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The Responses of the Roman Imperial Government to Natural Disasters 29 BCE-180 CE

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The Responses of the Roman Imperial Government to Natural Disasters (29 BCE
180 CE)

The Responses of the Roman Imperial Government to Natural Disasters (29 BCE-180 CE)

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the practice of imperial disaster relief between 29 BCE and 180 CE. It focuses upon both the process of disaster aid delineating how Roman emperors were petitioned for assistance, the forms disaster relief took, and the political motives individual emperors had for dispensing disaster aid. Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to the topic. Chapter 2 outlines the scope of the study as well as the examples used to establish disaster relief in context. Chapter 3 gives an overview of euergetism and also discusses two cases of disaster assistance that pre-date the reign of Augustus. Chapter 4 describes the process of disaster aid from petition to benefaction. It offers analysis of the different stages of disaster recovery and when acts of imperial aid fit within those stages. It also examines the funding sources for imperial benefactions designed to assist cities rebuild. Chapter 5 explains the correlation between disaster relief and an emperor's political image. It explores the religious significance that could be attached to major disasters. Then, the chapter shifts to three specific case studies that illustrate how disaster response could positively or negatively impact the political standing of an emperor. Chapter 6 offers a final, brief summary of the key points of this study.

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Dedication

To Amy, as promised.

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List of Abbreviations

<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année Épigraphique</i>
<i>AJ</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg Und Niedergang Der Romischen Welt</i>
Aristid. <i>Or.</i>	Aristides, <i>Orationes</i> (Keil)
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
<i>BMC RE</i>	<i>British Museum Catalogue of Coins of the Roman Empire</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Classical Journal</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CSHB</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i>
<i>ERW</i>	Fergus Millar, <i>The Emperor in the Roman World</i>
<i>ESAR</i>	<i>Economic Survey of Ancient Rome</i>
Euseb. Hieron. <i>Chron.</i>	Eusebius/Jerome's <i>Chronica</i>
<i>HN</i>	Pliny (the Elder), <i>Naturalis historia</i>
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i>
<i>IGR</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>LSJ</i>	<i>A Greek English Lexicon</i> , 8 th edition
Mal. <i>Chron.</i>	John Malalas, <i>Chronographia</i>
<i>OLD</i>	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i>
Oros.	Orosius, <i>The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans</i>

Plin. <i>Ep.</i>	Pliny (the Younger), <i>Epistulae</i>
<i>QNat.</i>	Seneca, <i>Quaestiones Naturales</i>
<i>Roman Empire</i> ²	<i>The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire</i> 2 nd ed.
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
<i>SHA</i>	<i>Scriptores Historiae Augustae</i>
<i>TAM</i>	E. Kalinka, et. al, <i>Tituli Asiae Minoris</i> (1901-)
<i>VS</i>	Philostratus, <i>Vitae Sophistarum</i>

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Three days after the terrible events of September 11, 2001, Chris Matthews published a syndicated column in the *Jewish World Review* wherein he wrote:

“Lucky though he was, Bill Clinton never had his shot at greatness. He could lower the jobless rate, balance the budget, console us after the Oklahoma City bombing. But he never got the opportunity George W. Bush was given this Tuesday: the historic chance to lead.”¹

Matthews’ basic assumption is that political greatness is not achieved through governing during prosperous times, it is earned through strong leadership during crises. A strong response to a disaster increases the public stature of political leaders while a poor reaction undermines a leader’s popularity and legitimacy to govern.² President George W. Bush, who saw his popularity rating soar from 51% before September 11, 2001 to 90% ten days after the disaster, experienced a reversal of his political fortunes and faced lingering questions about his competency after the U.S. government’s slow response to aid victims of Hurricane Katrina in

¹Chris Matthews, “Bush’s War,” *Jewish World Review*, September 14, 2001, <http://www.jewishworldreview.com/cols/matthews091401.asp> (accessed January 15, 2014).

²This correlation between political reputation and disaster response after a catastrophe has been studied in an US context. US voters base their views of politicians on their post-disaster spending not their pre-disaster preparedness. See Andrew Healy and Neil Malhotra, “Myopic Voters and Natural Disaster Policy,” *American Political Science Review* 103, no. 3 (August 2009): 387-406.

2005.³

Matthews' observations about President Clinton echo ancient sentiments. Suetonius' biography of the emperor Gaius (r. 37-41 CE), better known by his childhood nickname, Caligula, includes an anecdote wherein the Emperor ironically bemoans the misfortunes of his time as emperor saying:

Queri etiam palam de condicione temporum suortim solebat, quod nullis calamitatibus publicis insignirentur; Augusti principatum clade Variana, Tiberi ruina spectaculorum apud Fidenas memorabilem factum, suo oblivionem imminere prosperitate rerum; atque identidem exercituum caedes, famem, pestilentiam, incendia, hiatum aliquem terrae optabat (Cal. 31).

He even used openly to deplore the state of his times, because they had been marked by no public disasters, saying that the rule of Augustus had been made famous by the Varus massacre, and that of Tiberius by the collapse of the amphitheatre at Fidenae, while his own was threatened with oblivion because of its prosperity; and every now and then he wished for the destruction of his armies, for famine, pestilence, fires, or a great earthquake (trans. Rolfe).

Caligula, like Chris Matthews later, concluded that disasters, not prosperity, made a leader's tenure memorable. The similar observations of a Roman emperor and

³Presidential approval numbers are based upon Gallup's weekly tracking poll. Gallup, "Presidential Approval Ratings -- George W. Bush," <http://www.gallup.com/poll/116500/presidential-approval-ratings-george-bush.aspx> (accessed January 17, 2014). For the effect of Katrina on the Bush presidency, see Kenneth T. Walsh, "Hurricane Katrina Left a Mark on George W. Bush's Presidency," *U.S. News & World Report*, December 11, 2008, <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2008/12/11/hurricane-katrina-left-a-mark-on-george-w-bushs-presidency> (accessed January 16, 2014).

American political commentator reveal that disasters exert political power that transcends time, geography, and state organization. A political leader can educe fame, so Caligula and Matthews infer, from the public's misfortune.

Disasters, ancient or modern, affect human lives and destroy large amounts of property. No society, regardless of how rich or poor, enjoys total immunity from being vulnerable to some type of hazard and the damage it can cause. Disasters are economic events because the havoc they cause disrupts local and regional markets and destroys important structures such as houses, shops, or infrastructure. They are also political events in at least two ways. First, their occurrence can cause the public to doubt the quality of their leaders. Second, catastrophic events allow political leaders opportunities to impact the lives of people and to reshape the public's view of their ability to lead through providing assistance to victims and survivors of disasters.

This dissertation examines how Roman emperors in the early Empire (31 BCE-180 CE) gave aid to their subjects who suffered from a disaster. It will also demonstrate how emperors used disaster assistance to their political advantage with the Roman people and with those who lived in the provinces. Augustus' victory at Actium (31 BCE) led to the permanent altering of the diffusion of power within the Roman state. The gradual consolidation of imperial power caused a diminution in the political importance of the Senate and Rome's ambitious, traditional elites. But, during the early Empire, the process of this transformation was only in its initial stage. The Senate played a vital role by mediating an emperor's aid to the provinces, and when necessary, the emperors gave elites

opportunities to oversee disaster reconstruction thereby including them in the functions of state.

Despite the sense the term “emperor” conveys to the modern ear, in the early days of Rome’s imperial government, the emperors had yet to create a true autocracy. The basis of imperial power always rested on the loyalty of the army, but the early emperors did not have unchallenged regimes. Consequently, the individuals who ruled Rome needed ways to legitimate themselves as leaders. Emperors often demonstrated their keen sensitivity to open challenges to their authority. Tiberius (r. 14-37 CE) and Nero (r. 54-68 CE) carried out assassinations, murders, and forced suicides with extreme brutality against the faintest whispers of opposition. Stoic values coupled with republican virtues of honor and family legacy motivated some elite Romans to risk their lives to remove a man from power they perceived to be an enemy of the Roman state.⁴ Disasters of any kind could create unrest among the general public and, therefore, serve as fodder for skeptics and critics of imperial *auctoritas*. In the early Empire, when the equipoise between the emperor, Senate, and the Empire’s ruling elites was still in flux, the benevolence an emperor displayed when informed of a catastrophe developed into a powerful public relations opportunity.

But disaster relief in the provinces involved more than the personal ambitions and political machinations of the emperors. It was occasioned by the intricate web of interpersonal relationships between emperors and local elites upon

⁴Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 13.

which Roman control of the provinces relied. Because emperors did not volunteer to assist without formal petitions, the cities had to supplicate an emperor's aid.

Consequently, imperial disaster relief, especially in the Greek provincial cities, took place at the request of the cities rather than the behest of the emperor.

Each side had an interest in the process of recovery. For the Romans, provincial cities were the economic engines of the Empire via the taxes they paid into the imperial treasury. They were the administrative centers of the provinces through which Rome's governors meted out justice and managed provincial affairs. The citizens of the Greek cities in particular oriented their civic lives around magistracy buildings, gymnasia, theaters, and fountains; buildings that were so often destroyed during disasters. These important civic structures required large sums to rebuild, and the Emperors possessed the financial resources necessary to fund their reconstruction. Therefore, Greek civic ideology provided an impetus for the citizenry of the *poleis* to seek imperial disaster aid.

The evidence for disaster assistance also indicates the importance of communication and cooperation between the cities of the Empire. During times of crisis, the cities depended upon one another for the kind of immediate aid the difficulties of communication and travel made impossible for a distant ruler living in a remote imperial capital. Once the news of a disaster spread, nearby cities offered shelter to survivors who lost their homes, and they provided transportation so people could flee the damage and begin the process of rebuilding their lives. Thus, the nexus between cities became an important source for the kinds of aid that Rome could not and would not provide.

Nevertheless, following severe disaster events, the cities often did petition the early emperors for rebuilding assistance. The concept of appealing to the current hegemon for disaster relief did not originate with the establishment of Roman rule. Neither did Roman emperors invent the forms of assistance they gave. Especially in the Greek East, most of the practices predated Rome's dominance of the Mediterranean Basin. Thus, disaster assistance offers a glimpse into the Roman Empire's ability to utilize existing practices to foster local fealty while superimposing a new hierarchy of relationships that fundamentally transformed the power structure of society.

The assistance provincial cities gave each other showed continuity with pre-Roman practices, but with the dawn of Rome's imperial state, their situation had changed. The Greek cities, for example, continued to compete with one another for honors and status, but it was now the emperor who granted these coveted favors instead of local monarchs. Rome's interest in ruling through elites created a new political dynamic within the cities. Greek elites had long been expected to use their wealth to benefit their home city. But, now, they could equally accomplish this by volunteering to travel to petition Rome's emperor without having to promise to build or repair costly civic structures.

Imperial disaster assistance evolved in a world undergoing change. This dissertation will focus on how supplying aid became an important aspect of wielding imperial power. It will also elucidate what relief looked like and how the forms it took had their precursors among the Greeks of the Hellenistic period but grew over time into established imperial precedents.

Surprisingly, no advanced student of Roman history has ever produced a work of scholarship that is devoted exclusively to the examination of Roman disaster relief. In the 20th century, disaster assistance received little attention within the broader scholarship. However, that does not mean scholars avoided the topic altogether or did not recognize its importance for the imperial period of Roman history. Yet, acts of disaster assistance typically became subsumed within larger discussions of imperial building, the role of the emperor, or the economics of empire.

In 1959, R. MacMullen published a seminal article titled “Roman Imperial Building in the Provinces.” MacMullen offers an excellent overview of the various ways Roman emperors helped out the cities of the Empire through providing materials for building as well as giving them financial aid.⁵ Nevertheless, his lone mention of disaster assistance occurs in a footnote. S. Mitchell focused more narrowly on imperial building in his 1987 article titled, “Imperial Building in the Eastern Provinces.” Mitchell discusses disaster relief more openly describing the methods of giving tax remissions and monetary grants as means of supplying aid. Mitchell also provides an overview of the petition process required for the provinces to receive benefactions from the emperor.

Interest in modern day disasters like Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the Fukushima earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown have captured the attention of the public at large, and twenty-four hour satellite and cable television has made it possible for volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, famines, and

⁵R. MacMullen, “Roman Imperial Building in the Provinces,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 64 (1959): 210.

other crises to be known more broadly than ever before. Furthermore, major events like the 2001 attacks on New York City and Washington DC and the 2007 bombings in London have focused the public attention on the effectiveness of governments to prepare and handle unexpected human catastrophes.

Alongside these broader developments, disasters in antiquity have increasingly become a topic of scholarly inquiry. At the forefront of this recent interest in ancient disasters, in 2007, Gary Aldrete published *The Floods of the Tiber* wherein he examined the nature of floods in ancient Rome, how the floods affected the city's residents, and how the Romans intellectually processed the frequent inundations along with the physical alterations these events made to the landscape of the city. Aldrete was particularly interested in studying "the geographic extent, duration, seasonality, frequency, and magnitude" of the Tiber's floods from the Republic through the end of the Empire.⁶

The rise of environmental concern in much of the Western world has facilitated the interests of scholars in ancient disasters. The first work in this category is J. Hughes' *Pan's Travail* published in 1994. Hughes set out to study the ecological context in which the Greeks and Romans lived. In this seminal work, Hughes focused on the environmental problems the Greeks and Romans faced as well as the negative impacts they had on the environment. Thus, in the main body of the book, Hughes studies the evidence for the effects of deforestation, soil erosion, hunting, and urbanization on the ancient environment. More recently Lukas

⁶Gregory S. Aldrete, *Floods of the Tiber in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 6.

Thommen has published a similar work titled *An Environmental History of Ancient Greece and Rome*.

But of greater relevance to this dissertation is Jerry Toner's recent publication title *Ancient Disasters* (2013). Toner's work has two main strengths. First, he focuses on the effects both disasters and attempts at disaster assistance would have had on non-elite residents of Rome and provincial subjects. In that regard, *Roman Disasters* follows closely to much of the published literature in Disaster Studies since the appearance of Mike Davis' *Ecology of Fear* in 1998. Toner is concerned to show how economic disparity within the Empire would have created harsh, unfair conditions for those who did were at the lower end the Empire's economic scale. Second, Toner does an excellent job of introducing the reader to ways that people living in the Roman world would have experienced a disaster. Toner provides graphic descriptions of the ways residents of a city would have feared, fled, and coped with an occurrence of a major disaster where he or she lived.

One of the key weaknesses of Toner's approach is his treatment of disaster relief. While he does devote a whole chapter to "dealing with the aftermath," Toner avoids talking about imperial disaster assistance with any depth. His main focus in this chapter continues to be showing how income inequality within the Roman empire, exacerbated conditions for those less fortunate. The key problem though is his failure to use any specific case studies to show how Roman emperors bestowed their largesse upon the people in order to assist the recovery of their lives and cities.

This dissertation will focus on the practice of disaster relief during the early Empire. In this study, I want to accomplish three main goals. First, through the use of modern categories for understanding the stages of recovery, I will elucidate at what stage of recovery emperors became involved in the process of disaster relief. I also will observe what type of assistance they were able to give depending upon the timing of their relief. Second, I want to examine assistance through looking at specific case studies within their literary and epigraphical contexts. Third, I will look at how disaster relief was used, successfully or unsuccessfully, as a political tool by individual emperors.

My analysis of this topic depends upon two types of primary sources: literary and epigraphical. The contributions of the major literary sources of Suetonius, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio, with special focus on the latter two, have already received attention in R. Newbold's seminal article titled, "The Reporting of Earthquakes, Fires, and Floods by Ancient Historians."⁷ His statistics need not be repeated here. But, one of the important contributions this dissertation makes is its use of inscriptions to supplement the narratives found in the literary historical sources.

Inscriptions provide details that literary sources often do not. For example, in regard to inscriptions related to earthquakes, A. Bérenger-Badel has isolated two types of epigraphical evidence. On the one hand, there are those that credit the emperors with the rebuilding of buildings that suffered damage from an

⁷R.F. Newbold, "The Reporting of Earthquakes, Fires, and Floods by Ancient Historians," *The Proceedings of the African Classical Associations*, 16 (1982): 28-36.

earthquake.⁸ In the other type of inscriptions, one or more cities acknowledge the emperor as the savior or founder of a city which he assisted in its recovery from significant damage they had sustained from an earthquake.⁹

These are important details, but epigraphical sources are not unassailable, and they often generate as many questions as they do answers. There are three key problems these sources have: dates, wording, and purpose. Dates for the disasters they reference are not always obvious. Thus, an inscription that describes Titus' aid to Salerno following an earthquake has been the subject of intense debate.¹⁰ The Campanian region suffered from earthquakes in 62 CE as well as in 79 CE before, during, and after the Vesuvius eruption. Scholars have not always agreed about which series of earthquakes prompted Titus to give his assistance to the city of Salerno.

Another major issue related to inscriptions is the wording of the text contained thereon. Few ancient inscriptions do not require some redaction and restoration from highly specialized scholars. While scholars often reconstruct the wording based upon internal clues from the words they can read, the precise original wording is often unattainable. The wording of the text can affect both the dating of the inscription as well as our overall understanding of the circumstances under which an emperor bestowed his largesse upon a city. Finally, the purpose of

⁸Agnès Bérenger-Badel, "Les séismes dans la documentation épigraphique et numismatique sous le Haut-Empire: entre élaboration de la mémoire et reconstruction de l'événement," *Récits et représentations des catastrophes depuis l'Antiquité*. Grenoble: Publications de la MSH-Alpes (2005), 144.

⁹Bérenger-Badel, (2005), 145-146.

¹⁰See chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of the problems related to this inscription.

an inscription requires it to be approached with caution. Typically, references to disasters and subsequent imperial aid occur on honorary monuments designed to advertise imperial virtues and local gratitude for an emperor's assistance. Therefore, they were not designed to provide precise details about the number of casualties sustained in the disaster or even the exact way the emperor contributed to the restoration of some part of a city.

When I use evidence from inscriptions in this study, I present the major difficulties relevant to their interpretation when appropriate. I have demurred, however, to current consensus on the reading and dating of these texts. Thus, the precision of my interpretations depends on how accurately modern scholars have reconstructed their wording and correctly ascertained their dates.

Despite these difficulties, disaster relief presents us with an opportunity to see the various levels of the hierarchical Roman state at work. It is to describing the importance and process of disaster relief in the early Empire that the remainder of this work will be devoted.

Chapter 2 Disasters Defined

Contemporary Categories

Any survey of disaster assistance must begin by defining what constitutes a disaster and explaining how people grapple with their vulnerability to the natural world. From antiquity until the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, disasters were primarily viewed, in the West, as naturally occurring events or acts of God, and their severity was often measured on the basis of quantifiable numbers of dead and cost of damage. This means societies viewed humans as passive victims of catastrophes and defined disasters based upon the effects natural or man-made agents had upon human suffering.

After the Second World War, the threat of nuclear war generated an interest among academics, government agencies, relief organizations, and insurance companies in studying the effects of disastrous events upon people and learning how catastrophic damage could be lessened.¹ Today, the investigation of disasters and disaster response has become its own field of academic inquiry designed to increase awareness of the causes of disasters and to inform policy makers of better strategies for improving recovery responses and rebuilding processes for survivors of catastrophic events. The tangential fields of risk assessment and risk management have also emerged. Experts in these fields evaluate a people's level of risk to potential causes of disasters and formulate management strategies to

¹Anders Wijkman and Lloyd Timberlake, *Natural Disasters Acts of God or Acts of Man?* (Nottingham: Earthscan, 1985), 19.

diminish their effects and reduce their impacts upon societies.²

Because disastrous events commanded greater scrutiny in the late 20th century, scholars noticed a steady rise in human and financial costs catastrophic events caused even though the relative intensity of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions remained static and no scientific consensus existed regarding changes in Earth's climatic conditions.³ These observations created a need to reevaluate the way disastrous events are described and understood.

It is now generally accepted that natural events and the damage they produce cannot be considered collectively as “natural” disasters. Physical events like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis happen because of geological and climatic forces, and on their own they represent no threat to cause great harm. These phenomena only have the potential to be dangerous and costly when they intersect with human beings and the living environments they construct for themselves.⁴ An earthquake or volcanic eruption, then, is a naturally occurring, albeit extreme, event that becomes a “trigger” or “agent” for a human disaster because humans have chosen to make themselves vulnerable to them by living in areas of heightened risk for these events. In technical terms, vulnerability refers to “the susceptibility of a potential victim to the life-threatening impact of a ‘disaster

²A good overview of risk assessment and management can be found in David Alexander, *Natural Disasters* (New York: Chapman & Hall, 1993), 574-582.

³Wijkman and Timberlake (1985), 21-27. See also Randolph C. Kent, *Anatomy of Disaster Relief* (London: Pinter Publishers Limited, 1987), 2.

⁴Alexander (1993), 4.

agent’.”⁵ Therefore, the consensus among disaster relief experts and academic scholars is that humans are not the passive victims of forces of nature, but rather, humans choose to accept a degree of vulnerability and build their social and economic systems, upon which their ability to survive depends, in areas of increased risk. Whenever one of these “triggers” threatens this constructed social and economic environment to such a degree the ability of people to survive becomes endangered, a disaster will result.⁶ Therefore, humans contribute to creation of disasters.

Nevertheless, creating clear categories for disaster analysis has eluded policymakers and scholars who study catastrophic events and how to prepare for their occurrence. They have struggled with defining disasters partly because it is difficult to establish a method of classification that reflects nuanced distinctions between disaster types. One way to resolve this has been to categorize disasters by time. According to this classification model, there are three observable disaster types: sudden onset, creeping, and chronic.

Sudden onset or sudden impact disasters are those that happen in a relatively short period of time, often with little warning to the eventual victims. Earthquakes are sudden impact disasters because they usually last no more than a few seconds and usually strike with little to no forewarning. Floods too fall under this category because they can develop within a matter of hours, and flash floods

⁵Kent (1987), 2.

⁶Kent (1987), 3-4. Terry Cannon also provides insightful analysis on this topic in, “Vulnerability Analysis and the Explanation of ‘Natural’ Disasters,” in *Disasters, Development, and Environment*, ed. Ann Varley (John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 1994), 16.

inflict their damage quickly and then often subside with equal expeditiousness.

Creeping, or slow onset, disasters refer to those that take months or even years to form. The pressure in a volcano might gradually build over a long period before it finally causes an eruption. Land erodes or undergoes desertification over years or centuries, and ecological conditions gradually transform causing humans to be unaware they face a potential disaster due to their effects on the land .

Disasters can also be classified based upon the nature of their agency. In this system, there are three main classifications: geophysical, atmospheric or climatological, and land surface. Earthquakes, volcanoes, and tsunamis all have geophysical agents because they are caused by geological movements within the earth. Events such as tornadoes, floods, and droughts, though they differ in the way they impact human environments, are caused by changes in climate or atmospheric conditions. Landslides, soil erosion, and desertification are examples of disasters that develop due to changes in the surface of land over time.

Disasters can also have no natural agent and may, therefore, be branded as man-made. This type results entirely from conditions created by humans such as a building collapse that occurs because of poor construction techniques. Regardless of how they are classified, that all disasters impact human environments remains undisputed. A disaster, whether triggered from natural or man-made agents, only occurs whenever a disaster agent places stress upon vulnerable people to such a degree they are no longer able to sustain themselves without outside assistance.⁷

This brief overview of the modern approach to disasters reveals two

⁷Kent (1987), 4.

significant developments in how disasters are understood. First, experts have refined the nomenclature for disasters in order to distinguish between disaster agents. The use of specific terminology reflects the realization that disasters do not result from a single agent such as fortune or a divinity. Also, since understanding how people are affected by various triggers improves relief efforts, utilizing narrow terminology helps modern relief organizations and government agencies to prepare more adequately for the conditions the different disaster types create.

Second, recognizing that disasters do not result from a single cause has allowed scholars to focus on human involvement in creating conditions for disasters to happen. There is now an awareness that humans contribute to disasters beyond experiencing suffering and misfortune. Humans expose themselves to the risks hazard agents cause through choosing to live in areas known for one or more trigger types. When people knowingly live in places of elevated risk, a disaster will be inevitable.⁸ Whenever they choose to live in areas of heightened risk, human created environments increase the potential for a hazard agent to inflict catastrophic loss of life and destruction of property. In the modern world, for example, Third World countries often experience greater loss of life and property damage because they construct their homes with materials incapable of enduring a severe event. Furthermore, nations, regions, or cities that have higher poverty rates have fewer resources to cope with a disaster, and, therefore, people living in those areas may suffer from additional disaster agents like food or water shortages, fires, or exposure to the elements. Consequently, construction techniques, economic

⁸Cannon (1994), 22.

conditions, and even social structure determine the overall level of human vulnerability to a disaster trigger and contribute to the severity of a disaster.

Ancient Approaches

While the modern understanding of disasters reflects a scientific approach to hazardous events, ancient people often referred to any event where damage to property or loss of life occurred. This ancient view focused more on how hazardous agents caused people to suffer. Such events have also been referred to as misfortunes, calamities, tragedies, and times of evil, but this terminology does not account for human involvement in the disasters that hazardous agents trigger, rather it assumes humans to be the victims of the forces of nature.

This approach to disasters treats hazardous events as an integral part of nature and rejects separating the event from normal human existence. Until recently, the traditional terminology applied to disastrous events focused upon the suffering of the victims and the loss of or damage to property. Such terminology portrays the nature of the event only in light of the effect the agent has upon what humans perceive to be their normal lives.

An example of this thinking in the Roman sources comes from Tacitus' description of the collapse of a temporary wooden amphitheater. This structure was constructed to host gladiatorial games by a freedman named Atilius in the city of Fidenae, located on the outskirts of Rome, in 27 CE. When the structure fell it killed or injured between 20,000 (Suet. *Tib.* 40) and 50,000 (Tac. *Ann.* 4.62) people.

In his account of this man-made disaster, Tacitus used three different terms to

describe the event. He refers to it as a *clades*, *malus*, and *pestis* within a single paragraph recounting the calamity and its aftermath (*Ann.* 4.62).⁹ Yet, a massive earthquake that destroyed twelve cities in Asia ten years prior to the Fidenae amphitheater collapse also qualified as a *pestis* in Tacitus' prose despite the author's recognition that poor construction techniques and overcrowding were responsible for the later catastrophe. Thus Tacitus does not make narrow distinctions between man-made disasters or natural disasters. In addition, the Latin terms he uses to describe both types of disaster emphasize the suffering of or experience of calamity by the people.

Despite the overlap in word usage between man-made and natural disasters, it is clear the Romans recognized that human error caused such unfortunate casualties. The Roman Senate issued a *senatus consultum* establishing a minimum wealth requirement of 400k HS for anyone who wished to present a gladiatorial show of his own accord (*Tac. Ann.* 4.63). In addition, the Senate also decreed that future temporary amphitheaters had to be erected on proven solid ground. Tacitus presented the Fidenae collapse as one misfortune the people of Rome experienced during Tiberius' absence from Rome that misled many to conclude the Emperor's retirement to Capri portended the end of his reign (*Ann.* 4.58). So, the Senate knew human involvement had caused this *pestis*, but some saw this tragic circumstance as a sign from the gods of the end of Tiberius' reign.

⁹Tacitus describes this as a disaster by saying, "an unforeseen calamity equaled a disaster in a mighty war" (*ingentium bellorum cladem aequavit malum improvisum*, *Ann.* 4.62.1, trans. Rolfe). Later in the paragraph, using *pestis*, he says, "Hence the destruction was more severe" (*unde gravior pestis fuit*).

The modern, more scholarly approach to disaster studies has created useful ways to evaluate and illuminate how Romans of the early Empire, and their subjects, thought about disasters and the efforts required to give aid after them. The evidence suggests that some in the Greco-Roman world had a basic grasp of their vulnerability to hazardous agents. They also exhibited an awareness that their actions contributed to their vulnerable situation. An example of a people aware of their vulnerability comes from the descriptions of the ancient city of Philadelphia, modern Alaşehir, given by the first century geographer, Strabo (died ca. 21 CE).

The Greek city of Philadelphia was located some 30 miles from the important administrative and *conventus* city of Sardis near the Catacecaumene, or “burned land” region of southwestern Asia Minor.¹⁰ This zone still remains seismically active, and in antiquity, it experienced prolific seismic and volcanic activity. By the time Strabo wrote about the volatile situation in Philadelphia, the volcanism of the region had entered dormancy. Nevertheless, because of its geological context, the fault lines near Philadelphia remained so seismically active that Strabo referred to it as “full of earthquakes” (σεισμῶν πλήρης, 13.4.10). This characterization of the city’s routine rumbling was Strabo’s way of expressing what is known as “recurrence interval” in modern disaster studies. Recurrence interval, also known as return period, refers to “the average length of time between events of a given

¹⁰The importance of *conventus* cities, also called *assize* districts will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

size.”¹¹ Although the geographer’s observation the city was “full of earthquakes” lacks the exactitude of scientific terminology, he does convey that earthquakes were so regular they appeared to have a daily (καθ’ ἡμέραν) return period (12.8.18).

Strabo’s comments about Philadelphia generally focus on the instability of the walls of houses inside the city. Because the ground quaked with regular frequency, the house walls (οἱ τοῖχοι)¹² were shaken (σαλεύονται) and cracked (δίστανται) daily(12.8.18). In a later observation, Strabo cites the incessant cracking of house walls (οὐ γὰρ διαλείπουσιν οἱ τοῖχοι δυστάμενοι) as proof of the constant seismic activity of the city (13.4.10). Strabo’s knowledge of the routine cracking shows those who chose to dwell in the city understood the risks that came with living in such a volatile place.

The people of Philadelphia could never have known that the regular tremors that caused the persistent fracturing of the walls of their houses occurred because of the geological situation of the whole of Roman Asia. Roman Asia, present day Turkey, sat atop what modern geologists refer to as the Anatolian Plate. This region experiences a high recurrence of tectonic activity due to multiple geological factors. The Anatolian Plate has two significant fault lines that have formed due to the effects of its collision with the Arabian Plate, on which sits much of the Middle East, to the east. As the Arabian Plate, along with the continent of Africa, pushes

¹¹Alexander (1993), 21.

¹²Liddell and Scott make a distinction between the related terms τοῖχος and τεῖχος stating the former refers to house walls while the latter connotes the walls of a city (p. 1534). Strabo used τοῖχος in both passages (12.8.18 and 13.4.10), and, therefore, more likely focused on the stability of home construction rather than the city’s protective walls.

in a northward direction, its contact with the Anatolian Plate has produced the Eastern Anatolian Fault Zone (EAFZ) which runs in a northwestern direction. These tectonic movements combined with the movement of the Anatolian Plate from east to west have generated the Northern Anatolian Fault Zone (NAFZ) that bisects much of northern Anatolia. The seismic activity in southwestern Anatolia is also affected by the Hellenic Arc.¹³

¹³Neslihan Ocakoğlu, Emin Demirbağ, and İsmail Kuşçu, “Neotectonic structures in İzmir Gulf and surrounding regions (western Turkey): Evidences of strike-slip faulting with compression in the Aegean extensional regime,” *Marine Geology* 219 (2005): 155-157. The Hellenic Arc refers to a roughly 1200 km (720 miles) plate boundary between the Eurasian, African, and Arabian plates. It runs from the island of Zakynthos (m. Zakynthos) to Rhodes. A brief introduction to the formation of the Hellenic Arc can be found in Athanassios Ganas and Tom Parsons, “Three-dimensional model of Hellenic Arc deformation and the origin of the Cretan uplift,” *Journal of Geophysical Research (Solid Earth)* 114 (June 2009): 6404. See the movement of plates illustrated in Figure 1.

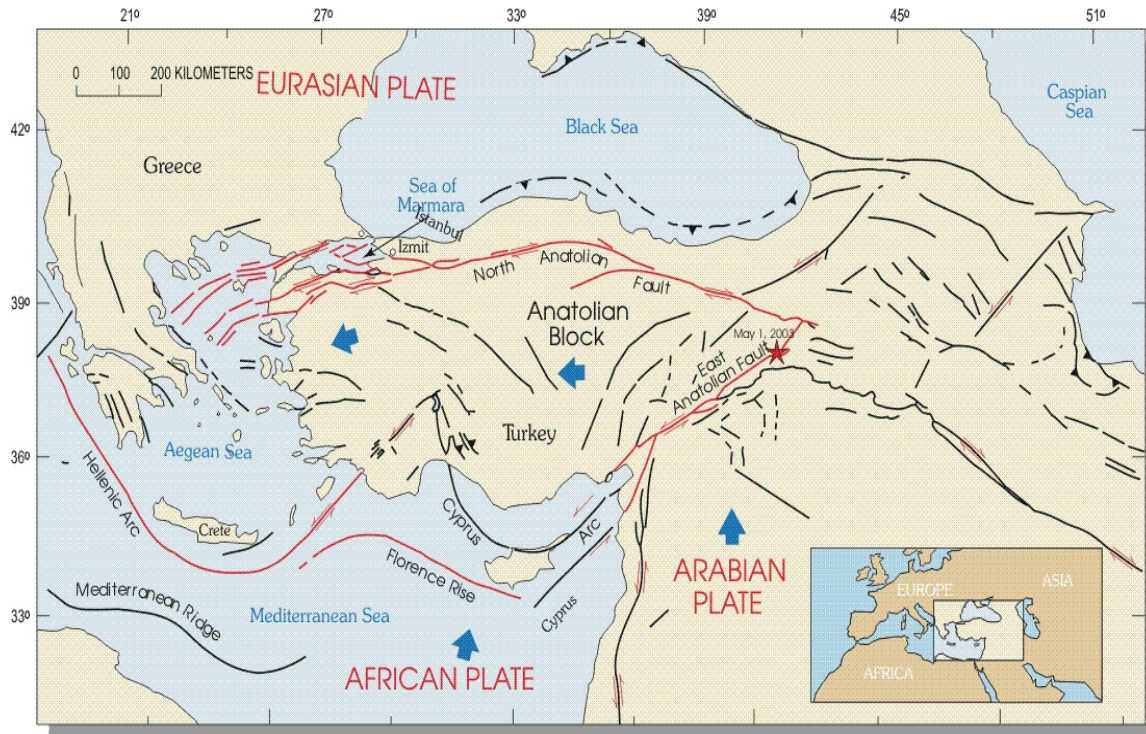


Figure 1: Tectonic Map of Turkey illustrating the major plates and their movements.¹⁴

Since the regular tremors wrought continual disturbance on the walls of their homes, according to the geographer, the inhabitants reacted in one of two distinct ways to the living conditions they faced. Strabo described those two responses in the following manner:

οἰκοῦσιν οὖν ὀλίγοι διὰ τοῦτο τὴν πόλιν, οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ καταβιοῦσιν ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ γεωργοῦντες, ἔχοντες εὐδαίμονα γῆν· ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ὀλίγων θαυμάζειν ἐστίν, ὅτι οὕτω φιλοχωροῦσιν, ἐπισηφαλεῖς τὰς οἰκίσεις ἔχοντες·

¹⁴http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eqarchives/year/2003/2003_05_01_maps.php

So, for this reason, few inhabit the city, but the majority live out their lives in the countryside farming and possessing productive land. But there is reason to marvel at the minority because they are so fond of the city despite having unsafe houses. (13.4.10)

The primary effect the seismic activity had upon the people was a distrust of the living environment in Philadelphia. Consequently, the majority viewed the surrounding farming villages as the safer alternative to life in the city.¹⁵ The villages not only offered safety from falling walls but also nutrient rich soil. In Strabo's view, relatively few loved the city's urban setting enough to risk living in such a dangerous environment.

But, the few who out of fondness for the city decided to live therein had no delusions that the tremors happened because of fate or any other supernatural or metaphysical force. Instead, they must have recognized the inadequacy of their methods of wall construction to withstand these regular shocks, but they willingly chose to accept the risk of the most damaging and fatal outcomes. Strabo explained the situation of Philadelphia in the following manner:

ἢ τε Φιλαδέλφεια, ἢ πρὸς αὐτῇ πόλις, οὐδὲ τοὺς τοίχους ἔχει πιστούς, ἀλλὰ καθ' ἡμέραν τρόπον τινὰ σαλεύονται καὶ δίστανται διατελοῦσι δὲ προσέχοντες τοῖς πάθεσι τῆς γῆς καὶ ἀρχιτεκτονοῦντες πρὸς αὐτά.

And Philadelphia, the city next to it [Phrygia Catacecaumene], does not have dependable walls, but daily, in some way, they shake

¹⁵In 12.8.18, discussed below, Strabo specifically characterized the walls of the city as untrustworthy (οὐδὲ τοὺς τοίχους ἔχει πιστούς).

and crack, but they constantly expect these sufferings of the earth and build in anticipation of them. (12.8.18)

Strabo concluded this passage by stressing the existence of a culture of anxiety about and anticipation of earthquake damage among the fearless few choosing to live inside of the city instead of opting for the fertile soils and relative safety of the Lydian countryside. Earthquakes happened so frequently in the city that those who lived therein learned to accept their routine occurrence and to construct their homes knowing the dangers inherent in doing so. Strabo expressed this by saying “they constantly expect these sufferings of the earth” (διατελοῦσι δὲ προσέχοντες τοῖς πάθεσι τῆς γῆς, 12.8.18). But, the phrase “they build in anticipation of them” (ἀρχιτεκτονοῦντες πρὸς αὐτά, 12.8.18) shows that the Philadelphians understood the greatest threat to the stability and safety of the city structures came from their methods of wall construction. Strabo’s use of the term ἀρχιτεκτονοῦντες suggests the city’s inhabitants experimented with building techniques designed to mitigate the damaging effects of the future tremors that they expected would place stress on the walls of their homes.

This example illustrates ancient awareness of vulnerability and human contribution to catastrophic events. The grasp that the citizens of Philadelphia had of these concepts derived from personal experience over decades or centuries more than from scientific inquiry. Therefore, although ancient authors like Tacitus and Strabo referred to disastrous events using terms related to human suffering, they also convey a broader awareness that people bore some responsibility for the catastrophes they experienced because of where they chose to live and the poor

construction techniques they used to construct their social and economic environments.

Background of Study

In the absence of quantifiable standards for casualties and destruction of property, Roman authors used common terminology for catastrophic events of all types making it difficult to classify disasters and the responses to them. Such a broad application of terms diminishes the possibility of an exhaustive examination of all disaster assistance in the Early Roman Empire. Nevertheless, a sufficient study of Roman disaster relief in the early Empire requires accounting for a minimum of three key variables relative to any disaster: type, location, and time.

Roman emperors responded to different types of disaster triggers including earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, and fires. During the 207 years of the early Empire, E.Guidoboni lists a total of 47 earthquakes, and there is literary or epigraphical evidence, or both, for some kind of imperial aid being given following 19 of those earthquakes.¹⁶ A total of 27 floods, on average one every 19 years, of the Tiber inundated Rome between 300 BCE and 200 CE, and both the emperor and the Senate devoted time and money to finance reconstruction after floods and to engineer the river to mitigate future flood damage.¹⁷ From the beginning of Augustus' reign through the death of Marcus Aurelius, Rome suffered from 17

¹⁶Emanuela Guidoboni, *Catalogue of Ancient Earthquakes in the Mediterranean Area up to the 10th Century* (Rome: Editrice Compostori sal, 1994).

¹⁷For the statistical frequency of floods of the Tiber, see: Aldrete (2007), 73.

known major conflagrations.¹⁸ Fires in the capital, like floods, demanded a response from the imperial government to help citizens rebuild after many of the city's frequent fires. In order to prevent widespread conflagrations, the Emperor Augustus established the city's first permanent fire brigade (*vigiles*) to stand prepared to control fires and their damage (Cass. Dio 55.26.4-5).¹⁹ Emperors assisted after fire outbreaks outside of Rome especially after the major fires in Bononia and Lyon.²⁰ The least common type of disaster for which there is evidence of imperial aid is a volcanic eruption. Mt. Aetna, in Sicily, erupted and destroyed the city of Catania in 121 BCE prompting the Senate to remit its tax obligations for ten years (Orosius 5.13.1). During the period from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius, only one documented volcanic eruption happened, namely the Vesuvius eruption that destroyed three small cities and six towns in Campania.

While each kind of agent creates terrible conditions for people, it generates its own unique kind of destruction and affects man-made structures in dissimilar ways. Aqueducts, the enduring symbol of Roman architecture, and homes made of stone or brick had a greater chance to withstand the effects of a fire or a flood than

¹⁸For a discussion of the known major fires in this period, see H.V. Canter, "Conflagrations in Ancient Rome," *CJ* (1932): 274-277.

¹⁹See also Lukas Thommen, *An Environmental History of Ancient Greece and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 105.

²⁰There are two main secondary studies of fires and fire brigades in the Early Empire: Gehard J. Baudy, *Die Brande Roms* (Hildesheim & New York: G. Olms, 1991). PK Baillie Reynolds, *The Vigiles of Imperial Rome* (Chicago: Aris Publishers, 1926). Lucas Rubin has written a more recent survey on Roman fires in his doctoral dissertation. See Rubin, L. (2004). *De incendiis urbis romae: The fires of Rome in their urban context*. (State University of New York at Buffalo). Available from Proquest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3141310)

an earthquake. Since different agents produce varying kinds of damage, the response needs for the survivors and their cities also differ. Consequently, a Roman emperor might respond to a fire by giving money to the victims, but he might rebuild an aqueduct in a provincial city following an earthquake. The damage spawned by each disaster type begat circumstances that determined what form imperial aid took.

