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## **"The Greatest in Human Memory": Reevaluating the Lydia Earthquake of 17 A.D.**

Maxwell John Shiller

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“THE GREATEST IN HUMAN MEMORY”: REEVALUATING THE  
LYDIA EARTHQUAKE OF 17 A.D.

by

Maxwell John Shiller

Honors Work in History

For Hist-498

Advised by Allannah Karas

College of Arts and Sciences

Valparaiso University

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Honor Code: I have neither given or received, nor have I tolerated  
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## Introduction — The Lydia Earthquake: Fracturing Earth and Relationships

When Rome formally established the province of Asia in 129 B.C., solidifying its recognition as the new political authority was a complex issue. Three Roman civil wars raged, republicanism was destroyed, and Emperor Augustus ushered in the newly-minted Roman Empire. Choosing the right side during these volatile times was a dangerous affair. Following the firm establishment of the Roman Empire under the victorious Augustus, however, Imperial authority could rightfully promise stability for the provincials of Asia under Roman governance. The gears of political change began to wheel about in Asia as Imperial officials superseded provincial Greek magistrates.

From the Roman perspective, the provinces should have had no issue proclaiming their loyalty to the Roman emperor, given the lack of comparably powerful political figures. In the provincial perspective, however, while the cement had been poured and the foundation for loyalty was laid, it was far from concrete. This paper claims that though the Lydia earthquake of 17 A.D. provided Emperor Tiberius an opportunity to establish his legacy through a successful disaster relief program, the ancient sources of the earthquake illustrate his clear failure to claim the strong and sustained support of the province of Asia as well as the Roman Empire as a whole.

### *Provincia Asia and Emperor Augustus: Establishing New Power Dynamics*

It is commonly accepted that the arrival of Augustus, Tiberius' predecessor, at the city of Ephesus after the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. represents the moment the loyalty of Asia

permanently shifted towards the new emperor. Augustus met with ambassadors from the Syrian city of Rhodus, who provided him with a crown and pledged their loyalty, to which Augustus “responded with praise for Rhodus, for its ambassadors, and for the outstanding services to him performed by its citizen Seleucus.”<sup>1</sup> Millar asserts that his address to the Rhodian ambassadors reflects “a relationship which must have been formed at the same moment with scores, perhaps hundreds, of other Greek cities... Ephesus had thus been for a moment the political focus of the Graeco-Roman world, and no one there could have been unaware that power had just changed hands.”<sup>2</sup> The image is a powerful one. Handed a crown as a show of loyalty, hosted by one of the foremost cities of the Greek world, and having delivered a fatal military defeat to Mark Antony, Augustus now claimed sole dominion.

Yet, while Emperor Augustus represented the Roman Empire to the provinces, he certainly was not the Roman Empire himself. The state did not collapse following his death in 14 A.D., though the loyalty of the provinces to the collective Roman government may have wavered. As Ando illustrates, “Provincials’ tacit and often unconscious recognition of the legitimacy of Roman government... was qualitatively similar to the contests among senators and *virii militares* for the throne of the empire... each group shifted the topic of public discourse from the legitimacy of the empire to the legitimacy of specific emperors and magistrates.”<sup>3</sup> The question of provincial loyalty was raised then again following the ascension of Emperor

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<sup>1</sup> Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 169.

<sup>2</sup> Fergus Millar, “State and subject: The impact of monarchy,” in *Caesar Augustus: Seven Aspects*, ed. Fergus Millar and Erich Segal (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 37-38.

<sup>3</sup> Ando, 49-50.



Tiberius. As Augustus utilized a powerful event, the Battle of Actium, to help solidify the loyalty of the province of Asia, so too did Emperor Tiberius with the Lydia earthquake.

I define the successful institution of loyalty for a Roman emperor in the province of Asia through the Augustus' example. Following his death in 14 A.D., the *Sebasteion* at Aphrodisias was built as the official Imperial cult temple for the province in order to honor and worship him as a god. The province and other nearby areas of the sub-continent of Asia Minor also include identifiable examples of Augustus' *Res Gestae* in prominent public locations, clearly celebrating his accomplishments that were completed during his rule. In the case of Emperor Tiberius, however, neither of these major pieces of evidence for sustained loyalty remain. There are identifiable honorific inscriptions written in which Tiberius is named as the new founder of cities following the Lydia earthquake, but such examples seem to be short-term political maneuvers. In contrast to Augustus, there is no identifiable extant official cult temple of Tiberius' own, though Smyrna is known to have been chosen to build his *Sebasteion*. Furthermore, no *Res Gestae* of Tiberius was created and erected for public display. The extant sources about the Lydia earthquake complete this picture, demonstrating considerably negative opinions of Emperor Tiberius that formed both during and following his rule. I then distinguish between the deep-seated loyalty found for Emperor Augustus and the temporary displays of loyalty that were given to Tiberius following the Lydia earthquake.

*The Lydia Earthquake and Its Effects*

While the transfer of Imperial power from Augustus to Tiberius shook the notion of the loyalty of Asia, the Lydia earthquake shook Asia itself. The Lydia earthquake, otherwise known as the Earthquake of the Twelve Cities, occurred in 17 A.D. in Western Asia Minor with a seismic intensity that was recognized far beyond the subcontinent where it occurred. Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* referred to the event as *maximus terrae memoria mortalium... motus* (“The greatest earthquake in human memory”).<sup>4</sup> Such a grandiose statement was not unwarranted.

To measure the seismic intensity of historical earthquakes like the Lydia earthquake, two scales are used by historical seismologists: the Medvedev–Sponheuer–Karnik scale, and the later European Macroseismic scale which improved on the MSK model. While each scale technically goes up until twelve in terms of its physical impact, no event in the *Catalogue of Ancient Earthquakes in the Mediterranean Area up to the 10<sup>th</sup> Century*, goes above a ten.<sup>5</sup> Of the 101 earthquakes Emanuela Guidoboni lists before the Vesuvius eruption in 79 A.D., only five are determined to be tens, the latest of which was the 17 A.D. Lydia earthquake.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 2.86. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Beyond all first references to ancient sources, the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* abbreviations will be followed. Perhaps Pliny the Elder would have revised his answer if he were to have survived the Vesuvius eruption in 79 A.D., which was preceded by significant seismic activity.

<sup>5</sup> Emanuela Guidoboni, Alberto Comastri, and Giusto Traina, *Catalogue of Ancient Earthquakes in the Mediterranean Area up to the 10<sup>th</sup> Century*, trans. Brian Phillips (Rome: Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica, 1994), 408-413.

<sup>6</sup> The penultimate of the five earthquakes that are listed as a ten is one that occurred by Sidon in approximately 199-198 B.C., a significant stretch of time between major events. As a further note, it is difficult to compare these two scales to the Richter scale. It may be conjectured that the earthquake was between approximately a 7.5 to a 9.0 on the Richter scale.

After reports of the earthquake's widespread destruction, Emperor Tiberius and the Roman government responded quickly in implementing a substantial relief program to deal with the financial hardships now facing the province. The most important provision of this program was Tiberius' decision to grant five years of tax exemption for the twelve affected cities as well as ten million sesterces for the individual city of Sardis. Eventually, he granted tax exemptions to two additional cities of Asia Minor, Ephesus and Cibyra, though this most likely stemmed from the damage done by later earthquakes.<sup>7</sup>

The socio-political effects observable from the Lydia earthquake on the province of Asia are diverse. The city of Sardis, with most of its buildings destroyed in the earthquake, was rebuilt in Roman Imperial architectural styles in lieu of its former Ionic Greek architecture. A few of the affected cities changed their names to Caesarea or Hierocaesarea in honor of the emperor for his relief program. Tiberius was also honored as the "new founder" of many of these cities, with Hierocaesarea creating a new calendar in which its first year began either on Emperor Tiberius' birthday or on the day the Lydia earthquake occurred. The affected cities additionally commissioned a statue group to be sent to Rome, which was subsequently placed in the Forum Julium in gratitude for Tiberius' relief efforts, along with identical copies set in the cities

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<sup>7</sup> Ann L. Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire in the Age of Augustus: The Case of the Boscoreale Cups* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 40. Guidoboni, Comastri, and Traina, 184. The names of Ephesus and Cibyra are found on the base of the statue group discovered at Puteoli, which according to Kuttner was erected in 30 A.D. Yet, they are not included in the twelve cities that Tacitus, the most detailed writer on the earthquake, says experienced damage from the Lydia earthquake. Guidoboni proposes three potential answers for this discrepancy. First, that both Ephesus and Cibyra were struck by an earthquake known to have occurred in 23 A.D. Secondly, Cibyra and Ephesus were somewhat damaged in 17 A.D., but were only forced to request tax exemption following further destruction from the 23 A.D. earthquake. Thirdly, Cibyra, but not Ephesus, was damaged in the Lydia earthquake, but both made claims of tax exemption in 23 A.D. that connected their claims and experiences to that of the other twelve cities. Of these three answers, Guidoboni believes that the first is the most probable and I am inclined to agree. The problem remains, however, that there is no evidence of an earthquake affecting Ephesus in 23 A.D. Perhaps future archaeological work will solve this mystery.

themselves. The statue on top of the base has been lost, but was almost certainly a depiction of Emperor Tiberius himself, potentially with smaller figures representing the twelve cities damaged by the Lydia earthquake. The original bases of the statue groups are also lost, but there is a copy of them found in the Italian city Puteoli made around 30 A.D.<sup>8</sup> There is speculation that there was a rise in Poseidon cult activity following the earthquake, though much of the evidence points instead to a rise in the building projects based around the Imperial cult instead.<sup>9</sup>

### *Emperor Tiberius' Relief Program: The Political Effects of Roman Munificence*

Tiberius' relief program reframed relations between the province of Asia and the Roman Empire, ensuring that the Greek poleis of the region did not turn to their own local officials in times of need but instead looked to the Roman emperor. The Puteoli statue group illustrates this shift well. Cities attempted to ensure their favored status in the eyes of the Imperial administration by adopting a *do ut des* ("I give so that you might give") mindset. Thus, the provinces and emperor participated in a delicate dance of obligation and gratitude. The provinces ensured the emperor had knowledge of their extensive displays of loyalty through projects in his name, honorific Imperial cult structures being a favorite form.<sup>10</sup> These types of displays further extended to Roman governors, as political representatives of the Roman emperor himself. On the

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<sup>8</sup> Ando, 278. Ando illustrates that this copy was found at Puteoli because of the strong trade connections the city had with the cities in the province of Asia.

<sup>9</sup> Poseidon, or Neptune as the Romans called him, was the god of earthquakes as well as the sea.

<sup>10</sup> Fikre K. Yegul, "A Study in Architectural Iconography: Kaisersaal and the Imperial Cult," *The Art Bulletin* 64, no.1 (Mar. 1982): 11. Yegul points out that inscriptions dedicating a structure to the emperor do not have to be directly related to the Imperial cult but paraphrases A.D. Nock, as he states, "these are simply dedicatory inscriptions demonstrating love and respect for the emperor; honorific and political in nature, they are not necessarily intended to associate the structure with his cult or worship." Thus, while the Imperial cult certainly has clear political ties, it was not the only avenue for cities to express their gratefulness and obedience.

other side of the coin, the Roman emperor, in Ando's words, "in asking for provincials' gratitude... had also to universalize the benefits of their actions. That is to say, they had to describe their actions as advantageous not simply to Rome or to Roman citizens, but to all residents of the empire."<sup>11</sup> In order to have the grateful provincial citizens obey, the emperor must first evoke this gratitude in them, which the relief program following the Lydia earthquake provided ample opportunity for Tiberius to do so.

With Emperor Tiberius given an added ability to produce gratitude, the cities of Asia more readily competed to become the emperor's favored city. Their initial target was to surpass the city of Aphrodisias, as they had seen the benefits it had reaped as "the 'one city from all of Asia'... that [Emperor Augustus] selected as his own."<sup>12</sup> Aphrodisias held an important religious connection to Aphrodite and transitorily the Julio-Claudian dynasty that claimed descent from the goddess.<sup>13</sup> Emperor Tiberius however had strong incentive to urge the cities of Asia to overtake the status of Aphrodisias. In order to gain this primary position, a city must be chosen by the Roman emperor as the location for the next official Imperial cult temple. In the case of Emperor Tiberius' official cult temple and where it would be placed, the competition between cities was fierce, as S.R.F. Price shows:

The difficulty of the process is illustrated by the case under Tiberius, when the assembly of Asia decided to erect a temple to Tiberius, Livia and the Senate following two judicial decisions in its favour. Permission was granted in Rome but three years later the cities were still squabbling as to where the temple should be located; the Senate eventually had to adjudicate between the claims of eleven cities. From the end of the first century *neokoros*, or 'temple warden', became the regular title to indicate that a city had been

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<sup>11</sup> Ando, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Kenan T. Erim, *Aphrodisias: City of Venus Aphrodite* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1986), 30.

<sup>13</sup> The Romans claimed that the founder of Rome, Romulus, was descended from the Trojan hero Aeneas, who was the son of Aphrodite, known as Venus by the Romans. Julius Caesar's family subsequently claimed descendancy from Romulus and by consequence Venus.

successful in this selection process and it was vaunted widely.<sup>14</sup>

Price then demonstrates the two-step process of establishing a new official Imperial temple. The province itself must first gain official approval to build and secondly must determine which city would receive the honor.

For those cities which did not gain the new Imperial temple, however, the Roman government ensured they were not disincentivized from making future claims. Ratte, Howe, and Foss show that Pergamon, Ephesos, and Miletos were refused as the official cult location since they already had other significant cult sites, while Smyrna was chosen over Sardis because of its services to Rome during the late Republican period.<sup>15</sup> Though Sardis did not receive an official Imperial cult building under Tiberius, its chances were high under the next Roman emperor, and it needed to maintain its high standing to eventually earn this prestigious honor.<sup>16</sup> Thus, many local cults of the emperor were established in cities that did not have official Imperial cult buildings as these poleis attempted to display their continued loyalty to the emperor and Rome itself.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> S.R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 64-65.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Ratte, Thomas N. Howe, and Clive Foss, "An Early imperial Pseudodipteral Temple at Sardis," *American Journal of Archaeology* 90, no.1 (1986): 65.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 64. As a disclaimer, there is no clear indication if Sardis did receive permission to build an official Imperial cult building under the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Emperor Caligula is known to have wanted his official cult to be housed in Miletus, though as Ratte, Howe, and Foss note, the name Sardis is found on a dedicatory inscription on the building at Miletus indicating that they were involved in the building process. This thereby ensured their connection to Caligula's cult, even if it was not housed in their own city. Sardis, however, certainly did have a temple that could have housed an official Imperial cult. Yet, because of the lack of extant dedicatory inscriptions, it is likely that if an emperor's cult was housed there, it was a cult of an emperor who received a *damnatio memoriae* (the condemnation of memory).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

*Ancient Authors and the Three Stages of the Lydia Earthquake*

While honorific building projects and their inscriptions demonstrate the presentation by the Greek poleis of Asia as loyal adherents to the Roman emperor, the literature surrounding the Lydia earthquake reveals a deeper understanding of how the disaster shaped provincial socio-political dynamics. In the religious beliefs of peoples across the Roman Empire, natural disasters of any kind were often directly connected to the current ruler. Oglivie illustrates that the Roman religious belief that the gods revealed their will through extraordinary natural events was well-supported by the influence of Stoicism and Eastern astrology during the Julio-Claudian era.<sup>18</sup> At the time of the Lydia earthquake, Emperor Tiberius was still establishing himself as the rightful successor of Emperor Augustus. As Cowan writes, he both needed to establish his “right to be the successor (often won by the elimination of rivals) and... systematize the Augustan achievement (a task rendered especially complex by the charismatic personality of the first *princeps* and the length of his regime which gave rise to multiple, and not always consistent, expectations).”<sup>19</sup> While Tiberius certainly could eliminate political rivals, he could not eliminate the potentially politically damaging effects of natural disasters like the Lydia earthquake. He could, however, attempt to suppress any religious interpretations of the Lydia earthquake that argued that he was unfit to rule. In order to do so, Emperor Tiberius took immediate action as seen by his creation of the relief program as well as in his support of the growth of Imperial cult

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<sup>18</sup> R.M. Oglivie, *The Romans and Their Gods in the Age of Augustus* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969), 54.

<sup>19</sup> Eleanor Cowan, “Tacitus, Tiberius and Augustus,” *Classical Antiquity* 28, no. 2 (Oct. 2009): 206.

activity in Asia, which helped paint his rule as a safeguard against, rather than the cause of, the effects of the Lydia earthquake.

Today's world faces its own social and political challenges in the midst of the Co-vid 19 pandemic, arguably the most impactful natural disaster since the 1918 influenza pandemic. Having followed the event closely, it is not the objective reports of new cases and deaths from the virus that generate the expression of public opinion, but rather the difficult decisions taken by politicians, organizations, and everyday individuals in response to the pandemic. With this in mind, I must evaluate the impact of the Lydia earthquake on Emperor Tiberius' legacy as seen through the eyes of the provincials of Asia and his fellow Roman citizens by examining the reactions recorded in the extant ancient sources. This thesis explores the ancient authors who write about the Lydia earthquake according to the basic three stages that occurred over the course of the Lydia earthquake that likewise occur with any significant natural disaster: the disaster itself, the immediate relief efforts, and the long-term social and political adaptation. The majority of these authors are historians, though poets, a geographer, philosopher, and a paradoxographer are likewise included. In my examination, I discuss the different ways these authors react to these stages and what these responses reveal about the expected reactions from Roman elites and the Greeks of Asia, the two groups most affected by the earthquake and its aftermath.

