TACITUS' JEWISH EXCURSUS: INTERNAL INCONSISTENCIES IN MYTHIC HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY, AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES

by

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Under the Direction of Erika Hermanowicz

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes internal inconsistencies in Tacitus' Jewish excursus (*Historiae* 5.1-13). It focuses on inconsistencies in terms of the Jews' mythic history, geography, and ethnic identity. In terms of analytical tools, I employ intertextual analyses and postcolonial theory to argue that Tacitus deliberately employs inconsistencies in order to achieve his own literary goals.

INDEX WORDS: Jewish Excursus, Tacitean Ethnography, Synchronism, Ancient Geography, Jewish History.

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INTRODUCTION

Tacitus' Jewish excursus (*Historiae* 5.2-13) is one of the best known passages on Judaism from the ancient world. Tempting as it may be to possess a source on the Jews' history and culture from the view of a Roman elite, the passage does not reflect either the veracity of Jewish history, culture, and religion or even accurately represent mainstream views of Greeks and Romans concerning the Jews. Sadly, a great deal of scholarship concerning the Jewish excursus has focused on issues of accuracy, perceived anti-Semitism, or Tacitus' access to sources. Thanks to this scholarship one can say with a fair amount of confidence that there are a number of anecdotes, facts, and misrepresentations which are unique to Tacitus in the Jewish excursus. This thesis is not concerned with any of these previous issues but, rather, focuses on the literary aspects of the Jewish excursus. Broadly, this thesis asks the question: What role does the Jewish excursus play in the extant portions of the *Historiae*? To answer this question, I aim to look specifically at the use of historical parallels between Romans and Jews, the blending of eastern and western traits for the Jews, and the blurring of ethnic lines between Romans and Jews. Through these three main avenues of investigation I will demonstrate that the Jewish excursus plays an imperative role in the reading of the *Historiae* as a whole due to the implicit comparison Tacitus draws between the Jews and Romans and the dissolution of the boundaries in their respective ethnic identities.

In my first chapter, I discuss Tacitus' use of narrative parallels between Jewish and Roman history, specifically with respect to their myths of origins. Tacitus crafts the

Jews into a people remarkably similar to the proto-Romans of Vergil and Livy. Both peoples are peoples of exile, both peoples are initially detested by others, and both peoples have tremendously ancient roots. The main tool by which Tacitus achieves this comparison is in the use of mythic and epic synchronism. For each of the six myths which Tacitus tells concerning the Jews, he synchronizes the Jews' exile with an event from Greco-Roman mythology, epic, or history. A subordinate tool of Tacitus is the use of Vergilian intertext. Tacitus uses Vergil as a means of drawing attention to his deliberate use of synchronism – particularly his choice of synchronizing with epic chronology.

In my second chapter, I discuss Tacitus' blurring of eastern and western ethnic traits for the Jews. Geography played a fundamental role in describing the cultures of foreigners, and geographies were considered an imperative part of any ethnography both on account of the causal nature of geography as well as their narratological function within historiography. In this chapter I briefly review what role geography plays in ancient historiography, various conceptions of the east in ancient thought, and how these conceptions of east and west effect Tacitus' Jewish excursus. Ultimately, I argue that Tacitus uses geography as a means of deliberately distorting the Jews' ethnic characteristics along with their geographical surroundings.

In my third chapter, I discuss what effects Judaea and the Jews have on the Romans and what effect the Romans have on the conquered Jews. In this chapter, I use some aspects of postcolonial theory to elaborate on the relationship between the conquered subject Jews and the Roman conquerors. I also discuss broadly how the dissolution of ethnic lines plays a pivotal role in the *Historiae* as a whole. This chapter

argues that through the dissolution of traditional ethnic identities, Tacitus' Jews and Romans of AD 69 are affected by a role reversal, with the Jews beginning to act like proto-Romans and the Romans beginning to act like the easternized Jews of the previous sections of the excursus.

Through these three avenues of expertise, I argue that Tacitus draws a comparison between Romans and Jews. The first chapter demonstrates, both people have mythic pasts firmly rooted in the epic tradition as well as significant narrative similarities in their histories. The second chapter contends that the Jews have gradually become Romanized by the Romans just as the Romans' ethnic identity is warped by contact with the East and the Jews. The third chapter claims that the Romans and Jews have affected one another to such a degree that the ethnic boundaries between them have begun to fade. This warped ethnic identity as exemplified by the Jewish excursus forms an important contribution to the reading of the passage as well as to the *Historiae* as a whole.

CHAPTER 1

CLARA IUDAEORUM INITIA: MYTHIC SYNCHRONISM, NARRATIVE PARALLELS, AND VERGILIAN INTERTEXT IN TACITUS' JEWISH EXCURSUS

Introduction

This chapter examines the parallels Tacitus draws in his Jewish excursus (*Historiae* V.2-13) between Roman and Jewish history. In particular, this portion of the thesis focuses on the synchronizing of Jewish and Roman chronologies as well as on similarities between the respective mythic histories and origins of the two peoples. Essentially, the driving question behind this chapter is: What functions do these deliberate comparisons between Romans and Jews achieve within the extant passages of the *Historiae*? This chapter argues that through synchronized chronologies, narrative and lexical allusions to epic, and similar mythical structures, Tacitus attempts to fashion the Jews into proto-Romans – i.e. the Romans of the *Aeneid* and the foundation myths of Livy. This chapter focuses, in particular, on *Historiae* 5.1-4; subsequent chapters will focus on later portions of the excursus.

This chapter postulates that synchronism is not inherently marginalizing, but rather that Tacitus uses synchronism as a tool to draw attention to epic and mythic parallels between the Jews and Romans. While Tacitus writes with a hostile narrative voice about many aspects of Jewish religion, history, and society in later sections of the excursus (particularly in the ethnography proper and in the later sections on contemporary history) the Jews of the first four sections are remarkably similar to the

earliest Romans. Tacitus' Jews are not the completely inverted barbarians of Herodotus (Egyptians as inverted Greeks), nor are they exactly parallel to the Romans. Rather, Tacitus' Jews are Romans seen through a distorting lens, that is, they are distorted Romans, but still recognizable.

Resolving Chronologies – Tacitus' Six Myths

Tacitus provides six different foundation myths with six time frames and five geographical regions for the Jews' origins in the excursus. When he recounts the history of the Jews, he begins by describing their origin myth and synchronizing it with various instances in time for the Greco-Roman reader. The six foundation myths described by Tacitus provide both geographical locations and points in myth and history at which the Jews' migration is believed to have occurred. These are: first, that the Jews came from Crete and fled the island during the reign of Saturn; second, that the Jews fled Egypt during the reign of Isis; third, that the Jews were driven out of Ethiopia by the mythic king Cepheus; fourth, that the Jews were Assyrians who conquered a portion of Egypt and settled there; fifth, that the Jews were a Homeric people called the *Solymi*, and when they founded their capital added the Greek word for holy to the front of their name, thus making *Hierosolyma*. Tacitus' sixth and final myth is described as taking place in historical, rather than mythological, time, about which he claims "Plurimi auctores consentiunt" (Most authors agree)[1]. In this final version of the origin myth, the Jews were the cause of a plague upon the Egyptian land, leading to their exile by King Bocchoris as

[1] Tac. *Hist*. 5.3. The difference between historical and mythological time will be fully discussed and explained in a later section. In short, I mean that historical time is what the ancients considered to have occurred from the first Olympiad, whereas mythological time was everything before the fall of Troy, with a grey period between them. For a general discussion of this concept, see Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginning of History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 68-107. All translations in this chapter are found in Tacitus, *Histories IV-V, Annals* I-III, rev. ed. Edited by Jeffrey Henderson, Translated by Clifford H. Moore and John Jackson, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931)

a means of purification after he consulted the oracle of Hammon. While Tacitus tells six different versions of the Jews' myth of origin, he does not include the myth which the Jews themselves held – the biblical narrative of the exodus – which some scholars believe he may have had access to.[2]

Resolving Chronologies – The Ancient Calendar and Synchronism

Many readings of this reconciling of chronologies have argued that it is inherently marginalizing.[3] Such readings, however, fail to consider many important aspects of ancient time-keeping, specifically the use of synchronized chronology and its use as a means of integration. The languages of ancient Greek and Latin lack a word for a specific date.[4] Time-keeping consisted of harmonizing specific and significant events in different regions and counting up or down from them. Instead of numerical dates on a spectrum, the ancients matched magistracies, battles, and priesthoods in order to create cross-cultural time-keeping.[5] That is, to synchronize is to situate one event taking place at a certain date (for example, the election of the consuls at Rome) with an event somewhere else (the election of a magistrate at Athens). A famous example is Herodotus' claim that the Syracusans' battle of Himera took place on the same day as the Athenians' battle of Salamis. Notwithstanding that Athens and Syracuse would have used completely

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[2] Andrew Feldherr, "Barbarians II: Tacitus' Jews" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Historians*, ed. Andrew Feldherr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 312. I choose to agree with Feldman, Feldherr, and Bloch that while much of the information Tacitus presents can be found in Greek and Latin texts, it is most likely that he read some Jewish sources (including the bible).

[3] For example, Andrew Feldherr has written that "Foreigners' notions of their own history, their land, and the gods who govern it are often integrated into the picture of the cosmos that emerges from Greek myth and science. A place is found for indigenous heroes in the genealogies of Greek myth. Foreign gods, as in Tacitus' *Germania*, are either given Graeco-Roman counterparts, or simply identified by their classical names. Foreigners can thus only be known as they can be translated into the familiar forms and language of Greek though, and this process inevitably implies a margianalization" in Andrew Feldherr, "Barbarians II: Tacitus' Jews" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Historians*, ed. Andrew Feldherr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 303

[4] D.C. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 15

[5] For a general description of this process, see D.C. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 7-42

different calendars, the Athenian reader could place the battle of Himera at a certain point in time relevant to his own calendric point of view. As Feeney points out, for the ancient chronographer "every date is a synchronism."[6] While Tacitus' description of the Jews' origin myth is certainly integrated into Greco-Roman myth and history, Tacitus is incorporating the time-keeping parameters of his day, not inherently marginalizing the Jews, as Feldherr has suggested. With that being said, however, Tacitus' choice of synchronistic markers cannot be overlooked due to the ideological ramifications of choices of markers within ancient synchronism. Such choices warrant further consideration and analysis.