Although Roman emperors of the early Empire mostly lived in the political environment of the city of Rome and the Italian Peninsula, they did not limit their acts of disaster relief to Roman citizens living in Italy. Emperors frequently aided the cities of the provinces when those cities invited their support for their recovery and rebuilding efforts. But, where a disaster occurred gave the imperial ruler a variety of response options from which to choose depending upon the degree of damage. The Roman Empire grew increasingly hierarchical and unequal over time. Consequently, the financial obligations of provincials differed in substantial ways from citizens living in Italy. Aemilius Paullus' (228-160 BCE) defeat of the Macedonian king, Perseus, in 168 BCE brought such a degree of wealth to Rome that in the following year, Roman citizens no longer bore tax obligations to support the army. From 167 BCE forward, Rome shifted its tax burdens from citizens to the

provinces by imposing tribute upon provincial communities.²¹

The Social War (90-88 BCE) caused Rome to extend the franchise to the Italians in Campania, thus bringing the entire Italian Peninsula under the umbrella of Roman citizenship and, with it, freedom from contributing to the state revenues via taxation.²² In the provinces, tribute became the onerous symbol of the Roman overlord. Yet, these unequal financial responsibilities also meant that Roman emperors had an important tool at their disposal for demonstrating good faith toward and concern for the provinces. Emperors could help the provinces in a way that was unnecessary in Italy because they had the power to suspend tax obligations for a period of time in order to free local capital for reconstruction.²³

When a disastrous event happened also affected the nature of the imperial response. The early Empire spanned from Octavius' defeat of Antony in 31 BCE to the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 CE. During this interval the position and power of the emperor evolved. The provinces, especially in the Greek East, began to appeal more frequently to the emperor and less to the Senate for economic benefits. Tax holidays became coveted awards whether or not a city needed to rebuild from a

²¹Andrew Lintott, *Imperium Romanum* (London: Routledge, 1993), 70. For different applications of financial policy in the provinces compared to Italy, see G.H. Stevenson, *Roman Provincial Administration* (New York: G.E. Stechert & Co., 1939), 135-136. The shift in tax obligations to the provinces in 167 BCE corresponded with increasing dependence upon allies and provinces to supply troops. See Mary Beard & Michael Crawford, *Rome in the Late Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 81.

²²Beard & Crawford (1985), 79.

²³Examples of imperial tax relief will be given in chapter 4.

catastrophe. Emperors financed public works with increased regularity.²⁴ Imperial building in the provinces became an integral aspect of Roman rule even when provincial cities did not suffer from natural disasters.²⁵ But, a key component of the development of the imperial office was the role the emperor took in granting assistance in the aftermath of catastrophic events. Standard ways of supplying aid became established over time. Emperors typically gave money grants or remitted taxes. But, whenever a major catastrophe occurred, they often did both. Nevertheless, the kind of help an emperor contributed for disaster assistance depended upon his personal political needs and the overall condition of the imperial treasury.

The financial condition of the imperial treasury during the reigns of Hadrian (r. 117-138 CE), Antoninus Pius (r. 138-161 CE) and Marcus Aurelius (r. 161-180 CE) had declined compared to the days of the Julio-Claudians. Most emperors who ruled during the early Empire exercised caution with the finances of the state, but the rulers at the end of the early Empire had to account for a diminished treasury in their fiscal decisions, including those related to disaster relief. Therefore, the timing of the disaster could affect the financial options available to an emperor for making a substantial response to aid its victims.

²⁴Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 420-421.

²⁵MacMullen(1959), 207–235. Stephen Mitchell, “Imperial Building in the Eastern Roman Provinces,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 91 (1987): 333–365.

Survey of disasters

The narrow range of data limits the possible breadth of disaster relief analysis. Ancient sources preserved details about floods and earthquakes more than any other disaster type partly because these triggers happened with greater regularity than other agents. But, accounts of major floods focus exclusively on the Tiber River in Rome. Descriptions of earthquakes abound for Asia Minor compared to other parts of the Empire including Italy. Unless a fire happened in conjunction with an earthquake, ancient authors typically mentioned their outbreaks only when they occurred in the capital city. These limitations create difficulties for providing an exhaustive analysis of imperial disaster relief. Therefore, the cases selected for this study have been chosen based upon the amount and quality of the source data, the category of disaster, and the location of the catastrophe. These examples will also illuminate how social, economic, and political exigencies influenced how emperors responded on a given occasion. A brief synopsis of the disaster events chosen for this study will occur below based upon the disaster type, location, and time of occurrence in order to analyze the evolution of imperial assistance.

Relief in the early Empire, however, cannot be investigated apart from a Hellenistic model of disaster assistance that became prominent in the Greek world following Alexander the Great's death and had influenced Rome by the Late Republic. In order to establish what occurred during the Hellenistic period, the earthquake that struck the city of Rhodes in 227 BCE will function as a model.²⁶

²⁶John Leopold reached a similar conclusion regarding the Rhodes disaster as a paradigm. See John W. Leopold, "Consolando per edicta: Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 4, 50 and Imperial Consolations for Natural Catastrophes," *Latomus* (1986): 817.

Earthquakes

Rhodes (227 BCE):

In 227 BCE²⁷, an earthquake struck the island *polis* of Rhodes causing the famous Colossus devoted to the sun god, Helios, to break off at the knees (περικλασθεῖς ἀπὸ τῶν γονάτων, Strabo 14.2.5).²⁷ This earthquake falls outside the chronological scope of the Early Roman Empire, and there are no descriptions of the degree of damage this earthquake caused beyond Strabo's reference to the Colossus. Nevertheless, Polybius' account of how the Rhodians sought assistance from their fellow Greeks establishes a precedent for how a Greek city procured help from other *poleis*. According to Polybius, the Rhodians sent embassies to Greek city-states and Hellenistic kings to inform them of the degree of damage their city had suffered and appeal to them for their assistance (Pol. 5.88.1-4). Under Roman rule, Greek cities continued to send embassies to represent their interests and appeal to the emperor and the Senate for financial assistance. A majority of Roman earthquake relief went to assist the Greek speaking provinces, especially those in Asia Minor, making existing Hellenistic precedents relevant for understanding imperial disaster relief

²⁷The traditional date for this earthquake is 227 BCE. The other possible dates for when this seismic event might have occurred will be part of a more in-depth discussion of this event below.

²⁷Rhodes formed a single *polis* after the 4th century BCE. See Vincent Gabrielsen, "The Synoikized Polis of Rhodes," in *Polis & Politics*, eds. Pernille Flensted-Jensen, Mogens Herman Hansen, Thomas Heine Nielsen, and Lene Rubinstein (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2000), 190; Christy Constantakopoulou, "Proud to Be an Islander: Island Identity in Multi-Polis Islands in the Classical and Hellenistic Aegean," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 20, no. 1 (June 2005): 7.

during the early Empire.

Tralles/Laodicea 27 BCE:

The same year the Senate bestowed the title “Augustus” upon the Emperor, a significant earthquake damaged the cities of Laodicea, Thiatyra, and Chios and most likely damaged Tralles and the island of Cos in the Aegean. The sources do not provide detailed descriptions of the damage this earthquake caused beyond Strabo’s mention of the collapse (συνέπεσεν) of the gymnasium (γυμνάσιον) and other parts (ἄλλα μέρη) of the city of Tralles (12.8.18). Few sources even mention this earthquake, but Strabo and Suetonius thought the imperial response to aid the cities damaged by the quake politically significant and worthy of explication. Augustus’ aid to these cities serves as the first example of imperial disaster relief in the extant sources. Strabo and Suetonius’ accounts of Rome’s response to this event provide an important portrait of disaster assistance at the dawn of the early Empire. Strabo saw the actions of the Emperor Augustus as archetypal for Tiberius’ later decision to relieve the cities of Asia Minor from the devastating 17 CE earthquake (Strabo 12.8.18). This event also reveals the prominent role the Senate had, during the reign of Augustus, in matters related to provincial assistance because Suetonius reports that Laodicea, Thiatyra, and Chios made their requests for assistance to that distinguished political body (Suet. *Tib.* 8). The same passage in Suetonius establishes the political importance of participating in disaster assistance for future emperors. Tiberius (r.14-37 CE), the future successor to the Emperor Augustus, implored the Senate for earthquake assistance on behalf of these cities (Suet. *Tib.* 8).

This was an important milestone in the beginning of his political career. Thus, not only did giving disaster aid have political importance for sitting emperors, Suetonius' account of this event shows that arguing for disaster relief in the Senate helped establish the political *bona fides* of Augustus' eventual successor.

Asia Minor 17 CE:

In the third year of Tiberius' reign, twelve important (*celebres*) cities of Asia Minor experienced what the Elder Pliny called "the greatest earthquake in mortal memory" (*maximus terrae memoria mortalium exstitit motus*, Pliny *HN*, 2.86). The key sources for this earthquake are Strabo (12.8.18, 13.3.5, 13.4.8), Suetonius (*Tib.*48), Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.47), and Cassius Dio (57.17.7). Two other important Roman sources make brief mentions of this memorable event, namely, Velleius Paterculus (2.126) and Seneca (*ad. Luc* 14.91.9, *QNat.*, 6.1.13). The *Chronicon* of Eusebius, a later Christian source compiled in the 4th century CE, tersely references the earthquake that wrought such great damage on the cities of Asia during the reign of Tiberius.

Although this earthquake received atypical attention in antiquity, those who mentioned it left no clues about the number of casualties it caused and provided few insights regarding the kinds of buildings it destroyed. What little evidence remains primarily comes from the city of Sardis. Strabo says Sardis lost many dwellings (*ἀπέβαλε πολλήν τῆς κατοικίας*, 13.4.8). Archaeological evidence indicates the main

street received damage and had to undergo significant repairs.²⁸ During the last years of his reign, Claudius (r. 41-54 CE) gave money for the construction of an aqueduct in Sardis which, it seems, had yet to be rebuilt after the destructive 17 CE earthquake.²⁹ Another inscription commemorates the repair of the temple by a Julia Lydia. The text of the inscription reads:

Σωκράτης Πολεμαίου
 Παρδαλάς τὸν ναὸν κατε-
 σκεύασεν καὶ τὴν Ἥραν ἀνέ-
 θηκεν {vac.} Ἰουλία Λυδία ἡ ὑωνὴ
 αὐτοῦ μετὰ τὸν σεισμὸν
 ἐπεσκεύασεν.

Socrates, the son of Polemaios Pardalas built the temple and consecrated it to Hera {vac.} Julia Lydia, his granddaughter, rebuilt it after the earthquake (*SEG* 28:928).

The text of the inscription indicates Julia Lydia's grandfather devoted the original temple to Hera. During the great 17 CE earthquake, the temple sustained at least enough damage to require repair.³⁰

While the sources give short shrift to damage reports, they do provide plenty of particulars about the earthquake. Seneca and Pliny the Elder both report that the destruction of twelve cities happened as a single event. Seneca (d. 65 CE), a first

²⁸George M.A. Hanfmann, *Sardis from Prehistoric to Roman Times* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 142.

²⁹This will be discussed in further detail below in ch. 3.

³⁰The Greek word (ἐπεσκεύασεν) connotes both repair and restoration (*s.v.* ἐπισκευάζω, *LSJ*, 552). Therefore, the minimum damage this earthquake caused required repairs to the temple. It is also possible a complete reconstruction took place.

century Stoic philosopher, says “ In Asia, twelve cities collapsed simultaneously” (*Asia duodecim urbes simul perdidit*, 6.1.13). Pliny thought their destruction occurred in a single night (*XII urbibus Asiae una nocte prostratis*, *HN*, 2.86). Tacitus concurred with Pliny’s memory of a nighttime earthquake destroying the cities of Asia (*duodecim celebres Asiae urbes conlapsae nocturno motu terrae*, *Ann.* 2.47).

Tacitus gave a dramatized portrayal of the havoc and terror the earthquake caused. He intensifies the suffering of the victims by portraying the ground as dividing (*diductis terris*), the mountains as collapsing (*sedisse inmensos montis*), and the ruins blazing (*ruinam ignis*) during the seismic event (2.47).³¹ Tacitus’ greatest contribution for this study comes from his discussion of the relief efforts of the Emperor Tiberius in response to the petitions by the twelve cities for assistance. Tacitus and Cassius Dio (57.17.7) both credit Tiberius with the use of tax remission as a form of aid. This was the first attested occasion that a Roman emperor responded to a disaster by granting the victims a limited immunity from their tax obligations.

Smyrna 177/178 CE:

During the final years of Marcus Aurelius’ (r. 161-180) reign, another powerful earthquake destroyed an important city in Asia Minor. The city of Smyrna again suffered significant damage and requested the aid of the joint emperors Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus.³² Unfortunately, the source information

³¹Tiberius’ relief of Asia will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

³²Commodus had become co-regent with his father by at least 176 CE.

for this disaster and the subsequent recovery efforts is not as varied or reliable as the major quake of 17 CE or the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE.³³ Nevertheless, the Smyrna earthquake to which Marcus Aurelius supplied assistance “is the best attested occasion of restitution of a city by an emperor and the processes which brought this about.”³⁴

The text of Cassius Dio mentions the earthquake in the context of the Emperor’s acts of munificence toward the Roman people and the cities of the provinces. It briefly reads, “and he gave money to many cities among which also Smyrna was ruined by an earthquake” (χρήματά τε πολλαῖς πόλεσιν ἔδωκεν, ἐν αἷς καὶ τῆ Σμύρνῃ δεινῶς ὑπὸ σεισμοῦ φθαρείσῃ, 72.32.3 = Zon.12.3). Cassius Dio also recounts the sending, by command of the Emperor, of an unnamed senator of praetorian rank to rebuild the city (72.32.3).

Three letters (*Orations* 18-21) written by the Sophist philosopher Aelius Aristides (d. ca. 181 CE) detail the damage this earthquake caused in Smyrna. In his initial letter of appeal to the Emperors, Aristides asserts the city suffered from a fire along with the earthquake (πυρὶ καὶ σεισμοῖς, *Or.* 19.1).³⁵ More importantly, the correspondence to Marcus Aurelius and Commodus paints a partial portrait of the destruction of the beautiful vistas and the important civic structures of the city both of which formerly brought renown to Smyrna. In order to secure imperial assistance for his city, Aristides took the rulers on a verbal tour of the destruction via his letter.

³³This disaster will be discussed in chapter 3 and 4.

³⁴Fergus Millar (1977), 423.

³⁵*Oration* 19 serves as the initial, written appeal from Aristides to Marcus and Commodus.

He knew Marcus visited the city in 176 CE, so he told the Emperor that all aspects of the city that had induced imperial awe now “lies in the dust” (ἅ νῦν πάντα ἐν κόνει *Or.* 19.2). He then described the city as though it had experienced death, saying the harbor:

μέμυκε μὲν ἐκεῖνος λιμῆν, οἴχεται δὲ ἀγορᾶς κάλλη,
κόσμοι δὲ ὁδῶν ἀφανεῖς, γυμνάσια δὲ αὐτοῖς
ἀνδράσι καὶ παισὶ διέφαρται, ναοὶ δὲ οἱ μὲν κείνται,
οἱ δὲ κατέδυσαν (*Or.* 19.3)

has closed its eyes, the beauty of the market-place is gone, the adornments of the streets have disappeared, the gymnasiums together with the men and boys who used them are destroyed, some of the temples have fallen, some sunk beneath the ground (trans. Behr).

Each of these buildings played an important role in the economic vitality and the reputation of the city in antiquity. Writing approximately 150 years before the earthquake destroyed the city, Strabo had praised the city as “the most beautiful of all (καλλίστη τῶν πασῶν, 14.1.37). From his perspective, the harbor, gymnasium, the division of the streets, and a library contributed to the aesthetic quality of the city. The death of the city, as Aristides decried it, involved the downfall of these same buildings Strabo thought beautified the city.

The *Chronicon* of Hieronymus also attests to an earthquake that destroyed the city of Smyrna in the 239th Olympiad, a four year interval from 177-180 CE. The source refers to the event in a brief excerpt saying, “Smyrna, a city in Asia, collapsed in an earthquake, for the renewal of which, immunity from taxes was given for a period of ten years” (*Smyrna urbs Asiae terraemotu ruit, ad cuius instaurationem*

decennalis tributorum immunitas data est, 210c). Despite its brevity, this statement uniquely credits the joint emperors with relieving taxes as a method of aid.

Although much is known about the imperial response to the disaster, scholars have not reached a consensus on the precise year the earthquake damaged Smyrna. The traditional date is the year 178 CE, and most earthquake catalogs follow this convention. But, A. Garzetti thought the destruction of Smyrna occurred in the year 176 CE and connected it with earthquakes in Nicomedia, Ephesus, Antioch, and Carthage.³⁶ E. Guidoboni follows the traditional 178 CE date in her catalog, but she says the *Chronicon* places the earthquake in the year 179 CE.³⁷

The most compelling argument, in my opinion, comes from C. Behr who believed earthquake happened in the year 177 CE.³⁸ He established this date on the basis of three key points. First, the earthquake seems to have occurred during the annual meeting of the Provincial Assembly which convened that year in Ephesus.³⁹ Behr suggests, “the Assembly met annually in a four year cycle, for three of those four years in Pergamum, Smyrna, and Ephesus, and on the fourth year in one of the remaining six cities.”⁴⁰ This means the city of Ephesus hosted the annual meeting

³⁶Albino Garzetti, *From Tiberius to the Antonines*, trans. J.R. Foster (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1974), 513.

³⁷Emanuela Guidoboni, *Catalogue of Ancient Earthquake in the Mediterranean Area up to the 10th Century* (Rome: Editrice Compostori sal, 1994), 238.

³⁸The following summary is based upon Charles Behr, *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales* (Amersterdam: Hakkert, 1968), 112 n.68.

³⁹*Prolegomena*, 737 Dindorf. For the annual meetings and sites of the Assembly see David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950) 1:448. Also, see Behr (1968), 63-64, n. 14.

⁴⁰Behr (1968), 63, n. 14.

every fourth year in the cycle. Since there is evidence that the Assembly met in Ephesus in 149 CE and 161 CE, the city should have welcomed the meeting in 165 CE, 169 CE, 173 CE, and 177 CE. In addition, Smyrna appears to have held the Assembly in years following Ephesus.⁴¹ Therefore, if the earthquake occurred while the Assembly met in Ephesus, the most likely date year was 177 CE. Thus, according to Behr's calculations, the meeting in Ephesus took place in 177 CE, and it reconvened the following year in Smyrna while the city was undergoing reconstruction.⁴²

Second, Cassius Dio's text grouped together the return of Marcus to Rome after an eight year hiatus with his relief of Smyrna following the earthquake.⁴³ Since Marcus left the city in 169 CE, an eight year absence makes 177 CE the year of his return. Third, since the *Chronicon* lists the tax relief given to Smyrna as an event of the 239th Olympiad (177-180 CE), Behr concludes this coincides with the year 177 CE.⁴⁴

This earthquake is very important for analyzing the development of imperial disaster relief. The use of tax relief, grants of money, and the appointment of a senator of praetorian rank to oversee reconstruction suggests standard practices had emerged for responding to extreme catastrophes. Furthermore, Aristides describes

⁴¹See Behr (ibid.) for all dates and references.

⁴²See *Or.* 20.2.

⁴³According to Cassius Dio 72.32.1, Marcus Aurelius claimed he had "journeyed for many years" (πολλοῖς ἔτεσιν ἀποδεδημηκῶς ἦν) to which the people shouted in response "eight" (ὀκτώ).

⁴⁴Behr (1968), 112, n. 68.

assistance provided to Smyrna by other Greek cities. This evidence shows local assistance was equally important as imperial aid. Finally, the relationship between Aristides and Marcus Aurelius indicates the sustained importance of Greek elites to the Roman governance of the Greek East. It further reveals that economic aid and political objectives often overlapped.

Volcanic Eruptions

Vesuvius 79 CE:

There is ample literary evidence that a few volcanic eruptions occurred in the Mediterranean between the reigns of Augustus and Marcus Aurelius.⁴⁵ However, only one volcanic eruption is known to have happened during that same span for which there is evidence for disaster assistance. That eruption was the 79 CE Vesuvius eruption that destroyed three small cities and six towns in Campania. Four literary, primary sources detail the extent of the damage caused by the volcanic eruption and the earthquakes that preceded it. Tacitus briefly mentions the destruction in Campania as part of his larger commentary on the disastrous state of the Empire, more broadly, following the death of Nero (d. 69 CE). These times were marked by disasters in Italy including “cities from the most fruitful region of Campania having been consumed or buried” (*haustae aut obrutae urbes, fecundissima Campaniae ora, Hist. 1.2.2*). This reference to cities being buried in Campania is an obvious allusion to the Vesuvius eruption. Unfortunately, whatever

⁴⁵Richard B. Strothers and Michael R. Rampino, “Volcanic eruptions in the Mediterranean before AD 630 from written and archaeological sources,” *Journal of Geophysical Research: Solid Earth* 88, no. B8 (1983): 6364-6368.

else Tacitus might have written about this disaster, the damage it caused, and the measures taken by Titus to assist survivors has not survived.

At Tacitus' request, his friend, Pliny the Younger, wrote two letters (*Ep.* 6.16; 6.20) describing his personal experiences in Misenum, as a teenager, during the eruption. The value of these letters for vivid descriptions of Vesuvius' ash plume, the panic the eruption sparked in Misenum, and the movements of the Elder Pliny, Pliny the Younger's uncle, both in his official capacity as admiral of the imperial navy and in his private pursuit of understanding nature has proven incalculable. But, Pliny gave no hints about the nature of the damage to the cities of the region, local attempts to assist victims and survivors, or the response by the Emperor to revitalize the area once the volcano quieted.

The remaining major literary sources for this disaster are Suetonius (*Tit.* 8.3-4) and Cassius Dio (66.21.1-24.1). Suetonius presented the Vesuvius eruption as one disaster among many Titus faced during his brief tenure as emperor. His account offers no explanation of the damage caused to any building or city in the vicinity of the volcano. The chief contribution Suetonius' version makes is his record of Titus' decision to send men of consular rank, chosen by lot, to oversee the recovery of the region.⁴⁶ Cassius Dio's account of this event resembles much of Suetonius' narrative. His work acknowledges the destruction of Pompeii and Herculenum by the volcanic eruption. He, like Suetonius, also described the efforts by Titus to aid the region so that it might recover.

Literary references to Vesuvius' destruction of Campania in 79 CE or the

⁴⁶Suetonius refers to these appointees as *curatores restituendae* (*Tit.* 8.4).

aftermath thereof can be found in the poems of Martial (d. ca. 104 CE) and Statius (d. 96 CE) as well as in the *Meditations* of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (r. 161-180 CE). Martial's *Epigrammata* (4.44.6) and Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* (4.39) characterize the whole area (Martial) and the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum (Marcus Aurelius) as buried beneath the ash of Vesuvius. Statius (*Silvae* 3.5) offers a unique perspective because he describes a renewed and vibrant civic life in the Bay of Naples despite the fear and destruction the volcanic eruption had previously caused.⁴⁷

In addition to the literary sources, there are four inscriptions that some rebuilding did occur in Campania and credit Titus for the restoration. Reconstruction of unspecified buildings took place in Naples.⁴⁸ The city of Sorrento attributes to Titus the rebuilding of a clock (*horologium*) that had collapsed in an earthquake.⁴⁹ Two additional inscriptions also indicate Titus aided the reconstruction of buildings in Nola and Salerno.⁵⁰

This disaster offers a unique contribution to the study of imperial responses to natural disasters because it provides the only case when a sitting emperor went to tour the damage site. Furthermore, when Titus traveled through the region inspecting the damage, he received word of the outbreak of a major fire in the city of Rome and returned to oversee the efforts in the capital (Cass. Dio 66.24.1). Because

⁴⁷These sources will receive greater attention in chapter 5.

⁴⁸*CIL* 10.1481 = *IG* 14.729 = *IGR* 1.435. See ch. 5.

⁴⁹*AE* 1902, 40.

⁵⁰*AE* 1951, 200 (Salerno); *AE* (1994), 413 (Nola).

he had to leave prematurely, he appointed men to oversee the revitalization of the region (Cass. Dio 66.24.5; Suet. *Tit.* 8.4). Titus also contributed money for the recovery of the area (Cass. Dio 66.24.6). Nevertheless, this disaster demonstrates the political imperative that disasters created. Titus held the imperium for four months, assuming a November eruption, before the disaster occurred. His reputation as well as his legitimacy hung in the balance, and therefore, it was all the more important for the new emperor to be seen assisting the victims of the disaster.

Fires

Caelian Hill 27 CE:

In the year 27 CE, a violent fire (*ignis violentia*) broke out on the Monte Caelio in Rome (Tac. *Ann.* 4.64). Tacitus (*Ann.* 4.64) and Suetonius (*Tib.* 48) are the two most important sources for establishing the damage this fire caused and Tiberius' political motivations for aiding those who suffered from it. Velleius Paterculus also praised Tiberius for helping "all ranks of people" (*omnis ordinis hominum*) after this fire (2.130).

Tacitus and Suetonius describe the destruction generated by this conflagration in different ways. Tacitus chose to emphasize the extent of the damage through the use of a broad expression. He characterized the Caelian Hill as "having been consumed" (*deusto*, *Ann.* 4.64). Notably absent from this description is any reference to specific structures damaged in the fire. Instead, by claiming the entire Caelian Hill was consumed by the fire, Tacitus leaves it to his audience to infer that the incendiary event devastated anything in the path of the flames. The

fire destroyed the entire area.

Suetonius' account, on the other hand, fills in the gaps left unanswered by Tacitus' version of the fire. Suetonius specifies that large buildings (*insularum*) burned down in the fire. The noun *insularum* refers to multiple high rise apartment complexes occupied by the urban poor in Rome since the invention of concrete in the second century BCE.⁵¹

The response by Tiberius to this fire is important for two reasons. First, it reveals how the Emperor elected to aid the victims of this disaster. Consequently, it permits a comparative analysis with the responses of Tiberius and other emperors to catastrophes, of similar and different types, that happened in the provinces. Second, the aid to victims of this disaster allows a glimpse into the importance disaster relief had for Rome's emperors. Political legitimacy and disaster responses were intertwined.⁵²

Aventine Hill 36 CE:

During the consulship of Sextus Papinius and Quintus Plautus, the area of Rome near the Circus Maximus and the Aventine Hill experienced a significant fire.⁵³ There are two literary sources that attest to this event and the subsequent response by Tiberius. The account of Cassius Dio (58.26.5) dates the event to the consulship of S. Papinius and Q. Plautus. Tacitus (6.45) and Cassius Dio both fix

⁵¹John E. Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 168.

⁵²A full discussion of this event and the ramifications of Tiberius' response occurs in chapter 5.

⁵³Tacitus describes this fire as: *gravi igne* (*Ann.* 4.65). Cassius Dio refers to it as "πυρὶ πολὺ" (58.26.5).

the number of sesterces given by Tiberius to the victims of the fire at 100 million.⁵⁴

Information about how this fire began comes from one epigraphical source. The *Fasti Ostiensis* claims the fire originated among the basket-makers (*inter Vitores*) in the region of the Aventine where their shops were located.⁵⁵

Tacitus alone supplies information about the kinds of structures that received damage from this fire. He comments that Tiberius turned this catastrophe to his renown (*quod damnum Caesar ad gloriam vertit*) through paying the value of the homes (*domuum*) and apartment buildings (*insularum*) destroyed in the fire (*Ann.* 6.45). This indicates that people's homes along with the apartment complexes on the Aventine received significant damage and became the focal point of imperial assistance in response to this hazardous event.

Tiberius' reaction to the 36 CE fire differs little from the aid he gave to the victims of the Caelian fire nine years earlier. Yet, such consistency of action suggests that norms for assisting victims of fires had developed. Tiberius clearly understood the political potency that this event had for shaping public perception about his tenure as emperor. The aid he showered upon the victims of this fire reflects the aging Emperor's continued grasp of the political significance of providing disaster relief in Rome. Therefore, this event further illustrates that disaster relief was simultaneously a political and economic event especially in the political environment of the city of Rome.

⁵⁴For the figure of 100 million HS, Tacitus uses the phrase *milies sestertium*. Cassius Dio says “δισχιλίας καὶ πεντοκσίας μυριάδας.”

⁵⁵*Inscriptiones Italiae* 13.1 no. 5.

Great Fire (64 CE):

The most well-known conflagration to ignite the tinderbox that was ancient Rome is the 64 CE fire during the reign of the Emperor Nero (r. 54-68 CE) that razed three of the fourteen city-districts (*regiones*) to the ground (Tac. *Ann.* 15.40). No fewer than eleven sources mention this fire, making it the most well-documented disaster of the early Empire. Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.38-44) provides the most thorough account of the fire's origins, the amount of damage it inflicted upon the people and buildings of Rome, and the measures taken by Nero and private individuals to assist victims and restore the city. Cassius Dio (63.16-18) describes, with much specificity, the conflagration, the ruined structures, and the terror it caused within the city. Suetonius (Nero 31.1; 38) discusses the occasion of the fire and casts suspicion on the Emperor for having his men set the blaze.⁵⁶

⁵⁶Additional literary sources for the fire and the extent of its damage are: Pliny, *HN* 17.1.5; Aurelius Victor, *Lib. De Caes.* 5; Eusebius, *Hieronimi Chronicon* an. 64; Eutropius, *Brev.* 7.14; Statius, *Silvae* 2.7.60-1; Orosius 7.7.4-6; Sulpicius Severus, *Cron.* 2.29; Seneca, *Ep. ad Paul.* 12.

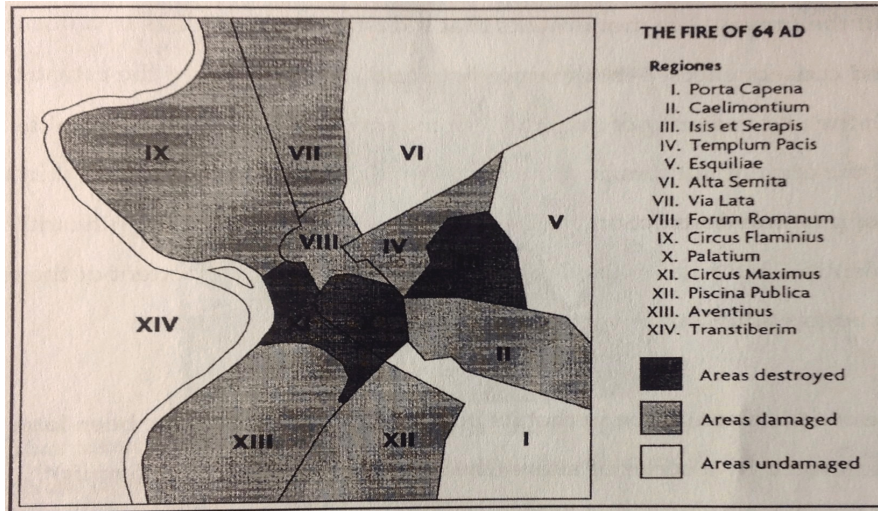


Figure 2: Damaged regions of Rome from the 64 CE fire.
 Printed by permission of Lucas G. Rubin⁵⁷

According to Tacitus, the fire started on July 19 (*Ann.* 15.41) and burned for five continuous days (*Ann.* 15.40).⁵⁸ The blaze began in the area of the Circus Maximus that adjoined the Caelian and Palatine hills (*initium in ea parte circi ortum quae Palatino Caelioque monitibus contigua est*, *Ann.* 15.38). The fire spread quickly from this area of the city because of the combustible combination of shops (*tabernae*) filled with inflammable merchandise, the lack of stone buildings in this *regio*, and a strong wind. Tacitus says the Romans had installed preventative mechanisms (*remedia*) in response to previous fires, but he does not elaborate on what they were. Instead, he says that even they proved unable to retard the advance of the flames, permitting it spread to more areas of the city (*Tac. Ann.* 15.38.2).

⁵⁷Original map is in Rubin (2004), 100.

⁵⁸Suetonius (*Nero*, 38) and Seneca *Ep. ad Paul.* 12 claim the fire lasted for six days. Cassius Dio (62.17.1) uses the more generic phrase “a few days” (ὀλίγας ἡμέρας).

The literary sources give an abnormally detailed list of structures that were damaged by the fire. The pseudepigraphal letters of Seneca addressed to the Christian Apostle Paul claim the blaze destroyed 132 houses (*Centum triginta duae domus*) and four *insulae* over the six days it raged through Rome (*Ep. ad Paul.* 12). Tacitus describes the destruction of three types of structures: private homes, apartment complexes, and temples (*domum et insularum et templum*, *Ann.* 15.41).⁵⁹ He lists five different temples destroyed by the fire: Luna, Altar to Hercules, Jupiter Statoris, Numa, and Vesta (*Ann.* 15.41). The flames also engulfed Nero's palace, and it burned monuments and artifacts that had been captured as spoils of war and publicly displayed to commemorate Roman victories over the Greeks (*Ann.* 15.41).

Both Cassius Dio (68.16-17) and Tacitus portray scenes of chaos and panic among the people of the city. People tried to escape the rapid spread of the flames only to be overrun by others or to be engulfed by the flames. People shouted at one another and tried to gather what possessions they could and flee from the approaching fire.

This disaster is important not only for the damage it caused but also for the response it elicited from the emperor. The 64 CE fire was more than an economic disaster. Nero attempted to help the victims of the disaster by providing shelter and food for the people, and he established new building codes so that new structures would be made of non-flammable stone rather than inflammable wood. It became a

⁵⁹Russell Meiggs provides an excellent discussion of the development of the differentiation between an *insula* and a *domus* in *Roman Ostia*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 237-238.

political event, and the Emperor's response remained shrouded in suspicion.⁶⁰

Floods

The Tiber River routinely overflowed its banks in antiquity, creating logistical nightmares for anyone wishing to navigate their way through the imperial capital. Evidence for the inundations of the Tiber abound in the extant sources. Despite their frequent references to floods in the sources, emperors responded more often to the secondary conditions floods created than to the floods themselves. Floods, like other disasters, generate environments for secondary dangers such as pestilence and food shortages. Consequently, the immediate responses associated with floods usually involve putting additional grain into the market to curb rises in prices or supplying it to the people directly at state expense. Another difficulty they present is limited evidence for them outside of the city of Rome. No example of imperial assistance to a flooded provincial city exists. The following examples illustrate how the sources connected floods with other kinds of hazardous agents to which the emperors of Rome reacted.

Tiber River 54 BCE:

According to Cassius Dio, the Tiber River overflowed its banks and brought significant destruction to the city of Rome in the year 54 BCE. His account of this inundation provides a detailed list of the structures it damaged. The flood caused the bricks in many houses to become soaked with water (διάβροχοί) to the point that they could no longer stand, and they immediately collapsed (κατερράγησαν, 39.61.2).

⁶⁰The suspicion surrounding Nero forms an important part of chapter 5.

Other houses stood for many days, but they too succumbed to the flood and caused people to be injured when they fell (39.61.2). Those who did not try to escape the rapid advance of the waters died either in their homes or in the streets (39.61.2).

Two aspects of this disaster elucidate the evolution of disaster assistance in the Roman world. First, Dio claims the people believed the flood evidenced “the anger of the divinity against them” (ὀργὴν σοφισι τοῦ δαιμονίου) for the restoration of Ptolemy to the Egyptian throne by the governor of Syria, Gabinius (39.61.3). They wanted to execute Gabinius in haste in order to assuage the anger of the gods. Second, it was not the flood itself that became the focal point of relief, but the ancillary effects it caused. The overflow of the Tiber created concern over the food supply in the city and, therefore, threatened to engender a second, more widespread disaster. The evidence for the developing concern over Rome’s food supply comes from the actions of Pompey who was absent from Rome during the Gabinius intrigue because he was securing the supply of grain in the aftermath of the flood. Cassius Dio specifically says, “For Pompey had been away from the city to provide for a supply of corn [grain], since much had been ruined by the river” (ὁ γὰρ Πομπήιος κατὰ τὴν τοῦ σίτου πρόνοιαν, ἐπειδὴ πολὺς ὑπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ διέφθαρτο, Cass. Dio, 39.63.3).⁶¹ Despite the pervasive collapse of houses caused by this deluge, the reconstruction of those structures garnered less concern than the security of Rome’s access to food. Therefore, in this event, we see a republican precedent for a single, powerful individual giving aid to the entire city of Rome following a catastrophe the public associated with an expression of divine anger.

⁶¹trans. Cary.

Tiber River 22 BCE:

In the year Marcus Marcellus and Lucius Arruntius were consuls, the ninth year of the reign of Augustus, Rome experienced a major flood of the Tiber River. Cassius Dio offers the lone account of this event. He claims that the flood happened in conjunction with a pestilence and a famine, thus increasing the difficulty of the Roman people to cope with the situation. Dio gives no recitation of the damage this flood caused to buildings, property, or people. After a brief mention of its occurrence, his attention shifts to the outbreak of a pestilence (νόσου) in Rome, and perhaps throughout the empire and the food shortage (λιμοῦ) these two disasters induced (54.1.1-2.).

Conditions in the capital deteriorated so badly after the flood, pestilence, and famine, the people insisted that Augustus accept the office of dictator (Cass. Dio, 54.1.3). The Emperor refused this role, but he did accept the position of *praefectus annonae*. The most pressing concern became supplying the inhabitants of the city with food and ending the famine. These developments illustrate the problem of ascertaining what disaster assistance following a flood looked like. Augustus did not respond to the flood directly. Instead, he, like Pompey before him, responded to the severe conditions this flood generated for the food supply of the city.

Conclusion

People living in the Roman Empire experienced the terrible effects of a variety of disasters. The kind of disasters that affected them often depended upon where they lived. Nearly all of the known earthquakes during the early Empire happened

in the Greek provinces, especially in Asia Minor and the islands in the eastern Aegean near Asia Minor. The extant sources focus upon floods of the Tiber in Rome more than any other hazard. Fires were also written about with frequency usually because they happened so often in Rome and because they often accompanied earthquake events in the provinces. Volcanic eruptions did not take place with regularity. But when they did, they did not affect the entire Empire. Mt. Aetna in Sicily had a reputation for frequent eruptions, but it created conditions for disaster assistance only once during the Republic. Vesuvius emerged from its dormant state with an extreme eruption in 79 CE, but it produced no subsequent events that demanded the relief of Campania comparable to the time of Titus. No other region of the Empire experienced a volcanic eruption because they did not live in the vicinity of an active volcano.

What will become clear below is that time and distance affected the ways emperors responded to help victims of a catastrophic event. Slow communication and travel time between Rome and the provinces limited the ability of the emperors to give immediate assistance to provincials. Yet, they were able to provide emergency services to people living in Rome during a fire and immediately thereafter. The occasion of a disaster did not predetermine the benefits the emperor bestowed. Cities did not have to request his assistance, and in theory he could refuse to grant it. Nevertheless, giving assistance became part of the routine of the emperor. The story that unfolds in the ensuing chapters attempts to explain what assistance looked like, how it changed over time, and what influences affected its practice.

Chapter 3 The Mentalité of Imperial Relief

Introduction

Severe disasters created paradoxical situations for Roman emperors just like they do for modern politicians. On the one hand, they were political liabilities because ancient people interpreted major disasters as a divine commentary on the quality of the ruler's leadership.¹ On the other hand, since catastrophes drew peoples' attention to the quality of an emperor's rule, they were political opportunities because an emperor could publicly advertise his contributions to the rebuilding efforts of victimized cities.² A noticeable response could settle any disquiet caused by the disaster and strengthen the political standing of an emperor. A negligible response could generate political tensions because doubts would arise about his capacity to manage the affairs of state.

Roman emperors wanted to settle any discontent a disaster might incite whether in Rome or in the provinces. The Greek provinces, particularly in Asia Minor, already had a system of gift exchange that Hellenistic kings and local notables used to diminish internal unrest within their cities. The relationship that developed between the emperors and the cities of the Greek East was based upon

¹The relationship between disasters, the gods, and political legitimacy will be the topic of chapter 5 below.

²Jason P. Davies, *Rome's Religious History: Livy, Tacitus, and Ammianus on Their Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 163-164. Modern analogs can be seen in the media reactions to the response of the Bush administration to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. See Jonathan S. Tobin, "George W. Bush" *Commentary Magazine*, November 15, 2013.

this system which is now called euergetism. The remainder of this chapter will focus on defining euergetism and outlining how it was used following occurrences of natural disasters.

