

## **Chapter Six:**

### **A Preliminary Assessment of a Potential German Annexation**

## **Chapter Six: A Preliminary Assessment of a Potential German Annexation**

This chapter presents a preliminary assessment of the likely costs and benefits associated with a potential German annexation during Trajan's reign. This chapter presents a preliminary assessment only, because a comprehensive examination of the likely costs and benefits associated with a German annexation would require far too much space and could easily constitute another dissertation on its own. Therefore, the results presented here are only intended to present a short synopsis of the likely findings for a potential annexation of this region. This assessment is based on an annexation of the entire free-German territory north of the Rhine River, prior to or in lieu of a Dacian annexation. Although the results would vary if an annexation of the region between the Rhine and the Elbe Rivers was examined,<sup>777</sup> this has not been undertaken because it is unlikely that this limitation would have provided Rome with any significant benefit over that of an annexation of the whole region, particularly as the likelihood of increased hostility from the remaining free-Germans situated beyond the Elbe River would have counter-

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<sup>777</sup> The suggested termination point that Augustus sought.

acted any benefits resulting from an annexation and garrisoning of a smaller geographical region.

This chapter will present a case favouring a Dacian annexation over an annexation of free-Germany, as Dacia would have been seen to present significantly more beneficial results for Rome than a German annexation during Trajan's reign.

### *Trajan and Germania*

It is clear that Trajan had significant experience in Germania prior to becoming princeps, and likely had an understanding of the ethnographic, political and geographic situation beyond the Rhine. Trajan spent the winter of AD 97/8 at Colonia Claudia Agrippina.<sup>778</sup> Apparently, Trajan was first hailed imperator while in command in Germany.<sup>779</sup> Trajan was probably governor of Upper Germany at the time of his adoption by Nerva.<sup>780</sup> At the time of Trajan's transferral to the Rhine, troops from Germania superior were actively engaged in the Black Forest region and those from Germania Inferior were

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<sup>778</sup> Bennett, *Trajan Optimus Princeps: A Life and Times*, p.49.

<sup>779</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid.

fighting the Bucteri.<sup>781</sup> Trajan appears to have been charged with formalising the frontier system which Domitian had initiated.<sup>782</sup>

Trajan would have had access to relatively detailed geographic information about Germania as a result of the numerous campaigns previously conducted in the region, and Varus' period as governor beyond the Rhine. As has already been discussed in the first chapter of this work, it was common practice for the Romans to keep relatively detailed itineraries of regions in which they were campaigning,<sup>783</sup> therefore it can be assumed that several itineraries describing Germany existed, dating back at least to the reign of Caesar.

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<sup>781</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid., p.49.

<sup>783</sup> Austin and Rankov, *Exploratio*, p.116.

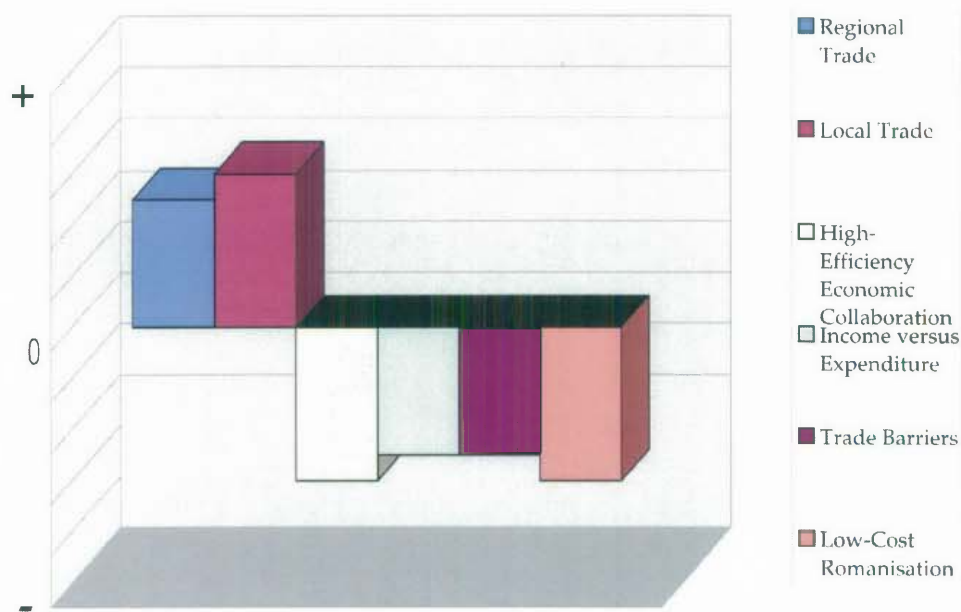


Fig. 37. German Economic Advantage Summary

## Economic Factors

### Regional Trade

Although the Germans were known to have engaged in regional trade with some of their nearby neighbours, an annexation of Germania would only have provided Rome with a minor economic advantage.<sup>784</sup> The Germans were known to on-sell Roman goods to their northern neighbours in Scandinavia.<sup>785</sup>

A Roman annexation of Germania would have provided Roman traders

<sup>784</sup> This factor has been rated as a +2 on the numerical indicator scale.

<sup>785</sup> W. Weber, "The Antonines," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, eds. F. E. Adcock, S. A. Cook, M. P. Charlesworth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), p.350.

with direct access to regional trade that Germania was conducting with the regions to the north.<sup>786</sup> Additionally, prior to the Dacian annexation, there is some evidence of German tribes engaging in trade with the Dacians;<sup>787</sup> trade between these regions appears to have been relatively minor at this point and predominantly favoured the Dacians. The Romans would only have gained a minor advantage from the increased regional trade they would have gained direct access to after an annexation.

## Local Trade

An annexation of Germania presented the potential to gain significant local trade advantages, albeit over a period of time.<sup>788</sup> The majority of German trade was conducted with the Roman Empire, therefore the Roman *limes* along the Rhine River allowed Rome to tax all exchanges crossing this border in either direction.<sup>789</sup> That the Romans were engaged in significant trade with the free-Germans is clearly demonstrated by archaeological finds and to a

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<sup>786</sup> Brogan, "Trade between the Roman Empire and the Free Germans," p.196.