Resolving Chronologies – Choosing Cultures and Events: Elevating Accomplishments through Synchronism

An important aspect of ancient time-keeping to remain cognizant of when discussing synchronism in the ancient world is that an ancient author's choice of a point in time with which to synchronize is neither random nor arbitrary. The choice of points with which to synchronize could just as easily be used as a tool for incorporation as for marginalization. Feeney describes this process elegantly when he states:

> For the composer of synchronisms, it is not a neutral process to choose which events and protagonists in one culture are going to be lined up against which events and protagonists in another culture; even more, as we see with Atticus, it is not a neutral process to choose which cultures are going to be lined up against each other in the first place. We may talk casually about synchronisms between Greece and Rome, but there is no Greek time against which to plot Roman time.[7]

Feeney is describing, in particular, Atticus' choice to use Athenian time to synchronize with Roman time rather than Argive, Spartan, or Syracusan time. Because of Atticus' political, cultural, and literary proclivities, he chooses to synchronize Roman time with

[6] Ibid., 13
[7] Ibid., 23

Athens as the representative of Hellenism. Thus, Rome is placed on the same plane as the cultural, philosophical, and sometimes military leader of the Greek world. In this way, synchronism, while certainly the mechanism by which the ancients were able to tell time cross-culturally, was also a tool which could be used for specific purposes, either to accentuate similarities or to emphasize differences.

Consider also, for example, when a 'less developed' society synchronizes with a more advanced one. As Feeney states, "synchronism is as much a tool of inclusion as exclusion."[8] The Syracusan historian Timaeus of Syracuse, anxious to validate his city's imperial and philosophical ambitions in his history, wrote a history replete with synchronisms with the 'more developed' mainland Greeks. The synchronisms include Euripides dying on the same day that Dionysius became tyrant of Syracuse (the playwright dying the day the patron ascended to the throne) and the thirty tyrants at Athens acquiring power in the same year as Dionysius II did.[9] Timaeus is also the first to situate the rape of Persephone in Sicily, as well as to claim that oratory first developed at Syracuse.[10] The result of this synchronism was that Syracuse and Sicily as a whole held a much more prominent place in history and myth – even appearing to eclipse the 'true' leader of the Greek world, Athens. In effect, synchronism, whether synchronizing events with history or with myth, could be employed as a powerful tool by the ancient historian in crafting a specific narrative, no matter how kitschy or superfluous some synchronisms may appear. For this reason, when studying synchronistic authors from the ancient world,

[8] D.C. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar,* 24
[9] For a description of Timaeus' synchronism in general, see D.C. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar,* 43-67. For this fragment of Timaeus' work itself, see *FGRH* 566 F 105
[10] D.C. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 49. For this fragment of Timaeus' work, see *FGrH* 566 F 164

a close reading of the dates which they employed is imperative in order to understand the specific goals of their narratives.

Resolving Chronologies – Choosing Cultures and Events: Disregarding Accomplishments and History with Synchronism

Synchronism was also employed as a means of depreciating or condescending to another culture. Aulus Gellius' efforts at synchronism, for example, consisted of pairing up significant events in Roman history with Greek history, as well as attempting to synchronize intellectual and literary achievements. Since Rome did not produce its first Latin poet until the 3rd century BC and Greece produced Homer by the 8th century BC, in order for the Romans to compete intellectually with the Greeks, the synchronism process required that he strain some of the synchronisms and write a history with broad temporal parameters. In order to be included with Greek accomplishments, Aulus Gellius used broad synchronism to avoid appearing the lesser people.[11] Thus, rather than appearing the less intellectually productive city, the Romans could disregard the Greeks' accomplishments until a point in their synchronism at which they are able to compete.

Another means by which an older culture could deliberately disregard another culture's accomplishments through synchronism was by 'out-past-ing' other peoples as a means of conferring authority and antiquity to themselves. By way of example, Christians' synchronism of sacred history with Greco-Roman history was a means of showing that the events of the Old Testament took place long before even Homer or Hesiod.[12] Christians frequently demonstrated the antiquity of their sacred history compared to the relatively recent history of the Greeks and Romans through synchronism

[11] Ibid., 33-35
[12] Ibid., 29-31, 78

for a variety of ends.[13] This process also garnered important political cachet for the Christians when they were persecuted as a new religion. Indeed, by including Jewish history within Christian sacred history, Christian chronographers were able to use Moses, who already had a long tradition among elite chronographers, as an ancient founder-philosopher for their religion.[14] For an earlier example, when Castor wrote his work of synchronism which first integrated the near-eastern king lists, he made sure to include the most ancient Greek king he could find, king Aegialeus of Sicyon to ensure that no out-past-ing took place for the Greeks.[15] Feeney refers to this process as "anti-simile," that is to say, to employ synchronism to show how drastically and radically divergent two cultures are.[16]

A third and final means of ignoring other cultures' accomplishments and history through synchronism was by beginning the synchronizing process only when the two cultures intersected in reality, as the Greeks did with the Romans, rather than telling two parallel histories for two cultures before first contact. For the Greek synchronistic historians Apollodorus and Eratosthenes, Roman history did not begin with the foundation of the city of Rome in 753 BC or even with the foundation of the republic in 509 BC, but rather with the Romans' war against Pyrrhus in the 4th century BC.[17] In this process, the centuries of Roman history before Roman contact with the Greeks are placed into what Feeney calls 'allochrony.'[18] Allochrony is when, despite knowledge of another culture's history and accomplishments, they are not mentioned in the synchronistic

[13] For further discussion, see D. C. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 28-32
[14] For a discussion of Moses in the tradition of chronology, see D.C. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 63
[15] Ibid., 63
[16] Ibid., 24-5
[17] Ibid., 24-5
[18] Ibid., 25

history until they intersect with the author's own culture's achievements. In the example from Eratosthenes and Apollodorus, Roman history was static and undeveloped while Greek history was vibrant and producing philosophical, literary, and oratorical achievements.

A nuanced reading of synchronism is required which factors in its practical and ideological functions, as well as the overall context of its development. As we have seen, synchronism could be used as a means to track time easily and it could also be used ideologically to equalize or to denigrate other cultures' political or intellectual achievements. It could be used to include or exclude, as well as to marginalize or incorporate. This aspect of time-keeping must also be kept in mind when studying synchronism in ancient historiography. While one cannot disregard synchronism as inherently marginalizing, at the same time one must not neglect synchronism as a simple tool for time-keeping. Synchronistic timekeeping – while in many ways owing its origins to Hellenistic Greek scholars – expanded tremendously during the late republic.[19] As the Roman world began to integrate thoroughly conquered peoples into its sphere, cross-cultural time-keeping became imperative, not only for the Romans' understandings of foreigners, but also for their own self-understanding, i.e. what was Rome doing and producing while her subjects were independent actors. Tacitus' *oeuvre*, in particular, requires special attention. Consider the fact that Tacitus' works are structured by the ideological use of synchronism: the history of imperial Rome is told in republican time-keeping. Despite the fact that Tacitus' work is divided into hexads based on the emperors' lives, the year by year chronology is still based upon the consular year. Given

[19] For a discussion of the development of synchronism in the late republic, including a discussion of Cornelius Nepos' *Chronica*, Atticus' *Liber Annalis*, and Varro's *De Gente Populi Romani*, see D.C. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 21-28

Tacitus' personal political views towards republican Rome and republican virtues, this synchronism serves an obvious political purpose. As Tacitus describes the crimes of the emperors and the gradual devastation of the senatorial class, he does so within a chronographic frame of reference which draws attention to the two parties. Not only does the content of Tacitus' work encourage the reader to dwell upon the relationship between the *principes* and the senators, even the synchronistic and chronographic structure of the work directs the reader toward this comparison. Tacitus' excursus on Jewish origins is no exception to this ideological use of synchronism.

Tacitus' Myths – Cretan Exiles

Tacitus' synchronizing of Jewish and Greco-Roman time and myth is one of the most marked characteristics of the entire Jewish excursus. While some historians have criticized this passage on account of perceived anti-semitism or inaccuracies, such a flawed reading ignores what Tacitus accomplished through both synchronism and the epic parallels which he draws.[20] Tacitus engages in this synchronizing of time by placing the Jews' exile in various mythical and historical periods, and he provides synchronistic markers for all but one of the foundation myths he tells concerning the Jews. Rather than a reading which focuses on the biases of the author, a reading which analyzes the roles the synchronisms play (i.e. to confer prestige and antiquity on the Jews' origins) is imperative. Tacitus first writes that:

> Iudaeos Creta insula profugos novissima Libyae insedisse memorant, qua tempestate Saturnus vi Iovis pulsus cesserit regnis. Argumentum e nomine petitur: inclutum in Creta Idam montem, accolas Idaeos aucto in barbarum cognomento Iudaeos vocitari.

[20] Chilver and Townend, for instance, write of *Historiae* 5.2-5 "The next four chapters fall sadly below T.'s usual standard as a historian. This is not so much for his anti-Semitism, shared by Seneca…., Persius, Petronius, Martial, and Juvenal … but for the general ignorance and silliness displayed" at Chilver and Townend, *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus'* Historiae *IV and V* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 90

> It is said that the Jews were originally exiles from the island of Crete who settled in the farthest parts of Libya at the same time when Saturn had been deposed and expelled by Jove. An argument in favour of this is derived from the name: there is a famous mountain in Crete called Ida, and hence the inhabitants were called the Idaei, which was later lengthened into the barbarous form Iudaei.[21]

This myth appears to be a uniquely Tacitean interpolation into the mythology of the Jews, whereas for subsequent myths he adheres to traditions established predominantly by Pliny the Elder and Josephus.[22] While it is certainly possible that Tacitus had an earlier (now lost) source for this myth, its uniqueness among surviving texts, as well as its distinctive content, warrant a short exegesis on the passage.