When the ancient literature on the earthquake is evaluated stage by stage, as I do in this thesis, the enormous socio-political impact of the Lydia earthquake becomes clear. Susanna M. Hoffman writes that while "the notoriety of most disasters tends to disappear in short shrift," a



select few “create legend.”<sup>20</sup> For an earthquake described as “the greatest in human memory,” there was certainly the potential for the Lydia earthquake to become legendary through the magnitude of its physical power and socio-political effects. In comparison, the 464 B.C. earthquake that famously destroyed much of Sparta led to the revolt of the helots against the Spartan elite. This later increased tensions between Athens and Sparta after the Spartans rejected Athenian aid in helping to put down the revolt, though they initially requested it.<sup>21</sup> The Athenian plague of 430 B.C. just a few decades later led to the polis’s distrust and death of its most powerful political figure, Pericles. Additionally, the Severan plague allegedly caused the death of the Roman co-emperor Lucius Verus in 169 A.D. Scholars at the same time tie the plague to the downfall of the Roman Empire, arguing that it was a major cause of the Empire’s decline in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. Yet, unlike these natural disasters and other notable examples such as the Vesuvius or Thera eruptions, the Lydia earthquake did not gain the same notoriety in cultural memory for two main reasons. First, these other disasters directly and severely impacted the power centers of large empires. Word would have spread much more quickly not only across the affected empire, but also throughout its neighbors and enemies. The Lydia earthquake, on the other hand, did not occur near Rome nor the Italian mainland, limiting its newsworthiness. Secondly, Emperor Tiberius was able to successfully and precisely frame the narrative of the earthquake as politically insignificant, at least on the surface. The fact that Pliny the Elder

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<sup>20</sup> Susanna M. Hoffman, “After Atlas Shrugs: Cultural Change or Persistence after a Disaster,” in *The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective*, ed. Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna M. Hoffman (New York: Routledge, 1999), 306.

<sup>21</sup> The Spartans had originally requested help from a number of Greek cities, including Athens. Those from other cities were allowed to help while the Athenians were sent back home. It is likely that the Spartans thought the Athenians might turn on them and help the helots to achieve a “democratic revolution.”

recognizes the earthquake as such a powerful event despite these obstacles all the more points to its remarkability.

In the first stage, the disaster stage, ancient authors avoid laying out many details of the destruction that the earthquake caused. Of these authors, only Strabo (c. 64/63 B.C.- c. 24 A.D.) was a contemporary of the earthquake and predictably says little about the disaster, beyond that it occurred. Seneca the Younger (c. 4 B.C.- 65 A.D.), writing during the reign of Emperor Nero, speaks briefly about the earthquake, but downplays the magnitude and unique circumstances of the event and thereby condemns any religious interpretation that claims it has any political significance. On the other hand, Tacitus (c. 56 A.D. - c. 120 A.D.) as well as Phlegon of Tralles (Early 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. - late 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.), who both write after the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, present more information compared to their predecessors that were shackled by political and religious dynamics. This chapter then demonstrates the power of the Lydia earthquake as a religious portent tied to political actions and additionally points to the danger of interpreting the disaster as a divine condemnation of Emperor Tiberius' rule.

While these authors refuse to connect Emperor Tiberius directly to the Lydia earthquake, they do not hesitate to clearly draw connections between him and the second stage of the disaster, the Tiberian relief program. Strabo connects Tiberius's actions to that of Augustus in order to indicate a smooth transition between the two emperors. Tacitus details the specific financial aid given to Asia, while Phlegon of Tralles states that the money came from Emperor Tiberius' personal treasury. Suetonius (c. 69 A.D.- c. 126 A.D.), writing around the same time as Tacitus, praises Tiberius for his generosity, though with clear reservation. The juxtaposition of these writers' work on the relief program compared to the paucity of description of the Lydia

earthquake itself confirms the Imperial desire to present Emperor Tiberius and the Roman government as the savior of the province.

Regarding the third and final stage, the social solidification and understanding of the new power dynamics between Emperor Tiberius and the province of Asia, ancient authors provide widely varying perspectives on the success of the relief program in instituting a strong sense of loyalty between the two parties. These reactions to the permanent power shift in the province to Emperor Tiberius largely fall along cultural lines. Roman authors, on the one hand, celebrate the transfer of socio-political power into Roman hands. The historian Velleius Paterculus (c. 19 B.C.- 31 A.D.), for example, rejoices that corrupt Greek magistrates have been replaced by the justice of Imperial administration. Inscriptions refer to Tiberius as the restorer and new founder of the twelve cities, thereby taking the continued success of the cities to be part and parcel of Tiberius' permanent legacy. Greek authors, like the epigrammist Bianor (Birth date unknown-death date 18 A.D. at the earliest) and the anonymous writer of one of the *Sibylline Oracles* (2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.), on the other hand, mourn the end of Greek independent power, now entirely subjected to the Roman Empire.<sup>22</sup> There is again no direct attack aimed against Emperor Tiberius in connection to the Lydia earthquake. The ancient writers then elucidate Emperor Tiberius' thorough manipulation of the earthquake to solidify his power in Asia. He not only aided the affected cities with enormous sums of money, but also quashed any negative connections he might have to the event itself, allowing only positive or neutral documentation of his relief

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<sup>22</sup> While Bianor's birth and death dates are unknown, his poems reveal his knowledge of events that occurred under Emperor Augustus and Emperor Tiberius, including the Lydia earthquake. Thus, he lived sometime between the beginning of Augustus' rule in 63 B.C. and the end of Tiberius' rule in 37 A.D., as well as at least until after the Lydia earthquake in 17 A.D. The *Fifth Sibylline Oracle* was composed following the destruction of the original Sibylline books in 87 A.D. and was completed sometime in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. The author of the section of text that contains the fragment that references the Lydia earthquake must then have lived during this time frame as well.

efforts among Roman writers. Yet, this Tiberian narrative was not sustained, nor was the loyalty of Asia following Tiberius' death in 37 A.D.

## Chapter 1 — Examining Scholarship Relevant to the Lydia Earthquake

With the amount of work that has survived from the quills of ancient authors, one might expect a significant body of modern scholarship that focuses on the Lydia earthquake as its main subject. The lack thereof points to a different conclusion. Since ancient authors tended to understate the human impact of the Lydia earthquake, modern historians have sometimes assumed that the event carried little long-term cultural significance. This position, however, requires revision when evaluated in conjunction with recent anthropological studies on the societal effects of natural disasters. The work of this chapter is to synthesize the scholarship that addresses the three stages of the Lydia earthquake. My contribution to the body of work on Emperor Tiberius and the Lydia earthquake, as well as ancient disaster history to a lesser extent, is in demonstrating the value of shifting the focus from the disasters themselves and more to the various reactions regarding decisions made in their aftermath. This decision then allows for the examination of the created legend of the earthquake while still recognizing the importance of its actual events, forming a more holistic image of how the Lydia earthquake came to be known as “the greatest earthquake in human memory.”<sup>23</sup> In accordance with the organization of this thesis, the examination of these modern sources will be split according to the three stages of the Lydia earthquake: the disaster, its relief, and the eventual social adaptation.

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<sup>23</sup> Plin. *HN* 2.86.

*Stage 1: Scholarship on Ancient Natural Disasters and Earthquakes*

Regarding this stage, I will discuss the inadequacy of categorizing natural disaster history as a subset of environmental history. I will then present and reject the argument that examining the long-term social effects of ancient natural disasters leads to historical positivism. Finally, I will argue for the inclusion of modern anthropological scholarship in ancient natural disaster history. Beginning with the first issue, environmental historians such as J. Donald Hughes and Lukas Thommen, recognize the importance of natural disasters in a broad sense, but provide limited perspective on individual events like the Lydia earthquake. Hughes, in his 2014 book entitled *Environmental Problems of the Greeks and Romans: Ecology in the Ancient Mediterranean*, highlights the destruction of the Colossus of Rhodes by an earthquake. He shows that the subsequent refusal to restore the monument, per the recommendation of an oracle, illustrates the Greek and Roman religious understandings of natural disasters.<sup>24</sup> Hughes elaborates on this broadly applied claim. He cites examples of divinely-created catastrophes from Homeric epic to the religious warnings prior to an earthquake in 365 A.D. that “created a tsunami that killed thousands of people in the Nile Delta.”<sup>25</sup> Thommen, in his 2012 work *An Environmental History of Ancient Greece and Rome*, details the relationship between religion and nature more closely than Hughes, recognizing that the earth, Tellus, is represented alongside the Imperial family of Augustus upon the Peace Altar erected in celebration of the Pax Romana.<sup>26</sup> In essence, the Peace Altar symbolizes not only Augustus’ pacification of the enemies

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<sup>24</sup> Donald J. Hughes, *Environmental Problems of the Greeks and Romans: Ecology in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 50.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 51, 197.

<sup>26</sup> Lukas Thommen, *An Environmental History of Ancient Greece and Rome*, trans. Philip Hill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 76.

and peoples of Rome, but also of its territory. Restricted by their choice of genre, Hughes and Thommen do not venture outside of the scope of environmental history. They provide important background material that is necessary to understand before exploring the Lydia earthquake, but do not offer deep insight into the potential of natural disasters to affect society beyond initial casualties.

Guidoboni, Comastri, and Traina contrast with Hughes and Thommen, focusing solely on the documentation and reactions to earthquakes in the ancient world in their 1994 work *Catalogue of Ancient Earthquakes in the Mediterranean Area up to the 10<sup>th</sup> Century*. The authors devote a sizeable section to the Lydia earthquake, proportionate to its effect on both the physical and social environment of western Asia Minor, which was arguably the most catastrophic in the region until the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>27</sup> Though earthquakes form the basis of the work, it clearly avoids overemphasizing their long-term consequences. In her own examination of the modern scholarship on the history of earthquakes, Guidoboni argues that 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century historians attempted to fill historical gaps through a positivist attitude” that overstated the role of earthquakes in historical developments without providing sufficient evidence to support their claims.<sup>28</sup> She then argues that in light of the previous scholarship performed on historical

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<sup>27</sup> That is to say, at least until the end of the catalogue, according to what may be determined about the seismic intensity and damage of earthquakes found in western Asia Minor identified within the work.

<sup>28</sup> Guidoboni, Comastri, and Traina, 15. N.N. Ambraseys, “Studies in Historical Seismicity and Tectonics,” in *The Environmental History of the Near and Middle East since the Last Ice Age*, ed. W.C. Brice (London: Academic Press, 1978), 208. The historical seismologist N.N. Ambraseys argues that the knowledge of historical earthquakes “gives a further dimension to our knowledge of... the rise and decay of cities.” Yet, in the same breath, he states that “the site of a large city prone to severe earthquakes is seldom changed,” which may serve as an example of Guidoboni’s concern.

earthquakes, future researchers' ambitions should not outrun their lack of evidence and conclude that powerful earthquakes have identifiable and long-term social impacts.<sup>29</sup>

More recent discoveries in anthropology and sociology have partially refuted Guidoboni's position. Historians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century may have resorted to positivism in their exploration of the relationships between natural disasters and ancient Mediterranean society to conceal a seeming lack of evidence, but their arguments may hold more weight when an interdisciplinary approach is utilized. The anthropologist Susanna M. Hoffman has recognized three main components of how a natural disaster may induce social effects in her chapter "After Atlas Shrugs: Cultural Change or Persistence after a Disaster" in the 1999 edited volume *The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective*. She writes, "Three distinct aspects of size play a role: the enormity of the calamitous event, the relative numbers of the population impacted, and the extent of the damage wreaked."<sup>30</sup> Though Hoffman does not speak about ancient societies, apart from certain events that created legend, e.g. the Pompeii and Thera eruptions, her extensive work on Santorini decades in the decades after an earthquake struck the Greek island in 1600 A.D. illustrates the sustained impact of the event. She again writes on her work,

Ten years seemed to me a long time, and I took everything to be normal. Only the experience of my own calamity made me realize that a decade is but an eye blink in the

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<sup>29</sup> Guidoboni, Comastri, and Traina, 182. While Guidoboni does flesh out the events of the Lydia earthquake in more detail, I believe there is still a relative lack of primary source evaluation. For example, she references an "Apollonius Grammaticus preserved in Phlegon of Tralles," but does not recognize this as a probable reference to the grammarian Apollonius Dyscolus. Such examples may undermine the authors' argument against historical positivism, especially regarding cultural historians. If they cannot discern the significance of an Asian provincial citing an Alexandrian Greek as his trusted source on the Lydia earthquake, which illustrates the widespread importance of the event in cultural memory, it is possible that they cannot be trusted to argue for minimizing the long-term impact of the earthquake in modern scholarship.

<sup>30</sup> Hoffman, 305.



recovery process... both village society and cultural heritage did change, and in trenchant ways. But only in-depth and in-place ethnographic research over a long span reveals the transformation.<sup>31</sup>

Comparing the scale of the Lydia earthquake to the Santorini earthquake, the contrast is stark.

The effects of the Pompeii eruptions need not include in-place ethnographic research given the wealth of information present in the archaeological record and the accounts of its contemporaries. The case of the Lydia earthquake is the same, though the evidence may be harder to extract.

I aim to especially use the ideas from Guidoboni and Hoffman's work throughout this project. While I do not agree with Guidoboni's conclusion that a historian's identification of long-term social impacts following earthquakes occurs from positivism, it is important to measure this project against her concern, to avoid similar mistakes by historians past. At the same time, the *Catalogue of Ancient Earthquakes in the Mediterranean Area up to the 10<sup>th</sup> Century* is an invaluable resource, not only for the Lydia earthquake, but also for comparison to the characteristics and events surrounding other earthquakes referenced by ancient writers. This comparison will then help to illuminate the uniqueness of the Lydia earthquake as well as demonstrating its significance in more depth. I will use Hoffman's work in the construction of a historiographical model influenced by modern anthropology and recognize the healing of natural disasters as a slow-moving process. While Tiberius' relief program may have solved the financial troubles of the twelve cities struck by the earthquake, it was a short-term solution, not a prescription for obtaining the sustained loyalty of the provincials of Asia.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 316.

*Stage 2: Scholarship on Roman Imperial Relief Programs*

Scholars have focused more closely on Imperial relief programs than on the disasters they alleviate, perhaps due to the number of detailed inscriptions on restored buildings. Yet, this work has focused more on different types of disasters besides earthquakes, concentrated on the city of Rome itself, and has not clearly defined the cultural and political dynamics operating during relief programs. In the case of G.S. Aldrete's 2007 work, *Floods of the Tiber in Ancient Rome*, extensive attention paid to earthquakes would detract from its main thesis. Yet, Aldrete provides important insight into how these events "represented not just problems for a ruler but also opportunities for him to display his munificence and enhance his reputation through ostentatious shows of benefaction."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Keitel, in her chapter "The Art of Losing: Tacitus and the Disaster Narrative" in the 2010 volume *Ancient Historiography and Its Contexts: Studies in Honour of A.J. Woodman* illustrates how Tacitus in his *Annals* recognizes the unique generosity of Emperor Tiberius in financing the restoration program following the disaster.<sup>33</sup> Clifford Ando likewise recognizes the potential of the Lydia earthquake as a powerful propagandist opportunity for the Imperial cult in Asia in his 2000 work *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*. While the field of ancient history has identified earthquakes as powerful propagandist opportunities during the Imperial period, work on the subject has been limited to the city of Rome and its floods and fires, as the example of Aldrete demonstrates.

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<sup>32</sup> G.S. Aldrete, *Floods of the Tiber in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 163.

<sup>33</sup> Keitel, Elizabeth Keitel, "The Art of Losing: Tacitus and the Disaster Narrative," in *Ancient Historiography and Its Contexts: Studies in Honour of A.J. Woodman*, ed. Christina S. Kraus, John Marincola, and Christopher Pelling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 336.

Research on the relationship between disasters and propaganda under Emperor Tiberius in the Hellenic East largely occurs in the exploration of Tacitus' *Annals*. Kelly Shannon-Henderson explores the subject in her 2019 book *Religion and Memory in Tacitus' Annals*, arguing that book 4 of the *Annals* illustrates a monumental shift in Roman religion regarding the interpretation of natural disasters due to Emperor Tiberius' actions. Notably, though Shannon-Henderson speaks on the Imperial cult and its effects in the province of Asia, she only addresses the interpretation of disasters in Rome, such as the Tiber flood of 15 A.D. She remarks that the flood "probably would have been interpreted as a sign from the gods if Tiberius had followed traditional practice."<sup>34</sup> As Tiberius refuses to make this connection, he sets a precedent that only the Roman emperor may legitimately interpret natural events in the future. If he refuses to do so, as he does here as with the Lydia earthquake, the gods have not sent a message. Thus, individuals have no ability to fix a religious problem they may have recognized by following the traditional Roman religious practices in the Republican period.<sup>35</sup> While Shannon-Henderson does well to recognize Tacitus' critique of Tiberius, her focus on the heart of Rome misses a larger trend. I believe the Lydia earthquake, a mere two years after the flooding of the Tiber, represents an intensification of the wrath of the gods in the *Annals*. The qualms of the divine have gone unaddressed and the emperor must now be reminded more strongly. Although Emperor Tiberius' power is most present in Rome itself, catastrophes in other parts of the empire deserve the scholar's attention as they may also reflect on the emperor's rule.

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<sup>34</sup> Kelly E. Shannon-Henderson, *Religion and Memory in Tacitus' Annals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019): 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

Regarding the physical manifestation of the Tiberian relief program, historians' conclusions reveal a variety of perspectives. It is clear from Stephen Mitchell's 1987 article "Imperial Building in the Eastern Roman Provinces" that the current Roman emperor received credit for restoration work, as evident by the majority of cities claiming Imperial names and titles after they were affected by an earthquake.<sup>36</sup> Yet it is more ambiguous if this credit would solely be given to Roman officials. While Mitchell believes there was "a common pattern" of Imperial contributions being matched by local benefactors, B. Meißner argues that the empire "directed the central administration towards routinely restoring public buildings which had been destroyed either by neglect or by earthquakes."<sup>37</sup> In Meißner's view, the Romans bypassed local magistrates, streamlining the restoration process and hamstringing the of these officials. Though this point about the Imperial desire to solidify their dominance over Asia holds merit, Clifford Ando convincingly refutes it. He writes, "As in so many areas of provincial administration, Rome relied on the local governments in larger cities to carry out its wishes... within their walls."<sup>38</sup> It then seems that while credit may have largely given to the Roman emperor, the role of the local elite was more than substantial.

The debate between archaeologists on whether the architecture of the cities of Asia reflects a cultural shift following the Lydia earthquake or not is similarly split. While Ratte, Howe, and Foss in their 1986 article "An Early Imperial Pseudodipteral Temple at Sardis" recognize that Sardis revived rapidly following the Lydia earthquake, they find little evidence to

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen Mitchell, "Imperial Building in the Eastern Roman Provinces," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 91 (1987): 361.