Euergetism Defined

Euergetism is a term of recent origin first introduced into the scholarship of the Ancient Mediterranean world by André Boulanger in his 1923 study of Aelius Aristides titled *Aelius Aristide et la sophistique dans la province d'Asie en IIe siècle de notre ère*. The most influential exposition of euergetism and its function within Greco-Roman society is Paul Veyne's magisterial *Le Pain et Le Cirque (Bread and Circuses)* published in 1976. In this study, Veyne offered his now famous definition of euergetism as "private liberality for public benefit."³ A person who engages in the euergetic act is called a εὐεργέτης, a Greek noun often translated into English by its Latin equivalent, benefactor. The benefactions bestowed by a εὐεργέτης are designated as εὐεργεσία.⁴ The Greeks, especially the Athenians, practiced euergetism prior to the Hellenistic period, but the transformation of the Mediterranean society and politics after the death of Alexander prompted its more pervasive use.

In actual practice, euergetism refers to a system of gift exchange wherein kings and wealthy elites used their personal fortunes for the benefit of other

³Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses*, trans. Brian Pearce (New York: Penguin Press, 1990), 10.

⁴The Latin noun equivalent is *liberalitas*.

individuals or, more commonly, their local, civic society in exchange for honor and recognition from the community.⁵ A. Zuiderhoek argues that both the gift and its corresponding commemoration completed an act of euergetism.⁶ Thus, civic euergetism consisted of two equally important components. On the one hand the benefactor made a substantial contribution to the improvement of civic life for all the citizens of his, or even her, *polis*. The benefactions ranged from the construction of major civic structures such as temples, stoa, or gymnasia to the supply of grain during times of scarcity. Euergetic acts also included the beautification or restoration of civic buildings, but they were not limited to large scale construction projects. Volunteering to serve as an embassy or to perform civic offices at his own expense constituted additional forms of euergetism for a Hellenistic notable.⁸

On the other hand, the beneficiaries of the gifts, especially cities, honored their benefactors by permanently commemorating their munificence usually by means of honorific inscriptions, statues, or titles. Permanent recognition partly motivated the notables to perform euergetic acts, and public acknowledgment of their gifts through ceremonies and public monuments affirmed the reception of the gift by a grateful civic community.⁹ These acts of reciprocity, therefore, equaled the

⁵Zuiderhoek refers to this latter, more common variety as “civic euergetism.” See Arjan Zuiderhoek, *The Politics of Munificence in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 6.

⁶Zuiderhoek (2009), 11.

⁸Sviatoslav Dmitriev suggests this was a pre-Roman development in the Greek world, especially among the cities of Asia. See Sviatoslav Dmitriev, *City Government in the Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 153.

⁹Zuiderhoek (2009), 7. Public dedication ceremonies often occurred.

benefaction in importance within this system of exchange.

The Purpose of Euergetism

Veyne saw euergetism as a “union of three ‘themes’ - patronage; the more or less symbolic largesses that politicians confer out of their own pockets by virtue of their office (*ob honorem*); and funerary liberalities and foundations.”¹⁰ The generosity displayed by a city patron occurred in order to “perpetuate his glory in a building, public inscriptions (*epidoseis*) and public promises of largesses.”¹¹ Kings also built buildings for cities and their subjects to gain legitimacy and to draw international attention to themselves.¹²

Besides giving for the sake of recognition, Veyne believed Hellenistic kings contributed grain, monuments, and money in order to maintain existing political relationships, display their greatness, and reinforce local dependancy on them.¹³ He flatly rejected that euergetism occurred because it was a form of tax or a means of maintaining political equilibrium within economically unbalanced city-states. In his view, its purpose was something “external to the social problems of the Hellenistic epoch.”¹⁴ Instead, through euergetic acts, local elites and Hellenistic monarchs, though acting as public servants, demonstrated their superiority to the common individual and therefore reinforced their right to control the political offices of their

¹⁰Veyne (1990), 85.

¹¹Veyne (1990), 85.

¹²Veyne (1990), 85.

¹³Veyne (1990), 102.

¹⁴Veyne (1990), 94.

city-states.¹⁵

While Veyne's views remain standard regarding the royal use of euergetism to enhance legitimacy, his interpretation of its function within Greek city-states has undergone modification. The new consensus is that euergetism served to create balance within *poleis* and increasingly did so as income disparity grew between elites and non-elites.¹⁶ Such inequality had the potential to disrupt the unity (*homonoia*) of the polis. As the discussion in the next section demonstrates, euergetism and the rise of ruler cults reflected the need to find an equilibrium between kings and elites and their non-elite counterparts. Each side made concessions in exchange for stable societies.

Euergetism in Hellenistic Politics

The death of Alexander in June, 323 BCE marked the beginning of the political, social, and economic transformation of the Greek world into its Hellenistic successor. His abrupt death prompted a political crisis within the Macedonian Empire that left in its wake the establishment of monarchy as the primary mode of governance among the Greeks. When he died, Alexander had a young son named Heracles, born of a Persian woman named Barsine, whom he refused to acknowledge as his legitimate child.¹⁷ His wife Roxane was also pregnant and would later give birth to a son, Alexander. In the absence of a clear successor, his untimely demise

¹⁵Veyne (1990), 121-124.

¹⁶See Zuiderhoek (2009), 53-70; For achieving "equilibrium" in the Hellenistic polis, see Ma (2005), 186.

¹⁷R. Malcolm Errington, *A History of the Hellenistic World 323-30 BC* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 14-15.

created a power vacuum within the Macedonian state, and it remained to his generals, officers, and army to resolve this political problem. These men tried to divide authority among themselves in a way that would placate the soldiers and, more importantly, maintain the unity of the empire.¹⁸ The system produced the key political development of the Hellenistic period, namely, the formation of independent kingdoms ruled by dynastic monarchs.¹⁹

The predominance of kingship represented a transition for the Mediterranean world in two important ways. For the Greeks, it represented a significant departure from the political philosophy of 5th century BCE Greeks who associated it with barbarian states and the more socially backward places in Hellas.²⁰ For the people of Asia and the ancient Near East, a new system of rival monarchs supplanted the Persians' single Mediterranean state, disrupted the stability and tranquility of the region, and imposed a new social hierarchy that required the kings to cultivate an equipoise with their subjects and allies in light of growing political and economic disparity.²¹

One of the social trends of the Hellenistic period was the division between

¹⁸Errington (2008), 15.

¹⁹F.W. Walbank, *The Hellenistic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 49. See also John Ma, "Kings," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 179.

²⁰Walbank, F. W., "Monarchies and monarchic Ideas", *CAH*². Vol. 7. Cambridge: 1984, 62. Sparta, considered socially backward by 5th century BCE Greeks, maintained its antiquated system of dual kingship despite the fact its power waned over time. See Paul Cartledge, *The Spartans* (New York: Vintage, 2002), 65.

²¹For the correlation between Hellenistic kingship and warfare, see John Ma, *Antiochus III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 108-121.

Greek ruling elites, who were in the minority, and the more numerous local populations.²² These populations had their own political, legal, and religious traditions that had long been established before the emergence of their Hellenistic suzerains. The Ptolemies, for example, controlled an Egyptian population where modes of interaction between ruler and subject already existed. Seleucid rule in Syria faced similar local traditions. In order to legitimize their rule and preserve their power, Hellenistic dynasts often acclimated their regimes to the norms of those under their hegemony.²³

The interaction between Hellenistic kings and the localities they ruled led to three important developments. On the one hand, kings established relationships with the cities of the Mediterranean Basin by assuming the role of protector and caretaker of the people. This protection was “from the vicissitudes of this life” which included such things as warfare, famines, earthquakes, or other local needs.²⁴ Benefactions from the kings became their avenue for legitimation with local populations. Hellenistic rulers also assumed certain commitments negotiated by the cities, and this “collaboration process reflects the kings’ need for legitimacy, and for acceptance by the local communities.”²⁵

²²Walbank (1992), 125.

²³Price holds a different view claiming “Civic traditions provided no ready-made position for the king.” It should be noted, however, that he seems to have in mind Greek civic traditions rather than the traditions among non-Greeks. See S.R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 28.

²⁴Antonia Tripolitis, *Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 16.

²⁵Ma (2005), 182.

On the other hand, to negotiate these royal euergetic acts, the “citizen-interceder” arose. Local elites helped their cities by petitioning the kings to engage in munificent acts that benefitted their fellow citizens. The benefits they tried to secure were things like tax exemptions, money grants, or gifts of grain.²⁶

Finally, the kings’ power to protect the cities under their hegemony led to the development of the ruler cult. A. Chaniotis argues that inscriptions relevant to understanding the rise of the civic ruler cults “suggest that royal cult was an instrument used by the *poleis* in order to establish a close relationship with a monarch and directly express their gratitude for past and their expectation of future benefactions.”²⁷ The formation of ruler cults, therefore, was not ancillary to the practice of euergetism. Instead, it was an integral part of its development and political use.

Ruler cult refers to the practice of honoring a ruler as a god while he lives. While there were local variations on this practice, it seems to have had some common elements. Cities erected local temples in honor of the ruler. Statues, a priesthood, sacrifices and offerings, and festivals were all dedicated to the ruler kings. Price argues the development of ruler cults in the Greek world suggests “that the cities established cults as an attempt to come to terms with a new type of power.”²⁸ The Greeks had never before had to confront the prospect of monarchical

²⁶For the work of the “citizen-interceder,” see Ma (2005), 181-182.

²⁷Angelos Chaniotis, “The Divinity of Hellenistic Rulers,” in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*, ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 440. For a slightly different perspective on the formation of these cults see Price (1984), 23-29.

²⁸Price (1984), 29.

power external the existence of their city-states. The political transitions following the death of Alexander the Great created the need for a new way of interacting with a novel form of power. According to Price, the Greeks developed the practice of honoring the ruler as a god as a means of “the giving of thanks to benefactors.”²⁹ Consequently, Chaniotis’ observation about the close correlation between the practice of euergetism and formation of ruler cults correctly assesses how intertwined these two practices were for the Greeks of Hellenistic and Roman periods.

In exchange for the benefactions of the kings, the cities bestowed upon them honorary titles that reflected their power to protect and create. The most common epithet reserved for protector kings was *soter* (σωτήρ) or “savior.” This term connotes a “deliverer, preserver, protector from all ills, healer, or guide.”³⁰ This honorary title was reserved for kings and local benefactors “who had improved a situation or had prevented a perilous one.”³¹ Often kings who founded cities or who gave benefactions after natural disasters were worshiped locally as “founders” (κρίστης).

These developments coincided with other important transformations in the Hellenistic world. Inter-city collaboration and contact grew beyond anything that had previously existed among the Greeks. The armed conflicts of past centuries gave way to rivalries for honors based upon alliances with kings and ties to ruler cults. A common civic culture that now had uniform institutions and norms arose

²⁹Price (1984), 51.

³⁰Tripolitis (2002), 16.

³¹Tripolitis (2002), 16.

among the cities that transcended continents . The use of *koine* Greek triumphed over the traditional dialects (Aeolic, Ionic, Doric) making possible the common political language that would appear in the correspondence between the cities and be expressed on commemorative inscriptions.³²

The Example of Rhodes

The earthquake that struck the island of Rhodes in 227 BCE illustrates how all of these transformations worked to bring aid to the victims in the aftermath of the disaster. The response to this earthquake also shows the presence of all the basic processes that would become staples of disaster relief throughout the period of the early Roman Empire. This paradigm of sending embassies for aid dated, at least, to the Rhodian earthquake of 227 BCE. During the Hellenistic period, Greek cities became accustomed to sending citizens to present their interests to kings and civic assemblies. The process by which the Rhodians obtained help from Hellenistic kings and other Greek *poleis* follows those precedents and provides a model for understanding how Greek cities petitioned for disaster assistance through the Roman period . Polybius records the aid given to Rhodes as follows:

‘Ρόδιοι δὲ κατὰ τοὺς προειρημένους καιροὺς ἐπειλημμένοι τῆς ἀφορμῆς τῆς κατὰ τὸν σεισμόν τὸν γινόμενον παρ’ αὐτοῖς βραχεῖ χρόνῳ πρότερον, ἐν ᾧ συνέβη τὸν τε κολοσσὸν τὸν μέγαν πεσεῖν καὶ τὰ πλείστα τῶν τειχῶν καὶ τῶν νεωρίων, [2] οὕτως ἐχείριζον νουνεχῶς καὶ πραγματικῶς τὸ γεγονός ὡς μὴ βλάβης, διορθώσεως δὲ μᾶλλον, αὐτοῖς αἴτιον γενέσθαι τὸ σύμπτωμα. [3] τοσοῦτον ἄγνοια καὶ ῥαθυμία διαφέρει παρ’ ἀνθρώποις ἐπιμελείας καὶ φρονήσεως περί τε τοὺς κατ’ ἰδίαν βίους καὶ τὰς

³²Richard Billows, “Cities,” in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*, ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 196-197.

κοινὰς πολιτείας, ὥστε τοῖς μὲν καὶ τὰς ἐπιτυχίας βλάβην ἐπιφέρειν, τοῖς δὲ καὶ τὰς περιπετείας ἐπανορθώσεως γίνεσθαι παραιτίας. [4] οἱ γοῦν ὅδιοι τότε παρὰ τὸν χειρισμὸν τὸ μὲν σύμπτωμα ποιοῦντες μέγα καὶ δεινόν, αὐτοὶ δὲ σεμνῶς καὶ προστατικῶς κατὰ τὰς πρεσβείας χρώμενοι ταῖς ἐντεύξεσι καὶ ταῖς κατὰ μέρος ὁμιλίαις, εἰς τοῦτ' ἤγαγον τὰς πόλεις, καὶ μάλιστα τοὺς βασιλεῖς, ὥστε μὴ μόνον λαμβάνειν δωρεὰς ὑπερβαλλούσας, ἀλλὰ καὶ χάριν προσοφείλειν αὐτοῖς τοὺς δίδοντας. (Polyb. 5.88).

At about the same time the Rhodians, seizing the occasion presented by the earthquake which had taken place shortly before and in which the great Colossus and the larger part of the walls and dockyards collapsed, used the incident in such a skilful [sic] and practical way that the disaster became a source of advantage to them rather than of damage [...] Rhodian diplomacy enhanced the magnitude and importance of the disaster, while their envoys conducted themselves with dignity and seriousness in public audiences and private meetings. In this way they made such an impression on the cities, and especially the kings, that not only did they receive presents beyond measure but they even made the donors feel under obligation to them.³³

The primary purpose of Polybius' account was to laud the wisdom of the citizens of Rhodes for converting a calamitous event that did great damage to the civic and economic life of their *polis* into a boon . But, it is the process he describes that is most relevant. In order to procure aid, the Rhodians sent embassies into the cities and kingdoms of the Hellenistic world where they engaged in public and

³³Translation in M.M. Austin, *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest: A Selection of Ancient Sources in Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 163.

private communications (ταῖς ἐντεύξεσι καὶ ταῖς κατὰ μέρος ὁμιλίαις) regarding the nature of the extreme event and the post-disaster state of their city (5.88.4) In these discussions, they manipulated (τὸν χειρισμὸν)³⁴ their audiences by conflating the size and severity (μέγα καὶ δεινόν) of the unfortunate event (τὸ σύμπτωμα) so they could garner great sympathy from their fellow Greeks and receive lavish gifts (5.88.4). They succeeded to such a degree that Polybius claims the kings and cities considered it a privilege (χάριν)³⁵ to have the opportunity to assist the Rhodians in their time of need (5.88.4).

Polybius' account is also noteworthy because his language implies the Rhodians intentionally stressed the damage the earthquake caused to their city so they might obtain greater benefits (55.8.2). Examples of disaster assistance in the literary sources for the early Roman Empire suggest that this remained a common practice for Greek embassies when they petitioned Rome for help. Tacitus' account of Tiberius' assistance for the cities of Asia specifically associates imperial sympathy with the degree of Sardis' suffering. Tacitus observed "the calamity, being harshest in Sardis, attracted for them most of the sympathy" (*asperrima in Sardonios lues plurimum in eosdem misericordiae traxit*, 2.47.2). The cities of Asia Minor were extremely competitive with one another for imperial benefits and honors. When given an imperial audience, they often recounted their city's antiquity and record of

³⁴The phrase τὸν χειρισμὸν can refer to the manipulation of information. See *LSJ*, 1720.

³⁵The literal sense of Polybius' words suggests the kings and cities thought they were "owed a gift" (χάριν προσοφείλειν) by being able to assist the Rhodians.

loyalty to Rome to distinguish themselves from other cities.³⁶ The Rhodian example and Tacitus' hierarchy of cities imply the embassies dramatized the extent of their city's damage in order to procure the largest amount of aid from the emperors.

Disasters created a new basis for competition among the cities, namely, being rebuilt by the Roman emperor (Aristid. *Or.* 20.5). The nature of Greek petitions for aid changed little over time. They used the same methods on new rulers.

Indeed, Polybius later lauds the actions of the Rhodians following the earthquake, saying "they are worthy of praise and emulation" (ἐπαίνου γὰρ εἰσιν ἄξιοι καὶ ζήλου, 5.90.5). He also makes a comparison between the paltry gifts kings offered to cities in his own time and the lavish liberalities bestowed by Hellenistic kings upon Rhodes. This latter observation suggests Polybius thought that the interaction methods employed by the Rhodian ambassadors to secure their city's aid and the competition among the cities and kings to aid the Rhodians functioned as a disaster relief model for his own time. In reality, it most likely establishes a baseline for understanding how Greek cities secured relief whether from Hellenistic kings or Roman emperors. Much of the process remained static in the midst of a Mediterranean world that experienced dynamic political changes.

Polybius' impressive list of the gifts showered upon the Rhodians by Greek kings helps to elucidate why later Greek cities expected their Roman sovereigns to contribute to their rehabilitation. The relief narrative gives a tally of nine kings who provided economic and rebuilding assistance to the people of Rhodes. He says the

³⁶Especially noteworthy are the series of orations to house the imperial cult in Tac. *Ann.* 4.55-56.

rulers of Syracuse, Hiero and Gelo:

ἔδωκαν ἑβδομήκοντα καὶ πέντ' ἀργυρίου τάλαντα
 πρὸς τὴν εἰς τὸ ἔλαιον τοῖς ἐν τῷ γυμνασίῳ
 χορηγίαν, τὰ μὲν παραχρῆμα, τὰ δ' ἐν χρόνῳ βραχεῖ
 παντελῶς, ἀλλὰ καὶ λέβητας ἀργυρούς καὶ βάσεις
 τούτων καὶ τινὰς ὑδρίας ἀνέθεσαν, [6] πρὸς δὲ
 τούτοις εἰς τὰς θυσίας δέκα τάλαντα καὶ τὴν
 ἐπαύξησιν τῶν πολιτῶν ἄλλα δέκα, χάριν τοῦ τὴν
 πᾶσαν εἰς ἑκατὸν τάλαντα γενέσθαι δωρεάν. [7] καὶ
 μὴν ἀτέλειαν τοῖς πρὸς αὐτοὺς πλοῖζομένοις ἔδοσαν
 καὶ πεντήκοντα καταπέλτας τριπήχεις. [8] καὶ
 τελευταῖον τοσαῦτα δόντες, ὡς προσοφείλοντες
 χάριν, ἔστησαν ἀνδριάντας ἐν τῷ τῶν Ῥοδίων
 δεῖγματι, στεφανούμενον τὸν δῆμον τῶν Ῥοδίων
 ὑπὸ τοῦ δήμου τοῦ Συρακοσίων (5.88.5-8).

gave them 75 talents of silver [for the rebuilding of the walls? and] for the provision of oil in the gymnasia, part at once and the rest very shortly after. They dedicated in addition silver cauldrons with their stands, and some water vessels, and added to this (a sum of) ten talents for sacrifices and another ten for the enrichment of the citizens, with the intention that their present should add up to 100 talents. They granted furthermore exemption to Rhodians sailing to their ports and presented Rhodes with 50 three-cubit catapults. After making all these presents they still regarded themselves as under obligation and set up statues in the Exchange at Rhodes showing the people of Rhodes being crowned by the people of Syracuse (trans. Austin).

This sample of gifts ranges from money to apply to the rebuilding of collapsed walls to utensils needed to reinitiate worship in the city's temples. The Rhodians also received ten talents to assist the citizens individually, and they obtained special exemptions designed to lessen the economic burdens upon their merchants. In 195 BCE, Iasus in Caria benefitted from similar assistance at the hands of Queen

Laodice. She contributed 1,000 Attic medimni of grain to the city for ten years in order to assist its recovery following an earthquake in 195 BCE.³⁷

Euergetism and Rome

These norms became crucial not only for cultivating the relationship between the Roman emperors and the Greek speaking cities of Asia Minor, but also for politics in Rome. By the Late Republic, the Roman state had begun to rely on wealthy benefactors to secure the grain supply, construct buildings, or help with disaster recovery.³⁸ Thus, before an emperor ruled the Empire in a manner resembling a monarch, the Romans had incorporated Hellenistic euergetism for the management of crises. The precedents established by elite benefactors of the Late Republic remained the norms after Augustus reconstituted the state. Consequently, the lasting influence of Greek euergetism both in the Greek speaking provinces and in the imperial capital meant that Augustus could project his power in the provinces and in Rome through euergetic actions, especially after natural catastrophes. In Rome, one of the Late Republican benefactors that provided a model for Augustus to follow later was Pompey. His response to the 54 BCE flood in Rome shows him using his power over the grain supply to project his influence in the city.

The Flood of 54 BCE

The precedents for imperial emergency relief in the city of Rome were

³⁷Austin (1998), 261; *SEG* 26.1226.

³⁸Peter Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 84-85.

established by the *imperatores* of the Late Republic. In 54 BCE, the Tiber inundated the nearby neighborhoods “saturating” (διάβροχοί) brick homes and causing them to “collapse” (κατερράγησαν, Cass. Dio, 39.61.2). Those who either refused or were unable to escape from the advance of the waters died in the deluge (Cass. Dio, 39.61.2). Three years before this terrible event, Pompeius Magnus had received charge of the grain supply for the city and used this position as a pretext to remain in Rome enabling him to secure control (κατάσχη) over affairs there (τὰ ἐν τῇ Ρώμῃ) and throughout the rest of Italy (τῇ τε ἄλλῃ Ἰταλίᾳ, Cass. Dio, 39.39.4). Since he retained responsibility for Rome’s grain reservoirs in 54 BCE, he acted to help the people of the city when the flood disrupted the flow of grain and destroyed much of the existing supplies (πολὺς ὑπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ διέφθαρτο, Cass. Dio, 39.63.3). Cassius Dio claims Pompey was absent from Rome during the contentious trial of Gabinius, the former governor of Syria, who had restored Ptolemy to the throne of Egypt in 55 BCE, because he was trying “to care for the supply of grain” (κατὰ τὴν τοῦ σίτου πρόνοιαν, 39.63.3).

Pompey’s attempt to ensure the availability of grain following the flood suggests that he recognized the basic correlation between flood damage and people’s access to adequate, affordable food. He also realized that the Romans expected a man of his political stature to respond to the disaster for the public’s benefit. Thus, the management of a flood crisis became a political opportunity for magnates like Pompey to solidify power and advance a personal agenda. This would remain the norm for the politics of emergency management throughout the early Empire.

Mutual Motivations for Disaster Assistance

The Roman Empire amounted to a network of important cities that had financial obligations to the emperors and to the imperial treasuries. In order to ensure peace in the provinces emperors nurtured their relations with Greek elites and the eastern cities through giving benefactions. Conversely, the Greek cities treated their new Roman overlords in the same manner they had their previous rulers. Consequently, the establishment of the imperial cult for living Roman emperors became vital to the interactions between provincial cities and the political center.

Roman emperors did not shower their bounty on all cities. Instead, accessing the euergetic benevolence of the emperors required the status necessary to gain an imperial audience. Thus, the Greek cities received assistance if they could demonstrate a history of loyalty and help to Rome, their economic and administrative importance to Roman rule, or their veneration for the imperial cult.

Each side had its own interests for working within this system. Roman emperors wanted to maintain stability in the empire, and sometimes they needed to respond to a disaster for the benefit of their political image.³⁹ These objectives made the system of exchange vital for accomplishing imperial interests.

The Greek cities had at least two main reasons to send envoys to petition the emperors especially after catastrophic events. First, the rivalries between the cities had become competitions for Rome's esteem.⁴⁰ Consequently, securing imperial assistance following a natural disaster would allow a city to advertize the emperor

³⁹This will be the topic of chapter 5.

⁴⁰Ando (2000), 132.

as its savior or founder, thus enhancing its reputation. Second, because of the geology of western Asia Minor, earthquakes often damaged or destroyed one or more civic buildings the Greeks believed integral for a real civic life.

Pausanias (fl. 150 CE), the periegete from Magnesia ad Sipylum, provides a glimpse into the significance of certain buildings for Greek civic ideology. He once questioned whether anyone could call the Phocian city (πόλις) Panopeus, located some 20 stades from Chaeroneia, a true *polis* because it did not have a magistracy (ἀρχεῖα), a gymnasium (γυμνάσιον), a theater (θέατρον), an agora, nor water descending into a fountain (ὔδωρ κατερχόμενον ἐς κρήνην, *Description of Greece*,

10.4.1). To this ancient commentary, A.H.M. Jones added:

Of the buildings which every self-respecting city had to possess many have already been mentioned--colonnaded streets and market squares, aqueducts and fountains, temples, gymnasia, baths, a stadium, a hippodrome, a theatre, an odeum. To these may be added buildings to house the various administrative services--the offices of the several boards of magistrates, the record office, the treasury, and the council chamber.⁴¹

These building types like gymnasia or temples were quite large and required expensive foundations to rebuild, and it was these costly structures that Greek cities often depended upon benefactors to fund for them.⁴² A recent reevaluation of the *polis* in the Hellenistic and Roman periods by M. Hansen indicates that Greek city-states experienced a number of important transitions. Hansen says, “more and more

⁴¹A. H. M. Jones, *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 236. See also Zuiderhoek (2009), 80.

⁴²Zuiderhoek (2009), 80.

cities were built, or restored, on the grid plan.”⁴³ The peace that accompanied Roman suzerainty over the Mediterranean made the construction or rebuilding of walls unnecessary. Buildings, theaters, stoa, and gymnasia became much more monumental in nature, and the cities no longer built their important temples exclusively on the *acropolis*, but spread them among the areas of the city where people lived.⁴⁴

For the Greek cities, restoration meant the recuperation of these structures so they could once again be worthy of being called a *polis* and resume a respectable Greek civic life. Thus, they eagerly sought imperial assistance because the emperors had the financial resources to build the foundations they needed. So, they worked within the existing system of *euergetism* and commemorated emperors as their founders in exchange for the revival of their *polis* life.

Conversely, because of the broader transitions taking place in the character of the Greek *poleis*, funding reconstruction after disasters gave Roman emperors an opportunity to remake Greek cities in a Roman style while leaving monuments to themselves in the form of traditional Greek civic buildings. Hence, through demonstrations of liberality, the emperors could erect permanent monuments to their memory that would outlast their own mortality.⁴⁵

The transition to Roman suzerainty over the Mediterranean brought little change to the practice of *euergetism* within the cities of the Greek world . The

⁴³Mogens Herman Hansen, *Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 133.

⁴⁴Hansen (2006), 133.

⁴⁵Mitchell (1987), 334.

Romans understood a system wherein wealthy elites entered into a system of reciprocal exchange with those who were not their equals. Thus because of the similarities between the two systems, the Greek cities, especially in Asia Minor, transitioned with little difficulty to having Rome as their overlords. Roman domination merely “shifted the standards by which power and esteem were measured.”⁴⁶ Euergetism was the basis of the relationship between Rome’s emperors and the cities of Asia and manifested itself in the invention of the imperial cult, the application of the honorary titles “savior” and “founder” to emperors for their benefactions for construction projects regardless of whether there had been a disaster, and through an intense competition for imperial privileges.

The Origins of Imperial Assistance in Asia

The evolution of the practice of disaster relief in the early Empire coincides with the establishment of the imperial office and with the development of the modes of interaction between the emperor and his subjects. The formation of these processes began with the accession of Octavius (b. 63 BCE) to the *imperium* following his victory over Antony at Actium in 31 BCE. How he and his successors expressed their power and legitimized their rule reflected the long term political and social changes that took place in the Mediterranean world after the death of Alexander the Great (d. 323 BCE). The model for how emperors responded to requests for disaster assistance has its roots in the practice of euergetism that Hellenistic kings employed to generate fealty and goodwill with their subjects as the Greek world experienced greater political and economic disparity.

⁴⁶Ando (2000), 133.

The cities of the province of Asia were of vital political and economic interest for Rome's administration of the Eastern Mediterranean. Rome had officially incorporated Asia as a Roman province in 133 BCE upon the death of King Attalus III of Pergamum who had bequeathed it to the Roman state.⁴⁷ Because of its established trade routes and natural resources, the province quickly emerged as a desired destination for exploitation by provincial governors and merchants. At the conclusion of the Republic, the province suffered greatly because of political and financial abuse exacerbated by an onerous system of taxation.⁴⁸ Following his victory over Pompey at Pharsalus in August, 48 BCE, Caesar reduced the tax liabilities of Asia by one-third, and he reformed the method of tax collection by eliminating the use of tax-farming corporations. Now, the cities collected direct taxes on a communal basis and paid them to the provincial quaestor.⁴⁹ The combination of peace and this new, stable tax policy facilitated the economic and civic life of the cities of Asia Minor.⁵⁰

In the aftermath of the civil war between Octavian and Antony (42-31 BCE), Asia Minor once again stood in need of economic and civic revitalization. Augustus made the province, although technically under the Senate's administration, the center-piece of his Eastern policy. Its economic recovery, therefore, became integral

⁴⁷Anthony Macro, "The Cities of Asia Minor under the Roman Imperium," in *ANRW*, vol. 2 no. 7 (1972), 663.

⁴⁸Macro (1972), 667.

⁴⁹Magie (1950), 405-406; See also Macro (1972), 667.

⁵⁰Macro (1972), 668.

to the overall success of the Empire.⁵¹ Thus, he not only cultivated a close relationship with the elites of the cities of Asia, but he also invested large sums of money in order to reinvigorate the economies of the province's major cities.⁵²

Augustus used benefactions and a nexus of personal relationships in order to create a new equilibrium between wealthy elites in Asia and the Roman emperor. As a consequence of this relationship, the cities of Asia began to send embassies to the emperor to make formal petitions while the emperor granted privileges and immunities to those cities or regions who acquiesced to his power.⁴⁰

It was the creation of this new equipoise between the center and the periphery of the Roman Empire that formed the backdrop of imperial disaster relief because it opened the channel of communication Roman emperors would need to give aid to those cities or entire provinces that were affected by catastrophic events. Disaster assistance in the Greek cities took place because the Romans adapted the preexisting system of euergetism to allow for elites to acknowledge Roman hierarchy and simultaneously remain loyal citizens of their *poleis*.

City Status and Disaster Relief

Roman emperors wished to maintain the political and economic stability of the Empire, and central to that purpose was insuring the vitality of the cities in Asia who supplied much money to the imperial treasuries in the form of taxes.

⁵¹Macro (1972), 660.

⁵²T.R.S. Broughton, "Roman Asia Minor," *ESAR* ed. Tenney Frank (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1938), 711.

⁴⁰George W. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 87.

Conversely, the cities wanted to surpass one another in prestige and importance to the emperors thereby increasing their access to power and money. Assize and neocorate cities were integral components to Roman provincial administration and the maintenance of the imperial cult. Thus, it is no accident that cities benefitting from the euergetic acts of the emperors after disasters usually fit into one or both of these categories.

Assize Cities

One important way provincial administration and urban economic vitality converged was through the selection of assize districts.⁴¹ Assize districts refer to select cities where the provincial governor would hold court to hear cases, administer justice, and inspect local civic affairs.⁴² The evidence for the assize districts and the dispensing of proconsular justice is much better for the period after the reign of Vespasian when the *conventus* districts became fixed.⁴³ Nevertheless, Burton has shown that although minor alterations occurred over time, the *conventus* system in Asia formed unusually early and remained relatively constant from the late Republic to the Flavian dynasty.⁴⁴ Before the end of the Republic's final century, the Romans created a circuit of *conventus* districts within the provinces of Asia and Africa, and the governors spent much of their annual tenure making this administrative tour.

⁴¹The Latin term is *conventus*.

⁴²The standard study on assizes and provincial governors remains G.P. Burton, "Proconsuls and the Administration of Justice under the Empire," *JRS* 65 (1975): 92-106.

⁴³Burton (1975), 99.

⁴⁴Burton (1975), 92.

Besides their importance for the direct administration of the province by the Roman governor, the assize districts were significant for two additional reasons.

First, it was an honor for a city to be given the headship of an assize.⁴⁵ In light of the constant rivalry between the cities of the Greek East, having this honor bestowed upon them was highly coveted. Second, heading a *conventus* brought with it the expectation of stimulus for the a city's economy. In a speech to the citizens of Celaenae in Phrygia, Dio Chrysostom (d. 112 CE), recounted the economic boost that occurred in their city whenever the annual (παρ' ἔτος) court was held. He declared, "so then, those having marketable goods are paid the highest value and nothing in the city is idle" (ὥστε τά τε ὄνια τοὺς ἔχοντας πλείστης ἀποδίδοσθαι τιμῆς καὶ μηδὲν ἀργὸν εἶναι τῆς πόλεως, *Or.* 35.15).⁴⁶ He went on to observe that "this is no small thing toward economic success. For, wherever a large crowd of people might gather, there becomes, out of necessity, a large amount of money" (τοῦτο δὲ οὐ μικρὸν ἐστὶ πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν. ὅπου γὰρ ἂν πλείστος ὄχλος ἀνθρώπων ξυνήη, πλείστον ἀργύριον ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐκεῖ γίγνεται, *Or.* 35.15-16).

Dio's oration reflects the correlation between the presence of the provincial governor and the increase in economic activity it spurred. This rise in merchandising and consumption had a long term effect upon the local economy because the governor's arrival increased the number of animals as well as

⁴⁵Macro (1972), 671.

⁴⁶The economic boon was probably not limited to the biennial arrival of the provincial governors. See Simon Swain, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World, AD 50-250* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 228.

individuals into the *conventus* districts. Consequently, local farmers benefitted from greater fertilization of their fields (*Or.* 35.16). Thus, the honor of hosting an assize resulted in the expansion of local economies and promoted the vitality of the major urban centers through which Rome administered the province of Asia.

Among the twelve prominent cities severely damaged by the 17 CE earthquake, Sardis alone had the honorable distinction of being an assize center.⁴⁷ Because of its administrative importance Tiberius would have taken an interest in its restoration even if it had not suffered the greatest degree of damage from the earthquake. Six years later, when the city of Cibyra in Phrygia suffered from an earthquake, Tiberius granted the city a three year remission of its taxes (*Tac. Ann.* 4.13.1). Cibyra, like Sardis, either had already received the honor of being an assize-center, or it was growing so important economically and politically that it soon would be given this benefit.⁴⁸ Thus, the two examples of earthquake assistance for Asia during the reign of Tiberius indicate a concern for cities whose restoration was in Rome's strategic interest.

Neokoroi

Another signal honor for the cities was to be awarded a neocorate. "Cities of Hellenic culture in some eastern provinces of the Roman empire called themselves

⁴⁷For Sardis as a *conventus* city from the late Republic through the reign of Caligula (37-41 CE), see Burton (1975), 93. Tacitus lists Philadelphia which became an assize center, but Burton (p. 94) places that city among fourteen known to have held the honor in the second and third centuries.

⁴⁸According to Burton (1975), 93 n.11, an inscription from Didyma makes it certain Cibyra was an assize-center during the reign of Caligula. The city would again be a recipient of earthquake assistance during the reign of Claudius (r. 41-54 CE).

‘neokoroi’ usually translated ‘temple wardens’ to signify that they possessed a provincial temple to the cult of the Roman emperor.”⁴⁹ Even before the consolidation of power in a single *princeps*, the Greek cities had honored Roman generals like they had Hellenistic kings. Generals like Caesar and Mark Antony received divine honors in Alexandria, Egypt.⁵⁰

With the establishment of the imperial form of government, it became the prerogative of the Emperor, in consultation with the Senate, to decide which cities received the honor of hosting the imperial cult. In actuality, the right to construct a temple in honor of the emperor was granted to a *koinon*, “an organization of cities of similar ethnic background and interests within a region, bound together by the practice of a particular cult.”⁵¹ Nevertheless, the cult’s temple resided in only one city within the *koinon*.⁵² Securing this privilege depended upon having representatives with close ties to the Emperor and demonstrating loyal service to the Roman state.

Tacitus preserves a debate that took place before Tiberius and the Senate between the representatives of Smyrna and Sardis as they competed for a chance to win the honor of becoming a *neokoros*. In 26 CE, Tiberius and the Senate held a competition between eleven cities of Asia for the right to construct a temple to the Emperor. Tacitus’ account demonstrates both the intense rivalry between the cities

⁴⁹Barbara Burrell, *Neokoroi: Greek Cities and Roman Emperors* (Boston: Brill, 2004), 1.

⁵⁰Chaniotis (2005), 443.

⁵¹Burrell (2004), 2.

⁵²Burrell (2004), 331.

and the basis upon which their envoys appealed for their respective selection for their city to receive the honor of building the temple (*Ann.* 4.55-56). Each city appealed for consideration on the basis the age (*vetustate*) of their people (*generis*), and they gave a recitation of the record of their city's loyalty to the Roman people, when they subdued Asia Minor in the aftermath of the Third Macedonian War (171-168 BCE), during Rome's wars against King Perseus of Macedon (d. 168 BCE), Aristonicus (Eumenes III, d. 128 BCE), and other, unnamed kings.

The Senate passed over the cities of Hypaepa, Tralles, Laodicea, and Magnesia because they were deemed to lack the significance (*parum validi*) commensurate with housing a temple dedicated to the imperial cult (*Ann.* 4.55.3). The argument of the chosen winner of this competition, Smyrna, indicates, the record of loyalty mattered more than the antiquity of the city's existence (*Ann.* 4.56.1). Tacitus says Smyrna's legates trusted most (*maxime fidebant*) their recitation of the loyal service the city had given to Rome prior the end of the Third Punic War (149-146 BCE) and the defeat of the kings of Asia Minor (*Ann.* 4. 56.1). Status, defined by a rich history and a record of loyal service, was the key to winning additional honor in this competition.⁵³

As mentioned previously, during the Hellenistic period, the cities promoted the imperial cult as a means of encouraging future benefactions. Likewise, having a temple dedicated the Roman imperial court must have strengthened the bond between the emperors and the Asian cities who oversaw them. Aelius Aristides, a second century rhetorician and devotee of Asclepius, specifically mentioned the

⁵³For the influence of the orators, see Burrell (2004), 333-335.

destruction of the provincial temple of Tiberius, Julia, and the Senate when he wrote to Marcus Aurelius of the destruction Smyrna suffered from the 177 earthquake (*Or.* 19.3).⁵⁴ The cities of Nicomedia (*koinon* Bithynia), Anazarbos (*koinon* Cilicia) and Cyzicus (*koinon* Asia) all received some kind of earthquake assistance after they became centers for the imperial cult. No doubt the emissaries that brought their petitions for relief exploited this relationship in order to enhance their chances to receive some form of aid.

Recognition of the Emperors

After receiving disaster assistance from an emperor, the cities of Asia often followed Hellenistic precedent by honoring him as “savior” or “founder” of their city. However, it should be noted that disaster relief did not create the only occasion for the cities to honor the emperors with this nomenclature. Any imperial public works in the provinces might result in an inscription honoring the emperor with these titles.⁵⁵ The city of Tralles, for example, honored Augustus as their κτίστης (founder) after he gave them financial aid to rebuild their city after the 27 CE earthquake.⁵⁶ Similarly, Cibyra commemorated Tiberius as “savior and founder” (ΣΩΤΗΡ ΚΑΙ ΚΤΙΣΤΗΣ) for receiving a three years remission of their tax obligations following a 23 CE earthquake that damaged the city.⁵⁷ Finally, after Claudius restored the temple of Dionysus at Samos, which collapsed in 47 CE in an earthquake, he was lauded as

⁵⁴See also Burrell (2004), 48.

⁵⁵See Mitchell (1987), 340 for examples.

⁵⁶*BCH* 10 (1886): 516, no. 5.

⁵⁷Inscription cited in Bérenger-Badel, (2005), 146.

the island's "new founder" (νεον κτιστην [sic]).⁵⁸

The titles given to the emperors in these inscriptions are connected to the imperial cults in two ways. First, like the privilege of having a temple, the willingness to claim the emperor as "founder" or "savior" of a city was a way to increase that city's esteem in the eyes of Rome. It was also a form of advertizing the honors the city had received. Second the terms "savior" and "founder" were ideologically charged terms the use of which had arisen in the Hellenistic period but were now applied to Roman emperors. Both terms indicate the divine powers the ruler of Rome had. Thus, the emperor's ability to resurrect a city from an earthquake damage reflected more than his financial capacity. It came from his superhuman power.

Smyrna Earthquake (177 CE)

The aftermath of the Smyrna earthquake of 177 CE illustrates how a city that functioned both as an assize district and a *neokoros* received relief from Marcus Aurelius. It further shows how the personal relationship between a Greek elite, Aelius Aristides (d. 181 CE) and the Emperor could be instrumental for the procurement of disaster aid. The letters and speeches of Aelius Aristides in response to earthquake also recognize Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus as the saviors of Smyrna because of the assistance they provided.

