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Building in words : representations of the process of construction in Latin literature

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Chapter II

The Emperor's New Nature: Debating the Draining of the Fucine Lake

1. Introduction

This chapter, like the previous one, deals with the question of how representations of the process of building can be designed to influence the impact of a finished structure. I now turn from urban and suburban monuments to large-scale engineering projects, such as landscaping or water management.[1] At the same time, I broaden the selection of texts I discuss to include not only representations designed to enhance the reader's appreciation of a particular structure, but also those designed to diminish it, and I consider how the two types interact. In this chapter, I also contextualise these descriptions within larger Roman debates about large-scale construction projects – debates about nature and construction, luxury and frugality, victory and defeat, boundaries and excess.

Large-scale engineering projects were no less controversial in Rome than they are today. Ancient texts present us with a bewildering range of reactions: effusive praise for the emperor who constructed a new aqueduct, harsh condemnation of a rich man's landscaped gardens, wonder at the miraculous achievement of a new harbour, moral outrage at a daring canal-building project. What are we to make of these fierce opposites? How can such projects represent the most defining achievements of the Roman people and at the same time be a sign of its advanced corruption and depravity?

It is possible to seek the reason for the different reactions in the individual projects: for example, one might assume that projects which were too expensive or designed to further only private luxury would be condemned, while projects designed to benefit the general public would be worth the expense and welcomed

[1] See however my earlier discussion of one engineering project, the Caesarian bridge, in ch. 1, p. 48-51 above.

as admirable achievements.[2] Another possibility is to understand the differences in terms of a development over time: it has been argued that huge interventions in nature were generally viewed with suspicion by the writers of the republic and early principate, while attitudes seem to undergo a change towards the end of the first century AD.[3] Both explanations are important and need to be taken into account, but neither is sufficient by itself.

An exclusive focus on external factors elides the fact that in describing human interventions in nature, authors always have a choice.[4] *Any* such project can theoretically either be praised or condemned. Whether an author activates the positive or negative sides of a project (or type of project) depends not so much on the kind or scale of the activity itself, but rather on the character of his text and the context in which the project is mentioned. Concentrating on descriptions of the *process* of engineering or construction, I shall examine in this chapter the rhetorical strategies that authors employ to address the ambivalence about intervention in nature.

2. Water Engineering in Rome

Since the corpus of Latin texts praising or condemning engineering achievements is far too large and diverse to be considered as a whole, I base my analysis of the strategies of environmental rhetoric on descriptions of water-engineering – a choice motivated by the central importance that water and its management have in the debates surrounding interaction between nature and man.

Fierce condemnations of large-scale human interventions in nature are especially common in 'moralising' texts, where construction on too grand or too luxurious a scale is criticised as (often socially) inapproprate, hybristic, or sinful.[5] As Edwards

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[2] See the clear summary of this aspect of the discussion by DeLaine (2002), 222-6, who quotes (224 n. 90) Cic. *Mur.* 76 as the earliest formulation of the antithesis (*odit populus Romanus privatam luxuriam, publicam magnificentiam diligit).*

[3] See e.g. Pavlovskis (1973), 1-25, on the new enthusiasm for technical advances in the Flavian period expressed by Statius and Martial, and Armstrong (2009), investigating the 'particular constellation of attitudes' (75) towards man-made marvels in the Augustan period.

[4] None of the scholars cited above deny that this is the case. Cf. also Hinds's reaction to Fantham's question regarding changing attitudes towards luxury as evinced by Stat. *Silv.* 2.2, in Hinds (2001), 260-1.

[5] The literature on Roman moralising and luxury building is vast. Edwards (1993), ch. 4 is the best introduction, drawing on a wide range of texts to support a convincing argument. Purcell

argues, the theme of water and of the manipulation of boundaries between water and land takes a central position in such moralising discourse.[6] She explains moralising criticism of (especially luxury-) construction as a vehicle for the elite's articulation of social hierarchies and social boundaries. The prominence of water-engineering in such discussusions can be explained by the clear natural boundaries at stake there: land and sea, lake and sea, lake and land, river and land.[7]

But water-engineering is not only a favourite theme of moralising criticism of society. Water-management had great ideological and economic significance for Roman culture. As Purcell argues, since the earliest days of the city of Rome, maintaining the city's habitability had involved a struggle to control water and render the marshlands of the Tiber fit to live in. This struggle of man against water is central to how Romans saw themselves and is reflected by a variety of cultural phenomena, from the prominence of water and water deities in foundational mythology to the water games of luxury villas.[8] Grand imperial projects of water-management were often locally motivated economic investments, designed to increase production and habitability, but at the same time they offered opportunities for grandiose displays of conquest of nature by way of a 'rhetoric of control over the landscape'.[9]

The language of moral outrage analysed by Edwards and the rhetoric of environmental power that Purcell investigates are not two completely separate ways of talking about water-management in Rome. This becomes apparent if, rather than asking which attitude would have been more typical, or how Romans *really* responded to a particular type of project, we turn to the *strategies* of the texts

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(1987) establishes the link with the archaeological evidence. A recent, wide-ranging survey of the ideologies of landscape in Rome, with much useful material on the relationship of man and nature and on criticism of luxury is Spencer (2010).

[6] Edwards (1993), 147. She may be right in suggesting that the theme is more prominent than a modern reader would expect. Truly harmful exploitation of human or environmental capital remains uncensured, while fishponds, which do not cause anyone (except the owner) the least inconvenience, are treated as a fundamental threat to society and morality.

[7] Edwards (1993), 147: 'The division between land and sea often appears in invective against luxury as one of the most archetypally natural distinctions.'

[8] On the early mythology of Rome and its preoccupation with water, see Purcell (1996), 184-9. On Roman villas, see 198-9: 'The games villa owners played with underground conduits and fountains and ponds were not just whimsies, but allusions to the control of water as it had gone on since Romulus built his city in the water-meadows.'

[9] Purcell (1996), 206. On the martial associations and rhetoric of Roman bridge-building, see Kleiner (1991).

which have transmitted these 'attitudes'. How precisely do authors construct their account of the project in order to activate the desired connotations and control the potentially problematic ones?

Two near-contemporary accounts of large-scale canal-building offer a first test case. One appears in Tacitus' *Annals*, the other in Pliny the Younger's letters to the emperor Trajan. Within his predominantly negative account of Nero's reign,[10] Tacitus describes Nero's ambitious project of connecting the *lacus Avernus* to Ostia by means of a channel (*Ann.* 15.42.2).[11] He omits any mention of the economic benefits of the project (ships bringing Egyptian grain from Puteoli to Ostia would no longer have had to navigate the dangerous cape of Misenum)[12] and via its immediate context associates it with the construction of the wasteful Domus Aurea on (allegedly) stolen ground. The architects in charge of Nero's building projects, Severus and Celer, are described as follows: … *quibus ingenium et audacia erat etiam quae natura denegavisset per artem temptare* – '… who had the genius and the daring to attempt through skill even what nature had denied'. Their work does not respect natural boundaries, such as mountains, which have to be dug through (*per montis adversos*). In terms of the economic side of the project, Tacitus only calls it *intolerandus labor nec satis causae* – 'intolerable toil and for an insufficient reason', and Nero an *incredibilium cupitor* – 'a desirer of incredible things', for attempting the impossible.[13]

Pliny's letter to Trajan (10.41), designed to convince both his immediate reader Trajan and a larger audience of the benefits of a canal building project in his province of Bithynia, dwells extensively on the economic benefits of the project (10.41.2), but also addresses several of Tacitus' causes for concern in respect of Nero's projects, albeit with the opposite intention.[14] This project, too, is daring and ambitious, but Pliny presents this fact in a very different light (10.41.2):

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[10] On Tacitus' portrayal of Nero, see the introduction by Keitel (2009), with further bibliography there.

[11] On this canal-project, see Griffin (1987), 107-8.

[12] Cf. the catastrophe described at *Ann.* 46.2, where a large part of the fleet is lost when attempting to navigate Cape Misenum in dangerous weather conditions.

[13] For the construction of Nero as the ruinous builder, see Elsner (1994).

[14] The correspondence between Pliny and Trajan makes up the tenth book of Pliny's *Epistulae*. The letters were written between AD 109 and 112, when Pliny was *legatus pro praetore* in the province of Bithynia and Pontus. For an introduction to this correspondence, see the up-to-date bibliography collected by Gibson/Morello (2011), 295 (item 3) and 305 (item 27).

> Intuenti mihi et fortunae tuae et animi magnitudinem convenientissimum videtur demonstrari opera non minus aeternitate tua quam gloria digna quantumque pulchritudinis tantum utilitatis habitura.
>
> When I consider the nobility of both your status and your mind, it seems very fitting that I should let you know of projects worthy of eternal fame no less than of your glory and likely to be as splendid as they are useful.

Where the *audacia* of Nero's architects was suspect, and he an *incredibilium cupitor*, the *animi magnitudo* of the emperor Trajan is precisely what is praised. The Bithynian project, too, would require huge amounts of manual labour (*hoc opus multas manus poscit* – 'this project requires many hands'), but Pliny hastens to add that this manual labour is in fact locally available. The danger of such a great project being left unfinished (exactly what happens to Nero's ambitious plans, called an *inrita spes*, 'a vain hope', by Tacitus), is addressed explicitly by Pliny, but turned by him into an additional source of prestige. A Bithynian king had already attempted the digging of a channel, but had failed*, intercepto rege mortalitate an desperato operis effectu* – 'because the king had been stopped by his own death or had despaired of finishing the project' (10.41.4). Pliny turns this earlier failure to account as follows (10.41.5):

> Sed hoc ipso (feres enim me ambitiosum pro tua gloria) incitor et accendor ut cupiam peragi a te quae tantum coeperant reges.
>
> But this is exactly what spurs me on and incites me to wish that you should accomplish what kings merely had begun (for you will permit me to be ambitious for the sake of your glory).

The juxtaposition of these passages shows that the categories of praise and censure overlap considerably.[15] Cost, labour, risk, size and ambition can all work either way. These are not two separate discourses – both authors are aware that it is perfectly possible to put the opposite construction on the facts they present. They face a rhetorical challenge: how to activate the desired connotations of the project in question, while silencing the undesired ones. I now turn to the contribution made to this kind of rhetoric by representations of the process of engineering. I do

[15] Cf. Edwards (1993), 142, on rhetoric and luxury building: 'Those who praised luxury used the same categories as those who condemned it'.

so by focussing on one particular, high-profile project of water-engineering of which several literary accounts have been preserved. It offers a perfect opportunity to experience the 'debate' in action, and to scrutinise the strategies by which literary texts attempt to attribute a particular meaning to the project.