<sup>37</sup> B. Meißner, "Natural Disasters in the Ancient World," in *Solidarité et assurance: Les sociétés européennes face aux catastrophes*, ed. R. Favier and C. Pfister (Grenoble: Msh. Alpes, 2008), 32.

<sup>38</sup> Ando, 91.

support a prominent architectural shift after the event. Rather, in their exploration of a pseudodipteral temple built soon after the earthquake, they argue that the temple largely follows the Hellenistic architectural tradition.<sup>39</sup> George M.A. Hanfmann roundly disagrees with this position. He argues in his 1986 article “Roman and Late Antique Sardis and the Contribution of Asia Minor to Roman Imperial Art” that following the Lydia earthquake, “Sardis presents the astonishing phenomenon of a monumental style civic center with a typical Roman Imperial symmetrical plan.”<sup>40</sup> As much of the city was destroyed in the event, Roman architects had the capacity to rework a large section of the infrastructure of the city, akin to the space opened following the Fire of Rome under Emperor Nero.<sup>41</sup> If Hanfmann is correct, the argument on whether Romans or Greeks were the main civil engineers of Sardis following the Lydia earthquake becomes more complex: either Romans imposed their architecture and cultural expectations onto the city themselves or the Greeks willingly submitted and conformed to their architectural practices.

### *Stage 3: Social Reintegration and Adaptation*

The loyalties of the provincial citizens directly relate to their understanding of the cultural and political dynamics within which they operate. In Asia, the sense of loyalty most clearly manifests itself in the provincials’ relationship with the Imperial cult and the shifting of

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<sup>39</sup> Ratto, Howe, and Foss, 57.

<sup>40</sup> George M.A. Hanfmann, “Roman and Late Antique Sardis and the Contribution of Asia Minor to Roman Imperial Art,” in *Rome and the Provinces: Studies in the Transformation of Art and Architecture in the Mediterranean World*, ed. Charles B. McClendon (New Haven: The New Haven Society of the Archaeological Institute of America, 1986), 22.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* Following the Fire of Rome in 64 A.D., Nero used the space that had been cleared of destroyed building debris to construct a massive palace, for which he drew much criticism.

the relational expectations between ruler and ruled from the Hellenistic and Roman Republican periods to the Roman Imperial period. In sum, scholarship regarding the third stage of the Lydia earthquake demonstrates the construction of a new social mold formed in the aftermath of the disaster: seated upon the throne of Hellenistic cultural tradition, the Roman Empire demonstrates its power through its citizens' devotion to the Imperial cult and rationalizes its influence through the public approval of the current emperor. Scholars then debate the staying power of these traditional influences, the nature of provincials' support of Emperor Tiberius through the Imperial cult, and the nature of the cult as both a political and religious entity. Egon Flaig attempts to define this new relationship by the rule that "Rulers rule because the grateful obey, that is, because those who are ruled are grateful," in his chapter entitled "Is Loyalty a Favor? or: Why Gifts Cannot Oblige an Emperor."<sup>42</sup> He is careful, however, to note, "In the Near Eastern or Hellenic context, the notion that ruling rested upon gratitude would hardly have been adopted."<sup>43</sup> Flaig attempts to illustrate this idea through a Roman official named Silius, who recognized that his official appointment was to be maintained only through continued loyalty to Tiberius, as he had previously given to Augustus. Yet, this argument does not transfer to the common provincial subject who had no government position for which to thank the emperor.

Ando argues for the Imperial cult as an answer to how provincials expressed their loyalty to the current Roman emperor. He writes, "The Roman Imperial government advertised to its subjects the existence of a shared history and a common political theology: the history was that

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<sup>42</sup> Egon Flaig, "Is Loyalty a Favor? or: Why Gifts cannot oblige an Emperor," in *Negotiating the Gift: Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange*, ed. Gadi Algazi, Valentin Groebner, and Bernhard Jussen (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 55.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

of Rome in the era of her empire, and the one constant in the religious firmament was the emperor.”<sup>44</sup> Support for the Roman emperor then was the same as participation in the Imperial cult. Given the dominance of the polis as the prevailing social and political construction of the Hellenic East, Ando illustrates how individual cities competed for the right to construct official Imperial cult temples in return for the recognition of higher status within the Roman Empire. Yet, the relationship between provincial cities and the emperor was not guaranteed, as both parties “shifted the topic of public discourse from the legitimacy of the empire to the legitimacy of specific emperors and magistrates.”<sup>45</sup> While Ando does pinpoint the moment in time the relationship between Emperor Augustus and the cities of the Hellenic East was legitimated, he makes no such claim for Emperor Tiberius and later emperors.

Though the relationship between a provincial governor and its province did not contain a sense of religious obligation, it was important to maintain a strong connection given the governor’s responsibility to carry out the emperor’s decisions and the responsibility of the province to obey said decisions. Ari Z. Bryen explains that in the beginning of its rule in Asia, Rome “found neither quiet inhabitants pleased to accept its rule nor a self-conscious population bent on rebellion and resistance.”<sup>46</sup> Provinces then, according to Bryen, “learned a package of techniques... for controlling the governor to an extent sufficient to harness his nearly unlimited power and turn it against their local enemies, usually in the course of civil disputes.”<sup>47</sup> At the same time, the governor did wield the power to dissolve the *politeia* (system of government) of a

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<sup>44</sup> Ando, 44.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>46</sup> Ari Z. Bryen, “Judging Empire: Courts and Culture in Rome’s Eastern Provinces,” *Law and History Review* 30, no.3 (Aug. 2012): 779.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 776.

city, which Bryen seems to underestimate as a governor's means of political control. A city without *politeia* was unable to engage with the emperor without the official documentation to prove the recognition of its population and thereby unable to build and worship at an official Imperial cult center.

The iconography of the Imperial cult reinforces the importance of *politeia*, as seen through the *Sebasteion* of Aphrodisias which reinforces a warning against rebelling against the Roman emperor. As Benjamin B. Rubin shows in his 2008 dissertation (*Re)Presenting Empire: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor, 31 BC-AD 68*,

Prominently featured in the sculptural reliefs of the *Sebasteion* are two sets of ethnic personifications... The personifications of conquered nations illustrate the futility of resisting the might of the Roman emperor, while the images of idealized subjects highlight the benefits of cooperation. Together these images expressed a powerful symbolic argument for the necessity of harmonious integration into the Roman Imperial system.<sup>48</sup>

Arminda Lozano recognizes that these images presented by the *Sebasteion* represent “cultural evolution in its broadest sense” for the religious centers of Asia.<sup>49</sup> In her words, “they must have adopted some characteristics... more acceptable to Roman authority, with the priesthood as a symbol of social prestige, but not of political power.”<sup>50</sup> The images of the statue group sent to Emperor Tiberius by the cities of Asia then reinforced their adherence and obedience to Roman rule: idealized female figures, each individually representing a city, form the base and thereby

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<sup>48</sup> Benjamin B. Rubin, “(Re)Presenting Empire: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor, 31 BC- AD 68” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008), 73.

<sup>49</sup> Arminda Lozano, “Imperium Romanum and the Religious Centers of Asia Minor: The Intervention of Roman Political Power on the Temples of Asia Minor,” in *Ruling the Greek World: Approaches to the Roman Empire in the East*, ed. By Juan Manuel Cortés Copete, Elena Muñiz Grijalvo, and Fern Lozano Gómez (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015): 68.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-79.



support a colossus of Emperor Tiberius imagined in his deified form. In the material record, honorary inscriptions, minted coins, and iconography attached to the Imperial cult celebrate Tiberius' restoration work following the earthquake and demonstrate it as evidence for his future deification. While some ancient writers were inclined to take similar positions, many claimed that the earthquake pointed to Tiberius' loss of Roman religious values, particularly when evaluated in conjunction with Tiberius' body of work during the latter parts of his reign.

### *Conclusion*

The conclusions that have been drawn from other natural disasters during the Roman Empire must be carefully evaluated and applied to the unique case of the Lydia earthquake. The location of the event shifts historical interpretations of the social and political dynamics involved, with previous work focusing mainly on the Roman heartland. Regarding the second stage of the earthquake, modern anthropological scholarship presents as much promise as it does challenge. The immediate tendency is towards positivism, particularly because of how ancient authors offer little evidence of the impactful social changes instigated by powerful catastrophes that were immediately apparent. This bias, however, is avoidable, despite Guidoboni's outcry that deems some 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century historians as clear positivists. As the discussion on the third stage of the earthquake shows, there is a variety of evidence ready to be evaluated, particularly regarding the connection between the Lydia earthquake and Emperor Tiberius.

## Chapter 2 — In the Wake of Destruction: Perspectives on the Lydia Earthquake's First Stage

*Introduction: The Political Limitations of the Discourse of Disaster*

In Oglivie's words, Romans believed that the divine sent extraordinary natural events in order to comment on the current ruler's "running of the world."<sup>51</sup> These occurrences often foretold the rise or demise of such individuals. For example, before the fall of the Roman Republic into the hands of Julius Caesar, there were "thunderbolts on the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, an earthquake, [and] a windstorm that hit temples of Saturn and Minerva."<sup>52</sup> Following the same windstorm, "The fall of a statue of Minerva on the Capitol... was regarded as a premonition of the death of Cicero."<sup>53</sup> During the Roman Republic, significant earthquakes could be and often were considered portents of improper Senatorial decisions. Yet, through the religious transformations enacted by Augustus and canonized by Tiberius, emperors seized "the right to categorize and interpret signs" from the Senate, thereby making such interpretations impossible.<sup>54</sup> The emperor rose above being merely the *pontifex maximus* (highest priest) and became the *pontifex unus solusque* (the one and only priest): Roman religion was his to control and his alone. Regarding the Lydia earthquake of 17 A.D., Tiberius refuses to recognize the event as a statement against his personal authority, leading ancient authors to craft varying descriptions of the disaster itself to avoid conflicting with the Tiberian narrative.

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<sup>51</sup> Oglivie, 53.

<sup>52</sup> Federico Santangelo, *Divination, Prediction, and the End of the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 240.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Pauline Ripat, "Roman Omens, Roman Audiences, and Roman History," *Greece & Rome* 53, no.2 (Oct. 2006): 162.

Strabo, Seneca, Phlegon of Tralles, and Tacitus all have different reasons to record the Lydia earthquake. Yet, one unifying characteristic of their accounts is their refusal to directly connect Emperor Tiberius to the disaster. While in some cases authors may criticize the actions of past emperors and argue for another interpretation of the omens, to do so under the current emperor directly calls his authority into question. There is then a conflict of interest. Emperors with sole authority over religious interpretations ignore ill omens, while others who recognize these signs withhold explicit judgement for fear of persecution.

In this chapter, I argue that when the accounts of the Lydia earthquake are evaluated together, the accounts adhere to an Imperial narrative that disconnects Emperor Tiberius from the disaster, but they implicitly allude to possible dissenting interpretations. As the authors demonstrate a general increase in their freedom of expression the farther in time from the Lydia earthquake in which they write, I approach their work in a rough chronological order.

*Strabo: Tiberius' Warily Succinct Contemporary*

While the name of the *Geography* betrays Strabo's (c. 64/63 B.C.- c. 24 A.D.) desire to produce an opus on the physical and human geography of the known world, the work is just as much a work of history.<sup>55</sup> In his descriptions of various places and cities, Strabo often informs the reader how a specific location was named or the reasoning behind its relative fame. Yet, in the case of the Lydia earthquake, Strabo minimizes the human suffering that resulted from the disaster. This decision protects the *Geography* from a negative reception by Emperor Tiberius, or

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<sup>55</sup> Gresens, "Genres of History: Μῦθος, Ἱστορία, and Πλάσμα in Strabo's *Geography*" (PhD diss. Indiana University), V.

at least his officials who may have become familiar with Strabo's work. It eliminates the ability of Strabo's readers, who would be the Greeks or other Greek-speaking citizens of Asia Minor like Strabo himself, to conclude that the earthquake is intimately connected to the decisions of the emperor.<sup>56</sup>

Of the three instances where the *Geography* alludes to the disaster, Strabo utilizes a distinctly terse style. He writes while speaking on the first stage of the Lydia earthquake:

καὶ τὰ περὶ Σίπυλον δὲ καὶ τὴν ἀνατροπὴν αὐτοῦ μῦθον οὐ δεῖ τίθεσθαι: καὶ γὰρ νῦν τὴν Μαγνησίαν τὴν ὑπ' αὐτῷ κατέβαλον σεισμοί, ἠνίκα καὶ Σάρδεις καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τὰς ἐπιφανεστάτας κατὰ πολλὰ μέρη διελυμήναντο (Strabo, *Geographica* 12.8.18).

It is not necessary to tell the story of Mount Sipylus and its destruction: for also at that time earthquakes destroyed Magnesia at the foot of the mountain, while at the same time destroying Sardis and the other most famous cities throughout the region.

Strabo's silence on the catastrophic details of the Lydia earthquake, that is to say, the evidence of human death and specific instances of physical destruction, points to his avoidance of providing information tangential to his portrayal of the geography of the observable world. Potheary argues that detail-barren anecdotes in the *Geography* point to "the need to avoid, or gloss over, dangerous, embarrassing or sensitive topics" as well as "sometimes, a simple reluctance by Strabo to tell his audience what they already know."<sup>57</sup> The widespread impact of the Lydia earthquake would have been well understood by the Hellenic East and the province of Asia, still experiencing its effects less than six years after its occurrence. A detailed account of the human

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<sup>56</sup> Keitel, 269-270. Keitel shows that there is a Greek tradition of minimizing human suffering following natural disasters while citing Newbold, as she states, "Newbold observes 'a lack of emphasis on human injury and suffering' in his samples taken from Thucydides, Diodorus, Tacitus, and Dio." As Van der Vliet states, Strabo "was probably a Roman citizen, but he appears as a Greek. His city, Amaseia in Pontus, however, is not a Greek city, and moreover, he must have had non-Greek, that is barbarian, ancestors."

<sup>57</sup> Sarah Potheary, "Strabo, the Tiberian Author: Past, Present and Silence in Strabo's *Geography*," *Mnemosyne* 55, no.4 (2002): 388.

casualties and physical destruction does no favors for Strabo in the eyes of his audience and is in rather poor taste to force his readers to relive an event fresh in their memory.

Strabo devotes much of his narrative of the earthquake to situating place names. His contemporaries understood from his description that he refers to *Magnesia ad Sipylum*, as opposed to the other provincial city of the same name, *Magnesia ad Maeanderum*.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, Strabo does not feel compelled to list all the cities affected by the earthquake, but illustrates that the earthquake also affected Sardis and relatively less important cities. At first glance, the plural σεισμοί (“earthquakes”) seems to indicate that *Magnesia* was destroyed in a different earthquake as opposed to Sardis and the other cities. Powerful earthquakes, however, naturally come with strong aftershocks, particularly in western Asia Minor.<sup>59</sup> Thus, Strabo may readily utilize σεισμοί and refer to both the Lydia earthquake and its aftershocks.<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, Strabo, through his choices of καὶ... νῦν, the aorist verbs κατέβαλον and διελυμήναντο, and the connecting ἠνίκα further abbreviates his narrative by pushing the ruin of *Magnesia*, Sardis, and the other cities into a singular collective. The immediacy of καὶ... νῦν (“also at that time”) as well as κατέβαλον (“they destroyed”) and διελυμήναντο (“destroying”) indicates the contemporary nature of the event in the historical present in Strabo’s *Geography*,

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<sup>58</sup> The epithets *ad Sipylum* and *ad Maeanderum* were mainly used by the Romans and not authors from Asia Minor. Strabo’s readers would have understood which *Magnesia* the account was speaking about simply by the mention of Mt. Sipylus. The two cities sit quite close to each other, as both are situated on the central western coast of Turkey, with *Magnesia ad Sipylum* approximately 100 kilometers north of *Magnesia ad Maeanderum*.

<sup>59</sup> Ambraseys, 203. The historical seismologist Ambraseys notes: “Although it has a much more discontinuous [seismic] activity, [the region] has shown very large shocks... followed by aftershock sequences of abnormally long duration.” Ambraseys specifically refers to the Border zone, situated between the North Anatolian Fault and a smaller extensional fault line found on the westernmost part of Asia Minor. The Lydia earthquake occurred near the southeastern part of this region.

<sup>60</sup> Strabo seems to be unique in his use of the plural σεισμοί instead of its singular form σεισμός. The possibility of him referring to different seismic events then must remain open, but the evidence seems to point to the argument described above.

which includes events up until 23 A.D.<sup>61</sup> His choice of ἡνίκα (“at the same time”) additionally supports this statement. One may argue that if Strabo meant that Magnesia, Sardis, and the other cities were ruined in the same event, he would not have separated them in the grammatical construction of the passage. Yet, the separation of the clause containing the city of Magnesia distances it, regarding its location, from the other cities. Magnesia is found in Mount Sipylus’ shadow while Sardis and the other cities are not. This construction then subtly illustrates the geographically wide impact of the earthquake, assuming from the readers some understanding of the distances between these locations.

In his other two references to the Lydia earthquake, Strabo is equally economical. His short descriptions avoid judgement claims on why the earthquake happened and prevent the opening of debate on its potential causes. He writes in book 13, Καὶ ταύτην δ’ ἐκάκωσαν οἱ νεωστὶ γινόμενοι σεισμοί (“The recent earthquakes destroyed this one [Magnesia] as well,” Strabo, *Geographica* 13.3.5). He continues later in the same book, ἡ πόλις καὶ οὐδεμιᾶς λειπομένη τῶν ἀστυγειτόνων, νεωστὶ ὑπὸ σεισμῶν ἀπέβαλε πολλὴν τῆς κατοικίας (“The city [of Sardis...] as well, the foremost of its neighbors, has lost many buildings to recent earthquakes,” Strabo, *Geographica* 13.4.8). Strabo presents the events of the Lydia earthquake “as transparent representations of the truth,” easily identifiable by the reader because of the central location of these culturally prominent poleis within the Roman Empire and their relatively recent destruction.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, in two out of the three quotations, Strabo will carefully lay out a brief description of Tiberius’ relief program, turning any negative perspective on the role of the

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<sup>61</sup> Gresens, 18. The latest event in the *Geography* is the death of King Juba II, which can be safely dated to 23 A.D.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 154, 155. According to Gresens, “Strabo constructed a model of the world that had two separate foci, a political and economic focus at Rome and a cultural focus in Greek Asia Minor.”