According to Philostratus, Aristides was born in Mysia around the year 117 CE (VS 2.9). Because he had poor health from his childhood, Aristides became a devoted follower of the healer god, Asclepius. His father, Eudaemon, made sure his

⁵⁸AE (1912), 217.

son received the best education, and Aristides trained under Alexander of Cotiaem who also supervised the education of the future emperor, Marcus Aurelius.⁵⁹

In adulthood, Aristides held citizenship in the city of Smyrna, but he remained outside the civic and social life of his *polis* by avoiding civic obligations expected of an aristocrat. Laurent Pernot cites three instances from the years 147-148 CE that demonstrate how Aristides claimed to have escaped from the usual, civic duties expected of Greek aristocrats in the second century CE.⁶⁰ In 147 CE, the Smyrnaean assembly applauded Aristides' presence in their midst and offered to nominate him for the common priesthood of Asia. But, he demurred, citing a dream he had received from Asclepius (*Or.* 50.101). In response to his expressed devotion to Asclepius, the assembly voted him to the office of the local priesthood of Asclepius whose temple, at that time, was under construction in the city. Despite what appeared to be an offer he could not refuse, Aristides again objected to the vote, later claiming that "it was impossible for me to do anything, either impossible or trifling, without the god, and therefore, it was not possible to think even of serving as a priest, until I had inquired about this from the god himself" (οὐδὲν οὔτε μείζον οὔτε ἔλαττον οἶόν τ' εἶη πράττειν μοι ἄνευ τοῦ θεοῦ, οὐδ' οὐν αὐτὸ τὸ ἱεράσθαι νομίζειν ἐξεῖναι πρότερον, πρὶν ἂν αὐτοῦ πύθωμαι τοῦ θεοῦ, *Or.* 50.102). Finally, in the following year, Aristides was nominated for the Provincial Assembly, but he invoked his god yet

⁵⁹Swain (1998), 256.

⁶⁰For a thorough discussion this point see Laurent Pernot, "Aelius Aristides and Rome," in *Aelius Aristides Between Greece, Rome, and the Gods*, eds. W.V.Harris and Brooke Holmes (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 175; see also Swain (1998), 296-297.

again and gained liberty from serving in this capacity (*Or.* 50.102). These examples show that Aristides did not wish to fulfill civic duties voted to him by the assembly. For him, the divine will of Asclepius superseded the votes of the people.

The year before the earthquake destroyed Smyrna, Marcus Aurelius and Commodus visited the city on their return to Rome from their tour of the Eastern provinces. After this brief stop, Marcus and Commodus returned to Rome in time for Commodus to be granted *imperium* alongside his father on November, 27. A few months later, in January 177 CE, Commodus assumed his first consulship and received tribunician power. Also in 177 CE, he received all the honors, titles, and powers of his father and became co-ruler.⁶¹ During their stay in Smyrna, Aristides met with the Emperor, creating a bond that Philostratus later deemed invaluable for Aristides' success in securing imperial assistance to rebuild the city after the earthquake (*V S* 2.9).

The earthquake most likely struck Smyrna in 177 CE or early 178 CE. Aristides claimed he learned the unexpected (*ἀνεπίστου*) news of the city's destruction while he resided at his Laneion Estate where, he said, the god Asclepius brought (*ἐκίνησέν*) him a few days prior the event and ordered (*προσέταξεν*) him to remain (*Or.* 19.6).⁶² The report of the condition of the city and its people affected him greatly because he describes his monody to the city (*Or.* 18) and his letter to the Emperors (*Or.* 19) as outlets for his personal travails (*τοῦ πάθους*) that the news evoked

⁶¹Anthony Birley, *Marcus Aurelius* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1999), 195-197.

⁶²In *Or.* 20.3, Aristides attributes to his god his absence from the city when the earthquake struck.

(*Or.* 20.3). He then says he thought himself uniquely able to call upon the Emperor, and therefore, without waiting to receive any official capacity, on the following day, he appointed himself to perform the service (ἐμαυτὸν ἔταξα διάκονον) of writing to request the aid of the Roman ruler (*Or.* 19.6). It is not surprising to see Aristides working unofficially to petition the Emperor independently of the city assembly. Such independence was consistent with his *modus operandi*.

The correspondence to Marcus Aurelius paints at least a partial portrait of the how the earthquake had destroyed the beautiful vistas and damaged the important civic structures of the city. In his letter, Aristides reminded the Emperor and his co-regent about the visual impression the city made on them when they first entered Smyrna in 175/176 CE. In a highly emotional appeal, Aristides wrote, “Remember what you said when you viewed it on approaching, remember what you said when you entered, how you were affected, what you did” (Αναμνήσθητε ὧν ἐπὶ τῆς πορείας ἐφθέξασθε ὁρῶντες εἰς αὐτήν, ἀναμνήσθητε ὧν εἴσω παρελθόντες, ὡς διετέθητε, ὡς διεθήκατε, *Or.* 19.2). Aristides most likely had not accompanied the emperor and his son when they first entered the city, but he provides enough particulars such as the observance of the Theoxenia and the ability of the emperors to get a respite from their long journey that it is conceivable he had learned these details through personal interactions with Marcus Aurelius. It is also possible, given his knowledge of when the Emperor had arrived in the city, that Aristides reasonably anticipated the emotional response he had upon seeing the great vistas that the impressive city had to offer. Regardless, Marcus must have found Smyrna to be a beautiful, awe-

inspiring city, and Aristides used the Emperor's intimate familiarity with the city to build a dramatic, emotive case for the leader of Rome to restore the city.

Aristides' letter took the Emperor on a verbal tour of the destruction. He began by claiming that everything about the city that once amazed the Emperor now "lies in the dust" (ἅ νῦν πάντα ἐν κόνει, *Or.* 19.2). He then described a kind of death scene saying the harbor "has closed its eyes, the beauty of the market-place is gone, the adornments of the streets have disappeared, the gymnasiums together with the men and boys who used them are destroyed, some of the temples have fallen, some sunk beneath the ground" (μέμυκε μὲν ἐκεῖνος λιμὴν, οἴχεται δὲ ἀγορᾶς κάλλη, κόσμοι δὲ ὀδῶν ἀφανεῖς, γυμνάσια δὲ αὐτοῖς ἀνδράσι καὶ παισὶ διέφραται, ναοὶ δὲ οἱ μὲν κείνται, οἱ δὲ κατέδυσαν, *Or.* 19.3).

C. Cadoux's seminal study of Smyrna postulates the site of the city gave it significant military and commercial advantages.⁶² The harbor was an integral component to the economic viability of the city because ships accessed the city by sailing inland from the Aegean Sea into a small harbor where commercial life thrived.⁶³ Strabo wrote that a majority of the city was located in a plain near the harbor. Strabo also saw the harbor as an important addition to the other significant structures in the city's possession (14.1.37). Given the consistent references to this harbor and to the vitality and beauty of the city, it is no doubt correct to assume that

⁶²Cecil John Cadoux, *Ancient Smyrna: A History of the City from the Earliest Times to 324 A.D.* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1938), 100.

⁶³Cadoux (1938), 101. Aristides' repeated references to the harbors also indicate their importance to the city prior to the earthquake and for its renewal (*Or.* 19.3, 20.21, 21.5).

Aristides meant this area of the city had “closed its eyes” due to the destructive quake. Since the harbor played such an important role in the commercial life of the city, even a minor disruption to its functionality threatened to imperil the economic sustainability of Smyrna. Although it is impossible to know the extent of the damage to the harbor caused by the earthquake, Aristides’ concern for the long-term revitalization of the city made it a natural point of emphasis of which the Emperor should be made aware.

The other damaged buildings Aristides mentions were all related to the Greek concept of civic life. He told the Emperor of the destruction of the gymnasia as well as the men and boys who regularly went there. The city had many buildings used for this purpose, according to Aristides, but Strabo refers to a singular gymnasium located near the harbor of the city where many of the important civic structures must have also been. Hadrian had also funded the construction of another large gymnasium that included an elaborate area for sun-bathing and a place for the Gerosia of the city to oil themselves following their time of exercise.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, what is striking here is that Aristides places the loss of gymnasia on par with the loss of human life. The destruction of the city of Smyrna meant the loss of buildings as well as the death of its people.

Aristides also refers to a beautiful market-place that has now disappeared after the earthquake along with the adornments of the streets. These adornments most likely refer to structures that lined the streets described by Strabo as “large

⁶⁴For references to the gymnasium constructed by Hadrian and the uses of the buildings see Philostratus, *VS* 1.25 and *CIG*, 3148.

quadrangular porticoes, with both upper and lower stories” (14.1.37). The final buildings mentioned by Aristides are various unnamed temples many of which he says have fallen down or “sunk beneath the ground” (κατέδυσαν, *Or.* 19.3).

There can be no doubt that Aristides presented the destruction of Smyrna in the most dramatic and, perhaps, hyperbolic terms possible in order to move the head of the Roman state to act on behalf of his city.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, all of these structures mentioned above indicate why Aristides expressed alarm over the long-term survivability of the city. The reputable beauty of the city, which had become the hallmark of Smyrna’s renown in the ancient world, had more to do with its civic buildings than with its vistas of the sea and surrounding plain.⁶⁶ For ancient Greeks, civic life required the presence of important civic structures. They could not imagine the existence of a city, let alone its continuation, apart from the presence of such edifices.⁶⁷ Often, these important buildings had stood for centuries, and the ancestors of current generations had served as benefactors for the erection of temples, gymnasia, streets, porticoes, and stoa by which Greek civic life was defined. Aristides made clear to the Emperor that his immediate concern lay with the need for those vital structures to be rebuilt by imperial aid, but he was not concerned about recent constructions built outside of the walls of the city (*Or.* 19.8). This also helps explain why Aristides placed the death of men and boys on par with the loss of

⁶⁵Bowersock says of this letter that “it cannot be denied a certain contrived power.” See G. W Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 46.

⁶⁶On this point, see Cadoux (1938), 173.

⁶⁷Zuiderhoek (2009), 78.

the gymnasia they frequented. For Aristides, the loss of the buildings along with the people converted this once great city into “ruins and corpses” (ἐρείπιων καὶ νεκρῶν, *Or.* 19.3). Thus, his description of post-earthquake Smyrna is reflective of genuine concern that the city, with all of its history, might not “be thrown away like a broken utensil, condemned to uselessness” (μὴ καθάπερ σκεῦος συντριβὲν ἐκριφῆναι καταγνωσθὲν ἀχρηστίας, *Or.* 19.7). Aristides implored Marcus Aurelius to let “it live again through you” (ἀναβιώσθαι δι’ ὑμῶν, *Or.* 19.7). The city could not live again as long as its civic structures lay in ruins. Thus, for the revival of Smyrna, in Aristides’ view, the Emperor needed to provide the financial resources that only his treasury could give.

This final appeal to permit the city to live reveals two important aspects of Aristides’ perspective on the need for the Emperor to assist Smyrna’s reconstruction. First, Aristides understood the destruction of the city to be so extensive that only the Emperor possessed the financial capacity to fund its revitalization. In Greek cities, euergetic acts performed by local aristocrats or Roman emperors typically focused upon the building or beautification of specific structures such as aqueducts and temples. For example, according to Aristides’ letter, on a previous occasion, Marcus Aurelius had funded work on the temples in Smyrna (*Or.* 19.10). But, this letter begs for the salvation of the whole city (πᾶν σχῆμα σώσαντες, *Or.* 19.10). The damage to Smyrna comes across as so extensive that it required the finances that only the ruler of the Empire possessed in order to revive it.

In a section of the letter designed to remind the Emperor of Smyrna’s past fidelity to Rome, Aristides described how Smyrna had previously given aid to the Chians, Erythraeans, Teians, and Halicarnassians when they had suffered from

earthquakes and famines (*Or.* 19.12). On those occasions, Smyrna had assisted with gifts of wheat and money. But, the earthquake in 177/178 CE had crippled Smyrna so pervasively that no one city had the financial capacity to assist it like Smyrna had previously aided these other cities. If Smyrna was going to obtain the financial resources that it needed to recover from this earthquake, they would need assistance from Rome. Hence, Aristides wrote to the Emperor, “Hope in you remains” (ἡ δὲ παρ’ ὑμῶν ἐλπὶς λείπεται, *Or.* 19.12). This was no hyperbolic presentation of the greatness of the city’s past in order to justify the merits of imperial assistance. Instead, these statements explain the enormity of the financial barrier to rebuilding one of the important centers of Roman Asia Minor in the wake of the recent earthquake. According to this letter, the city required the financial resources only the Emperor could provide.

This point receives further emphasis a few paragraphs later in a discussion of the now sunken temple that had been dedicated to the worship of the imperial cult. Aristides wrote, “Perhaps it could recover this temple through the help of Asia if you approve, but the restoration of the whole city belongs alone to you, to whom the gods have given such great resources” (τοῦτον μὲν οὖν καὶ διὰ τῆς Ἀσίας κομίσαιτ’ ἂν ἴσως, ἂν ὑμῖν δοκῆ δὲ τῶν ὄλων ἐπανόρθωσις μόνων ὑμῶν, οἷς οἱ θεοὶ τὰ τηλικαῦτα ἀπέδοσαν, *Or.* 19.13). It seems clear from this claim that Aristides wanted Marcus Aurelius to think that the entire province of Asia lacked the economic ability to rebuild Smyrna. The true nature of Aristides’ interest in asking for imperial assistance lay in the financial costs needed to resurrect the city from the rubble. Rome alone had the financial resources that this terrible situation demanded.

The second perspective that emerges from the missive to the Emperor is Aristides' recognition of the relationship between the imperial will and the needed aid he could provide. Smyrna did not have to re-emerge from this catastrophe. If it received any imperial aid, it would do so because the Emperor wanted to help it. Aristides recalled a well-known incident, at that time, from the previous ruling dynasty wherein the imperial will wished the Nasamones out of existence (μὴ βούλεσθαι Νασαμῶνας εἶναι, *Or.* 19.9). The unattributed quote refers to a rebellion by the Nasamones during the reign of Domitian, an event later recorded by Cassius Dio. The Nasamones revolted against Rome because the Romans began to collect taxes forcibly from those subject to the exactions. The Nasamones killed the tax-collectors, forcing Flaccus, the governor of Numidia, to suppress the uprising by force of arms. Once Flaccus had succeeded in quelling the rebellion, Domitian is said to have reported to the Senate, "I forbade the Nasamones to exist" (Νασαμῶνας ἐκώλυσα εἶναι, *Cass. Dio* 67.4.6). Although he omitted the historical specifics, the orator's use of the story remains obvious. Smyrna would rise from the ruins of the earthquake only if Marcus Aurelius wished for it to do so (*Or.* 19.9). And, in this admission, he not only showed proper deference to the authority of the position of the Emperor, he also recognized that the Emperor had the power to reconstitute the city with imperial coin, but only if Marcus and Commodus wanted the city to be rebuilt.

It is the acknowledgment of the connection between the imperial will and the state treasury that motivated him to write, "having indicated that you want Smyrna to exist, you will speedily show to all of us what we desire" (προδείξαντες ὅτι βούλεσθε Σμύρναν εἶναι, ταχέως ἅπασιν ἡμῖν ὁ ποθοῦμεν δείξετε, *Or.* 19.9). Thus, Aristides' letter

reflects an understanding that rebuilding the city required more than imperial monetary assistance, it also demanded the emperor's personal will for the city to revive. Securing the necessary financial aid was, then, secondary to winning the imperial will.

Smyrna no doubt sent formal messengers to request aid, but the extant sources are biased toward the effect of Aristides' letter to Marcus Aurelius. Aristides did not write with any official sanction, and if Aristides' personal correspondence with Marcus Aurelius did motivate him to act on behalf of the city, it shows that imperial aid could be granted outside of the rituals that had customarily governed the imperial relationship with the provincials. Finally, the nature of his correspondence with the Emperor shows that Aristides recognized the superiority of the Emperor in deciding whether or not Smyrna should continue to exist. Receiving the funds for reconstruction, therefore, only could occur if the Emperor concluded it was in his, and the Empire's, best interest for the city to recover from the earthquake and fire.

The work of reconstructing Smyrna progressed to such a degree in 178 CE that the provincial assembly was able to meet in the city that year.⁶⁸ For this occasion, Aristides composed a speech in which he remarked upon the progress of the reconstruction of the city's buildings and the restoration of its civic life. Evidence of the ongoing rebuilding can be seen in his praise of the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus of whom he writes, "Because of their love for the existing city, they did not think that they should move it, but they are restoring it upon its

⁶⁸Behr (1969), 113.

remains” (μεταθεῖναι μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἠξίωσαν ἔρωτι τῆς ὑπαρχούσης, οἱ δ’ ἐπὶ τῶν ἰχνῶν ἐγείρουσιν, *Or.* 20.20). This statement not only indicates that the restoration of the city took place upon the remnants (τῶν ἰχνῶν) of the destroyed city, but it also shows the process of raising (ἐγείρουσιν) Smyrna from its ruins remained underway.

Aristides also refers to the restoration of Smyrna’s famous harbors. He writes, “The harbors are getting back the embrace of their most beloved city, and it in turn is adorned by them” (καὶ δὴ λιμένες τε κομίζονται τὰς τῆς φιλάτης πόλεως ἀγκάλας καὶ πάλιν [αὐ] κατασκοσμεῖται, *Or.* 20.21). This statement implies the reconstruction of the harbors and the city progressed together, making it possible for the harbors to adorn (κομίζονται) the city while the city enjoyed the renewed existence of the harbors.

It is unknown when the reconstruction of Smyrna ended. But, by the time Aristides penned his “Smyrnaean Oration” (*Or.* 21), he wrote of the restoration of the city as a past event. The date for this work ranges from as early as 179 CE to as late as 184 CE.⁶⁹ Aristides most likely wrote this oration to welcome a new provincial governor to “the city now restored for us” (τῆς νῦν ἀνιούσης ἡμῖν πόλεως, *Or.* 21.1).⁷⁰ The speech recapitulates the rise and fall of Smyrna throughout its history, and within that framework discusses the more recent travails experienced because of the earthquake. After recounting the superior beauty compared to all other Greek cities

⁶⁹An excellent, brief overview of the scholarship on the date and intended audience of this letter can be found in G.P. Burton, “The Addressees of Aelius Aristides, Orations 17K and 21K,” *CQ* 42, no.2 (1992): 444–447. Burton does not offer a specific solution to problem of the letter’s date.

⁷⁰Burton (1992) 446-447.

Smyrna had before the earthquake, he now brags “then it was superior to other cities, but now, one might almost say, to itself” (τότε μὲν γὰρ τὰς ἄλλας πόλεις, νῦν δ’ αὐτὴ σχεδὸν ὡς εἰπεῖν ἑαυτὴν νενίκηκεν, *Or.* 21.11). Thus, for Aristides, the city had emerged from the rubble and ashes in a greater condition than its previous form because of the greatness of its new founders, the Roman emperors.⁷¹

Conclusion

Euergetism permeated the entire process of Roman disaster assistance. The system of exchange served as the framework through which the cities petitioned the emperors for aid and the emperors reciprocated with their financial assistance. The provincial cities, especially, had no claim to be entitled to receive an emperor’s help for rebuilding their cities. Thus, to receive aid, the cities had to petition the emperors of their own accord.

The cities of the Greek world were particularly interested in obtaining funds necessary for the reconstruction their important civic buildings. They also wanted to earn concessions that gave them a reprieve from their tax obligations. Therefore, they actively sought to cultivate a special relationship with the emperors through requesting to build temples for the imperial cult and praising the emperors’ divine powers to rebuild after catastrophes. By following the long orchestrated norms of euergetism, the Greeks showed their subservience to Rome and encouraged the emperors to make future benefactions. Nevertheless, individual Roman emperors

⁷¹For his elaboration of this point see *Or.* 21.12.

also had their own reasons for supplying aid to their subjects. The motives that lay behind their responses will be the focus of the rest of this dissertation.

Chapter 4 The Process of Relief

Introduction

At 5:23 A.M., December 28, 1908, a severe earthquake and subsequent tsunami devastated the Italian harbor city of Messina, Sicily. The shocking number of casualties, numbering more than 100,000, gained the attention of international media. Despite the earthquake happening before governmental emergency agencies became prevalent, the people of Sicily benefitted from the support of relief organizations like the Italian Red Cross which immediately set up field hospitals and sent trains and ships staffed with medical personnel to care for the injured. The American Red Cross gave \$48,000 to purchase materials and build houses for survivors. American citizens donated over one million dollars to aid the American Red Cross in its relief efforts, and the United States Congress appropriated \$800,000 for direct assistance to the people of Sicily.¹

The international response to this disaster has comparative value with Roman antiquity. In 1908, the proliferation of the automobile, the ubiquity of mass media, and the invention of modern communication devices had yet to initiate a total

¹This summary of the event comes from Mary Boardman, "The American Red Cross in Italy," *The National Geographic Magazine*, January 1, 1909, 396-97. An excellent first-hand account of the Red Cross's work in Messina is Alice Fitzgerald, "My Experiences in Naples after the Messina Disaster," *The American Journal of Nursing*, vol. 9, no. 7 (April, 1909): 482-492, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3403794/> (accessed May 12, 2009). In 2013 dollars, \$48,000 in 1908-09 would approximate to \$1.12 million. \$800,000 in 1908-1909 would have an approximate 2013 value of \$18.6 billion. Source: Oregon State University, "Inflation Conversion Factors for Years 1774 to estimated 2019," <http://www.http://oregonstate.edu/cla/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/infcf17742008.pdf> (accessed December 27, 2013).

transformation of human travel and communication.² Yet, the Sicilians and Italians experienced a near immediate response from the Italian government, the US Congress, and major relief organizations. This outpouring of volunteer aid came without the survivors making formal appeals to any government or private individual. They received help at the most critical time, immediately after the event, and were supplied with the necessary medical care and shelter so vital to survivability following such a catastrophe.

The Romans did not have independent aid societies or a Roman Emergency Management Agency to plan for eventual disasters, deploy medical supplies, provide transportation services, or construct housing for a catastrophe's unfortunate victims. Roman assistance mainly took the form of imperial monetary grants and tax remissions and resulted from the protocols for securing euergetism and patronage established in the Hellenistic period and the Roman Republic.

Disaster relief also exposed the inequalities within the Roman world. Those who lived in Rome had the likelihood of an emperor's immediate response because in the early Empire, Rome was the center of the emperors' lives. But people living in cities other than Rome were left to themselves to handle the immediate recovery from an earthquake, fire, flood, or volcanic eruption. In provincial cities, the oppressive Roman tax system stood as a barrier to recovery. Provincials could obtain assistance from the Emperor, but securing his aid required submitting a formal request and making an elaborate, even emotive, case for the worthiness of a

²Compare with the near instantaneous international awareness of the Fukushima, Japan earthquake and tsunami in March, 2011.

city to receive the Emperor's largesse. Outside of Rome, then, disaster assistance from the state depended upon the community's voluntary petition for imperial help. Consequently, disaster relief in the Roman Empire amounted to a disjointed effort that included private individuals, neighboring cities, and the state in the person of the emperor. There was little collaboration between these entities.

Receiving imperial help also depended upon a city's status from the emperor's vantage point. This chapter will examine the stages of disaster recovery, explain how the Roman state was involved in providing aid during those stages, and it will describe the processes provincials went through to receive the emperor's aid.

Stages of Recovery

Modern studies of disaster relief provide a useful framework for understanding the stages of recovery that follow a disaster, the kind of hardship a community of people faces at each stage, and the type of aid needed during these phases to facilitate the long-term rehabilitation of private and civic life. A disaster stricken area generally undergoes four stages of response and recovery: emergency, restoration, replacement reconstruction, and developmental reconstruction.³ These phases can be applied to ancient disasters to discover when Roman disaster assistance most often took place, to investigate how imperial responses varied

³The following discussion of the four stages of disaster assistance reflects the Kates-Pijawka model and is based on Alexander (1994), 445-46. For a three stage model see Kent (1987), 12. Kent lists the stages as: emergency, rehabilitation, and post-rehabilitation. All four stages need not occur independently of the others. For the potential of all four stages occurring concomitantly, see the critique of the Kates-Pijawka model by Sarah J. Hogg, "Reconstruction following seismic disaster in Venzone, Friuli." *Disasters* 4, no. 2 (1980): 173-185.

between Rome and the provinces, and to illuminate why people living in Rome's empire looked to the emperor for recovery aid.

Stage I

During the emergency phase, the relief efforts focus on the survivors and the recovery of victims. Search and rescue operations take place. Debris and rubble are removed, if possible, to prevent additional casualties and to facilitate efforts to locate trapped victims. After a disaster has disrupted local social and economic systems, those who survive become increasingly vulnerable to secondary disasters like starvation and exposure. Therefore, during the emergency stage, "relief is principally concerned with temporary shelters, medical treatment, food and clothing. The underlying assumption is that, without this kind of assistance, the conditions of the victims will deteriorate to such an extent that their lives will be in immediate jeopardy."⁴ This stage may last for many weeks depending upon the type and severity of the disaster.

The ability of a Roman emperor to give assistance in the emergency phase depended upon the locus of the extreme event. During this stage, early emperors routinely gave help to the city of Rome, but time and space created a lag in communication and response time preventing emperors from aiding the rest of Italy or the provinces at this critical juncture.

Rome in the Early Empire

Nero's aid to Rome's residents during the Great Fire of 64 CE provides a more

⁴Kent (1987), 12.

useful illustration of an emperor giving emergency assistance during an evolving hazardous event. The fire, which began on July 19, burned for five consecutive days before it temporarily subsided. When the blaze first began, Nero was in Antium (modern Anzio), a resort town located some 38.5 miles outside of the city of Rome. Tacitus says he showed little interest in returning to the city until he learned the fire was on a course to destroy his Palatine home which connected to the gardens of Maecenas (*qua Palatium et Maecenatis hortos continuaverat*, Tac. Ann. 15.39.1).

Tacitus gives a vivid account of the aid Nero gave to the city once he returned from Antium. He writes:

sed solacium populo exturbato ac profugo campum Martis ac monumenta Agrippae, hortos quin etiam suos patefecit et subitaria aedificia extruxit quae multitudinem inopem acciperent; subvectaque utensilia ab Ostia et propinquis municipiis pretiumque frumenti minutum usque ad ternos nummos (Ann. 15.39.2).

But, as a relief for the evicted and fugitive people, he opened up the Plain of Mars and the monuments of Agrippa, in fact even his own gardens, and he set up improvised buildings to receive the destitute multitude; and comestibles were sailed up from Ostia and nearby municipalities, and the price of grain was reduced to three sesterces (trans. Woodman).

Based upon this passage, Nero's emergency relief measures can be divided into two categories: shelter and food. The fire displaced many people from their homes creating a multitude of refugees. For these evacuees, Nero opened (*patefecit*) the Campus Martius (*campum Martis*), the monuments of Agrippa (*monumenta*

Agrippae), and his own gardens (*hortos suos*). He also had temporary shelters (*subitaria aedificia*) constructed (*extruxit*) to house (*acciperent*) the helpless multitude (*multitudinem inopem*).

The fire destroyed all but four of Rome's districts, and it no doubt disrupted the city's available supplies of grain. In his biography of Nero, E. Champlin speculates that the destruction would have created the need for "the temporary feeding and housing of perhaps 200,000 homeless."⁵ Nero, therefore, tried to manage both the supply and cost of food to prevent further loss of life caused by starvation and to avoid a dramatic spike in the price of grain (*Ann.15.39.2*). To insure the people of the city had access to adequate food supplies, food stuffs (*utensilia*) were transported (*subvecta*) from nearby Ostia and other neighboring towns. From centuries of experience with floods and fires, the Romans understood that catastrophic events, like the Great Fire, increased demand for strained grain supplies thereby causing the price of basic food stuffs to skyrocket. To avoid an exorbitant rise in the cost of grain, Nero implemented price controls by reducing its cost to three sesterces (*pretiumque frumenti minutum usque ad ternos nummos, Ann. 15.39.2*).⁶

Despite the important role emperors played in supplying relief in Rome

⁵Edward Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003), 180.

⁶M. Griffin interprets Cassius Dio's claim that Nero discontinued the *frumentaria* after the fire (καὶ τῶν Ῥωμαίων αὐτῶν τὸ σιτηρέσιον παρεπάσατο, 62.18.5), even if briefly, as a plausible "emergency measure which enabled him to keep the market price of corn low by releasing stored corn onto the market, including that bought for the state distributions." See Miriam T. Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (London: Routledge, 2000), 106-107. For speculation on the cost of Nero's aid after the fire, see Champlin (2003), 180.

during the immediate recovery phase, disaster aid remained *ad hoc*. The sources offer no indication Roman emperors considered it necessary to have state agencies prepared to offer emergency assistance to people. Yet, the existence of imperial assistance did not monopolize emergency aid or exclude private action. Instead, individuals and families bore the primary responsibility for search and rescue and provided the medical care needed by the victims.

When a makeshift amphitheater, constructed by a freedman named Attilus, collapsed in Fidenae in 27 CE, between 20,000 (Suet. *Tib.* 40) and 50,000 (Tac. *Ann.* 4.62) spectators died or suffered significant injuries.⁷ Tacitus (*Ann.* 4.63) describes a desperate and chaotic scene that unfolded when word of the tragedy spread and loved ones converged on the site to search for their friends and relatives. To rescue the living and recover the lifeless, it was first necessary to remove the rubble. Although Tacitus does not specify who cleared the ruins (*ut coepere dimoveri obruta*), the context indicates the people moved the debris as part of the process of rescuing and recovering bodies of those dearest to them.

Those who suffered bodily trauma received swift medical attention in the homes of Rome's elite families. Tacitus recounts the help the victims were given:

⁷There are two seminal literary analyses of Tac. *Ann.* 4.57-67 that discuss Tacitus' fascination with war scenes. A.J. Woodman has shown that Tacitus uses a "captive-city topos (*urbs capta topos*) to compare the Fidenae disaster to Rome experiencing a military siege. See A.J. Woodman, "Remarks on the Structure and Content of Tacitus, Annals 4.57-67," *CQ* 22, no.1 (May 1972): 150-158. Elizabeth Keitel applies Woodman's scholarship to Tacitus' disaster narratives showing Tacitus' fixation with sudden disasters and demonstrating his use of the *urbs capta topos* to portray Tiberius in the worst possible way. See Elizabeth Keitel, "The Art of Losing: Tacitus and the Disaster Narrative," in *Ancient Historiography and Its Contexts: Studies in Honour of A.J. Woodman*, eds. Christina S. Kraus, John Marincola, Christopher Pelling (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 331-353.

*ceterum sub recentem cladem patuere
procerum domus, fomenta et medici passim
praebiti, fuitque urbs per illos dies
quamquam maesta facie veterum institutis
similis, qui magna post proelia saucios
largitione et cura sustentabant. (Ann. 4.63)*

But as an immediate response to the disaster the houses of the aristocracy were thrown open and dressings and doctors made widely available, and the City throughout those days, though of sorrowful appearance, resembled the established customs of the ancients, who after great battles gave support to the injured with lavishness and care (trans. Woodman).

This account indicates the victims received prompt treatment by doctors (*medici passim praebiti*) immediately after the event (*sub recentem cladem*) as well as care to alleviate (*fomenta*) their suffering. The search for survivors, the recovery of the dead, and the treatment of the injured were a spontaneous, frantic effort by self-interested individuals with neither Tiberius, the army, nor a state institution present to manage the crisis.

The tragic breakdown of Attilus' wooden structure at Fidenae happened at an inopportune time in Tiberius' political career. He had grown weary of life in Rome and had retired to Capri (Suet. *Tib.* 40) to escape the political and social fervor of the capital (Tac. *Ann.* 4.57).⁸ Nevertheless, his absence illustrates that while an emperor often supplied monetary support to help people recoup their financial losses, it was usually private individuals who cared for the injured, gave medical

⁸For Tiberius' exhaustion with Rome see also Robin Seager, *Tiberius*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 170-171. The relationship between Tiberius' political career and his disaster relief efforts will receive further attention in Ch. 5.

treatment, recovered bodies, and removed debris. Emergency relief from this sudden, man-made disaster came from the elites in Rome who gave attentive and adequate auxiliary aid to those wounded in the collapse. Disaster assistance was a collective effort of individuals acting to help each other. Whenever the emperors became involved it was often for their own political benefit rather than for overall welfare of the people.

In an empire with a clear political and social hierarchy, Rome's condition took precedence above all other cities in the Empire. Rome had special significance for the emperors, especially those who came from the Julio-Claudian and Flavian lines respectively. Making a tour of the Empire became a more common imperial practice in the second century as Rome's importance steadily declined. But the early dynasts spent much of their time in Italy, particularly in Rome, where they maintained the imperial court and interacted among Rome's elites.⁹

The kind of relief given by Pompey and Nero should be seen in the broader context of the evolution of the office of emperor and of the political importance of Rome to the political aspirations of the early emperors. Disasters in Rome generated a sense of urgency in the emperors because of Rome's central place in the political hierarchy of the Empire. Neglecting Rome in a time of crisis invited challenges to an emperor's legitimacy and power.

Consequently, the Caelian Hill fire and Fidenae disaster, both occurring in 27 CE, prompted Tiberius to abandon his retirement in order to return to Rome to give financial assistance to the survivors of those tragedies (*Tac. Ann.* 4.63). In 80 CE,

⁹*ERW*, 18-23.

when Titus (r. 79-81 CE) learned of a major fire outbreak in Rome, he abruptly ended his Campanian tour of the destruction caused by the recent Vesuvius eruption so he could rush to the capital to supply monetary aid to the victims (Cass. Dio, 66.24.1).¹⁰

The absence of a petitioning process for obtaining imperial assistance also signifies the supreme status of Rome and Italy. There is no indication from the sources that Rome or the municipalities of Italy had to send embassies to the emperor to request his financial support. Instead, an emperor, like Titus in 80 CE, only needed to be informed a disaster had stricken the capital city in his absence, and he returned to give the assistance the situation required. Even when an emperor was not present to give emergency relief to the inhabitants of the city, they assuredly knew he would invest in the long-term revitalization and reconstruction of the city's damaged regions in order to facilitate a full economic and civic recovery.

Emergency aid in Italy

Beyond Rome, those in harm's way received no imperial aid during the initial phase of recovery. The Elder Pliny (d. 79 CE), as commander of the imperial navy, did attempt to rescue as many people as possible during the 79 CE Vesuvius eruption. At the time of the eruption, Pliny was stationed with the navy at Misenum (modern Miseno), 20 miles southwest of Naples. He owned a villa there, and his sister and nephew, the Younger Pliny, accompanied him to the family estate where they too experienced the pre-eruption earthquakes and witnessed the eventual

¹⁰An in-depth discussion of Titus' visit to Campania and its sequential relationship to the 80 CE fire in Rome will occur below in ch. 5.

super-explosion that claimed thousands of lives across Campania (Plin. *Ep.* 6.16; 6.20).

When Vesuvius first exploded, Pliny the Elder noticed the large plume above the mountain and decided to make a closer observation of the phenomenon. As he prepared to leave, he received a letter from a concerned woman named Rectina. The Younger Pliny describes the events as follows:

Egrediebatur domo; accipit codicillos Rectinae Tasci imminente periculo exterritae - nam villa eius subiacebat, nec ulla nisi navibus fuga -: ut se tanto discrimini eriperet orabat. Vertit ille consilium et quod studioso animo incohaverat obit maximo. Deducit quadriremes, ascendit ipse non Rectinae modo sed multis - erat enim frequens amoenitas orae - laturus auxilium (Ep. 6.16).

He was leaving the house; he received a letter from Rectina the wife of Tascius¹¹ who was terrified by the imminent danger – for her villa was at the foot of the mountain, and there was no fleeing except by ships – she asked that he might rescue her from the hazard. He changed his plan and what began with an inquisitive spirit ended with bravery. He led the quadriremes, he personally embarked intending to bring aid not only to Rectina but also to many others – for [the area] was crowded due to the pleasantness of the region.

The Elder Pliny's embarkation to save Rectina and many others (*ascendit ipse non Rectinae modo sed multis*) is an example of his intention to give emergency assistance during the Vesuvius eruption. Yet, like the earlier response by

¹¹For a detailed discussion on the identity of Rectina's husband as Tascius, see the comments in A.N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 373.

individuals at Fidenae, Pliny the Elder's actions were motivated as much by personal concern as by official capacity. Pliny knew Rectina because their families were friends.¹² Her personal correspondence prompted him to use the resources at his disposal as naval commander to save her and others. Despite having comm Roman navy, Pliny took these actions independently without any direct communication from the Emperor Titus. Thus, rescue assistance happened extemporaneously because of individual choices, not at the direction of the state's ruler.

Emergency aid in the provinces

There are no examples of the Roman state giving emergency aid in the provinces. People living in provincial cities relied upon each other. Cities also assisted one another. Such inter-city aid, especially in the Greek east, mirrored similar developments among Greek cities during the Hellenistic period.¹³ In 177 CE, the city of Smyrna suffered from a devastating earthquake.¹⁴ The Greek cities of Asia and Europe responded by offering the Smyrnaeans food, shelter, and modes of travel to escape their fallen city. The Second Sophistic orator and citizen of Smyrna, Aelius Aristides (d. ca. 181 CE), provides a graphic picture of the kinds of immediate assistance the citizens of Smyrna received from their fellow Greeks. He writes:

ἀγοραὶ μὲν ἀπανταχόθεν τοῖς κατὰ χώραν μένουσιν

¹² For the relationship between the families of Rectina and Pliny, see Sherwin-White (1966), 373.

¹³The Rhodian earthquake of 227 BCE illustrates the development of the process of petitioning for aid and was discussed in the previous chapter.

¹⁴See chapter 5 below for a fuller discussion of this earthquake event and the narratives associated with it.

ἐκ γῆς καὶ θαλάττης εἰσαφιχνούμεναι, ἄμιλλα δὲ
καὶ σπουδὴ τῶν ἑκατέρωθεν μεγίστων πόλεων,
καλούντων τε ὡς αὐτοὺς καὶ ὀχήματα καὶ πορεῖα
ἐπιπεμπόντων, ἔτι δ' οἰκῆσεις καὶ συνεδρίων
κοινωνίας καὶ πάσας ἀφορμὰς παρασκευαζόντων,
ὥσπερ γονεῦσιν ἢ παισὶν αὐτῶν, παραπλήσια δὲ
καὶ τῶν μεγέθει μὲν ἀπολειπομένων, προθυμίας δὲ
καὶ τιμῆς οὐδὲν ἔλλειπόντων (Aristid. *Or.* 20.16).

There were markets which came from
everywhere, by land and sea, for those who
remained on the spot, and there was the
rivalry and zeal displayed by the greatest
cities on each continent, inviting the refugees
and dispatching wagons and other means of
conveyance, and also providing housing, a
share of their council chambers, and every
other means of assistance, as if for their own
parents or children; and the same was done
by those who were less great, but wanted
nothing in their enthusiasm and their show of
honor (trans. Behr).

Providing the survivors of the earthquake with food and supplies (ἀγοραὶ)¹⁵
became the initial way the Greek cities of Asia and Europe helped those who wished
to remain near the fallen city. Competing with one another by preparing
(παρασκευαζόντων) houses (οἰκῆσεις) for refugees and sharing the use of their civic
buildings (συνεδρίων κοινωνίας) for Smyrnaeans to hold council meetings was a
second way the biggest cities on the two continents contributed to the relief of
Smyrna.¹⁶ Sending (ἐπιπεμπόντων) vehicles (ὀχήματα καὶ πορεῖα) to transport those
who wanted to leave Smyrna served as the final means of emergency aid offered by

¹⁵In his translation, Behr translated ἀγοραὶ with the term “markets”, but it seems
the term “supplies” would reflect the intended sense of the term in this context.

¹⁶In *Or.* 20.17, Aristides says even lesser cities welcomed (δέξασθαι) refugees into
their cities as settlers (συνοίκους).

Smyrna's neighbors to the earthquake's victims.

Emergency assistance mirrored another growing trend within the imperial system, namely, the consolidation of state functions in the person of the emperor. When the state responded at this point in a crisis, it was because the emperor was present. When the emperor was not nearby, the state did not provide immediate help. Cities had to organize their people, and individuals acted instinctually to aid one another with little expectation of state intervention.

Rome's network of roads and the imperial post system eased travel and communication throughout the Empire, but the speed of travel posed an impediment to rapid recovery response especially in the provinces.¹⁷ Also the imperial bureaucracy in the provinces was not designed to respond to local disasters. It primarily collected taxes from the cities and maintained peace. Provincial governors made an annual circuit of select cities, called assize or *conventus* cities, to adjudicate local cases, but they did little, if anything, to help during crises.¹⁸

In 22 out of 47 known earthquake events that took place in the early Roman Empire, either no imperial aid was given, or no known source remains to attest to the emperor's beneficence. When a famine crippled Jerusalem between 45-47 CE, during the reign of Claudius, it was neither the Emperor nor the governor of Judea

¹⁷For a detailed description of the Roman system of roads and the difficulty of travel, see Ludwig Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners Under the Early Empire*, 7th ed., trans. by Leonard Magnus (London: Routledge, 1908), 268-286.

