Julius Caesar, *Translatio Imperii* and Tyranny in Jasper Fisher's *Fuimus Troes*

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Abstract
This article discusses Jasper Fisher's *Fuimus Troes* (1633), a play that has received scant critical attention despite raising a number of issues relevant to Stuart foreign and domestic policy. First, the article demonstrates how deeply the play's treatment of Julius Caesar is influenced by previous dramatic portrayals of him. Secondly, it shows that the uneasiness in accepting Caesar's *Commentarii* as the most authoritative historical source for the events depicted is mirrored stylistically in the Britons' attempt to avoid pronouncing Caesar's name as a way to exorcise his power. Then, the article examines the negative depiction of the Roman Empire in order to shed light on the play's scepticism about the notion of *translatio imperii* that was so crucial to Stuart propaganda. Finally, it considers how the play ends up being oddly prophetic through its focus on the issues of tyranny and internal dissension, which would mark Charles I's reign till its tragic epilogue.
Key-words: Caesar, *Fuimus Troes*, Empire.

1. Introduction

An academic play performed at Magdalen College, Oxford, at an unspecified date[1], published anonymously in 1633[2] and generally

[1] The play has notably proved resistant to attempts at dating it conclusively. While it may well be possible that some passages refer either to James I's love for hunting (I.iii.24-9), his irenicism (Marshall 2000: 119), the secret military negotiations between England and the French Huguenots in 1611-13 (pp. 115-6), Prince Henry Frederick's death in 1612 (Hopkins 2002: 39), Princess Elizabeth's wedding with Frederick V, Elector Palatine, in 1613 (Butler 2007: Introd.), the 1620 Palatinate crisis (Butler 2007: Introd.) or Queen Henrietta Maria's Neoplatonism (Hopkins 2002: 40-1), these can hardly be taken as firm evidence. However, even though I am inclined to concur with Hopkins's view that the dates of composition and performance were close together (p. 39), *Fuimus Troes* may indeed have been written/performed as early as 1607, when Fisher matriculated at Magdalen College.
[2] Together with the revival of William Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* at Whitehall on 1

attributed to Church of England clergyman and playwright Jasper Fisher, *Fuimus Troes* is conspicuous as the only extant play published in England between 1558 and 1642 dramatising Julius Caesar's invasion of Britain, an episode barely mentioned by other early modern playwrights.

It is therefore to some extent surprising to discover that Fisher's is actually the early modern English play featuring Caesar as a character that has attracted the scantest scholarly attention. Admittedly, until about fifteen years ago, critical commentary on the play was limited to (negative) aesthetic judgments. The year 2002 finally witnessed the publication of the first two sustained scholarly attempts at unravelling the complex issues informing the play, followed by a more recent contribution in 2015.

Lisa Hopkins (2002: 37) reads *Fuimus Troes* within the context of a cluster of publications shaped by "a collective soul-searching on the subject of national identities" that engaged Britain around 1633, the year of Charles I's Scottish coronation. In Hopkins's view, the play "offers a complex picture of British identity which is deeply rooted in the enduring myth of British descent from Brutus" (p. 38) that had been vigorously revived by the Stuart monarchs. At the same time, it negotiates "the interpenetration of classical and Christian cultures and ideologies" (p. 39). In so doing, the play ends up foregrounding the "difficulty in maintaining secure identifications and differentiations" (p. 38), thereby exposing a considerable confusion of identities between its Romans and its exceedingly Romanised Britons: it proves to be extremely difficult to ascertain who the true Trojans are. Proceeding in the investigation of this "game of shifting identities", Monica Matei-Chesnoiu (2015: 88) has interestingly used a geocritical approach in order to shed light on how "hydrographical metaphors […] play a significant part in further exacerbating fracture and confusion, while they demarcate national boundaries".

From a different though complementary angle, John E. Curran focuses on Fisher's effort to conciliate Geoffrey of Monmouth's legendary

January 1634 upon Charles's return from his Scottish coronation, the publication of the first edition of George Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey* in 1631 and the second edition of Thomas May's *Continuation of Lucan* in 1633, the publication of *Fuimus Troes* in 1633 testifies to a lively interest in both the question of Roman Britain and in the literary depictions of the character of Caesar in the early 1630s.

account of the Roman invasion of 55-54 BCE with that found in Caesar's *Commentarii*. Even though increasingly discredited as non-history by 1633, Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*c.* 1136) was difficult to leave behind, insofar as it "shaped the past into a coherent design to let the past dignify itself and the present", and saw Caesar's failed invasion as a decisive moment in its "sweeping epic narrative" (Curran 2002: 21). In trying to conflate two such conflicting sources, "the play betrays a wish […] that events as they had actually played out and events as seen from the perspective of the glorious epic narrative could somehow coincide" (pp. 22-23), in that "without Caesar […] the story would seem absurd; but without Geoffrey, [it] would be meaningless" (p. 21). The play is therefore sharply "divided against itself in its conception of the origins and limits of British history" (p. 24).

In the wake of these critical studies, this article will first demonstrate how this play, though portraying a different segment of Caesar's biography, offers a depiction of Caesar that shares numerous features with previous dramatic treatments of him. Secondly, it will show that the uneasiness in unequivocally accepting Caesar's *Commentarii* as the most authoritative historical source for the events depicted in the play is mirrored stylistically in the playwright's seemingly deliberate choice to have the Britons consistently try to avoid pronouncing the name of Caesar as a way to exorcise his power. Then, the article will examine the negative depiction of the Roman Empire in the play in order to shed light on Fisher's ambivalent view on the notion of *translatio imperii*. Finally, it will analyse how the play ends up being oddly prophetic in taking up the issues of tyranny and civil strife that were to torment Charles I's early reign until his decapitation.

2. A hubristic, destructive viper: another fully (English) Renaissance Caesar

In the light of the pervasive influence Geoffrey's *Historia* exerted on the structure and content of the play, one might expect Caesar's characterisation to have been as heavily affected by it. In fact, Fisher's portrayal of Caesar is consciously and profoundly steeped in the early modern English Caesarean dramatic tradition[3].