Roman government in the occurrence of the earthquake into a positive. The *Geography* does not tell the reader the extent of the damage, but assures Tiberius has fully mitigated it.<sup>63</sup>

*Seneca the Younger: Defending One's Benefactor*

Seneca the Younger's (c. 4 B.C.- 65 A.D.) rationale behind refusing to connect earthquakes to religion stems from his adherence to Stoic philosophy coupled with his close relationship with Emperor Nero. Seneca owed his high political position to Nero and so, as Flaig shows, in the Roman system his "gratitude did not exist merely in regard to the present ruler, but to his predecessors as well."<sup>64</sup> Thus, in his discussion of the Campanian earthquake, which occurred under Nero in 67 A.D., Seneca made it a point to argue that the earthquake did not have a religious connection to Nero in his *Natural Questions*. So also, he extends this conclusion to other earthquakes under Nero's Julio-Claudian predecessors like the Lydia earthquake.<sup>65</sup> If Seneca is able to rationalize the phenomenon freshest in his reader's memory, he is well prepared to do the same with all other earthquakes that have occurred or will occur in the future.

Seneca's *Natural Questions* then is more than an encyclopedia of the Roman understanding of the natural sciences. It is a piece of Stoic natural philosophy that argues that all

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<sup>63</sup> These quotations, which come from *Geography* 12.8.18 and 13.4.8 will be explored in the following chapter.

<sup>64</sup> Flaig, 60.

<sup>65</sup> Regarding Seneca's loyalty to the Julio-Claudian rule as a whole, religious interpretations do not seem to go backwards in time, meaning that an earthquake that occurred under Nero would be tied directly to Nero's actions and his successors, but it would not be tied back to Tiberius. Yet, an earthquake that occurred under Nero, like the Campanian earthquake, may have potential implications as an intensifier of a religious interpretation of an event that occurred under Tiberius, such as the Lydia earthquake. Such interpretations do not seem to be common however, as much of the interpretation of an earthquake was tied to its location. Counterfactually, if both the Lydia and Campanian earthquakes were to have occurred in the province of Asia and destroyed the same cities, a serious reconsideration would have been made regarding the interpretation of the first event.

natural events, ordinary and extraordinary, fit within the natural order and should not claim religious attachments. Regarding earthquakes, Seneca turns to the past and chooses three specific earthquakes to illustrate his point: an earthquake that struck Tyre in 140 B.C., the Lydia earthquake, and an earthquake that occurred in Achaia and Macedonia in 61 A.D. It is interesting to note that these events form a tripartite series that points to the Campanian earthquake as its culmination. Seneca writes,

*Tyros aliquando infamis ruinis fuit; Asia duodecim urbes simul perdidit; anno priore achaiam et Macedoniam, quaecumque est ista vis mali quae incurrit nunc Campaniam, laesit* (Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones* 6.1.13).

Tyre at some time experienced infamous destruction; Asia lost twelve cities at the same time; in the last year it struck Achaia and Macedonia, whatever this disastrous force is, that now attacks Campania.

The Tyre earthquake is the geographically farthest example as well as being the most distant in time, having occurred 200 years before the Campanian earthquake. The Lydia earthquake happened in the Hellenic East and was only 50 years prior. Finally, the earthquake in Achaia and Macedonia occurred in the cultural heart of the empire, Greece, and happened within the last year. The Campanian earthquake is then naturally the next event in the series, directly affecting the Italian mainland and Roman elites.

Seneca does flesh out the details of the Campanian earthquake more than the three others he cites, as it represents the most recent powerful earthquake referred to in his *Natural Questions*. The conditions of the earthquake further increase his interest. For one, the timing of the earthquake disproves “the old view that earthquakes never occurred in winter.”<sup>66</sup> Secondly,

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<sup>66</sup> Harry M. Hine, “Rome, the Cosmos, and the Emperor in Seneca’s *Natural Questions*,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 96 (2006): 52.



Seneca speaks of “sensational stories of statues splitting in two, a huge flock being killed, and people being driven mad.”<sup>67</sup> The destruction of a large percentage of the buildings of Pompeii and Herculaneum was especially significant. As Guidoboni illustrates: “The area contained much sought-after luxury villas belonging to the family of the emperor and the Roman aristocracy.”<sup>68</sup> As earthquakes in the Roman religious system “had... traditionally been treated by the Senate as prodigies requiring expiation by religious means,” the Campanian earthquake’s direct and significant damage done to the estates of Imperial elites would naturally enact condemnatory interpretations aimed at Emperor Nero.<sup>69</sup> Based on these characteristics of the Campanian earthquake, its cultural memory is filled with the potential for *religio* (“superstition”) that condemns Emperor Nero’s impiety. Seneca then serves the emperor by attempting to normalize the Campanian earthquake. In order to do so, he proposes a Stoic perspective, which reasons that earthquakes are rational occurrences of a naturally just physical world, thereby eliminating the impact of *religio* on their interpretations.

While Seneca references the Lydia earthquake only twice in his extant works, his terseness and lack of comment on the disaster is crucial to understanding his consideration of its importance.<sup>70</sup> In contrast to Strabo, Seneca is distinctly more short-spoken on the subject. In accordance with tenets of Stoicism, Seneca focuses on rationalizing the natural events around him to guard against irrational perspectives derived from *religio*. For rarer and particularly powerful natural events, like the Lydia earthquake, applying reason in order to explain them

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<sup>67</sup> Seneca the Younger. *Naturales Quaestiones* 6.1.3.

<sup>68</sup> Guidoboni, Comastri, and Traina, 26.

<sup>69</sup> Hine, 67.

<sup>70</sup> A passing reference to the Lydia earthquake is found in Seneca the Younger, *Epistulae ad Lucilium* 91.9, but will not be discussed in this project.

proves to be more difficult. Inwood states: “Rare events... inspire superstitious reactions (*religio*) both public and private, and our astonishment is mixed with fear.”<sup>71</sup> The brevity of his comments then points to the high potential of the earthquake to create these types of superstitious reactions. If Seneca were to fully detail the extent of the impact of the Lydia earthquake, human or physical, he may implicitly deem the nature of the event as extraordinary and divine. In this way, he would effectively undermine his construction of earthquakes as part of the natural order.

Seneca’s description of the Campanian earthquake helps to quantify the others he mentions, including the Lydia earthquake. As he writes in 6.12, *Alia temporibus aliis cadunt* (“Some things fall at one time and some at another,” Sen. *QNat.* 6.1.12). In essence, Seneca is saying that the timing of the Lydia earthquake means nothing. If it had not occurred on that night in 17 A.D., it would have happened at some other time in the future. Such events are not within human control. This theme carries throughout the rest of the sixth book. As Williams explains, “A ‘whole’ picture emerges in 6.30 of different levels of seismic activity and effect, levels ranging from the domestic and local to the more global; any given earthquake may be viewed as but one part, a single manifestation, of a general phenomenon.”<sup>72</sup> Seneca characterizes the Lydia earthquake as particularly severe and worthy of being one of the three past examples of seemingly remarkable earthquakes. Nonetheless, he avoids identifying it as something extraordinary and thereby fueling irrational and superstitious interpretations of similar events.

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<sup>71</sup> Brad Inwood, *Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 180. In his statement on fear, Inwood cites Seneca’s *Natural History* 6.3.4, *nihil horum sine timore miramur* (“we are amazed by nothing about these things without fear”).

<sup>72</sup> G.D. Williams, “Greco-Roman Seismology and Seneca on Earthquakes in *Natural Questions* 6,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 96 (2006): 144.

*Phlegon of Tralles: Against Seneca*

Phlegon of Tralles (Early 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.- late 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.) recognizes the firm attachment of the οἱ πολλοί to *religio* and uses it to his advantage in his work, entitled the *Book of Marvels*. While Seneca minimizes the impact of the earthquake, Phlegon of Tralles accentuates it. By writing in the ancient genre of paradoxography, which speaks of fantastical natural phenomena and loosely assigns them to reality, Phlegon of Tralles may more freely speak about Emperor Tiberius and the Lydia earthquake by situating the two in a pseudo-reality. He includes Sicily, Rhegium, and Pontus as all being affected by the disaster, which is an impossibly wide scope of physical impact.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, his citation of Apollonius Dyscolus comes at the beginning of a story about the discovery of giant bones in the aftermath of the disaster.<sup>74</sup> After the discovery, Emperor Tiberius avoids disturbing the dead by commissioning a reconstruction of the bones, rather than bringing the skeletons to Rome.<sup>75</sup> This thereby eliminates any sense of wrongdoing on the part of Tiberius as his actions align with Roman religious values. In this way, Phlegon of Tralles contradicts any popular opinions that believe Tiberius' impiety caused the Lydia earthquake. He then does not combat *religio* as Seneca does, but actively diverts potentially harmful interpretations away from the emperor.

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<sup>73</sup> Phlegon of Tralles. *Miracula* 14. Guidoboni, Comastri, and Traina, 179, 182-183, 186. The specific section is the following, Ἔπαθον δὲ καὶ τῆς Σικελίας ὑπὸ τοῦ σεισμοῦ οὐκ ὀλίγαι πόλεις καὶ τὰ πλησίον Ῥηγίου. ἐσειέθη δὲ οὐκ ὀλίγα καὶ τῶν ἐν Πόντῳ ἔθνῶν (“And many cities in Sicily and near Rhegium were affected by the earthquake and many cities of the people in Pontus.”) Phlegon of Tralles seems to combine three earthquakes into one here. The Lydia earthquake in 17 A.D., an earthquake in the Reggio Calabria region circa 17 A.D., and one in the Pontus region in 24 A.D. Guidoboni, Comastri, and Traina recognize this and cite chapters 13 and 14 of the *Book of Marvels* for all three earthquakes in their *Catalogue*.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.3-4.

Phlegon of Tralles' reference to an Apollonius Grammaticus constitutes the most perplexing source on the first stage of the Lydia earthquake, but provides a glimpse into the cultural memory of the event beyond the propagandist restrictions of the Julio-Claudian emperors. In a fragment of the *Book of Marvels*, Phlegon of Tralles writes,

Ἀπολλώνιος δὲ ὁ γραμματικὸς ἱστορεῖ ἐπὶ Τιβερίου Νέρωνος σεισμὸν γεγενῆσθαι καὶ πολλὰς καὶ ὀνομαστὰς πόλεις τῆς Ἀσίας ἄρδην ἀφανισθῆναι (Apollonius Dyscolus apud Phlegon of Tralles, *FGrH* 257 F 36 (XIII)).

And Apollonius Grammaticus observes that during the reign of Tiberius an earthquake had occurred and many worthy cities of Asia were utterly erased.

Though it is unclear in the text, this Apollonius is most likely the grammarian Apollonius Dyscolus, a contemporary of Phlegon of Tralles, who wrote in approximately the 130s A.D. Why Phlegon of Tralles would choose a grammarian from Alexandria in Egypt, who lived outside of the province of Asia, as his trusted source on the Lydia earthquake is difficult to justify.<sup>76</sup> Perspective on this issue is then limited, given the fragmentary nature of Apollonius Dyscolus' work found in the *Book of Marvels*. While the context in which the fragment is presented warrants a cautious approach, its use by Phlegon of Tralles reveals the widespread cultural impact of the Lydia earthquake across the Roman Empire. The fact that Phlegon of Tralles believes an Alexandrian to be an authority on the Lydia earthquake demonstrates the recognition of the importance of the disaster far outside of Asia Minor. Furthermore, Apollonius Dyscolus,

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<sup>76</sup> A potential explanation is that there was an earlier paradoxographer around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., now known as Apollonius Paradoxographus. His work was published under the name of Apollonius Dyscolus, who himself wrote a now lost work *On Fabricated History*. If Apollonius Dyscolus did indeed write about the Lydia earthquake, this means that there were mythical accounts derived from the disaster that were still circulating in the early 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. Otherwise, Phlegon of Tralles either completely invented the story or took elements of Apollonius Paradoxographus' earlier work and assigned them to the Lydia earthquake.

in writing about the earthquake, would have had to defend its importance to his readers in Egypt or elsewhere in the Roman Imperial world, since he lived over a century after its occurrence.<sup>77</sup>

*Tacitus: A Freer Hand*

Tacitus' (c. 56 A.D.- c. 120 A.D.) account of the Lydia earthquake in the second book of his *Annals* is the most detailed description of the disaster stage and as such deserves the most attention. This may stem from the *Annals* being the chronologically brief of the historical works that address the Lydia earthquake since it covers only from 14 to 68 A.D., as well as the author's desire to present a history that is *sine ira et studio* ("without passion and inclination").<sup>78</sup> Tacitus' description of the disaster alludes to the extraordinary nature of the event, which ultimately may place blame upon Emperor Tiberius for the occurrence of the Lydia earthquake by connecting its characteristics to Tiberius' specific actions. As Tacitus writes,

*Eodem anno duodecim celebres Asiae urbes conlapsae nocturno motu terrae, quo improvisior graviorque pestis fuit. neque solitum in tali casu effugium subveniebat in aperta prorumpendi, quia diductis terris hauriebantur. sedisse immensos montis, visa in arduo quae plana fuerint, effulsisse inter ruinam ignis memorant* (Tacitus, *Annales* 2.47.1-4).

In the same year twelve celebrated cities of the province of Asia collapsed by means of an earthquake at night, and for this reason it was a more unexpected and dangerous disaster. Nor in this case could people use the usual way of escape, rushing into open spaces, because they were being swallowed up when the land parted beneath them. People remember that large mountains sat down, things that were flat seemed elevated, and fires raged among the ruins.

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<sup>77</sup> This seems to illustrate that Seneca's attempt to minimize the impact of the earthquake did not take a firm hold, at least in the Hellenic East, which continued to see the earthquake as culturally significant for a number of generations after its occurrence.

<sup>78</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.1.10.

The narrative contains four details of special interest: the status of the twelve cities as *celebres*, the earthquake occurring at night, Tacitus remarking on the usual way of escaping harm during an earthquake, and the imagery of violent changes created in the landscape. When taken together, the details Tacitus includes crafts a clear picture of the physical effects of the earthquake and how they may connect to Tiberius' actions.

In calling the twelve cities affected by the Lydia earthquake *celebres* (“celebrated”), Tacitus emphasizes that the significance of the destruction of the cities was recognized outside of the province of Asia. His language mirrors other authors such as Strabo, who, as stated above, refers to the destruction of Magnesia, Sardis, and τῶν ἄλλων τὰς ἐπιφανεστάτας (“the most famous of the other cities [of the region],” Strabo 12.8.18). Yet, the significance of Tacitus’ emphasis is strengthened by his cultural background as a Gallic-Roman as opposed to the Greek-speaking Strabo. By appearing to be a Greek writer in his *Geography*, Strabo would very naturally refer to significant poleis in Asia Minor as “famous” or “celebrated,” whereas Tacitus’ decision to do so is more emphatic as it is not rooted in his cultural background. It may be that Tacitus simply follows the language of previous authors who have documented the Lydia earthquake. This does not have to mean that Tacitus read or was even aware of the work of Strabo or other authors who may have utilized this diction. He may instead draw from an oral tradition that had formed around the event.<sup>79</sup> If the Lydia earthquake created legend, those whom the earthquake affected would certainly pass on the story of the disaster orally.<sup>80</sup> This description

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<sup>79</sup> Phlegon, *Mir. 13*. Phlegon of Tralles’ citation of Apollonius Dyscolus speaks of the destruction of πολλάς... ὀνομαστάς πόλεις τῆς Ἀσίας (“many noteworthy cities of Asia”) as well. Though Apollonius Dyscolus was Tacitus’ contemporary, his works were likely written after the *Annales*, with Apollonius Dyscolus becoming more well known around 130 A.D. or about a dozen years after the *Annales* were well under way.

<sup>80</sup> Hoffman, 306.

of the twelve cities as celebrated or famous then presents a unifying trope and identifiable epithet for the Lydia earthquake: “The Earthquake of the Twelve Cities.”<sup>81</sup> Tacitus’ use of *conlapsae* (“collapsed”) fits Hoffman’s statement that legends of catastrophes explicitly say that a people or place was completely destroyed: the cities have collapsed and there is nothing left but *effulsisse inter ruinam ignis* (“fires burning among the ruins”).<sup>82</sup>

By bringing attention to the famous nature of the destroyed cities, Tacitus constructs his narrative of the Lydia earthquake as a legend based in known and accepted facts. This further speaks to the cultural power of the earthquake, since it destroyed the storied fame of these twelve cities in a single night. Keitel states: “Disaster, obviously, threatens to eradicate the past, by destroying monuments, cities, cultures, and the people who can remember them. Tacitus does fix in memory some of what was lost.”<sup>83</sup> Tacitus, then, like Tiberius, does his own restoration work. While the cities may have lost their fame following the earthquake, he reminds his readers of their former glory.

Tacitus also points out that the Lydia earthquake’s occurrence at night signified something more than just greater physical danger to the affected cities. Particularly for the people of Asia Minor, for whom earthquakes were extraordinary though not necessarily uncommon occurrences, correct religious interpretations of such events were crucial to maintaining the *pax deorum* (“peace of the gods”).<sup>84</sup> Tacitus, by stating that the earthquake

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<sup>81</sup> It is important to note that the original fame of the cities did not come from the earthquake. Pergamon and Sardis in particular were poleis of substantial wealth and power in the Hellenistic era prior to Roman rule.

<sup>82</sup> Hoffman, 306.

<sup>83</sup> Keitel, 351.