¹⁸On the limited role of a provincial governor see also Fergus Millar, "State and Subject: the Impact of Monarchy," in *Rome, the Greek World, and the East*, ed. Hannah M. Cotton and Guy M. Rogers, vol. 1 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 296.

who eased the conditions for its inhabitants. Food for the people came from Helena, Queen of Adiabene, who had her servants purchase grain in Alexandria and dried figs from Cyprus. (*AJ*, 20.51).¹⁹ Provincials had to rely upon such local acts of kindness and the goodwill of other cities to get through the initial hardships caused by an extreme hazard. Therefore, if it arrived at all, Roman assistance came during the later stages of recovery.

Stages II-IV

Once the immediate needs of survivors are met and the initial search and recovery attempts have ended, a recovering community transitions to the restoration phase of relief. Three important things happen at this point. First, structures that remain standing but that have become structurally unsound are torn down to prevent additional casualties. Second, damaged public utilities and private residences receive necessary repairs. Third, the survivors of the tragedy who sought vital resources and shelter in nearby communities begin to return, if they return at all. It is at this point that some degree of normalcy resumes for a community.²⁰

In the third phase, the reconstruction-rehabilitation period, the economic vitality of the stricken area returns to pre-disaster levels. The damage caused by the disaster to houses, local government services, if they existed, and the local

¹⁹Acts 11: 28 calls this a “worldwide” famine. Pliny (*HN*, 5.58) claims the largest known flood of the Nile occurred during Claudius’ reign. This may have contributed to the famine. See also Barbara Levick, *Claudius* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 179. Levick also suggests that Claudius could not respond to the famine because it was a type of disaster that required speed. An indispensable explanation of the evidence for and scope of this famine occurs in Jack Pastor, *Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine* (London: Routledge, 1997), 151-156.

²⁰See Kent (1987), 12 on the return to normalcy.

economy becomes negligible. Survivors are able to obtain gainful employment again, and the infrastructure necessary for future economic success is restored.

The last recovery stage, in the Kates-Pijawka model, is called developmental reconstruction. At this point, most or all of the post-disaster rehabilitation has taken place. Now, cities mark the occasion of the extreme event by constructing monuments or buildings to commemorate the disaster. Communities begin to see the areas most adversely affected by the disaster develop beyond pre-hazard levels. It is also at this time that local leaders and experts assess vulnerabilities and create strategies or erect barriers to increase the resiliency of the community.²¹

Modes of Recovery Assistance

Most Roman disaster assistance outside of Rome came during these later phases of recovery in the form of economic aid designed to stimulate local reconstruction. The literary and epigraphical evidence attests to four kinds of financial help: monetary gifts, tax remission, foregoing inheritances (*bona caduca*), and the appointment of one or more Roman senators to oversee the reconstruction of the damaged area. It is clear these became established methods of disaster assistance, and Roman emperors repeated the relief measures utilized by their predecessors. Therefore, these forms of disaster relief became precedents and gave later emperors a range of options for giving aid depending upon the severity of local damage and the exigencies of their political situation.

The emerging literature on the topic of Roman disasters lacks a deeper

²¹Kent (1987), 12.

analysis of the methods of disaster assistance. Toner's chapter wherein he discusses how the Romans dealt with the aftermath of disasters exemplifies the current state of the scholarship. He observes that "assistance could be in the form of cash, a tax rebate, the cancellation of debts, or acts such as the advancement of civic status."²² Unfortunately, he offers no specific case studies that show the circumstances under which gifts of cash, tax rebates, and a cancellation of debts occurred. He also offers no explanation of what he means by aid "in the form of cash." It is true that Roman emperors gave grants of money as a form of disaster aid, but the current scholarship rejects that hordes of coin were sent to disaster stricken cities.²³ In addition, he does not address whether these grants were the same in all cases or whether they might differ in amount depending on local needs. He also ignores altogether the use of inheritance money as a method of disaster relief. Toner's work illustrates that greater contextual analysis of these methods is needed to provide a clearer and more nuanced understanding of these forms of assistance.

Mitchell gives an excellent overview of occasions when monetary grants and tax remissions for disaster assistance were used in the eastern provinces, but he leaves larger historical questions to be answered.²⁴ For example, were monetary grants given proportionally based upon the degree of damage and loss, or did the emperors earmark gifts for the reconstruction of specific buildings? If they were given proportionally, does the current evidence offer clues about how the damage

²²Toner (2013), 53.

²³See discussion and references below, especially n.41 in this chapter.

²⁴Mitchell (1987), 345-352.

was assessed? Were there different types of monetary grants for people in Rome than for provincials? On the matter of tax remissions, were individuals exempted from paying their yearly dues, or did local communities continue to collect the annual taxes and reuse, with imperial permission, the money for needed reconstruction? Finally, under what circumstances did emperors redirect the use of inheritances for local disaster relief? The following sections of this chapter will attempt to answer to these questions.

Monetary Grants

Grants of money from the emperor to cities and individuals were the consistently employed method of Roman disaster relief irrespective of the type and location of a catastrophe.²⁵ Emperors gave this kind of assistance with great regularity, and the Greek sources for the early imperial period typically refer to such grants with the plural term *χρήματα*, a very general term for money. Augustus established this precedent for imperial disaster relief when he granted the cities of Tralles and Laodicea, in Asia, money (*χρήματα*) for the restoration of those cities in 27 BCE (Strabo 12.8.18). Ten years later, he gave money (*χρήματα ἔχαρίσατο*) for the reconstruction of Paphos after an earthquake caused considerable damage to Cyprus' major city (Cass. Dio 54.23.7). These imperial *χρήματα* can be classified under two headings: general and targeted.

General monetary grants are those acts of imperial munificence designed to

²⁵Emperors from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius chose to give disaster aid in the form of financial grants a total of twelve times. This is the most of any form of earthquake support. For the commonality of this form of relief see also Mitchell (1987), 346. See also Hans Kloft, *Liberalitas Principis; Herkunft Und Bedeutung* (Köln: Bohlau, 1970), 119–121.

make money available for disaster rehabilitation but not designated for the construction of specific structures. Grants of this variety were sometimes doled out in proportion to the losses of the survivors, and other times they were bestowed without such considerations. Tiberius' responses to the Asia earthquake of 17 CE and the Aventine Hill fire of 36 CE are good examples of general monetary grants given in proportion to a people's degree of loss.

After Tiberius learned of the catastrophic earthquake that destroyed twelve cities of Asia in 17 CE, he promised (*pollicitus*) 10 million HS (*centies sestertium*) to the citizens of Sardis because "the calamity, being harshest in Sardis, attracted to them most of the sympathy" (*asperrima in Sardianos lues plurimum in eosdem misericordiae traxit*, Tac. Ann. 2.47.2). The inhabitants of Magnesia ad Sipylum were treated similarly since that city followed Sardis in the degree of damage (*proximi damno*, Ann. 2.47.3).²⁶ Tacitus' narrative clearly creates a hierarchy of need based upon the extent of the earthquake's effects on the cities. Sardis came first, Magnesia second, and then the rest of the cities. Sardis benefitted from Emperor's largesse the most because its degree of suffering left its citizens with the most need.

In 36 CE, a severe fire (*gravi igne*) broke out on the Aventine Hill near the *Circus Maximus* (Ann. 6.45.1). The fire started in the area of the Aventine where the basket-makers' shops were located, and it destroyed homes and high rise

²⁶Tacitus' emphasis upon the condition of Sardis and Magnesia is more than rhetorical flourish. Strabo also pays inordinate attention to suffering of Sardis (13.4.8) and Magnesia (12.8.18) during this earthquake and the assistance Tiberius sent them after it.

apartment complexes (*insularum*) along its path. Tacitus says the Emperor paid the value of the houses and apartment buildings (*exolutis domuum et insularum pretiis*) damaged in the fire (*Ann.* 6.45.1). Both Tacitus and Cassius Dio credit Tiberius with making large contributions to homeowners and apartment tenants to defray the losses they incurred (*Tac. Ann.* 6.45.1; *Cass. Dio* 58.26.5).²⁷ Yet, Tacitus reveals that Tiberius selected (*delecti*) four grandsons-in-law (*progeneri*) to form a board charged with assessing the value of each person's loss (*aestimando cuiusque detrimento*, 6.45.2).²⁸ This response followed the pattern of the Caelian Hill fire in 27 CE when Tiberius assisted the people commensurate with their losses (*tribuendo pecunias ex modo detrimenti*, *Tac. Ann.* 4.64.1).²⁹ These examples evince a consistent policy, in Tiberius' reign, of disaster relief distributions being given proportionally to the degree of damage an individual or family suffered.

Proportional monetary grants served two important purposes. First, such distributions were congruent with Tiberius' frugal management of the state treasury.³⁰ By having a commission assess people's private property damage, he could alleviate their losses at a minimal cost to the state. Second, apportioning

²⁷The two sources give different amounts for the imperial contribution. Tacitus valued it at 100 million HS (*milies sestertium*, 6.45.1). Cassius Dio says it was 250,000 HS (δισχιλίας καὶ πεντακοσίας μυριάδας, 58.26.5). Both figures merely denote a sizeable sum. See discussion on ancient figures below in this chapter.

²⁸The four chosen were Cn. Domitius, Cassius Longinus, M. Vinicius, and Rubellius Blandus. See Barbara Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 1999), 218 for kinship ties between these men and Tiberius. The consuls nominated a fifth person, P. Petronius.

²⁹Vell. Paterculus claims Tiberius gave these distributions "to all ranks of people" (*omnis ordinis hominum*, 2.130).

³⁰Suet. *Tib.* 48.1. See also Levick (1999), 133.

disaster aid commensurately to the degree of destruction enabled the Emperor to supply the most aid to those with the greatest need. In this scheme, the more a city or an individual suffered the more imperial money they would receive.

Consequently, although general monetary grants did not require a specific use of imperial money, emperors did not lavish money on disaster victims haphazardly. By giving the grants proportionally, the emperors guided the flow of money so it maximized the assistance they offered.

Targeted monetary grants are imperial gifts assigned for particular uses. This type of grant typically came during the third or fourth phases of recovery and was often used to assist a damaged city normalize its economic conditions and complete needed reconstruction projects through appropriating money for the construction of buildings. Cities in Asia often sought such grants because the reconstruction of important civic buildings such as temples, aqueducts, and gymnasias, which frequently collapsed during earthquakes, required large sums to complete.³¹ Therefore, when a source honors an emperor for such works projects, the assumption is it reflects a community's commemoration of an imperial financial contribution to the reconstruction of buildings deemed vital to civic life.³²

The emperor Claudius contributed to the rehabilitation of earthquake stricken cities in Asia by building specific structures. He rebuilt the temple of Dionysus (*aedem Liberi Patris*) at Samos in 47 CE after it collapsed in an earthquake that

³¹Zuiderhoek (2009), 80.

³²Mitchell (1987), 344.

struck the Aegean island.³³ Prior to his death in 54 CE, he also constructed an aqueduct for the city of Sardis which may have still been rebuilding after the devastating earthquake of 17 CE. An inscription preserved in both Greek and Latin reveals that a Tiberius Claudius Demetrius superintended the construction of this important water supply. The inscription reads:

[Ti. Claudi]us Drusi f. Caesar August[us Germanicus, pont(ife)x max(imus), trib. pot(estate) X, [co(n)s(ul) V, imp(erator) X] XVII, p(ater) p(atriciae), [a]quam cibitati Sardianorum [ex fonte perduxit], [{vac.}] Ti Cla[ui]dio Demetri f. Quirina Apollop[hane] opera curante].

[Ti. Κλαύδι]ος Δρούσου υἱὸς Καῖσαρ Σεβαστὸς Γερμανικός, [ἀρχιερεὺς, δημαρχικῆς ἐξουσίας τὸ ι. ὕπατος τὸ ε'], [αὐτοκράτωρ] τὸ κζ', πατὴρ πατρίδος, ὕδωρ ἀπὸ πηγῆς π[ρὸς τὴν Σαρδιανῶν πόλιν διήγαγεν], [{vac.}] ἐργεπιστατήσαντος Τιβερίου Κλαυδίου Δημητρίου υἱοῦ Κυρεῖνα Ἀπολλοφάνου] (Sardis 7.1.10 = *CIL* 3.409 = *IGR* 4.1505).

[Tiberius Claudi]us Drusus, the son of Caesar Augustus Germanicus, [pont(ife)x max(imus), in the tenth year of his tribunician power, his fifth year as consul, [in his seventeenth year with imperial power], father of the country, [brought] water from a source to [the city of Sardis], [{vac.}] with Tiberius Claudius Demetrius son of Quirina Apollophanes as superintendent of the work.

This inscription dates to the reign of Claudius, and there is a lack of evidence for another earthquake in Sardis since 17 CE. Consequently, the scholarly consensus is that the aqueduct had sustained damage in the 17 CE earthquake and had yet to be

³³*AE* 1912, 216. The Greek and Latin inscriptions are also cited in Guidoboni (1994), 188-189. *Liber Pater* commonly referred to Dionysus.

rebuilt until Claudius gave the funds to do so.³⁴

Appropriating funds for the construction of specific projects like temples and aqueducts made the Emperor comparable to a local *evergetes*. The commemorative inscriptions to Claudius' largesse are much more conventional, differing little from Sardis' memorial to Julia Lydia's reconstruction of the temple of Hera after 17 CE.³⁵ Unlike Tiberius' earlier *χρήματα*, Claudius' grant was not intended to stimulate broader reconstruction because recovery, especially in Sardis, had progressed beyond the need for the immediate infusion of capital. Consequently, Sardis must have asked the Emperor to finance a public works project that enhanced the collective, communal lives of its citizens.³⁶ No doubt Samos did the same. Therefore, the use of targeted monetary grants reflects euergetic enhancement rather than economic stimulation.

Emperors also gave gifts (*χρήματα*) that were neither proportional nor targeted. Like proportional *χρήματα* they often were intended to instigate recovery and rebuilding after hazardous events. Nero sent four million HS to Lugdunum (mod. Lyon) after a fire destroyed the city and to reciprocate Lugdunum's offer to aid Rome following the Great Fire (Tac. *Ann.* 16.13.3).³⁷ According to the epitome of

³⁴Construction on this aqueduct may have begun during the reign of Caligula. See Sardis 7.1.11 and Frank Card Bourne, *The public works of the Julio-Claudians and Flavians* (Princeton University, 1946), 41. For the consensus on the timing of construction, see Bourne (1946), 47, Hanfmann (1983), 142, and especially see Levick (1990), 178-179. See Levick (1990), 235 n. 31 for additional references.

³⁵This inscription has already been cited. See ch. 1, p. 33.

³⁶For collective benefit of such projects, see Zuiderhoek (2009), 35.

³⁷Tacitus only refers to a disaster (*cladem*). Seneca (*Ep.* 91) describes a terrible fire that consumed the colony there (*colonia exusta est*). This is most likely the disaster

Cassius Dio, Titus sent “other money” (χρήματα ἄλλα) to encourage the recovery of Campania in 79 CE (66.24.3). Likewise, Marcus Aurelius gave χρήματα to many cities especially Sardis when it suffered from the 177 CE earthquake (Cass. Dio 72.32.3). Aristides claims Marcus and Commodus also arranged for other sources of money (χρημάτων πόρους ἀπεδείνυσαν), in addition to their own gifts, to aid the city in its reconstruction efforts (*Or.* 20.8). The references to these imperial benefactions offer no indication of their value, how they were apportioned, or of their purpose. They only reveal that the emperors contributed money to assist the victims of a disaster.

Despite frequently mentioning imperial benefactions as a form of disaster assistance, the sources must be treated with caution on two points. First, too much can be made of the stated values of the gifts. They are stylized, not actual. In his analysis of financial figures in the Roman historians, Walter Scheidel concludes, “between ninety and one hundred percent of all existing financial numerical data are merely conventional figures which cannot automatically be accepted as rough appropriations or rounded variants of actual figures known to the authors.”³⁸ Scheidel shows that Roman authors preferred to use figures based upon powers of ten (e.g. ten, one hundred, one thousand, ten million, etc.).³⁹ Tacitus’ use of the

to which Tacitus refers.

³⁸Walter Scheidel, “Finances, Figures and Fiction,” *CQ* 46, no. 1 (1996): 223.

³⁹Scheidel (1996), 224. See also Richard Duncan-Jones, *Money and Government in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: 1994), 16–19.

figure ten million HS (*centies sestertium*; *Ann.* 2.47.4) for the valuation of Tiberius' benefaction to Sardis in 17 CE falls within this entrenched, stylized pattern.⁴⁰

A Roman historian's financial figures can be accurate rather than stylizations, but given the degree to which conventions were followed, it is impossible to distinguish between precision and convention. Thus, Scheidel cautions that "practically all numerical references may be no more than indicative of a certain order of magnitude."⁴¹ This means that the financial information given by Tacitus in the above example should not be interpreted too rigidly. The quantity he states offers little for assessing the true monetary value of Tiberius' assistance. Instead, Tacitus uses a literary form to convey that Tiberius gave moderate economic assistance to rebuild Sardis and Magnesia.

Figure 3

**Known Amounts of Imperial Monetary Grants for Disaster Relief
Early Empire**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Cause</i>	<i>Amount (HS)</i>
17 CE	Earthquake - Sardis	10 million
36 CE	Fire relief - Aventine Hill	100 million
53 CE	Fire - Bononia	10 million
65 CE	Fire reimbursement - Lugdunum	4 million

Second, there is no clear evidence to ascertain how imperial grants reached their beneficiaries. Scholars have generally agreed that emperors did not send bags

⁴⁰Scheidel (1996), 232.

⁴¹Scheidel (1996), 236-237.

containing large quantities of currency when they sent aid to the provinces.⁴² What other arrangements were made to transport imperial coin to damaged cities remains unknown. Neither is it obvious how fire victims in Rome received imperial munificence. This might naturally have been the responsibility of appointed commissions like the one in 36 CE, but Tacitus only states it estimated damage. He stays silent on how Tiberius distributed the funds.

Despite the noted problems with the accuracy of the figures given in the sources, they show, even if stylized, some indication of the value of the gifts and therefore permit comparison. For example, the HS 4 million granted to Lugdunum serves as the least known amount given for disaster assistance. Lugdunum received this gift because they had given money to help the rebuilding of Rome after the Great Fire of the previous year. Tacitus refers to Nero's grant as "the same sum of money which the Lugdunenses had previously offered the misfortunes of the City" (*quam pecuniam Lugdunenses ante obtulerant urbis casibus. Ann. 16.13.3*).⁴³ In comparative terms, this amount most likely did not represent a substantial cost for Nero. Suetonius records that he spent the exact same amount, HS 4 million, for the purchase of headbands for his dinner guests (*Suet. Nero 27.3*). Since Lugdunum had sent this amount to assist Rome, we might surmise this represented a substantial contribution for the city. Consequently, the reimbursement by Nero,

⁴²For the scholarly consensus, see MacMullen (1959), 210; Mitchell (1987), 344; P.A. Brunt, "The Revenues of Rome," *JRS* 71 (1981), 161.

⁴³trans. Woodman.

while comparatively small, might have represented a significant influx of capital to help that city rebuild.

The amount given by Tiberius to Sardis, HS 10 million, seems rather modest given the magnitude of the disaster as it is reported in the sources. This amount equals the value of the subvention that Claudius gave to Bononia to assist its recovery from a fire. Based upon these very limited figures, it appears that neither Tiberius nor Claudius spent lavishly on these two respective cities. In the case of Sardis, the amount Tiberius contributed indicates that the majority of the financial resources for resurrecting that city from the major earthquake of 17 CE came from local elites and the tax revenues that he permitted them to keep.⁴⁴

In contrast, Tiberius' grant of HS 100 million following the Aventine fire of 36 CE represents a substantial investment in the rehabilitation of that part of the city (*Tac Ann.* 6.45.1). This amount equals the total contribution that Tiberius made to the state treasury in an attempt to end a credit crisis in 33 CE (*Tac. Ann.* 6.17.3). The total is also ten times larger than the grant he made for the recovery of Sardis. Since we know nothing about the extent of Sardis' damage in the 17 CE earthquake, it is impossible to make a direct comparison between the condition of the two cities and what their needs were. Nevertheless, the size of Tiberius' grant in 36 CE does reinforce the idea that the Emperor's primary concern was the city of Rome, and the Romans benefitted from the Emperor's presence in a way that provincials could and did not.

Tax Remission

⁴⁴See discussion on tax remissions below.

The Romans imposed two main types of direct taxation upon their provincial subjects: *tributum soli* and *tributum capitis*. *Tributum soli* was a tax upon both public (*ager publicus*) and private (*ager privatus*) land. Land that owed dues to the state in the form of tithes and rents paid tribute on them to the provincial administration.⁴⁵ Civic territories also paid the land tax as *ager privatus* unless a community or city had received special immunity from this obligation. The land tax included quotas on produce and payments on the assessed value of *instrumentum fundi* “such as slaves, animals, equipment for cultivating and processing crops, farm buildings, storage vessels, waggons (sic), boats, [and] grain stored for seed or maintenance of *familia*.”⁴⁶ People in the countryside also paid additional exactions such as craft-dues (χειρωναξίον), a pig tax, and a salt tax.⁴⁷

Most of the Greek speaking provinces had grown accustomed to the obligations that were part of *tributum soli* because the Hellenistic-monarch states that preceded Roman rule had similar forms of taxation. Rathbone suggests that in the cases of Asia, Egypt, and Sicily, the provinces for which there is the most evidence, Rome did not make vast changes to the preexisting methods of taxation.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Rathbone (1993), 86 categorizes this kind of land as *ager publicus*.

⁴⁶Brunt (1981), 166. Also Corbier (1992), 227.

⁴⁷This was especially in true in Egypt, but Egypt most likely served as the model for the remainder of the provinces. Such taxes also expose additional inequalities within the system because those living in the countryside (χώρα) paid taxes from which urban elites were immune. This has been long noted in the scholarship. See Rathbone (1993), 86-87; Corbier (1992), 229-230; R. MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 34.

⁴⁸Rathbone (1993), 85-86.

Thus, as they had done with the system of euergetism, the Romans left unchanged most of the forms and rates of taxation to which the Greeks had become accustomed.

The Romans also introduced a new form of taxation to the Mediterranean known as the *tributum capitis* or poll-tax.⁴⁹ This was a tax upon the person and represents the “potent symbol of subjection to Roman rule.”⁵⁰ This tax emphasized the hierarchical distinctions stressed by the Romans between the farmers of the country-side who paid higher rates and those who were urbanites who paid reduced rates.⁵¹ Associated with *tributum capitis* was the census that took place, depending on the province, in five, fourteen, and fifteen year cycles.⁵² The census took account of all persons dwelling in houses as well as the number of buildings a property owner had on his property.

Emperors, usually in consultation with the Senate, granted tax remission as a form of disaster aid. Because Roman citizens had gained immunity from paying *tributum* in 167 BCE, this type of assistance was only relevant in the provinces for provincial cities bore the unequal burden of direct, Roman taxation.⁵³ In light of existing evidence, temporary tax exemptions for disaster relief rarely happened in the early Empire and only after severe earthquakes. Emperors used this form of

⁴⁹Rathbone (1993), 86.

⁵⁰Rathbone (1993), 86.

⁵¹Rathbone (1993), 87.

⁵²Duncan-Jones (1994), 59-63.

⁵³For a good discussion of the inequalities in the Roman tax system see Mireille Corbier, “City, territory, and taxation,” in *City and Country in the Ancient World*, eds. John Rich and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (London: Routledge, 1992), 213-220.

disaster aid a mere six times in 47 earthquake events during the first 200 years of the imperial government.⁵⁴ Therefore, it may have been “the simplest method” of disaster relief, but it was sparingly used.⁵⁵

Figure 4

Tax Remissions for Earthquake Relief: Early Empire		
<i>Year (CE)</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Length of Exemption (yrs)</i>
17	Asia Province	5
23	Cibyra, Aegium	3
47	Antioch, Daphne	unknown
53	Phrygian Apamea	5
120	Aoria, Cyzicus, Nicea, Nicomedia	unknown
177	Smyrna	10

Giving disaster relief by remitting taxes may have followed a precedent established by the Senate during the Republic. However, the lone reference to such senatorial action by comes from the 5th century CE Christian historian, Orosius whose work serves partly as a compilation of Roman disasters which he made at the behest of Augustine to counter pagan charges that recent disasters caused by the Germanic invasions resulted from the abandonment of traditional, Roman religion.⁵⁶

⁵⁴See Figure 2.

⁵⁵Mitchell (1987) calls tax remission “the simplest method” (345). The data for imperial earthquake responses also do not support his claim that “It was surely easier and more politic to ask for a remission of debts than for an outright imperial grant” (346).

⁵⁶An excellent introduction to Orosius, the sources of his work, its purpose, and Augustine’s influence occurs in David Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity*

He claims that in 121 BCE the Senate remitted the taxes of Catania in Sicily for a period of ten years after an eruption of Mt. Etna destroyed that city (5.13.1).

Although his section on the history of the Republic used Livy as its main source, no text of Livy is extant for that period to confirm Orosius' account.⁵⁷

The Senate, as the guardians of state finances during the Republic, had the power to help the plight of the Catanians. But after Augustus seized control of the Empire, the management of the treasury came under the auspices of the emperor, and the power to grant tax immunity as a means of aid became his and his successors' prerogative.⁵⁸ Augustus, who readily gave disaster help, relied upon monetary grants rather than tax remissions. Although, after the cities of Asia suffered from earthquakes, in 12 BCE, he did pay the cost of their annual tribute from his own finances (τόν τε φόρον αὐτῆς τὸν ἔτειον ἐκ τῶν ἑαυτοῦ χρημάτων τῷ κοινῷ ἐσήνεγκε, Cass. Dio 54.30.3). Cassius Dio explains that Augustus took this action because the province (τὸ ἔθνος) needed (ἔδειτο) assistance (ἐπικουρίας, 54.30.3). Even though he did not offer an extensive remission of tax obligations, Augustus did use easing tax burdens as a way to alleviate additional financial stress upon the recovering province.

(London: Routledge, 2002), 135-149. See also David S. Potter, *Literary Texts and the Roman Historian* (London: Routledge, 1999), 71-72.

⁵⁷Rohrbacher (2002), 138.

⁵⁸Levick (1999), 107 says Augustus did not work with the Senate to send aid to Tralles and Laodicea in 27 BCE. Emperors, including Augustus, sought the Senate's *consulta* on monetary grants and tax remissions. See "The Senate and Senators" in the section below.

Tiberius made remitting taxes a more common form of disaster aid than did his predecessor. His gift of a five year tax remission to spark the recovery of Asia after the 17 CE earthquake established a trend for future tax remissions and paralleled the Senate's response to the Catanian catastrophe. Tacitus and Dio concur that Tiberius remitted taxes for all twelve cities destroyed in the earthquake irrespective of their degree of damage. Cassius Dio's shorter version states that Tiberius remitted "much money from the taxes" (ἐκ τῶν φόρων ἀνείθη πολλά) while Tacitus' fuller account specifies the length of the remission. Later in his reign, when the Asian cities Cibyra and Aegium were shaken by an earthquake in 23 CE, Tiberius, in consultation with the Senate (*senatus consulta*), exempted them from taxation for a three year period (*subveniretur remissione tributii in triennium*, Tac. *Ann.* 4.13.1).

Claudius, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius followed the example Tiberius set and suspended tax obligations to enable provincial cities to recover from earthquakes. Claudius twice did this. He lightened the obligations of Syrian Antioch in 47 CE so the city might rebuild arcades that had originally been built when Tiberius was emperor (Mal. *Chron.* 246). He again granted remission in 53 CE when a sixteen year old Nero secured a five year exemption for Apamea in Phrygia (Tac. *Ann.* 12.58.2). According to the troublesome *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, a series of imperial biographies preserved in a 9th century codex, Hadrian routinely

used remitting taxes to relieve many earthquake shaken cities (*tributa multis remisit, SHA. Had. 21.5-7*).⁵⁹

In 177 CE, the city of Smyrna (mod. Izmir) in Asia Minor suffered from an earthquake that destroyed its famous harbors, temples, and gymnasia. The emperor, Marcus Aurelius, had visited the city the previous year and forged a close bond with it. To assist the restoration of the city's civic life, Marcus and his son Commodus, who was now co-regent, granted the city a tax remission for ten years. In a brief excerpt, Eusebius' *Chronicon* states, "Smyrna, a city in Asia, collapsed in an earthquake, for the renewal of which, immunity from taxes was given for a period of ten years" (*Smyrna urbs Asiae terraemotu ruit, ad cuius instaurationem decennalis tributorum immunitas data est, 210c*).⁶⁰ This claim is problematic because the source is late, has no corroboration, and lists an unusually long exemption period.

Eusebius' account, however, is not without foundation. Emperors did follow precedents, but nothing required them to follow the precise ways their predecessors supplied recovery assistance. Despite the lack of an imperial *exemplum* for a ten year tax remission, the Senate had granted Catania an exemption of that same length in 121 BCE. In spite of coping with fluctuating finances, second century CE emperors became increasingly comfortable with granting lengthy tax immunities

⁵⁹A good introduction to the *SHA* and the historiographical problems associated with it can be found in Ronald Mellor, *The Roman Historians* (London: Routledge, 1999), 157-164.

⁶⁰No original Greek manuscripts of Eusebius' *Chronicon* are extant. Only Armenian and Latin translations remain.

and long-term debt relief as a way to extend favors to Rome and the provinces and to give disaster assistance.⁶¹ Hadrian remitted the debts owed to the imperial and public treasuries for a fifteen year period (Cass. Dio 69.8.1-2). Marcus Aurelius expanded Hadrian's relief for 45 additional years (Cass. Dio 72.32.2).⁶² There is also credibility to the claim of the *SHA* that Marcus Aurelius regularly remitted (*remisit*) tribute and taxes (*vectigalia*) to ruined towns (*oppidis labentibus*) as a form of aid (*auxilium*, *SHA*. Marc. Aur. 23.3). It is significant, therefore, that the epitome of Cassius Dio groups Marcus' earthquake aid to Smyrna and grants to other cities with these long-term financial allowances (72.32.2). Hence, a ten year remission to revitalize Smyrna in 177 CE fits within the broader trend of the tax breaks second century CE emperors gave the provinces.

From these examples, two significant patterns emerge. First, tax remissions were granted at the beginning of new tax cycles. From the outset of the Empire, the tax system followed fifteen year and five year cycles (*lustra*).⁶³ The five year cycle fits within a broader fifteen year tax calendar so it is likely some overlap between the systems occurred.⁶⁴ Since new tax cycles began with the census, census years permit an accurate calculation of the beginning of those cycles.

⁶¹See Kloft (1970), 124 for additional information and references.

⁶²Rostovtzeff interpreted Marcus' remission of debts to the *fiscus* and *aerarium* as a continuation of the practice of Hadrian. See *Roman Empire*² (1957) 1.373.

⁶³This discussion of Roman tax cycles follows Duncan-Jones (1994), 59-63. The lone exception to the fifteen year cycle was Egypt which followed a fourteen year cycle. See Duncan-Jones (1994), 61 and Dominic Rathbone, "Egypt, Augustus, and Roman Taxation," *Cahiers du Centre Gustave Glotz* 4, no. 1 (1993): 89-90.

⁶⁴Three five year cycles could comprise one larger fifteen year cycle.

Augustus held his first two censuses within a twenty year span in 28 BCE and 8 BCE respectively.⁶⁵ In 47/48 CE, Claudius took another census that corresponded with the renewal of the Augustan five year lustral cycle. This means that the five year remission granted to the cities of Asia by Tiberius in 17 CE happened at the start of a new tax-period. The year 23 CE began the next five year cycle, and in that year, he granted a three year exemption to Cibyra and Aegium. Claudius' five year remission for Phrygian Apamea falls within this framework. This also lends credibility to a ten year tax immunity for Smyrna after the 177 CE earthquake. Ten years, a multiple of five, equals two consecutive tax cycles and fits within a broader fifteen year tax cycle, and the year 178 CE, the year after the earthquake, marked the beginning of a new five year tax cycle.

Second, tax remissions for disaster assistance were intended to provide short-term stimulus for reconstruction not permanently alter a city's tax obligations. Earthquake damage would have disrupted the tax revenues a city could expect to collect. Damage to lives and property would have reduced the value of assessments on property of those living in the cities and those in the *χώρα*. Casualties caused by quakes would have lessened the number of persons to pay *tributum capitis*. A temporary stay of tax obligations for at least one tax cycle would have freed

⁶⁵Duncan-Jones (1994), 61. These dates establish a baseline from which to anticipate future census years. Following the 8 BCE census, the new tax cycles, in a five year cycle, would begin in 3 BCE, 2 CE, 7 CE, 12 CE, 17 CE, and so on.

additional, local money for rebuilding large civic structures and homes as well as barns and storage facilities on countryside farms.⁶⁶

That tax relief was temporary suggests that the Romans recognized their tax system impeded disaster recovery and, therefore, needed to be lifted so rehabilitation could occur. Yet, the limited number of years placed on the immunities suggests the imperial hegemony expected the brief tax hiatus to stimulate a full rehabilitation so that tax obligations could resume when the next tax cycle began.

Requests for a remission from tax burdens were a regular occurrence especially by the Greek speaking provinces. Tacitus records that Claudius, in the year 53 CE, granted an immunity from taxes to the island of Cos and to the city of Byzantium (*Ann.* 12.61-63.). This text is instructive because it implies the cities had to go through an appeals process to obtain these tax remissions similar to the procedure for obtaining disaster assistance. Both Cos and Byzantium had envoys who argued their *poleis* deserved tax immunities because of their past service and loyalty to Rome.

Claudius shows a familiarity with the historical ties between Cos and Rome during his discussions with the Senate about granting the island tax immunity. Tacitus says it was the Emperor who “put forward a motion about granting immunity to the Coans” (*Rettulit dein de immunitate Cois tribuenda, Ann.* 12.61.1). Their appeal for immunity was based upon the same two criteria that the cities of Asia had used in their debate for the right to house an imperial temple: antiquity

⁶⁶One tax cycle would be five years. Marcus Aurelius granted Smyrna a two cycle exemption. Cibyra and Aegium (3 years) only received a partial immunity.

and service to Rome.⁶⁷ Tacitus claims Claudius proposed to grant them a remission of tax obligations “recalling many things about their antiquity” (*multaque super antiquitate eorum memoravit, Ann. 12.61.1*). Tacitus later comments that “there can be no doubt that he could have submitted as evidence their many services to the Roman people and their allied victories” (*neque dubium habetur multa eorundem in populum Romanum merita sociasque victorias potuisse tradi, Ann. 12.61.2*).

During the discussions about a tax immunity for Cos, representatives from Byzantium also petitioned to be excused from their tax burdens. They too appealed to Claudius on the basis of their long history of loyalty to the Roman state. The Byzantians recalled a treaty they had made with the Romans in 148 BCE during their war with Andriscus, a pretender to the Macedonian throne (*Ann. 12.63*). They also cited their offers of assistance to Sulla, Lucullus, and Pompey as well as the the Caesars (*Ann. 12.63*). This history of fidelity to Rome and their exhaustion from recent conflicts won them a grant of a five year tax remission (*Ann. 12.63*).

Besides the comparative value of the appeals process for tax remission that *Annals* 12.60-63 brings to light, it also reveals that Byzantium, and presumably Cos too, sought relief from a burdensome system. Two times the Byzantine envoys refer to the “magnitude” of their tax obligations. Tacitus writes they “begged before the senate to be excused from the magnitude of their burdens” (*cum magnitudinem onerum apud senatum deprecarentur, Ann. 12.62.1*). Later, Tacitus claims they asked for an end to “the pressing magnitude of their burdens” (*magnitudine onerum*

⁶⁷See pp. 71-73 above.

urgente, *Ann.* 12.63.3). Byzantium requested a tax remission because of the economic effects of Rome's tax requirements.

There is additional evidence that Roman emperors recognized their tax system proved onerous for provincials. Both Rostovtzeff and Duncan-Jones cite the fifteen year tax remission by Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius' extension of that same immunity for 45 additional years as evidence of the economic struggle the provinces faced because of Rome's tax system.⁶⁸

This evidence indicates that a disaster exacerbated economic conditions within a city or region. Furthermore, disasters, like an earthquake in Asia, gave the representatives of a city the opportunity to request at least a temporary immunity from an already burdensome system. The willingness of the emperors to grant tax remissions demonstrates more than their generosity and liberality. It amounts to a tacit admission of the onerous nature of their tax system, and it suggests they understood a temporary pause in tax payments could stimulate economic restoration whether a disaster had occurred or not. Disasters then represent unique situations that necessitated economic stimulation through tax relief.

"The city, wherever it existed, was the basic unit for tax-collection."⁶⁹ After collecting taxes, the local community then relinquished them to the provincial administration. Brunt has convincingly argued that a grant of tax remissions for disaster relief only removed "communal liability" for submitting tax receipts to the provincial *fiscus* but did not absolve the individual from paying his or her taxes.

⁶⁸*Roman Empire*² (1957) 1.373; Duncan-Jones (1994), 56.

⁶⁹Corbier (1992), 231.

Communal liability refers to the tax obligations of the city as an entity. He cites as evidence the small fishing community of Gyaros who sent an ambassador to Caesar “to request a reduction in their tribute; for, he said, they were paying one hundred and fifty drachmas when they could only with difficulty pay one hundred” (ὅτι πρεσβεῦοι περὶ κουφισμοῦ το φόρου: τελοῖεν γὰρ δραχμὰς ἑκατὸν πενήκοντα καὶ τὰς ἑκατὸν χαλεπῶς ἂν τελοῦντες, Strab. 10.5.3).⁷⁰ Brunt also points to Augustus’ grant of a “remission of one hundred talents of the appointed tribute” (ἑκατὸν τάλαντων ἄφεσιν γενέσθαι τοῦ προσταχθέντος φόρου) to the island of Cos in exchange for a painting of Aphrodite Anadyomene (Strab. 14.2.19).⁷¹ These two examples illustrate two *poleis* either seeking or obtaining tax remissions as entities, not as individuals of which these city-states consisted.

Therefore, in the case of tax remissions for disaster assistance, cities continued to collect tax revenues from individuals but did not have to remit them to the state.⁷² They could then reallocate the funds to begin the recovery and rebuilding process.⁷³ Thus, farmers and non-elites would not have been advantaged by tax immunity because despite being the most adversely affected by the quake, they would have seen no reduction in their tax liabilities whatsoever. Consequently,

⁷⁰trans. Cary.

⁷¹trans. Cary.

⁷²Brunt (1981), 169, also Corbier (1992), 229.

⁷³Brunt (1981), 169.

“the burden of the reconstruction of towns would have fallen for the most part on the population of their *chora*.”⁷⁴

On the surface, grants of tax immunity appear to help cities and individuals, regardless of their wealth class, rebuild following an earthquake event. But the benefits of these tax remissions depended upon how the Roman state granted them. However, since tax immunities were granted to communities and not individuals, farmers, merchants, and even city elites had to continue to meet their tax obligations despite the additional hardship a disaster might have created. Furthermore, by granting communal immunity instead of individual relief, the emperors received credit for their benevolent restoration of fallen cities, when in reality they shifted the rebuilding of those cities to the residents who had the least ability to pay.

Inheritances

Two additional sources of money emperors made available for disaster recovery came from inheritances bequeathed to the emperor from his friends (*amici*) and the estates of those who died with no heir (*bona caduca*). The practice of “making one’s friends or allies either partial heir or legatees in one’s will was continuous from the later republic into the empire.”⁷⁵ Under the empire, it became common practice for the emperor to be named at least a partial heir of an elite’s estate. Those closest to the emperor were expected to name him in their wills.⁷⁶

⁷⁴Corbier (1992), 230.

⁷⁵*ERW*, 154. See also Robert Samuel Rogers, “The Roman Emperors as Heirs and Legatees,” *Transactions and Proceeds of the American Philological Association* 78 (1947): 140-141.

⁷⁶*ERW*, 154.

Along with legacies, the imperial treasury absorbed the estates of those who died without heirs. By longstanding custom, such lands were considered ‘royal’ and went into the *Fiscus*, the technical term for the imperial estate.⁷⁷ Because this property became part of the emperors’ personal wealth, they had free use of this revenue and could report it to the general state treasury (*aerarium*) or reserve it for other uses.

Titus unquestionably apportioned these funds for disaster aid to Campania after the Vesuvius eruption, and in doing so, he may have imitated one aspect of Tiberius’ response to the Asia earthquake in 17 CE. The account of Suetonius corresponds to the epitome of Cassius Dio on the details of Titus’ aid following the Vesuvius catastrophe. Titus opted to send two former consuls to oversee the rebuilding and he “assigned the property of those killed by Vesuvius for whom there were no heirs for the restoration of the afflicted cities” (*bona oppressorum in Vesuvio, quorum heredes non exstabant, restitutioni afflictarum civitatum attribuit*, Suet. *Tit.* 8.4). Likewise, Cassius Dio says Titus helped the region when he “donated the property of those who died without heirs” (τὰ τῶν ἄνευ κληρονόμων τεθνηκότων ἐδωρήσατο, 66.24.4).