3. Debating the Draining of the Fucine Lake

In central Italy, about 86 km east of Rome and 155 km north of Naples, stretches a fertile plain of 150 km², called 'Il Fucino'. This plain is the result of a gigantic engineering operation, carried out between 1855 and 1876 on the initiative of Count Alessandro di Torlonia: the complete drainage of the largest lake of central Italy, the lago Fucino.[16] Alessandro di Torlonia was not the first to attempt this ambitious project. The draining of the Fucine Lake had already been considered by Julius Caesar and Augustus, before Claudius eventually embarked on the huge operation.[17]

The area around the Fucine Lake was initially populated by the Marsi.[18] For the inhabitants of the area the lake provided a large quantity of fish, and the soil surrounding it was fertilised by frequent floods. However, the danger of these floods outweighed their beneficial effects. The level of the lake could change rapidly, causing substantial losses to agriculture, while the constantly waterlogged soil offered an ideal breeding-ground for malaria.[19]

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[16] Alexandre Brisse, the last of the engineers to direct the project (from 1869 to its official completion in 1878) published a detailed account of the draining operation: Brisse/de Rotrou (1876). For a more recent account and assessment of the project, see Burri (2011).

[17] See Suet. *Iul.* 44.3 on Julius Caesar, where the Fucine Lake is included in a long list of Caesar's ambitious plans, and *Claud.* 20.1 on Augustus, who denied the Marsians' request for the draining of the lake (for this passage see also below, p. 91).

[18] On the Marsi in antiquity see Letta (1972), or, for a briefer introduction, Letta (2001) = Letta (2003). The Roman colony of Alba Fucens was founded in 304 BC to the north-west of the lake.

[19] On the pre-draining situation of the land around the Lacus Fucinus, see Lycoph. *Alex.* 1275-80, Sen. *Q Nat.* 3.3.1, Str. 5.3.13, and *RE* s.v. *Fucinus lacus.*

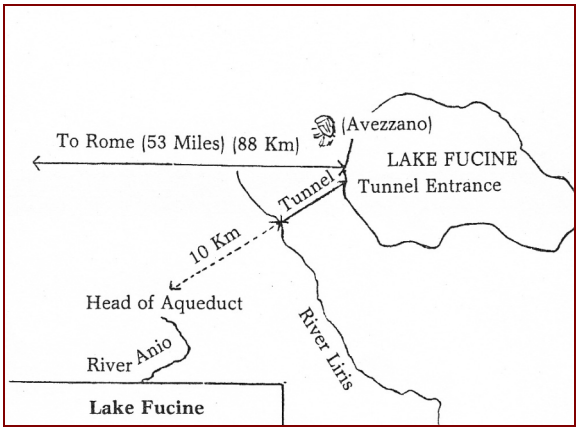

Figure 13. Schematised map showing the location of the tunnel between the Fucine Lake and the river Liris.

The Claudian plan involved digging an underground tunnel to connect the lake to a nearby river, the Liris (fig. 13). The assumption was that part of the water of the lake would flow into the river, resulting in a partial draining of the lake.[20] The tunnel would form a natural outlet to prevent flooding, and the additional water directed into the river Liris would render this small river more navigable.[21]

The potential agricultural and economic benefits were thus enormous, but the project itself was enormous too: a tunnel of 6 km had to be dug underground, through both earth (under the Campi Palentini) and hard rock (under the Mons Salvianus) (fig. 14). The project thus combined potential practical and economic benefits with the chance of demonstrating the emperor's astounding control over nature.[22]

[20] There is absolutely no doubt that Claudius only ever intended a *partial* draining of the lake, a fact not sufficiently acknowledged in most discussions of the literary descriptions of the project, where the fact that the lake was not drained completely is too often seen as proof of its failure (cf. e.g. the dramatic, but in this respect misguided, re-creation of Osgood (2011), 168-9). The evidence for partial draining is presented by Messineo (1979), 140, 165-6, D'Amato (1980), 61-85, 151-3, and Letta (1994), 203.

[21] This last effect is only mentioned in Cass. Dio, 60.11.5.

[22] The close connection between the two, for which Purcell (1996) also argues (see p. 65 above) is expressed in the pointed formulation of Suet. *Claud.* 20.2: *non minus compendii spe quam gloriae* – 'no less in the hope of profit than of glory', on which see below, p. 91-2.

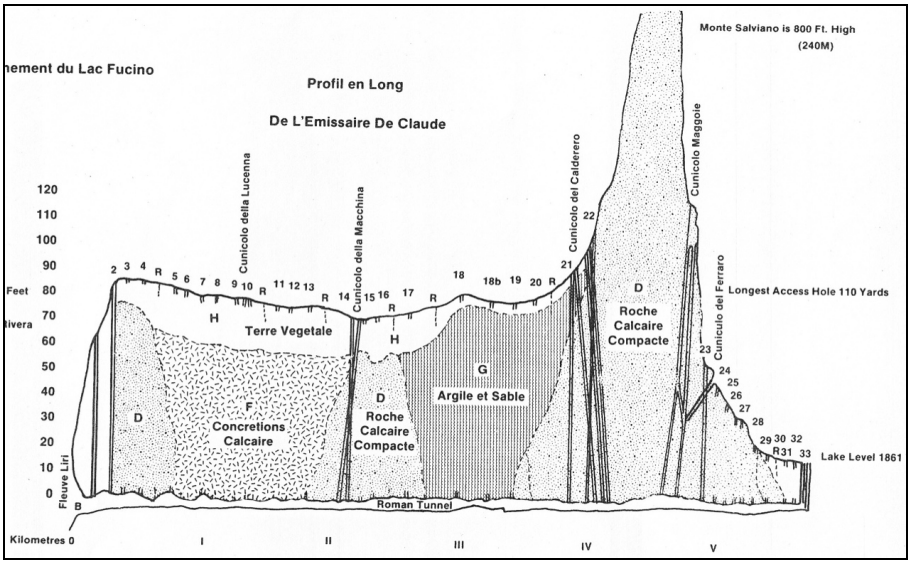

Figure 14. Longitudinal section of the Fucine Lake tunnel.

The work was carried out between AD 41 and 52. Our literary sources diverge substantially in their opinions of its degree of completion and success. As far as an accurate assessment is still possible today on the basis of the meagre archaeological remains, the Claudian outlet did function, in that it connected lake and river, stabilised the water level of the lake, and very slowly began a partial draining of the lake. However, construction work on the network of drainage channels was probably not yet quite complete. Therefore the tunnel did not yet accomplish drainage significant enough to gain arable land in large quantities.[23] This could in part account for the seemingly paradoxical nature of the literary sources: the channel did function, but at the same time it was an economic failure, in that the investment was not returned through the gain of land. Until the age of Hadrian, the tunnel appears to have continued to function as it did at the death of Claudius,

[23] Letta (1994), 207, argues that the project was not finished by Claudius, and that a well-functioning network of drainage channels would have required further investments by Nero, who, however, was not interested in continuing his predecessor's work. D'Amato (1980), 95-6, suggests that the collecting channel leading from the lake to the tunnel entrance was only finished after the (disastrous) opening ceremonies. Then the drainage began, but Nero's neglect of the project soon led to problems and the blocking of the channel.

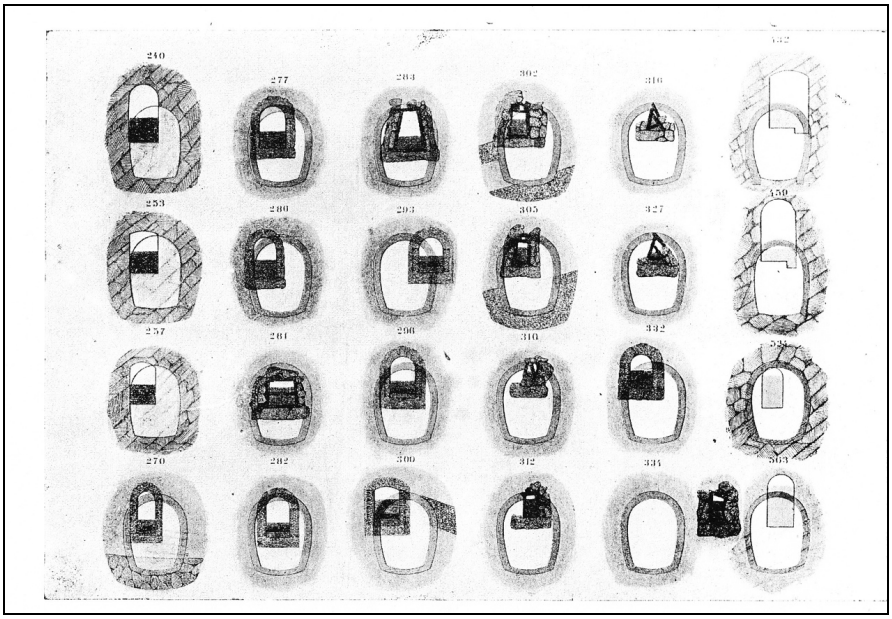

Figure 15. Brisse's drawings showing the overlap between the ancient tunnel and the 19th century tunnel between 2400 and 3600 metres.

with considerable improvements made by Hadrian.[24] Some time between AD 362 and 380, the tunnel was damaged by an earthquake and ceased to function.[25]

The drainage works of the 19th century almost entirely destroyed the ancient tunnel works, since a larger and wider tunnel was cut through the mountain along the trajectory of the ancient tunnel. Brisse and Rotrou attempted to document the ancient tunnel before its destruction: their illustrations show how the modern tunnel overlaps with the ancient one for almost the entire length of the conduit (fig. 15). The remains still visible today are mostly confined to the shafts ('pozzi') and tunnels ('cunicoli') connecting the ancient channel to the surface. The ca. 40 vertical shafts leading from the channel to the surface, the locations of which are indicated in figure 14, were needed to lift water and rock out of the tunnel during the building works as well as for later maintenance of the conduit.[26] There were

[24] D'Amato (1980), 109-48, Letta (1994), 207-10. Hadrian's repair works are mentioned at Aug. *Hadr.* 22.12. On Trajanic works on the outlet, see below, p. 74-5.
[25] Letta (1994), 210.
[26] See Burri (2001) for a brief exposition of the archaeological record of the conduit and the 'pozzi'. On the lifting mechanisms for water and earth used in the shafts, see Giuliani (2003b).

also a number of larger tunnels (nine are known to date), designed to facilitate access to the building sites, to keep the tunnel ventilated, and to allow for the transport of larger tools and building materials.[27] The remnants of the entries to some of these structures can still be seen above ground today.[28]

A Magnificent Failure? Debating the Draining

There are four surviving accounts of the draining in Roman literature. Firstly, Pliny the Elder's mention of it in book 36 of his *Natural History*, secondly, Tacitus' dramatic account of the two opening ceremonies in *Annals* 12.56-7, thirdly, a number of mentions in Suetonius' *Life of Claudius* (20, 21 and 31). Finally, the historian Cassius Dio mentions the draining in his *Roman History* (60.11.5, and 60.33.3-5, the latter preserved only in the excepts of Xiphilinus and the *Excerpta Valesiana*) written in Greek in the early third century AD. Dio's representational strategies will not be discussed in detail, since his text falls outside the chronological scope of this work, but his text offers an important point of comparison for determining the individual authors' contributions.[29] Building on the previous chapter's conclusions about the representational strategies of different media, I shall also briefly consider an epigraphic and a visual source, both concerned not with the initial drainage but with later repair and maintenance works on the outlet (although probably roughly contemporary with the composition of the texts of Tacitus and Suetonius): these sources are an inscribed Trajanic statue base, and a panoramic relief from the Collezione Torlonia. The relief and inscription allow us a glimpse of other kinds of representational strategies, and thus offer an important frame of reference for our literary texts.