[3] With the phrase "early modern English Caesarean dramatic tradition" I refer to the body of dramatic works featuring Caesar as a character written between 1594 and

Appearing in ten out of thirty-five scenes, Caesar is a central figure in the play. In keeping with the haughtiness typical of most other early modern dramatic representations of him, Fisher's Caesar repeatedly reveals himself to be overly self-conscious about his feats. This is exemplified as early as I.ii by his entry on stage with great pomp and ceremony, sharply contrasting with the intimate opening soliloquy by Nennius, the legendary hero brother to the British King Cassibelane. Caesar's hubristic attitude is especially evident in his bombastic claim that:

> I long to stride
> This Hellespont, or bridge it with a navy,
> Disclosing to our empire unknown lands
> Until the arctic star for zenith stands. (I.ii.32-6)

Here Caesar trenchantly fashions himself as a giant crossing the Channel in a single stride, appropriating the gigantism informing Cassius's fantasy of Caesar "bestrid[ing] the narrow world / Like a Colossus" in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (I.ii.136-7). As we shall see, such gigantism underpins Caesar's conception of the Roman Empire too, prompting the Chorus regretfully to recall "How Brute did giants tame" (II.viii.5).

Caesar's arrogance is also prominent in his relationship with Fortune, another recurring motif in previous dramatic renditions of the Roman leader (Lovascio 2015: 41, 87-94, 177-8, 181-2). Following the destruction of his fleet caused by a violent storm and the news of his daughter Julia's death, Caesar ragingly inveighs against Fortune: "When, powerful Fortune, will thy anger cease? / Never till now did Caesar Fortune fear" (III.iv.10-1). Immediately after things start going right for the Romans again, however, Caesar overweeningly proclaims "Fortune repents at last" (IV.i.31), displaying once more his familiar superciliousness – in his view, even Fortune is eventually compelled to obey him.

Besides being unpleasantly presumptuous, Fisher's Caesar is also conceived of by other characters as a destructive force with connotations

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c. 1620, seven of which are extant: *Cornelia* (1594) by Thomas Kyd, the anonymous *Caesar's Revenge* (c. 1595, publ. 1606), *Julius Caesar* (1599) by Shakespeare, *Caesar and Pompey* (c. 1606, publ. 1631) by Chapman, *Julius Caesar* (1607) by William Alexander, *Catiline His Conspiracy* (1611) by Ben Jonson and *The False One* (c. 1620, publ. 1647) by John Fletcher and Philip Massinger.

recalling the fascinatingly monstrous Caesar depicted by Lucan in his epic poem *Bellum civile*, another feature Fisher's Caesar shares with previous dramatic portrayals of the Roman leader (Lovascio 2012: 77-80). Upon seeing Britain for the first time, Caesar declares that he will Mars-like "in desolate streets / Raise trophies high of barbarous bones, whose stench / May poison all the rest" (I.ii.31-3). Then, just before the decisive confrontation against the Britons, Caesar apocalyptically foresees the ruinous consequences his attack will have on Britain:

This blow shall like an earthquake move
The roots and pillars of this sea-clipped isle.
A cloud of vultures shall attend our camp,
And no more shall the fields bear *vert* but *gules*.
The grain engrained in purple dye shall lose
His verdant hue. Bones, marrow, human limbs
Shall, putrefying, reek, whose vapoured slime,
Kindled on high, may breed long-bearded stars
To tell more mischief and out-beard Apollo. (IV.iv.98-106)

That Caesar's destructiveness is no mere braggadocio, and that he is not "just a quiet and likable fellow", as Clifford J. Ronan (2005: 81) would have it, is borne out by the Atrebatic king Comius's implicit comparison of the Roman leader with Attila the Hun earlier in the play – "No herb can ever grow where once he treads. / Nothing withstands his force" (II.v.4-6) – through which, incidentally, Caesar paradoxically takes on the features of a barbarian. Caesar's unstoppable destructive impetus is confirmed in Act V by Cassibelane himself, who is forced to admit that

No ramparts keep him back. He presses forward
Though every stamp he treads seems to conjure
The fates from their infernal centre. None
But he durst be so bold. (V.ii.1-4)

And a little later, he repeats: "Nothing stops him – / Rivers nor ramparts, woods nor dangerous bogs" (V.iv.15-6). His destructive character is an important trait of Fisher's Caesar, inasmuch as it effectively dramatises the menace he represents for Britain while simultaneously linking him with previous theatrical portrayals of the Roman leader on a literary level.

Nevertheless, what places this Caesar even more firmly in the context of the early modern English Caesarean dramatic tradition are the repeated associations (both direct and oblique) of his figure to herpetological imagery, a favourite dramatic device for demonising Caesar in Renaissance England (Lovascio 2017). Caesar is directly referred to by Nennius as a "more accursed man, / Who serpent-like in poison bathes his sting. / Tiber doth breed as venomous beasts as Nile" (III.v.15-8) – where Nennius also disparages Rome by undoing "the distinction between Rome and Egypt which Shakespeare had made so crucial in *Antony and Cleopatra*" (Hopkins 2002: 45). Caesar's parasitically serpentine nature is also implied by Belinus, the commander-in-chief of Cassibelane's army, who claims that the Roman leader "prospers by our spoil; we feed a viper" (IV.iii.55), and by Cassibelane himself, who likens the Roman navy to "the Lernean adder" (IV.iii.17), that is the Hydra, the gigantic mythical nine-headed water-serpent defeated by Hercules as one of his labours.

That Fisher is intentionally playing with Caesar's association with ophidian imagery characteristic of early modern English drama is also substantiated by his choice to incorporate in *Fuimus Troes* a detail from John Higgins's 1574 additions to the *Mirror for Magistrates*. Geoffrey's *Historia* reports that Nennius found Caesar on the battlefield and fought against him in single battle. Even though Caesar inflicted a lethal wound on Nennius, his sword remained stuck in the Briton's shield and he had to run away, shamefully showing his back to the Britons – as Lucan relates, "Territa quaesitis ostendit terga Britannis" (*Civil War*, II.572). The *Mirror*, however, tells a slightly different story. There, Nennius explains that Caesar gained the upper hand and killed him only by poisoning his sword before the duel. Fisher's choice proves very effective in attributing to Caesar the serpentine trait of poisonousness, thereby making his own portrayal of the character fully consistent with the foregrounding of Caesar's double-dealing nature typical of Tudor and Stuart drama (Lovascio 2017).