<sup>787</sup> See Regional Trade Chapter 4.

<sup>788</sup> This factor is rated at +6.

<sup>789</sup> T. Mommsen, *The Provinces of the Roman Empire from Caesar to Diocletian*, trans. William P. Dickson, vol. 1 (Chicago: Ares Publishers Inc., 1974), p.123.

lesser degree by contemporary literary references.<sup>790</sup> Recent evidence suggests that the Germans were engaged in relatively vibrant trade with Rome and its provinces.<sup>791</sup> Some of this trade, it is clear, dealt in the chief industries of Germania during this period,<sup>792</sup> such as cattle-rearing and agriculture.<sup>793</sup> The quantity of available surpluses produced by the Germans for sale however must be questioned as their farming was most likely geared predominantly towards subsistence production, (the Germans being described by Tacitus as primitive of character,)<sup>794</sup> and limited by the availability of quality agricultural land.<sup>795</sup> There is however some evidence that the Germans traded in perishable goods.<sup>796</sup> The evidence for the scale of this trade is relatively meagre as perishable goods leave little archaeological evidence. A wax tablet found near Leeuwarden provides some evidence that the Germans were engaged in, at least small scale, sales of cattle to the Romans.<sup>797</sup>

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<sup>790</sup> Tac., *Germ.*, 41.1; Pitts, "Relations between Rome and the German 'Kings' on the Middle Danube in the First to Fourth Centuries A.D.," p.55.

<sup>791</sup> Tac., *Ann.*, II.62; *Ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>792</sup> Ekholm, "The Peoples of Northern Europe: The Getae and Dacians," p.71.

<sup>793</sup> Agricultural produce of Germany seems to have been largely restricted to the production of grain: Tac., *Germ.*, 26.1-4.

<sup>794</sup> Tac., *Germ.*, 26.1-4.

<sup>795</sup> Matyszak, *Enemies of Rome*, p.171.

<sup>796</sup> Brogan, "Trade between the Roman Empire and the Free Germans," p.219.

<sup>797</sup> *Ibid.*

Roman traders were often found beyond the frontiers of the Empire. In the case of Germania, the presence of Roman traders in this region is undoubted, as is highlighted by the Roman traders recorded in the territory of the Marcomanni during the reign of Maroboduus.<sup>798</sup> Tacitus clearly identifies several German tribes that were engaged in at least some form of regular trade with Rome during the period under consideration, such as the Frisii, Hermunduri and Marcomanni.<sup>799</sup>

The Romans would likely have gained a significant local advantage from a German annexation, but this would likely only have developed over a period of some time as Roman influence encouraged the Germans to develop practices to increase the production of surpluses,<sup>800</sup> and developed the Roman transportation networks that would significantly reduce the transport-related costs associated with trade in Germania.<sup>801</sup>

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<sup>798</sup> Tac., *Ann.*, II.62.

<sup>799</sup> Tac., *Germ.*, 41.1; Brogan, "Trade between the Roman Empire and the Free Germans," pp.196-200.

<sup>800</sup> Often this was spurred on by the need to pay taxes in coin, not in kind.

<sup>801</sup> Greene, *The Archaeology of the Roman Economy*, p.40: the costs associated with the transport of goods on unmade roads was approximately twice that of the costs of transporting the same goods on Roman roads.



## High-Efficiency Economic Collaboration

The chances of Rome achieving high-efficiency economic collaboration in the short to medium term after a conquest of free-Germany were relatively poor, and would have provided Rome with a significant disadvantage,<sup>802</sup> at least in the short-term. Unlike Dacia, even though the Germans had undoubtedly been exposed to the Roman economic system and the tribes living closest to the Roman frontier largely utilised a three metal coinage system, the German economy and economic infrastructure could not be considered sufficiently compatible with the Roman economic institutions to allow for rapid high-efficiency economic collaboration. Pitts has suggested that many of the tribes in the interior of free-Germany were utilising coins only as bullion not as a coinage system,<sup>803</sup> further indicating that the likelihood of high-efficiency economic collaboration was slim.

Although some degree of craft specialisation and centralisation for

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<sup>802</sup> This factor has been rated at -6.

<sup>803</sup> Tac., *Germ.*, 5; Brogan, "Trade between the Roman Empire and the Free Germans," p.206, demonstrates that the Germans predominantly used Roman silver coinage; bronze coinage finds which would demonstrate the use of a coinage system for day-to-day transactions are not common before the third century AD.

Germany can be demonstrated,<sup>804</sup> this was only the case in a minority of German communities, and a huge investment in economic infrastructure would have had to have taken place to secure high-efficiency economic collaboration. Additionally, an attempt to centralise the German administration would have been required to achieve high-efficiency economic collaboration, which the Germans were not accustomed to and would have been difficult, time-consuming and expensive to implement.<sup>805</sup>

### **Income versus Expenditure**

The majority of the region occupied by the free-Germans did not possess significant mineral wealth,<sup>806</sup> dramatically reducing the potential for ongoing income that could exceed the expenditures associated with an annexation of

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<sup>804</sup> Pitts, "Relations between Rome and the German 'Kings' on the Middle Danube in the First to Fourth Centuries A.D.," pp.45; 46.

<sup>805</sup> The Marcomanni were somewhat of an exception to this generalisation, displaying some centralising force over their immediate region, in part by subjecting many smaller tribes to their authority: Ibid., p.46.

<sup>806</sup> With the notable exception of plentiful bog iron in the northern part of Germany. However the gathering of bog iron is time-consuming, and it is of an inferior quantity to mined iron ore, significantly reducing its value to the Romans: Brogan, "Trade between the Roman Empire and the Free Germans," p.214.

this region.<sup>807</sup> Any conquest of Germania would have been extremely expensive in terms of manpower used in the conquest and required to adequately garrison the region afterwards; Domitian had utilised five legions and many auxiliaries during his Chattan war. Domitian celebrated a triumph in AD 83, which proved to be premature as by AD 84 it was proven that the Roman forces had not even been able to do enough damage to this one German tribe to weaken them sufficiently to prevent them attacking another German tribe the very next year.<sup>808</sup> The manpower likely to have been required to conquer the whole of Germany would have been substantially higher and would require a substantial investment of time. The lack of centralisation evident in Germania would have further increased the investment of manpower required to defeat and garrison the Germans.