<sup>84</sup> James S. Murray, “The Urban Earthquake Imagery and Divine Judgement in John’s Apocalypse,” *Novum Testamentum* 47, no.2 (Apr. 2005): 147. Murray cites a 1967 survey by Turkish seismologists at the Technical University of Istanbul which concluded that in 60 years there were “1680 tremors with epicentres in or near

occurred at night and swallowed solid ground whole then alludes to a much more serious affront to the gods that political authorities have committed than if the event had happened during the day, as it was an *inprovisior graviorque* (“more unexpected and dangerous”) disaster.<sup>85</sup> While other Roman authors such as Velleius Paterculus openly assign blame to provincial authorities, Tacitus may more tactfully point to Tiberius himself as the root cause of the Lydia earthquake.<sup>86</sup>

Suetonius, a contemporary of Tacitus, is more forthright in his blame of Tiberius, who in his eyes was *Circa deos ac religiones neglegentior, quippe addictus mathematicae plenusque persuasionis cuncta fato agi*, (“In respect to the gods and religion very negligent, of course he was addicted to astrology and persuaded by the arguments that everything is ruled by fate,” Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum* 2.69). The Romans, if Suetonius’ position was a prevalent one, directly connected Tiberius’ religious faults to the Lydia earthquake, thereby signaling the loss of his right to rule. Similarly, in Tacitus’ description, the consequence appears more dire than many natural disasters in the past, with its occurrence at night being *inprovisior graviorque*.

Tacitus’ account of the natural effects of the earthquake further emphasizes the distinctiveness of the event and the potential mistakes made in the Roman political realm. Roman interpretation of the meaning behind the mountains being laid low and low places being turned into high ones would have been straightforward: a similar flip was about to take place in the political world. Tacitus recognizes that the Roman religious world experienced a substantial

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Turkey.” There is no evidence to support a conclusion contrary to an assumption that similarly high levels of seismic activity occurred in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.

<sup>85</sup> Tacitus’ statement on the open spaces being swallowed up refers to physically visible and severe earthquakes, only possible with earthquakes of extremely high magnitudes.

<sup>86</sup> Velleius Paterculus’ account of the Lydia earthquake will be covered in the following chapter.



shift in the Imperial age and critiques Emperor Tiberius' role in establishing new and detrimental religious precedents for future emperors.<sup>87</sup>

This systematic change makes sense from the political standpoint of the emperor. If the emperor has the sole right to proper religious interpretation, political enemies cannot use religion as oppositional propaganda. Yet, this line of reasoning is precisely the issue. Emperors would refuse to interpret any signs as speaking out against their decisions and undermine their own authority. Thus, after Tiberius as a relatively new emperor decides that the flooding of the Tiber in 15 A.D. is not a negative religious portent, in later passages Tacitus makes no mention of Tiberius' religious interpretations of natural occurrences, including the Lydia earthquake. According to Tacitus, if Tiberius has made his decision to disregard a clear sign opposing his rule, he will disregard all similar signs in the future.

*Conclusion: The Interpretative Limits of Disaster Narratives under the Roman Empire*

The choices of these four ancient authors in their respective presentation of the first stage of the Lydia earthquake reveal much about the political framing and social interpretations of the event. Each author writes with a wary conservatism. Although Strabo was the author who arguably had the most access to the firsthand accounts of the Lydia earthquake, his references are

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<sup>87</sup> Shannon-Henderson, 3. Shannon-Henderson argues that Tacitus' account of the flooding of the Tiber in the first book of the *Annals* demonstrates the significant issue of religious interpretation under Tiberius' leadership as *pontifex maximus* and self-designated sole interpreter of religious omens. She states, "By [Tiberius] refusing to allow consultation of the Sibylline books... only the emperor may now decide when something is a religious problem, and once he has decided that the flood is not, there is no more discussion." While Shannon-Henderson recognizes the flood of the Tiber as a sign against Tiberius' right to authority, she ignores earthquakes entirely in her study of the *Annals*. This is a significant omission, especially as Shannon-Henderson does make mention of Western Asia Minor.

decidedly brief and colorless. This is certainly understandable, as he lived under the reign of Tiberius. Seneca likewise avoids discussing the human suffering involved in the Lydia earthquake and minimizes the uniqueness of similar powerful natural events through Stoic philosophical argumentation. Phlegon of Tralles utilizes Apollonius Dyscolus' account to redirect the *religio* Seneca sought to suppress. In the larger context of the passage, he argues that Emperor Tiberius was pious and therefore could have had no role in causing the disaster. Finally, even though Tacitus provides a detailed account of the Lydia earthquake, one must read between the lines to glean any blame-placing on Tiberius for problems in the Roman Empire. To connect the Lydia earthquake with Emperor Tiberius was a dangerous act, even much later in time as it allows for a similarly negative connection to a current ruler. As a result, the four authors who write about the disaster stage of the earthquake approach the subject with considerable care. Yet, together, these accounts demonstrate the potential interpretations of the Lydia earthquake as a condemnation of Emperor Tiberius according to the traditional Roman religious beliefs which the Julio-Claudian emperors sought to control and suppress.

## Chapter 3 — Restoration or Revolution?: The Politics of Relief

*Introduction: Molding Renewed Relationships*

Contrasting with the accounts on the disaster stage of the Lydia earthquake, the Roman government fully encouraged publicizing the details of the Tiberian relief program. Emperor Tiberius would warmly welcome the spread of the news of his substantial monetary gift across the province of Asia, let alone the Roman Empire. While Asia had experienced similar relief programs under Emperor Augustus, the novelty of a natural disaster the size of the Lydia earthquake during the early Roman Imperial period presented a unique opportunity for Tiberius.<sup>88</sup>

As previously established, the *do ut des* relationship between the Roman emperor and the provincials of Asia hinged on the promise of monetary or military support by the emperor in exchange for the gratitude and continued support of his subjects.<sup>89</sup> Yet, this traditional Roman idea did not have the same universal acceptance in the Hellenic and Near East. The provincials of Asia perceived their relationship with the Roman emperor as being similar to their previous connections to Persian and Hellenistic rulers. Based on the plethora of inscriptions documenting various victories and achievements from these former rulers that dotted the landscape of Asia during the Imperial period, this new relationship relied on the emperor's ability to display his

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<sup>88</sup> This example, the Tralles and Laodicea earthquake that occurred in 27 B.C., will be discussed at length in the Strabo section.

<sup>89</sup> Flaig, 55. See page 26. Apart from monetary aid for natural disasters, the Roman province, or later provinces, in Asia Minor needed constant military protection from the sustained danger imposed by the Parthians in the east.

power through monuments and inscriptions, the presence of which would convince his subjects of the futility of anything but submission.

Emperor Tiberius follows Augustus in recognizing the symbolic importance of honorary inscriptions to convince Hellenic traditionalists of the extent of his power and stabilize the foundations of the relationship between himself and the provincials of Asia. Rubin states concerning Augustus' *Res Gestae*, (of which two of the three extant copies are found in Asia Minor) that "in the cultural context of Asia Minor, where lengthy autobiographical inscriptions were closely associated with royal power, the *Res Gestae* made a natural addition to the ideological program of the Roman Imperial cult."<sup>90</sup> Tiberius saw no reason to stray from this precedent. After all, by adhering to the Augustan narrative, he solidified his position as Augustus' rightful heir and extended the influence of the *do ut des* style relationship that was new to Asia. As a result, the primary sources documenting the disaster relief program show Tiberius as the continuation of Emperor Augustus, the hero of the *Res Gestae*.

Following the precedent of the previous chapter, this stage will be explored through a chronological examination of the ancient sources. Strabo offers an important example of a Greek writer (as he presents himself) from Asia Minor reacting to contemporary events familiar to his readers. Tacitus, as in the disaster stage, provides the most detail on Tiberius' relief program following the earthquake. Finally, Suetonius compares Tiberius' relief program to actions taken by Augustus, but does so in a way that demonstrates Tiberius' inferiority.

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<sup>90</sup> Rubin, 121.

*Strabo: Necessarily Propagandist*

Strabo, as a contemporary of the Lydia earthquake, immediately recognizes its political importance and the propagandist tactics taken by Emperor Tiberius. He writes approvingly of Tiberius in the twelfth book of his *Geography*,

ἐπηνώρθωσε δ' ὁ ἡγεμῶν χρήματα ἐπιδούς, καθάπερ καὶ πρότερον ἐπὶ τῆς γενομένης συμφορᾶς Τραλλιανοῖς (ἤνικα τὸ γυμνάσιον καὶ ἄλλα μέρη συνέπεσεν) ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ καὶ τούτοις καὶ Λαοδικεῦσιν (Strabo, *Geographica* 12.8.18).

But the emperor restored the cities by giving them money, like and just as previously his father did before when disaster came upon Tralles (at the time when the gymnasium and the other parts fell together) and to the Laodiceians.

This passage is composed of two portions: the shorter addresses Emperor Tiberius' relief efforts after the Lydia earthquake and the longer references an earthquake that occurred in Tralles and Laodicea under Augustus' rule. While this information on the Tralles and Laodicea earthquake seems tangential to a discussion of the Lydia earthquake, Strabo's audience must again be considered. As the main body of his readers came from Asia Minor, most would have been quite familiar with the Lydia earthquake.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, there was little need to review either the extent of the relief program or the specific buildings or cities it restored. They would, however, need a reminder about the Tralles and Laodicea earthquake, which had happened 44 years earlier, in 27 B.C.

By juxtaposing these two disasters, Strabo compares both their characteristics and relief efforts. As seen from the passage, the Tralles and Laodicea earthquake was quite powerful, or at least strong enough to knock the gymnasium flat. This fact held special cultural significance as in

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<sup>91</sup> See chapter on the disaster stage.

Hawhee's words, the ancient Greek "gymnasia were recognized sites for the production of citizen subjects," in both mental and physical capacities.<sup>92</sup> The importance of this earthquake is not only found in the Greek mindset, but also in the Roman, as it is indirectly referenced in the *Res Gestae* 16.<sup>93</sup> While Augustus does not directly include the Tralles and Laodicea earthquake in his official document, the bilingual inscription of the work found upon the Temple of Augustus at Ankyra fills in this gap in its Greek version of the text. It states,

Δαπάναι δὲ εἰς θεάς καὶ μονομάχους καὶ ἀθλητὰς καὶ ναυμαχίαν καὶ θηρομαχίαν δωρεαί τε ἀποικίας πόλεσιν ἐν Ἰταλίαι, πόλεσιν ἐν ἐπαρχείαις σεισμῶι καὶ ἐνπυρισμοῖς πεπονηκυίας ἢ κατ' ἄνδρα φίλοις καὶ συνκλητικοῖς, ὧν τὰς τειμήσεις προσεξεπλήρωσεν ἄπειρον πλῆθος (*Res Gestae* 4, appendix).

The expenditures provided for theatrical shows, gladiatorial sports, for exhibitions of athletes, for hunts of wild beasts, and the naval combat, and his gifts to colonies in Italy, to cities in the provinces which had been destroyed by earthquake or conflagration, or to individual friends and senators, whose property he raised to the required rating, are too numerous to be reckoned.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Debra Hawhee, *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 112.

<sup>93</sup> The following text is the entirety of *Res Gestae* 16, as translated by Frederick W. Shipley (Loeb Library), *Pecuniam pro agris, quos in consulatu meo quarto et postea consulibus M. Crasso et Cn. Lentulo augure adsignavi militibus, solvi municipis. Ea summa sestertium circiter sexsicens milliens fuit, quam pro Italicis praedis numeravi, et circiter bis milliens et sescentiens, quod pro agris provincialibus solvi. Id primus et solus omnium, qui deduxerunt colonias militum in Italia aut in provinciis, ad memoriam aetatis meae feci. Et postea Ti. Nerone et Cn. Pisone consulibus, itemque C. Antistio et D. Laelio cos., et C. Calvisio et L. Pasiene consulibus, et L. Lentulo et M. Messalla consulibus, et L. Caninio et Q. Fabricio cos. militibus, quos eme riteis stipendis in sua municipia deduxi, praemia numerato persolv, quam in rem sestertium quater milliens libenter impendi.* (To the municipal towns I paid money for the lands which I assigned to soldiers in my own fourth consulship and afterwards in the consulship of Marcus Crassus and Gnaeus Lentulus the augur. The sum which I paid for estates in Italy was about six hundred million sesterces, and the amount which I paid for lands in the provinces was about two hundred and sixty million. I was the first and only one to do this of all those who up to my time settled colonies of soldiers in Italy or in the provinces. And later, in the consulship of Tiberius Nero and Gnaeus Piso, likewise in the consulship of Gaius Antistius and Decimus Laelius, and of Gaius Calvisius and Lucius Pasiene, and of Lucius Lentulus and Marcus Messalla, and of Lucius Caninius and Quintus Fabricius, I paid cash gratuities to the soldiers whom I settled in their own towns at the expiration of their service, and for this purpose I expended four hundred million sesterces as an act of grace).

<sup>94</sup> The original Latin has a gap following *et donate pecunia a* ("and his gifts to...") which leaves out the mention of colonies and provincial cities, before continuing that these gifts are *terrae motu incendioque consumptis* ("for those destroyed by earthquakes and fire").

Strabo by speaking about the Tralles and Laodicea earthquake then invites the comparison between the deeds of the now-deified Emperor Augustus found in the *Res Gestae* (particularly the restoration of civic buildings such as gymnasia) and those of the current ruler Emperor Tiberius, which lends his support to how Emperor Tiberius has helped Asia recover. Just as Augustus helped Tralles and Laodicea to be fully restored, so will the Tiberian relief program restore the twelve cities to their former glory.

Strabo even more explicitly states his approval for the Tiberian relief program in the thirteenth book of the *Geography*. He writes,

ἀναληφθεῖσα δ' ἀξιολόγως ὕστερον διὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν τῆς χώρας ἢ πόλις καὶ οὐδεμιᾶς λειπομένη τῶν ἀστυγειτόνων, νεωστὶ ὑπὸ σεισμῶν ἀπέβαλε πολλὴν τῆς κατοικίας. ἡ δὲ τοῦ Τιβερίου πρόνοια τοῦ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἡγεμόνος καὶ ταύτην καὶ τῶν ἄλλων συχναὶ ἀνέλαβε ταῖς εὐεργεσίαις, ὅσαι περὶ τὸν αὐτὸν καιρὸν ἐκοινώνησαν τοῦ αὐτοῦ πάθους (Strabo, *Geographica* 13.4.8).

And although the city [Sardis] was remarkably raised up again because of the virtues of the place and although it was the foremost of its neighbors, recently it lost many of its buildings due to an earthquake. And the foreknowledge of Tiberius, the leader of our time, restored this city as well as other cities by his good works, which made common cause in the same misfortune at the same time.

While this passage neither mentions that Tiberius restored the city of Sardis using his own money nor connects his actions to those of the *Res Gestae*, it provides three important details. The first concerns the Roman reasoning for the restoration of Sardis stemming from τὴν ἀρετὴν τῆς χώρας upon which the city was situated. While H. L. Jones was inclined to extrapolate from the phrase that the city was restored because of “the fertility of its territory,” it may more clearly be rendered as simply “the virtues of the place.”<sup>95</sup> This translation more fluidly connects the

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<sup>95</sup> H.L. Jones translation of the *Geography* was left unfinished, but is presented in the Loeb editions of Strabo's *Geography*.

phrase to the following οὐδεμιᾶς λειπομένη τῶν ἀστυγειτόνων, (“although it was the foremost of its neighbors”), certainly true in terms of Sardis’ size and cultural significance to the province of Asia. The second point identifies Tiberius’ πρόνοια (“foreknowledge”) in being prepared to restore the cities of Asia. While the language may simply illustrate the efficient and organized way that Rome responded to the Lydia earthquake, it carries a sense of religious responsibility: Tiberius was prepared because his rule has the support of the gods. By claiming that Tiberius was πρόνοιος and prepared for the occurrence of any such earthquake, Strabo deflects interpretations that the earthquake signals the illegitimacy or religious impiety of Tiberius’ rule away from Tiberius himself.

*Tacitus: Relaying the Structure of Tiberius’ Program*

Tacitus, as with the disaster stage of the Lydia earthquake, provides the most detail of any of the extant sources on the relief process. Despite previously presenting Tiberius negatively by attaching him indirectly to the disaster stage of the Lydia earthquake, Tacitus remains decidedly neutral regarding the relief program. He writes,

asperrima in Sardianos lues plurimum in eosdem misericordiae traxit: nam centies sestertium pollicitus Caesar, et quantum aerario aut fisco pendebant in quinquennium remisit. Magnetes a Sipylo proximi damno ac remedio habiti. Temnios, Philadelphenos, Aegeatas, Apollonidenses, quique Mosteni aut Macedones Hyrcani vocantur, et Hierocaesariam, Myrinam, Cymen, Tmolium levare idem in tempus tributis mittique ex senatu placuit, qui praesentia spectaret refoveretque. delectus est M. Ateius e praetoriis, ne consulari obtinente Asiam aemulatio inter pares et ex eo impedimentum oreretur (Tac. *Ann.* 2.47.1-4).

A most cruel misfortune on the Sardians brought for the same people much sympathy: for Emperor Tiberius promised 10 million sesterces and for five years exempted the amount they paid in taxes or public revenue. For the Magnesians by Mount Sipylus were nearest in their harm and their use of aid. Temnians, Philadelphians, Aegeatians, Apollonidensians, who are called Mostenians or the Macedonians of Hyrcanus, and



Hierocaesaria, Myrina, Cyme, and Tmolus, it was pleasing to lighten their tribute at that time and that someone be sent from the Senate, who would examine their present conditions and restore the cities. Marcus Ateius was chosen from the praetorians, lest a consul obtaining Asia raise up envy and turmoil among his equals.

Tacitus here reveals three related components of the Roman relief system: how the Romans measured relief, the centrality of the emperor as the sponsor of the program, and the immense political potential raised by disasters like the Lydia earthquake.