The early emperors usually followed the example of Augustus and accepted the wills only of those whom they knew personally.⁷⁸ They also typically refused to be the beneficiaries of those outside their inner-circle. Because Campania was a

⁷⁷*ERW*, 160-162; Fergus Millar, “The fiscus in the first two centuries,” *JRS* 53 (1963): 29.

⁷⁸Rogers (1947), 143.

popular destination for Rome's political class, it is unclear whether this property belonged those who knew the emperor or to a few who did not know him yet made him their heir. Regardless, what is key here is Titus' assumption of responsibility for intestate estates and his reallocation of them for the recovery of the region.

Titus' response arguably followed an earlier precedent in Tiberius' relief of Asia. Unfortunately, the only comparable reference comes from Xiphilinus' summary of Dio's history, and the text potentially suffers from a lacuna. It reads:

ταῖς τε ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ πόλεσι ταῖς ὑπὸ τοῦ σεισμοῦ
κακωθείσαις ἀνὴρ ἐστρατηγηκῶς σὺν πέντε
ῥαβδούχοις προσετάχθη, καὶ χρήματα πολλὰ μὲν ἐκ
τῶν φόρων ἀνείθη πολλὰ δὲ καὶ παρὰ τοῦ Τιβερίου
ἐδόθη: τῶν γὰρ ἀλλοτριῶν ἰσχυρῶς, μέχρι γε καὶ
τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετὴν ἐπετίδευσεν, ἀπεχόμενος, μηδὲ
τὰς κληρονομίας ἃς τινες αὐτῷ συγγενεῖς ἔχοντες
κατέλιπον προσιέμενος, πάμπολλα ἔς τε τὰς πόλεις
καὶ τοὺς ἰδιώτας ἀνήλπισκε, καὶ οὔτε τιμὴν οὔτε
ἔπαινον οὐδένα ἐπ' αὐτοῖς προσεδέχετο (Cass. Dio
57.17.7-8).

And to cities in Asia which were damaged by the earthquake, a praetor with five lictors was assigned, and much money was remitted from the taxes and much was also given by Tiberius: for vehemently rejecting the property of others, to whatever extent he practiced any other virtue, and not accepting the inheritances which some having relatives left to him, he lavished very much on the cities and individuals, and accepted neither honor nor praise at all for them.

The difficult section of this paragraph begins with the explanatory phrase “for vehemently rejecting the property of others” (τῶν γὰρ ἀλλοτριῶν ἰσχυρῶς...ἀπεχόμενος).

What is unclear is whether this description serves a general character assessment of Tiberius or offers more details about the Emperor's earthquake assistance. Tiberius'

predecessor refused to accept inheritances from those who died having living children, so this passage may credit Tiberius with similar actions (Suet. *Aug.* 66.4).⁷⁹ Not accepting inheritances from people with living heirs also differs from Titus who appropriated the estates of those without heirs. Nevertheless, we cannot entirely rule out interpreting Cassius Dio to mean that one source of Tiberius' χρήματα for Asia's restoration came from his refusal to absorb inheritances into his *fiscus*. Such action would have established a precedent of appropriating this money for disaster assistance which Titus later followed.

The Senate and Senators

Under the imperial government, the Senate's role gradually diminished as the emperor's *auctoritas* increased. However, emperors did seek out the advice of that body and included it in decisions especially those involving the province of Asia.⁸⁰ In cases of disaster relief, emperors consistently involved the Senate and senators in one of two ways. First, the Senate issued decrees (*consulta*) on monetary grants and tax remissions. Tiberius began his political career by appealing to the Senate on behalf of Chios, Laodicea, and Thyatira after those cities of Asia suffered from an earthquake in 27 BCE (Suet. *Tib.* 8). In 23 CE, at Tiberius' insistence, a *senatus consultum* granted Cibyra and Aegium a three year tax remission (Tac. *Ann.* 4.13.1).

Following the 177 CE earthquake that hit Smyrna, Aristides claimed Marcus Aurelius and Commodus "became ambassadors on our behalf to the Roman Senate,

⁷⁹Rogers (1947), 143.

⁸⁰Martin Goodman, *The Roman World 44 BC-AD 180* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 94-95. See also Levick (1999), 103 on *consulta* being mere recommendations not policies.

requesting them to pass decrees for which no one of us would have dared to ask”

(αὐτοὶ πρέσβεις περὶ ἡμῶν πρὸς τὴν οἴκοι βουλὴν κατέστησαν, ἃ μηδεὶς ἂν ἡμῶν ἐθάρρησεν αἰτῆσαι, ταῦτ' ἀξιούντες ψηφίσασθαι, *Or.* 20.10).⁸¹

These examples suggest the Senate, though meeting only twice per month, remained at the forefront of Rome's relationship with its provinces. During the Republic, provincial cities grew accustomed to informing the Senate of their condition and petitioning it for needed aid. In order to secure benefits, the cities relied upon ambassadors to bring their cases before the Senate. In the early Empire, embassies could now appeal directly to the emperors, or they could be heard in the Senate.⁸² This reveals a shift in the hierarchical structure of Roman politics. The relationship between the emperors and the provinces evolved alongside the transition of power away from the Senate toward the person of the emperor. In the early Empire, that process was not yet complete. The emperors worked in cooperation with the Senate to give disaster assistance.

Senators and magistrates also played an important role as assessors and overseers of the reconstruction of damaged cities in the provinces and in Italy. According to Tacitus, Tiberius sent M. Ateius, a senator with the rank of praetor, to inspect the degree of damage among the ten lesser damaged cities affected by the 17 CE earthquake and relieve them (2.47.4; Cass. Dio 57.17.7). After his hasty

⁸¹trans. Behr.

⁸²*ERW*, 346. See also J.A. Crook, *Consilium Principis: Imperial Councils and Counsellors from Augustus to Diocletian*, (New York: Arno Press, 1975), 37, along with Pat Southern's discussion of Augustus' cooperation with the senate in *Augustus* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 141-144.

departure from Campania, Titus selected two former consuls by lot (*sorte*) and sent them to the region as to oversee its restoration (*curatores restituendae*, Suet. *Tit.* 8; Cass. Dio 66.24.3).⁸³

What senators did when assigned to these tasks remains difficult to ascertain. The appointment of official overseers of imperial construction projects occurred frequently. Hadrian appointed men who oversaw imperial construction in the provinces under the title *curatores operum publicorum dati ab divi Hadriano*. *Curatores* appear in Greek inscriptions with titles such as ἀρχιτέκτονες, a term signifying their supervisory role in the building process. Their chief duties were to “farm out contracts to expedite the procuring of materials and labor, and to keep a general eye on expenses.”⁸⁴ However, the use of *curatores* throughout Italy in order to prevent excessive expenditure did not become commonplace until after the reign of Trajan when the appointment of *curatores rei publicae* for that purpose became a regular practice.⁸⁵

Curatores were chosen because each was “someone rich, influential, and vigorous,” not because they had architectural expertise.⁸⁶ Perhaps the emperors had men ready at hand who could be used in the capacity of *curatores* whenever a need

⁸³On the custom of *sorte*, see Nathan Rosenstein, “Sorting Out the Lot in Republican Rome,” *AJP* 116, no. 1 (1995): 43–75.

⁸⁴MacMullen (1959), 210.

⁸⁵For a more detailed discussion of this development, see Richard Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 305.

⁸⁶MacMullen (1959), 211.

for them arose.⁸⁷ Thus, they not only protected the imperial coffers from over expenditure and mismanagement, but financially conscious emperors could deflect the costs of reconstruction and building to the imperial accounts by utilizing these men of substantial wealth in a capacity that would enable them to absorb some of the financial burden.

Although the position and function of the *curatores* became formalized after the disasters in Asia and Campania, the tasks with which they were entrusted resemble the bureaucratic responsibilities of the official *curatores* of the second century CE. M. Ateius and the two ex-consuls sent to Campania traveled as representatives of Tiberius and Titus, respectively, to provide much needed assistance to the victims of two terrible tragedies.

Modern models for disaster assistance assume the involvement of government emergency agencies, local emergency personnel, non-government organizations (NGOs), and international bodies like the United Nations to contribute to providing relief at all phases following a disaster.⁸⁸ The Romans, and those living under their rule, lacked the benefit of these agencies to assist the people who had suffered in a major disaster. Nevertheless, these examples, while fragmented, demonstrate

⁸⁷MacMullen (1959), 211.

⁸⁸The assumed participation of these organizations has prompted scholarly inquiry on the need for local input in the recovery and rebuilding process. See especially Jennifer Duyne Barenstein, "Who governs reconstruction? Changes in continuity policies, practices, and outcome," and Alicia Sliwinski, "The politics of participation: involving communities in post-disaster reconstruction," in *Rebuilding after Disasters*, eds. Gonzalo Lizarralde, Cassidy Johnson, and Colin Davidson (Abingdon: Spon Press, 2010), 149-192.

imperial assistance for every recovery stage could be accessed by the inhabitants of Rome, Italy, and the provinces.

The Provincial Procurement Process

Having established the kinds of aid the Roman state provided after extreme events, we now focus on how this assistance was obtained. Outside of Rome, Roman disaster responses were always reactionary and had to be prompted by provincial petition because only Antioch in Syria, during the reign of Trajan (r. 98-117), experienced a disaster while the emperor resided within it.

In December 115 CE, the emperor Trajan, while on his Mesopotamian campaign against the Parthians, wintered with his troops in the great Syrian city of Antioch. During his stay, a major earthquake hit the region causing the catastrophic collapse of many civic and private structures in Antioch.⁸⁹ Cassius Dio reports that “many of the people were hurt even those outside of houses” (τῶν δὲ δὴ ἀνθρώπων πολλοὶ μὲν καὶ ἐκτὸς τῶν οἰκιῶν ὄντες ἐπόνησαν) and “some were injured and others killed” (καὶ οἱ μὲν ἐπηροῦντο οἱ δὲ ἔθνησκον, 68.24.5). Many of the injured suffered violently, losing limbs or sustaining head trauma or internal injuries (68.25.1-2). Falling debris and collapsing buildings crushed those unfortunate who were unable to dodge the danger. The rubble trapped victims, and though many were rescued, others died slow deaths due to their injuries or hunger while they awaited their removal. Trajan himself received injuries during the quake, and he

⁸⁹The sources for this earthquake are Cass. Dio 68.24, 25.6; Hieron. *Chron.* 196c; Mal. *Chron.* 275; Oros. 7.12.5. For a summary of the debates on the chronology of this earthquake, see Guidoboni (1994), 232.

only escaped through a window in his room (διέφυγε μὲν διὰ θυρίδος ἐκ τοῦ οἰκήματος) with the help of a few able bodied men (68.25.5). According to the 6th century CE *Chronographia* of John Malalas (d. ca. 570 CE), Trajan rebuilt (ἔκτισεν) many structures in the city including the Middle Gate (μέσην πύλην), the theater, a public building (δημόσιον), an aqueduct (ἀγωγόν), and two large colonnades (τοὺς δύο ἐμβόλους τοὺς μεγάλους, Dindorf, 275-276).⁹⁰

It was not extraordinary in the early Empire for an earthquake to destroy a Greek provincial city. Guidoboni's *Catalogue* lists no fewer than 31 known earthquakes affecting one or more Greek cities from the reign of Augustus through the reign of Marcus Aurelius.⁹¹ But, this deadly earthquake, while tragic for the people of Antioch, is unique among the disasters that struck the provinces during the early Empire because it is the only attested occasion that an emperor faced danger alongside his subjects. Emperors had been present in Rome when the Tiber flooded, and Titus had visited the damage in Campania following the Vesuvius eruption, but Trajan experienced the Antioch earthquake first-hand and knew the kind of assistance the city required.

The typical experience for provincial cities differed significantly from Rome and Antioch. They had neither the privilege of being the imperial capital (Rome) nor having the emperor present when an extreme event occurred (Antioch). If they wanted imperial assistance for rebuilding and recovery efforts, they had to notify

⁹⁰The Greek text of Malalas' *Chronographia* comes from the standard edition found in *CSHB*, ed. L.A. Dindorf (Bonn: Impensis Ed. Weberi, 1831).

⁹¹Guidoboni (1994), 174-238.

him that a disaster had taken place and petition him or the Senate for aid. The voluntary nature of this act is made clear by Laodicea's choice to rebuild itself without seeking aid from Rome after an earthquake destroyed the city around 60 CE. (Tac. *Ann.* 14.27.1).⁹² Nevertheless, in extremely catastrophic cases like the earthquakes in Sardis (17 CE) and Smyrna (177 CE), the total destruction of vital civic infrastructure made the prospect of restoration and recovery unlikely without significant financial support. In the Roman Empire, there was no greater source of capital than the state treasuries. Therefore, although asking for the emperors' assistance reinforced their reduced state within the Roman order, the Greek cities readily sent embassies to them and the Senate because without access to their economic resources the civic vitality of their cities could not recover from major disasters.

In the chaotic aftermath of a disaster, cities in the provinces, especially in the Greek east, followed an established "pattern of natural disaster, petition, and imperial response" that "recurs throughout the principate" to access imperial assistance.⁹³ Central to this process, therefore, was communication between the emperor and an injured city. Once the decision was made to request an emperor's economic intervention, the cities were required to send a representative to make a formal petition because "no information or request could reach the emperor unless

⁹²The text of Tacitus reads, "*Eodem anno, ex inlustribus Asiae urbibus Laodicea tremore terrae polapsa, nullo a nobis remedio, propriis opibus revaluit.*" Laodicea showed no particular animus toward Roman assistance for past earthquakes. They sought Augustus' aid in 27 BCE (Strabo 12.8.18).

⁹³Mitchell (1987), 349.

either a written missive were physically brought to him or he were addressed verbally (or, as in many cases, both).⁹⁴ Administrative decisions came only at the end of this ritualized process.⁹⁵

Benefactors in the Greek cities served as their link to the emperors. Because travel in the ancient world was costly, appealing for disaster relief required great expense, and the cities had to fund sending their diplomats out of their own treasuries.⁹⁶ In this way, disaster relief exposes additional inequalities within the Roman system. Only those cities that had the financial means to fund a diplomatic mission could afford to ask for disaster aid. This helps explain why the larger cities of Asia Minor received the majority of imperial assistance. They either had enough funds on hand to finance diplomatic missions or they had elites with the economic means and political ties necessary to gain an imperial audience. Given the consistently poor state of Greek city treasuries, local elites became the faces of their cities.

Since the Augustan succession, Rome insured its control of the Greek east by establishing relationships with city elites.⁹⁷ The very elites who represented the cause of their cities were those with whom the emperors wanted to foster ties of fealty. When the cities sought imperial disaster aid, both sides were able to benefit

⁹⁴*ERW*, 364.

⁹⁵Werner Eck discusses diplomacy as a ritual and describes the appeals process in “Diplomacy as Part of the Administrative Process in the Roman Empire,” in *Diplomats and Diplomacy in the Roman World*, ed. Claude Eilers (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 194-196.

⁹⁶Eck (2009), 200.

⁹⁷Bowersock (1965), 87.

from the transaction. The civic life of Greek cities was restored while the emperors maintained local loyalty.

Nevertheless, having access to the emperor's inner circle did not guarantee a positive outcome to imperial petitions. To improve their chances of obtaining an emperor's largesse, the cities needed representatives who had close, personal ties to the emperors.⁹⁸ Some cities relied upon the advocacy of members of the imperial family to receive assistance. Tralles, Laodicea, and Chios benefitted from imperial χρήματα because Tiberius implored (*deprecatus est*) the Senate on their behalf (Suet. *Tib.* 8). Claudius sent a financial gift to Bononia after a fire and granted a five year tax remission for Apamea based upon Nero's appeals for them (Tac. *Ann.* 12.58.2). In the second century CE, the Greek cities frequently utilized their sophist citizens to deliver petitions to the emperors.⁹⁹ After the earthquake of 177 CE, Aelius Aristides wrote a letter requesting the aid of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus without waiting for the city to appoint him. Consequently Philostratus later referred to Aristides as the founder (οἰκιστὴν) of the city because his initial correspondence to Marcus Aurelius about the devastation in the city induced the emperor to cry (V S 2.9).¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

⁹⁸James B. Rives, "Diplomacy and Identity among Jews and Christians," in *Diplomats and Diplomacy in the Roman World*, ed. Claude Eilers (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 115.

⁹⁹Rives (2009), 115.

¹⁰⁰Rives (2009) groups Aristides with these sophists (115), but Simon Swain's caution against classifying him as such should be noted. See Swain (1998), 255.

The Roman imperial state provided disaster assistance to Roman citizens and provincial subjects. The confines of time, space, and status affected the stage at which relief came and the amount received. This chapter has demonstrated that grants of money took a variety of forms depending upon the purpose for the gift. Emperors also gave tax temporary tax remissions to initiate immediate rebuilding in disaster stricken areas. In extreme cases, the emperors sent one or two Roman magistrates to assess local damage and provide additional funding for local reconstruction.

This chapter has also shown how Roman disaster aid brings to the fore the inherent hierarchy in the Roman Empire because while the emperors supplied disaster assistance, they did so in unequal ways. Rome in the early Empire received the greatest attention from the emperors. Provincial cities received aid, but the presence of the tax system and the need to petition for assistance reinforced the secondary status of provincial cities. Thus, those cities relied upon a network of people close to the emperors to gain his audience and secure his assistance. This generated additional competition between cities for the honor of being rebuilt by their Roman suzerains. This process was quite costly for provincial cities, especially when faced with a dire situation, and made the system of euergetism important within those cities because they often needed the financial resources of their local elites to make send their ambassadors to the imperial court.

Finally, this chapter has shown that emperors did not supply the majority of disaster assistance. The difficult and emotional work of moving rubble, searching for bodies, recovering the dead, and helping the wounded was left to individuals,

families, and cities. Even the cities of Asia Minor, who were fond of making appeals to the emperors, did not request their aid for most of the earthquakes the cities suffered. Consequently, through the process of relief, we see a voluntary system of assistance. The emperors helped where and when they wished, and the cities invoked their assistance when conditions and needed warranted it.

Chapter 5 Disaster Relief and Imperial Politics

Disasters and Political Perception

In 2011, John Gaspar and Andrew Reeves published an analysis of the US electorate wherein they found the American public holds governors and presidents responsible for disaster and weather related events even though politicians do not cause such events to happen. Their study divided voters' attitudes into two competing frameworks: the responsive electorate and the attentive electorate. The responsive electorate describes people who judge the performance of leaders based upon "the current state of the world without respect to cause."¹ Voters in this category punish politicians because damage has occurred from catastrophic or weather related events and do not factor the response a politician makes to the disaster into their perception of his or her quality of leadership.

The attentive electorate pays attention to how politicians react to crises and holds leaders responsible for their response to the hazard but not the event itself. The attentive voter also rewards politicians for attempting to respond and punishes them for poor reactions.

Based upon their analysis of county-level damage estimates aggregated six month prior to all gubernatorial elections from 1970-2006 and presidential elections from 1972-2004, Gaspar and Reeves discovered that the US electorate is both

¹John T. Gaspar and Andrew Reeves, "Make It Rain? Retrospection and the Attentive Electorate in the Context of Natural Disasters," *American Journal of Political Science* 55 no. 2 (April 2011): 342.

responsive and attentive.² Voters blame politicians for exogenous events and punish presidents and governors at the polls for their occurrence. Yet, their “findings show that electorates reward governors who act in the face of severe weather damage.”³ Even when states receive no direct federal aid, voters view governors favorably for their “intention of declaring a disaster.” Presidents who deny federal disaster benefits are punished.

Gaspar and Reeves’ analysis resulted in three significant findings. First, American voters do blame presidents and governors for extreme events that are otherwise beyond their control.⁴ Second, they tend to “reward for both observed aid as well as innuendo of action.”⁵ Third, “a disaster declaration outweighs all of the observed cases of damage in terms of electoral benefit.”⁶

What Gaspar and Reeves learned from their study of American disaster politics reflects broader human attitudes about disasters and disaster responses that have existed since antiquity and that transcend time and space. Blaming a political leader when a disaster occurs is neither an American nor a modern phenomenon. Even in states, like the Roman Empire, where the public has no direct recourse to remove a political leader from power, disaster relief is vital for the public’s overall confidence in the leadership abilities of their current leader. A disaster followed by a

²For the scope of the study see Gaspar and Reeves (2011), 341.

³Gaspar and Reeves (2011), 349.

⁴Gaspar and Reeves (2011), 352.

⁵Gaspar and Reeves (2011), 353.

⁶Gaspar and Reeves (2011), 351.

poor response could create public trepidation at the ineffectiveness or incompetence of political leaders. This could foster strained relations between heads of state and the people they govern.

Disasters and Political Stability

Disasters have tremendous power to destabilize states, especially when governments or political leaders prove ineffective at responding to them. Stuart McCook has recently shown that the powerful March 26, 1812 earthquake in Venezuela exposed the inability of the government of the First Republic to give needed relief to victims of that Holy Thursday quake. Since the government did not adequately respond, Venezuelans concluded it lacked the capacity to govern effectively. Consequently, many sided with opposition royalist forces who were fighting the “patriots” of the republican colonial government. The earthquake hastened the end of the Venezuelan Congress’ control of the republic, and in its place an executive triumvirate with dictatorial authority assumed power to resolve the political and environmental crises the quake had exacerbated.⁷

The earthquake also sparked philosophical discussions over the most appropriate form of government for Venezuela. Those who favored the royalist regime of King Ferdinand VII used religion to suggest the earthquake was an expression of divine anger for Venezuela’s rebellion against the Spanish monarch.⁸

⁷This summary is based on Stuart McCook, “Nature, God, and Nation in Revolutionary Venezuela: The Holy Thursday Earthquake of 1812,” in *Aftershocks: Earthquakes and Popular Politics in Latin America*, eds. Jürgen Buchenau and Lyman L. Johnson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 43-69.

⁸McCook (2009), 49.

In light of the failures of the Venezuelan Republic, Simón Bolívar, the influential South American political thinker and revolutionary leader, became an advocate for strong, centralized government to respond quickly and efficiently to emergencies.⁹ Hence the quake dramatically affected how people thought about the function of government and the relationship between divine will and political structure.

Venezuela in 1812 shows the heightened public attention disasters can attract to governments and political leaders. These events give heads of state opportunities to demonstrate the quality of their leadership and the effectiveness of their governments. They also afford them chances to cement their place in the collective memory of the public. This correlation between public memory and disaster response existed in ancient societies. During the early Empire, earthquakes and fires sometimes occurred on occasions when the Roman public and, especially, Rome's political elites had grave concerns about their emperor's ability to carry out his office. The disaster cast a further shadow over the emperor's political standing, and his response to the disaster became integral for changing how the public viewed him.

This chapter will explore the attitudes the Romans and their subjects had toward disasters and disaster response. Analyzing their attitudes will illuminate how important responding to extreme events was in building the political careers of future emperors and in establishing a sitting emperor's credibility and legitimacy when his political capital was diminished or popular sentiment doubted his capacity to govern. Above all, this chapter will show how the same methods of disaster

⁹McCook (2009), 60.

assistance were employed by different emperors, facing their own political crises, to reassert or remake their public image.

Disasters in Roman Popular and Political Mentalité

Ancient people interpreted physical, cosmological, and seismic phenomena to portend the direction of the future or offer a divine commentary on the present.¹⁰ Natural events like earthquakes, floods, or fires were indistinguishable from cosmological signs like eclipses or comets. They were all “harbingers of doom.”¹¹ At the least, disasters had the potential to disrupt the delicate balance of an unequal Roman society. Consequently, disasters adversely affected the emperors because in the ancient mind they created a direct link between the stability of an emperor’s regime and his subject’s lives. Among some of Rome’s political vanguard, disasters raised doubts about an emperor’s capacity to govern or the stability of his reign. Their occurrence had the potential to undermine his legitimacy.¹²

An example of the political implications of *prodigia* comes from Tacitus’ list of prodigies that occurred at the end of the year 64 CE. He writes:

*Fine anni vulgantur prodigia imminentium
malorum nuntia: vis fulgurum non alias
crebrior, et sidus cometes, sanguine inlustri
semper [Neroni] expiatum; bicipites hominum*

¹⁰Michael D. Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 21-22.

¹¹Davies (2004), 156. The plural (neuter) Latin term for such signs is *prodigia*.

¹²Divine favor remained paramount for state stability. Clifford Ando reminds us that “The Roman state flourished when it enjoyed the favor of the gods.” Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 392.

aliorumve animalium partus abiecti in publicum aut in sacrificiis, quibus gravidas hostias immolare mos est, reperti. et in agro Placentino viam propter natus vitulus, cui caput in crure esset; secutaque haruspicum interpretatio, parari rerum humanarum aliud caput, sed non fore validum neque occultum, quin in utero repressum aut iter iuxta editum sit (Ann. 15.47).

At the end of the year publicity was given to prodigies announcing looming calamities: the discharge of lightning at no other time more frequent, and a comet, something always expiated by Nero with illustrious blood; two-headed fetuses of humans and other animals, respectively discarded in public and discovered during the sacrifices at which it is the custom to immolate pregnant victims. And in Placentine territory next to a road a calf was born whose “head was on its leg”; and there followed the diviners’ interpretation that in preparation there was another head of human affairs, but it would not be effective or concealed, because it had been suppressed in the womb and delivered by the wayside (trans. Woodman).

In this paragraph, Tacitus not only provides an impressive list of *prodigia* that reportedly happened at the end of the year, but he says the interpreters of such events directly connected them with Rome’s politics. Nero, he says, habitually expiated the sightings of comets, no doubt because they had negative implications for his power as well as the state.¹³ Tacitus claims, however, that the interpreters concluded that the appearance of a calf with its head on its leg portended the existence of another head of human affairs. In Roman politics, this could only mean

¹³Nero reacted similarly on the advice of augurs when the temples of Jupiter and Minerva had been struck by lightning, see Tac. *Ann.* 13.24.

that Rome would soon have a new emperor. Indeed, since these events happened at the end of 64 CE, Tacitus knew that the end of Nero's regime drew near.

According to Davies, the advent of the imperial form of Roman government transformed the Roman perception of *prodigia* in two significant ways. First, prodigies and omens drew greater public attention because they signaled the potential end of a regime or dynasty.¹⁴ Second, the heightened public awareness of such phenomena made emperors highly sensitive to news of their occurrence, since reports of catastrophes and cosmic signs could agitate public confidence about the stability of the current political order. Conversely, the increased exercise of imperial power against political enemies reduced public discourse on such events with the exception of those so prodigious they could not be ignored.¹⁵

The amplification of the importance of *prodigia* during the early Empire had lethal effects for those who wrongly presumed hazards and celestial signs foretold an imminent conclusion to an emperor's reign. Tacitus demonstrated the deadliness of misinterpretation in his narrative of the events of 27 CE. In that year, he explains, the Emperor left Rome for Capri and "experts in heavenly matters said that Tiberius had left Rome under such movements of the planets as denied him a return"

*(ferebant periti caelestium iis motibus siderum excessisse Roma Tiberium ut reditus illi negaretur, Ann. 4.58.2).*¹⁶ The experts' misinterpretation of the cosmological signs caused "the extermination of many who inferred and publicized a speedy end to his

¹⁴Davies (2004), 161.

¹⁵Davies (2004), 162-164.

¹⁶trans. Woodman.

life” (*unde exitii causa multis fuit properum finem vitae coniectantibus vulgantibusque, Ann. 4.58.2*).¹⁷

While Tiberius was away, four other events occurred that exacerbated the rumors of the his personal demise (*Ann. 4.59.1*). First, during his journey to Campania, the Emperor and his entourage stopped to dine in a cave near the villa Spelunca. During their dinner, a rockslide buried the mouth of the cave, and Tiberius escaped injury because Sejanus protected him (*Ann. 4.59.2*). Second, two distinguished men of Rome died at the end of the year: Asinius Agrippa and Q. Haterius (*Ann. 4.61*). Third, the collapse of Atilius’ hastily constructed amphitheater at Fidenae killed thousands creating scenes of death, injury, and aid that Tacitus compares to a time of war (*Ann. 4.62-63*). Fourth, immediately following the Fidenae tragedy, a devastating fire burned the Caelian Hill (*Ann. 4.64*). These events collectively prompted the public to maintain “that it was a fatal year and that the princeps’s counsel of absence had been undertaken with unfavourable omens” (*feralemque annum ferebant et ominibus adversis susceptum principi consilium absentiae, Ann. 4.64.1*).¹⁸

We should not conclude that every hazardous event raised public doubts about the current emperor. But, Tacitus’ commentary, while dramatized, shows that a fire, earthquake, flood, or volcanic eruption in the midst of other adverse circumstances could cause the Roman public to doubt the emperor in light of these otherwise exogenous events. Pressure especially came from the political elites who

¹⁷trans. Woodman.

¹⁸trans. Woodman.

formed the social circle of the emperors. However, from the outset of the Empire, Roman rulers learned how to offset the germination of popular concern and to remake their image in the eyes of their peers.

Toner has observed “that disasters created a threat to the political order which sometimes required the state to reassert its political strength.”¹⁹ This statement is only partially accurate. It is true that disasters could generate angst and unrest among the people of Rome and the provinces. However, Toner does not specify what he means when he says disasters “required the state to reassert its political strength.”²⁰ Who or what does he mean by “the state?” If he means the Emperor as the embodiment of the state, he is correct because the emperors needed to show strength in the face of disastrous events that otherwise suggested their weakness. If he intends “the state” to refer to Rome’s ruling elites, it remains unclear how they might have acted in unison to assert themselves over Roman society.

Toner’s generalized observation needs refinement for two reasons. First, the emperors made sure to give disaster relief in Rome because there was little unity within the elite class. Threats to the security of the emperors did not come from the lower ranks of Roman society, they came from the elites. Second, the political and chronological context of each emperor was different. Therefore, it is not enough to observe ways “the state” tried to reinforce itself. Major disasters need to be examined within the overall context of the reigns of individual emperors to

¹⁹Toner (2013), 55.

²⁰Toner (2013), 55.

understand why disasters created unrest and why it was vital for a particular emperor to quell public concern through relieving his suffering subjects. Thus, the focus must be on individual acts of disaster relief and how they affected the political image of the current emperor.

Disaster Relief and Political Image

The potential for the public to interpret extreme events negatively made disaster assistance an indispensable political tool for Rome's emperors. Since a disaster could unsettle the order of society, disaster relief became increasingly important for reestablishing and maintaining balance in a socially imbalanced world. Imperial generosity became the mechanism emperors used to reorient popular thinking about disasters so the public might see them as opportunities to receive imperial gifts rather than as expressions of the anger of the gods (*ira deum*). Therefore, by responding to disasters with monetary grants, Roman emperors transformed the practices of Hellenistic euergetism and Roman patronage into a sustained method of mitigating popular concerns about their legitimacy or competency to govern.²¹

There are examples from antiquity where disaster assistance played an integral role in reasserting the emperor's legitimacy to rule or in reshaping public perception about his capacity to govern. The following section will analyze Tiberius' response to the Caelian Fire (27 CE), Titus' reaction to the Vesuvius eruption (79-80 CE), and Nero's relief measures after the Great Fire (64 CE). Each of these emperors had to respond to a disaster at a critical time in his reign. For them,

²¹These conclusions were much influenced by Davies (2004), 162-164.

disaster relief came to be about more than fulfilling one of the civic functions of the emperor. It was a matter of restoring the political balance of society and their place at its head.

Caelian Response (27 CE)

Major Sources for Imperial Relief

The two major accounts of Tiberius' reaction to the Caelian Hill fire come from Tac. *Ann.* 4.64.1-2 and Suet. *Tib.* 48.1. Tacitus' narrative dramatizes the disaster as part of a series of ominous events that occurred in 27 CE. In *Ann.* 4.57-67, he focuses upon the reasons why those events bolstered the confidence of Tiberius' opponents and how the Emperor responded to abate growing public concern.²² Suetonius' version is much shorter and emphasizes Tiberius' relief of the victims as one of only two examples of his public generosity. Thus, these two authors had competing motives for including this disaster narrative. Tacitus wanted to show how the emperor benefitted politically from responding to the fire, and Suetonius tried to demonstrate that Tiberius' miserliness elucidates his poor character. Nevertheless, these two accounts, along with a brief comment by Velleius Paterculus (2.130) permit a sketch reconstruction of the severity of the fire, why the emperor responded with monetary grants, and who benefitted from his aid.

Overview of the Disaster

Since the time of the Republic, the Caelian Hill was one of the more densely populated regions of the city making it home to large apartment complexes (*insulae*)

²²Woodman (1972), 150-158; Davies (2004), 145.

that had been constructed to accommodate the influx of people (Suet. *Tib.* 48).²³

According to Tacitus, the fire that consumed Caelius Mons was extraordinary (*ultra solitum*) for a city quite accustomed to significant blazes (*Ann.* 4.64.1).²⁴ The fire devastated the area so completely that its social landscape was permanently transformed. After the fire, the more affluent members of Roman society settled in the region where they continued to construct large palatial homes through the fourth century CE.²⁵

It is difficult to reconstruct Tiberius' precise location at the time of the fire. Although earlier in the year he had absconded from Rome for his Caprean retirement, the collapse of the Fidenae amphitheater compelled him to return to the mainland so the public could have access to their emperor (Suet. *Tib.* 40). This does not mean that Tiberius returned to Rome, but he did reside somewhere on the mainland so he could be accessed by the people of Rome. After responding to that disaster, Suetonius says he retired again to the island (*regressus in insulam, Tib.* 41). Tacitus, however, presents all of the ominous events of the latter half of 27 CE, including the Caelian fire, with Tiberius out of the city. He also claims the Fidenae and Caelian disasters were concurrent events saying that the Fidenae disaster "had not yet abated when a violent fire afflicted the City more than usual, with the Caelian Hill burned down (*nondum ea clades exoleverat cum ignis violentia urbem*

²³Lawrence Richardson Jr., *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 63. Evidence for the presence of *insulae* comes from Suetonius.

²⁴The ominous events that preceded this event are outlined in the previous section above.

²⁵Richardson (1992), 63.

*ultra solitum adfecit, deusto monte Caelio, Ann 4.64.1).*²⁶ Since Suetonius places Tiberius somewhere on the mainland after the Fidenae collapse and Tacitus claims the Caelian fire happened immediately after that disaster, Tiberius might have not yet returned to Capri making him available to respond to the fire in a timely manner after it raged through the Caelian Hill.

Political Context of Relief Measures

What is clear is that Tiberius was aware the fire had occurred, and he knew it intensified the groundswell of negative public sentiment against him. According to Tacitus, it was knowledge that the public was beginning to blame his absence for the fire that prompted Tiberius' financial disaster aid. Tacitus writes:

feralemque annum ferebant et ominibus adversis susceptum principi consilium absentiae, qui mos vulgo, fortuita ad culpam trahentes, ni Caesar obviam isset tribuendo pecunias ex modo detrimenti (Ann. 4.64.1)

People were maintaining that it was a fatal year and that the princeps's counsel of absence had been undertaken with unfavorable omens (which is a habit of the public, interpreting chance events in terms of blame); but Caesar confronted the issue by distributing money in proportion to the losses (trans. Woodman).

Tacitus dismisses the public's interpretation of the year's disasters as "the habit of the crowd" (*mos vulgo*, 4.64.1). Nevertheless, the key point in the Tacitean assessment of this event is that the imperial response to the fire occurred because "a

²⁶trans. Woodman.

religious interpretation was beginning to gain momentum.”²⁷ Instead of seeing the fire and the Emperor’s absence from Rome as coincident, Tacitus says the public view shifted *ad culpam* (*Ann.* 4.64.1). Consequently, Tiberius thought the fire necessitated a generous response so he could stop the deterioration of the public’s confidence in the stability of his reign. In Tacitus’ words, “Caesar confronted the issue by distributing money in proportion to the losses” (*Caesar obviam isset tribuendo pecunias ex modo detrimenti*, *Ann.* 4.64.1). Therefore, Tiberius gave proportional monetary grants designed to temper public fear over the current condition of the state under his rule.²⁸

Despite its clarity, Tacitus’ narrative raises two significant questions. First, why did Tiberius use distributions of money to check public concern? Second, who benefitted from his proportional grants? The first question has a simple answer: by 27 CE, imperial largesse had become the standard form of disaster relief.²⁹ Augustus had used monetary grants to help provincial cities after earthquakes, and Tiberius followed his predecessor’s example when he aided the cities of Asia in 17 CE. Nine years after the Caelian response, Tiberius again used gifts of money to his political advantage in response to the Aventine fire (*Tac. Ann.* 6.45). We must then conclude Tiberius knew the people’s concerns could be allayed by responding in a

²⁷Davies (2004), 163.

²⁸Davies (2004), 164.

²⁹Davies (2004), 164; Rubin (2004), 87.

way they anticipated. And, after 58 years of imperial government, they had grown accustomed to the emperor assisting them with gifts of money.³⁰

The answer to the second question is more complex, but it is also important for appreciating the pervasiveness of societal angst over the future of Tiberius' reign. Suetonius places Tiberius' concern with the wealthy owners of the *insulae* that were destroyed by the fire. He describes this as a time "when he [Tiberius] made good the losses of some owners of blocks of houses on the Caelian Mount, which had burned down" (*rursus quibusdam dominis insularum, quae in monte Caelio deflagrant, Tib. 48.1*).³¹ Velleius Paterculus, however, credits the Emperor with an indiscriminate response to the fire claiming he assisted "all ranks of people" (*omnis ordinis hominum, 2.130*). This comports with Tacitus' version that claims, "he helped by his munificence even unknowns who had been summoned spontaneously" (*ignotos etiam et ultro accitos munificentia iuverat, Ann.4.64.2*). The portrait here is of an emperor not only concerned with Rome's elites who owned the apartment complexes and had political clout, but who also cared about the lower class renters who occupied the buildings.

Putting these anecdotes together creates a portrait of widespread loss of property among all ranks of those who dwelled on the Caelian. Those who lived in the tenements would have lost their personal effects and would have been displaced from their homes. The owners of the high-rise complexes would have lost revenue from rents and their initial investment for construction costs. If, as Tacitus asserts,

³⁰See discussion in previous chapter.

³¹trans. Rolfe.

Rome's inhabitants blamed Tiberius for this disaster, there is every reason to believe the fire inflamed opposition from all orders of Roman society. Tiberius' aid, therefore, confronted widespread concern about his reign.

Tiberius reacted to the Caelian disaster through established methods of disaster relief. His motivation for giving assistance grew out of the extreme misfortune of all who suffered loss in the fire, but his political standing was ultimately the intended beneficiary of his aid. The pervasive public disquiet over the events of 27 CE provides some explanation for Tiberius' advertisement of his munificence in the aftermath of the fire. Suetonius says he valued his beneficence to such a degree (*tamen beneficium tanti aestimavit*) that he changed the name from the Caelian Hill to the Augustan Hill (*Tib.* 48.1; *Tac. Ann.* 4.64.3). Thus, as he would do again in 36 CE, Tiberius' response to the 27 CE fire turned a disaster into a situation that enhanced his personal reputation. Nevertheless, the gifts had the initial design of altering the populace's attitude about the current state of his reign.

Great Fire Response (64 CE)

Nero's response to the Great Fire of 64 CE, along with the sources that describe it, was analyzed in the previous chapter as an example of emergency relief, but his assistance deserves further examination because of the political motivations he had for giving aid. This incident reveals how disaster assistance could be used brazenly to achieve political objectives, and it also shows that such aid did not always succeed in assuaging public rancor about the emperor.

Recovery Relief Measures

Besides the emergency measures that Nero took to aid people displaced from their homes, to insure the city's grain supply, and to control grain's price, he led the transition into the restoration phase of recovery. His recovery measures can be divided into three categories: building codes, financial assistance, and appeasement of the gods.

The fire burned through ten of the city's fourteen districts, prompting Tacitus to later write that "it would not at all be easy to arrive at the number of houses, apartment complexes, and temples that were lost" (*domuum et insularum et templorum quae amissa sunt numerum inire haud promptum fuerit, Ann. 15.41.1*). Nero, so it seemed, relished the opportunity to rebuild much of Rome, and, as he did so, he implemented important building codes designed to transform the look and beauty of the city and to prevent a future conflagration from destroying lives and property on a comparable scale to the 64 CE fire.