3. Caesar, or the power of a name

Where *Fuimus Troes* is even more interestingly attuned to earlier portrayals of Caesar, however, is in the treatment of the conjuring

power customarily associated with his name in early modern English drama (Lovascio 2015: 18–28). In pointed contrast with Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, where "Caesar" is the proper name most often uttered (219 times!) not only by Caesar himself but also by his opponents (Spevack 1968: 573), a close scrutiny of the scenes in *Fuimus Troes* in which the Britons talk about him makes it apparent how his opponents are at pains to avoid naming him altogether.

TABLE 1
References to Caesar by the Britons in *Fuimus Troes*

	Character	*Line(s)*
the Roman	Rollano	I.iii.37
His navy	Rollano	I.iii.39
from him	Rollano	I.iii.41
proud Caesar	**Cassibelane**	**I.iii.43**
he	Cassibelane	I.iii.44
this common foe	Cassibelane	I.iii.57
him	Cassibelane	I.iii.58
He	Cridous	II.i.27
him	Cridous	II.i.32
Caesar	**Eulinus**	**II.i.40**
the Roman, armed with foreign spoil	Nennius	II.i.72
him	Nennius	II.i.73
his army's weight	Nennius	II.i.74
His first arrival	Cassibelane	II.i.89
the Roman leader	Comius	II.v.3
he	Comius	II.v.5
his force	Comius	II.v.6
He	Cassibelane	II.v.9
his wrath	Comius	II.v.14
Him	Comius	II.v.16
at Caesar's hand	**Comius**	**II.v.25**
the foe-man	Hulacus	II.vi.38
the Roman	Hulacus	II.vi.39

(*continued on next page*)

TABLE 1 (*continued from previous page*)

	Character	*Line(s)*
that vent'rous captain Caesar	**Nennius**	**III.ii.5**
Caesar	**Nennius**	**III.ii.24**
Caesar	**Nennius**	**III.ii.28**
his conquest	Nennius	III.ii.29
he	Nennius	III.ii.30
he	Nennius	III.ii.31
he	Nennius	III.ii.32
he	Nennius	III.ii.33
by Caesar's sword	**Nennius**	**III.ii.54**
his friend	Nennius	III.ii.54
his greater ghost	Nennius	III.ii.55
The foe	Belinus	III.iii.48
His ships	Belinus	III.iii.49
he	Belinus	III.iii.51
His camp	Belinus	III.iii.52
His chief munition	Belinus	III.iii.54
he	Belinus	III.iii.55
his camp	Cassibelane	III.iii.61
false Caesar's sword	**Nennius**	**III.v.10**
more accursed man	Nennius	III.v.15
the great Caesar	**Cassibelane**	**III.vii.105**
his aid	Androgeus	III.viii.52
his drooping fire	Androgeus	III.viii.52
him	Androgeus	III.viii.53
a Caesar	**Eulinus**	**IV.ii.36**
his barks and galleys	Cassibelane	IV.iii.15
him	Cassibelane	IV.iii.20
his huge navy	Cassibelane	IV.iii.21
him	Cassibelane	IV.iii.23
his ships	Cassibelane	IV.iii.23
he	Cassibelane	IV.iii.24
his footing	Belinus	IV.iii.25
he	Cassibelane	IV.iii.27
His time and leisure	Cassibelane	IV.iii.31
he	Belinus	IV.iii.41
He	Belinus	IV.iii.55

his (strength)	Cassibelane	IV.iii.60
him	Cassibelane	IV.iii.62
him	Cassibelane	IV.iii.63
he	Cassibelane	IV.iii.64
his future grave	Cassibelane	IV.iii.64
him	Cassibelane	V.ii.1
He	Cassibelane	V.ii.1
he	Cassibelane	V.ii.2
he	Cassibelane	V.ii.4
his fleet	Cassibelane	V.ii.24
him	Cassibelane	V.ii.30
The enragèd foe / With cruel pride	Cassibelane	V.ii.34-5
he	Cassibelane	V.ii.43
His huge and expert army	Cassibelane	V.iv.15
him	Cassibelane	V.iv.15
his dismal ensigns	Cassibelane	V.iv.17
Caesar	**Cassibelane**	**V.iv.38**
his dainty soldiers	Cassibelane	V.iv.41
his face	Cassibelane	V.iv.44
he	Cassibelane	V.iv.48
Caesar	**Androgeus**	**V.v.7**
A foreign aid	Themantius	V.v.15
this emperor	Androgeus	V.v.23
a Julius Caesar	**Cassibelane**	**V.vi.67**

An analysis of the data provided in Table 1 reveals that out of as many as 83 references to Caesar by the Britons in *Fuimus Troes* only in twelve cases (that is a mere 12.45%, in bold in the table) do his opponents refer to him by his proper name rather than by a pronoun, an attribute or a metonymical reference to either his power, his huge army or fleet, or his destructiveness. Moreover, of those twelve instances, one is by Androgeus (who will go on to side with Caesar and betray the Britons) and four by Nennius, the only Briton as powerful as Caesar and therefore presumably less afraid of naming him than his countrymen. In addition, though Cassibelane does name Caesar four times too, that is out of as many as 37 references to the Roman leader. What is more, of those four instances of naming Caesar, one is clearly derogatory ("proud

Caesar", an attempt to associate him with Tarquin the Proud), one is aimed at diminishing the import of his conquest ("There is more behind / Than Caesar hath overrun", V.iv.38-9), while the last one ultimately seeks to aggrandise Britain in the light of the unparalleled might of the enemy with whom peace has been sealed – with Caesar's name given almost in full ("a Julius Caesar": only the *praenomen* Gaius is missing).

Cassibelane and the Britons seem to be portrayed by Fisher as trying to undermine Caesar's superiority by means of avoiding as much as possible to mention his name. Rather than trying to negate the power of Caesar's name as Cassius does during the seduction scene with Brutus in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (I.ii.141-9), Fisher's Britons look all too aware and afraid of that power, which they therefore attempt to exorcise by erasing the Roman leader's *cognomen*.