In the first place, the success of the relief program was measured according to how it met the needs of the cities of Asia, which fall within three levels that Tacitus demonstrates were created to judge the relief needed by the affected cities. The highest level belongs solely to Sardis as its experience of the earthquake was *asperrima* (“most cruel”). Tacitus also uniquely assigns a monetary amount that Tiberius explicitly gives to relieve Sardis, which he does not do for the other cities he mentions.<sup>96</sup> This detail reinforces Sardis as the most prominent, at least in regards to the Lydia earthquake, when compared to the other cities in two ways. First, Emperor Tiberius himself, the obviously highest figure in the Roman world, directly promises 10 million sesterces to aid Sardis as well as five years of tax exemption. Secondly, by providing the specific and sizeable amount of money given to the city, Tacitus shows that this is a particularly remarkable donation in comparison to the other cities.<sup>97</sup> While this may be because Sardis simply required the most aid, the city additionally had significant political importance as the seat of the

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<sup>96</sup> While this certainly points to Tacitus’ illustration of Sardis being at the highest level of importance, it begs the question of if he had similar information on the other cities. Furthermore, if he did have this information and his narrative of the earthquake was detail-oriented, why were these numbers not included in his text?

<sup>97</sup> The decision by Tiberius to give such a large donation to Sardis may be related to importance of the city to Augustus, as shown by the extant *Res Gestae* found in the city. I hesitate to make this argument, however, because of the lack of extant *Res Gestae* inscriptions not only in Asia, but also across the Roman world. Surely, if Augustus publicly proclaimed Aphrodisias his favored city in Asia they would have had their own copy. It would be surprising if other cities that had their temples restored by Augustus, which presumably includes Sardis, would have a copy of the document as well.

Roman proconsul for the province. Tiberius' decision to give an enormous amount to Sardis certainly would have gained considerable influence over the city and its officials. Following Sardis, Magnesia forms the second level, as Tacitus shows they were *proximi damno ac remedio habiti* ("nearest in their harm and use of aid"). The remaining cities then form the third and final level. It seems from Tacitus' description of the relief given to Sardis and Magnesia that the remaining cities merely needed to have their tribute lightened, not necessarily removed, for an unspecified period of time. Though Tacitus may have arbitrarily assigned these categories, he reveals the Roman mindset in how individual cities and the ill effects that they suffered were prioritized in the relief process, both in terms of need and political influence.

Turning to the second point, Tacitus places Emperor Tiberius directly into the narrative of the Lydia earthquake, but does so in a positive manner. While Tacitus implicitly condemns Tiberius' religious impiety, as seen in the previous chapter, he seems to paint Tiberius in a positive light when writing about his donation to Sardis. In fact, later in the sixth book of the *Annals*, Tacitus writes about a fire in Rome, *quod damnum Caesar ad gloriam vertit exolutis domuum et insularum pretiis [eo]* ("the harm which Caesar turned to his glory with the price for the damage of houses and city blocks having been paid for [by him]," Tac. *Ann.* 6.45). The language of *ad gloriam vertit* is comparable to the *Res Gestae*, in which Augustus repeatedly provides enormous sums of money, the most prominent example of which may be his donations during food shortages at Rome.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, after the province of Asia officially declared Emperor Augustus a god in 9 B.C., Bosworth shows that the province justified the decision "by a

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<sup>98</sup> See *Res Gestae* 5, 15, 18.

classic restatement of the Hellenistic principle of deification through euergetism.”<sup>99</sup> Personal donations following a natural disaster certainly constituted εὐεργά, good works, illustrating that Tiberius followed Augustus’ precedent in both manner and scale.

It is important to note, however, that Tacitus differs from Strabo as he does not speak about Tiberius’ preparedness. While Strabo praises the “foreknowledge of Tiberius” when addressing the Lydia earthquake, Tacitus writes only of his actions following the event. In the Tacitean narrative, Tiberius acts exclusively in a reactionary manner as opposed to Strabo’s image of a Tiberius who acts almost preventatively, or in the least has the administrative capability to institute a relief program with little delay. By this small exclusion, Tacitus eliminates one of the two propagandist tools Tiberius has through the relief program. Tiberius, like other emperors, “could repeatedly portray themselves as rescuers in time of need, and give propagandistic proof of their beneficence.”<sup>100</sup> Yet, Tacitus, unlike Strabo, does not depict a Tiberius whose preparedness may represent his strong religious piety. Hence, with the Roman Imperial government simultaneously spreading the idea that “the one constant in the religious firmament was the emperor,” Tacitus’ narrative may imply a significant systematic flaw.<sup>101</sup> If the Roman emperor, the cornerstone of the Imperial Roman religious system, cannot maintain the illusion of predicting and preparing for specific instances of natural disasters, he compromises his case for deification.

For other contemporary Roman politicians, the Lydia earthquake certainly impacted their aspirations as well. Though Emperor Tiberius claimed the right to personally bestow wealth

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<sup>99</sup> Brian Bosworth, “Augustus, the *Res Gestae*, and Hellenistic Theories of Apotheosis,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 89, no.1 (2009): 12.

<sup>100</sup> Thommen, 115.

<sup>101</sup> Ando, 44.

upon the heaviest hit, and arguably the most politically prominent, of the twelve cities, the Senate provided the program administration and the decision on how to approach the relief of the other eleven cities. Yet, the final order on who would oversee the relief program was most likely made by Tiberius himself. As Garnsey and Saller show, “Ex-praetors holding senior posts in the emperor’s service were usually promoted to the consulship while their contemporaries in the senate usually were not; moreover, the emperor preferred to use men without consular ancestors as legates to govern his provinces.”<sup>102</sup> While in this case the praetorian Marcus Ateius did not rise to the rank of consul, his being chosen in the stead of a consul illustrates the prestige of the post. Tiberius’ decision to appoint an ex-praetor then was a safe one. It avoided upsetting any balance (or for that matter imbalance) in the Senate that Tiberius would seek to exploit.

*Suetonius: Exposing Augustus’ Flawed Successor*

Compared to Strabo and Tacitus, Suetonius’ (c. 69 A.D.- c. 126 A.D.) reference to the Lydia earthquake and the Tiberian relief program is decidedly brief. Yet it expresses his low opinion of Tiberius when compared to his of Augustus, arguing that this rare act of generosity was unnatural for Tiberius and as such deserves scrutiny. He writes, *Ne provincias quidem liberalitate ulla sublevavit, except Asia, disiectis terrae motu civitatibus*, (“Not even the provinces did he assist with any liberality, with the exception of Asia, because its citizens had been ruined by an earthquake,” Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum* 3.48). Though Suetonius’ *About the Lives of the Caesars* is a historical work that describes the Roman world and the lives of

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<sup>102</sup> P. Garnsey and R. Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 25.

Julius Caesar and the first eleven Roman emperors, Suetonius holds no negative opinion of Tiberius back in his dedicated volume. In this passage, it is abundantly clear that Suetonius believes Tiberius held no sense of liberality apart from the unique events of the Lydia earthquake as seen in the previous chapter.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, in a later chapter, Suetonius contrasts Tiberius with Augustus, describing Tiberius in the following words:

*Princeps neque opera ulla magnifica fecit—nam et quae sola susceperat, Augusti templum restitutionemque Pompeiani theatri, imperfecta post tot annos reliquit —neque spectacula omnino edidit; et iis, quae ab aliquo ederentur, rarissime interfuit, ne quid exposceretur (Suet. Tib. 47.1).*

During the whole time of his government, he [Tiberius] never erected any noble edifice; for the only things he did undertake, namely, building the temple of Augustus, and restoring Pompey's Theatre, he left at last, after many years, unfinished. Nor did he ever entertain the people with public spectacles.

This directly juxtaposes with the image of Emperor Augustus presented in the *Res Gestae*, whose extensive list of beneficence includes restorative programs, public distribution of food and money in times of economic need or poor harvest, and the funding of public games and spectacles.<sup>104</sup> Suetonius then encourages his reader to question the validity of Tiberius' claim to divine status in comparison with Augustus, whom he sees as the golden measure of Roman emperors.

Suetonius' detail on Emperor Tiberius being generous solely towards the province of Asia likewise connects to Emperor Augustus and the *Res Gestae*, but with a negative connotation. While the *Res Gestae* of Augustus is decidedly Romanocentric, Suetonius argues

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<sup>103</sup> Concerning Suetonius' opinion on Tiberius' irreverence, see page 45.

<sup>104</sup> D. Wardle, "Suetonius on Augustus as God and Man," *The Classical Quarterly* 62, no.1 (May 2012): 326. Wardle argues that, "Suetonius' Divus Augustus, by comparison with the other *divi*, appears to be a deity whom Suetonius is encouraging his reader to take seriously. His deliberate framing of Augustus' life by passages that place great emphasis on the real divinity of Augustus is unique in the *Lives*."

that Tiberius flips this narrative during his rule.<sup>105</sup> The world of Tiberius is decidedly Hellenocentric: he retreats to and lives on the Greek island of Rhodes for a significant portion of his rule where he eventually dies, he loses his focus on Roman religion and begins to practice Hellenic and Near Eastern beliefs in astrology, and even in his poetic tastes “Tiberius’ aim was to advocate a marginal and uncanonical taste, which rebelled against the classicizing aesthetics of his adoptive father.”<sup>106</sup> While benefaction to Asia and the Greek world during Augustus’ rule was an exception to his consistent benevolence aimed at benefitting Romans directly, this is not the case under Tiberius. As Suetonius notes in 47.1, Tiberius is not even able to complete the projects that he had begun for the benefit of the city of Rome. Thus, Suetonius utilizes this small passage regarding the Lydia earthquake as an example that prominently showcases the differences between the successfully deified Augustus and the weaknesses of Emperor Tiberius’ concentration on Greek cultural practices in lieu of Roman ones.

### *Conclusion: Tiberius in Augustus’ Shadow*

Strabo, Tacitus, and Suetonius all openly invite their readers to explore a comparison between the actions of Emperor Tiberius following the Lydia earthquake and those of Emperor Augustus as seen through his *Res Gestae*. Cognizant of his position as Tiberius’ contemporary,

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<sup>105</sup> Bosworth, 13. As Bosworth illustrates about Augustus’ *Res Gestae*, “Commentators have rightly insisted on the Roman context of the document... With the single exception of the restitutions of the temple treasures of Asia... his euergetism is directed to the Roman citizen body.” Bosworth here references *Res Gestae* 24.1 as translated by Frederick W. Shipley, *In templis omnium civitatum provinciae Asiae victor ornamenta reposui, quae spoliatis templis is cum quo bellum gesseram privatim possederat*. (“After my victory I replaced in the temples in all the cities of the province of Asia the ornaments which my antagonist in the war, when he despoiled the temples, had appropriated to his private use”).

<sup>106</sup> Jacqueline Klooster, “Tiberius and Hellenistic Poetry,” *Aitia: Regards sur la Culture Hellénistique au XXIe Siècle* 7 (Mar. 2017): 7.

Strabo paints him in a positive light, arguing that Tiberius' actions mirror those of Augustus following the Tralles and Laodicea earthquake of 27 B.C. If such acts of beneficence foreshadowed Augustus' apotheosis, then it was fitting for Strabo to likewise connect Tiberius to the potential for future deification. On the other hand, Tacitus and Suetonius see a Tiberius that has drowned in Augustus' shadow. Tacitus, though he seems to openly praise Tiberius' actions, silently condemns his religious impiety. While Strabo speaks of Tiberius' foreknowledge in providing relief for the Lydia earthquake, Tacitus avoids assigning him any additional sense of preparedness. Suetonius, the younger contemporary of Tacitus, more openly attacks Tiberius. He contrasts the Romanocentric perspective of Emperor Augustus and the Hellenocentric one of Tiberius. In this case, Tiberius' strong and decisive action for the culturally Greek province of Asia constitutes a negative aspect of his reign, as he does no similar actions for the benefit of the citizens of the city of Rome itself.<sup>107</sup> These authors then identify the *Res Gestae* of Emperor Augustus as the litmus test for the success of Emperor Tiberius' rule in the wake of his predecessor.

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<sup>107</sup> Aldrete, 164. Suetonius does fail to mention at least twice where Tiberius gave money to the city of Rome to compensate for damages done by a fire that destroyed the Caelian Hill and also in 36 A.D. for a fire that affected an area close to the Circus Maximus and the Aventine Hill.

## Chapter 4 — As the Dust Settles: Socio-Political Adaptation following Disaster

To this point, all authors have presented a perspective on the Lydia earthquake and made a judgement, directly or indirectly, on the role of Emperor Tiberius in initiating the disaster and in the restoration of the twelve cities of Asia. Most have openly supported Emperor Tiberius, although they may also have backhandedly opposed his rule and role in the catastrophe. Within the third and final stage, which deals with social and political reconstruction and adaptation, individual viewpoints such as Strabo's and Phlegon of Tralles' are expressed the most clearly. This change may be attributed to a shift of authorial focus from Emperor Tiberius to the cities of Asia themselves. Tiberius following the relief stage of the Lydia earthquake has served his role as benefactor. It was then the duty of the cities to successfully utilize the aid they had received and ensure their continued success and importance to the empire writ large. As a result, the cities responded in gratitude to Emperor Tiberius, promising their fidelity to him and by proxy the empire holistically. Yet, the primary literature and inscriptions demonstrate two opposing cultural reactions to the remolding of the socio-political dynamics in Asia following the Lydia earthquake. While Romans celebrate the expansion of their Republican values far into the Hellenic East, the Greeks mourn the end of their political power and the diminished importance of the polis.

*Bianor: A Poet's Idea of Earthquakes and Religion*

While the work of the Greek epigrammist Bianor (Birth date unknown- death date 18 A.D. at the earliest) does not connect to the first two stages of the Lydia earthquake, his



reference to the event broadly expresses its cultural impact on the twelve cities and Asia as a whole. Little is known about Bianor except that he lived in the province of Bithynia under the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius.<sup>108</sup> While his poetry does not reveal an opinion on Tiberius, it seems to place the blame for the Lydia earthquake on the city of Sardis, reflected in it being the most damaged of the cities following the earthquake, perhaps for its position as the seat of the Roman proconsul that oversaw the province.

Bianor devotes one of his two dozen extant epigrams entirely to an allusion to the fate of Sardis during the Lydia earthquake,

Σάρδιες αἰ τὸ πάλαι Γύγου πόλις, αἶ τ' Ἀλυάττου  
 Σάρδιες, αἰ βασιλεῖ Περσὶς ἐν Ἀσιάδι,  
 αἶ χρυσῶ τὸ παλαιὸν ἐπλινθώσασθε μέλαθρον,  
 ὄλβον Πακτωλοῦ ρεύματι δεξάμεναι:  
 νῦν δὴ ὄλαι δύστηνοι ἐς ἓν κακὸν ἀρπασθεῖσαι,  
 ἐς βυθὸν ἐξ ἀχανοῦς χάσματος ἠρίπετε,  
 Βοῦρα καὶ εἰς Ἑλίκην κεκλυσμένοι: αἰ δ' ἐνὶ χέρσῳ  
 Σάρδιες ἐμβυθίαις εἰς ἓν ἔκεισθε τέλος. (*Anthologia Palatina* 9.423)

Sardis, once the city of Gyges and Alyattes; Sardis, who was for the great king a second Persia in Asia Minor; you who built yourself in ancient times a hall of golden bricks, winning wealth from the stream of Pactolus; now, ill-fated city, enveloped all of you in one disaster, you have fallen headlong into the depths, swallowed by the fathomless cavern. Bura and Helice too were engulfed by the sea, but you, Sardis, the inland city, have met with the same end as these which rest in the deep (tr. W.R. Paton).<sup>109</sup>

This poem contains two significant sections: Bianor's division between Sardis' past from its present and future as well as his statement that shows that Sardis was engulfed by the earth like the cities of Bura and Helice. Beginning with Bianor's division of Sardis' past from its present

<sup>108</sup> Bianor's references include events under Emperor Augustus and Tiberius, but do not extend to any later emperors.

<sup>109</sup> Guidoboni, Comastri, and Traina, 181. Translation by W.R. Paton.

and future, it seems that the shining past of the city has burned out and been completely eradicated. While the city certainly did experience the worst effects of the earthquake, as proven by other authors such as Strabo and Tacitus, Bianor is unique in his removing any thought concerning the second and third stages of the earthquake: there is no hope for restoration for a Sardis which has been engulfed by and erased from the earth. This distinction then allows Bianor to focus solely on the past of Sardis rather than speak on its contemporary nature as a Roman Imperial city. While other authors may speak of Sardis as solely a Greek city, Bianor expands the focus to include its history as the capital of the Lydian Empire and an important city to the Persian Empire by referencing King Alyattes and Persia respectively.

Bianor utilizes rather apocalyptic imagery to illustrate the severity of the Lydia earthquake and to argue that Sardis' religious impiety is to blame for the disaster. He intends to convey a similar argument about the Roman rule over Sardis and the province of Asia to Tacitus' account of the Lydia earthquake itself: the chasm that opened up at Sardis reveals that the wrongs done to the gods by the ruling powers are unusually, if not unnaturally, severe. According to Aelian (175 A.D. – 235 A.D.), who recounts the story of the Bura and Helice earthquake of 373 B.C. (*On the Nature of Animals* 11.19), the people of Helice had violated the rules of ξενία, Greek guest-friendship, when they murdered Ionians who had come to their city for help. This was a greater crime as Ionian blood was spilt upon temple altars, defiling the temple and offending the gods. As their punishment, a tsunami caused by an earthquake destroyed the entire city, pulling it into the sea.<sup>110</sup> The effect of the Lydia earthquake on Sardis

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<sup>110</sup> I have here attempted to summarize Aelian's *On the Nature of Animals* 11.19. I include here the Greek text as well as the 1958 English translation by A.F. Scolfield. μελλούσης δὲ οἰκίας καταφέρεσθαι αἰσθητικῶς ἔχουσιν οἱ τε ἐν αὐτῇ μύες καὶ μέντοι καὶ αἱ γαλαῖ, καὶ φθάνουσι τὴν καταφορὰν καὶ ἐξοικίζονται. τοῦτό τοι φασι καὶ ἐν Ἑλικῇ

and the Bura and Helice earthquake share a few key characteristics: the towns entirely collapse, they are swallowed up either by water or the earth, and they occurred at night.<sup>111</sup> Unlike Bianor, Aelian cites a direct and identifiable cause for the Bura and Helice earthquake: Helice's violation of ξενία and the defiling of religious altars with human blood (Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals* 11.19.3-5). While Bianor does not opt to identify a cause for the Lydia earthquake himself, his comparison between the two events may encourage his reader to inquire more deeply into the causes of the Lydia earthquake.