Tacitus' Myths – Blending of Generic Language and Content

Tacitus uses language in this passage as a means of blending the content of epic with the generic conventions of history and oratory and as a means of inserting a potentially original (or at least little-known) myth of origin for the Jews. It is noteworthy that this myth is articulated in indirect statement. An anonymous 'they' recall (*memorant*) these myths of the Jews. This verb governs the first two myths which Tacitus recalls, and various other verbs of assertion govern the rest of the section (which is written entirely in indirect statement). Tacitus' use of indirect statement provides some distance between the narrative voice of the historian and the myths related to the reader. Consequently, Tacitus is able to provide his reader with five different myths without asserting that any one in particular is true – though the final version appears to be the one which Tacitus believes.[23] This use of anonymous 'sources' asserting the details which Tacitus relates is

[21] Tac. *Hist*. 15.2.1 Trans. Ben Nikota, 2014
[22] Guy Chilver and G.B. Townend, *A Historical Commentary of Tacitus' Histories IV and V*, 90-91
[23] Paul Schäfer, *Judeophobia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1997), 31. A discussion of the interaction of all six myths will take place towards the end of this chapter.

not unique to the Jewish excursus in the *Historiae*. In fact, in the extant books of the *Historiae* Tacitus only twice cites authorities.[24] Tacitus frequently uses unnamed written sources which he cites as '*scriptores*' or '*auctores*'. While it is certainly possible that Tacitus is citing sources now lost to the modern scholar, in this instance (the myth of the Cretan Jews), he may be inserting his own invention for his own literary goals or asserting a new but legitimate line of thought. Another interesting feature of Tacitus' language is the use of certain stock rhetorical phrases. Tacitus employs the construction '*argumentum…petitur'* to assert the truth of his claims. This phrase is used, in particular, by rhetoricians including Cicero, Quintilian, and Manilius.[25] Tacitus juxtaposes styles: content and phrases adapted from epic (to be discussed below) combined with stock phrases from history and rhetoric. In this way, the mythical content of epic is blended with the authority of rhetorical and historical prose. This juxtaposition of language and content – the style of history and oratory with content borrowings from epic – is indicative of the early sections of the excursus as a whole: a deliberate generic blending between history and epic.

In terms of the actual content of this passage, Tacitus' first myth, as well as many of the following myths, offers remarkably illustrious origins for the Jews, due predominantly to their antiquity, the prestige which comes with divine association (through Kronos), and the association with Crete and Mount Ida. The use of Mount Ida would have served an obvious purpose for an ancient reader as it is the mountain in

[24] Ronald H. Martin, *Tacitus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 189. For the two citations themselves, see Tac. *Hist*. 3.25.2 and 3.28

[25] Heinz Heubner and Wolfgang Fauth, *P. Cornelius Tacitus, Die Historien, Kommentar, Fünftes Buch,* (Heidelberg: Heidelberg, 1982), 21. For some examples from the passages themselves, see Cic. Fin. 2,32; Quint. Inst. 5,10,20. Manil. 2,450.

which the Zeus as a baby was hidden from his father Kronos. Tacitus illustrates the connection between the Jews and Saturn by setting the exile at the very time when Jupiter drives Saturn from power. This is a significant synchronistic marker. As Saturn is representative of the golden age – an era in which there were no laws due to everyone being just – the fact that the Jews can trace their lineage back to a time of flawless justice also confers great prestige upon them. Another aspect of the Jews' illustrious origins is their description as the *accolas* of Mount Ida. Rather than describing the Jews as a *populus* or *cives*, Tacitus uses the verb *colo*, which has very strong connotations of cultivating, tending, caring for an area or person, and, most importantly, religious connotations of reverence and worship.[26] Thus, the Jews are situated by Tacitus on the island where Zeus was nourished, hidden, and saved, the island where king Minos – another figure associated with justice – is meant to have lived, and they are even called its cultivators – remarkably illustrious origins for a people Tacitus will later refer to as the meanest portion of slaves. Tacitus, as we shall see in the following sections, is rooting the Jews firmly in a mythic, and particularly epic, chronology with an eye towards making the Jews not only an ancient but a just people. Not only are there allusions to the Hesiodic succession of gods, but there are also lexical similarities to passages of exile and foundation in Vergil. When Tacitus presents his first foundation myth for the Jews, he invents one which is heavily indebted to epic for both style and content, and one in which the Jews are illustrious and just.

[26] *S.v. Colo, Oxford Latin Dictionary*, edited by P. G. W. Glare (New York: Oxford University Press), 1982

Tacitus' Myths – Vergilian Intertext

Let us now consider some of the allusions to epic within this passage. Joseph describes Tacitus' allusions to epic as "occurring with uncommon frequency."[27] These epic allusions frequently draw attention to content as well as interplay between the genres.[28] Consider, for example, the episode from *Annales* I when Tiberius refuses to visit the legions. Tacitus describes the decision as "*immotum adversus eos sermones fixumque.*"[29] Vergil, when describing Dido's (ultimately failed) decision to never commit to another man, describes her determination as *fixum immotumque*.[30] Thus, in order to criticize and disregard Tiberius, Tacitus compared him to Dido about to break her own word by using the exact same vocabulary and structure as Vergil. This is but one of myriad Vergilian intertexts present in Tacitus' work.[31] Tacitus' description of the Jews' flight from their homeland to found a new nation also partakes in Vergilian intertext. Tacitus describes the Jews as *profugos*, the very same word which Vergil uses in the second line of the *Aeneid* to describe Aeneas, the Roman founder *par excellence*. Indeed, every time Vergil uses the word *profugus* it is in reference to the Trojans under Aeneas.[32] The word is also used in Livy specifically for his sections on the Roman foundation myth.[33] The word *profugus* holds very different connotations than, say, the word *exul*. *Profugus* is a deliberate Vergilian allusion to a foundation narrative taking place in heroic time. Thus, the fourth word Tacitus employs in his first myth describing the Jews is

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[27] Timothy Joseph, "Tacitus and Epic," in *A Companion to Tacitus*, edited by Victoria Emma Pagán (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 370
[28] Ibid., 370-1
[29] Tac. *Ann*. 1.47.1
[30] Verg. *Aen*. 4.15
[31] For more on Vergilian intertext, see R.T.S. Baxter, "Vergil's Influence on Tacitus in Book 3 of the *Histories*," *Classical Philology* 67: 246-269 and H. Schmaus, *Tacitus ein Nachahmer Vergils*, (Bamberg: Buchner, 1887)
[32] The word appears at Verg. *Aen*. 1.2, 7.300, 8.118, 10.158, and 10.720.
[33] Liv. 1.1, 1.8

probably a deliberate reference to Rome's quintessential poet and founder. The Jews' story begins just as the Romans' does –by *profugi* fleeing their ancestral homeland to found a new city.

In addition, the entire first line (At Tac. *Hist*. 5.2) of the myth of the Cretan Jews appears to be something of a Vergilian intertext. At *Aeneid* 3.121, Vergil writes "*Fama volat pulsum regnis cessisse paternis Idomenea ducem, desertaque litora Cretae*," (Rumor flew that the leader Idomeneus, expelled from his hereditary kingdom, had left the deserted shores of Crete).[34] The construction of "*pulsum regnis*" is used in the exact same way (perfect passive participle with an ablative of separation) for both Saturn and Idomeneus. The same word choice and construction are also used for leaving the fatherland: for Idomeneus, *cessisse regnis*, for Saturn, *cesserit regnis*. Tacitus' use of this intertext with Idomeneus, the leader of the Cretan forces at Troy in the Iliad, makes the reader consider Homeric and Vergilian precedent, and, obviously, draws attention to the Jews' own supposed Cretan background. Furthermore, Crete's function is inverted for the ancient Jews and Aeneas and the Trojans. When Idomeneus is *pulsum regnis*, the Trojans believed they have found their ancient homeland, whereas when Saturn is *pulsum regnis* the Jews must depart theirs. Ultimately, however, the Trojans (just like the Jews) will have to depart Crete as well. Both the ancient Trojans and the ancient Jews lived on Crete, and both the ancient Jews and the Trojans of Aeneas' time were forced into exile when Crete's leader was *pulsum regnis*. The intertext draws a comparison between the mythic histories of the Trojans and Jews and directs the reader to consider the similarities between the two peoples. The difference between the two lies in the fact that while the

[34] Verg. Aen. 3.121. Trans. Ben Nikota, 2014

Trojans left Crete to found a great empire – driven out because they mistook the gods' oracle – the Jews left Crete to become subjects forever, due to the end of the golden age and the rise of Greece. The Romans and Jews had similar cosmological origins with divergent ensuing paths. The connections between the Homeric world and the Jews' exile will be a factor Tacitus explores in later versions of the myth, particularly the third, but it is first alluded to here through Vergilian intertext. Through these two allusions in particular, the use of *profugos* and the reference to Idomeneus, Tacitus invents a myth for the Jews with clear narrative similarities to the Roman foundation myth while at the same time 'out-past-ing' the Romans by situating it in the reign of Saturn. The result is that Tacitus confers prestige on the Jews' origins and establishes narrative expectations for their history. Not only are there broad narrative parallels (exile, foundation, etc.) but even specific shared geographical and lexical likenesses between the two myths. Rather than portraying the Jews as morally repugnant enemies of Rome, Tacitus establishes expectations by making them parallels to the ancient Romans.