The effort to silence Caesar's name seems to mirror on a stylistic level the uneasiness and embarrassment that the play expresses regarding its own conflation of two such dissimilar sources as Geoffrey's *Historia* and Caesar's *Commentarii* (Curran 2002: 19–25). Hard as Fisher and the Britons may try to belittle Caesar, however, both attempts are doomed to failure. This is implicitly shown not only when Mandubrace inadvertently frames Caesar as a god able to redress those wrongs that the gods themselves have neglected (IV.i.53-4) but especially in the Britons' repeated appropriation of Caesar's characteristic third-person self-referencing. Cridous (King of Albania), Gurthel (King of Ordovicia), Britael (King of Demetia) and Eulinus (nephew to Androgeus) all speak of themselves as though they were speaking of another person in II.i, just as Caesar does. Even the brave Nennius ends up assuming a Caesar-like persona by the same means (III.ii.49, 58) while brandishing Caesar's own sword to boot. The overall message seems to be that the pervasiveness of Caesar's power and authority is such that any attempts to deny it or to assert an equality with him in prestige, power and prominence are bound to fail, whether on the battlefield or the stage.

4. Caesar, Rome and the evils of empire

For an early modern English Protestant audience, though, Caesar and his name would not only have meant hubris, destruction,

ingratitude and power; they would have also evoked a series of menacing contemporary associations, especially with the papacy and the Habsburg Empire. In the wake of previous plays depicting a clash between the Britons and the Romans such as Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (c. 1610), R.A.'s *The Valiant Welshman* (1610-12) and John Fletcher's *Bonduca* (1613-14), *Fuimus Troes* interestingly explores the question of empire. Despite Ronan's conviction that the play is informed by an "acceptance of Renaissance England's colonialism" (Ronan 2005: 80), I find the play's perspective on the question of empire to be significantly more controversial, possibly betraying Fisher's own uneasiness at unproblematically accepting the belief in the notion of a northward and westward *translatio imperii* from Troy to Rome and then to Britain. Such a notion had been crucial to the propaganda generated around the Stuart monarchs since James I's ceremonial entry into London in 1604 as a second Brute (Marshall 2000: 27-8), seen as the harbinger of a Virgilian *imperium sine fine*. The notion of *translatio imperii* also informs the three plays mentioned above and had been already viewed with scepticism by a number of other early modern writers (Kerrigan 2006: 114).

From Act I onwards, Roman expansion practices are consistently cast in a negative light, both directly and obliquely. Caesar and the Romans repeatedly attempt to fashion their conquest as a revenge expedition. Upon spotting the unknown land of the Britons on the horizon, Comius is quick to come up with a pretext for invading it: the Romans have the right to avenge themselves on the Britons because the latter "lent / Their secret aid unto the neighbour Gauls, / Fostering their fugitives with friendly care, / Which made your victory fly with slower wing" (I.ii.24-7). "That's cause enough" (I.ii.28), replies Caesar. By this, he seems to imply that he regards revenge as a *just cause*, according to which he feels entitled to *do wrong* to the Britons – or, as the priest Hulacus would have it, a "Brutish wrong" (V.i.48).

The most attentive people in the audience may have discerned in Caesar's reply an oblique reference to the now controversial lines of Shakespeare's Caesar's reply to Metellus Cimber's request that his brother be recalled from exile a few moments before the conspirators stab the dictator to death on the Ides of March, i.e. "Know Caesar doth not wrong but with *just cause*, / Nor without cause will he be satisfied" – not as they appear in the *First Folio*

but as are mockingly cited (in their reputed original phrasing) in Ben Jonson's *Discoveries* (1641) and *The Staple of News* (staged 1626, publ. 1631). On the face of it, Jonson was jibing at those lines from a logical standpoint. On a deeper level, however, he was probably taking issue with the character's political attitude: in those lines, Caesar indeed regards himself, at the height of his arrogant posture and delusion of grandeur, as the supreme judge of right and wrong, thereby conveying an extremely idiosyncratic, above-the-law idea of justice (Donaldson 2000: 103), which actually seems perfectly to suit the character's overall temperament.

That there is indeed a certain concern in the play with the issue of a *just cause* is also apparent in the fact that Nennius, the champion of British liberty, mentions the concept twice. First, he refers to "our just cause" (II.i.76) in a speech seeking to inflame his countrymen against the Romans. Then, during the hand-to-hand combat against Caesar, he suggests outright that they "Let our blades discuss / Who hath the justest cause" (III.ii.10-1). It is possible that these were oblique allusions to Shakespeare's Caesar as captured in a very disagreeable, tyrannical, amoral posture, which would therefore have been meant subtly to discredit the Romans' claims to the right of avenging themselves on the Britons, thereby calling into question their colonial discourse and practices. In this sense, the effect would be quite similar to that produced by a crucial passage in *The False One*, where Caesar exclaims, after witnessing the tremendous riches of Egypt:

> I am asham'd I warr'd at home, (my friends)
> When such wealth may be got abroad? what honour,
> Nay everlasting glory had Rome purchas'd,
> Had she a just cause but to visit Ægypt?
> (Fletcher and Massinger, *The False One*, III.iv.77-80)

Here, again, the association with Shakespeare's Caesar's conviction invariably to have a "just cause" on his side when doing wrong might have been intended to cast his shamelessly rapacious expansionist stance in a very grim light (Lovascio 2015: 166-7). Moreover, when the military tribune Quintus Laberius encourages Fisher's Caesar to attack Britain immediately, the latter seems hesitant:

CAESAR
First, let's advise, for soon to ruin come
Rash weapons which lack counsel grave at home.
LABERIUS
What need consulting where the cause is plain?
CAESAR
The likeliest cause without regard proves vain.
LABERIUS
Provide for battle, but of truce no word.
CAESAR
Where peace is first refused should come the sword.
LABERIUS
But 'tis unlike their self-presuming might
Will curbéd be with terms of civil right.
CAESAR
'Tis true, yet so we stop the people's cry,
When we propose and they do peace deny. (I.ii.43-52)

In this quasi-stichomythia, Caesar's superior strategic shrewdness borders on deviousness. Even though he knows the Britons will reject his offer, he intends to propose peace before waging war so as to defuse in advance any accusations of tyranny. Such a cold premeditating attitude further undermines the possibility of a legitimisation of the Roman attack on Britain.