The texts of Pliny, Tacitus and Suetonius all postdate the draining by several decades, and between the publication of Pliny's and of Suetonius' text lie a further forty years.[30] However, the project and the significance attached to it were acutely

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[27] Burri (1994b), 235.

[28] On one of the best preserved sections of the 'cunicoli', see Cairoli/Torrieri/Agostini (1994).

[29] On the question of Dio's sources see Millar (1964), 34-8; see also 85-7 and 105 on Dio and Suetonius. For the imperial period, it has been argued that Dio draws not so much on Tacitus himself as on older historical sources, some of which were used also by Tacitus (Syme (1958), 271-303). It is likely that one of Dio's primary sources was Pliny's lost historical work: Hurley (2001), 16.

[30] Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* is dedicated (1 *praef* 3) to Titus during his sixth consulate (AD 77-8). Tacitus' *Annals* were probably written after the author's return from his proconsulship in

relevant also at their time of writing: repair and maintenance works on the tunnel were being carried out, and other, comparable projects were being set in motion by the emperors under whose rule these texts were composed.[31] The three authors write in different genres, mention the draining within different contexts, and interest themselves in different aspects of it. Although their respective representations of the draining of the Fucine Lake are influenced by these factors and consequently appear (at first sight) very different, it is a plausible supposition that Tacitus and Suetonius were familiar with Pliny's earlier treatment of the subject, and I aim to show that acknowledgement of this can actually be detected in their texts.[32] As regards the relation between Tacitus and Suetonius, it is impossible to date the texts securely with respect to each other – all we can safely say is that the authors were contemporaries – but it is likely that they also knew each other's treatment of the event.[33] Quite aside, however, from questions of dating and mutual influence, reading these three texts as a group, and thus staging a 'debate' between the three authors about the Fucine Lake and its significance, reveals a number of patterns and common themes that structure the authors' engagement with the event.[34] These texts participate in the larger, fundamental debate about human intervention in nature, sketched in sections 1 and 2 above. The thematic structure of the debate surrounding the Fucine Lake helps us also to

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Asia (AD 113), but the precise dates are unknown. The first two (or perhaps first six) books of Suetonius' *Lives* were published before AD 122 (since they are dedicated to the urban prefect Septicius Clarus). There are virtually no other reliable clues to the dating of the *Lives* (the change in Suetonius' use of sources in the later books does not have to be due to the loss of his post as imperial secretary).

[31] See p. 74-5.

[32] On Tacitus' use of Pliny for the Fucine lake episode, see Koestermann (1967), 206 ('Möglicherweise diente Tacitus für seine Erzählung Plinius als Vorlage'), and Syme (1958), 1.292. Suetonius does not name any literary sources in the *Life of Claudius*, but in the whole of the *Lives* the Elder Pliny (presumably in his lost historical work) is one of only five credited sources (Suet. *Tib.* 73). See Mottershead (1986), xii-xiii and Hurley (2001), 14-16 for possible common sources used by both Suetonius and Tacitus (especially Pliny the Elder and Cluvius Rufus).

[33] That Suetonius knew Tacitus' *Annals* is almost undisputed: Wallace-Hadrill (1983), 2: 'Suetonius was undoubtedly looking over his shoulder at Tacitus'. Woodman (2009b) on 'Tacitus and the contemporary scene' demonstrates how an investigation of Tacitus' interaction with his literary environment can move beyond identifying the 'direction' of influence. See 36 specifically on Tacitus and Suetonius.

[34] The different literary accounts of the draining of the Fucine lake have been analysed as a group, but so far exclusively to investigate the technical, economic or archaeological side of the project: see Thornton/Thornton (1985), Leveau (1993) and most extensively Letta (1994), a thorough reconsideration of the literary sources with a view to a better understanding of the archaeological record.

understand better the wider debate about the economic, moral, and political implications of large-scale water-engineering. Although I pay some attention to the authors' concrete references to each other, I will therefore concentrate especially on the focal themes of the debate that we can identify by reading the texts as a group.

The debate about the Fucine Lake is characterised by an astonishing discrepancy in the different authors' assessments of the project, ranging from magnificent achievement to complete failure, from major public benefaction to disgraceful waste of money. The first theme or focus of the debate is the most obvious and important for the modern reader, though not, as we shall see, for the ancient authors: the actual success of the enterprise, or indeed its failure. Closely related is the question of whether the work was completed, or whether it was abandoned while still unfinished. A second focus of the debate arises from the sheer difficulty of assessing how efficiently the channel actually functioned: is it even possible, the authors ask, to judge and to express the value of the project? And in particular, to what extent can visual impressions be a guide to one's assessment, especially regarding a project which was almost entirely underground? Finally, the third focus of the debate concerns the relationship between man and nature, and the ways in which they interact in the course of the draining. Is the project, for example, cast in terms of a struggle or a conflict between nature and man – a basic constellation that can be rhetorically exploited in various ways: who won or lost in this struggle? Who emerged triumphant, who humiliated? Was there (perhaps excessive) violence?

Keeping Up the Good Work: The Non-Literary Representation of Maintenance Operations

There is only one epigraphic source that mentions the engineering works at the Fucine Lake.[35] It is a statue base, which was discovered reused in a wall of the

[35] There is another epigraphic find connected with the emissary: a number of marble tablets with indications of distance which were placed along the underground tunnel at certain intervals, possibly to facilitate orientation (*CIL* 9.3888-90): Burri (2001), 11.

church of San Bartolomeo in Avezzano and transcribed only twice before disappearing.[36] The inscription runs as follows (*CIL* 09.3915, cf. *AE* 1994.546):

> Imp(eratori) Caesari divi / Nervae fil(io) Nervae / Traiano Optimo / Aug(usto) Germanico / Dacico Parthico / pont(ifici) max(imo) trib(unicia) pot(estate) XX[I imp(eratori) X]III / co(n)s(uli) VI patri patriae / senatus populusq(ue) Rom[anus] / ob reciperatos agros et possess[ores reductos] / quos lacus Fucini violent[ia exturbarat]
>
> To the emperor, the son of the deified Nerva, Caesar Nerva Trajan Optimus Augustus, conqueror in Germania, Dacia and Parthia, the Pontifex Maximus, invested with the tribunician power twenty-one times, proclaimed imperator thirteen times, consul six times, Father of the Fatherland, the senate and people of Rome (dedicated this statue) because he had reclaimed the acres and reinstated the landowners whom the violence of the Fucine Lake had driven away.

The inscription refers to Trajanic restoration works of the tunnel, which needed regular technical maintenance to remain functional. It has been argued that a major collapse in the tunnel had rendered it completely incapacitated, a problem these engineering works apparently rectified.[37] In return, the SPQR set up a statue of the emperor with this inscription, commemorating the achievement. The inscription personifies the lake, endowing it with *violentia* and the power to rob rightful owners of their land and drive them away. Trajan is set up as overcoming this *violentia* and restoring the order that the misbehaving lake had threatened.[38]

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[36] Its authenticity has been called into question due to an apparent error in the indication of the tribunician year: the transcription preserves *trib pot XXIII*, clearly a mistake, since Trajan was only invested with the *tribunicia potestas* for the 21st time in the final year of his reign. Mommsen's explanation for the *CIL* edition is to read *trib(unicia) pot(estate) XXI im[p(eratori) XII]*. Letta (1994), 208, argues for reading *trib(unicia) pot(estate) XX[I imp(eratori) X]III*, which would date the completion of the repairs into the final year of Trajan's reign, AD 117, and I have taken over his reading here. See also Catalli (2011) for a thorough discussion of the inscription.

[37] Letta (1994). There was a regular maintenance crew for the conduit (a *statio classiarii* from Ravenna) installed there by Claudius, but the work required in this case seems to have been beyond their capacities: see Letta (1994), 208. However, considering the unreliability of rebuilding inscriptions for questions of detail and especially scale of restoration (Thomas/Witschel (1992) and p. 20 above), I do not consider the inscription conclusive proof that the conduit had actually completely ceased to function at any point.

[38] For comparable rhetoric of victory over water in Trajanic inscriptions, see the examples quoted by Purcell (1996), 203 n. 2.

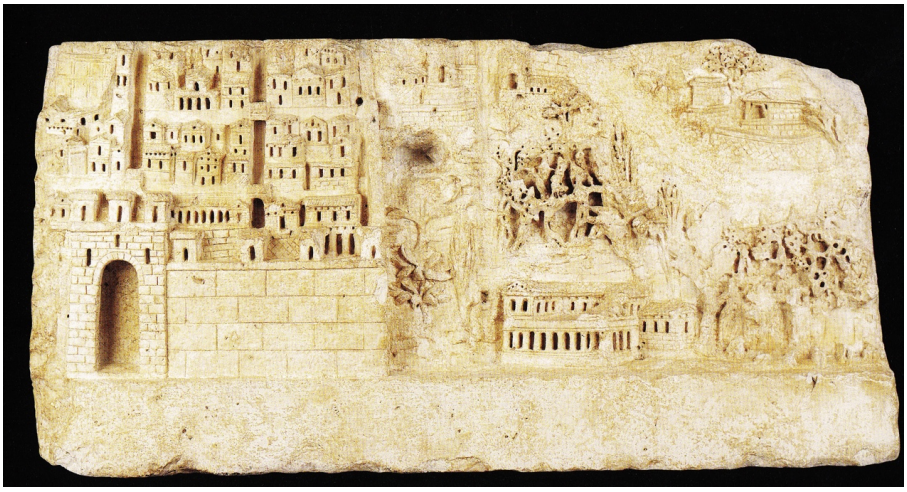

Figure 16. Torlonia relief, panel 2, showing a city and the surrounding countryside.

During the construction works for the 19th-century tunnel, a number of fragments of a large limestone panel relief were discovered.[39] At least some of the relief panels had already been part of an earlier ancient monument before being recycled for the panel relief discussed here.[40] In the middle ages, the panels were apparently used as building material for medieval restorations of the ancient tunnel.[41] The five fragments turned out to have been part of a large panoramic scene. Of the largest two fragments, one shows a settlement with orthogonal streets and a theatre in the top left-hand corner (fig. 16). To the right of the walled settlement, the surrounding countryside is depicted, featuring a road, a river and a bridge.

