

A victore ob metum

Tacitus, in a well-known and endlessly-discussed passage (*Germania*, 2, 5), reports as follows on the emergence and enlargement of meaning of the tribal name *Germani*. *Ceterum Germaniae vocabulum recens et nuper additum, quoniam qui primi Rhenum transgressi Gallos expulerint ac nunc Tungri, tunc Germani vocati sint: ita nationis nomen, non gentis, evaluisse paulatim, ut omnes primum a victore ob metum, mox etiam a se ipsis invento nomine Germani vocarentur.*

A difficulty has always, and with good reason, been felt about the meaning of the phrase *a victore ob metum*. Does *a victore* mean "by the victor" or "from the victor" (in the sense of "after the name of the victor")? The latter view is maintained in what is perhaps the best-known treatment of the question, by Eduard Norden (*Die Germanische Urgeschichte in Tacitus Germania*, p. 312 ff.). Norden, in his very valuable discussion, quotes many instances from Greek and Latin where ἀπό with the genitive or *a* with the ablative are used in somewhat similar phrases of naming, the name concerned being derived from the name given in the genitive or ablative case respectively. These instances are very interesting, but they throw no light at all on whether *a victore* is used in that sense and not rather in the quite normal sense of "by the victor" (ὀπό with genitive in Greek).

Since this clause may then be regarded as ambiguous in the meaning to be assigned to *a victore*, perhaps we may seek light from the following parallel clause *a se ipsis*. If we understand *a se ipsis* in the sense which Norden assigns to *a victore*, the second clause becomes a mere tautology, and this moreover is shown to be an impossibility by the presence of the phrase *invento nomine*. It follows that *a se ipsis* must be interpreted as "by themselves", and thus Norden, in fact, takes it.

Norden therefore understands the two parallel phrases *a victore* and *a se ipsis* in two quite different senses, the first meaning "by the name of the victor" (ἀπό with genitive) and the second "by themselves" (ὀπό with genitive). Now it would clearly require a number of parallel instances to support this surprising viewpoint. Norden adduces a few examples (mostly from Pliny *N. H.*) where in successive phrases with *a* plus ablative the derivative meaning (ἀπό) and causative meaning (ὀπό) follow one on the other. It is noteworthy that in these phrases the causative, that is the more normal meaning, usually comes first, while the derivative, the more unusual meaning, usually comes second, presumably in an effort to avoid ambiguity. Of Norden's examples however, none is in the least parallel to the example in Tacitus, where the two clauses are tightly bound together not only by *primum* — — — *mox* but by a complete and thorough parallelism, which makes it quite certain that the ablatives are to be understood in exactly the same sense. It would be futile to look for examples which would weaken this argument. To use parallel phrases of this kind with quite distinct meanings would simply be an absurd misuse of language. Tacitus moreover is merely quoting from the author disguised by the word *quidam*, and there is no place here for rhetorical asymetry or ambiguity of meaning. Therefore the two phrases are parallel in meaning (ὀπό).

But with this sense the *a victore* clause has no meaning, and the inevitable conclusion is that the clause is corrupt¹⁾. The original text is to be sought on the lines of J. Grimm's correction of *victore* to *victo*. I would propose rather that the original text read *a victis victoris ob metum*, corrupted by haplography to *a victoris ob metum*, and later corrected to *a victore ob metum*²⁾. This emendation gives a complete and perfect sense to the whole passage. Norden's „Textänderungen haben ganz außer Betracht zu bleiben“ (p. 341) is here methodologically incorrect.

Victis is preferable to Grimm's *victo*, since Tacitus has been using plurals, *Gallos* and *Germani*. It corresponds also with *a se ipsis* and makes the haplography of *victis victoris* easier with the identical endings.

The source used by Tacitus explained how the tribal name (*nationis nomen*) *Germani* gradually became the national name (*gentis*). The tribe of *Germani* cross the Rhine (when?) and displace the Gauls. The name *Germani* is then developed or enlarged, in two stages (*evaluisse paulatim*, — — — *primum* — — — *mox*). The first stage is that of Gallic usage (*a victis*), the second is an additional (*etiam*, v. l. *et*) stage of Germanic usage (*a se ipsis*). The various reasons for these two developments are also given, in parallel. The (displaced) Gauls began to call all the tribes, both cis- and transrhene, *Germani*, because of their terror of the single conquering tribe of *Germani* (*victoris ob metum*). The Germans in turn (in the wider sense) began to use the name *Germani* as a national name when it had come into use (*invento nomine*). The period described by *mox* is vague. During it the name *Germani* became enlarged in Gallic and Germanic usage, and the original *Germani* obviously lost their name and became *Tungri*. We know that the second part of the account in the source of Tacitus is wrong, since the Germans did not use this name of themselves. But the first part of the account, the enlargement of the meaning in Gallic usage, may be taken as fact rather than theory.

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1) In support of textual corruption cf. R. Meissner, Rh. M. 1939 pp. 379—384, and E. Bickel, *ibid.* p. 384. Against, H. Fuchs, *Mus. Helveticum*, 1947, p. 152. I have been unable to see F. Focke, *Der Namensatz*, in *Satura*, Festschrift O. Weinreich, Baden-Baden 1952, p. 31.

2) I have just now been informed, through the good offices of Dr. Wetzel of Bonn University (kindly communicated to me by Professor H. Herter) that my emendation was to some extent anticipated by A. Weidner (*Criticarum scriptio-num specimen*, Progr. Friedr.-Wilh.-Gymn., 4, Cöln 1864; not available to me), who proposed the reading „*a victis victorum ob metum*“. I think, however, that the singular *victoris* makes the haplography, and its later emendation, more easily credible.