Another avenue through which the Romans attempt to justify their expansionist claims is by fashioning their expedition as a civilising mission, which would readily resonate with "the civility vs. barbarousness paradigm espoused by early modern colonialism" (Kerrigan 2006: 113; Armitage 2000: 48-52). The Romans describe their opponents as savages, whose "bulks" (IV.iv.13) and "statures tall and big, / With blue-stained skins and long black dangling hair, / Promise a barbarous fierceness" (II.iv.10-2). Caesar himself says that "they are rude / And must be frighted ere we shall be friends" (II.iv.33-4). Their very rudeness, in the Romans' view, bespeaks the Britons' need to receive civilising support. Later on, upon the news of the arrival of fresh forces from the Picts and the Scots during the first martial encounter between the Romans and the Britons, Caesar cries out:

What, still fresh supplies come thronging from their dens?
The nest of hornets is awake. I think,

Here's nature's shop. Here men are made, not born,
Nor stay nine tedious months, but in a trice
Sprout up like mushrooms at war's thunderclap. (III.i.17-21)

Caesar first animalises the Britons by imagining them to be spurting out from dens like wild beasts or buzzing out from nests like hornets. Then, the natives' disturbing alterity is exorcised with the monstrous fantasy of Britain as a place where men are forged in a flash rather than after nine months' gestation, which contains an echo of Erasmus's famous comment *homines non nascuntur, sed finguntur*, whose meaning is, however, twisted from positive to negative. The point here is not the potential for improvement and self-fashioning but monstrosity. The Britons' backwardness – which in fact contrasts with the nobility they display on the battlefield – prompts Caesar to explain to Mandubrace that he has embarked in such an enterprise "For your good, more than mine, that happier sky / May bless your towns with peace, your fields with plenty" (IV.i.42-3), in a scarcely credible attempt to dissimulate his real intent.

The depiction of the ancient Britons as primitives is rooted in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century rediscovery of the historical (as opposed to the Galfridian legendary) barbarous origins of Britain – as especially circulated by William Camden's *Britannia* (first Latin edn 1586, English trans. 1610) and John Speed's *The Historie of Great Britaine* (1611) and *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine* (1611) – a rediscovery that went on to develop a mutual relationship with the British colonial enterprise. As Richard Hingley (2008: 19-20) notes, "the encounter with the indigenous people of the American territories made it possible for the British to envisage how their ancestors might have lived in those times that reached far before Caesar's invasion". At the same time, however, this new knowledge of ancient Britain contributed to moulding overseas policy, insofar as it put forward the civilisation of those savage people as a just cause for British colonial ventures. This is visible in a number of writings promoting colonial travels. The statement of Robert Johnson (London alderman and Deputy Treasurer of the Virginia Company from 1616 to 1619) that "we had continued brutish, poore and naked Britaines to this day, if Julius Caesar and his Roman legions . . . had not laid the ground to make us tame and civill" (Johnson, *Nova Britannia*, C2^{r}) is akin in spirit to the cleric Samuel

Purchas's comment in a marginal note to *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas his Pilgrimes* (1625):

> Were not wee our selues made and not borne ciuill in our Progenitors dayes? and were not Caesars Britaines as brutish as Virginians? The Romane swords were best teachers of ciuilitie to this & other Countries neere vs. (Purchas 1625: 1755)

The key point of such widespread arguments promoting colonies was that violence against overseas populations could be seen as legitimate if it was to be employed for the higher purpose of bringing culture and civility (and hence Christianity) to those savage populations, just as Caesar had done with the ancient Britons (Fitzmaurice 2003: 139; Hingley 2008: 60). The publicist of the Virginia Company Robert Gray (1609: C4r) openly stated that

> all Polititians doe with one consent, hold and maintain that a Christian King may lawfullie make warre upon barbarous and savage people . . . [if] the war be undertaken to this end, to reclaime and reduce those Savages from their barbarous kinds of life, and from their brutish and ferine manners, to humanitie, pietie, and honestie [...]. And Lipsius alledgeth Saint Augustine for proofe hereof whose words are these, *Qui licentia iniquitatis eripitur, utiliter vincitur*. Those people are vanquished to their unspeakable profite and gaine.

Gray's stress on "humanities, pietie and honestie" is consistent with the widespread tendency in Jacobean colonial rhetoric to put *honestas* before *utilitas*. As Andrew Fitzmaurice (2003: 3) explains, "profit and possession [...] were secondary aims or were denied to be aims at all. [...] For early English would be colonisers, glory had to be separated from profit and allied to the exercises of virtues such as [...] justice in the treatment of the native". Even though such attitudes did generally bespeak a genuine contradictoriness and ambivalence in the *Weltanschauung* of the promoters of colonial enterprises, they "frequently disclaimed the intention to dispossess and then proceeded to do precisely that" (p. 192).

This broader context of colonial promotion seems directly to impinge on *Fuimus Troes*. First, that Caesar's civilising claims lack credibility is apparent in the fact that the Romans' supposed superiority as sneeringly flaunted by Laberius – "A fly is not an

eagle's combatant, / Nor may a pygmy with a giant strive" (II.iv.46-7) – ultimately takes the shape of subterfuge, with Caesar getting the better of Nennius only by poisoning his own sword. More importantly, however, Caesar's claim that "I long to view / This unknown land and all their fabulous rites / And gather margarites in my brazen cap" (II.iv.36-8) inadvertently calls into question any potential cultural or scientific justification of his expedition the very moment it is uttered, as the actual motive behind Caesar's decision seems his historically documented passion for pearls – the primary reason why he went to Britain in the first place according to Suetonius (*Life of Caesar*, 47.1) – rather than a humanitarian desire for civilisation. Incidentally, Fisher's choice of the unusual noun "margarites" rather than the more common "pearls" here may be interpreted as a further spur to the audience to think of the colonial enterprise, as it would have readily reminded them of Thomas Lodge's *A Margarite of America* (1596) – though it may simply be a result of Fisher's desire to stay close to Suetonius, who uses the genitive "margaritarum". That such a way of justifying his enterprises is quite customary for Caesar and the Romans is subtly shown by Laberius's comment that "Now Caesar speaks like Caesar" (II.iv.40). The play is clearly expressing some scepticism on the kind of propagandistic rhetoric justifying the invasion of foreign lands at all costs on pseudo-civilising, scientific and cultural rather than economic grounds of which we have seen a few examples above.