### **Changes in Trade barriers with the Conquered**

It is clear that trade barriers existed between the Roman provinces south of the Rhine and the free-Germans to the north. These trade barriers however were mostly of Roman instigation,<sup>809</sup> therefore an annexation of the

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<sup>807</sup> This factor has been rated at -5.

<sup>808</sup> A. King, *Roman Gaul and Germany* (London: British Museum Publications, 1990), p.167.

<sup>809</sup> There is some evidence for the existence of Marcomannic taxation on trade, but the

free-Germans would not have had any significant positive effect on the Roman ability to trade beyond this frontier.<sup>810</sup> The Germans were neither sufficiently centralised to impose trade barriers, nor were they concerned with limiting trans-Rhine trade with the Roman Empire. Therefore, the Romans would not have gained any advantageous changes in trade barriers if they had annexed free-Germania.

### **Potential for low-cost Romanisation**

The free-Germans did not possess centralisation in any true sense. Although there is some degree of centralisation evident, this occurred mostly in regions nearest to the Roman Empire, and certainly did not extend to the central parts of Germania. This lack of centralisation would have made the annexation and Romanisation of a German province beyond the Rhine an expensive and hard-fought proposition.<sup>811</sup> Tiberius' diplomatic policy largely prevented the centralisation of the Germans, primarily because a centralised Germany would have posed a significantly higher threat to the Roman Empire.

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evidence also indicates that the Marcomanni waived this tax for Roman traders: Pitts, "Relations between Rome and the German 'Kings' on the Middle Danube in the First to Fourth Centuries A.D.," p.47.

<sup>810</sup> This factor had been rated at -5.

<sup>811</sup> This factor has been rated at -6.

It could therefore be argued that the Roman threat minimisation strategy in place also reduced the potential for low-cost Romanisation of the region after an annexation.

A lack of centralisation in Germania can be demonstrated by an examination of native structures and communities. Regions that possessed fortified communities in central locations can present some evidence of centralisation.<sup>812</sup> Between the Halstatt and early La Tène periods the archaeological evidence suggests that the majority of communities were engaged in the on-site production of pottery, iron and textiles, producing subsistence goods for their own requirements, demonstrating neither craft specialisation nor centralisation.<sup>813</sup> There is evidence of some exceptions to this, including Steinsburg in Thuringa and Neuenburg near the Black Forest, both of which appear to have been metal-working production centres.<sup>814</sup> There is also some limited evidence of political centralisation in Germany, but this was largely restricted to the Marcomanni who had incorporated several smaller nearby tribes.

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<sup>812</sup> Groenman-van Waateringe, "Urbanization and the North-West Frontier of the Roman Empire," p.1039.

<sup>813</sup> Wells, "The La Tène Period in Germany," p.9.

<sup>814</sup> Ibid.

A lack of centralisation suggests that Rome would have been forced to take individual control of disparate tribal groupings in order to implement an acceptably usable centralised system to ensure the success of remote governance. This would have been difficult to implement as the Germans were not accustomed to either the production of substantial surpluses and craft specialisation necessary for centralised trade exchange, nor were the Germans accustomed to indirect or remote government, where they would not have had direct daily contact with their rulers. The removal of direct contact with their rulers might well have led to some discontent.

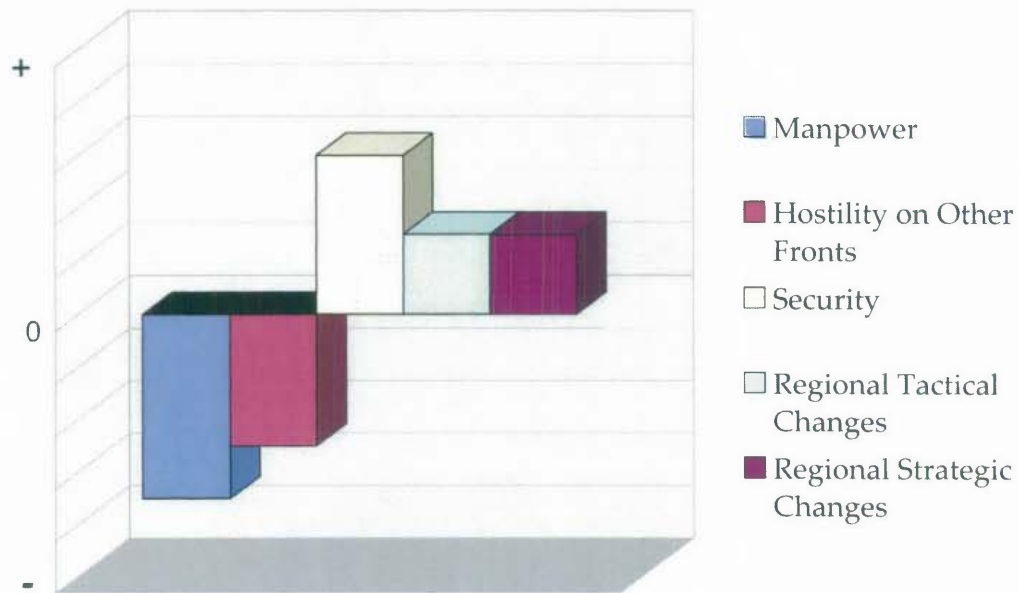


Fig. 38. German Geopolitical Advantage Summary

## Geopolitical Factors

### Manpower

The first geopolitical factor to be considered is the size of the force required to subdue and garrison the Germans. It is likely that the Romans would have required a large force to effect an annexation of all the Germans north of the Rhine, and a large garrison would have had to remain in Germany for a considerable amount of time after the completion of the annexation in order to effectively control the de-centralised population and start the process of Romanisation. Therefore, it is likely that manpower requirements for a potential annexation of this region would have amounted to a significant disadvantage for Rome.<sup>815</sup>

The Augustan annexation of Germany between the Rhine and the Elbe Rivers, although successful for a time,<sup>816</sup> was by no means comprehensive. Augustus' garrison consisted of three legions supported by some auxiliary troops. Dio's description of Augustus' annexation of German territory north of the Rhine indicates that only certain areas had been brought under Roman

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<sup>815</sup> This factor has been rated at -7.

