote more than he”]. The younger Pliny furnished Baebius Macer with five more titles, of which the three volumes on oratorical training and the eight devoted to *sermo dubius* ought surely to have been included by a *scholasticus* compiling his *De viris illustribus*. And if the elder Pliny was included in the section consecrated to historians, why are the thirty-one volumes *A fine Auidi Bassi* [“From the Close of (the history of) Auidius Bassus”] excluded?

The third and final section of the *vita* offers the following account of Pliny’s death: *perit clade Campaniae; cum enim Misenensi classi praeesset et flagrante Vesuvio ad explorandas propius causas liburnica pertendisset, nec adversantibus ventis remeare posset, vi pulveris ad favillae oppressus est, vel ut quidam existimant a servo suo occasus, quem aestu deficiens ut necem sibi maturaret oraverat.*

This *exitus* scene takes up almost half of the *vita*, at least as we have it. One or two similarities of language suggest an acquaintance with Pliny’s letter to Tacitus. For instance, the nephew’s account begins *erat Miseni classemque imperio praesens* ["he was stationed at Misenum in active command of the fleet"] (Ep. 6. 16.4); his uncle’s scientific curiosity appears thus: *magnum propiusque noscendum ut eruditissimo viro visum* [“his scholarly acumen saw at once that it was important enough for a closer inspection”] (Ep. 6. 16. 7); and the *aestu deficiens* [“overcome by heat”] of the *vita* may owe something to the *frequenter aestuans* ["frequently inflamed"] of the epistolographer (Ep. 6. 16. 20). But, as always, this sort of echo is subject to the *caveat* that verbal similarities in two passages describing the same event are virtually inevitable.

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115 Or with the Tacitean version?
Of far greater moment is the degree to which the vita differs from the account which Pliny sent to Tacitus as maxime vera ["having the greatest veracity"] (Ep. 6. 16. 22). The biographer has the elder Pliny set out in a liburnica (a fast, two-banked galley). According to the nephew, it was a quadrireme. But one sees where the Suetonian version comes from; for the earlier order of the elder Pliny was liburnicam aptari ["for a liburnian to be made ready"]

The biographer has it that Pliny’s sole motive for embarking on his fatal mission was scientific curiosity. Not so in the account of the nephew, who writes pointedly: vertit ille consilium et quod studioso animo incohaverat obit maximo ["He changed his mind, and what he had begun in a spirit of inquiry he completed as a hero"] (Ep. 6. 16. 9).

The two accounts agree that Pliny was cut off from final escape by adverse winds and waves, and that he was suffocated. However, as has been seen in an earlier chapter, the biographer terminates his account by reviving the theory that Pliny may have ordered one of his slaves to kill him. The nephew is witness to the fact that his uncle was accompanied by two servoli, but implicitly denies the story: corpus inventum integrum inlaesum opertumque ut fuerat indutus ["his body was found intact and uninjured"] (Ep. 6. 16. 20).

It looked probable that the first half of the vita owed a deal, in terms of content and language, to Pliny’s letter to Baebius Macer; also that there were deliberate departures from that source. The younger Pliny sent his account of the uncle’s end to Tacitus, at the request of that historian. Is it conceivable that Suetonius received a copy for use in his biographical labours? If so, Pliny can hardly have been pleased by the result. Although more favourable than not, especially in the first half, the vita alters the details and changes the emphasis of the letter, in addition to reviving the theory of death with servile assistance, a version not at all congenial to the nephew. It is a situation which may dissuade some from accepting the vita as genuinely (or wholly) Suetonian.

We flounder, and there is no remedy here for that. On the score of diction, there is nothing to confirm or exclude Suetonian authorship. Only two words occur which are not elsewhere employed by the biographer: integritas (discussed in a footnote to the above) and remeare. The vita could be

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116 [Radice translates "most likely to be accurate" I felt the stronger statement was warranted as conveying Pliny’s intention – T.H.]

117 Ep 6 16 7 Sherwin White (1966:374) does not draw attention to this, merely stigmatising the liburnica as a Suetonian error. As we shall see, there may be more to it than that [On liburnians, see Casson 1971: 141-42 – T.H.]
Abridged. If that be granted, points such as the curiously truncated bibliography surrender their force.

There are several possibilities concerning the authorship, of more or less equal validity:

a) Suetonius wrote it, using the two pertinent letters of Pliny.
b) Suetonius wrote it, before, or otherwise not, having access to the Plinian correspondence.
c) Someone other than Suetonius composed it, with the aid of the Plinian versions.
d) A non-Suetonian author composed it without employing Pliny’s accounts.
e) What we possess is partly Suetonian, partly not.

Two terminating observations. First, who are the quidam existimant ["some who think"] associated with the non-Plinian version of the uncle’s death? Could they possibly include Cornelius Tacitus, unimpressed by the nephew’s maxime vera?

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