Caesar's appetite for pearls is the play's earliest hint at the rapacity of Roman colonial policy. "Rome's avarice and pride" (II. vii.20) is repeatedly attacked in the play and at times even implicitly acknowledged by the "proud usurpers" (II.vi.82) themselves. For the Britons, Rome is a "ravenous wolf", an "imperious monster", a "seven-headed hydra" "armed with foreign spoils" (II.i.35-6, 72). Here, Fisher is extensively drawing upon the imagery routinely associated with Rome as the cradle of *superbia* and *saevitia* in early modern English drama (Ronan 1995: 108-50). The Britons attack the Romans as veritable parasites that prosper "by our spoil" (IV.iii.55), "covetous rogues / Who spoil the rich for gain and kill the poor / For glory? Blood-suckers and public robbers" (III.i.26-8). This litany of accusations is poignantly encapsulated by Cassibelane's raging harangue levelled at Caesar's and Rome's expansionism:

The enragèd foe
With cruel pride, proud avarice, hath spoiled
From east to west, hunting for blood and gain,
Your wives and daughters ravished, ransacked towns,
Great bellies ripped with lances, sprawling babes,
The spouse about her husband's neck run through
By the same spear. Think on these objects,
Then choose them for your lords who spoil and burn
Whole countries and call desolation peace.
Yield, yield, that he, ennobled by our spoils,
May climb the Capitol with triumphant car,
You led, fast-fettered, through the staring streets
For city dames to mock your habit strange
And fill their arras-hangings with our story. (V.ii.34-47)

A greedy, bloodthirsty, rape-addicted, destructive and sadistic force, the Caesar populating Cassibelane's fantasy rejoices at exhibiting the shackled Britons as exotic curiosities during his triumph through the streets of Rome. The British King even "anachronistically" associates Caesar's army with Tacitus's famous "ubi solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant" (Tacitus, *Agricola*, 30.5), which in *Agricola* is actually uttered by Calgacus, the chieftain of the Caledonian Conspiracy who fought (and lost) against the Roman army led by Agricola in 83-84 CE. With those words, Calgacus implies that what the Romans call empire is in fact a series of destructive and rapacious activities designed to increase their wealth and glory through the unscrupulous subjugation of others. Fisher significantly inserts this sentence in his play, aware that it would instantly recall Tacitus's work. In *Agricola* as much as in *Fuimus Troes*, the Romans are portrayed as avaricious, vicious and oppressive, and their victory is only partly due to Agricola's martial prowess; it is especially to be attributed to the corruption of the ancient Britons' virtues by Roman vices.

5. Rome, Britain and *translatio imperii*

More importantly, however, Caesar's and Rome's rapacious and destructive expansionist practices as depicted in *Fuimus Troes* would also quite readily recall the Habsburg Empire, at once an antagonist and a model for British claims to *imperium*: as Fitzmaurice (2003: 140) points outs, "English promoters repeatedly called for

the emulation of the Spanish success". Fisher's play abounds with passages fostering this identification. First of all, the Roman eagle, a symbol that very effectively combined "Rome's reprehensible tyrannical and savage side with a glimpse of her more admirable aspects" (Ronan 1995: 111-2), and would have probably prompted spectators and readers alike to associate ancient Rome with the Habsburg Empire, is referred to – often ominously – roughly ten times in the play (Prologue.33, I.i.10, I.ii.SD, II.iv.46, III.iii.32-3, III.vii.58-9, IV.i.13, V.v.10, V.vi.44). Secondly, Caesar's typical *superbia* and ambition – like Alexander the Great, he wishes there were more than just a world to conquer (I.ii.12-4) – would very effectively recall the legendary hubris commonly associated with the Spanish Habsburgs. As a matter of fact, Cassibelane's question in his legation to Caesar "Seeing your empire's great, why should it not suffice? / To covet more and more is tyrant's usual guise" (II.iv.16-7) sounds like a plain criticism of Philip II's *motto Non sufficit orbis*, "The world is not enough" (whose ultimate source is Juvenal's Tenth Satire), coined after the unification of the Iberian Crowns of Spain and Portugal as the first truly global empire in 1581. Finally, the Holy Roman Empire is even more clearly alluded to when Caesar boasts that

> Our empire from Quirinus' narrow centre
> Doth, circling, spread, and finds no brink nor bottom.
> Titan no later sets nor earlier wakes
> Than he beholds our provinces. (IV.iv.42-5)

The name Titan is here used to refer to Helios, the Greek god of the sun. Fisher is therefore making Caesar sound a lot like Charles V, who famously boasted that the sun never set on his lands. As David Armitage (2000: 32) remarks, Charles's empire "was the nearest the post-classical world would come to seeing a truly worldwide monarchy, […] the closest approximation to universal *imperium* since the last days of the *Imperium Romanum* itself".

To such a threateningly engulfing notion of empire – "Is no nook safe from Rome?" (I.iii.67), desperately wonders Rollano – the Britons oppose the notion that "Rome must keep her bounds / Or fish for tribute in the dreadful deep" (V.v.51-2): the Roman Empire should somehow respect a sort of natural boundary represented

by the sea surrounding Britain. On the one hand, the Britons put forward the Christian-like idea that you should not do to others what you do not want to be done to you – "To lose what Jove you gave, you'd think it but unjust" (II.iv.18) – which strikes a similar note to an idea expressed by Cicero in Kyd's *Cornelia* precisely in connection with an attack on Rome's unscrupulous expansionism[4]. On the other hand, the Britons flaunt an ideal of national self-sufficiency that is the exact opposite of Roman expansionism: "We have a world within ourselves" (II.i.80), says Nennius to express the idea of Britain's isolation (Marshall 2000: 116-7), ultimately recalling Virgil's well-known phrase *penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos*, but perhaps more immediately echoing the Queen's son Cloten's similar statement that "Britain's a world / By itself" in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (III.i.12-3).

The notion of Britain's isolation had a significant appeal in Renaissance England, since "the traumatic break entailed by the Reformation, cutting England off from most of the continent, encouraged the English to regard themselves as inhabiting a world apart" (Schwyzer 2004: 5). By the second decade of the seventeenth century, however, Britain's insularity was no longer "used to explain the lack of overseas possessions and to congratulate the English in particular on their insular self-sufficiency, their indifference to expansion [...], and their ennobling distance from the scramble for territory and trade being fought between the great Catholic powers of the Continent" (Armitage 1998: 112). On the contrary, it was interpreted in a completely antithetical manner, as a way to promote "the Virginia Company's embryonic ventures" (p. 112) and encourage Britain to expand its empire in the New World in order to rival the Spaniards, as occurs in a 1612 ballad:

[4] "For heaven delights not in us when we do / That to another, which ourselves disdain: / Judge others as thou wouldst be judged again / And do but as thou wouldst be done unto. / For, sooth to say, in reason, we deserve / To have the self-same measure that we serve. / What right had our ambitious ancestors, / Ignobly issued from the cart and plough, / To enter Asia? What, were they the heirs / To Persia or the Medes, first monarchies? / What interest had they to Africa, / To Gaul or Spain? Or what did Neptune owe us / Within the bounds of further Britain? / Are we not thieves and robbers of those realms / That ought us nothing but revenge for wrongs?" (Kyd, *Cornelia*, I.132-7).