The Sibylline Oracles (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), though a collection of Jewish prophetic literature, share Bianor's Hellenistic poetic style and decision to compare the Lydia earthquake to a separate earthquake. These Sibylline Oracles are not to be confused, of course, with the original Roman Sibylline Books, which were destroyed in a fire in 83 B.C.<sup>112</sup> The fifth book of

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γενέσθαι. ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἠσέβησαν ἐς τοὺς Ἴωνας τοὺς ἀφικομένους οἱ Ἑλικήσιοι, καὶ ἐπὶ βωμοῦ ἀπέσφαξαν αὐτούς, ἐνταῦθα δὴπου τὸ Ὀμηρικὸν τοῦτο τοῖσιν δὲ θεοὶ τέρατα προύφαινον: πρὸ πέντε γὰρ ἡμερῶν τοῦ ἀφανισθῆναι τὴν Ἑλικὴν, ὅσοι μύες ἐν αὐτῇ ἦσαν καὶ γαλαῖ καὶ ὄφεις καὶ σκολόπενδραι καὶ σφονδύλαι καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ὅσα ἦν τοιαῦτα, ἀθρόα ὑπεξῆει τῇ ὁδῷ τῇ ἐς Κερύνειαν ἐκφερούση. οἱ δὲ Ἑλικήσιοι ὀρῶντες τὰ πραττόμενα ἐθαύμαζον μὲν, οὐκ εἶχον δὲ τὴν αἰτίαν συμβαλεῖν. ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀνεχώρησε τὰ προειρημένα ζῶα, νύκτωρ γίνεται σεισμός, καὶ συνιζάνει ἡ πόλις, καὶ ἐπικλύσαντος πολλοῦ κύματος ἡ Ἑλικὴ ἠφανίσθη, καὶ κατὰ τύχην Λακεδαιμονίων ὑφορμοῦσαι δέκα. (Ael. NA 11.19).

("When a house is on the verge of ruin the mice in it, and the martens also, forestall its collapse and emigrate. This, you know, is what they say happened at Helice, for when the people of Helice treated so impiously the Ionians who had come to them, and murdered them at their altar, then it was (in the words of Homer [Od. 12. 394]) that the gods showed forth wonders among them.' For five days before Helice disappeared all the mice and martens and snakes and centipedes and beetles and every other creature of that kind in the town left in a body by the road that leads to Cerynea. And the people of Helice seeing this happening were filled with amazement, but were unable to guess the reason. But after the aforesaid creatures had departed, an earthquake occurred in the night; the town collapsed; an immense wave poured over it, and Helice disappeared, while ten Lacedaemonian vessels which happened to be at anchor close by were destroyed together with the city I speak of."

<sup>111</sup> As an added piece, the Bura and Helice disaster happened in the winter, which was believed by Imperial Romans to be unnatural. See Seneca's section on the Campanian earthquake, p. 37.

<sup>112</sup> Stephen Felder, "What is The *Fifth Sibylline Oracle*?" *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 33, no.4 (2002): 365. Jewish authors took the opportunity to compose replacements for the original Sibylline Oracles and infuse their new pseudo-prophecies with anti-Roman sentiment. It would make sense for these authors to have written following the destruction of the Second Temple, when this odium of Roman was felt most strongly by the diaspora Jewish community.

the Sibylline Oracles, in which the reference to the Lydia earthquake is made, was likely composed before 135 A.D. in Egypt, based on the composition and contextual evidence of the text.<sup>113</sup> The specific passage on the disaster reads as follows,

ἀλλὰ τί δὴ μοι ταῦτα νόος σοφὸς ἔγγυαλίζει;  
 ἄρτι δέ σε, τλήμων Ἀσίη, κατοδύρομαι οἰκτρῶς  
 καὶ γένος Ἴωνων Καρῶν Λυδῶν πολυχρύσων.  
 Αἰαῖ [σοι,] Σάρδεις: αἰαῖ πολυήρατε Τράλλις:  
 αἰαῖ, Λαοδίκεια, καλὴ πόλι: ὡς ἀπολεῖσθε  
 σεισμοῖς ὀλλύμεναί τε καὶ εἰς κόνιν ἀλλαχθεῖσαι.  
 Ἀσίδι τῇ δωοφερῇ [Λυδῶν τε — — πολυχρύσων]. (*Oracula Sibyllina* 5.286-292).

But why does my wise mind present these things to me?  
 But even now you, suffering Asia, I weep for pitilessly  
 And for the race of Ionians, Carians, and Lydians rich in gold.  
 Woe to you, Sardis: woe to you much beloved Tralles:  
 Woe to you, Laodicea, beautiful city: as you will be destroyed  
 And perish and turned to dust by earthquakes.  
 For sorrowing Asia and Lydians rich in gold.

The narrating Sibyl in this passage speaks about the earthquake that struck Tralles and Laodicea in 27 B.C. and the Lydia earthquake jointly, though it does speak about multiple σεισμοί, earthquakes. In many ways, the pseudo-prophecy follows behind Bianor in its apocalyptic imagery, with no hint of any restoration that follows the earthquakes. As Felder shows, for the members of the Jewish community who wrote the fifth *Sibylline Oracle*, “These prophecies were thus well-suited for the task of the redactors, i.e., to express their antagonism towards Rome in Hellenic terms.”<sup>114</sup> Though Bianor does not seem to express the same antagonism as the *Sibylline Oracles*, the underlying message is very similar: Asia, which was once powerful and

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 369. Referencing J.J. Collins, “What is *The Fifth Sibylline Oracle*?” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 33, no.4 (2002): 363-385.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 380.

wealthy, has experienced considerable trouble under the Roman Empire and will continue to experience further catastrophes if Roman rule continues.

*Strabo: The Post-Disaster Remnants of Philadelphia*

Though Strabo recognizes the danger of expressing his personal opinion on the Lydia earthquake and Emperor Tiberius' actions taken in its aftermath, he is able to convey his thoughts by describing the individual polis of Philadelphia which was affected by the disaster. Dandrow points out the centrality of the polis in Strabo's descriptions of the Greek world, as he writes, "Strabo establishes [the polis] not just [as] a baseline to assess the Greekness of a community or people, but to make that assessment a moral discourse that establishes the present as corrupt and identity 'in crisis.'"<sup>115</sup> As Philadelphian statesmen focused on supporting the imperial figurehead Tiberius, their polis would be failing morally by endangering its independent identity. This cultural immortality is identifiable through the three areas that Dandrow identifies as composing the ideal Greek polis: a clear foundation history, land that is productive, defensible, walled, and organized aesthetically and rationally, and finally the possession of "a socio-political order based on a mixed constitutional government."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Edward Dandrow, "Memory and the Greek City in Strabo's *Geography*," in *Urban Dreams and Realities in Antiquity: Remains and Representations of the Ancient City*, ed. Adam Kemezis (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 439.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 446. Dandrow includes four main categories that form the ideal polis, but I have taken the liberty of combining his second and third points. The following is his full description of the polis, "Firstly, it has a clear foundation history. Secondly, its place of foundation consists of productive land, access to the sea or water routes, defensible positions, habitable terrain, moderate climate, and accessible and plentiful resources. Thirdly, in terms of its physicality, it is walled and organized aesthetically and rationally, possessing paved streets in straight lines, porticoes and colonnades. Also, the city is adorned with artworks and possesses physical structures that promote Greek institutions and culture, such as the gymnasium. Fourthly, the ideal polis possesses a socio-political order (σύστημα) based on a mixed constitutional government (consisting of monarchical, aristocratic and democratic

Strabo presents the city of Philadelphia as a case study for the Greek poleis of Asia under Roman rule. He describes the city six years after the earthquake with the following words:<sup>117</sup>

μετὰ δὲ Λυδούς εἰσιν οἱ Μυσοὶ καὶ πόλις Φιλαδέλφεια σεισμῶν πλήρης. οὐ γὰρ διαλείπουσιν οἱ τοῖχοι διστάμενοι καὶ ἄλλοτ' ἄλλο μέρος τῆς πόλεως κακοπαθοῦν: οἰκοῦσιν οὖν ὀλίγοι διὰ τοῦτο τὴν πόλιν, οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ καταβιοῦσιν ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ γεωργοῦντες, ἔχοντες εὐδαίμονα γῆν: ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ὀλίγων θαυμάζειν ἔστιν ὅτι οὕτω φιλοχωροῦσιν, ἐπισφαλεῖς τὰς οἰκίσεις ἔχοντες: ἔτι δ' ἂν τις μᾶλλον θαυμάσειε τῶν κτισάντων αὐτήν. (Strabo, *Geography*, 13.4.10.)

And after the Lydians are the Mysians and the city of Philadelphia full of earthquakes. Not only do the walls contain gaps but they also, being divided in this part or that throughout the city, suffer terribly: thus few people live throughout this city, but many live out in the surrounding area as farmers, possessing flourishing soil: but even so it is marveled about the few that live in the city that they so love it, having homes prone to destruction: but still one may marvel more about the founders of the city.

All three characteristics of the ideal polis (as described above by Dandrow) may be evaluated through Strabo's account, though Philadelphia has varied success in their achievement.

Beginning with the clear foundation of the city, Strabo speaks rather vaguely about its origin. He does speak about the “founders” of the city, but does not explicitly name any individuals. Perhaps this ambiguity stems again from Strabo's desire to avoid any details that his intended audience would already be aware of, as it is clear that the city was founded in 189 B.C. by King Eumenes II of Pergamon.<sup>118</sup> The political implications of the Lydia earthquake, however, have muddled the Imperial narrative of the history of Philadelphia. While King Eumenes II may have been the original founder, benefactory inscriptions following the disaster

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institutions) and written laws, effective leaders who produce wise and reasonable foreign, domestic and economic policies and practices.”

<sup>117</sup> Strabo's last reference speaks on an event that happened in 23 A.D. and the *Geography* can be reasonably dated to be no later than that year.

<sup>118</sup> King Eumenes II named it for his younger brother Attalus II, who was nicknamed *Philadelphos*.

paint a different picture. An inscription from the ancient city of Aegea in the province of Asia contains the following description of Emperor Tiberius,<sup>119</sup>

*[Ti(berius) Caesar divi Augusti f(ilius) divi Iuli n(epos) Aug(ustus), p(ontifex)] m(aximus), tr(ibunicia) p(otestate) [--- c]o(n)s(ul) V, conditor uno tem[pore XII civitatum t]errae motu ve[xatarum] (Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum 3.7096).*

[Ti(berius) Caesar Aug(ustus) s(on) of the divine Augustus n(ephew) of the divine Julius Caesar, p(ontifex)] m(aximus), holding tr(ibunal) p(ower) [--- c]onsul for the fifth time, founder at the one ti[m]e twelve of the cities were [struck] by an [e]arthquake.

Similarly, an inscription found by Foucart in the city of Mestene refers to Emperor Tiberius as κτίστης ἐνὶ καιρῷ δῶδεκα πό/λεων (“founder at the one critical moment for twelve cities”).<sup>120</sup>

While these inscriptions both occur in the 30s A.D., it may be surmised that the cities of Asia that received aid quickly defined Emperor Tiberius as their new founder, since the precedent for doing so had been set under Emperor Augustus.<sup>121</sup> Thus, while there may be a new and clearly defined foundation history for Philadelphia, its founder is not of Greek origin, which points to Strabo’s observation of the decay of Greek cultural power.

Regarding Dandrow’s second point, the land upon which Philadelphia is situated is certainly productive, but its defensibility is in doubt.<sup>122</sup> With its walls in a ruinous state following

<sup>119</sup> Guidoboni, Comastri, and Traina, 185. Guidoboni shows that “The inscription appears on four fragments of the architrave of a building, whose position has not been identified, in the Turkish town of Nemrud Kalesi (ancient Aegae).”

<sup>120</sup>P. Foucart, “Exploration de la plaine de l’Hermos par M. Aristote Fontrier,” *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 28 (1887): 88-89. Cited in Guidoboni, Comastri, and Traina, 185.

<sup>121</sup> Guidoboni, Comastri, and Traina, 177. Following the 17 B.C. earthquake that destroyed much of the Cyprian city of Paphos, Dio Cassius records that Augustus gave money for the restoration of the city καὶ τὴν πόλιν Αὐγουσταν καλεῖν κατὰ δόγμα ἐπέτρεψε (he changed the name of the city to Augusta). Like the few cities after the Lydia earthquake renamed themselves Hierocaesarea or Caesarea, Augustus’ action symbolized the new founding of the former city of Paphos.

<sup>122</sup> Dandrow, 448. Dandrow sees the polis and its ideal in Greek cultural memory under Roman rule through the Greek historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus. He writes, “Dionysius establishes [the Romans] as Greek by descent and, although they have become mixed, have forgotten many of their ancient institutions, and speak a corrupted form of Aeolian, they stand as a marvel (θαῦμα) in their preservation of Greekness.” (Dandrow here references

numerous earthquakes, including the Lydia earthquake, its citizens are hardly protected from attacks. Thus, its people have scattered to the surrounding areas to minimize their losses. This in turn points to the loss of a socially cohesive central entity such as a gymnasium. Yet, the people of Philadelphia still look back on the former successes of their city in the distant past, prior to its current ruinous state. From this passage, Dandrow then is able to conclude, “As [Strabo] casts his gaze upon the contemporary Greek world, he describes a landscape filled with ruins and absence, and decay, decadence, isolation, barbarization, or any combination of these that [sic] mark those communities that have ‘survived’ through time.”<sup>123</sup> Thus, though Strabo on the first two stages of the Lydia earthquake paints Emperor Tiberius in a positive light, he demonstrates his reservations that what has been restored is not in line with the ideals of the historical Greek past, but reflects the outsourcing of Greek culture from the polis to a new Imperial vision.

#### *Velleius Paterculus: Tiberius' Man*

While many authors, such as Tacitus and Suetonius, place the blame for the Lydia earthquake on Emperor Tiberius, Velleius Paterculus (c. 19 B.C.- 31 A.D.) looks instead towards the magistrates of the cities of Asia. As a Roman veteran who fought under Tiberius, Velleius Paterculus stays true to his commander while writing his *Roman History*, which is a more

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Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 1.89.3-4; 3.91.1). Strabo, though he would likely have had access to Dionysius of Halicarnassus' work, does not agree with his predecessor's optimistic perspective. I make this assumption based off of Dionysius of Halicarnassus' prominence during his lifetime, which was during Emperor Augustus' reign, and his proximity to Strabo as a fellow resident of the subcontinent of Asia Minor.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 438-439.



propagandist and hyperbolic work than one of history.<sup>124</sup> The book itself, though meant to be a universal history, has survived to the present day in a section that covers from about 133 B.C. to 30 A.D.<sup>125</sup> Regarding the Lydia earthquake, he writes,

*Fortuita non civium tantummodo, sed urbium damna principis munificentia vindicat. Restitutae urbes Asiae, vindicatae ab iniuriis magistratuum provinciae: honor dignis paratissimus, poena in malos sera, sed aliqua: superatur aequitate gratia, ambitio virtute; nam facere recte civis suos princeps optimus faciendo docet, cumque sit imperio maximus, exemplo maior est* (Velleius Paterculus, *Historia Romana* 2.126.4-5).

The munificence of the emperor claims not only the casualties of the citizens, but also the losses of the cities. The cities of Asia were restored, they were claimed from the injustices of the magistrates of the province: honor is most provided for the worthy, punishment upon the evil is slow, but comes in some way or another: favoritism is overcome by justice; for the highest first citizen teaches his people to do rightly by doing, and as he is the greatest in the empire, he is greater by his example.

While Seneca, in his defense of Nero, avoids forming any relationship between the emperor and the Campanian earthquake that occurred under his rule, Velleius Paterculus attacks the issue directly to aid Tiberius. Gowing argues that in the *Roman History*, “One hears the voice of a man who... believes... that the Tiberian period represents the true fulfillment of the Augustan promise to ‘restore the republic,’ not the creation of a separate, distinct political entity we call the principate.”<sup>126</sup> The Lydia earthquake then presents a perfect opportunity for Velleius Paterculus to illustrate the restorative powers of Emperor Tiberius.

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<sup>124</sup> Catalina Balmaceda, “The Virtues of Tiberius in Velleius’ ‘Histories,’” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 63, no.3 (2014): 340. Balmaceda shows that Velleius Paterculus was a *praefectus equitum* in Tiberius’ army, later a *quaestor*, *legate*, and finally a *praetor* in 15 A.D.

<sup>125</sup> The section begins with the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus in 133 B.C. and ends with the consulship of Marcus Vinicius in 30 A.D.

<sup>126</sup> Alain M. Gowing, “The Imperial Republic of Velleius Paterculus,” in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, ed. John Marincola (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), 860.

Velleius Paterculus particularly shows that while Tiberius restored the physical destruction that followed the disaster and showed the beneficence necessary for future deification, he also instilled traditional republican values in the province of Asia. Balmaceda states that according to Velleius Paterculus, Tiberius' aim "was to restore the original place of *virtus* in Roman life, lost since the fall of Carthage, and this is what Augustus does and Tiberius helps to consolidate... Following and using Augustus' language of restoration, Velleius is able to create the necessary link between republicanism and empire."<sup>127</sup> As the magistrates of Asia are culturally Greek and have no experience in acting in accordance to the traditional *virtus* of the Roman Republic, they cannot hold the values that Velleius Paterculus, as well as presumably Tiberius, seeks in Imperial officials.

Thus, to emphasize the euergetism of Emperor Tiberius in restoring the cities of Asia, Velleius Paterculus paints the Greek magistrates as an opposing force that needs to be overcome. This broad juxtaposition between the *virtus* of Emperor Tiberius and the vices of others runs throughout the entirety of the *Roman History*. Balmaceda states, "By placing the account of the *princeps*' qualities at the center of the narrative, Velleius assigns them the force of historical facts, and also a political-ideological purpose... and... makes his *Historiae* appear as the happy progression towards the achievement of virtue over evil."<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, Velleius Paterculus argues that the gods have aided Emperor Tiberius in his goal of restoring the *virtus* of the Republic through the Lydia earthquake: while the gods have delivered *poena in malos* ("punishment upon the evil"), Tiberius utilized the event to reclaim the cities *ab iniuriis*

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<sup>127</sup> Balmaceda, 344.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 341-342.