<sup>816</sup> Dio, LVI.18.2.

dominion:

The Romans were holding portions of it – not entire regions, but merely such districts as happened to have been subdued.

Dio, LVI 18.1

This is contrary to Augustus' claims,<sup>817</sup> and limits its value as a gauge by which to measure the forces necessary to complete an annexation of the whole region during Trajan's reign. It demonstrates, however, that three legions with the support of the frontier troops on the Rhine were insufficient to maintain the security and peace of the province. Additionally, Augustus' attempted annexation is interesting partially because the Romans continued to maintain the forces they had stationed on south side of the Rhine,<sup>818</sup> suggesting that Augustus did not feel, even during this annexation's most successful period, that the Germans had been sufficiently subdued to move the frontier forward without endangering the security of Gaul.

Dio's account of the Varan disaster demonstrates that the Germans were not kept subdued by the garrisoning forces present in the region north of the

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<sup>817</sup> Aug., *Res Gestae*, 26.2.

<sup>818</sup> Dio, LVI.18.4.



Rhine.<sup>819</sup> The German decisions not to openly revolt and to draw the Roman garrison away from their supporting forces stationed on the Rhine demonstrate that the German leadership was more concerned about a combination of the garrisoning forces and those stationed south of the Rhine.<sup>820</sup> This leads to the conclusion that the three legions under the control of Varus were insufficient to control the relatively limited area annexed during this period, and that a more extensive annexation of the region would have required a substantially larger garrison to have been effective. After the Varus defeat the Roman army stationed on the southern side of the frontier was increased to eight legions, with a force of auxiliaries whose number is difficult to determine.<sup>821</sup>

Oldfather, primarily writing about Tiberius' and Augustus' reigns, suggests that there can be little doubt that Rome could have mustered the forces required to annex Germania; he bases this opinion on the fact that Augustus was able to muster 15 legions to put down a Pannonian revolt.<sup>822</sup>

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<sup>819</sup> Dio, LVI.18.4.

<sup>820</sup> Dio, LVI.18.4.

<sup>821</sup> Mommsen, *The Provinces of the Roman Empire from Caesar to Diocletian*, pp.118-19: the auxiliary forces of the upper German army in the reigns of Domitian and Trajan has been estimated by Mommsen at approximately 10,000 troops.

<sup>822</sup> Suet., *Tib.*, 16; W. A. Oldfather, "The Varus Episode," *The Classical Journal* 11, no. 4 (1916): p.228.

This opinion however assumes that the forces required to quell the Pannonian rebellion would have been equal to the task of annexing Germany, and that they could be spared from other duties for the time required to affect this annexation without endangering the empire. Oldfather also indicates that a mere three years before the loss of Varus' army, 12 legions were assembled against Maroboduus.<sup>823</sup> That it was felt necessary to mobilise 12 legions against a single, albeit the most powerful, German tribe suggests that even if the 15 legions used in Pannonia could have been spared to annex Germany, they may have proved insufficient to complete the annexation of the whole region.<sup>824</sup>

Furthermore, Oldfather argues that because Augustus had the military capacity, in his opinion, to annex the Germans and did not do so, Augustus' intent was not to annex Germany at all.<sup>825</sup> This seems unlikely based on the evidence that Varus, who in addition to not being a military leader of any renown, was tasked with the job of setting up a German province, and was

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<sup>823</sup> Ibid.

<sup>824</sup> Note that Oldfather's article is based only on the conquest of territory between the Elbe and the Rhine. Oldfather, "The Varus Episode," pp.226; 228.

<sup>825</sup> Oldfather, "The Varus Episode," p.230.

apparently having some success.<sup>826</sup>

One of Tiberius' first acts as emperor in AD 14 was to send six legions under the command of Germanicus across the Rhine river into Germania.<sup>827</sup> The defeat of Varus had tarnished the image of the empire as the pre-eminent military force in the region, and weakened the psychological frontier that Rome was careful to protect. The psychological deterrent that the Romans cultivated in order to help prevent threats from beyond the frontier was an important and conscious factor utilised to increase Roman security.<sup>828</sup> Tiberius likely felt that he needed to re-establish the authority of Roman military might, and may have harboured some ideas of regaining the territory between the Rhine and the Elbe. Continued difficulties in the region apparently convinced him that a German annexation was too costly to pursue, with the damage Germanicus had been able to inflict on the Germans being sufficient to salvage the honour of the empire.

Germania's lack of centralisation, which has been discussed in the

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<sup>826</sup> Dio, LVI.18.2.

<sup>827</sup> Matyszak, *Enemies of Rome*, p.172.

<sup>828</sup> Tac., *Ann.*, XV.31.2; Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire, from the First Century A.D. To the Third*, pp.33; 195-200.

low-cost Romanisation section, would have significantly contributed to the manpower required to effectively garrison the region. A lack of centralisation in a newly-annexed region meant that the Romans would likely need to provide significantly larger garrisons than would otherwise be required. An examination of the Claudian annexation of Britain in AD 43 demonstrates that the number of troops required to secure the non-centralised tribal regions, such as those of the Cornovii, was significantly greater than those required in centralised regions such as those of the Catuvellauni.<sup>829</sup> Due to the lack of centralisation in pre-Roman Germania an annexation of these people would very likely have required a substantial investment of manpower in order to effectively secure this region. The numerous tribes described by Tacitus each with their own leaders would not only have to be subdued,<sup>830</sup> but then garrisoned, which would significantly add to the expense associated with a potential annexation in this region. This factor was clearly understood and considered by Cerialis during the Batavian rebellion AD 70:

it is impossible to maintain quiet peace between tribes without the use of armed forces; these cannot be kept up without pay, nor pay without tribute.