Perhaps the most important facet of this first myth, however, is the synchronistic date Tacitus chooses: the reign of Saturn. Some scholars have dismissed this synchronism as Tacitus simply attempting to explain the Jewish Sabbath, since Tacitus muses that there may be a connection between Saturn and the Sabbath at section 5.4.[35] Given what we have already observed concerning ancient time-keeping and synchronism, this is a somewhat simplistic and narrow explanation for Saturn's presence in the myth. For the chronographers of the ancient world, there were fairly standardized temporal markers between mythological and historical time. 'Historical time', for the ancient historian and

[35] For example, Chilver and Townend, *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus'* Histories *IV and V*, 91

chronographer, began with the first Olympiad in 776 BC.[36] Mythological time tended to be everything before the Trojan war, circa 1158 BC.[37] Within this mythological time, before the end of the Trojan War, no dates were tabulated by the ancients. While the succession of generations of gods is well documented in ancient poetry, no chronographer attempted to chart these myths and coherently date them in the way some Jews and Christians counted back from the biblical patriarchs to creation.[38] By placing the Jewish exile to the moment between the reigns of Saturn and Zeus, Tacitus achieves a variety of literary and synchronistic goals. First, as Zeus is obviously king of the gods during the *Iliad*, Tacitus safely places the Jews' exile very far back into mythological time, in the midst of the cycle of the succession of gods. This grants the Jews antiquity and prestige. Second, by drawing attention to the conflict between Jupiter and Saturn, he draws attention to the Jews' home on Mount Ida, their supposed connection to Crete, which in turn assists in the comparison to the Romans. Third, Saturn is almost always associated with golden age myths.[39] The Roman golden age was thought of as a time of prosperity and a time when laws were unnecessary due to the inherent justice of the people. The end of the golden age was signified by Saturn's exile. The end of the golden age necessitated Jupiter's brand of justice on account of the injustice of people. It is thus established that the Jews were forced into exile at the same time as Saturn. There is no reason given for the Jews' exile, though it may be implied they were exiled on account of their association with Saturn. The Jews are thus portrayed as just golden-age leftovers in

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[36] For a discussion on the difference between mythical and historical time, see D.F. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 68-82. For an example the ancients' own view on the differences, see Censorinus' quoting of Varro at *DN* 20.12-21.2
[37] Ibid., 81
[38] Ibid.,78
[39] Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 186

an age of injustice – part of what makes them so strange to Greeks and Romans. In Tacitus' first myth, the Jews appear to have been exiled on account of their just nature.

On the whole, Tacitus' portrayal of the Jews is predominantly a positive one. The Jews, while certainly a people of exile, are never directly stated to have been exiled deliberately – as they are in the sixth myth. For all intents and purposes it appears as if they were exiled purely for their association with Saturn, which in turn makes them just. Antiquity is one of the most respected qualities of the Jews among ancient writers, and by placing the Jews' origins so far into mythic history and from such a religiously significant place, Tacitus accrues prestige for the Jews.[40] Tacitus develops origins and history for the Jews in which they possess illustrious and prestigious origins and even share a great number of traits with the Romans.

Tacitus' Myths – Surplus Egyptian Population: Synchronistic Point

Tacitus' second myth features a different synchronistic point as well as radically different content from the first myth. Tacitus states that "*Quidam regnante Iside exundantem per Aegyptum multitudinem ducibus Hierosolymo ac Iuda proximas in terras exoneratam*" (Some hold that in the reign of Isis the superfluous population of Egypt, under the leadership of Hierosolymus and Iuda, discharged itself on the neighbouring lands).[41] The Jews' Egyptian connection is first asserted by Tacitus in this myth, a connection which will persist in some of the subsequent versions which he tells, particularly the final and 'most accurate' version. In terms of the synchronistic point that Tacitus uses, he once again chooses one firmly rooted in mythological time, the reign of Isis. By situating the exile in the reign of Isis rather than the reign of Zeus, Kronos, or an

[40] Ibid., 177
[41] Tac. *Hist.* 5.2

historical king, Tacitus simultaneously places the myth in prehistoric mythological time and accentuates the perceived Egyptian connection of the Jews. The temporal marker of Isis' reign, however, is ambiguous for the ancient reader. Isis' 'reign' is not an episode in the Hesiodic cosmology in the same way as the crisis between Zeus and Kronos. Consider, for example, Plutarch's text *On Isis and Osiris* and its attempt to situate Isis within the Greco-Roman cosmology. While summarizing the ancient 'scholarship' on Isis, Plutarch writes that Isis is the mother of Dionysus (with Zeus as the father), a contemporary of Typhon, the daughter of Prometheus (a version in which she is wedded to Dionysus), the Egyptian equivalent of Tethys, the daughter of Kronos; and even stating that Isis is synonymous with the earth in a manner similar to Gaia.[42] Thus, to the ancient reader, to claim that the Jews left Egypt during "the reign of Isis" would not act as a synchronistic marker in the same way that the Trojan War or the Hesiodic succession of gods would. Rather, Tacitus provides a deliberately ambiguous date (the reign of Isis) so that the Jews are simply situated somewhere in mythic time. Regardless of the ambiguity, however, Tacitus confers prestige upon the Jews' origins. Isis was associated from the time of Herodotus with Demeter and, more generally, she was considered holy and august by the ancient Egyptians.[43] Furthermore, while members of the cult could be expelled from the city or have their shrines destroyed, the popularity of the cult of Isis was growing among elites in Italy at the time of Tacitus.[44] Thus, Roman elite readers may have had some familiarity with Isis, whether they viewed her favorably or harshly. Tacitus, in this way, simultaneously provides another synchronistic marker accentuating

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[42] Plut. *De Iside et Osiride*, 34-38
[43] Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 188-189
[44] For a discussion of the growth of the cult of Isis, see Beard North and Price, *Religions of Rome, Volume I: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1998), 291-2; 161 for an account of the destruction of shrines and expulsion of members.

the Jews' antiquity and accords prestige to the Jews through their association with Isis, while at the same time maintaining the Jews' foreignness. The use of an Egyptian deity as a synchronistic marker to describe a supposedly Egyptian people asserts the prestige of the Jews' antiquity much like the use of Saturn in the previous myth. The Jews' origins are placed far back in time, so that their history is static, and the use of Isis means that despite any perceived similarities to Romans or Greeks, the reader reads the Jews' antiquity while always recalling their foreignness. While it is certainly the case that no ancient author disputed the antiquity of the Jews, Tacitus chooses to focus on multiple prestigious origins for the people.

Tacitus' Myths – Surplus Egyptian Population: Tacitus' Colonization Narrative

Another remarkable aspect of this second version of events is the motivation for the Jews' exile. In many of the myths which follow, the Jews are exiled from their homeland and are detested by their rulers – in line with Tacitus' later description of the Jews as "*despectissima pars servientium*" (the meanest portion of [their] slaves)[45]. In this version of the myth, however, the Jews' exile is more similar to a Greek colonization narrative than to a narrative of exile.[46] The Jews are under the leadership of two founders – Hiersolymus and Juda – in the same way that Greek colonization narratives feature a particular leader or leaders for the expedition (Such as Battus of Cyrene). Tacitus, however, partakes in some creative editing. Hierosolymus and Juda are also found in Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*. Tacitus omits their genealogy with respect to Isis: namely, that Hierosolymus and Juda were meant to be sons of Isis' arch-nemesis, the monster

[45] Tac. *Hist*. 5.8. Trans. Ben Nikota, 2014
[46] Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 188-9

Typhon.[47] Tacitus never once mentions this connection or Typhon. Rather, Tacitus simply describes the two men as *duces* on their nation's expedition to colonize more land. The omission is a deliberate means by which to confer prestige upon the Jews through their foundation myth. Tacitus consciously alters the mythic history of the Jews and excises their founders' connection to the monstrous. Tacitus' portrayal of the Jews in this myth is overall a positive one with narrative parallels to Greek colonization narratives.

Tacitus' Myths – Ethiopian Exiles: Synchronistic Date and Geographic Location

Tacitus writes, in his third account of the Jews' origins, that "*plerique Aethiopum prolem, quos rege Cepheo metus atque odium mutare sedis perpulerit.*" (many others think that they were an Ethiopian race, which, in the reign of Cepheus, fear and hatred drove to change abodes.)[48] This version of the Jews' foundation seems to be an amalgam of a variety of ancient sources, rather than a Tacitean invention.[49] It is worth positing that, as the book of Genesis asserts that the descendants of Ham populated parts of Africa and Asia, it is possible that Tacitus is also amalgamating some Jewish sources to his tradition.[50] Once again, Tacitus situates the Jews' exile and foundation in mythical time, and even a mythical place. While Ethiopia was and certainly still is a nation and region, the Ethiopia of the ancient world is more associated with epic than actual geography – indeed, it is with the Ethiopians that Zeus is feasting at the beginning of Iliad I as their people are the most beloved by the gods.[51] Tacitus, again, nods to epic with this foundation myth for the Jews, and he does so in a particularly positive way. To say that

[47] Plut. *De Iside et Osiride*, 31
[48] Tac. *Hist.* 5.2
[49] Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 189
[50] At Gen. 10:6-12
[51] Specifically, at Hom. *Il.* 1.423

the Jews descended from the Ethiopians is to associate them with a people who were known in epic for their piety, wisdom, and bravery.

Tacitus' Myths – Ethiopian Exiles: Epic Allusion

Stemming from Ethiopia's associations with myth and epic, Tacitus once again uses Vergilian intertext when narrating the Jews' exile as a means of drawing attention to their antiquity and their place in epic. The phrase which Tacitus uses to describe the factors which led to the Jews' exile, king Cepheus' *metus atque odium,* is a borrowing from Vergil's description of the Phoenician tyrant Pygmalion's motivations for the exile of Dido and her followers.[52] Tacitus has now drawn comparisons between the Jews and the two founder figures of the *Aeneid*. Rather than a deliberate parallel to Aeneas and the Trojans, Tacitus compares the Jews to the 'foreign' founder in the *Aeneid* and the progenitor of Rome's arch nemesis – a telling parallel between the Jews and the Carthaginians considering Tacitus is describing the history of Rome's enemy on their *supremum diem*.[53] Tacitus, as early as the third myth, has begun to subvert his reader's expectations of the Jews. They are first described as founders firmly rooted in the Greco-Roman tradition. By the third myth, Tacitus begins to use the same tools (allusion to epic and narrative similarities to colonization narratives) he had used to fashion the Jews into an epic people to transform the Jews into inverted Romans – more alike to Dido and the Carthaginians than to Aeneas and the Trojans.