Who knows not England once was like
a Wildernesse and savage place,
Till government and use of men,
that wildnesse did deface:
And so Virginia may in time,
be made like England now. (qtd. in Armitage 1998: 112)

The point had become that England had been a savage land until the Roman conquered it and brought there civility; now the British would be able to do the same with the New World. Fisher, however, seems closer to the old interpretation of Britain's isolation and appears hesitant wholeheartedly to embrace a colonial model akin to the Romans' and the Habsburgs', perhaps also on the strength of the awareness that previous British colonial efforts more openly directed to expedience and profit had miserably failed.

It is therefore with more than an ounce of scepticism that the audience find themselves looking at Mercury's final celebration of *translatio imperii* to Britain:

The world's fourth empire Britain doth embrace.
The thunder-bearer, with a Janus look,
At once views ruddy morn and cloudy west.
Her wings, displayed o'er this terrestrial egg,
Will shortly hatch a universal peace,
For Jove intends a favour to the world. (V.vii.20-5)

Mercury is here the herald of a providential design ultimately resulting in universal peace; his words partake of a constellation made up of the prophecy uttered by Lantonus that the British lion and the Roman eagle will be united by an embrace of the two Cs – and there may very well be a pun here on "sees" (as in the see of Rome) – of Cassibelane and Caesar (III.iii.31-6); Cassibelane's equating the fall of Britain with the end of the world (V.ii.17-8); Caesar's paradoxical transformation into an Augustus-like herald of peace and prosperity ("It is my glory to end all with peace", V.vi.4); a number of references to Astraea, the goddess of justice whom Virgil had predicted would return to earth for a new golden age (I.iv.98, III.viii.16); and to millennial imagery (V.ii.16-21). However, such allusions to a Virgilian *imperium sine fine* (numerous as they may be) are difficult to take at face value in the light of what the

play shows. In other words, they fail to annihilate the subversive questioning of Rome's civilising power and influence that dominates the play.

As noted above, *Fuimus Troes* as a whole seems in fact to express ambivalence towards the British desire to emulate the Roman Empire, tinged with the fear that Britain might be consumed by expansionist aspirations that could dangerously come to resemble those of its Roman and Habsburg counterparts. The repeated attacks on the *modus operandi* of the Roman Empire go a long way to render Cassibelane's warm welcome of the ultimate union between Rome and Britain hollow at best, thereby significantly contributing to undermining the *translatio imperii* apparently celebrated by Mercury:

> The lion and the eagle do design
> The British and the Roman states, whose arms
> Were painted with those animals; both fierce,
> Weary at last conclude. The semi-circles,
> First letters of the leaders' names, we see
> Are joined in true love's endless figure. (V.vi.44-9)

The "masculine embrace […] invoked rhetorically as a figure for the new relation between Rome and Britain" (Mikalachki 1995: 303) seemingly puts on the same level Cassibelane, tellingly defined as *imperator Britannorum* in the list of *dramatis personae*, and Caesar, thereby uniting the two Cs much as occurs in *Cymbeline* (V.vi.471-7). However, Cassibelane's subsequent words tell quite a different story:

> Since the great guide of all, Olympus' king,
> Will have the Romans his viceroys on earth;
> Since the red, fatal eyes of crow-black night
> Fling their malignant influence on our state;
> Since Britain must submit, it was her fame
> None but a Julius Caesar could her tame. (V.vi.62-7)

The Britons' submission is here not only political but also religious, as they bow to Jove's will and receive their divine appointment from him rather than from their own god. And even though it is true that "*translatio imperii* made it possible to interpret submission as the

price of an imperial destiny" (Kerrigan 2006: 133-4), Cassibelane's words actually seem to describe a meagre consolation for the Britons (who have to submit to the mighty Caesar and not an ordinary enemy) rather than the start of a glorious path towards universal peace; as Matei-Chesnoiu (2015: 101) observes, "for the defeated Britons, the Roman eagle has turned into a crow, the symbol of bad omen". Hence, the play's apparent celebration of *translatio imperii* cannot but sound flimsy, especially in the light of Caesar's celebration of his umpteenth conquest:

Now, the Tarpeian Rock o'erlooks the world,
Her empire bounded only by the ocean,
And boundless fame beats on the starry pole.
So Danube, crawling from a mountain's side,
Wider and deeper grows and, like a serpent,
Or pyramid reversed, improves his bigness
As well as length, till, viewing countries large,
And fed with sixty rivers, his wide mouth
On the Euxine sea-nymph gapes, and fear doth stir,
Whether he will disgorge or swallow her. (V.vi.52-62)

Caesar's celebration of the ominously hypertrophic Roman Empire he describes trumps the existence of some sort of natural boundary for the Romans' territories as claimed by the Britons. The image of the serpent returns here, in a much broader context, in connection with the Danube and, by extension, with the Empire as a whole. As Matei-Chesnoiu (2016: 101) again points out, "the river Danube here is […] a threatening and fearful force of nature representing indomitable conquest", which "does not suggest a benevolent civilizing force, but a threatening tyrannical power that engulfs individual identity and is maintained by fear".