Tac. *Hist.* IV, 74.

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<sup>829</sup> Millet, *The Romanization of Britain*, p.50.

<sup>830</sup> Tac., *Germ.*, XLI-XLII.

Millett's discussion of the British annexation suggests that decentralised regions with multiple political nuclei required between two and three times the number of garrisons than would be required in centralised regions,<sup>831</sup> further highlighting the fact that an effective garrison for Germania would have been very large and costly. Additionally, it is likely that troops would have had to have remained stationed on the Rhine border to protect the Gallic provinces from incursion by German rebels; the length and nature of this frontier would have required substantial manpower, unlike Dacia where the majority of the population of Dacia was contained within the Carpathian ring by the legions stationed at Apulum and Berzobis.<sup>832</sup>

### **Hostility on other Fronts**

The Romans were faced with the potential for a significant increase in hostility on other fronts if they had annexed Germania.<sup>833</sup> Although the Romans already controlled many of the regions nearest Germania: Britain, Pannonia, and Dalmatia, based on the assumption that this annexation occurred prior to or in preference to a Dacian annexation, the regions immediately to the

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<sup>831</sup> Millett, *The Romanization of Britain*, p.49.

<sup>832</sup> See Dacia map legionary placement. p.256.

<sup>833</sup> This factor has been rated at -5 for the purpose of the numerical indicator scale.

North and East of Germania would have remained problematic to Rome. To the East the Romans faced the Iazyges, their sometime ally, and the Dacians, either of which presented the potential for increased hostility after a German annexation. Additionally, the Romans might have faced a new enemy in the north of the newly-constituted province.

## Security

The Romans of the late republic and early imperial period clearly thought of the Germans as a significant security risk and a major threat to the empire.<sup>834</sup> The quantity of forces the Romans stationed on the German frontier clearly demonstrates how serious they perceived this risk to be.<sup>835</sup> The works of Tacitus further clarify this perceived risk, and that it was a common fear amongst the early Roman emperors that the Germans would seize any opportunity to invade Roman territory if they felt that the frontier was weakened.<sup>836</sup> The Romans had learnt that a well-organised German army under the command of a competent leader could be a formidable and

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<sup>834</sup> Dio, LVI.23; the fourth century Roman writer Ammianus Marcellinus still referred to the Germans as 'our implacable foe': Amm., 21.11.12; this factor has been rated at +6.

<sup>835</sup> Eight legions, four each in Germania superior, and inferior after the Varan disaster see Mommsen, *The Provinces of the Roman Empire from Caesar to Diocletian*, p.119.

<sup>836</sup> Tac., *Ann.*, 11.18; Tac., *Germ.*, 37.

dangerous force.<sup>837</sup> Although some modern authors<sup>838</sup> have argued that the German armies did not pose a significant threat to the Roman forces they faced, largely as a result of the paucity of quality metal weapons and armour, a simple assessment of this kind does not provide an accurate illustration of the actual threat that the German forces posed, or the Roman perceptions of the threat. This is demonstrated by the fact that Rome had suffered several defeats at the hands of the Germans in the past, arguably the most notable of which was the defeat of Varus and the three legions he commanded in the Teutoberg forest near Kalkriese in AD 9. This perception is supported by Caesar's commentaries on the Gallic war, where he describes the fear felt by his soldiers upon news of a German approach:

So great a fear suddenly seized the whole army that it disturbed the hearts and minds of all in no small degree...They could not control their looks nor at times hold back their tears...Wills were signed and sealed everywhere throughout the whole camp.

Caesar, *Gallic War*, I.39.

It can be argued that Caesar exaggerated the threat that the Germans posed in order to increase his own glory at overcoming the difficulties they presented

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<sup>837</sup> Todd, *The Northern Barbarians 100 B.C. - A.D. 300*, p.47.

<sup>838</sup> Oldfather, "The Varus Episode," p.229.

to his conquest of Gaul, but Caesar's praise for the abilities of his enemies is a clear acknowledgement by one of Rome's greatest generals that the German forces posed a significant and realistic threat to the Roman forces he led.<sup>839</sup>

The reality was that it would have been unlikely that the Germans would have been able to cause any significant and lasting damage to the Empire, as their forces were not able to unify for any significant period of time, making a lasting conquest very unlikely.<sup>840</sup> Instead the damage they could cause might interrupt trade and frontier security, keeping the Roman legionaries actively engaged in a series of attacks that would have cost the Empire significant amounts in terms of manpower and financial losses.

No matter how poorly-armed the German warriors were, they managed to defeat the Roman armies sent against them on more than one occasion. The destruction of the three Varian legions at Kalkriese, one of the worst defeats in Roman history,<sup>841</sup> clearly had an effect on the Romans and on their frontier policy in the region. This is demonstrated by Augustus' recommendation that any idea of advancing the German border northwards be abandoned after

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<sup>839</sup> J. H. Ross, "In Behalf of Caesar's Enemies," *The Classical Journal* 34, no. 8 (1939): p.460.

<sup>840</sup> Oldfather, "The Varus Episode," p.229.

<sup>841</sup> Dio, LVI.24; Tac., *Ann.*, II.26.



this episode,<sup>842</sup> and the fact that, for the most part, this recommendation was heeded.

At times as they did at Kalkriese, the Germans were able to field armies of significant size, which might have been able to threaten the security of the Empire's frontiers. Although this demonstrates a degree of unity, as these forces consisted of the soldiers from several tribes, instances of demonstrable unity were the exception rather than the rule. The greatest mitigating factor to any threat posed by the Germans was their lack of unity. This often prevented them from assembling large forces and maintaining an army of any considerable size for the duration required to significantly damage Roman interests.<sup>843</sup> It is clear that the German leadership were not able to maintain the supplies or supply-lines required to feed a large force for any period of time.<sup>844</sup> Therefore, although the threat posed was perceived as considerable,<sup>845</sup> the German threat was usually limited to small raids over the border into Roman territory, disturbing nearby provinces and temporarily disrupting

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<sup>842</sup> Dio, LIV.9.