The second large fragment (fig. 17) is mostly covered by the representation of waves, very probably indicating the Fucine Lake. In the top right-hand corner, the shoreline is marked by trees. Two disproportionally large capstans are visible along the shore, each worked by two men. Further, smaller fragments of the relief also show parts of buildings and settlements. Giuliani has proposed a reconstruction of the entire composition, measuring a stunning 2 by 3.5 metres (fig. 18).[42] Taking into account the few specific topographic details provided in the representations, he divides the scene into three levels. On his reconstruction, the relief presents the view from the mountains on the east side of the lake. The lowest level shows the

[39] On the archaeological discoveries during the 19th-century draining, see Segenni (2003).
[40] Facenna (2003), 72-5.
[41] Segenni (2003), 56-7.
[42] Giuliani (2003a).

Figure 17. Torlonia relief, panel 1, showing a lake, ships and capstans.

eastern shore of the lake, featuring Marruvium and the river Giovenco. The middle level is taken up by the lake itself, while the top level represents the opposite (western) shore of the lake, where the smaller fragments show part of further settlements on that side of the lake.

The context of this relief is completely unclear. It could have been part of a public monument or a private funerary one.[43] It is tentatively dated on stylistic grounds (of the relief proper as well as of the earlier carvings on the reused blocks) to the mid- to late second century AD.[44] For the present investigation, the prominent representation of the capstans, centrally placed within the composition, is most relevant. It appears unlikely that the scene is a straightforward representation of the Claudian drainage, since the reliefs were probably produced at least a century after the completion of the Claudian works. One possibility is that the representation shows a specific instance of maintenance work, for example the Hadrianic improvements of the tunnel.[45] However, I favour a more abstract reading of the representation.

The theme of the relief is the flourishing landscape surrounding the Fucine Lake. The entire work shows a civilised landscape of production, with boats crossing the

[43] Facenna (2003), 75, leaning towards a public monumental context.
[44] Facenna (2003), 76.
[45] Facenna (2003), 76-7, cf. Giuliani (2003a), 82 n. 1.

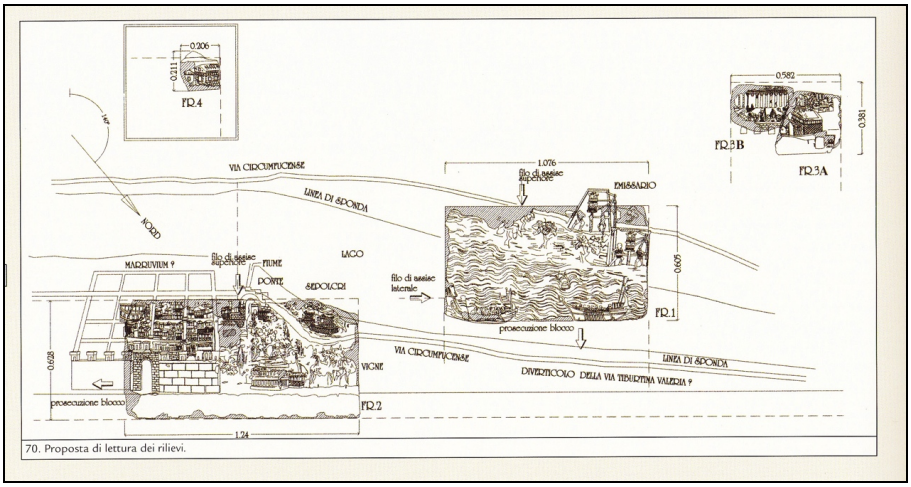

Figure 18. Possible reconstruction of the entire Torlonia relief, including panels 1 and 2.

lake, bridges, roads, sanctuaries, and safely-walled cities. The conduit which prevented the lake from flooding the land surrounding it was simply an integral part of this landscape – albeit an invisible one. The only way of rendering this important element of the civilised landscape visible would have been to represent the only element that could ever be seen above ground – the capstans at the top of the shafts, employed to convey water, earth, and building materials beween tunnel and surface. At the same time, the representation of work in progress functions in a similar way to the representations considered in the previous chapter. Just as the crane in the Haterii relief encourages the viewer to consider the effort and skill necessary for constructing the tomb building, so do the capstans here evoke the technical achievement of digging the emissary and maintaining its functionality.

Pliny the Elder's Invisible Miracle

The 36th book of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, which deals with the topic of 'stone' in its different manifestations, contains a section on architectural marvels.[46] The passage describing the draining of the Fucine Lake forms part of the climax of this section, dedicated to aqueducts and other forms of large-scale (mostly water-) engineering. After a passionate encomium of Roman aqueducts in general (*vera aestimatione invicta miracula* – 'miracles unsurpassed in their genuine value', *NH*

[46] On Pliny's *Natural History* and its 36th book, see p. 51 above.

36.121) and the Aqua Claudia in particular,[47] Pliny turns to another admirable project of the emperor Claudius (36.124):[48]

> Eiusdem Claudi inter maxime memoranda equidem duxerim, quamvis destitutum successoris odio, montem perfossum ad lacum Fucinum emittendum inenarrabili profecto impendio et operarum multitudine per tot annos, cum aut conrivatio aquarum, qua terrenus mons erat, egereretur in verticem machinis aut silex caederetur quantaque intus in tenebris fierent, quae neque concipi animo nisi ab iis qui videre neque enarrari humano sermone possunt!
>
> Among the most memorable [deeds] of this same Claudius, I at least venture to count, even though [the project] was abandoned because of the jealousy of his successor, the mountain that has been dug through to drain the Fucine Lake, with indeed indescribable expense and a multitude of workmen over so many years, because, either, where earth formed the interior of the mountain, water that collected in the tunnel had to be transported to the top [of the shaft] by hoists, or [where the mountain was made of rock] the rock had to be cut out, and operations of such magnitude executed underground in the darkness, as can neither be understood (except by those who have seen them) nor described in human language.

The word *equidem* in the first sentence already serves to acknowledge that Pliny's assessment of the Fucine Lake project has a place within a debate, and that there may be others who have expressed different opinions.[49] In terms of the first theme which we identified as a focus of the debate, Pliny is brief and to the point. The channel was not finished, the project was abandoned after Claudius' death: *quamvis destitutum successoris odio*. The remark looks innocuous, but it is of considerable interest. There is no other source that mentions the work having been left incomplete at Claudius' death. As we shall see, Tacitus, Suetonius and Dio all assume that the work was completed in Claudius' lifetime, albeit with technical

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[47] *NH* 36.123: *quod si quis diligentius aestumaverit abundantiam aquarum in publico, balineis, piscinis, euripis, domibus, hortis, suburbanis villis, spatia aquae venientis, exstructos arcus, montes perfossos, convalles aequatas, fatebitur nil magis mirandum fuisse in toto orbe terrarum.* – 'But if someone were to assess quite carefully the abundance of water in public places, in baths, fish ponds, channels, houses, gardens, country estates near the city, and if someone were to assess the distances traversed by the water, the arches that have been erected, the mountains that have been dug through, the valleys that have been levelled, he would admit that there has been nothing more worthy of admiration in the whole world.'

[48] I quote the text of André (1981).

[49] For this common function of *equidem* see *OLD* 1b.

problems. By saying nothing of work that was inadequate or of technical failures, but instead pointing to its unfinished nature, any flaws and imperfections that may have been known to readers are by implication attributed solely to Claudius' untimely death. By linking the abandonment, and hence failure of the project to the proverbially 'bad' emperor Nero (whose aqueducts are also unceremoniously left out of the list of aqueducts which precedes this passage), the eventual result of the drainage, evidently thought unsatisfactory, is associated only with Claudius' supposedly jealous and incapable successor and entirely separate from the magnificent Claudian undertaking. Besides deviously reapportioning responsibility, Pliny also strongly downplays the importance of the functionality of the outlet. This project is *maxime memorandum* and indescribably great, and the criteria that render it so are discussed at length. Whether the tunnel actually *worked*, Pliny suggests, is not a measure of its greatness.

In dealing with the value of the project and the possibilities of determining and describing it, Pliny combines two different strategies. On the one hand, he claims that words cannot capture the magnitude of the cost or the labour needed for the endeavour (*inenarrabili profecto impendio* and *quae … neque enarrari humano sermone possunt)*. Inexpressibility is a well-known rhetorical topos,[50] and Pliny here increases its effect by combining this language of impressive vagueness with a number of categories that one might encounter in, for example, a building inscription, and in respect of which it would be perfectly possible to be more specific (the scale of works carried out, the time needed, the expense).[51] Leaving all these elements unspecified suggests that they are too large to *be* specified. The Fucine Lake therefore surpasses in greatness even the Aqua Claudia, called the most admirable thing of the entire world only a few sentences earlier, since the cost of the aqueduct was still specifiable (36.122). As the reason for this immeasurability Pliny points to the special difficulty of the work:[52] the challenge of digging through earth, requiring constant removal of water, and cutting through hard rock.[53]

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[50] Pliny also uses it at *NH* 2.6, 8.21, 8.159, 10.3, 12.38, 12.86, 12.110, 17.35, 21.1, 32.1, 35.158, 37.57, 37.80, 37.90. For the innumerable as a *topos* in imperial praise, see Men. Rhet. 368.21-369.2.

[51] On these categories in building inscriptions, see p. 17-20 above. They are taken up by Suetonius, see below p. 92.

[52] Cf. the *difficultas* invoked as a category of praise by Caesar in *B Gall.* 4.17.2 and Pliny in *NH* 36.69: see p. 48 and p. 52 above.

[53] The Torlonia relief helps us to understand how the mechanism for the removal of water and earth functioned: see Giuliani (2003a).

There would be only one way, Pliny suggests, of actually grasping the magnitude of the project, namely to see the work in progress for oneself: *quae neque concipi animo* ***nisi ab iis qui videre*** *(…) possunt.* For Pliny, the greatness of the project lies in the execution of a near-impossible feat. Unfortunately, both the building work and the finished result of the Fucine Lake project were completely invisible, hidden underground. The artist of the Torlonia relief addressed the problem of invisibility by representing the only element of the entire mechanism that *was* visible above ground, the capstan-mechanisms, in action, in extra-large size and in a prominent position near the centre of the relief.[54] Pliny, on the other hand, turns precisely the invisibility of the works to account. The claim that one would appreciate the greatness of the works if one could see them creates a suggestion of accountability. At the same time, the fact that no one will ever be able to do so adds to this greatness, since all the work was carried out *in tenebris*.

As a third focus of the debate, I identified the interaction between man and nature during the execution of the draining. However, any reference to this relationship is conspicuously absent from Pliny's description of the draining. It is neither characterised as harmonious nor as confrontational. This absence is 'conspicuous' because of the relation between this passage and the wider context of the *Natural History* and the views on the relationship between man and nature expressed there.[55] As a general principle, Pliny approves of human use and deployment of resources that nature readily provides, but not of major human interventions in the 'natural state' of things, which are often driven by the desire for more than an appropriate share.[56] For example, book 33 opens with a forceful condemnation of mining. Digging up precious stones and metals is morally wrong, since it involves taking from nature by force something that she has withheld from us for our own good (33.1-2):

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[54] See p. 77-8 and fig. 17 above.

