

Egypt sends to Rome exceeds in one month what you send in a year! The land is protected by impassable deserts, seas without harbors, rivers, and swamps. Yet none of these assets were sufficient to resist the Fortune of Rome. Two legions stationed in Alexandria curb the remotest parts of Egypt and the proud Macedonian elite to boot.

“What allies do you hope for in the coming war? You must expect them from the uninhabited wilds, for the inhabited world is all Roman. . . .”

7.2 “They Make a Desert and Call It Peace”: A View of Rome from the Provinces

Britain was added to the Empire in the first century A.D. One of the principal architects of the conquest was Agricola, the father-in-law of the great senatorial historian Tacitus. The following reading is found in a eulogy composed by Tacitus in honor of Agricola's accomplishments. The speech is attributed to the Caledonian (Scottish) chieftain Calgacus, who is trying to rally his troops against the Romans. The sentiments are conventional Greco-Roman projection—that is, they express what they thought would or should be the appropriate sentiments of barbarians. Tacitus' intent was not so much to provide historical insight into the mind of a Scots chieftain egging on his reluctant followers to fight as it was to berate contemporary Romans for their lack of spirit. Although they thought of themselves as masters of the world, Romans, Tacitus is saying, were in reality the slaves of the emperors.

The picture he paints of the Empire is a bleak one. While it is undoubtedly true that a percentage of Rome's subjects would have shared these sentiments, the opinion that states were nothing but organized robberies was an old one. This speech should not be interpreted as though it were based on a poll of Rome's subjects. Calgacus despairingly suggests that there is some hope in the heterogeneous ethnicity of the Roman army.²

“Whenever I review the causes of this war and our present desperate situation, I have great confidence that today our united efforts will be the beginning of Britain's liberty. The reason is that all of us are united. We are free of the effects of enslavement. There is no other land beyond us. Indeed, not even the sea is secure, for Rome's fleet threatens us from that quarter. Thus battle and arms will offer for the brave the most glory, and for the coward the greatest safety.

“Previous battles against the Romans, although fought with varying outcome, have left us the hope of success. We, the best people in Britain, living in the country's inner recesses and never having any contact with the conquered, have, as a result, preserved ourselves unpolluted from the contagion of enslavement. Here at the world's end, we, the last unenslaved people, have preserved our liberty to this day because of our remoteness and our obscurity. Now, however, the farthest parts of Britain lie open and all the unknown is wondered at. But there are no peoples beyond us, nothing but

²Tacitus, *Agricola* 30.

the waves and the rocks—and the even more cruel Romans. Their arrogance you cannot escape by obedience and submission. Robbers of the world, having exhausted a devastated earth, they now try the oceans! If the enemy is rich they are avaricious; if he is poor they lust for power. Neither East nor West has satisfied them. Alone among humankind they covet with equal rapacity rich and poor. Plunder, slaughter, and robbery they falsely call empire; they make a desert and call it peace.

“Children and kin are by nature our dearest possessions. Yet these are carried off from us by levy to be slaves in other lands. Our wives and sisters, even if they escape the lust of our enemies, are seduced by men pretending to be friends and guests. Our goods and possessions are collected for tribute, our land and harvests for grain requisitions. Our very bodies and hands are ground down by the lash, making roads through marsh and forest. Slaves born into slavery are sold once and for all and are at least fed by their owners; but Britain daily purchases her own enslavement—and to boot, feeds what she has purchased! Just as in the slave-gang the most recent addition is the butt of the jokes of his fellow slaves, so in this worldwide slave-gang we, the most recent and most dispensable, are marked for elimination, for there are no lands or mines or harbors in our land for whose exploitation we might be preserved.

“Bravery and independence of spirit on the part of subject peoples are unpalatable to their masters. Remoteness and isolation, to the degree they provide safety, provoke suspicion. Accordingly, since there is no hope of mercy, even at this late hour take courage, whether it is safety or glory that is most precious to you. The Brigantes under the leadership of a woman were able to burn a colony, storm a camp, and if their success had not made them careless, they might have thrown off the Roman yoke altogether. Therefore, we who are untouched and unconquered, who were bred for freedom not regrets, let us show them at the first battle what kind of men Caledonia has been keeping in reserve.

“Do you imagine that the Romans will be as brave in war as they are lustful in peace? It is our own disputes and feuds that bring them fame; the mistakes of their enemies become the glory of their army. That army, made up of different peoples, is held together by success and will fall apart when things go badly for them. Unless of course you suppose that Gauls and Germans and even, I am ashamed to admit, many Britons, having loaned their support to an alien tyranny of which they have been enemies longer than subjects—unless you think they are attached to Rome by loyalty and affection. Fear and terror are weak ties of attachment; take them away and those who have ceased to fear will begin to hate.

“All the incentives to victory belong to us. The Romans have no wives to inspire them, no parents to reproach them if they run away. The majority have no fatherland at all or at best one very far away. Few in number, uneasy because of their lack of knowledge of the country, looking around at an unknown sky, an unknown sea and forest—they have been delivered by the gods to us like caged prisoners.

“Do not be frightened by their outward show; the flash of gold and silver neither helps nor hurts. We shall find help in the very battle lines of the enemy. The Britons will recognize their own cause, the Gauls will remember their former liberty; the

of course you think you will be better off under Tutor and Classicus [*the rebel leaders*], or that the armies to protect you from the Germans and Britons will cost less!

"If the Romans are driven out—Heaven forbid!—what else can there be except wars among all these nations? Eight hundred years of the divine fortune of Rome and its discipline have produced this federal empire and it cannot be pulled apart without the destruction of those attempting to do just this.

"You are in the most dangerous situation. You have gold and wealth—the main causes of war. Therefore, love and care for peace, and also love and care for that city which victors and vanquished alike share on an equal basis. Learn the lessons of fortune for good or evil: Do not choose obstinacy and ruin in preference to submission and safety."

7.4 Training Soldiers

In his description of the Roman army, the historian Josephus noted that the legionary was equipped with breastplate, helmet, sword, and dagger. In addition, he carried a javelin, an oblong shield, a saw, a basket, a shovel, an ax, a leather strap, a scythe, a chain, and three days' food supply. "As a result," Josephus goes on to say, "the legionary soldier differs little from a loaded pack mule." (Josephus, A History of the Jewish War, 3.107–108). The fourth-century military writer Vegetius describes how recruits were trained.⁴

The Romans have subjugated the whole world by no other means than through training in the use of weapons, strict discipline in camp, and experience in warfare. From the start of their training new recruits must be taught the military pace. Keeping their ranks while moving must be carefully checked whether on the march or in battle. This cannot be done except by constant practice, for an army which is broken up and lacks orderly ranks is always in danger from the enemy. Therefore twenty Roman miles (i.e., about 18–19 U.S. miles) at the military pace should be completed in five hours during summer time. At the quicker full pace twenty four Roman miles should be completed in the same time.

The recruit must be trained to jump ditches . . . he must learn how to swim for there are not always bridges over rivers, and in retreat or in pursuit an army is frequently forced to swim. In sudden rainfalls or snowfalls, streams become torrents and dangers arise from not knowing how to swim . . . vaulting onto horses should be practiced strictly and constantly, not only by recruits but also by trained soldiers . . . young soldiers must be frequently required to carry loads up to 60 pounds and to march at the military pace . . . every recruit must know how to construct a camp. Nothing else is more advantageous and necessary in war. If a camp is built correctly, the soldiers spend their days and nights securely inside the rampart, even if the enemy besieges them. It is like carrying a walled city around with you wherever you go.

⁴Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris* 1.