Tacitus' Myths – Assyrian Conquerors

In Tacitus' fourth account of the Jewish exile, the shortest of all six, he writes "*Sunt qui tradant Assyrios convenas, indigum agrorum populum, parte Aegypti potitos,*

[52] Verg. *Aen*. 1.361-2, "metus aut… odium"
[53] Tac. *Hist*. 5.1

mox proprias urbis Hebraeas- que terras et propiora Syriae coluisse." (Still others report that they were Assyrian refugees, a landless people, who first got control of a part of Egypt, then later they had their own cities and lived in the Hebrew territory and the nearer parts of Syria.)[54] A unique aspect of this myth is that Tacitus tells this version without satirical comment or challenge.[55] Perhaps the most notable aspect of this passage, however, is the complete lack of a synchronistic date – there is no king, magistrate, or mythical figure to assist the Roman reader in placing this conquest on a timeline. There are only four facts: where the Jews came from, why they left, where they went, and what they did there.

This version of the myth is, however, something of a radical departure from all Tacitus' previous attempts at describing the Jews' origins. Rather than exiles or the lowest subjects of an empire, in this myth the Jews are the imperialists, conquering an area of Syria as their homeland. The fertility of the Jews, first alluded to in the Egyptian version of the myth, is still present here as it is because of a lack of land that the Jews had to conquer their neighbors. Tacitus' portrayal of the Jews is, overall, a positive one given his respect for the ancient empires of the near east on account of their antiquity.[56] This myth continues the emphasis on of the Jews' antiquity, while at the same time maintaining their 'otherness'. This is, perhaps, Tacitus' first attempt at 'easternizing' the Jews – an aspect of the work which will be discussed at length in the following chapter. For now, consider that with each successive myth Tacitus has recounted, the Jews'

[54] Tac. *Hist*. 15.2
[55] Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 190
[56] See Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 63-5 for a discussion of Greeks and Romans' conceptions of the ancient near eastern empires.

original homeland has moved farther and farther east, from Crete to Egypt to Ethiopia to Syria.

Tacitus' Myths – The Homeric Tribe

In Tacitus' fifth account of the Jews' exile he writes "*Clara alii Iudaeorum initia, Solymos, carminibus Homeri celebratam gentem, conditae urbi Hierosolyma nomen e suo fecisse*. (Still others say that the Jews are of illustrious origin, being the Solymi, a people celebrated in Homer's poems, who founded a city and gave it the name Hierosolyma, formed from their own).[57] While this myth still takes part in the folk-etymologizing of the first myth, the fact that the Jews in this version are entirely illustrious, taking their name from a people glorified by Homer, is particularly notable. Indeed, to use the loaded adjective *clarus* for a Roman reader would be some of the highest praise Tacitus could accord to a foreign people.[58] This change in tone is even acknowledged by Tacitus: while the indirect statement continues as it did in the previous myths, Tacitus changed the subject with the word *alii*, i.e., while some people and authors told the myths in which the Jews were exiles, others tell this Homeric version of events in which they are a Homeric people with an illustrious origin. While the synchronism in this passage continues to be firmly rooted in mythological time, it is just on the cusp between mythological and historical time, as Homer's epic obviously take place at the beginning of what Feeney calls the 'grey' period between the Trojan War in the 12th century BC and historical time in the 8th century BC.[59] Tacitus seems to be moving chronologically forward from the earliest foundation myth (the time of Kronos) to the most recent one (through the age of heroes, the early Bronze Age empires, and,

[57] Tac. *Hist*. 5.2
[58] Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 191
[59] Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 79

finally, to the cusp of the historical period). The Solymii allow Tacitus to keep the Jews illustrious, but also assist in easternizing the Jews, as the Solymii were identified as the Lycians by Herodotus.[60] Finally, they version incorporates the Jews into the series of myths from the expeditions to and from troy. This myth also intersects with some of the others in terms of chronology and content, to be discussed in a section below.

Tacitus' Myths – Exile Under Moses

In Tacitus' final and most extended version of the foundation myth of the Jews he writes

> Plurimi auctores consentiunt orta per Aegyptum tabe quae corpora foedaret, regem Bocchorim adito Hammonis oraculo remedium petentem purgare regnum et id genus hominum ut invisum deis alias in terras avehere iussum. Sic conquisitum collectumque vulgus, postquam vastis locis relictum sit, ceteris per lacrimas torpentibus, Moysen unum exulum monuisse ne quam deorum hominumve opem expectarent utrisque deserti, sed sibimet duce caelesti crederent, primo cuius auxilio praesentis miserias pepulissent. Adsensere atque omnium ignari fortuitum iter incipiunt. Sed nihil aeque quam inopia aquae fatigabat, iamque haud procul exitio totis campis procubuerant, cum grex asinorum agrestium e pastu in rupem nemore opacam concessit. Secutus Moyses coniectura herbidi soli largas aquarum venas aperit. Id levamen; et continuum sex dierum iter emensi septimo pulsis cultoribus obtinuere terras, in quis urbs et templum dicata.
> Most writers, however, agree in stating that once a disease, which horribly disfigured the body, broke out over Egypt; that king Bocchoris, seeking a remedy, consulted the oracle of Hammon, and was bidden to cleanse his realm, and to convey into some foreign land this race detested by the gods. The people, who had been collected after diligent search, finding themselves left in a desert, sat for the most part in a stupor of grief, till one of the exiles, Moses by name, warned them not to look for any relief from God or man, forsaken as they were of both, but to trust to themselves, taking for their heaven-sent leader that man who should first help them to be quit of their present misery. They agreed, and in utter ignorance began to advance at random. Nothing, however, distressed them so much as the scarcity of water, and they had sunk ready to perish in all directions over the plain, when a herd of wild asses was seen to retire from their pasture to a rock shaded by trees. Moses followed them, and, guided by the appearance of a grassy spot, discovered an abundant spring of water. This furnished relief. After a continuous journey for six days, on the seventh

[60] Herod. 1.173

> they possessed themselves of a country, from which they expelled the inhabitants, and in which they founded a city and a temple.[61]

Let us first consider this version of the myth in terms of synchronism. It is interesting to note that the final story Tacitus tells, which he claims is the most reliable, is the only version of the story rooted in historical time as opposed to mythical. In the previous five stories the Jews' exile was firmly set in mythological time, but Tacitus undercuts the reader's expectations by providing a foundation myth with a synchronistic date not only situated only in historical time, but at approximately the same moment as the first Olympiad and the foundation of Rome – mid 8th century BC. At the same time, however, he chooses a somewhat ambiguous, problematic date – the reign of king Bocchoris. This version of events stems from Lysimachus in the 2nd century BC, and it was also mentioned in Josephus.[62]There was no accurate date, however, in either Lysimachus or Josephus for the reign of king Bocchoris.[63] He was the only king of his dynasty so his reign can be estimated to have taken place approximately from 770-725 BC.[64] This date is tremendously important for ancient time-keeping in terms of the difference between historical and mythic time. Feeney has written on the difference the ancients drew between mythological and historical time, succinctly describing the ancients' views towards it as:

> Historians, then, fenced off myth from their work in various ways, and one of their reasons for doing this – or perhaps we should say one of their strategies for doing this – was based on the idea that the times of myth were beyond the pale in terms of chronology. For the historians there is no chronology of myth, no set of interlocking synchronistic data that makes a system; there is no 'canon' as they put it.[65]

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[61] Tac. *Hist.* 15.3
[62] Chilver and Townend, *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus'* Historiae *IV and V*, 91. For the passage itself , see Jos. *AP*. I. 304
[63] Ibid., 91
[64] Ibid., 91
[65] Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, 79

Thus, the Romans – operating at a time when 'history' begins with the first Olympiad in 776 BC – situate the founding of their city in 753 BC, conveniently placing their foundation with the beginning of Greek history. The date and the event which Tacitus provides for the Jews' foundation, then, as the most 'reliable', also takes place during the mid-8th century, when ancient historians believed history to have begun.

Another important aspect of this synchronistic date is that the king Tacitus chooses to provide to his reader as a synchronism is a foreign king, rather than a Greco-Roman historical figure. Tacitus, at this juncture, undercuts the reader's expectations which he had built up through his relentless synchronism with Greco-Roman myth. Now, rather than a legendary mythical figure, it is an Egyptian king who comprises a one-man dynasty. Bocchoris is also known for his reception in Greek and Roman texts. Diodorus Siculus wrote concerning king Bocchoris, describing him as a lawgiver for the Egyptians and considering him to be one of the eminent lawgivers of the ancient world.[66] Indeed, not only did Diodorus Siculus rank Bocchoris among Solon and Lycurgus in the Greek world, he even describes Bocchoris' laws as being similar to those of Solon: that is to say, Bocchoris wrote laws concerning debt bondage.[67] Thus, Tacitus situates the myth featuring the leader closest to Greco-Roman leaders and lawgivers, Tacitus, by citing an Egyptian lawgiver simultaneously accentuates the Jews' Egyptian connection as well as the similarities between Bocchoris, his cohort of lawgivers, and Moses. The synchronistic marker (Bocchoris) and the content of the myth (the lawgiver Moses) continue Tacitus' trend of describing the Jews as a just people – given their association with Kronos, Crete (homeland of Minos), and the golden age. There is a tension in the passage, however,

[66] Diod. 1.65
[67] Diod., 1.79

because the exile of the Jews is successful in ending the plague and it certainly does appear that the Jews are hateful to the gods. I would argue that the Jews remain just on account of their Saturnian associations and they are hateful to the new generation of gods. They remain a just people in an age of injustice.