<sup>843</sup> Oldfather, "The Varus Episode," p.229.

<sup>844</sup> Tac., *Germ.*, 30; A.K. Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army at War 100 BC - AD 200* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). p.47.

<sup>845</sup> Dio, LVI.23.

trade in the search for booty. The Roman leadership utilised mostly non-military solutions to minimise the German threat. Tiberius' use of diplomacy to breed internal discontent ensured that the Germans remained unable to form a coalition that might have proven itself dangerous to Rome. Therefore, Tiberius' recall of Germanicus, although described as an act of jealousy on the emperor's part by Tacitus, can be explained as a desire to stop the drain of money and manpower for very little gain.

A successful annexation and garrisoning of free-Germany would have significantly added to the security of the Empire in the medium to long terms, but not in the short term. A combination of political measures, a physical deterrent in the form of the *limes* along the Rhine and Danube border and the presence of a large Roman military contingent provided a relatively effective restraint, particularly against medium to large forces likely to cause significant damage to the Roman-German provinces. As demonstrated by Tiberius' recall of Germanicus,<sup>846</sup> these measures were believed to be more cost-effective than an annexation of the free-German territories.

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<sup>846</sup> Tac., *Ann.*, II.26-27.

## Tactical and Strategic Advantage

A German annexation would have provided some tactical and strategic advantages particularly for any potential future campaigns against the Iazyges or the Dacians east of Dacia.<sup>847</sup> The Germans being the western-most enemy of Rome north of the Rhine-Danube line however means that a conquest of Germania would not have broken the contiguous line of enemies in the region. Therefore, a potential German annexation would not have provided any strategic or tactical advantage over the Parthians or the Roxolani east of Dacia, limiting the value of this annexation. Conversely, the imposition of a Roman force in Dacia, the physical separation of the Iazyges and Roxolani resulting from this annexation, and the Roman control of contact between these two related peoples functioned as an effective threat reduction, mitigating the need for the Romans to take direct military action against them.

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<sup>847</sup> Each of these factors has been rated at +3 for the purposes of the numerical indicator scale.

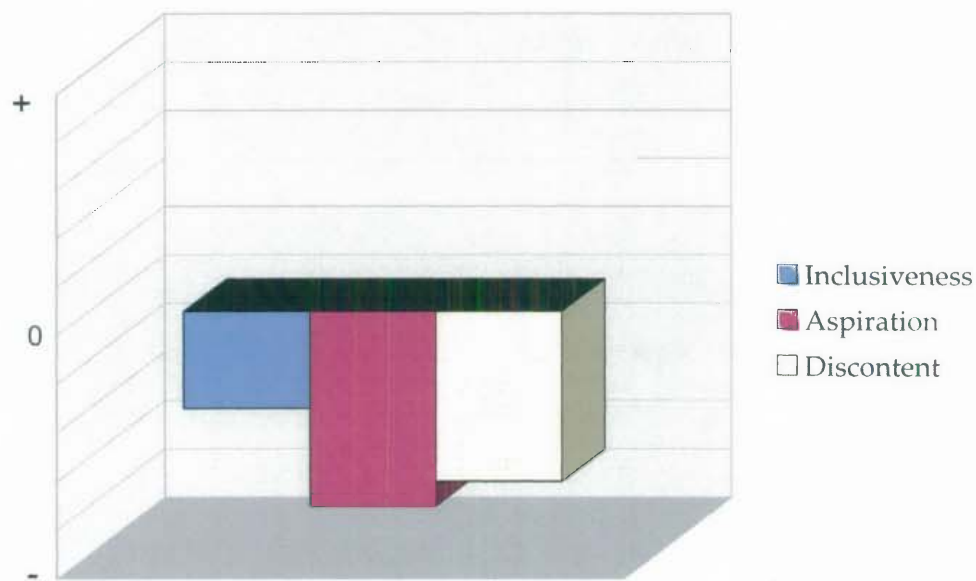


Fig. 39. German Systemic Advantage Summary

## Systemic Frustration

### Inclusiveness

The standard Roman policies in regards to this factor are easily demonstrable,<sup>848</sup> however, previous experience in Germania is likely to have resulted in a modified policy resulting in less inclusiveness.<sup>849</sup> The Augustan annexation of Germania demonstrated the willingness of the *princeps* to include the native elite of this region in the newly-formed province, however the fact

<sup>848</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>849</sup> This factor has been rated at a -4.

that this resulted in a successful rebellion against Roman authority makes it likely that these levels of inclusiveness would not have been repeated, at least in the short term, as the risks of another native rebellion were too high.

## **Aspiration**

It seems highly unlikely that a majority of German tribal leaders would have willingly submitted to Roman annexation. The events following Augustus' annexation illustrate this clearly, suggesting the likelihood of a substantial disadvantage to Rome.<sup>850</sup> The Germans demonstrated only isolated and minimal examples of any desire to become more Romanised. The German desire to become more Romanised of their own accord seems largely limited to the desire to engage in more active trade with the Romans. Maroboduus' trade relationship with Rome demonstrates that Roman trade was welcomed in the region. However the Roman system of governance and decision-making were alien concepts to the majority of Germans who were accustomed to direct participation in the decision making process.

Rome had made a clear attempt at annexing and Romanising the Germans during the reign of the emperor Augustus. This attempt met with an expensive

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<sup>850</sup> This factor has been rated at a -8.

failure: the loss of three legions and Varus, the Roman-appointed governor of Germania.<sup>851</sup> This attempt was not totally unsuccessful, and at one stage it appeared that the Germans were adopting some degree of Romanisation as demonstrated by Dio:

The barbarians were adapting themselves to Roman ways, were becoming accustomed to hold markets, and were meeting in peaceful assemblages. They had not however forgotten their ancestral habits, their native manners, their old life of independence, or the power derived from arms.