Even more fascinatingly, to the more learned spectators and readers, Caesar's mention of the Tarpeian Rock would have recalled an anecdote recounted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Roman Antiquities*, IV.59.1-61.4) and Livy (*Roman History*, I.55.5-7) providing an explanation for the Tarpeian Rock having been renamed Capitoline Hill. The story tells that during the digging for the construction of a new temple for Jupiter, the workmen uncovered a man's severed head, still dripping blood. The Etruscan divines who were asked to provide an explanation of the omen after the

Roman ones had failed to do so interpreted the portent to mean that Rome would become the head (*caput*) of all Italy. Therefore, the hill on which they had found the head was renamed Capitoline (Varro, *On the Latin Language*, V.41). Side by side with this interpretation, however, there coexisted another, which would be also famously alluded to by Andrew Marvell in his *Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland* (1650):

So when they did design
The Capitol's first line,
A bleeding head, where they begun,
Did fright the architects to run;
And yet in that the state
Foresaw its happy fate. (ll. 67-72)

The finding of the severed head could indeed be construed as meaning that violence would lie at the foundation of Rome's glory, which would in turn be marked by the eternal recurrence of that same foundational violence. This had been also obliquely stressed earlier in the play through the presentation of the Britons as "the heirs of mighty Brute" (II.i.63) as opposed to that of the Romans as "Romulus' race" (II.i.9), with the audience subtly reminded that the history of Rome had begun with a bloody fratricide and Remus's violent death. Caesar's reference to the Tarpeian Rock can therefore be seen as intended subtly to evoke the indissoluble connection between Rome and violence, thereby reinforcing the overall criticism of Roman expansionism in the play.

6. *Fuimus Troes* and Charles I

The notion of a *translatio imperii* from Troy to Rome to Britain was not only endorsed by James but remained crucial to the massive propaganda around his son Charles, who in the first part of his reign was increasingly willing to cast himself as Emperor of Great Britain, even more grandiosely than his father. Court panegyrists such as the Scot George Lauder moulded the monarch as successor to his late brother Henry Frederick as the new champion of British Protestantism. In the propagandistic celebrations of the king, Charles would surpass the Romans, overthrow the Habsburgs and

rule a worldwide empire – even though no such thing was ever to happen – and in the court masques of 1631-32 he was consistently associated with Roman triumphs (Miller 2001: 119-27).

Fisher's scepticism about the idea of *translatio imperii* seems to be in some respects combined with a preoccupation with Charles's internal political direction. This seems to be conveyed through the play's depiction of the dangers of monarchical overreach, which might subtly air worries about the beginning of Charles's so-called eleven years' tyranny (1629-40). After Eulinus mistakenly kills Cassibelane's nephew Hirildas, Britain's *concordia*, the Britons' effort "to make / One soul inform three bodies" (I.iii.21-2), is exposed as extremely shaky and fragile. Cassibelane worryingly seems more interested in achieving revenge for his own satisfaction rather than genuinely concerned with the good of his country. This inevitably endows Cassibelane with some tyrannical valences, at least in the traitors' eyes.

As James himself had specified in *Basilikon Doron*, while a good king places his utmost satisfaction in his subjects' prosperity, a tyrant "inuert[s] all good Lawes to serue onely for his vnrulie priuate affections" (James VI & I, *Basilikon Doron*, 20). An exchange between Androgeus and Mandubrace seems to frame Cassibelane as a tyrant who has used his deviousness to seize power and now administers it without scruples, but whose reign is for this very reason built on shaky ground and kept with the constant fear of assassination (III.viii.31-47). And if Themantius is convinced that "A body politic must on two legs stand" (V.v.37) rather than be led by a single person, Mandubrace – who plainly labels Cassibelane "The tyrant" (IV.iv.72) – even hints at the prospect of tyrannicide: "A tyrant's only physic is phlebotomy" (III.viii.69). After Nennius's death, Cassibelane's tyrannical display is a tremendously severe blow to Britain's stability. A seventeenth-century audience would have easily related with the notion that tyranny is a very well-trodden path to internecine conflict: "No way half so quick / To ruinate kingdoms as by home-bred strife" (V.ii.8-9), bitterly ascertains Belinus. Civil conflict, in turn, renders a country dangerously ripe for foreign conquest, which is exactly what occurs in *Fuimus Troes*, where internal dissension is repeatedly foregrounded as the decisive element for Caesar's victory.

The question of tyranny is also touched upon in Caesar's dialogue with the priest Hulacus in V.i. Caesar asks Hulacus if he can foresee

the perils he will have to go through in his future endeavours. Hulacus replies by prophesising a series of glorious enterprises and even Caesar's apotheosis. More interestingly, however, the priest warns Caesar twice to "shun the Senate house" (V.i.37, 44) and ominously concludes:

Be Saturn, and so thou shalt not be Tarquin.
A Brutus strong
    Repays in fine
Thy brutish wrong
    To Brutus' line. (V.i.45-9)

While Hulacus's repeated admonishment would readily recall Shakespeare's soothsayer advising Caesar to "Beware the Ides of March" (*Julius Caesar*, I.ii.19, 25), his final prediction – besides framing Caesar's assassination as deserved punishment for his illegitimate attack on Britain – creates an even stronger bridge with Shakespeare's play, where Brutus decides to murder Caesar because he suspects he will prove to be a second, tyrannical Tarquin, rather than a just king reigning over a golden age like Saturn, whom Virgil had likened to Augustus (rather than Caesar) in his *Eclogues* (IV.6). With the benefit of hindsight, Hulacus's words end up sounding chillingly prophetic as a warning to Charles, who would meet a fate akin to Caesar's a few years after the publication of *Fuimus Troes*.

7. Conclusion

Eerily looking forwards into the future as much as backwards into the past, *Fuimus Troes* is a play deeply embedded in its cultural and political *milieu* in spite of its academic origin. For one thing, Fisher's portrayal of Caesar is heavily shaped by and in dialogue with other Tudor and Stuart cultural depictions of the Roman leader. This is evident not only in Caesar's well-known hubris, destructiveness, duplicity and viperousness, but also in the significance subtly attributed to the menacing power associated with his name, which the Britons are at pains to avoid uttering. Even more interestingly, in harshly criticising the hypocrisy, violence and rapaciousness of Roman (and, by analogical extension, Habsburg and potentially British) expansionist practices, the play also expresses a certain

scepticism about the notions of *translatio imperii* and *imperium sine fine* that were extensively associated first with James and then with Charles by Stuart panegyrists in their imperial propaganda. The matter of the Roman conquest of ancient Britain, however, is also dramatised in ways that make it directly relevant not only to contemporary foreign policy, but also to contemporary domestic policy, as the play's secondary focus on the ruinous consequences of internal dissension on Britain's *concordia* and *libertas* seems to register the harbingers of the bloody commotion that would tear the kingdom apart in less than a decade.

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