Rome's reconstruction, under the Emperor's supervision, would not happen haphazardly (*passim, Tac. Ann. 15.43.1*). The new city districts (*vicorum*) would be of standardized size (*ordinibus, Tac. Ann. 15.43.1*). Instead of the narrow streets for which Rome was known before the fire, the resurgent city would have "wide spaces for roads" (*latis viarum spatiis, Tac. Ann. 15.43.1*).³² Tenement apartment complexes would now have enforced height restrictions (*aedificiorum altitudine*), open areas (*patefactis areis*), and frontage porticoes (*porticibus quae frontem*) to add

³²trans. Woodman.

extra fire protection (Tac. *Ann.* 15.43.1).³³ Buildings, especially houses and *insulae*, were now required to be constructed “without beams and consolidated by Gabine or Alban rock, because such stone was impervious to fire” (*sine trabibus saxo Gabino Albanove solidarentur, quod is lapis ignibus impervius est*, Tac. *Ann.* 15.43.3).³⁴ Finally, new buildings were to have self contained walls rather than sharing partitions with neighboring structures (Tac. *Ann.* 15.43.4).³⁵

Scholars have routinely remarked on the negative ramifications for the look of the city and the effects on the intra-city social relations of Nero’s new building regulations.³⁶ For example, the broader thoroughfares would have lessened the available amount of property for tenement reconstruction. Consequently, the property shortage created by the new regulations would have driven up rents for those who could least afford the increase in the cost of living. Toner has speculated that “clearing away the crammed little lanes of old Rome will also have destroyed social networks among the poor.”³⁷ Newbold also theorizes that the fire would have

³³Augustus had already restricted the height of *insulae* to 70 feet (Strab. 5.3.7). In light of Trajan’s later limit of 60 feet, Nero’s codes may have been ignored. See Gustav Hermansen, *Ostia: Aspects of Roman City Life* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1981), 217. Suetonius claims the porticoes were added to provide space for fighting future fires (*Nero* 16.1).

³⁴Tacitus (2004), 325.

³⁵G. Hermansen provides a helpful overview of Nero’s building codes in his analysis of Ostian *insulae*. See Hermansen (1981), 212. Scholars have rightly pointed out the adverse affects these building regulations would have had on building costs, property values, and the availability of housing for the poor. See especially Griffin (2000), 130 and Jerry Toner, *Roman Disasters* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 54.

³⁶See R.F. Newbold, “Some social and economic consequences of the AD 64 fire at Rome,” *Latomus* (1974):859-860; Toner (2013), 54; Griffin (2000), 133.

³⁷Toner (2013), 54.

altered the existing warehouse space used by shopkeepers and traders. He further suggests that Nero's new building and space requirements would have limited the available quantity of property for the reconstruction of storehouses and shops. This had the potential to spark a heated competition to purchase land on the city's outer corridor for rebuilding them.³⁸

The Emperor's financial contributions for the recovery and reconstruction of Rome began with his promise to fund the cost of removing the debris and to pay for the retrieval of the dead from the ruins (Suet. *Nero* 38.3). He also arranged for the ships that transported grain from Ostia to return carrying loads of rubble for disposal in the Ostian marshes (Tac. *Ann.* 15.43.2). The newly required porticoes for *insulae* Nero promised (*pollicitus est*) to erect with his own money (*sua pecunia*, Tac. *Ann.* 15.43.2). Lastly, to encourage immediate rebuilding, he offered financial incentives (*praemia*) to private individuals, based upon rank and family finances, who completed houses or apartments within a specified time frame (Tac. *Ann.* 15.43.2).

Nero's promises to pay for the removal of rubble and the retrieval of the dead, along with his rebuilding plans, no doubt helped Rome's inhabitants immensely, but their fulfillment came at considerable cost to the provinces.³⁹ Suetonius says, "and from the contributions which he not only received, but even demanded, he nearly bankrupted the provinces and exhausted the resources of individuals" (*conla-*

³⁸Newbold (1974), 860-861.

³⁹While Nero had schemes for reconstruction, he did not live to see all of these plans implemented, and his successors did not continue them. See Griffin (2000), 129.

*tionibusque non receptis modo verum et efflagitatis prouincias priuatorumque census prope exhaustit, Nero 38.3).*⁴⁰ Tacitus' account widens the target of Nero's economic exploitations to Italy and the gods. He claims:

Interea conferendis pecuniis pervastata Italia, provinciae eversae sociique populi et quae civitatum liberae vocantur. inque eam praedam etiam dii cessere, spoliatis in urbe templis egestoque auro, quod triumphis, quod votis omnis populi Romani aetas prospere aut in metu sacraverat. enimvero per Asiam atque Achaia non dona tantum, sed simulacra numinum abripiébatur, missis in eas provincias Acrato et Secundo Carrinate. (Ann.15.45.1-2).

Meanwhile, for contributions of money, Italy was being laid waste and the provinces ransacked, as well as allied peoples and those communities which are called free. To that plunder even the gods subscribed, their temples in the City despoiled, and their gold carried off—gold which during triumphs and vows every generation of the Roman people had consecrated in prosperity and dread respectively. Indeed across Asia and Achaea it was not only gifts to but representations of divinities which were looted, after the dispatch of Acratus and Secundus Carrinas to those provinces (trans. Woodman).

Nero not only exacted contributions from Italians and provincials, but he also confiscated gifts made to the gods housed in Rome's remaining temples. His representatives, Acratus and Secundus Carrinas, also extracted donatives stored in and statues from the temples in Asia and Achaea. One reason Nero may have plundered temples is because many housed great wealth. P. Temin has shown that

⁴⁰trans. Rolfe.

Greeks and Romans used temples as storehouses for personal and public treasuries. Individuals made endowments to the temples that in turn could be lent out at interest to merchants or other investors. Temin says, “temples were an important means of “pooling” investment funds in the early Roman Empire.”⁴¹ In his view, therefore, temples served as ancient banking institutions because they received deposits and lent money at interest.⁴² Thus, in addition, to the votive offerings made to the gods and the elaborate statues housed in Greco-Roman temples, many temples had large financial resources for Nero to expropriate.

Nero’s decision to exploit the provincial treasuries and private incomes to increase his financial resources for rebuilding Rome meant provincial merchants and farmers covered at least some of the cost Rome’s reconstruction. Their taxes supplied the revenues collected in the provincial treasuries. Other cities volunteered to give money to help Rome rebuild. Lugdunum offered to contribute at least four million HS for Rome’s recovery (*Ann.* 16.13.3). Thus, Nero’s guarantees shifted the financial burden for rebuilding Rome to wealthy individuals and provincials.

After he had finalized his plans for rebuilding the city, the final component of Nero’s response was appeasing the gods through religious ritual. During the Republic, whenever a time of crisis arose, the Senate consulted the books of Sibyl to learn how to remedy the situation. Although Tacitus does not state who consulted the books following the 64 CE fire, he is clear that it was done at Nero’s direction

⁴¹Peter Temin, “Financial Intermediation in the early Roman Empire,” *Journal of Economic History* 64, no. 3 (2004): 725.

⁴²Temin (2004), 719-725.

(Ann. 15.44.1). After consulting the Sibylline books, “supplication was made to Vulcan, Ceres, and Proserpina, and Juno was propitiated by matrons” (*supplicatum Vulcano et Cereri Proserpinaeque ac propitiata Iuno per matronas*, Ann. 15.44.1).⁴³

The Politics of the Relief Measures

All of Nero’s emergency and recovery-restoration measures to provide housing for refugees, prevent the starvation of Rome’s population, promote reconstruction, and protect the city from a future conflagration seem like logical reactions. Yet, Tacitus, who is the lone source for the politics of this disaster, makes each form of imperial response a calculated political maneuver. In describing Nero’s emergency relief during the fire’s emergency phase, Tacitus’ language implies that by aiding the people, Nero tried to achieve some larger objective. Of the relief measures Tacitus writes that “despite being popular, [the measures] failed in effectiveness” (*quae quamquam popularia in irritum cadebant*, Ann. 15.39.3). This does not just reveal the public response to the initial attempts by the Emperor to help victims of the disaster. It also indicates that relief providing at this stage of the fire had some aim which it did not achieve. What, then, was Nero trying to accomplish? And in what sense did these acts prove ineffectual?

Since people believed major disasters to be expressions of the gods’ anger, Nero had reason to believe he was already under the public’s suspicion. His initial help, particularly with the grain supply and its price, repeated the precedents established by Pompey and Augustus, but Nero knew already that the people of Rome expected him to maintain the supply of grain for the city. Just prior to the

⁴³trans. Woodman.

outbreak of the Great Fire, the Emperor decided against leaving Rome for a journey to Achaëa and Egypt (Tac. *Ann.* 15.36.1). In preparation for the trip, Nero visited the temple of Vesta and suddenly changed his plans. Tacitus then writes:

deseruit inceptum, cunctas sibi curas amore patriae leviores dictitans. vidisse maestos civium vultus, audire secretas querimonias, quod tantum [itineris] aditurus esset, cuius ne modicos quidem egressus tolerarent, sueti adversum fortuita adspectu principis refoveri (Ann. 15.36.2-3).

He relinquished his undertaking, insisting that all his concerns were trivial when compared to his love for his fatherland: he had seen the sorrowful looks of the citizens, he could hear the secret complaints that he would be embarking on so great a journey when they could not endure even his limited excursions, accustomed as they were to being rekindled by the sight of their princeps to counteract the effects of chance events (trans. Woodman).

In this passage, Tacitus says the Emperor “heard their secret laments” (*audire secretas quierimonias*) over his planned departure. According to Tacitus, those laments expressed the people’s uneasiness about an extended imperial absence because they depended upon him “to restore them from chance disasters” (*adversum fortuita...refoveri, Ann.* 15.36.3). After Nero publicized that he would not embark upon a journey to the East, Tacitus explains why the plebs, particularly, welcomed the news. He says:

haec atque talia plebi volentia fuere, voluptatum cupidine et, quae praecipua cura est, rei frumentariae angustias, si abesset, metuenti (Ann 15.36.4).

Words such as these were welcome to the

plebs, with its desire for pleasure and dreading a straitened grain supply (which is its primary concern) if he were absent (trans. Woodman).

Thus, he reveals that the plebs grew unsettled at the prospect of his trip to the East because they feared a strained grain supply in his absence (*rei frumentariae angustias, si abesset, Ann. 15.36.4*).

An *adversum fortuita* did happen in the form of the Great Fire, and Tacitus, in these earlier passages, has already signaled to his readers that the people of Rome expected Nero to revive them and that the plebs looked to him to give stability to the supply and price of grain. Nero, understanding these expectations (*Ann. 15.36.3-4*), acted accordingly, but unexpectedly, public rumor disrupted the normal course of the politics of Roman disaster relief causing Nero's assistance to fail in its effectiveness. Hence, Tacitus writes of those relief measures that "despite being popular, [they] failed in effectiveness because a rumor circulated that at the same time of the city's fire, he [Nero] went on a private stage and sang the demise of Troy" (*quae quamquam popularia in inritum cadebant quia pervaserat rumor ipso tempore flagrantis urbis inisse eum domesticam scaenam et cecinisse Troianum excidium, Ann. 15.39.3*).

Nero followed the precedents of Pompey and Augustus, and he did everything the people expected. His relief measures were popular. But, his generosity proved ineffectual at reversing the rapid decline of his public image. The same Roman citizenry who objected to his eastern trip were beginning to suspect he was not someone who would restore their fortunes. Instead, rumors led to the popular suspicion that their emperor who at worst celebrated the city's destruction because

of his personal ambition to rebuild it or at best was indifferent to its demise and the suffering of its people.

The Question of Culpability

After a second blaze ignited near the estate of Tigellinus, his praetorian prefect, Nero's political situation worsened. A new rumor spread that Nero ordered Tigellinus to start the fire. The association of this fire with someone so close to Nero sparked claims that he wanted the old city to be destroyed so he could found a new one named after himself.⁴⁴ The political pressure intensified for the emperor, and the remainder of his response including the building codes, the financial promises, and the expiation of the gods was designed to curtail public suspicion of him.

The ancient sources neither agree on Nero's culpability for starting the fire nor on what he did while the city burned and the people suffered. Suetonius (*Nero* 38.1), Cassius Dio (62.16.1), and the Elder Pliny (*HN* 17.1.5) all accept that Nero personally ordered the burning of the city. Cassius Dio's epitome that says Nero ordered men to set fire to buildings in various parts of the city to prevent anyone from tracing its place of origin (62.16.1). Suetonius says that Nero sent his chamber attendants (*cubicularios*) to consular estates to start the blaze, and several granaries near the Domus Aurea were knocked over with siege engines and set on fire (*Nero* 38.1). Suetonius (*Nero* 38.2) and Cassius Dio (62.18.1) also equally claim that Nero gave a full dress public recital of a song lamenting the destruction of Troy while the inhabitants of Rome experienced loss of life and property.

⁴⁴In a section unrelated to describing the Great Fire, Suetonius makes a similar claim writing, "Nero intended to call Rome Neropolis" (*destinaverat et Romam Neropolim nuncupare, Nero* 55).

Tacitus, on the other hand, takes a decidedly less certain view of Nero's guilt for setting the blaze. He dismisses insinuations that the fire resulted from an imperial directive as mere chatter.⁴⁵ Nero, he claims, was at Antium when the fire began, and the Emperor too suffered the loss of his personal property, particularly the *Domus Transitoria*, in the blaze (*Ann.* 15.39.1). While Tacitus, therefore, rejects the rumors about Nero's involvement as factual, he does concede they influenced all the gestures for relief and recovery Nero made in the fire's aftermath. This includes his consultation of the Sibylline books.

Because the ancient accounts do not agree on the degree of Nero's responsibility for the Great Fire, it is no surprise to see varied views by modern scholars on the question of his culpability. Griffin calls Tacitus' scepticism of Nero's responsibility for the fire "just."⁴⁶ She points to Nero's own loss of tenements on the Palatine and Oppian Hills as evidence for his lack of involvement. Furthermore, she argues that "The Fire [sic], after all, did not start, or restart, in the area Nero ultimately developed for the Domus Aurea."⁴⁷ D. Shotter also rejects blaming Nero for causing the fire. He says, "we need no explanation beyond Rome's susceptibility to fire and the fact that a strong wind was blowing at the time of outbreak."⁴⁸ In his recent work on the Great Fire, Dando-Collins implies that Nero did not start the fire by claiming its outbreak and the subsequent popular rumors threw Nero into a state

⁴⁵Tacitus does tell of Subrius Flavus' (d. 65 CE) charge that Nero was an *incendiarius* (*Ann.* 15.67.2).

⁴⁶Griffin (2000), 132.

⁴⁷Griffin (2000), 132.

⁴⁸David Shotter, *Nero*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 59.

of depression. Instead, he concludes his work by speculating that Nymphidius, the prefect of the city's vigiles and head of the Praetorian Guard in 64 CE, set a plan in motion to overthrow Nero and install a puppet ruler by giving the order for the spreading of the fire.⁴⁹

Champlin believes the evidence suggests Nero did start the fire of 64 CE. He points to two key developments to support his conclusions. First, Champlin interprets Nero's cancellation of two imperial journeys to the East as an indication that the Emperor knew something bad was about to occur in Rome. In both cases, Nero publicly proclaimed his reason for canceling his trips was so he could remain in the city to cheer the people if something happened to cause them to suffer. Second, Champlin concludes that Flavius' accusation that Nero was an arsonist serves as adequate proof of his culpability for the fire (Tac. *Ann.*15.67.2). Thus, Champlin writes, "it looks as if Nero was responsible for the Great Fire after all, as his ancient critics maintained, and his motive can only have been the alleged one, that he wanted to rebuild the city."⁵⁰

Nero's Use of Religion

When Tacitus gives his final assessment of the political failure of Nero's response to the Great Fire, he divides the imperial measures into two classifications: human counsel (*humanis consiliis*) and divine propitiation (*dis piacula*, *Ann.* 15.44.1). *Humanis consiliis* refers to the practical measures, like building codes, that were outlined above. *Dis piacula* is how Tacitus characterizes Nero's public use

⁴⁹Dando-Collins (2010), 239.

⁵⁰Champlin (2003), 191.

of religion in the aftermath of the fire. After describing Nero's new building codes and promises to help the recovery and rebuilding processes, Tacitus says:

*mox petita dis piacula aditique Sibyllae libri,
ex quibus supplicatum Volcano et Cereri
Proserpinaeque, ac propitiata Iuno per
matronas, primum in Capitolio, deinde apud
proximum mare, unde hausta aqua templum
et simulacrum deae perspersum est; et
sellisternia ac pervigilia celebravere feminae,
quibus mariti erant (Ann. 15.44.1).*

expiations for the gods were sought and the books of the Sibyl were appealed to, as a result of which supplication was made to Vulcan, Ceres, and Proserpina, and Juno was propitiated by matrons, first on the Capitol and then at the nearest stretch of sea, from which water was drawn to besprinkle the temple and the representation of the goddess; and sittings and vigils were celebrated by ladies who had husbands (trans. Woodman).

Nero's use of these religious rituals after the fire has become the subject of scholarly disagreement. In her biography of Nero, M. Griffin passes it over as merely the first failed attempt to placate public outrage directed at the Emperor over the fire and sees no greater symbolism in the use of the rituals themselves.⁵¹ Champlin, however, sees populist symbolism in Nero's invocation of Vulcan, Ceres, and Juno. He argues the books of Sibyl prescribed supplicating at the *mundus* of Cereris, a ritual pit that was originally "the round trench said to have been dug by Romulus in the Comitium, into which he threw different first-fruits (Ceres was the god of the harvest), at the founding of Rome."⁵²

⁵¹Griffin (2000), 132.

⁵²Champlin (2003), 193.

By invoking these gods, Nero's design, Champlin suggests, was to associate his reconstruction of Rome with the original founding by Romulus.⁵³ Furthermore, Vulcan and Ceres were "popular gods" whom the people associated with one another because of the proximity between their altars and because their worship took place on successive days, August 23-24, every year. Each of these gods was venerated because Rome's inhabitants feared fires and because Ceres controlled the passage into the world of the dead.⁵⁴

Champlin thinks the propitiation of Juno was designed to embrace the relationship between the 64 CE fire and the Gallic destruction of Rome in 390 BCE. He arrives at this conclusion because the accounts of the fire in Tacitus and Cassius Dio each make associations between the Gauls' sack of Rome and the fire during Nero's reign. Tacitus, who provides the most detailed comparison, points out that some "noted that the start of this conflagration arose on the fourteenth day before the Kalends of Sextilis, on which the Senones too ignited the captured City" (*fuere qui adnotarent XIII Kal. Sextiles principium incendii huius ortum, quo et Seneones captam urbem inflammaverint, Ann. 15.41.1*).⁵⁵ Cassius Dio twice asserts the comparison between the Great Fire and the Gallic invasion. After describing a dramatic scene wherein the people give up trying to save their possessions, Dio claims that they reflected on the historical nature of the fire in the following manner:

⁵³Champlin (2003), 193-194.

⁵⁴Champlin (2003), 193.

⁵⁵trans. Woodman.

ἐπὶ μὲν τοῖς σφετέροις μηδὲν ἔτι λυπεῖσθαι, τὸ δὲ δημόσιον ὄδυρομένους ἀναμνησκέσθαι ὅτι καὶ πρότερόν ποτε οὕτως ὑπὸ τῶν Γαλατῶν τὸ πλεῖον (62.17.3).

[the survivors] did not grieve over their own [possessions], but lamenting the State [they] were reminded that on a previous occasion most [of the city was burned] by the Gauls.

Later Dio assesses the magnitude of the disaster by saying, “At that time, the city experienced the sort of disaster which [it had] neither formerly nor recently [experienced] except [during the invasion] of the Gauls” (τοιούτῳ μὲν δὴ πάθει τότε ἡ πόλις ἐχρήσατο οἷα οὔτε πρότερόν ποτε οὔθ' ὕστερον, πλὴν τοῦ Γαλατικοῦ, 62.18.2).

Since the sources indicate that Rome’s inhabitants in 64 CE were aware of parallels with the fourth century BCE Gallic sack of their city, Champlin suggests that Nero invoked Juno Moneta, “Juno the Warner,” because of her association with the Gallic conflict. After promising to build a temple to Juno Moneta in 345 BCE, M. Furius Camillus, whose father played a role in repelling the Senones from Rome in 390 BCE, built it the next year on the home site of M. Manlius Capitolinus who in 390 BCE had been made privy to an impending Gallic attack by a flock of geese. In Champlin’s view, Nero’s appeal to Juno was designed to recall “resistance to the Gauls” made possible by the warning given to Manlius Capitolinus and to conjure the memory of the restoration of the city after it was sacked and burned by the Gallic invaders.⁵⁶

Champlin’s interpretation has great appeal particularly because he views Nero’s responses to the fire as a form of popular politics. The problem arises when

⁵⁶Champlin (2003), 194.

Champlin argues that Nero, through appealing to the gods Vulcan, Ceres, and Juno wanted the people of Rome to think about its original founding by Romulus and the rebuilding after the Gallic invasion. Champlin's Nero embraces the popular rumors and makes a public display of them in his appeasement of the gods.

Such a view requires reading against the primary sources. All the major literary sources claim rumors abounded that Nero wanted to destroy the old city so he could rebuild it. Tacitus even lists his desire to rebuild the city as one of the popular perceptions that arose after the second fire started near the estate of Tigellinus (*Ann.*15.40.2). But it was these same rumors Tacitus claims Nero tried to dispel through human aid, imperial largesse, and appeasing the gods. It was precisely because these efforts failed to curb rumors of his culpability that the Emperor then resorted to blaming the much disliked Christians for starting the blaze (*Ann.* 15.45.2).⁵⁷ It seems the last thing Nero wanted was for people to believe he wanted to found a new city. To promote himself as a new Romulus would have fanned the flames of the very popular rumors that Nero wished to extinguish. The better explanation is that he used the traditions of religion to induce the Romans to forget the reports that he had sinister motives.

Champlin is right on one account, namely, that Nero used the past to interpret the present. It seems more likely that Nero tried to use traditional means to quiet rumors about him.⁵⁸ During the fire's first wave, he used the common

⁵⁷See further discussion on the Christians below.

⁵⁸See also Kelly Shannon, "Memory, Religion and History in Nero's Great Fire: Tacitus, *Annals* 15.41-7, *CQ* 62, no.2 (December 2012): 756-758.

method of securing the grain supply and demonstrating his generosity by making shelter available for the homeless. Then, after the second fire broke out near Tigellinus' estate, Nero resorted to generosity again. This time he promised to give financial rewards for timely construction, and he promised that he would fund the costs of the newly required porticoes. He depended upon the sense of security his new building codes would engender to demonstrate his concern for the future of the city and its people. Finally, he followed the republican custom of consulting the Sibylline oracles during times of crisis. During the Republic, the Senate alone usually referred to these books to learn how to cope with unexpected crises. The symbolism would be clear to the people of Rome that Nero, rather than intentionally harming the citizenry for his own aggrandizement, was taking care of their long-term well-being by ensuring no fire of this scale would again be permitted to happen in the city.

This would also explain the importance of expiating Vulcan and Ceres. The extraordinary fire destroyed lives and property on a scale which Rome had not experienced since the Gallic invasions of 390-386 BCE. Vulcan, the god of fire, needed to be appeased in order to prevent Rome from a similar destructive fire in the future. Such a disaster also seriously threatened the sustainability of life after the fire because of its destruction of grain supplies. Ceres, equivalent of the Greek Demeter, was the goddess of grain and the harvest. Nero had already portrayed her on the reverse of his coinage in 61-62 CE in praise of his care for supplying the city's

grain.⁵⁹ Thus, observing the rituals of these gods was to protect the city's future by appeasing the gods of fire and grain.⁶⁰



Figure 5: Silver denarius dating to 61-62 CE depicting Nero on the obverse and Ceres on the reverse.⁶¹

Supplicating these gods, therefore, reflects the two immediate logistical concerns this disaster created: structural safety and security of food supplies. Nero's building codes were designed to mitigate the potential for another large scale fire, but the 64 CE fire had also jeopardized the grain supply, further threatening the city's survival. Nero used grain ships from Ostia to carry debris out of Rome because Ostia, as the principal harbor for the city of Rome, supplied Rome with its grain from all over the Mediterranean. In a brief section related to Nero's post-fire building schemes, Suetonius says he "planned to extend the walls as far as Ostia and to bring the sea from there to Rome by a canal" (*destinarat etiam Ostia tenus moenia promouere atque inde fossa mare ueteri urbi inducere, Nero 16.1*). This plan suggests

⁵⁹See also Griffin's discussion on Nero's tendency to promote his care for the grain supply by the use of Ceres imagery. Griffin (2000), 122. See Figure 4 for the coinage imagery.

⁶⁰*Contra* Shannon who suggests the placation of Ceres, Proserpina, and Juno was needed because their temples were destroyed in the fire. See Shannon (2012), 756.

⁶¹*BMC RE*: 1, 205.32.

the continuation of a long term strategy, begun by Claudius, to secure the city's food supply.⁶² In the aftermath of a food shortage in Rome in 41 CE, Claudius had expanded the harbor at Ostia to ensure the grain imports from Africa could quickly be brought into Rome throughout the year.⁶³ Nero's intention to extend the walls must be viewed as part of a broader struggle by the early emperors to prevent food crises in Rome by facilitating the movement of grain from the sea, to the harbors at Ostia, and into the city via the Tiber. Despite these practical strategies, the invocation of these two gods, no doubt, was an integral aspect of providing the long term protection of the new city's infrastructure and food supply.

When Nero's acts of public aid and religious piety failed to change the decline of public trust in him, he took the extraordinary step of shifting blame toward a disliked religious group. Traditional scholarship follows the current reading of Tacitus' text and says that Nero used the Christians as scapegoats to deflect suspicion from himself.⁶⁴ Tacitus' text reads:

ergo abolendo rumoribus Nero subdidit reos et quaesitissimis poenis adfecit, quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Chrestianos appellabat (Ann. 15.44.1-2). Therefore, to dispel the rumor, Nero supplied defendants and inflicted the choicest punishments on those, resented for their outrages, whom the public called Chrestiani (trans. Woodman).

⁶²Griffin (2000), 130.

⁶³Meiggs (1973), 54-55; Levick (1990), 110; Garnsey (1988), 223-224.

⁶⁴The biographies of Nero cited in this dissertation all serve as examples of traditional scholarship on this issue.

The text clearly intends to connect the *Chrestianos* with Christians because the next line offers the following explanation for the origin of their name:

*auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio
imperitante per procuratorem Pontium
Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat (Ann. 15.44.2-
3).*

The source of the name was Christus, on whom, during the command of Tiberius, reprisal had been inflicted by the procurator Pontius Pilatus (trans. Woodman).

Those caught and convicted of initiating the blaze were subjected to public humiliation as part of the process of capital punishment for the crime. Tacitus writes:

*et pereuntibus addita ludibria, ut ferarum
tergis contecti laniatu canum interirent aut
crucibus adfixi [aut flammandi atque], ubi
defecisset dies, in usu[m] nocturni luminis
urerentur (Ann. 15.44.4-5).*

And, as they perished, mockeries were added, so that, covered in the hides of wild beasts, they expired from mutilation by dogs, or fixed to crosses and made flammable, on the dwindling of daylight they were burned for use as nocturnal illumination (trans. Woodman).

A recent, revisionist interpretation of this text by Dando-Collins suggests the references to Christians in Tacitus may have been forgeries interpolated into the text by a later Christian redactor.⁶⁵ Dando-Collins points to four key textual clues that he believes indicate the text of Tacitus did not originally refer to Christians. First, he argues the term Christian does not appear in first century Roman

⁶⁵Dando-Collins (2010), 10-14.

literature. Second, Romans did not use the term Christian because they saw the religion as a subgroup of Jewish religion not an independent system of worship. Third, Tacitus' text, he says, refers to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea at the time of Jesus' crucifixion, as "procurator" (*procuratorem*). He says this is the title by which Pilate is known in Christian literature, but Tacitus, who had access to official state records, would have known Pilate's official Roman title was "prefect of Judea." Finally, he argues that Christians would not have constituted "an immense multitude" in the city but remained a "small community" which Tacitus would not have referred to as a "class at Rome."⁶⁶

Instead of denouncing Christians, Dando-Collins postulates the text originally may have indicted Egyptian followers of the cult of Isis.⁶⁷ Isis was an Egyptian goddess whose association with motherhood and the promise of eternal life made her an attractive deity both to Roman women and men of all social classes.

Consequently, "the worship of Isis was among the most popular of the religious cults followed at Rome by noncitizens [sic] during the first century."⁶⁸ In support of this theory, Dando-Collins claims that despite its popularity, the majority of the public disliked the religion. Furthermore, he states that Nero personally "scorned the cult."⁶⁹ He also believes the humiliations heaped upon Nero's scapegoats reflect mockeries reserved for followers of Isis rather than Christianity. According to

⁶⁶This summary is based upon Dando-Collins (2010), 11-14.

⁶⁷Dando-Collins (2010), 12.

⁶⁸Dando-Collins (2010), 14.

⁶⁹Dando-Collins (2010), 16.

Tacitus, the Romans insulted the victims by covering them with animal skins and throwing them to the dogs (*Ann.* 15.44.4-5). They were also subjected to crucifixion and set ablaze. Dando-Collins thinks this indicates that the Romans associated the cult of Isis with the broader Egyptian religious practice of portraying their gods as animals. Anubis, the Egyptian god of the dead, took the form of a dog's head, therefore, being attacked by dogs would have constituted an insult to an Egyptian cult. Finally, he connects together the burning of those crucified with the religion because fire, "played a key part in Isiac religious observances."⁷⁰

Dando-Collins' theory, while imaginative, has little currency. It is true that there is no consensus regarding the people Tacitus refers to as *Chrestiani* in *Annals* 15.44. There is also suspicion this reference to Christians by Tacitus reflects the work of later Christian redaction of the text.⁷¹ However, E. Laupot has recently shown that statistical and linguistic analysis of this text along with a fragment known as Tacitus' Fragment 2 supports the reading as originally Tacitean.⁷² In addition, E.M. Smallwood has explained that Josephus made a habit of referring to early governors of Judea as "procurators" rather than prefects.⁷³ While this does not prove Tacitus would have blurred the usage of Roman governmental terminology, it does show that the mixed usage of terms was not the reserve of Christians.

⁷⁰This summary is based upon Dando-Collins (2010), 16-17.

⁷¹Eric Laupot, "Tacitus' fragment 2: The anti-Roman movement of the *Christiani* and the Nazoreans," *Vigiliae Christianae* 54, no. 3 (2000): 233.

⁷²See especially Laupot (2000), 238-242.

⁷³E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), 39.

Finally, Dando-Collins' suggestion that Tacitus would not have referred to Christians as a "class" appears to be an error of translation rather than an argument based upon historical substance. In the Latin of Tacitus' text, the people subjected to persecution by Nero are designated by the accusative plural noun *reos*. They are further described by the accusative plural adjective *invisos*. *Reos* comes from *reus*, a noun that refers to plaintiffs or defendants in a trial.⁷⁴ The adjective *invisos*, from *invisus*, means "hateful, odious, or disliked."⁷⁵ Neither of these terms suggests a class or order of people as do the terms *equites* or *nobiles*. Dando-Collins, then, has uncritically followed the reading Church-Bodribb translation of Tacitus' *Annals* 15.44 to arrive at the conclusion that Tacitus referred to Christians as a class when the Latin indicates he portrayed the *Chrestiani* as defendants put on trial for starting the Great Fire.

In addition to these points, Dando-Collins seems to accept that the text can simultaneously be a forgery and reveal accurate information, since he does not question that Nero carried out religious persecution to redirect the public's attention away from himself. He offers no evidence that Christians substituted their own name for the cult of Isis or some other group. Nero's excesses of humiliation and execution alone cannot sustain the argument that Tacitus originally named the followers of Isis as the victims of his cruelty.

Furthermore, the Parthian religion of Mithra would seem an equally valid candidate for persecution by the Romans. Followers of that cult used fire in their

⁷⁴OLD s.v. *reus*.

⁷⁵OLD s.v. *invisus*.

worship rituals, and their religion also grew popular in Rome in the first century CE.⁷⁶ More recent analysis, like that of Shannon, on *Annals* 15.44 does not question the authenticity of the reading *Chrestianos*. The historical problem lies more in determining why Nero carried out the persecution than whom he victimized.

Shannon argues that the scapegoating of a foreign cult was consistent with the use of other traditional religious practices, such as the rites to Vulcan and Ceres, that Nero emphasized after his other measures failed to convince the public that he did not start the fire.⁷⁷ The Romans did not dissuade people from observing other religious rituals besides the traditional gods of the state, but they saw their own gods as vital to the maintenance of proper social order.⁷⁸ Cassius Dio purports to record a speech by Maecenas, a powerful friend and confidant of Augustus, in which he says to the Emperor:

τοὺς δὲ δὴ ξενίζοντάς τι περὶ αὐτὸ καὶ μίσει καὶ
κόλαζε, μὴ μόνον τῶν θεῶν ἔνεκα, ὧν ὁ
καταφρονήσας οὐδ' ἄλλου ἄν τινος προτιμήσειεν,
ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ καινά τινα δαιμόνια οἱ τοιοῦτοι
ἀντεσφéronτες πολλοὺς ἀναπειθουσιν
ἀλλοτριονομεῖν, κάκ τούτου καὶ συνωμοσίαι καὶ
συστάσεις ἐταιρεῖαι τε γίνονται, ἅπερ ἥκιστα
μοναρχία συμφέρει (Cass. Dio 52.36.2).

Those who attempt to distort our religion
with strange rites you should abhor and
punish, not merely for the sake of the gods
(since if a man despises these he will not pay
honour [sic] to any other being), but because

⁷⁶Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Malden & Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 195-247. Especially p. 219.

⁷⁷Shannon (2012), 758.

⁷⁸Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 2nd ed. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 63.

such men, by bringing in new divinities in the place of the old, persuade many to adopt foreign practices, from which spring up conspiracies, factions, and cabals, which are far from profitable to a monarchy (trans. Cary).

These words are designed to show the danger foreign religions presented to the stability of monarchical government. Nevertheless, they also illustrate the overall attitude of at least the senatorial class of Romans toward foreign gods. The speech of Maecenas lists other social ills, such as factions, conspiracies and cabals, that are not compatible with monarchy. These were all symptoms of the worship of new divinities rather than the traditional gods.

The Romans were a deeply religious people who believed “that religion is a patrimony of the past which sustains the life of the state.”⁷⁹ Hence, in the second century CE, “Christians were seen as religious fanatics, self-righteous outsiders, arrogant innovators, who thought that only their beliefs were true.”⁸⁰ Therefore, foreign religions, like Christianity, might lead to neglect of the traditional state gods and cause them to be angry.

Nero’s persecution of a people associated with a foreign cult would have been interpreted as an attempt to cleanse Rome of followers of a superstition hostile to the Roman gods. Since the fire itself would have had a religious interpretation, the crucifixion and humiliation of Christians would have served the purpose of placating the traditional gods of the Roman state. It also gave Nero an additional opportunity

⁷⁹Wilken (2003), 63.

⁸⁰Wilken (2003), 63.

to cloak himself in traditional practices that conveyed a sense of concern for the long term well-being of the city and its people. In the *Chrestiani*, Nero found a group that became the objects of widespread anger.

However, as Tacitus explains, even this act backfired on Nero. The harsh and humiliating punishments to which the victims were subjected caused the public to become sympathetic toward them. Therefore, Tacitus' text indicates that Nero never successfully renewed his public image in the eyes of the residents of Rome. Traditional piety and imperial generosity reinforced his guilt and cruelty.

The Great Fire of 64 CE did not instigate an immediate overthrow of Nero's regime, nor was it singularly responsible for his eventual demise. Other broader factors like his treatment of senators, a growing megalomania, and a shift in public loyalty away from the person of the emperor and toward the institutions of Empire facilitated his downfall.⁸¹ Nevertheless, his miscalculation of the political value of disaster assistance permitted the rumors surrounding the fire to damage his public image. The traditional acts of imperial generosity were unable to reassert the goodness of the Emperor in the public mind. Instead, his relief measures, though popular, fed the narrative that he was responsible for the fire.

Vesuvius Response (79-80 CE)

Major Sources for Imperial Relief

Only two literary sources detail the assistance the Emperor Titus gave for the reconstruction of Campania following the 79 CE Vesuvius eruption: Suet. *Tit.* 8.3-4 and Cass. Dio 66.21.1-24.1. Both sources suffer from serious organizational or

⁸¹Shotter (2004), 59; Ando (2000), 293.

textual flaws. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has described the account of Titus' reign as "one of the weakest" of Suetonius' imperial biographies and characterizes it as "marked by uncritical panegyric."⁸² Suetonius, like other second century CE Roman authors, remembered Titus as a universally beloved emperor, and his narrative of Titus' life is much less critical than his presentations of Augustus and Tiberius.

The portion of Cassius Dio's *Histories* that includes Titus' imperial tenure only exists in summary form preserved in the works of two late 11th and early 12th century monks, Ioannes Xiphilinus (11th cent.) and Ioannes Zonaras (12th cent.). Millar describes Xiphilinus' epitome of Cassius Dio as "not so much a précis of Dio as a rather erratic selection from his material, substantially, but not invariably, in Dio's order and often keeping very closely to Dio's wording."⁸³ Despite having significant omissions and "a spasmodic and barely intelligible narrative," Xiphilinus' work preserves valuable information about Dio's life, and its greatest contribution lies in conserving the structure of Dio's books which discuss the history of Rome after 47 CE.⁸⁴

Although Xiphilinus' work consists of a "mixture of quotations, abbreviations, and omissions," its form is very common for historical summaries from the early

⁸²Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), 177. See also pp. 61-63 for his description of the progressive decline in the quality of Suetonius' work.

⁸³Fergus Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 2. See also Brunt's important discussion of Xiphilinus' work in P.A. Brunt, "On Historical Fragments and Epitomes," *CQ* 30, no. 2 (1980): 488-492.

⁸⁴Millar (1964), 2.

Byzantine period.⁸⁵ Because he quoted extensively from Cassius Dio, Xiphilinus has conserved the skeletal structure of Dio's history, especially for the early Empire. Nevertheless, what remains exists in redacted form that omits much of Dio's own commentary and historical interpretation.⁸⁶ Thus, Xiphilinus has preserved the parts of Cassius Dio's history that he deemed important, but his condensed quotations permit the confident, yet cautious, use of Cassius Dio for reconstructing major events of the early Empire including Titus' reaction to Vesuvius' eruption.

Zonaras' chief value is the preservation of Dio's first twenty books that cover the history of Rome to 146 BCE. But, Zonaras is also important for studying the early Empire because he used Cassius Dio and perhaps Xiphilinus' epitome to summarize the period from Julius Caesar's assassination through the reign of Nerva (r.96-98 CE). Thus, for the period ranging from the end of the Republic until the beginning of the 2nd century CE, Zonaras is key, along with Xiphilinus, for the reconstruction of Dio's text.

Titus' assistance to the cities of Campania also has epigraphical attestation. Inscriptions from Naples, Nola, Salerno, and Sorrento credit him with restoration work in their cities. All four cities escaped total destruction from Vesuvius' eruption but sustained damage from the accompanying earthquakes. Each of the four inscriptions commemorates Titus' reconstruction assistance following an earthquake. But they, like their literary counterparts, also have problems.

⁸⁵Brunt (1980), 490-492.

⁸⁶Brunt (1980), 491.

Since these inscriptions refer to a form of earthquake assistance, dating them becomes less straightforward because earthquakes in 62 CE and 64 CE struck this same region. Seneca the Younger (d. 65 CE) claims the 62 CE earthquake “devastated all of the region and caused great destruction” (*totiens defunctam metu, magna strage uastauit, QNat. 6.1.2*).⁸⁷ Naples, he says, was only “lightly affected” (*leviter*) suffering only the loss of private (*privatim*) structures not civic (*publice*) buildings (*QNat. 6.1.2*)⁸⁸ His geographical description of the region’s scope which included Surrentum (mod. Sorrento) implies that the 62 CE quake also affected that city since it destroyed the whole region (6.1.1-2). Therefore, it is difficult, without additional context, to ascertain whether the inscriptions memorialize Titus’ earthquake relief following the Vesuvius event or whether those cities received money from him to rebuild structures damaged by one or more of the earlier quakes.

Current scholarly consensus dates all four inscriptions between the last half of 79 CE and 81 CE, placing their provenance after the Vesuvius eruption.⁸⁹ The most debated of the four has been the Salerno inscription that reads:

imp. t. cAESAR
 uespASIANUS aug.
 tribuNIC · POTEST · VI
 cos. u CENSOR · P P
 imp. xII · A · P · S · RESTITVit⁹⁰

⁸⁷trans. Hine.

⁸⁸Seneca (2010), 87.

⁸⁹See discussion of dates for these inscriptions in Stefano Conti, “Lateinische Termini für Erdbeben in literarischen und epigraphischen Quellen der römischen Zeit,” *Historical Social Research* 32, no. 3 (2007): 64-66.

⁹⁰*AE* (1951), 200. Lowercase letters indicate proposed readings. See a translation of this inscription on the following page.

A. Merlin originally placed the date “dans le second semestre 76 ap. J. -C,” but after the influential analysis of G. Paci, this inscription is now dated during the reign of Titus.⁹¹ Paci’s proposed reconstruction of the text of the inscription reads:

[IMP · TITUS · C]AESAR · [DIVI
VESPASIANI · F · V · VESP]ASIANUS · [AVG
PONTIF · MAXIM · TRIBV]NIC ·
POTESTVI[III
IMP · XV · COS · VII · DES · VIII] · CENSOR · P · P
[TERRAE · MOT · CON]LAPS · RESTITV[IT]⁹²

[The Emperor Titus Cae]sar, son of the *divus* Vespasianus, Vespasianus Augustus, *pontifex maximus* (holding the) power of tribune for the VIII TIME, (acclaimed) emperor for the fifteenth time, elected consul for the seventh time, consul designmate for the eighth (?) time, *ensor*, father of the nation, restored [the ---] destroyed [by earthquakes?] (trans. Guidoboni).