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and this is further supported by the available archaeological evidence which demonstrates the extensive use of Roman artifacts, coins and Roman-style buildings by the aristocracy.<sup>852</sup>

It could be argued that individual Germans showed a desire to become more Romanised as is demonstrated by their joining of the Roman auxiliary forces in order to earn citizenship; however, many of these enlistments would simply have been the result of German desire to gain an income, and occurred

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<sup>851</sup> Tac., *Ann.*, I.3.

<sup>852</sup> Pitts, "Relations between Rome and the German 'Kings' on the Middle Danube in the First to Fourth Centuries A.D." p.54.

prior to any potential annexation taking place.<sup>853</sup> If Tacitus is at all correct in his descriptions of the German way of life, it was seen as honourable to earn a living through warfare, and the Roman army offered the Germans an opportunity to engage in their preferred method of income generation.

Certain German kings and hence their tribes also associated themselves with the Romans. Segestes, after he was rescued from Arminius by Germanicus reaffirmed his support for Rome and expressed a desire for continued peace under Roman direction, choosing his friends and enemies according to the advantage of Rome.<sup>854</sup> To what degree this demonstrates a desire to actually Romanise as opposed to a demonstration of their need for Roman assistance, mostly militarily or financial, is uncertain. Rome made sure to attach as many German tribes to themselves as they could in order to reduce the potential for a German war. Rome offered political, military and financial assistance to German kings in an effort to keep them loyal to Rome; more often than not the Romans would provide financial assistance to allied kings, however they usually steered away from offering military assistance as military disruptions beyond the frontier served Roman purposes well.

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<sup>853</sup> Brogan, "Trade between the Roman Empire and the Free Germans," p.222; for specific examples of German troops in the Roman auxiliary see Tac., *Ann.*, I.54-56 and II.7-20.

<sup>854</sup> Tac., *Ann.*, I.58.

Tacitus' descriptions of the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius in regards to Germania, although utilising the Germans as a device to illustrate the nobility that he felt the Romans had lost, still illustrates the German desire to remain free of Roman rule, and the differences in the aspirations of these two peoples. Arminius is used by Tacitus to demonstrate the German desire for independence:

Germany will never tolerate Roman rods, axes, and robes between the Rhine and the Elbe. Other countries, unacquainted with Roman rule, have not known its impositions or its punishments. We have known them – and got rid of them!

Tac. *Ann.*, I.59.

The German people demonstrated very few instances where they seemed ready to accept the process of Romanisation and centralisation, not a factor that the Romans could easily change. The Germans were fiercely independent and saw the process of Romanisation as conqueror-imposed slavery.<sup>855</sup> Perhaps the best opportunity that Rome ever managed to get was immediately after the Augustan advancement of the Elbe River, but the actions of Varus, the governor in charge of organising the province, put a swift end to German co-operation in the process. This in turn led to the Germans forming a negative

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<sup>855</sup> Tac., *Ann.*, I.59.



view of the process and its likely results that made them fight all the harder to keep Rome from achieving such a position of pre-eminence again.

Too many German elites would have lost their positions of power within German society after a Roman annexation, and as such the chances for systemic frustration within the German ruling elite, which were accustomed to leading their people to war, would have been very high. This would almost certainly have led, as it did during Varus' governorship, to costly and damaging revolution. An examination of Arminius' campaign against Varus demonstrates that this revolt was clearly led by the upper-class members of the German society.

The Romans understood this, and the only likely way to prevent this turn of events would have been to kill the majority of the native elite, preventing the Roman administration utilising them in the running of the province.

## **Discontent**

The potential for substantial discontent after an annexation of Germania by Trajan was very high.<sup>856</sup> The Augustan annexation and the subsequent

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<sup>856</sup> This factor has been rated as a -7.

mobilisation of political discontent under the leadership of members of the native elite demonstrates the level of discontent possible after a Trajanic annexation of the region. Although some Germans were allied with the Romans, Roman aggression, annexation and the introduction of Roman taxes and coercion could turn allies into enemies.<sup>857</sup>

Tacitus' account of the German rebellion relies on Arminius, the native noble who apparently organised the rebellion that killed Varus and his legions, to present the case the German case for rejecting Roman dominance. The feelings Tacitus has Arminius espouse most commonly describe slavery, brutality, greed and arrogance as the rewards for submission to Roman imperialism.<sup>858</sup> The likelihood that extraordinary coercive or repressive measures would have been required in Germania after its incorporation as a province was high.

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<sup>857</sup> Tac., *Ann.*, II.7.

<sup>858</sup> Tac., *Ann.*, II.8, II.9, II.15.

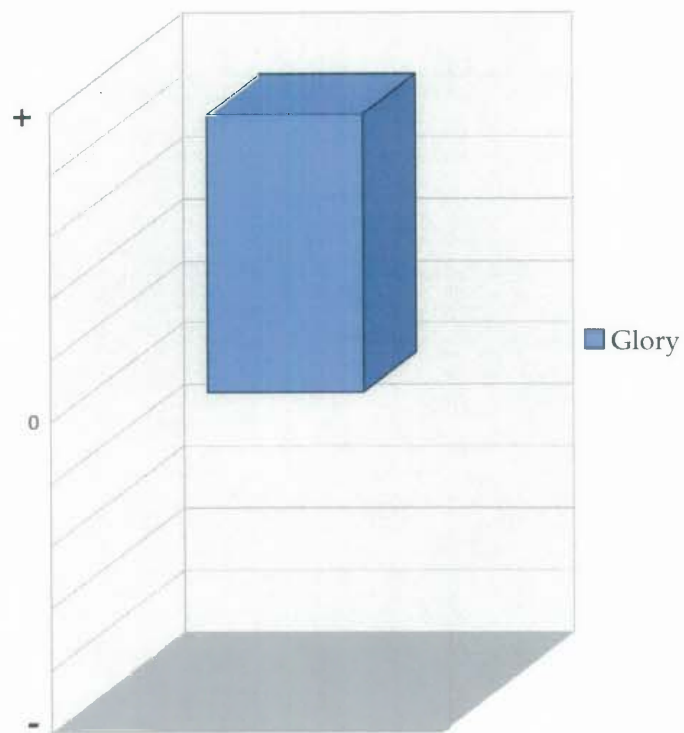


Fig. 40. German Internal Advantage Summary

## Internal Factors

### Glory

Glory as a factor is based as much on the perceptions of a given situation as the realities. Therefore the fact Roman authors had for some time been suggesting that the Germans posed the most significant threat to the Empire would almost certainly have added substantially to the glory won by

an emperor who could conquer this region.<sup>859</sup>

Considering the difficulties that Rome had faced from the German people over a prolonged period of time, and the failure of any attempt to create a lasting German province beyond the Rhine, annexation would have ensured substantial amount of glory for an Emperor that managed to accomplish such a feat.