[55] On attitudes to nature in Pliny, see generally Beagon (1992) and (1996), Wallace-Hadrill (1990), and Sallmann (1986).

[56] This ideal of the 'natural' is never clearly defined, but in general, as Wallace-Hadrill (1990), 88, phrases it, 'the idea of the natural is … intimately linked with simplicity, cheapness, and accessibility. ... Luxury, by contrast, is characterised by superfluity. It is always excess to requirements. It is wasteful and destructive.' Cf. also Beagon (1996), 306: 'Indeed, it is Pliny's careful evaluation of what man's needs really are, both material and moral, that often leads him to place restrictions on man's activities in nature.' On the 'natural' as a moral category see also Edwards (1993), 144-5.

> persequimur omnes eius fibras vivimusque super excavatam, mirantes dehiscere aliquando aut intremescere illam, ceu vero non hoc indignatione sacrae parentis exprimi possit. imus in viscera et in sede manium opes quaerimus, tamquam parum benigna fertilique qua calcatur …
>
> We go in pursuit of all her [i.e. the earth's] bowels, and live above [the earth] that we have hollowed out, marvelling that occasionally she splits open or begins to tremble – as if this could not indeed be elicited by the indignation of our holy parent. We penetrate her innermost parts and seek for riches in the dwelling-place of the spirits of the dead, as though [the part] where we tread upon her were not sufficiently beneficent and fertile.

The digging up of precious metals and stones is described in terms of harming the physical body of the earth and causing her to tremble in pain – unnecessarily, since what she provides for us above ground is generous enough (*tamquam parum benigna fertilique qua calcatur*). Greed drives humans even to disturb the most inviolable and sacred of natural boundaries, that between the living and the dead: *in sede manium opes quaerimus*.[57]

Book 36, which ends shortly after the Fucine Lake passage, opens with an extensive diatribe against human violation of mountains (36.1-2):

> montes natura sibi fecerat ut quasdam compages telluris visceribus densandis, simul ad fluminum impetus domandos fluctusque frangendos ac minime quietas partes coercendas durissima sui materia … (2) promunturia aperiuntur mari, et rerum natura agitur in planum; evehimus ea, quae separandis gentibus pro terminis constituta erant …
>
> Mountains nature had made for herself to serve as a kind of structure for holding firmly together the innards of the earth and at the same time to subdue the violence of the rivers, to break the force of the sea, and so to restrain her least restful elements with her hardest material … (2) Headlands are opened up to the sea [by us], and nature is flattened out. We remove the features that are set as boundaries to separate nations …

Again, nature is strongly and emotively personified, as possessing a body (*telluris viscera*) and as having provided well for mankind. Her mountains function as

[57] On the importance of boundaries and their violation as a measure of moral depravity, see Edwards (1993), ch. 4 *passim*, esp. 143-9, and p. 64-5 above.

natural boundaries which humans have a moral obligation to accept (*pro terminis constituta erant*), and they are essential for keeping the larger order of the world intact.[58]

Against this background, it becomes clear that Pliny's praise of the Fucine Lake tunnel presents him with a challenge. He has to contend not only with the potential moral criticism of other authors, but also with his own, strongly expressed moralising strictures. Having first criticised the manipulation of mountains as essentially sinful and transgressive, and having stressed their essential function for keeping apart different bodies of water, he now extols digging through a mountain to disperse large quantities of water from a lake into a river, with the object of turning water into land. In this context, the absence of any hint at opposition between man and nature should be understood as a deliberate strategy to dissociate Claudius' act of engineering from such human acts of transgressive violence.[59] 'Packaged' between a number of successful projects of unassailable *utilitas* (the aqueducts, the harbour at Ostia), this massive, though flawed, engineering project is carefully protected from any association with human disrespect for natural boundaries.[60]

Tacitus' *Annals* 12.56-7

Tacitus treats the Fucine Lake project towards the end of his account of the reign of Claudius.[61] In the Claudian books of the *Annals*, the princeps' central characteristics are his passivity and his lack of control. Agents other than Claudius often take centre-stage, especially Messalina and Agrippina. Towards the end of *Annals* 12, Agrippina's grip on Claudius is at its strongest, and she uses it ruthlessly to manoevre her son Nero into position as the future princeps. Tacitus' depiction of the Fucine Lake has to be understood in this context. Although its focus is completely different, it can nevertheless be read as reacting to Pliny's earlier

[58] For the philosophical background of Pliny's views on nature, see Beagon (1992), ch. 1.
[59] Cf. Reitz (forthcoming) on another Plinian strategy for achieving this end: his use of the topos of cooperation between nature and builder.
[60] On *utilitas* in Pliny, see Citroni Marchetti (1982). For an overview of Claudius' 'useful' engineering projects, see e.g. Levick (1990), 108-12, and Osgood (2011), 168-89.
[61] The first Claudian books are lost; the narrative only picks up halfway through Claudius' reign, in AD 47. Malloch (2009) offers a good introduction to the treatment of the Claudian reign in the *Annals*. See also Vessey (1971), Seif (1973), Mehl (1974) (on events at court), Martin (1981), 144-61, Griffin (1990), Hausmann (2009), 149-439.

version of events and participating in the struggle over the interpretation of the Fucine Lake project. Tacitus chooses to describe not the execution of the engineering work but the two opening ceremonies for the channel, both of them spectacular public displays (*Ann.* 12.56-7).[62]

> (56.1) Sub idem tempus inter lacum Fucinum amnemque Lirim perrupto monte, quo magnificentia operis a pluribus viseretur, lacu in ipso navale proelium adornatur, ut quondam Augustus structo cir<ca> Tiberim stagno, sed levibus navigiis et minore copia ediderat. (2) Claudius triremes quadriremesque et undeviginti hominum milia armavit, cincto ratibus ambitu, ne vaga effugia forent, ac tamen spatium amplexus ad vim remigii, gubernantium artes, impetus navium et proelio solita. in ratibus praetoriarum cohortium manipuli turmaeque adstiterant, antepositis propugnaculis, ex quis catapultae ballistaeque tenderentur. reliqua lacus classiarii tectis navibus obtinebant. (3) ripas et colles montiumque edita in modum theatri multitudo innumera complevit, proximis e municipiis et alii urbe ex ipsa, visendi cupidine aut officio in principem. ipse insigni paludamento neque procul Agrippina chlamyde aurata praesedere. pugnatum quamquam inter sontes fortium virorum animo, ac post multum vulnerum occidioni exempti sunt. (57.1) Sed perfecto spectaculo <cum> apertum aquarum iter, incuria operis manifesta fuit, haud satis depressi ad lacus ima vel media.[63] eoque tempore interiecto

[62] The description comes at the end of the year AD 52. However, since two opening ceremonies are described, with some time, possibly even years, between them (*tempore interiecto*), it seems most likely that the second of the two openings took place in AD 52, while the first one dates to an unspecified earlier year. Cf. Koestermann (1967), 204, *ad* 56.1. The text quoted is Heubner (1994).

[63] On the text here see Hausmann (2009), 392 n. 1228, who convincingly defends *vel media*, deleted by, among others, Heubner (1994). Letta (1994), 204, adduces archaeological arguments for deletion, perhaps assuming a rather more detailed understanding of the design of the mouth of the emissary than Tacitus may have possessed. Cf. also Koestermann (1967), who suggests emending to *vel medii*. In fact, *vel* here has the force of *saltem* (*KSt* 2.109): 'not to the depths or even just to the middle levels'. What precisely Tacitus' understanding of the improvements was remains a difficult question, since we cannot say precisely what part of the work *specus* represents. He may have thought that the actual tunnel was dug out more deeply, a possibility excluded by the archaeological evidence (Letta (1994), 204). Various attempts have been made to explain the failure that Tacitus mentions. Considering the lack of archaeological evidence, I see no way of deciding between them. D'Amato (1980), 240-4, argues that there may have been a collapse in the tunnel at the last moment before the opening, which blocked the channel. Letta (1994), posits a protective dam-like structure designed to regulate the flow of water into the outlet (important especially in case of high water levels) and argues that in some way the ducts (*specus*, a solution that explains the plural) leading through this dam to admit the water to the tunnel in a controlled way had not been constructed at a low enough level, and the water in fact

altius effossi specus, et contrahendae rursum multitudini gladiatorum spectaculum editur, inditis pontibus pedestrem ad pugnam. (2) quin et convivium effluvio lacus adpositum magna formidine cunctos adfecit, quia vis aquarum prorumpens proxima trahebat, convulsis ulterioribus aut fragore et sonitu exterriti<s>. simul Agrippina trepidatione principis usa ministrum operis Narcissum incusat cupidinis ac praedarum, nec ille reticet, impotentiam muliebrem nimiasque spes eius arguens.

At about the same time, after the mountain between the Fucine Lake and the stream of the Liris had been pierced through, it was so that the magnificence of the work could be viewed by greater numbers that on the lake itself a naval battle was arrayed, just as Augustus, having positioned a pool near the Tiber, had produced one formerly, but with light vessels and a smaller force. Claudius armed triremes and quadriremes and nineteen thousand men, enclosing the periphery with rafts to prevent random escapes, and yet embracing enough space for the violence of oarage, the helmsmen's skills, the thrusts of ships, and battle routines. On the rafts maniples and squadrons of the praetorian cohorts stood by, stationed behind defences from which catapults and ballists could be drawn back and aimed; the rest of the lake was held by marines on decked ships. The banks, hills, and mountain heights were filled, like a theatre, by an uncountable crowd from the nearest municipalities, and some from the City itself, in their desire to view or out of duty towards the princeps. He himself in a distinctive military cape – and, not far away, Agrippina in a golden chlamys – presided. The battle, though between convicts, was fought in the spirit of brave men, and after a considerable amount of wounding they were exempted from slaying. But when on completion of the spectacle the waterway was opened, the carelessness of the work was evident, since it had not been sunk sufficiently to the lowest or even the middle levels of the lake. For that reason, after an interval of time, the cavities were dug out to a greater depth, and, for assembling a crowd yet again, a spectacle of gladiators was produced on planks superimposed for an infantry fight. Moreover a dinner party too was placed near the outlet of the lake, affecting everyone with great alarm because the volume and force of the surging water was sweeping away its immediate surroundings, while the remoter parts shook or were terrified by the crashing sound. At the same time Agrippina took advantage of the princeps' trepidation to accuse Narcissus, the agent for the work, of

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could not drain away through them. A number of further explanations are summarised by D'Amato (1980), 234-8.