The most important narrative aspect of this passage is Tacitus' description of the Jews under the leadership of Moses. For 'pagan' writers who discussed the Jews, Moses was frequently considered an 'ideal' leader.[68] In this narrative, which, as we have seen, dates to the period of the early Roman kings, Moses is depicted as Romulus and Numa combined: founder and lawgiver of the city as well as author of the religious rites of his people. Moses' depiction as a foreign lawgiver is accentuated by the synchronistic marker Tacitus uses, king Bocchoris, the most famous lawgiver of the Egyptians. The Jews' foundation now begins with exile and ends with the foundation of a city and the creation of its laws by the hands of one man. Furthermore, the details of this myth are found in the biblical account of the exodus. Tacitus is merely massaging some of the facts for his own purposes. These are deliberate narrative parallels which Tacitus draws between the Romans and Jews in order to make them very similar, but not identical. Indeed, rather than a founder who is the son of a deity, like Aeneas, or favored by Mars, like Romulus, the Jews' founder tells his people not to rely on the gods but upon themselves, inverting the trope of a divinely sanctioned founder. After building up the Jews' illustrious origins, Tacitus continues to undercut them with this myth.

While this version of the myth may seem the most overtly hostile towards the Jews on account of its depiction of the Jews as a people abandoned by the gods and a

[68] For a general discussion of Moses in ancient literature, see Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World,* 233-287

people who are a blight upon the land, Tacitus, just as he did in the Isis myth, indulges in some creative editing. His main source for this narrative of the Jews was Lysimachus, whose narrative features many other aspects which portray the Jews in a negative light – including that the Jews were afflicted by leprosy and scurvy, that the Jews begged for food (as lepers), and that they wrapped lepers up in sheets of lead and sunk them in the ocean.[69] Tacitus also concedes that the Jews' rites are *defenduntur* on account of their antiquity. Tacitus continues to praise the Jews' origins while, at the same time, constructing Jews whose history is remarkably similar to Roman history.

Commonalities of the Six Myths

At first glance, the foundation myths which Tacitus provides for the Jews seem completely divergent and any attempt to read them cohesively appears to be an exercise in futility. There are, however, unifying themes throughout all of them. First and foremost: the Jews' antiquity. Regardless of the mythic synchronism Tacitus provides, the Jews are always tremendously ancient, whether they are situated in the Hesiodic succession of gods or on the brink of historical time. While 'out-past-ing' could certainly be used as a tool to marginalize other cultures, Tacitus does not attempt to have the Romans or Greeks 'out-past' the Jews. Rather, it is the Jews who frequently out-past the Greeks and Romans. It is only the final myth in which their origins take place at the same time. This synchronism, in fact, is an important parallel which Tacitus draws between the Jews and Romans: the defining trait of both peoples' foundation myths is an exile-foundation narrative situated in mythic, particularly epic, time. Another unifying factor in the myths is the illustrious origins Tacitus provides for the Jews, a factor which is particularly jarring considering later sections in the ethnography in which he adopts an

[69] Lysimachus is quoted in Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.305-11

antagonistic narrative voice. As I have attempted to demonstrate in the analyses of the individual sections of the ethnography, Tacitus provides the Jews with storied lineages, whether they are ancient Cretans, descendants of the Ethiopians, or superfluous Egyptians while also Romanizing their origins with language and content rooted in Roman epic.

While it is impossible for Tacitus to write these six very divergent myths as one coherent whole, nearly every myth is somehow connected to one of the others. One might even say the myths speak to one another. Consider, for example, some of the myriad connections between the myths. Tacitus writes that after the Jews left Crete, they settled on the *novissima Libyae*. Feldman has suggested that the remotest parts of Libya may well refer to Ethiopia, thus connecting the first and third of Tacitus' myths.[70] Tacitus' second myth, in which the Jews leave Egypt during the reign of Isis, connects to the first due to the belief by some ancient authors that Isis was the oldest daughter of Kronos. Tacitus' fourth myth is the closest to existing in a vacuum, but still features the Jews' antiquity and foreign roots. Tacitus' fifth myth, regarding the Solymi, once again connects to the Cretan origins of the Jews (on account of the Homeric connection). The final and most extensive version of the myth is connected to the second myth through the Egyptian association of the Jews. Tacitus provides a variety of myths which superficially seem radically divergent – taking place in different regions and time periods – while at the same time filling the myths with connections to one another. In the same way that the Romans had multiple foundation myths, Aeneas and Romulus to name the two most famous, which were eventually amalgamated into one coherent narrative, Tacitus provides the reader with a suggested parallel structure for the Jews: just like the Romans,

[70] Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 187

they have multiple foundation myths across mythic and historical time. Indeed, of all foundation myths from the ancient world the two peoples with the most versions are the Romans followed by the Jews.[71] Consider, for example, the fact that Tacitus bookends his six myths with the oldest and most recent foundation myths for the Jews, mimicking the twin foundation myths for the city of Rome. Tacitus appears to imply that the first version of the myth, in which the Jews were Cretan, is just as true as the sixth version of the myth, in which the Jews were exiled by a king at section 5.4 when he says, in the midst of describing the sixth myth, that the rites of the Jews are from the Idaeans and Saturn. It appears as if Tacitus is implying the exiled Cretans later became the exiled Jews of Bocchoris' time. Tacitus' syncretism between the oldest and most recent of the Jewish foundation myths also parallels the Romans' twin foundation myths, that is, of Aeneas and Romulus. Tacitus thus writes six variations with some commonalities and connections without ever outright asserting one to be 'true'. With that being said, it certainly appears as if the citing of consensus and lack of denial of the story lends credence to Tacitus asserting the veracity of the sixth and final myth. In fact, Tacitus writes as if multiple versions of these myths are true and none of them can be discounted for what they accomplish in terms of synchronism, asserting the Jews' antiquity while at the same time criticizing them, and drawing parallels between the Romans and Jews.

Conclusion

Frequently, discussion of Tacitus' Jewish excursus has focused on whether or not he is 'anti-semitic' or his perceived failures as a historian in the section. But, these are not productive nor relevant questions to ask concerning this passage, as Tacitus is obviously crafting his own literary world for the Jews. When Tacitus begins his excursus on the

[71] Ibid., 184

Jews, he justifies it by saying that *Sed quoniam famosae urbis supremum diem traduturi sumus, congruens videtur primordial eius aperire* (However, as I am about to describe the last days of a famous city, it seems proper for me to give some account of its origin).[72] Earlier in the *Historiae,* Tacitus describes the Roman state as if it were about to die, "*annum sibi ultimum, rei publicae prope supremum"* (the final year [for Galba and Titus], and nearly the final year for the state).[73] Just as Rome nearly perished in AD 69, Jerusalem actually did. Tacitus wants the reader to consider the parallels between Jews and Romans – particularly with respect to their mythical foundations. This serves an obvious didactic purpose for Tacitus: if the Jews share so many parallels with the Romans and they were destroyed, could it be that Rome's time will also come? This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that Tacitus uses synchronism and epic parallels to fashion the ancient Jews into the Roman founders of the *Aeneid* and of Livy's history as a means of bringing about this comparison and this question for the reader. Tacitus begins by fashioning the Jews into proto Romans, while at the same time 'easternizing' them. Tacitus' literary goal has its inception in *Historiae* 5.2-4, in which he asks the reader to consider the *primordia* of the Jews on their *supremum diem.*

[72] Tac. *Hist.* 5.2
[73] Tac. *Hist.* 1.11

CHAPTER 2

MIRUM DICTU: GEOGRAPHIC DISTORTION AND CONTRASTS IN TACITUS' JEWISH EXCURSUS

Introduction

This chapter argues that Tacitus employs internal geographic and ethnographic inconsistencies (by which I mean he says one thing about geography and ethnography which he himself later contradicts) by blending eastern and western traits of both the geography of Judaea and the culture and comportment of its people. That is to say, Tacitus first describes the Jews in a manner which is in line with previous authors (including Pliny the Elder) in which Judaea is eastern (hot, dry, and producing luxury goods) before he blurs the line between eastern and western traits for the Jews both in terms of the geography and ethnography. The inconsistencies employed by Tacitus are written in such a way that the Jews first display eastern characteristics before eventually transforming into a people displaying more western traits. The result is that the Jews of AD 69 begin to resemble their Roman contemporaries in many ways, just as Tacitus' ancient Jews resembled proto-Romans (in sections 5.1-4). In terms of structure, Tacitus' Jewish excursus, a fourteen section digression, can be categorized succinctly as four sections of Jewish origins (5.1-4), two sections of ethnography proper (5.5-6), two sections of geography (5.7-8) and five sections of recent history between Romans and Jews (5.9-13). This chapter will focus primarily on the geographic sections of the work

and the ethnography proper, with some commentary on the final five sections (which will form the primary focus of the third chapter).

What is the East in Ancient Thought? – Geography and Climate

Before addressing how Tacitus uses the East or how he places the Jews and Judaea within the paradigm of 'easternness', a brief summary on the Romans' conception of the eastern and (its opposite) the western periphery is warranted. While it is certainly beyond the scope of this chapter to describe centuries of discussion on the east and west, I will attempt to summarize the salient themes of 'easternness' in a wide swath of pre-Tacitean authors and thought. Bluntly put, for the Roman, the East is a complicated concept or, more properly, a complicated mix of concepts. There is a wide variety of locations east of Rome which exemplify varying levels of 'easternness'. Further complicating the matter is the fact that there was no clear or absolute frontier between the eastern world and the Roman world.[74] Given this ambiguous area of ancient geography and ethnography, let us briefly compare some Roman attitudes towards other areas of the world as a means of elucidating the Romans' general conception of geography and foreignness.