An annexation of Germania had been considered since at least the time of Caesar. Additionally, Augustus had partially succeeded before losing his gains on the north of the Rhine, and Germanicus had made attempts to extend the boundaries in Germania during Tiberius' reign with some success.<sup>860</sup> Any successful annexation of Germania would therefore have been seen as a major accomplishment, in all probability ranked at least as high as the conquest of Gaul by Caesar.

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<sup>859</sup> This factor has been rated at +9.

<sup>860</sup> Tacitus has Tiberius explain the withdrawal of Germanicus by stating 'I was sent into Germany nine times ... I achieved less by force than diplomacy' but then explains Germanicus' recall as a function of jealousy on Tiberius' part. Tacitus' bias does not make him a credible source in matters concerning the Julio-Claudians, and the quoted passage seems a plausible cause for the withdrawal of the Roman forces to the Rhine.

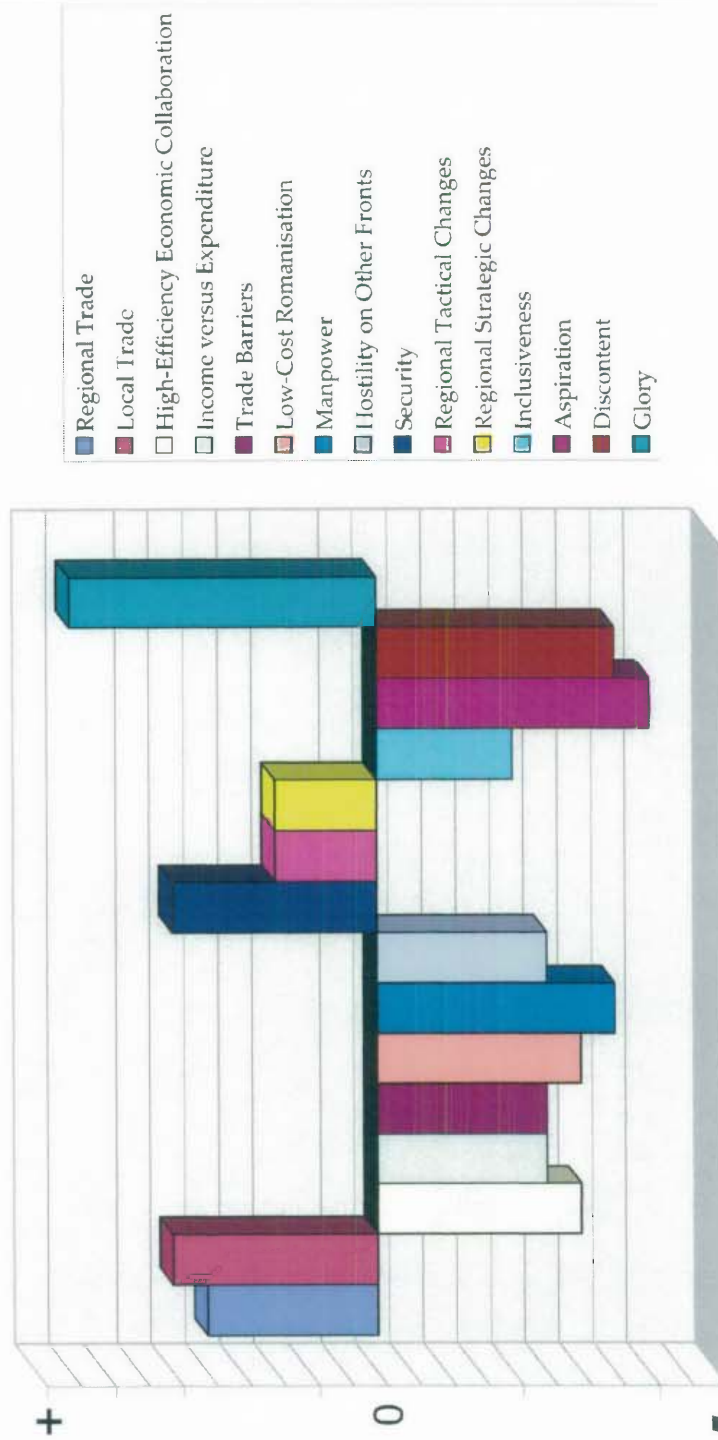


Fig. 41. Overall German Summary

The fact that Germans had on several occasions caused the empire damage and distress, especially the fear felt of a German invasion, would have counted significantly towards the glory a successful emperor would have received. The destruction of Augustus' three legions at Kalkriese and the death of the German governor Varus clearly left a lasting impression in the Roman psyche. Tacitus' account of Germanicus' actions over the Rhine and Tiberius' withdrawal of these forces because of the success he was achieving demonstrate the potential glory that Tacitus, and possibly Tiberius, felt was attached to a successful German annexation. The fact that Tacitus could proclaim that Tiberius' withdrawal of Germanicus was due to jealousy of success demonstrates that success in Germany would add significant prestige to the individual deemed responsible.

Although a potential annexation of Germania by Trajan would have resulted in several advantages including minor advantages in regional trade, strategic and tactical changes, the disadvantages associated with a potential German annexation far outweighed these and made a German annexation at this time unrealistic and dangerous. Trajan's decision not to attempt an annexation of Germania was therefore entirely logical in terms of the likely costs and benefits.