> cupidity and embezzlement, nor did he stay silent for his part, criticizing her womanly unruliness and excessive hopes.[64]

Did the draining of the Fucine Lake succeed? A reader of Tacitus' account is hardly in a position to judge, since Tacitus does not offer the slightest indication of what the project was supposed to achieve: *inter lacum Fucinum amnemque Lirim perrupto monte* is all he provides as a description of the project itself. In terms of the effectiveness of the tunnel, Tacitus claims that the first attempt at draining failed because of careless workmanship. At the second opening of the channel, the force of the water gushing through is much stronger than expected, and it frightens and endangers the spectators and even the imperial family, but the actual result of the improvements is left open.[65] Although there is a general suggestion that the work was carried out badly, Tacitus, like Pliny, does not dwell on the question of the functionality of the tunnel.

Considering the lack of information on this crucial point, how, then, is a viewer of the spectacle (or a Tacitean reader) supposed to judge the project? In terms of the second focus of the debate, the differences between Tacitus' and Pliny's accounts are especially instructive. As far as the categories invoked by Pliny in his praise of the project are concerned, Tacitus is silent on the *multitudo operarum* and the number of years of hard work. The expense, which for Pliny served as one of the indescribable assets of the project (*inenarrabili profecto impendio*), is taken up by Tacitus only in his suggestion of corruption and embezzlement, an accusation levelled by Agrippina against Narcissus, the *minister operis* (12.57.2).[66] The great difficulty of the work, too, is turned into criticism rather than praise by Tacitus, since it was evidently too great for Claudius' engineers, and the opening of the channel thus resulted in the emperor's public humiliation. Pliny's categories of praise are thus either ignored or invoked to discredit the project.

As we saw above, Pliny points to the importance of actual *vision*, as opposed to mere description, for the appreciation of the magnificence of the project. Only those who had seen the work with their own eyes could really comprehend how

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[64] The translation is that of Woodman (2004), slightly adapted.

[65] Again, different reconstructions have been attempted of what could have caused the alarming flooding, among them another collapse, causing obstruction in the channel and therefore a forceful resurgence of the water at the lake-end of the tunnel (D'Amato (1980), 244-52, Letta (1994), 206) or a collapse of the protective dam-structure mentioned in n. 63 above (Letta (1994), 206-7).

[66] Narcissus' embezzlement is also mentioned (as a rumour) in Cass. Dio 60.33.5.

difficult and impressive it was – a neat strategy for using the invisibility of the structure to his advantage. Tacitus, on the other hand, depicts *only* happenings visible above ground, i.e. the opening spectacles, but uses the contrast between the impressive display and the failure of the opening proper to illustrate precisely the *unreliability* of visual impressions. The theme of viewing is introduced in the first sentence of the section (… *quo magnificentia operis a pluribus* ***viseretur)***, but the focus in this passage is on the conscious orchestration of viewing and view: staging, spectacle, theatrical performance. The opening of the tunnel is on both occasions preceded by large displays of gladiatorial fighting, and the passage shows throughout a sustained use of the vocabulary of spectacle and stage: *visendi cupidine … perfecto spectaculo … spectaculum editur.*[67] The draining of the lake is, more than anything else, a huge spectacle in its own right, and even the natural situation of the lake becomes part of the theatrical display of the emperor: *ripas et collis montiumque edita in modum theatri multitudo innumera complevit*. The viewing public is not supposed to judge the work objectively: they are being manipulated by Claudius' and Agrippina's dazzling show.

The theme of discrepancy between appearance and reality also offers the key to the two-part structure of the Fucine Lake passage.[68] The first round of spectacles initially seems impressive and successful, but this positive impression is deceptive: the project itself turns out to be a failure. Claudius would like to show off the *magnificentia operis* (56.1), but instead, the *incuria operis* emerges (57.1).[69] He would like to appear another Augustus (*ut quondam Augustus structo cir<ca> Tiberim stagno*, 56.1), but fails to live up to his model.[70] In order to sharpen the contrast between attempted *magnificentia* and evident *incuria*, Tacitus even suggests that the failure was

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[67] Santoro L'Hoir (2006), 240.

[68] On the contrast between the two parts of the description, see Seif (1973), 222-3 and Hausmann (2009), 389-95. On the contrast between appearance and reality more generally in the work of Tacitus, see Pearcy (1973), a study on the words *species*, *imago*, *effigies* and *simulacrum* in Tacitus.

[69] Seif (1973), 222, Hausmann (2009), 392. On Tacitus' use of the word *magnificentia*, see Koestermann (1967), 27, *ad* 11.1.1.

[70] Keitel (1977), 199 and Hausmann (2009), 392 on this contrast. Hausmann especially points to the importance of the revelation for the characterisation of the emperor (393): 'Es wird deutlich, daß Tacitus durch seinen auffallend gleißenden Bericht in ann. 12,56 lediglich eine Fallhöhe für Claudius aufbauen wollte, von der aus er den unliebsamen Kaiser anschließend ins nahezu Bodenlose hinabstoßen konnte.' On Claudius' (failed) attempts of setting himself up as another Augustus in the *Annals*, see O'Gorman (2000), 107-9. On Augustus' *navalia* that Claudius intends to outdo, see Coleman (1993), *passim*; see also Berlan-Bajard (2006), 346-8 on Claudius' *navalia* as *imitatio Augusti*.

apparent immediately (*manifesta fuit*), a version of events that cannot be reconciled with the technical facts.[71] Understanding the passage in terms of the contrast between first, deceptive, appearance and its unmasking also allows for an improved understanding of the theme of the relationship between man and nature, the third focus of the debate, to which I now turn.

From Tacitus' (and, as we shall see, Suetonius') accounts it appears that Claudius intended his achievement to be seen in terms of his triumph and domination over nature.[72] On both occasions, the opening is preceded by a display of fighting, which could suggest that Claudius wanted his project to be understood as another sort of fight – one between human ingenuity and the waters of the lake. The unusual costumes of Claudius and Agrippina, which both Pliny and Tacitus comment on, also suggest this:[73] Claudius' coat, the *paludamentum*, is a general's cloak, while the gold *chlamys* worn by Agrippina in Tacitus' version is also a (Greek) military cloak, and even worn by triumphant generals.[74] The emperor attempts to cast himself as the victor in a struggle with nature, in the same way that Trajan, in the inscription discussed above, is set up as subduing the violent lake and thus restoring natural order.

Tacitus thus at first sight appears to follow and reproduce Claudius' ideological display, but he quickly turns the significance of this staged confrontation on its head. I argued above that the rhetoric of environmental control and that of moral

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[71] Even with the highly functional draining channel constructed in the 19th century, the draining of the lake took 16 years. With the less ambitious Claudian channel, where even slower drainage would have been expected, the *incuria* could hardly have been obvious immediately. See Cozzo (1928), 303.

[72] For comparable Claudian displays of victory over water, see Osgood (2011), 180-5 on the Porta Maggiore as a monument of triumph over water, a whale-hunt in the harbour of Ostia (described in Pliny, *NH* 9.14-15), canal-building at Ostia and measures against the flooding of the Tiber in Rome. Berlan-Bajard, A. (2006) sketches the gradual loss, during the early empire, of the direct association between staged sea-battles and naval military victories (348-50), and analyses the different ways in which aquatic spectacles served as a 'célébration d'une maîtrise surnaturelle des éléments marins' (350-61).

[73] Pliny has Agrippina wear a golden *paludamentum* (*NH* 33.63): *nos vidimus Agrippinam Claudi principis, edente eo navalis proelii spectaculum, adsidentem et indutam* ***paludamento*** *aureo textili sine alia materia.* – 'I saw Agrippina the wife of Claudius, when he was putting on the spectacle of a naval battle, sitting next to him and clad in a *paludamentum* made of golden cloth without any other material.' Pliny does not explicitly connect this description to the Fucine lake, simply referring to a sea fight as the occasion.

[74] Suetonius also has Caligula wear a *chlamys* on the occasion of a triumph over water, the inauguration of the bridge between Puteoli and Baiae: Suet. *Cal.* 19.2. For the parallel see also Koestermann (1967), 206 *ad* 12.56.3.

transgression employ the same *topoi* and lie perilously close to one another. Tacitus uses this circumstance to his advantage when he subtly activates the paradigm of the Persian king Xerxes and his reckless and fatal disrespect for natural (and national) boundaries in his description of the second gladiatorial display: *gladiatorum spectaculum editur, inditis pontibus pedestrem ad pugnam*. The fighting takes place, Tacitus claims, on planks laid across the water. Even though water is naturally available, and was used for a sea battle at the first opening, the emperor now chooses to demonstrate, yet again, human dominance over the boundaries between land and water, by laying planks across the water, which allow for fighting on foot – on water. Through the juxtaposition of *pontibus* and *pedestrem,* Tacitus stresses the perverse nature of this display, and through using the word *pontibus* in a context where a powerful ruler turns water into land on a grand scale, Tacitus evokes Xerxes' bridge over the Hellespont, one of the best-known paradigms of the immoral and hubristic crossing of the boundaries between land and sea.[75]

Finally, Tacitus combines the theme of the contrast between appearance and reality with that of the struggle between man and nature through the way in which nature's reaction to Claudius' use of violence is phrased. In the first sentence of the Tacitean passage, the digging of the tunnel is described by the word *perrumpere* (56). The Tacitean *perrupto monte* (perhaps even a deliberate reaction to Pliny's more neutral *montem perfossum*), suggests a powerful, possibly even violent action.[76] The danger inherent in using this kind of force against nature is demonstrated towards the end of the passage, when the water behaves in an unexpectedly violent fashion itself: it bursts forth with such violence that it sweeps away everything in its reach. The *perrupto monte* of the first sentence is here taken up by *vis aquarum prorumpens*. To violence, nature responds with violence, and its counterattack spreads terror among spectators and the imperial family. Similarly, the use of *vis* here may also recall the *vim remigii* which Claudius *could* (still) control and contain during his initial spectacle. This revelation of Claudius' lack of control over nature and her forces

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[75] See also Plin. *NH* 4.75. For the use of the Xerxes-paradigm in a similar context cf. Suet. *Calig.* 19.3. On Xerxes as a paradigm of transgressive manipulation of nature, see also Edwards (1993), 146 on Plutarch and Traina (1988), 320-32 on Vitruvius.

[76] Pliny uses this expression twice in quick succession, once in 36.123 concerning the Aqua Claudia, and then again in 36.124 with reference to the Fucine Lake. *perfodere* suggests continuous labour, while *perrumpere* evokes a single, violent action. The word *perrumpere* is for example also used in *Ann.* 15.42 (… *si perrumpi possent, intolerandus labor nec satis causae)*, discussed above, p. 66.

fits with Tacitus' larger theme of the emperor's weakness. Not only his wife, but even nature herself refuse to take the emperor seriously.