Roman Ideas Concerning the North and West

For the Roman, northern and western regions were easy to identify and their peoples exhibited specific northern or western traits. The lines between the North or the West were easily demarcated for the ancient Romans. To locate northerners, one would

[74] For a discussion of the Roman frontiers, see A.D. Lee, *Information and Frontiers: Roman Foreign Relations in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), *passim*; C.R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univresity Press, 1994), *passim.*

look beyond the Rhine and the Danube.[75] If one looked to the west, there was a natural boundary in the form of the Atlantic Ocean breaking off the Roman world from the barbarous territories of Ireland and Britain.[76] For the Roman, an area is defined not only by its physical location with respect to the Roman world, (though stark boundaries certainly assist in a preliminary classification) but also by its climate and the related conduct of its peoples.[77] In this way, areas were defined as north and west as much by their climate and the comportment of their people as by their physical location with respect to Rome. Thus, while areas on the Roman side of the Rhine or Danube frontier were still physically north or west of Rome, Roman writers did not write of these places as if they were the foreign 'other'. Rather, for areas like Lugdunum in Romanized Gaul, Roman intellectuals patronize and look down on the provincials, i.e. Pliny the Younger is surprised that Lugdunum has bookshops and Cassius Dio considered the inhabitants of Lugdunum to be crude and unsophisticated by Roman standards.[78] Thus, even for areas as simple to define as the West or North, there is still something of a sliding scale of foreignness. The general rule of this scale is that the farther one is from Rome, the more 'foreign' areas become.[79] There is not, however, always a stark dichotomy between Roman and 'other'. The western provinces act as an example showing that Romans' conception of foreignness could be quite fluid. While the local inhabitants were certainly more barbaric than Italy they were less barbaric than the tribes living beyond the Rhine. This fact will become important in the coming discussion of the east.

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[75] J.P.V. Baldson, *Romans and Aliens* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 58-61.
[76] Ibid., 61-2.
[77] For some ancient authors attesting the relationship between climate and comportment, see Vitr. 6.1-12; Veget. 1.2; Hp. Aer. 11-12; Aristot. *Pol.* 7.6-7; Hdt. 3.106-17.
[78] For these passages, see Plin. *Ep.*9.11 and Cass. Dio. 78.21
[79] Caesar says this explicitly at Caes. Gal. 1.1

Roman Ideas Concerning the Mythical Periphery

Some areas exceptionally far away from Rome and the civilized world, however, gain a certain mythological cachet rather than extending farther and farther into foreignness and barbarism *ad infinitum*. By way of example, the Hyperboreans were considered to live at the Northern edge of the world. They were portrayed in poetry and prose as blessed and just, as a utopian society, and as living beyond the area of the world where griffins were meant to roam.[80] The Greek concept of the Hyerpboreans begins to form one of the earliest models for a northern utopian society – a motif which would recur in the form of Thule and the Isle of the Blessed. This paradigm also applies to areas exceptionally far east from the Roman world. India, for instance, was conceived of as a sort of 'never never land', a land of "marvels and monsters", in the words of Grant Parker.[81] J.P.V.D. Balsdon describes the ancients' view on India by saying "no story about India was too fantastic to be true."[82] Notwithstanding that India was located east of Rome and possessed a warm climate which ought to have produced the Orientalized stereotypes which Romans held concerning Syrians, Egyptians, and to a lesser extent Greeks, its distance from Rome rendered it something else entirely.[83] One must remain cognizant of the caveat that India and the people of Thule are associated more with poetic and mythical geography than the actual geography of locations like Syria or Egypt. Some real geographic locations (as opposed to poetic locations) were able to degenerate into

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[80] Daniela Dueck, *Geography in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 23. For the ancient texts themselves, see Hdt. 4.32-36; Pind. *Pyth*. 10.29-46; *Isthm*. 6.23. For further information on the Hyperboreans, see James S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 60-67.

[81] Grant Parker, *The Making of Roman India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 69

[82] Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens*, 61. Balsdon summarizes Megasthenes' account of India, pointing out that Megasthenes included in his account that India possessed rivers glowing with milk and honey, great animals, and vegetarian Brahmans.

[83] For a discussion of India in Roman thought, see Parker, *The Making of Roman India, passim*

barbarism to an excessive degree. At the end of the *Germania,* for instance, Tacitus describes half-men, half-animals (though he refuses to comment on the veracity of this claim).[84] Nevertheless, India, like the Hyperboreans, was far enough from Rome to be transformed into a utopian society by Roman writers. In India the Roman might find marvels, and from India came spectacular things. [85]

Roman Ideas Concerning the East

For the Roman, the East, unlike the north or west, was something of a hodgepodge of locations, lacking any natural boundaries like the Rhine or the Danube, and as much defined by its geography as by the behavior its own people. Asia Minor, Persia, Judaea, India, and Egypt all lay East of Rome. Each one, however, exemplifies varying levels of 'easternness' in Roman writings. Consider, for example, the area due east of Rome and Italy – Greece. Since culture was considered to be directly linked to climate in ancient thought, one might expect that the Greeks, with a climate nearly identical to that of the Romans, would be considered part of the same general ethnic paradigm. While the relationship between Romans and Greeks is complex to the point that it could fill volumes, some of the stereotypes by which the Romans derided the Greeks were similar to the stereotypes associated with the easterner. The Greeks are regularly charged with effeminacy by Roman writers. Martial, for instance, contrasts the strong and stocky Spaniard with the "sissy" Greek soldier.[86] Furthermore, Tacitus believed that the Greeks made poor fighters as they were idle and undisciplined.[87] The Greeks were thought to be over-civilized, a morally corrupting influence, and too quick-

[84] At Tac. *Ger*. 46
[85] For the Hyperboreans in Herodotus, see Herod. 4.30-36
[86] Mart. 10.65.1-4
[87] Tac. *Hist*. 3.47

witted.[88] While it cannot be denied that there were high levels of hellenophilia in the Roman world, this did not prevent Romans from slandering the Greeks themselves with some Orientalized traits. Thus, to the ancient Roman, even an area as nearby as Greece maintains some Asiatic or Orientalized traits, despite the similar climate to Rome. That is not to say that the ancient Roman thought of Greece in the same category as Syria or Mesopotamia. Greece is merely an example of a people barely east of Rome exemplifying minor levels of 'easternness' despite the similar climate to Rome.

Roman Ideas Concerning Climate, Geography, and Comportment

The comportment of peoples north and west of Rome and those east and south of it was considered to be directly related to the climate of their nations. For example, the barbarians north and west of Rome were thought to be taller than Romans or easterners on account of the cold climate drawing their humors to the ground rather than towards their head.[89] The result was a stockier people who were slower-witted. The climate of the east, on the other hand, which was marked by heat and dryness, resulted in its inhabitants having less blood, being shorter, and quick witted but due to their borderline hemophilia reluctant to engage in battle – leading in turn to stereotypes of cowardice.[90] With this model, the Romans, as occupiers of the temperate centre of the Mediterranean, are the people who excel both intellectually and physically.[91]

Another instance of these climatic differences resulting in differing ethnic stereotypes for the two poles (north/west vs. east/south) lies in their effect on the dissimilar patterns of urbanization which, in turn, results in stereotypes of over- or under-

[88] Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens*, 30-36.
[89] Ibid., 60
[90] Ibid., 59-60
[91] Vitruvius states this explicitly at 6.1-12

civilization. Consider, for example, the comparison Tacitus implicitly draws in book five of the *Historiae* between the Batavians with their revolt in (modern Holland) and the Jews with their revolt in Judaea. The Batavians, due to their harsh climate, live in villages – resulting in a high level of individualism among them (another trait of the northern and western barbarian).[92] The Jews, on the other hand, are described as living in a hyper-urbanized environment (Jerusalem) with a high level of care for the collective (another trait of the eastern barbarians, that they are corrupted by over-civilization).[93] Thus, ancient conceptions of 'easternness' were not solely limited to geographic location vis-à-vis Rome; they were in fact directly related to climatic traits of regions and how these traits affect the lands' habitants. The east's hot and dry climate resulted in a variety of traits that Roman writers traditionally associated with 'easternness', a concept to be discussed at length below.

Thus far we have observed how the Romans conceived of foreignness vis-à-vis geography. That is, the farther one is from Rome and the harsher the climate, the more foreign and 'other' the inhabitants will be (with the notable exception of inconceivably far countries like Thule or India). Having established how tremendously important geography is for the study of ethnographic traits, I will now consider the specific ethnographic traits of 'easternness' as a whole before analyzing Tacitus' use of geography and ethnography.

Roman Ideas Concerning the East – Political Indolence and Laziness

Political indolence and sloth – which were considered to result in a trend towards autocratic dictatorships – were two of the traits Romans traditionally associated with the

[92] Tac. *Hist.* 4.12-37; 4.54-67; 5.14-26 for the Batavian revolt.
[93] Andrew Feldherr, "Tacitus' Jews," in *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus*, ed. Andrew Feldherr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 303

East. Lucan writes of the East, "Let Syria be slave, and the East, which is accustomed to kings,"[94] and Cicero writes that the Syrian is a "natural slave."[95] This concept of political indolence stems from the actual history of successive generations of hereditary kingships, the fact that Syria did in fact produce a number deal of slaves for Rome, as well as the literary tradition concerning the East dating back to Greek authors, particularly Herodotus.[96] Also imperative for this stereotype was the 'scientific' idea that excessively warm temperatures generate slothful behavior in people. Consider Hippocrates' statements in *Airs, Waters, and Places* on the people in Asia and Africa:

> τὸ δὲ ἀνδρεῖον καὶ τὸ ταλαίπωρον καὶ τὸ ἔμπονον καὶ τὸ θυμοειδὲς οὐκ ἂν δύναιτο ἐν τοιαύτῃ φύσει ἐγγίνεσθαι οὔτε ὁμοφύλου οὔτε ἀλλοφύλου, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀνάγκη κρατεῖν διότι πολύμορφα γίνεται τὰ ἐν τοῖς θηρίοις. περὶ μὲν οὖν Αἰγυπτίων καὶ Λιβύων οὕτως ἔχειν μοι δοκεῖ.
> Manly courage, endurance of suffering, laborious enterprise, and high spirit, could not be produced in such a state of things either among the native inhabitants or those of a different country, for there pleasure necessarily reigns. For this reason, also, the forms of wild beasts there are much varied. Thus it is, as I think, with the Egyptians and Libyans.[97]

The traits which are necessary to maintain *libertas* in the Roman mind – manly courage, laborious enterprise, and high spirit – were not able to thrive in the East due to climate. Accordingly, throughout Roman thought, thanks to both the theoretical approach of the geographers and the historical interaction between Romans and the East, areas far east of Rome (particularly in Asia) were perceived to be places where liberty could not and ought not to thrive.