Arguing that line three properly reconstructed refers to Titus’ possession of tribunician power for the ninth time, power he assumed only after the death of his father on June 23/24, 79 CE, Paci dates this inscription between July 1, 79 CE and June 30, 80 CE.⁹³ The remaining three epigraphical records also date after Titus’

⁹¹Merlin’s conclusions are in *AE* (1951), 200. For Paci’s reevaluation of the evidence, see Gianfranco Paci, “Tito a Salerno,” *Epigrafia: Publications de l’École française de Rome* 143 (1991): 694.

⁹²Paci (1991), 699.

⁹³Paci (1991), 699. For a summary of arguments and reconstructions of epigraphy see also Guidoboni (1994), 225-226.

ninth tribunician power lending further support to the literary sources' claims that he sent aid to Campania after the volcanic eruption.⁹⁴

This summary of the sources has shown that problems exist with the precise readings of the literary and epigraphical evidence for Titus' aid to Campania. Nevertheless, they reveal enough specifics to assess the overall nature of his response to region. As the following analysis will show, the sources compliment one another in significant ways and make possible a clearer understanding of the cities Titus helped and how those cities used the financial assistance he gave them.

Overview of the Disaster

The month of Vesuvius' 79 CE explosion has sparked intense debate among scholars since the late 19th century. Pliny's letters to Tacitus on the topic of the elder Pliny's death provide the traditional dates of August 24-26 for the eruption (6.16;20). According to Pliny, earthquakes preceded the event by a day or two, but, more importantly, he places his uncle's command of the Roman navy at Misenum on August 24, 79 CE (*Nonum Kal. Septembres*, 6.16.4). It was on that day, he claims, they noticed Vesuvius' ash column rising in the distance (6.16.4).

Most of the recent literature on the Vesuvius eruption accepts the Plinian, late summer eruption without question. In a recent biography of the volcano, A. Scarth discusses the 79 CE event without mentioning any other possible date than

⁹⁴See Guidoboni (1994), 225-226 for brief introductions to the additional inscriptions. The other three inscriptions will be discussed below.

August 24-26.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, there are reasons to doubt the accuracy of Pliny's date. First, August 24 neatly coincides with Vulcanalia festival celebrated by the Romans August 23-24 each year. Since Vulcan was the god of fire, Pliny, or a later redactor, might have wished to give his presentation of the eruption additional flare by having it begin at the same time as the festival.

Second, based on archaeological analysis of fruits and other produce preserved by the lava flow at Pompeii, M. Ruggiero in 1879 proposed an alternative, late autumn date of November 23 for the eruption.⁹⁶ Ruggiero's theory was revitalized by U. Pappalardo in 1990, but its chief support has come more recently from the study of wind patterns in Campania by G. Rolandi.⁹⁷ Rolandi's analysis determined that the distribution of ash toward the cities southeast of the volcano is inconsistent with the June-August high altitude wind pattern for the Vesuvius region. In the late summer, the winds trend toward the west, an opposite direction from the destroyed cities. This poses additional evidence against a late August eruption in 79 CE. Thus, wind direction analysis and archaeological findings suggest the eruption most likely occurred in late November 79 CE, not in August as Pliny claims.⁹⁸

⁹⁵Alwyn Scarth, *Vesuvius: A Biography* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 39-86.

⁹⁶Michele Ruggiero, "Pompei e la regione sotterrata dal Vesuvio nell'anno LXXIX," *Memorie e notizie pubblicate dall'Ufficio Tecnico degli scavi delle province meridionali* (Napoli: Francesco Giannini, 1879), 1:20.

⁹⁷U. Pappalardo, "L'eruzione pliniana del Vesuvio nel 79 dC: Ercolano," in *Volcanology & Archaeology: European Workshop: Papers*, eds. Claude Albore Livadie and François Widemann (Council of Europe, 1990): 209-211; Rolandi (2008), 87-98.

⁹⁸A good summary of the issues with dating this disaster can be found in Guidoboni (1994), 224.

Vesuvius is the more recent iteration of an older volcanic complex called Somma.⁹⁹ Somma and Vesuvius join together to form what geologists call a composite volcano. Soil studies conducted around the base of the volcano have improved geologists' understanding of the history of its eruptions and its pattern of activity. A chief characteristic of this volcano is explosive Plinian eruptions accompanied by large deposits of pumice and pyroclastic flows.¹⁰⁰ Plinian or Vesuvian eruptions "cause more than 1km³ of magma to be projected up 25 km into the atmosphere at speeds between 600 and 700 ms⁻¹ by a continuous jet stream and thermal expansion."¹⁰¹ This is what caused the umbrella-pine like cloud (*arbor quam pinus*) that Pliny and his uncle, from their Misenum villa, witnessed rising in the distance (*Ep.* 6.16.5). Once the magma chamber of the volcano empties during this kind of eruption, the ash column collapses creating pyroclastic avalanches of extremely hot gas and ash destroying and burying everything in its path.¹⁰² When the ash cloud collapsed in 79 CE, pyroclastic flows and ash deposits destroyed the

⁹⁹The current Vesuvius developed only after the 472 CE eruption. See Angelo Peccerillo, *Plio-Quaternary Volcanism in Italy: Petrology, Geochemistry, and Geodynamics* (Berlin, Heidelberg, New York: Springer, 2005), 133.

¹⁰⁰Haraldur Sigurdsson, "Mount Vesuvius Before the Disaster," in *The Natural History of Pompeii*, eds. Wilhelmina Feemster Jashemski and Frederick G. Meyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 30. A similar discussion of the formation of Vesuvius and its eruptive history can be found in Ernesto De Carolis and Giovanni Patricelli, *Vesuvius A.D. 79* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), 7–25.

¹⁰¹Jonathan Nott, *Extreme Events: A Physical Reconstruction and Risk Assessment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 204.

¹⁰²Nott (2006), 205.

cities of Pompeii, Herculænum, Oplontis and Stabiae and obliterated the towns of Leucopetra, Taurania, Sora, and Cossa.¹⁰³

Vesuvius does not have one of these super-eruptions with great regularity. Instead, these explosive eruptions typically mark the end of a long period of dormancy and initiate a new cycle of activity. The span between major explosive eruptions ranges from between 1400-4000 years. Nevertheless, in between these major eruptions, Vesuvius has less disruptive periods of minor activity. Based upon the total thickness of the sand layer deposits near modern Terzigno, located about five miles north of Pompeii, Sigurdsson estimates that prior to its 79 CE eruption, Vesuvius had gone through a period of quiescence for approximately 700 years.¹⁰⁴ This explains why ancient authors, like Diodorus (4.21.5) and Strabo (5.4.8), believed it had long gone extinct.

The long quiescence of Vesuvius also helps to explain the reputation the mountain had in antiquity as a hill “covered with wild vine of abundant growth” (ἀμπελον δὲ πολλὴν ἀγρίαν ἐπιπολῆς πεφυκυῖαν) and as a place known for thick forests and wild boars (Plut. *Vit. Crass.* 9.2). In fact, the whole area near Vesuvius became noted for its agricultural bounty. Strabo referred to it as the “most prosperous plain of all” (πεδῖον εὐδαιμονέστατον τῶν ἀπάντων) proven, he says, by its productivity in grain and wine (5.4.3). The agricultural productivity of the land made possible “a

¹⁰³Michael Grant, *Cities of Vesuvius: Pompeii & Herculænum* (London: Phoenix Press, 2005), 21.

¹⁰⁴Sigurdsson (2002), 29-32 provides an excellent introduction to the eruption cycle and history of Vesuvius. See also Scarth (2009), 11-27.

local, landed aristocracy who made its wealth through agriculture.”¹⁰⁵ The dormancy of the volcano, its forestation, and the productive Campanian soil caused Sigurdsson to observe “that the Romans did not consider the mountain a threat and were probably not even aware of its volcanic character until that fateful day in AD 79.”¹⁰⁶ The Campanians’ unawareness of their extreme risk worsened the degree of death and destruction the eruption caused. Political Context of Relief Measures

The summer of 79 CE brought significant change to the Romans and their Empire. On June 23/24 of that year, the first emperor from outside the Julio-Claudian family, the emperor Vespasian (r.69-79 CE), died in his home in the Sabine territory. Consequently, his elder son, Titus, acceded to the office of emperor marking the first time a Roman emperor’s successor was his biological progeny.

Titus’ rule was brief, lasting only two years, but later generations of Roman authors compared him in greatness to Augustus (Cass. Dio 66.29.5). Suetonius famously called him “the delight and darling of the human race” (*amor ac deliciae generis humani*, *Tit.* 1.1).¹⁰⁷ Titus earned this reputation *in imperio*, for before succeeding his father, “he did not escape hatred, much less public criticism” (*ne odio quidem, nedum viturperatione publica caruit*, (Suet. *Tit.* 1.1).¹⁰⁸ Thus, Titus’

¹⁰⁵Tenney Frank, “Rome and Italy of the Empire,” in *ESAR*, ed. Tenney Frank (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1940), 5:253–254. Rostovtzeff believed the region had declined in economic importance by the Flavian period and pointed to the lack of rebuilding following the 79 CE eruption as evidence for its reduced status even though he admitted this in no way reflected on the overall agricultural productivity of Campania. See *Roman Empire*², 2:194-195.

¹⁰⁶Sigurdsson (2002), 32.

¹⁰⁷Suetonius (1997), 321.

¹⁰⁸Suetonius (1997), 331.

reputation went through a total transformation, and his responses to three disasters, the Vesuvius eruption, the 80 CE Rome fire, and a plague outbreak, were integral to his political makeover.

Rome's political class knew their new emperor well because as the son of a notable general and senator, Titus grew up within the ranks of the elites. He moved into public life when he became part of the *contubernium* of the Emperor Claudius, where he lived as the friend and schoolmate of the Emperor's son, Britannicus (Suet. *Tit.* 2).¹⁰⁹ Titus benefitted from this association by receiving an elite education in horsemanship and rhetoric, and he learned to write in both Latin and Greek (Suet. *Tit.* 3).

After his father won control of the Empire in 69 CE, Titus' reputation suffered from what Rome's political elites considered scandalous behavior. As head of Vespasian's praetorian guard, Titus became known for cruelty because he conducted himself arrogantly and he removed anyone suspected of plotting against his father with unsparing ruthlessness (Suet. *Tit.* 6). He solidified this reputation when he ordered the execution of Aulus Caecina whom he accused of conspiring with Eprius Marcellus to undermine Vespasian's rule (Suet. *Tit.* 6; Cass. Dio 65.16.3-4). Consequently, Suetonius says, "he brought about so much unpopularity at the time that hardly anyone ever acceded to the principate with such an adverse reputation and against the will of all" (*ad praesens plurimum contraxit invidiae, ut non temere quis tam adverso rumore magisque invitis omnibus transierit ad principatum, Tit.* 6).

¹⁰⁹On the importance of the *contubernium*, see Wallace-Hadrill (1984), 178.

In addition to his reputation for cruelty, Titus came to be known as a profligate. He was said to revel with his friends late into the night, and he was said to have illicit sexual liaisons with young boys (*exoletorum*), eunuchs (*spadorum*), and Queen Berenice (d. ca. 92 CE), the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, whom he met while leading the suppression of the Jewish revolt in Judea. Therefore, when Titus replaced Vespasian as emperor, the Roman political elite feared he would be a second Nero practicing imperial avarice, profligate spending, and trials for treason (Suet. *Tit.* 7.1).

These concerns formed the backdrop against which Titus assumed the *imperium* on June 23/24, 79 CE. The literary sources are clear that Titus knew of the public's perception of him, and Cassius Dio's epitome claims the seriousness of possessing power caused him to take the office and his reputation seriously (66.18.12). Titus seems to have reversed the public's perception of him quickly by not reintroducing sedition trials, being frugal with state finances, and avoiding impropriety when Berenice visited Rome in 79 CE.

One key component to remaking the Emperor's public persona was his response to the three major disasters that struck Italy during his brief reign. These disasters did not occur in a remote province; they affected the inhabitants of Rome and Italy as well as the Emperor's social circle. Thus his recovery assistance after the Vesuvius disaster was vital to reorienting people's attitudes about his character and his capacity to govern well.

Recovery Measures for Campania

Sometime after the eruption, Titus took the extraordinary step of traveling to Campania to inspect the damage personally (Cass. Dio 66.24.1). No other emperor in the early Empire made a journey to a disaster site outside of Rome so he could review the devastation for himself. Before he left Campania to return to Rome, Titus provided three standard forms of assistance to aid local recovery. He sent two commissioners, called by Suetonius *curatores restituendae*, who were chosen by lot from the former consuls to oversee the recovery efforts (Suet. *Tit.* 8.4; Cass. Dio 66.24.3).¹¹⁰ He also applied the funds from the estates of those who died intestate (*bona caduca*) toward rebuilding the region (Suet. *Tit.* 8.4; Cass. Dio. 66.24.3). Finally, the Emperor granted them “other money” (χρήματα ἄλλα) in addition to the other forms of assistance he made available (Cass. Dio. 66.24.3).

The literary claims of Titus’ assistance compared to the lack of evidence of rebuilding in cities like Pompeii and Herculaneum raises questions about the intended beneficiaries of imperial munificence. Suetonius’ account only furthers the confusion because he ambiguously states that Titus applied intestate estates “for the restoration of the suffering cities” (*restitutioni afflictarum civitatum*, *Tit.* 8.3). Since the cities were buried under 50 feet of volcanic ash, it is unlikely Suetonius meant Pompeii, Herculaneum, or Stabiae. Zanker has explained that there is evidence in Pompeii that survivors tried to search for reusable building materials among the buried ruins.¹¹¹ However, he dismisses entirely the possibility that searches for

¹¹⁰See ch. 3 above.

¹¹¹Paul Zanker, *Pompeii: Public and Private Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 132.

materials took place under the direction of the *curatores Campaniae restituendae* who were sent to the region by Titus to oversee its reconstruction.¹¹²

P. Allison has suggested Roman elites were the intended beneficiaries not the cities. She argues, “While Flavian emperors (AD 69-96) were known for their concern for social welfare, it is likely that imperial and senatorial interest from Rome concerned villas of their own kind as much as, if not more so than, the property of these local townspeople.”¹¹³ It is true that the wealth of Rome’s elites flowed into the region in the last two centuries of the Republic as Campania became a popular destination for leisure. Rome’s elites built lavish country estates northwest of Vesuvius near places like Puteoli, Cumae, Misenum, and especially Baiae.¹¹⁴

Elite investment also transformed cities to the southeast like Pompeii where wealthy residents abandoned the more native Hellenistic style of building in order to imitate what they could see taking place along the coast of Naples. No longer were the old style tufa houses of the Oscan landowners and merchants built in the style of the Greeks.¹¹⁵ Rome’s elites accumulated villas and affected construction on both

¹¹²Zanker (1998), 132.

¹¹³Penelope Allison, “Recurring Tremors: The Continuing Impact of the AD 79 Eruption of Mt Vesuvius,” in *Natural Disasters and Cultural Change* (London: Routledge, 2002), 113.

¹¹⁴The Bay of Naples has been characterized as an extension of the city of Rome. See John R. Patterson, “The Emperor and the Cities of Italy,” in *Bread & Circuses: Euergetism and Municipal Patronage in Roman Italy*, eds. Kathryn Lomas and Tim Cornell (London: Routledge, 2002), 92.

¹¹⁵Zanker (1998), 74–75.

sides of the volcano to such a degree that Strabo described the region from Misenum to Surrentum as one continuous city (5.4.8).

Since the elites were Titus' social and political peers, Allison's interpretation seems plausible. They were also those with reservations about Titus' character and capacity to govern. Furthermore, Tiberius' money grants to the owners of apartment complexes following the Caelian and Aventine fires provides a precedent for an emperor helping affluent property owners to offset their losses from a major disaster. Thus, through traditional relief measures, Titus might have demonstrated his generosity to Rome's elites and, by doing so, allayed their concerns about the nature of his government.

Allison, however, while acknowledging that other scholars limit their reading of the literary evidence to Pompeii and Herculaneum, commits a similar offense in her treatment of the archaeological evidence for rebuilding in Campania.¹¹⁶ Scarth also focuses only on the more well-known cities and claims of Titus' aid, "unfortunately, no descriptions have survived of the kinds of public works that were undertaken at the time."¹¹⁷ It is the case that if the search for evidence of reconstruction is limited to the cities most affected by the disaster, there are no indications that rebuilding occurred, and an alternative explanation, like Allison's, is needed to account for Titus' expenditure of money. However, the epigraphical data from Naples, Nola, Salerno, and Sorrento, which neither Allison nor Scarth

¹¹⁶Allison (2002), 113-114.

¹¹⁷Scarth (2009), 83.

considers, can be reconciled with the literary evidence to produce an alternative explanation of how Titus aided the Vesuvius region.

First, it must be remembered that the literary sources point to a regional disaster and do not emphasize specific cities affected by the eruption. Thus, Suetonius writes, “there were some dreadful disasters during his reign, such as the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in Campania” (*Quaedam sub eo fortuita ac tristia acciderunt, ut conflagratio Vesuvii montis in Campania, Tit. 8.3*). It has already been suggested above that Suetonius could not have meant Pompeii, Herculænum, or Stabiae when he stated that Titus used intestate property “for the restoration of suffering cities” (*restitutioni afflictarum civitatum, Tit. 8.3*). Cassius Dio’s epitome also says, “In Campania some fearful and amazing things happened” (ἐν δὲ τῇ Καμπανίᾳ φοβερὰ τινα καὶ θαυμαστὰ συνηνέχθη, 66.21.1). Tacitus even mentions “cities having been consumed and buried in the most fruitful region of Campania” (*haustae aut obrutae urbes, fecundissima Campaniae ora*) as a characteristic of post-Nero Roman history (*Hist. 1.2.1*). While the summaries of Cassius Dio do name Pompeii and Herculænum as two cities destroyed by the volcano (66.23.3), the ancient sources, including Cassius Dio, do not give them degree of attention they receive by modern scholars. Thus, the search for rebuilding with imperial money must be broadened to include all Campanian cities from Misenum to Surrentum (Strab. 5.4.8).



Figure 6: Ancient Campania¹¹⁸

Also, the region of Campania was affected by more than one type of disaster during the Vesuvius event. Pliny (6.16) and Cassius Dio (66.22.3) mention earthquakes occurring for days prior to the volcanic blast. This means evidence for recovery should include restoration from earthquake damage and should not be limited to resurrection from either general ashfall or the ashes of the pyroclastic flows.

Four inscriptions from Campanian cities credit Titus with the restoration of specific structures after the earthquakes that accompanied the 79 CE volcanic eruption. These records manifest the kind of targeted imperial assistance that emperors often gave to help cities rebuild after disasters.¹¹⁹ A diglot inscription from Naples dating between 80 and 81 CE reads:

[Αὐτοκράτωρ] Τίτος Καίσα[ρ]
 [θεοῦ Οὐέσπασιανοῦ υἱὸς Ο]ὐέσπασιανὸς
 Σεβαστός,

¹¹⁸Map of ancient Campania from Keith Johnston, *Classical Atlas* (Boston, New York, Chicago: Ginn and Company, 1886) public domain.

¹¹⁹Grant (2005) argues Nola, Neapolis, Surrentum, and Capua received Titus' aid because they offered assistance to refugees from Pompeii and Herculaneum, 22-23.

The inscribed text credits Titus with the restoration (*ἀποκατέστησεν/restituit*) of multiple buildings that were destroyed (*[σ]υμπεσόντα/conlapsa*) by earthquakes.¹²³

While the reading in its current condition does not name specific buildings Titus restored, the commemoration of imperial largesse by the city suggests they were buildings highly valued for the civic life of the community.¹²⁴

The Salerno inscription too has lacunae that prevent knowing what structures Titus helped restore there, but the Sorrento and Nola texts remain in good condition.

The Surrentum inscription reads:

IMP · TITVS · CAESAR *divi*
 VESPASIANI · F · VESPASIANus
 AVG · PONT · MAX · TR · POT · *ix imp. xii*
 COS · IIX · CENSOR · P · P · HOROLOGium
cum suis | ORNAMENTIS · TERRAE ·
 MOTIBus *conlapsum rest.*¹²⁵

The emperor Titus Caesar Vespasia[nus] Augustus son of the [*divus*] Vespasia[nus] *pontifex maximus*, on whom a ninth power as tribune has been conferred, [emperor for the fifteenth? time], consul for the eight time, *ensor*, father of the nation, [restored, together with all] it ornaments, the cloc[k destroyed] by earthquakes (trans. Guidoboni).

¹²³The neuter plural participles, *[σ]υμπεσόντα* and *conlapsa*, indicate Titus restored more than one building which had succumbed to earthquakes.

¹²⁴An inscription of this type most likely would have specified the structures Titus helped build. Especially helpful on this point is Agnès Bérenger-Badel's explication of the two types of inscriptions that correlate imperial aid to a specific seismic event. See Bérenger-Badel (2005): 144-146.

¹²⁵*AE* (1902), 40.

Thus, as the inscription indicates, Surrentum had an ornate clock that had succumbed to damage from earthquakes. The city honored Titus with the restoration (*restituit*) of *horologium* the earthquakes had destroyed.¹²⁶

Nola obtained imperial munificence for rebuilding a “terastyle temple of the Genius of the colony” (*terastylum Geni coloniae*).¹²⁷ The Latin inscription, which likely dates between March and June 81 CE, says:

*Imp(erator) Titus Caesar divi Ves[pasiani] f.
Vespasianus Aug(ustus)] | pont(ifex)
max(imus) trib(unicia) potest(ate) X,
imp(erator) XVII c[on]sul VIII, desig(natus)
VIII? censor p(ater) p(atriciae)] | tetrastylum
Geni coloniae ter(rae motib(us)? colapsum
restituit].¹²⁸*

The emperor Titus Caesar [Vespasianus Augustus son] of the *divus* Vesp[asianus], *pontifex maximus*, on whom a tenth power as tribune has been conferred, emperor for the seventeenth time, consul for the eighth time, *censor*, father of the nation, [restored] the tetrastyle temple of the Genius of the colony [for it had been destroyed by] ear[thquakes] (trans. Guidoboni).

These inscriptions offer three important pieces of evidence. First, current scholarship places their provenance after the Vesuvius eruption.¹²⁹ Consequently, it is unlikely that Titus' aid went toward the reconstruction of buildings that were damaged before the 79 CE catastrophe. Second, all of the inscriptions refer to

¹²⁶ *AE* (1902), 40.

¹²⁷ *AE* (1994), 413.

¹²⁸ The inscription and the likely dates of its provenance can be found in *AE* (1994), 413. Guidoboni cites Simonelli and suggests earlier date of 80 CE.

¹²⁹ See the earlier discussion of dates for these inscriptions.

buildings restored after they had sustained damage from or been destroyed by multiple earthquakes. The Latin text of the diglot inscription from Naples preserves the ablative plural ending *ibus* on what is believed to be the words *terrae motibus* (earthquakes). Likewise the extant portion of the Surrentum inscription contains the plural reading of TERRAE MOTIB. The reconstructed sections from the Salerno and Nola inscriptions respectively all assume references to the plural reading *terrae motibus* (earthquakes).

At the time of the Vesuvius eruption, Pompeii had yet to recover fully from the devastation it suffered from an earthquake that struck the Campania region in 62 CE.¹³⁰ It is likely that other cities also had lost important civic buildings in that quake and had not rebuilt them by 79 CE. The epigraphical references to multiple earthquakes combined with their post-eruption dates of origin suggest the damage received in Naples, Nola, Salerno, and Surrentum was not limited to the severe earthquake that struck Campania 17 years before the Vesuvius disaster. The only known earthquakes to have happened after 62 CE were those that accompanied the eruption of Vesuvius. Therefore, there is a high probability that the beneficence those cities received from Titus helped to rebuild structures that were ruined by earthquakes associated with the eruption of Vesuvius.

Thirdly, this evidence conforms to the claims made by the literary sources that Campanian cities benefitted from Titus' largesse. It further suggests what the archaeological data already confirm, namely, that Titus' aid was not intended for the cities buried by Vesuvius' eruption. Instead, it went to cities whose losses were not

¹³⁰Zanker (1998), 124-133.

as catastrophic. Given Titus' reputation for frugality, it seems unlikely he would have spent large sums on places like Pompeii and Herculaneum where there was little hope for rebuilding.¹³¹ Furthermore, the presence of the *curatores restituendae* indicates Titus wanted to keep his expenditures under control. Temples and other public-use buildings are precisely the types of reconstruction projects emperors often agreed to finance for Italian and provincial cities because they were beneficial to civic life and their costs were finite. Thus, Titus' gifts to Campania were more targeted for the restoration of specific structures than the literary sources indicate. Nevertheless, such aid is what decades of imperial practice would cause us to expect.

All the evidence for Titus' post-Vesuvius eruption aid shows little innovation in the imperial gifts themselves. By 79-81 CE, the forms of imperial disaster assistance had long been established, and legitimacy was confirmed by assisting the people in expected ways. What makes his assistance after this tragedy unique is the political context in which it was given and the transformation of Titus' public image to which that aid contributed.

Titus did not need to bestow his munificence directly on Rome's elites to change public perception about his character and ability to rule. Since the Roman public expected emperors to extend their generosity by giving money, Titus' targeted assistance for the restoration of buildings vital to Campanian civic life permitted him to be seen acting in ways anticipated from good emperors. At the same time,

¹³¹Cassius Dio says Titus "did not spend money vainly" (οὐ μάτην ἀνήλισκεν, 66.19.3). An in depth analysis of Titus' continuation of Vespasian's financial policies can be seen in Brian Jones' biography of him. See particularly Brian Jones, *The Emperor Titus* (London and New York: Croom Helm, 1984), 140-141.

Titus was able to control costs and thus continue the image of frugality that his father's financial policies established for the new dynasty.

Titus' known response to the Vesuvius eruption was patterned after the practices of his predecessors because his munificence took the form of monetary grants, those gifts of money funded the construction of specific damaged civic structures, and he sent representatives from the Senate to supervise the use of imperial funds. By imitating his father's financial policies and, therefore, not spending exorbitant amounts on the restoration of hopelessly buried Campanian towns, he was also able to show that his reputation for greed and profligacy had given way to a munificence worthy of the imperial office. Jones has observed, "he was well aware of the need to observe the formalities and appear to be generous, and at the same time ensure that he had the funds to be so."¹³² Therefore, the Vesuvius eruption permitted Titus to exhibit the characteristics of generosity and frugality simultaneously.

Responding to the Vesuvius eruption was not the only occasion Titus had for demonstrating his generosity to the Roman people. In 80 CE, during his Campanian tour of Vesuvius' destruction, a major fire broke out in the city of Rome (Cass. Dio 66.24.1). Dio's epitome lists the important buildings destroyed by the fire. It reads:

καὶ γὰρ τὸ Σεραπεῖον καὶ τὸ Ἰσεῖον τὰ τε σέπτα καὶ
τὸ Ποσειδώνιον τὸ τε βαλανεῖον τὸ τοῦ Ἀγρίππου
καὶ τὸ πάνθειον τὸ τε διριβιτώριον καὶ τὸ τοῦ
Βάλβου θέατρον καὶ τὴν το Πομπηίου σκηγήν, καὶ
τὰ Ὀκταουεία οἰκήματα μετὰ τῶν βιβλίων, τὸν τε
νεῶν το Διὸς το Καπιτωλίου μετὰ τῶν συννάων
αὐτο κατέκαυσεν (66.24.1).

¹³²Jones (1984), 141.

For it burned the Serapeion and the temple of Isis and the Saepa and the temple of Neptune, and the bath house of Agrippa and the Pantheon and the Diribitorium and the theater of Balbus and the stage of Pompey and the Octavian buildings with the books and the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus together with its [temple of Jupiter] nearby temples.

When Titus received word of the fire, he traveled to Rome and appointed two former consuls as *curatores restituendae* to oversee the rebuilding of Campania (Cass. Dio 66.24.3; Suet. *Tit.* 8.4). Suetonius describes Titus' aid for the reconstruction of the lost buildings in this way:

cuncta praetorium suorum ornamenta operibus ac templis destinavit praeposuitque complures ex equestri ordine, quo quaeque maturius paragerentur (Tit.8.4).

He set aside all the ornaments of his villas for the public buildings and temples, and put several men of the equestrian order in charge of the work, that everything might be done with the greater dispatch (trans. Rolfe).

In these actions, two points stand out. First, the Emperor used his personal property for ornamental repairs on public buildings and temples. This reinforces the idea that the dividing line between the emperor's personal property (*fiscus*) and the state treasury (*aerarium*) had become blurred very early in the Empire's history. Titus' gifts were tantamount to the use of state funds for disaster repair.¹³³ Second, the practice of delegating individuals, in this case men of equestrian rank, to oversee

¹³³Duncan-Jones (1994), 43. See also Millar (1963) for the *Fiscus* as the personal property of the emperors. Millar takes a different view and argues the lines between the two treasuries were not blurred (pp. 29, 41).

the reconstruction efforts appears to have grown into a normative practice. Titus made such appointments for the rebuilding of Campania, and now he selected men to oversee the reconstruction of Rome.¹³⁴

Suetonius lists a third disaster that occurred during Titus' short tenure as emperor. In addition to the volcanic eruption and fire in Rome, "a plague the likes of which had hardly ever been known before" (*item pestilentia quanta non temere alias*) broke out during his reign (*Tit.* 8.1, trans. Rolfe). Suetonius' text is unclear whether this pestilence affected the entire empire or only the inhabitants of Rome. However, Cassius Dio's epitome offers a potential clue. Cassius Dio most likely refers to this pestilence when he connects the outbreak of a sickness in Rome to the ash falls from Vesuvius. After explaining that dust (κόνις) from Vesuvius "came to Africa and to Spain and to Egypt" (ἦλθε μὲν καὶ ἐς Ἀφρικὴν καὶ ἐς Συρίαν καὶ ἐς Αἴγυπτον), he says, "it also came to Rome" (ἦλθε δὲ καὶ ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην, 66.23.4). The summary of Dio then blames the arrival of this ash for a later pestilence in Rome saying:

ἡ μὲν οὖν τέφρα αὕτη οὐδὲν μέγα τότε κακὸν
αὐτοῦς εἰργάσατο ὕστερον γὰρ νόσον σφίσι
λοιμώδη δεινὴν ἐνέβαλε (66.23.5)

Thus, at that time, this ash affected them [the Romans] (with) no great malady, yet later a pestilence brought a severe sickness on them.

¹³⁴See earlier description in this chapter of Tiberius' delegation of overseers.

Any real correlation between the plague and the Vesuvius eruption is doubtful, but scholars accept that during Titus' reign, Rome did suffer from a plague that may have killed as many as 10,000 Romans per day.¹³⁵

According to Suetonius, Titus labored to find any divine or medical remedy for this terrible pestilence. Suetonius writes:

*Medendae valitudini leniendisque morbis
nullam divinam humanamque opem non
adhibuit inquisito omni sacrificiorum
remediorumque genere (Tit.8.4).*

For curing the plague and diminishing the force of the epidemic there was no aid, human or divine, which he did not employ, searching for every kind of sacrifice and all kinds of medicines (trans. Rolfe).

This text conveys the impotence of the Roman Emperor to stop the suffering of the people. It also illustrates the imperial prerogative for placating the wrath of the gods, and it also shows Titus working tirelessly to provide any possible relief for the public. He acted generously and as protector of the people.

The Campanian response together with his aid after the 80 CE fire in Rome and his expiation of the gods during the plague proved vital for a full reassessment of Titus' capacity to be emperor. Disaster relief was, therefore, an important component in how Titus' brief reign was remembered by later generations of Romans. Suetonius includes his discussion of Titus' disaster assistance in a larger section on Titus' public generosity (*Tit.* 8.1-5). His disaster relief efforts were

¹³⁵Walter Scheidel, "Germs for Rome," in *Rome the Cosmopolis*, eds. Catharine Edwards and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 171-172, n. 37.

transformed into something more than a Roman emperor fulfilling the duties of his office in a way consistent with his predecessors. Instead, the relief measures became vital aspects of a later, positive reworking of his overall character and his capacity to manage the Roman state in a way beneficial for the people of the Empire.

Disaster Relief and Imperial Political Initiation: Tiberius and Nero

Before concluding this chapter, it is necessary to discuss the importance disasters played in marking out the careers of two future emperors. Both Tiberius and Nero made their political debuts by advocating for cities from Asia Minor to receive earthquake assistance from the Roman state. While Augustus campaigned in northern Spain against the rebellious Cantabri, an emissary from Tralles, a city in Asia Minor, arrived to inform him of an earthquake that struck in 27 BCE and to request his assistance.¹³⁶ Strabo recounts the loss of the city's gymnasium along with additional parts of the city (ήνίκα τὸ γυμνάσιον καὶ ἄλλα μέρη συνέπεσεν, 12.8.18). Augustus gave them money (χρήματα) for rebuilding (Strab. 12.8.18). The 6th century historian, Agathias (d. 580 CE), later claimed Augustus committed funds for the rebuilding of the city and sent former consuls to oversee its reconstruction (Agath. 2.17). An inscription from Tralles lauds Augustus as its founder most likely because he aided the city after the earthquake.¹³⁷

¹³⁶Specific evidence for this earthquake is primarily literary being attested in: Strab. 12.8.18; Suet. *Tib.* 8; Euseb. *Hieron. Chron.* 164d; 168d; *IGR* 4.1237 = *TAM* 5.974.

¹³⁷*BCH* 10 (1886): 516, no. 5.

Tralles, however, did not suffer from this earthquake alone because at least three additional cities sought relief from the damage the quake caused. When the earthquake struck in 27 BCE, Tiberius was with Augustus in Spain being introduced to military life, but two years later he returned to the capital, and delegates representing Laodicea, Thyatira, and Chios sought his help (*opemque implorantibus*) in making their case before the Senate (Suet. *Tib.* 8.1).¹³⁸ Tiberius agreed and entreated the Senate (*senatum deprecatus est*) on their behalf.

This was an important moment for Tiberius' eventual succession to the *imperium*. In 27 BCE, Augustus had taken him on the Spanish expedition in order to introduce Tiberius to military life and the soldiers. With his appeal to the Senate for earthquake assistance in 25 BCE, Tiberius made a typical entrance into political life for a Roman politician.¹³⁹ Suetonius even refers to his performance before the Senate as the beginning of his "civil career" (*civilium officiorum*, *Tib.* 8.1). This rhetorical achievement along with his military training indicates that Augustus was already preparing Tiberius as a potential successor. Thus, working to obtain disaster assistance was an important way to demarcate a possible future emperor with substantial political clout.

In 53 CE, the future Emperor, Nero, had a similar public introduction. That year marked his 16th year of age, and he had already married. But, to enter political life and demonstrate his oratorical prowess, he became an advocate for cities who sought relief, for some reason or another, from their hardships. The colony in north

¹³⁸Levick (1999), 20.

¹³⁹Levick (1999), 20.

Italy at Bononia, he won 10 million HS to help them rebuild after a fire (Tac. *Ann.* 12.58.2). He also secured for Apamea in Asia a five year tax remission after it had been destroyed by an earthquake (*Ann.* 12.58.2).

Whether or not these cities would have entrusted their ability to procure disaster relief to political neophytes from the Rome's imperial family would seem doubtful given the stakes. Nevertheless, the real significance of these readings lies in Tacitus' association of disaster aid with the public emergence of these future emperors. Handling or making requests for disaster relief would be an important aspect of being the emperor of Rome. Suetonius and Tacitus appear eager to demonstrate that both Tiberius and Nero showed promising signs of their preparedness to be emperor from the outset of their political careers.

Conclusion

The examples given in this chapter demonstrate how politically significant disasters could be for Roman emperors. If a disaster occurred at a time when the Roman public already questioned the stability of the regime (Tiberius) or the ability of the Emperor to rule well (Titus), they could generate additional opposition and further embolden those willing to risk actively seeking an emperor's removal from power.

They also show that disaster assistance was an important public relations tool in the arsenal of the emperors. Tiberius, Nero, and Titus actively used disaster assistance to change public opinion of their reigns not merely to project imperial power through benefaction. Furthermore, the failure of Nero's relief measures provides evidence that imperial generosity did not have a guaranteed verdict in the

court of Roman public opinion. Emperors could follow established precedents for disaster relief, but circumstances during their reigns determined how the public would view them and their gifts. Finally, Tacitus shows the political weight being associated with disaster relief had by associating the budding political careers of Tiberius and Nero with making requests for disaster assistance on behalf of damaged cities.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This study has focused on specific case studies from the ancient literary and epigraphical sources to examine the practice of disaster relief by the Roman emperors of the first and second centuries CE. From this examination, three important characteristics of Roman disaster relief have emerged.

First, the Romans did not themselves invent the framework within which imperial relief was provided either at Rome or in the provinces. The practice of euergetism predated the ascendancy of Rome, but it was the mechanism not only for disaster relief but also the achievement of stability and balance within the cities of the empire. Disaster assistance also provides insight into how the Romans adapted their rule to local norms in order to achieve and maintain the stability of the Empire. Also, the Greek cities' worship of the living emperor as a god helped give certain cities an advantage over others for receiving imperial benefactions.

Second, the status a city or individual had from the viewpoint of the emperor determined its likelihood to receive imperial aid. Cities that had been granted the right to build a temple devoted to the emperor or cities deemed vital to Rome's ruling interests in a specific provinces increased the chances that city would benefit from the emperor's aid. Rome, because it was the main home of these early emperors, received the greatest amount of imperial attention in the city of Rome. Many cities such as Ephesus, Sardis, Smyrna, and Nicaea appear as repeated beneficiaries of the emperors' liberality because they were associated both with the imperial cult as well as with provincial administration.

Status also affected the process of relief. The inhabitants of Rome benefitted from disaster aid more than provincial cities because in the early Empire the emperors lived and stayed in Rome for a majority of their reign. In addition, the inhabitants of Rome did not have to petition the emperor for his aid as did those who lived in the provinces. On the other hand, in order to receive the assistance of the emperor, the cities of the Greek east sent embassies to him either to represent their interests and to procure the needed finances for rebuilding their cities back home. The use of ambassadors also depended upon the cities selecting men of whom the Roman emperor had some knowledge. Securing disaster assistance or gaining other imperial favors became much more likely if the emperor already had a working relationship with the selected ambassador.

On an individual level, status or a person's rank within Roman society might determine how much access they had to the emperor, and therefore, the amount of his largesse they might receive. By examining the practice of tax remissions (ch. 4), we saw how emperors shifted the financial responsibility for funding the restoration of destroyed or damage cities through granting to cities immunities from their communal taxes. This permitted the cities to continue collecting taxes locally like they would do if a disaster had not occurred. As a consequence, country-side farmers not only had to recover from experiencing the disaster, but they also had to continue to pay the taxes they owed to their city-state even if the hazardous event had not occurred.

Finally, we saw disaster assistance as an important political weapon in the arsenal of Rome's emperors. Because the Romans were a deeply religious people,

they took seriously signs from the gods and other omens that portended the demise of the current emperor. The Roman public often interpreted occurrences of disasters as signs from the gods of dissatisfaction with the current emperor. Thus, giving gifts of money to the victims of disasters served to quell rising public rancor over any kind of event that could be interpreted as disastrous. Thus, disaster relief was a vital function of the state to give help to imperial subjects, and it was an important political opportunity that could change the public's view of the emperor for good or bad.

Therefore, the study of Roman imperial disaster assistance has a greater importance beyond the identification of the processes associated with imperial aid. It reflects how power gradually became centered in the position of the emperor and he increasingly became the focal point of the state. As the position of emperor became more prominent, the political ramifications of disasters and their relief increased as well. Not only did individuals and cities turn to the emperors to provide assistance in the form of grants and tax remissions, but the emperors tried to use these opportunities to their political advantage to prevent the decay of public confidence in their leadership. Thus, disaster relief became an important tool used by emperors to craft their own imperial image.

In addition, disaster assistance brings to the foreground the extensive reach of the state throughout the Empire. The Roman government and its policies affected the lives of individuals and cities beyond Rome and the Italian peninsula. The emperors managed the provinces through governors, civil bureaucrats, and the army. But, even rural farmers in distant provinces felt the weight of the Roman tax

system imposed on them from the capital. They were the primary contributors to the coffers of the treasury. Most likely, these individuals paid the majority of the costs of imperial disaster relief through paying meeting their annual tax obligations which provincial governors still collected despite the occurrence of a major disaster like a fire or earthquake.

The recent scholarly interest in Roman disasters opens up exciting new avenues to see the machinery of Roman government in action. This dissertation will hopefully spark further scholarly inquiry into the interaction between the emperors and their subjects. Perhaps it can also generate additional research into the nature of imperial politics and the role disasters and disaster relief playing in shaping the image of power each of the early emperors tried to project upon the inhabitants of the city of Rome.

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