*magistratum provinciae* (“from the injustices of the magistrates of the province”). As a result, Velleius Paterculus illustrates that the Lydia earthquake does not warn of a rift in the *pax deorum*, the peace with the gods, but rather it reveals the strength of the bond between the gods and Emperor Tiberius, who would soon be one of their number.

*Pliny the Elder: Legacies of Tiberius and the Lydia Earthquake*

Pliny the Elder (23/24 A.D. – 79 A.D.) in his extensive work entitled the *Natural History* addressed a number of issues regarding earthquakes, including their size, location, different characteristics, and their use as portents. Yet, regarding the third stage of the Lydia earthquake he provides only one notable detail. He states, *Maximus terrae memoria mortalium exstitit motus tiberii caesaris principatu, xii urbibus asiae una nocte prostratis*. (“The greatest earthquake in human memory came forth in the rule of Emperor Tiberius, with twelve cities of the province of Asia knocked flat in one night,” Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 2.86). This statement then encourages his reader to seek more answers about the earthquake beyond knowing the specific time it occurred.

Since Pliny the Elder provides such sparse detail on the Lydia earthquake, the Roman reader would naturally conclude that Tiberius was the cause of the disaster, a perspective which Pliny the Elder makes sure to solidify. In the first place, he slants his historical perspective by “suppressing mention of Tiberius’ excellent relief measures when reporting Asian cities

damaged by earthquake.”<sup>129</sup> Instead, he seems to show that Asia remains desolate in many places. Meißner demonstrates,

The Roman writer Pliny... gives long and detailed lists of [sic] abandoned settlements when he describes the geography of Greek settlements in Asia Minor. *Intercaderer* or *interire* (perishing), *fuit* (it has ceased to exist), *obire* (to die), *hausta... mari* (eaten-up by the sea), *terrarium motu subversa* (destroyed by an earthquake): these are only some of Pliny’s terms for what had happened to these cities, which are still present in the people’s memory, either as ruins or as faint recollections of their names.

Pliny the Elder shows that the memory of the Lydia earthquake is still deeply rooted not only in the minds of the people of Asia, but also across the Roman Empire. Yet, Emperor Tiberius’ restorative work has been removed from the narrative, apart from the attachment of his name to the event. Thus, though other authors, such as Tacitus and Suetonius, do assign at least the virtue of generosity, or *liberalitas*, to Tiberius, Pliny the Elder does not openly allot him any positive values in this passage.

On the other hand, Pliny the Elder does ensure that the reader understands Emperor Tiberius as a negative character in Roman Imperial history throughout other portions of the *Natural History*. While he connects his contemporary Emperor Vespasian, whom Pliny dedicates his work to, and Emperor Augustus by referring to Vespasian as “an *imperator Augustus*,” this title is “denied throughout the *Natural History* to other emperors from Tiberius on.”<sup>130</sup> Evidently, unlike Augustus and Vespasian, in the eyes of Pliny the Elder, Tiberius was not worthy of deification. In fact, he refers to Tiberius in chapter 35 of the *Natural History* as *minime comis imperator* (“the least elegant emperor”).<sup>131</sup> Pliny directly opposes the perspective of Velleius

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<sup>129</sup> Barry Baldwin, “Roman Emperors in the Elder Pliny,” *Scholia: Natural Studies in Classical Antiquity* 4 (1994): 66. Baldwin here refers to Plin. *HN* 2.200.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>131</sup> Plin. *HN* 35.28.

Paterculus and his attempts to connect the actions of the deified Augustus to those of Tiberius. He instead presents a Tiberius that has worked to destroyed the *Pax Romana* established by Augustus.<sup>132</sup> As evidence, Pliny speaks of the outbreak of two diseases during Tiberius' reign, the second of which struck the emperor as its first victim.<sup>133</sup> Thus, though Pliny may hesitate to openly assign the blame for the Lydia earthquake to Emperor Tiberius, he recognizes its prospects as a negative portent against Tiberius.

### *Phlegon of Tralles: The Politics of Gift Giving*

Phlegon of Tralles presents a uniquely neutral account of the events that followed Tiberius' relief program in *On Wonders* through his favored source Apollonius Grammaticus. He writes that Apollonius Grammaticus had said regarding the aftermath of the Lydia earthquake:

ἀνθ' ὧν κολοσσόν τε αὐτῷ κατασκευάσαντες ἀνέθεσαν παρὰ τῷ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης ἱερῷ, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ῥωμαίων ἀγορᾷ, καὶ τῶν πόλεων ἐκάστης ἐφεξῆς ἀνδριάωτας παρέστησαν. (Phlegon of Tralles *FGrHist* 257 F 36 (XIII)).

Afterwards they built a colossus of [Tiberius] and dedicated it besides the temple of Venus, which is in the Roman forum, and each of the cities successively erected statues.

The statue, as well as its location, has been clearly identified through various pieces of ancient literature, though the original has been lost. The statue base at Puteoli made around 30 A.D. however, is an exact copy of those that would have been placed in the Roman Forum and in the cities of Asia.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, it is certainly possible to draw connections between the information

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<sup>132</sup> Baldwin, 63.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65. Reference to Plin. *HN* 26.9.

<sup>134</sup> Ando, 278. Ando illustrates that this copy was found at Puteoli because of the city's strong trade connections to cities in the province of Asia.

provided by Phlegon of Tralles and the archaeological record and the relationship between Tiberius and these cities following the earthquake.

Through the act of dedicating the statue group in the Roman Forum as well as placing replicas in the twelve cities, the cities of Asia demonstrate the firm solidification of a *do ut des* relationship between themselves and the emperor, which is represented by the composition of the extant Puteoli group. Though no longer present, the statue would certainly have been a colossal likeness of Emperor Tiberius himself. The provincial donation in the form of a colossus had clear precedent under Emperor Augustus as well, as a statue was erected in the Augustan Forum by the province of Hispania Ulterior Baetica.<sup>135</sup> The viewer would naturally marvel first at the statue before examining the base below. They then would observe fourteen idealized figures representing the cities of Asia who have dedicated the statue.<sup>136</sup> This type of city representation as idealized figures likewise had earlier roots in the Hellenistic period.<sup>137</sup> Yet, while the work draws upon the cultural past, it reveals a clear shift in the political dynamics of the province. While under the Hellenistic period, the figures, otherwise known as *ἔθναι*, would have been presented as equal to, if not greater than, their ethnically Greek individual rulers, they are clearly not on the same level as Tiberius during the Imperial period. As Rubin illustrates about a similar set of symbolic images found on the *Sebasteion* at Aphrodisias,<sup>138</sup>

The inherent gender dynamics cued the viewer to interpret the relationship of the emperor and the provinces in terms of traditional male/female power dynamics. Just as men were

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<sup>135</sup> Kuttner, 76.

<sup>136</sup> See page 8.

<sup>137</sup> Ando, 278.

<sup>138</sup> The name *Sebasteion* is the Greek version of *Augusteum*, which is an Imperial cult temple that is obviously named after Emperor Augustus. While the *Sebasteion* of Aphrodisias was dedicated to Augustus, this does not mean that other *Sebasteioi* or *Augustea* were dedicated to Augustus, but could be dedicated to any other emperors that succeeded him.

supposed to dominate women... the *Sebasteion* suggests that the Roman emperor was meant to rule over the provinces.<sup>139</sup>

By the provincial cities sending the statue group to Rome, they have fully accepted their position as the subjects of Emperor Tiberius and the empire rather than as independent poleis. The *do ut des* relationship between Emperor Tiberius and the provincial cities of Asia after the Lydia earthquakes has been fully established, if not reestablished.

### *Establishing a New Status Quo*

Though the sources on the third stage of the Lydia earthquake, apart from Velleius Paterculus and Phlegon of Tralles, react negatively to the changes that have occurred, they demonstrate the firm solidification of Roman rule in the province of Asia, regardless of their opinion on the development. The earliest of the authors, Strabo, is compelled to support the relief program as Tiberius' contemporary, but expresses his doubt in its success in a later book of his *Geography*. Taking Philadelphia as an example, he illustrates that though Tiberius celebrated the success of his restoration work, the administration, left parts of Asia in ruinous condition following their handling and distribution of resources. Thus, while under the Hellenistic kings restorative work following earthquakes focused on stabilizing poleis and their communities, the Roman Empire turned to a business model to address such events. Though Sardis and the other economically or politically crucial cities are rebuilt quickly, Philadelphia does not receive the same treatment and fares much worse in the aftermath of the Lydia earthquake.

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<sup>139</sup> Rubin, 79.

The apocalyptic Hellenistic literature of Bianor and the *Sibylline Oracles* interprets this key bureaucratic change as the end of the power of Greek civilization. For authors aligned with Greek culture, the change to Roman Imperial rule does not represent a new beginning, but rather an end. For the author of the fifth book of the *Sibylline Oracles*, this transition occurred with the ascension of Emperor Augustus, as demonstrated by his allusion to the earthquake that struck Laodicea and Tralles, and he sees no hope of Greek revival following the further destruction caused by the Lydia earthquake. For Bianor, however, the end of Greek culture in the province of Asia and the superiority of Roman power comes later, with the destruction caused by the Lydia earthquake itself. By comparing the Lydia earthquake and the earthquake that struck Helice and Bura in the late Classical period, he implicitly argues that the province, and the city of Sardis more specifically, has deeply wronged the gods. Therefore, just like Helice and Bura, it is destined to no longer retain major power and authority.

To Pliny the Elder, the Lydia earthquake in some ways also represents the end of an era, but he sees it rather as marking the end of Augustan morality under Tiberius' rule. While he does not explicitly claim that Tiberius had caused the Lydia earthquake, he points out the deterioration of the traditional Roman Republican values that Augustus had tried to restore during his rule, with the main agent of this decay being Tiberius himself. His argument then refutes that of Velleius Paterculus, whose *Roman History* painted the Greek magistrates of Asia and their injustices as the cause of the Lydia earthquake. Both authors then conclude that the Roman Empire has a goal of instilling Augustan principles in the province of Asia, though they disagree about whether Tiberius has succeeded in doing so.



Finally, while Phlegon of Tralles does not take a position and evaluate the cultural productivity of the province of Asia, he does illustrate how the relationship between province and the Roman emperor manifests following the Lydia earthquake. As fourteen individual poleis have come together to present the statue to Emperor Tiberius rather than providing individual gifts, there is a sense that power has shifted from the Greek polis to the central Roman provincial administration. The province, represented by these cities, must recognize the superiority of the emperor and pledge its fidelity going forward. Besides their own gift of the statue group, this would entail cooperating with the Roman governor of the province, the political representation of the will of the emperor. Thus, Emperor Tiberius could celebrate the expansion of Roman power in the province, though he needed to be aware of the negative interpretations from Greeks as well as his fellow Romans on his involvement with the disaster itself.

## Conclusion

Earthquakes in the ancient world presented unique challenges to religious, political, and social aspects of societies. Given the magnitude of the Lydia earthquake, difficulties in these areas were made all the more extreme. Confronted with a multi-cultural province with different traditional understandings of ruler and ruled, which was then combined with Tiberius' need to cement himself as equally adept as the deified Augustus, the differing expectations of both Hellenistic and Roman parties would surely lead to conflict. The sources of the Lydia earthquake reflect this conflict not only in how its contemporaries understood it to be, but also in the generations that followed the rule of Tiberius and the end of the Julio-Claudians.

While the Lydia earthquake in previous scholarship has not been a major topic of historical study, its unique circumstances warrant thorough examination in the future. During the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the Imperial cult in the province of Asia gains significant influence not only over traditional religious temples and shrines in the region, but also over the political innerworkings between the central Roman administration and provincial subjects. The Lydia earthquake is instrumental in this process, snatching power from the financially-limited Greek magistrates and handing their subjects over to Emperor Tiberius and Imperial power. This shift, however, does not result in a blind allegiance to Tiberius. While the provincials of Asia demonstrate their loyalty to Tiberius through gifts and dedications, other areas of the empire feel no such compulsion, having themselves received no substantial financial assistance. Emperor Tiberius' relief efforts lead to the strong establishment of Roman power in the province of Asia, but do not likewise lead to the solidification of his legacy and claim to deification that was

recognized by the entire empire, as shown through the various detracting perspectives of the numerous writers who describe the three stages of the Lydia earthquake.

*First Stage: Descriptions of Disaster*

The four writers who address the disaster stage of the Lydia earthquake operate under vastly different circumstances which inhibit, in different ways, how they are able to express the details of the event. As the only contemporary who writes on the disaster stage, Strabo must ensure that his *Geography* is well-received by the Roman officials of Asia, though he mainly writes for a Greek audience. For both sets of readers, extensive details of the earthquake would create problems: Romans may mistakenly identify a treasonous intent by Strabo, while Greeks would frown on the author forcing them to reexamine the painful event. Seneca, though not a contemporary of the earthquake, is similarly restricted in his narration of the disaster. He cannot argue that the Lydia earthquake is a religious portent against Tiberius without endangering the right to rule of the Julio-Claudian dynasty and legitimating a connection between Nero and the Campanian earthquake.

The examples of Tacitus and Phlegon of Tralles hold far less restrictions than Strabo and Seneca as the Julio-Claudian dynasty has ended before their work. Tacitus does not hesitate to provide clear details on the circumstances of the Lydia earthquake, demonstrating its extraordinary nature. Yet, he stops short of arguing that its specific characteristics confirm the irreligiosity of Emperor Tiberius. If he were to do so, any similar event during the rule of a future emperor may be concluded as a divine condemnation against their rule. Thus, the religious

reputation of Emperor Tiberius would have survived the Lydia earthquake unscathed during Tiberius' lifetime. His administration would strongly compel contemporary writers to separate the earthquake from the emperor, while future authors would likewise hesitate to connect the two for fear of the occurrence of a similar event during their own lifetime.

### *Second Stage: The Tiberian Relief Program*

Such restrictions are lifted, however, when authors write on the relief efforts that Tiberius institutes following the Lydia earthquake. As magnanimous benefaction and significant military conquest constitute the two main criteria for deification, Tiberius promotes any propagandist material that celebrate his sizable donation to the province of Asia and encourages the connection between his action and those of Augustus' *Res Gestae*. Strabo reflects this desire the most strongly of the authors. He directly connects the restoration efforts of Tiberius following the Lydia earthquake to that of Emperor Augustus after the earthquake that struck Tralles and Laodicea. Furthermore, Strabo writes about the *πρόνοια* ("foreknowledge") of Tiberius in providing relief to the affected cities of Asia, illustrating that Tiberius' preparedness does not point to a broken relationship between him and the gods.

As for the Roman authors on the subject, Tacitus and Suetonius, they are able to remove their negative opinions of Tiberius from his relief efforts. Though Tacitus does not provide an opinion on how prepared Tiberius is in providing relief to the cities of Asia, he writes in detail on his relief program. He includes that Tiberius ensured there would be no political squabbles over the official placed in charge of the administration of the program, choosing a retired praetorian

Marcus Ateius to head the efforts. Suetonius likewise praises Tiberius, though he does so backhandedly by stating that the relief program constitutes the emperor's only significant example of *liberalitas* ("generosity"). Thus, both authors spotlight the Lydia earthquake as a high point of Tiberius' administration. Yet, at the same time, they see it as an isolated example in his overall body of work, illustrating that though Tiberius' actions were well received in the province of Asia, his legacy in other parts of the empire is less than positive.

### *Third Stage: Adapting to New Circumstances*

In the third and final stage, ancient authors experience minimal restrictions and express themselves the most fully of the three stages, revealing a deep divide between the supporters of Tiberius and his detractors in the historical record. For those of Greek origin or identifying with Greek culture, the Lydia earthquake is the end of the power of Greek civilization. Strabo, through his demonstration of the dilapidated state of Philadelphia, sees the end of the centrality and power of the Greek polis in favor of the Roman administrative system. The epigrammist Bianor speaks instead about the end of Sardis through apocalyptic imagery. For a city that has been a major component of empires past, its Greek identity has been destroyed by the earthquake, which in subsequent restoration firmly establishes its already significant Roman influence, as evident by its architectural changes.

Pliny the Elder, as the only Roman author who discusses the third stage of the Lydia earthquake, illustrates that in both Greek and Roman memory it is the destruction caused by the disaster rather than the efforts at rehabilitation that is remembered fifty years following its

occurrence. As a consequence of the legend of the earthquake, the work of Emperor Tiberius is overshadowed and eventually blamed by Pliny himself for the occurrence of the earthquake. Though Tiberius follows Augustus' pattern of benefaction and illustrates a restored *do ut des* relationship seen through Phlegon of Tralles' description of the statue group, later Roman writers like Pliny reject his claim to a sustained legacy. Roman power is well-established in Asia following the Lydia earthquake, yet Tiberius' support, unlike Augustus, crumbles soon after his death.

### *Final Thoughts*

This project has sought to demonstrate the importance of reexamining not only the Lydia earthquake, but also other catastrophic earthquakes beyond centers of political power. These events may more clearly reveal the intricacies of the relationship between ruler and subject in the ancient world. If a ruler acts in accordance to his subjects' expectations for relief following a natural disaster, the relationship will flourish. If he fails to live up to those expectations, the relationship will be strained. The Lydia earthquake and the authors who reference it demonstrate how this picture is quickly complicated. While Emperor Tiberius succeeds in gaining the approval of the province of Asia for a short time, its residents continue to mourn the loss of their power as Greek poleis before Roman rule. Romans, however, interpret Tiberius' relief efforts as expressed favoritism towards Greek culture over the ideals of Republican Rome. Thus, having explored the primary texts, this project has found that through the Lydia earthquake, Tiberius began to lose the support of his fellow Romans while simultaneously failing to gain a sustainable

base of support in the provincials of Asia. Though his relief program following the disaster seemed to show the continuation of Emperor Augustus' euergetism, Tiberius did not respond with similar energy following other natural catastrophes during his rule. As a result, his fellow Romans believed that he favored the Greeks of Asia over his own people, while the Greeks saw the relief of the Lydia earthquake as a shallow and singular act of propaganda. Other earthquakes in the ancient world may similarly influence the public opinion of important rulers or shift political power dynamics, as future research may find.

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