The contrast between the initially positive description of the spectacle and the revelation of its complete emptiness illustrates the unreliability of visual impressions, but on another level, it also reveals the unreliability of narrative itself. Just as the emperor is able to dazzle his subjects with empty spectacles, so can the writer, if he chooses to do so, lead his readers astray in their evaluation of events, as Tacitus does in the first half of the Fucine Lake episode. In this context, the confrontation between Agrippina and Narcissus that concludes the episode may be suggestive. Both try to use the terror and impressionability of the nearly-drowned Claudius to pitch their interpretation of events to the princeps. Agrippina would like him to understand the disaster as an illustration of the greed and corruption of Narcissus. Narcissus, on the other hand, urges the princeps to see the events as revealing Agrippina's lack of self-control and moderation. Tacitus here displays his awareness of the manipulability of the event's meaning. He shows Agrippina and Narcissus attempting to control the significance of this powerful confrontation between man and nature through their use of rhetoric (*arguens*). This may also be a nod towards the magisterial controlling act that he has just performed for *his* audience.

Suetonius' *Life of Claudius*

In Suetonius' *Life of Claudius*, the draining of the Fucine Lake is mentioned not once, but three times. This is due to the nature of Suetonius' work: the individual emperors' biographies are not presented as chronological narratives, but organised according to thematic categories (*per species*, *Aug.* 9), covering the public aspects of the emperor's reign (such as generosity to the populace, military achievements, or administration) as well as his private life and personality (for example personal appearance or habits).[77] Accordingly, the engineering works appear in chapter 20, which treats Claudius' public building projects, while the spectacles held to celebrate the opening of the tunnel are discussed separately, in the subsequent

[77] On the structure of Suetonius' *Lives*, and the provenance and function of the rubrics he uses, see Wallace-Hadrill (1983), ch. 7. See also Hurley (2001), 17-19 on the structure and design of the *Life of Claudius*. Roughly, *Claud.* 10-25 pertain to Claudius' public works and administration, *Claud.* 26-42 to his personality. On the 'building' rubric in the *Life of Claudius*, see Osgood (2011), 172.

section on the spectacles that Claudius produced for the populace during his reign (21). Finally, in chapter 32, the dinner party of the royal family on the occasion of the (second) opening of the channel is mentioned briefly in the context of Claudius' *convivia*. Being able to deal with different aspects of the draining of the Fucine Lake under different biographical rubrics allows Suetonius to exploit the ambivalent potential of the project most effectively. He can construct one image of the draining and subsequently modify it by throwing light on the project from a different angle – a technique that can be observed regarding all three areas of the debate identified earlier.[78]

The Fucine Lake is first introduced at the opening of the section on public building (20.1), where Suetonius offers an overview of the projects to be treated subsequently:[79]

> … ductum aquarum a Gaio incohatum, item emissarium Fucini lacus portumque Ostiensem, quamquam scriret ex iis alterum ab Augusto precantibus assidue Marsis negatum, alterum ab Divo Iulio saepius destinatum ac propter difficultatem omissum.
>
> … an aqueduct that Gaius had begun, likewise the outlet of the Fucine Lake and the harbour at Ostia, although he knew that of those last two one had been denied to the Marsians by Augustus although they begged him most fervently, and that the other had quite often been considered by the deified Julius and been abandoned due to its difficulty.

After a short (and approving) assessment of the Claudian aqueducts, Suetonius turns to the Fucine Lake:

> Fucinum adgressus est non minus conpendii spe quam gloriae, cum quidam privato sumptu emissuros se repromitterent, si sibi siccati agri concederentur. per tria autem passuum milia partim effosso monte partim exciso canalem absolvit aegre et post undecim annos, quamvis continuis XXX hominum milibus sine intermissione operantibus.

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[78] I structure my discussion of Suetonius' account according to the different sections of the *Life*, in order to facilitate understanding of the modification of earlier impressions. For each section, I consider the relevant themes of the debate in turn.

[79] Suetonius regularly introduces a new category with such a *partitio*, a structuring sentence summarising the content of the following section, designed to help the reader in following the movement from one category to the next. See Hurley (2001), 19.

> He took on the Fucine Lake driven by a hope for profit no less than for glory, since there were those who contracted themselves to drain the lake at their private expense, if the drained farmland were given to them. But the channel, which was three thousand feet in length, he finished, partly by digging and partly by cutting through the mountain, with great difficulty and only after eleven years, although thirty thousand men worked on it continuously without interruption.

The mention of Augustus' rejection of the project in the introduction might hint at unsurmountable difficulties or suggest that Claudius was rash to take on such a difficult project.[80] In what follows, however, Suetonius is no more expansive than his predecessors on the subject of the success or failure of the project. Precisely two words are accorded to the question of whether the canal was completed (and none to whether it worked): in flat contradiction of Pliny's report, Suetonius makes it clear that Claudius *canalem absolvit* – 'finished the canal' (20.2).[81]

Suetonius also engages Pliny on what I have identified as the second focal point of the debate. His introduction of the Fucine Lake within exactly the same context as Pliny (preceded by the aqueducts, followed by the harbour at Ostia) activates the model (as well as creating a general aura of *utilitas* for the project), and Suetonius subsequently takes his cue from Pliny for the categories by which to measure the emperor's achievement: the expense, the time that the project required, the amount of work to be carried out, and the extreme difficulty of execution, involving both digging and rock-cutting. However, while Pliny uses the unquantifiability of these categories as an indication of the project's greatness, Suetonius gives us an exact number of workmen as well as the time required for building (the cost of the enterprise is not specified, although it is pointed out that it was borne by external investors). Much suggests that Suetonius' 'exact' numbers are not particularly closely related to reality,[82] but the number of 30,000 men is a solid, factual(-seeming) response to Pliny's vagueness and to his claim that the

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[80] The *difficultas* of constructing a harbour at Ostia did not in fact turn out to be insurmountable: cf. *Claud.* 20.3.

[81] On *absolvit* meaning 'finished', see Hurley (2001), 146 *ad. loc.*

[82] In a quantitative analysis of the draining of the Fucine Lake, it has been calculated that restrictions of space in the tunnel would have made it impossible for more than 3000 workmen to have been employed there at any one time, even according to the most generous estimates: Thornton/Thornton (1985), 107-12. While their calculation of workforce, cost and time needed has some methodological flaws (cf. Wiseman (1991)), their calculation of the workforce employed in the tunnel, drawing partly on Brisse's detailed account of his own tunnel building works, appears convincing to me.

magnificence of the project cannot be expressed in words (*neque enarrari humano sermone possunt,* 36.124).[83] The figures Suetonius quotes are so overwhelmingly high that they are, after all, a means of expressing the achievement.

The passage offers little in terms of the third focus of the debate. The slightly military ring of *Fucinum adgressus est* possibly hints at a 'confrontation' between Claudius and the lake, as does the *gloria* the emperor hopes to gain from the project, but the general tone of the passage is neutral and technical.[84]

The reader's first image of the draining is a positive one. Suetonius seems to refer to, and agree with, Pliny's favourable and admiring assessment of the project. He even goes further than Pliny's praise when he has Claudius finish the project and provides the numbers to back up Pliny's claims of magnitude. However, the emerging picture of the project receives substantial modification in the subsequent section, concerned with the emperor's public spectacles (*Claud.* 21.6).

> quin et emissurus Fucinum lacum naumachiam ante commisit. sed cum proclamantibus naumachiariis: 'have imperator, morituri te salutant!' respondisset: 'aut non', neque post hanc vocem quasi venia data quisquam dimicare vellet, diu cunctatus an omnes igni ferroque absumeret, tandem e sede sua prosiluit ac per ambitum lacus non sine foeda vacillatione discurrens partim minando partim adhortando ad pugnam compulit. hoc spectaculo classis Sicula et Rhodia concurrerunt, duodenarum triremium singulae, exciente bucina Tritone argenteo, qui e medio lacu per machinam emerserat.
>
> Even when he was about to drain the Fucine Lake, he arranged a sea battle first. But when the fighters cried: 'Hail emperor, those who are about to die salute you!' and he replied: 'or not', and when after he said this no one wanted to fight any longer, since they thought that they had been pardoned, he long hesitated about destroying them all with fire and sword, but finally jumped up from his throne, ran to and fro along the perimeter of the lake with his ugly tottering gait, and forced them to fight partly by threats and partly by encouragements. In this spectacle, a Sicilian and a Rhodian fleet engaged, each consisting of twelve triremes, with a silver Triton calling on his horn, who had emerged from the middle of the lake by means of a lifting device.

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[83] Multiples of three are elsewhere used for almost magical impressiveness. Cf. e.g. 3, 30 and 300 as a prelude to *sine fine* in Jupiter's speech to Venus at *Aen.* 1.265-79.
[84] On the sense of attack in *adgredior*, see Hurley (2001), 145, *ad loc.*

The Fucine Lake spectacle is the last in a long list of *beneficia*, but what is set up to be the climax of Claudius' lavish entertainments for the people turns out to be a farce. In the Tacitean account, the *naumachia* was a splendid, well-organised display for an admiring public – unfortunately in stark contrast with the badly engineered draining operation that they were supposed to celebrate. Splendid appearances there contrasted with a grim reality of overreaching and failure. Suetonius reacts to this Tacitean reversal with a reversal of his own. His first, positive account of the draining proper is juxtaposed with a disastrous failure of precisely the *visual* part of the project.

How precisely does Suetonius deviate from the Tacitean version? According to Tacitus, 19,000 men were involved, an incredible number, and they fought so bravely that the survivors were eventually exempted from fighting each other to the death. While Suetonius gives an inordinately high estimate for the men working at the Fucine Lake, the number of ships in his account is significantly lower than that quoted by Tacitus.[85] The bravery of the men that Tacitus stresses is now absent – instead, the convicts initially refuse to fight and have to be forced to do so. The main focus of the episode lies on the grotesque behaviour of Claudius himself, which turns the entire display into a comic spectacle.[86] Realism is left aside in Suetonius' description of the accidental farce enacted by the emperor. There is nothing surprising about the convicts' initial refusal to fight,[87] but in Suetonius' comedy, it is the two joking words (*aut non*) uttered by the emperor from the side of the lake that cause the fiasco – they are apparently heard by hundreds (or thousands) of fighters on a very large lake, who then in a concerted action refuse to fight.[88] No more realistic, and no less farcical, is the image of Claudius running

[85] Suetonius' modest number of twelve triremes would never fit Tacitus' 19, 000 fighters. Cass. Dio 60.33.3 accords 50 ships to each side, while Tacitus, unlike Suetonius, speaks of both triremes and quadriremes. See Kierdorf (1992), 114 *ad loc.*, and Hurley (2001), 158 *ad loc.*

[86] The section on public displays contains another example of a spectacle which accidentally descended into comedy: the announcement of the secular games (21.2). Claudius wanted to hold them again, believing that the Augustan calculations had been incorrect, but the herald's announcement that the games would be such as 'no one had ever seen before' caused general ridicule, since many of those present would have seen the Augustan games, and even some of the actors had already appeared under Augustus.

[87] The *naumachiae* were simply a form of public execution, hence the anti-escape measures described by Tacitus. In Dio's account, the convicts also refuse to fight and have to be forced to do so (60.33.4). There is no mention of Claudius' joke. See also Seif (1973), 220.

[88] Presumably, Claudius meant to point out that not all of those greeting him were in fact *morituri,* since some survivors might be pardoned. However, the fighters understood (or pretended to understand) *aut non* as an imperial pardon.

along the perimeter of the lake (which would have been about 50 km), upbraiding the fighters. A reference to Claudius' handicap, always a source of high comedy, completes the humorous sketch.[89]

For Tacitus, the impressive spectacle served as a foil for the ensuing disaster. Suetonius' account of the spectacles is as disastrous as Tacitus' account of the draining, but the treatment of different aspects of the same incident under different rubrics means that the fiasco of the sea battle does not explicitly detract from the earlier, positive assessment of the value of the enterprise.

One detail at the end of this passage is highly relevant for the third focus of debate. Only Suetonius reports that the spectacle included a silver statue of Triton, rising from the middle of the lake by means of a mechanical device and blowing on his horn. Public spectacles frequently included mythological re-enactments, and while Suetonius' account suggests that one of the functions of this Triton was to call the fleets to battle, the actual significance of the call seems to lie in a different mythological association.[90] In the first book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* a terrible flood extinguishes almost all human life. When finally only Deucalion and Pyrrha survive, Jupiter calms the skies, and Neptune embarks on the task of restoring the sea to its original state (Ov. *Met.* 1.330-9, 341-7):[91]

> nec maris ira manet, positoque tricuspide telo
> mulcet aquas rector pelagi, supraque profundum
> exstantem atque umeros innato murice tectum
> caeruleum Tritona vocat, conchaeque sonanti
> inspirare iubet fluctusque et flumina signo
> iam revocare dato. cava bucina sumitur illi,
> tortilis in latum quae turbine crescit ab imo,

[89] The comic effect is strengthened through the use of the unusual word *vacillatio*, only attested here and once in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* in a discussion of ridiculous mannerisms of speakers (*Quint.* 11.3.128). On Claudius' gait, see also *Claud.* 30, for an exploitation of its comic potential, see most famously Sen. *Apocol.* 1.2, 5.3. For Claudius as a comic figure in Suetonius, cf. also *Claud.* 41 (a recitation turned farce) and *Claud.* 45 (his death kept secret by bringing in comic actors). Santoro L'Hoir (2006) detects a comic side to the proceedings also in the Tacitean version of the Fucine lake episode (240). See also Dickison (1977) on Claudius and comedy in Tacitus.

[90] On mechanical devices (such as the rising Triton) as part of Roman spectacles, see Hammer (2010).

[91] The reference to *Met.* 1 is pointed out by Hurley (2001), 158, *ad loc.* For a different type of re-enactment of mythical episodes staged by the emperor, see Coleman (1990) on public executions.

bucina quae, medio concepit ubi aera ponto,
litora voce replet sub utroque iacentia Phoebo.
tum quoque …
…
omnibus audita est telluris et aequoris undis,
et quibus est undis audita coercuit omnes.
iam mare litus habet, plenos capit alveus amnes,
flumina subsidunt collesque exire videntur,
surgit humus, crescunt sola decrescentibus undis;
postque diem longam nudata cacumina silvae
ostendunt, limumque tenent in fronde relictum.

> And the sea did not stay angry, for by putting down his three-pronged fork the marine ruler soothed the waters and called out to aquamarine Triton, who rose above the deep, his shoulders covered with living murex, and told him to blow into his sounding conch-shell and give the signal to recall now the floods and rivers: he took up the hollow horn which,f from the bottom of its spiral, twists and grows in width, a horn which, whenever it is blown in the middle of the sea, fills with its voice the shores that lie beneath each Phoebus. Then too … it was heard by all the waters of the earth and of the sea, and it held back all the waters by which it had been heard. Now the sea had a shore, their channels held the full streams, the rivers fell and the hills were seen to emerge; the earth rose; and with the decrease of water the ground increased; and after a long time the woods showed their uncovered tree-tops, but kept the silt left on their foliage.[92]

In Ovid's depiction, Triton rises from the sea (*supraque profundum exstantem*), just as he does from the lake in Suetonius due to a mechanical device. Triton's horn (likewise called a *bucina*, likewise sounded from the middle of the water (337)) orders the waters to recede, and as the waters obey, more and more ground emerges. The appearance of just such a Triton from the waters of the Fucine Lake must have been designed to turn the draining of the lake into a mythological re-enactment of this event, and thus to render this project a divine act of cosmic significance, with Claudius implicitly in the role of the divinity (Jupiter and/or Neptune) who orders the Triton's appearance. In terms of the theme of the relation between man and nature, Suetonius thus hints at Claudius' ambitions of

[92] The translation is taken from Hill (1985).

ruling over the elements as the gods do and effecting an almost cosmic change by making a lake disappear.[93]

This is the impression the reader is left with at the end of the section on public spectacles: a positive assessment of the economic and engineering aspect of the project, but a spectacle that accidentally deteriorates into a farce, and deflates Claudius' claims to divine control of the floods. But a final modification of the reader's image of the Fucine Lake project is still in store. In a section on Claudius' *convivia* the following brief episode occurs (*Claud.* 32):

> convivatus est et super emissarium Fucini lacus ac paene summersus, cum emissa impetu aqua redundasset.
>
> He also feasted above the outlet of the Fucine Lake and was almost submerged when the water was let out in such a rush that it overflowed.

The word *summersus* here may recall the final word of the previous section on the Fucine Lake, where the Triton majestically emerged (*emerserat*) from the waters of the lake at Claudius' desire. While Claudius through this action attempted to show his divine control of the waters, this final spotlight that Suetonius throws on the Fucine Lake project shows the princeps as completely incapable of controlling the floods, since he is almost drowned himself. In a final twist, comparable to that at the end of Tacitus' account, the water here regains control and responds to Claudius' interference with violence (*impetu*). We also learn only now that Claudius was feasting while the *naumachia* and the opening of the channel took place. Eating at the wrong time and in the wrong place is a topos in descriptions of a bad ruler or leader, and Claudius' dinner during this less-than perfect performance adds another morally doubtful note.[94]

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[93] Although Suetonius does not spell out the significance of the Triton's appearance, most of his readers would presumably have been familiar with the myth and/or the opening of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

[94] On the topos of rulers eating at inappropriate times (especially times connected with death, killing, or mourning), see Malloch (2009), 118 and n. 12 (specifically on Tacitus) and (more generally) Paul (1991), 164-6. For Claudius' constant, often ill-timed and inappropriate desire for food, see also *Claud.* 33.1: *cibi vinique quocumque et tempore et loco appetentissimus* … - 'most desirous of food and wine, at whatever time and place …'. Cf. also Tac. *Ann.* 12.64.2, Sen. *Apocol.* 8.2, Cass. Dio 60.2.5-7.

In three separate episodes, Suetonius has encouraged us to look at the Fucine Lake differently each time. A positive assessment of the useful, economically sound and extremely difficult engineering project appears in a different light when the associated spectacles reveal Claudius as a laughing-stock. A final, short mention sets Claudius' pretensions at divine control over water and land into a different light again – he is not only a comic figure, but dangerously negligent, and rather than mastering the lake, the lake almost masters him. For a reader who encounters the three episodes in the correct order when reading the text in its entirety, the final modification may remain as the strongest impression, but no effort is made within the *Life of Claudius* to reconcile the different aspects of the project. Suetonius' thematic approach does not necessarily aim at creating one coherent image of Claudius' reign and personality. Different aspects appear as more or less positive, and the whole presents the image of an emperor who was neither good nor bad. Suetonius can use three different perspectives on the Fucine Lake project to illustrate completely different aspects of Claudius' life, and this threefold use of the project demonstrates *in nuce* the extreme flexibility of the associations of large-scale engineering projects for which I argued earlier in this chapter.

4. Conclusion

We do not know what really happened at the Fucine Lake. On the basis of the literary evidence available, it is impossible to establish whether the project was completed by Claudius or not, whether the channel functioned or not, whether the surrounding land was partially drained or not. However, the literary texts allow us to understand something potentially even more interesting: how was the draining of the Fucine Lake *talked about*, how was its significance debated? It emerges that to tell the story of the tunnel's creation, to represent the process of construction and of the opening of the outlet allows the authors to manipulate their readers' assessment of it.

A number of parallels in phrasing and theme perhaps point to some direct connections between the versions of Pliny, Tacitus and Suetonius. More importantly, however, the authors' versions of the events of the Fucine Lake reveal significant overlap in respect of the criteria according to which the event is represented and assessed. These criteria emerge as three thematic areas around which the debate of the Fucine Lake is structured.

The first focus of the debate turned out to be of minor importance only. Whether the channel was finished, and whether it worked, is usually not accorded more than a few words, and appears a near-irrelevant criterion for assessing the project. Secondly, the debate focusses on how the value of the project can be assessed and quantified. The invisibility of the project is an obstacle to a viewer's appreciation. Claudius' opening spectacle and staging of the draining are themselves an attempt to render the invisible visible. The Torlonia relief has to rely on the visual clue of capstans to suggest work under ground, only intelligible to those already aware of the existence of the tunnel. While Pliny claims that viewing the work in progress guarantees appropriate appreciation, Tacitus attacks this notion: viewing gives no guarantee of true perception, nor does narrative, as his own piece demonstrates. Suetonius first offers reassuring specifications in Pliny's measurable categories of time, workforce, and difficulty, but his subsequent, confusing spotlights leave us with a general sense of disorientation as to how the project may be judged. Thirdly, Claudius intended the draining as an imperial triumph over nature and a spectacle of god-like control over the elements, and the rhetoric of a comparable attitude informs the Trajanic restoration inscription. Pliny is unable to extract a positive message from Claudius' struggle with nature because of associations of this theme that he wants to and has to avoid. Tacitus and Suetonius activate precisely those negative aspects that Pliny seeks to evade. In the *Annals*, nature responds to Claudius' transgressive behaviour with equal violence, while Suetonius comically deflates the emperor's pretence to divine control over the elements.

The Fucine Lake thus turns out to be a battleground of rhetoric. Each writer tells his own story of the lake, and in doing so values or devalues the project according to the requirements of his narrative. The themes that recur in their versions can partly be linked to the positive features of the building process used for making 'memories' in chapter 1 (speed, manpower, cost). But the Fucine Lake debate reveals that there is also an ethical dimension to descriptions of construction. In their literary versions of construction the authors problematise the possibilities of 'staging' engineering and the resulting difficulty of seeing through such displays and shows. They also use descriptions of engineering to tap into a moral discourse about humans and natural boundaries, selecting and activating different elements of this debate to manipulate the impact of the project they describe. In terms of the flexible valuations attached to it, the Fucine Lake is no exception but the rule. To a Roman writer, any large-scale engineering project could be a Fucine Lake, and

to tell the story of a project's execution was one way of turning it into a marvel and a victory or deceit and failure.