Roman Ideas Concerning the East – Luxury

Luxury and opulence – that is to say, not only having *luxuria* but excessive enjoyment of it – were also traits which the Romans attributed to the East. This

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[94] Luc. *Phars*. 7.442. This sentiment also manifests itself in Tacitus' *Historiae*. When Julius Civilis boasts of defeating a Roman governor from the east, he echoes this notion. Tac. *Hist* 4.17.4
[95] Cic. *De Provinciis Consularibus*. 10
[96] Basldon, *Roman and Alien*, 67
[97] Hipp. *Aer*. 12. All texts and translations of Hippocrates may be found in Hippocrates, *Volume I: Ancient Medicine*, rev. ed. Translated by W. H. S. Jones

stereotype was rooted partly in the actual trade in luxury goods which flowed from the east towards Rome. It was also, once again, rooted in Hippocratic scientific notions. Consider, in his treatise *Airs, Waters, Places* when he writes:

> τὴν Ἀσίην πλεῖστον διαφέρειν φημὶ τῆς Εὐρώπης ἐς τὰς φύσιας τῶν συμπάντων τῶν τε ἐκ τῆς γῆς φυομένων καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. πολὺ γὰρ καλλίονα καὶ μέζονα πάντα γίνεται ἐν τῇ Ἀσίῃ, ἥ τε χώρη τῆς χώρης ἡμερωτέρη καὶ τὰ ἤθεα τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἠπιώτερα καὶ εὐοργητότερα. τὸ δὲ αἴτιον τούτων ἡ κρῆσις τῶν ὡρέων, ὅτι τοῦ ἡλίου ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἀνατολέων κεῖται πρὸς τὴν ἠῶ τοῦ τε ψυχροῦ πορρωτέρω
>
> I hold that Asia differs very widely from Europe in the nature of all its inhabitants and of all its vegetation. For everything in Asia grows to far greater beauty and size; the one region is less wild than the other, the character of the inhabitants is milder and more gentle. The cause of this is the temperate climate, because it lies towards the east midway between the risings of the sun and farther away than is Europe from the cold. [98]

In this passage, Hippocrates is describing Asia Minor. Asia Minor, the closest territory to Greece, is softer than Greece which results in softer and gentler people. Because Asia Minor lies closer to the sun than Europe it produces more luxury goods than Europe's and milder peoples. Not only is luxury inherent to the East, but luxury goods which leave the East are seen as a corrupting influence. Aristotle and Cicero both believed that while it is somewhat beneficial for the ideal state to have a port for a variety of reasons, there remains a corrupting influence from the influx of luxury goods.[99] Luxury was an exportable eastern vice, unlike some of the other traits which grew from the climate.[100]

Roman Ideas Concerning the East – Military Cowardice

Stemming from Roman belief about the luxury which the East was thought to enjoy was a belief in their penchant for supposed military cowardice, a stereotype which was held to be particularly true of the Near East. The Roman belief concerning military cowardice is partially derived from the manner by which the easterner was supposed to

[98] Hip. *Aer*. 12
[99] At Aristot. *Pol*. 7.6 and Cic. *Rep*. 2.7-8
[100] This notion is also found in Roman historiography, for example at Sall. *BC*. 11.5 Sallust claims that Roman presence in the East softened the defiance of the soldiery.

fight – hit-and-run tactics from horseback as opposed to fighting in the front-line like the Greco-Roman phalanx or legion.[101] Another source for this stereotype, as previously mentioned, was the notion that the easterner had less blood than the northerner and thus was less inclined to engage in battle. This stereotype also stems from some of the other aforementioned stereotypes concerning luxury, opulence, and sloth. Tacitus himself comments on the supposed military cowardice of the East, particularly vis-à-vis the threat posed to Rome by the Germans.[102] While this may be a rhetorical turn of phrase meant to denigrate the Parthians and elevate the Germans, the statement still hinges on military inefficiency and cowardice. Tacitus believed that a barbarian who had not yet been corrupted by civilization, who tended culturally towards martial valor and biologically towards being tall, strong, and stocky posed a threat to Rome. Tacitus considers this northern barbarian certainly more of a threat to Rome than an eastern barbarian who was over-civilizaed, tended culturally towards cowardice, and biologically towards being smaller.

Roman Ideas Concerning the East – Lax Sexual Mores and Effeminacy

Sexual depravity and license were two other traits traditionally associated with the eastern barbarian. Unlike the Germans, whom Tacitus notes with approval punish sexual deviants (particularly homosexuals),[103] the East was believed to be a hotbed of sexual immorality. Polygamy was frowned upon in the Roman consciousness as an indicator of an oversexed man. This oversexed nature once again has its root in a perceived geographic causality (as the easterner is meant to be more hot blooded) as well as

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[101] Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens*, 61

[102] Specifically at Tac. *Ger*. 37 where he claims the only defeat suffered by Rome at the hand of the easterner is that of Crassus and that "quippe regno Arsacis acrior est Germanorum libertas" (Truly, the independence of the Germans is harsher than the rule of Arsaces)

[103] Tacitus speaks approvingly of this practice at Tac. *Ger.* 12.1

historical interaction between the Romans and monarchs (with accompanying harems) in the East and South – such as the Numidian, Mauretanian, and Parthian kings.[104] Not only was the eastern man oversexed, he was also effeminate. This notion of the oversexed man being effeminate was also was rooted in Hippocratic notions. Eastern dress included garments which the Romans thought were unfit for warfare and unfit for men – long, flowing garments such as the burnouse.[105] The use of this garment assisted in promoting the stereotypes of both cowardice and effeminacy among the eastern man. Indeed, lax sexual mores and effeminacy are not significant merely because the Romans looked down upon them, as we have seen in previous Hippocratic writings, but because it is manly excellence which is necessary for *libertas.* Lax sexual mores are directly linked to the East's supposed penchant for dictatorships and autocracy.

Roman Ideas Concerning the East – Religious Superstition

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for Tacitus' geographic and ethnographic purposes on the Jews, religious *superstitio* was a trait traditionally associated with the eastern barbarian. The Latin word s*uperstitio* has a broad scope of meanings. Beard, North, and Price describe the difficulties in defining *superstitio* (and its 'opposite' *religio*) by saying "As we shall see, *religio* was regularly an aspect of a Roman's *self*-description; while *superstitio* was always a slur against others; but they do not denote simple, or easily definable, opposites."[106] *Superstitio* did not necessarily mean the worship of false deities or the practice of fabricated rites. To the contrary, *superstitiones* such as astrology or magic could be considered powerful and dangerous to the Romans'

[104] Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens*, 234-235
[105] Ibid., 222
[106] Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome Volume 1: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1998), 215

religio.[107] Some of the earliest usages of *superstitio* do not even apply to foreign affairs, but rather excessive or improper worship at Rome. It is only in the early second century BC that *superstitio* gains its associations with magic. Magic, according to the elder Pliny, is a combination of medicine, religion, and astrology, originating in Persia, and is also fraudulent.[108] To engage in magic is to engage in improper (and potentially dangerous) religious behavior, and magic was believed to have originated from the East. The east's penchant for soothsayers, magicians, fortune tellers, and astrologers represented a threat to the traditional order which *religio* helped maintain. While it is certainly the case that astrologers could and did play prominent roles at Rome, their position frequently remained precarious. Indeed, Tacitus comments on the class of soothsayers and astrologers in *Historiae* book I, when he states "genus hominum potentibus infidum, sperantibus fallax, quod in civitate nostra et vetabitur semper et retinebitur" ('A group of men faithless to the powerful, lying to the hopeful, who will be forever forbidden and retained in our state').[109] For humans to employ these arts – i.e. to dabble in the divine – was frequently considered to be a specific kind of hubris which was taboo in the Roman consciousness, much in the same way that excessive private worship in early Rome was considered *superstitio*. Thus, because the East's worship employed many 'superstitious' arts and because it was a foreign religious cult, religious worship in the East was frequently labeled as *superstitio*.

How do Tacitus' Jews fit into this Paradigm of Easternness?

Tacitus explicitly mentions "The East" ('*Oriens'*) with respect to the Jews three times. These are: first, at 5.5 when Tacitus states that some believe the Jews worship

[107] Ibid., 217
[108] Ibid., 217
[109] Tac. *Hist.* 1.22

father Liber;[110] second, at 5.8 when he talks about the successive empires which have held Judaea;[111] and, third, and perhaps most explicitly, at 5.13 when he states that the Jews heard a portent stating that their victory in the war against Rome represents the final triumph of "The East".[112] There are, however, complicating factors beyond Tacitus' description of the Jews as easterners. The remainder of this chapter will consist of analyzing how Tacitus interweaves eastern and non-eastern traits for the Jews both in terms of the literal geography of Judaea and the comportment of its people (since the two are inextricably linked).

How do Tacitus' Jews fit into this Paradigm of Easternness? - Geography

Before analyzing the ethnic traits Tacitus creates for the Jews, a close reading of Tacitus' geography is imperative. Not only do geographical excurses have causality for ethnographic portions of the work, but, as Daniela Dueck has recently noted, "Because geographical excurses played a crucial role in advancing the narrative line, they were often essential and integral to the enterprise [of historiography]."[113] Tacitus' portrayal of the Jews is inconsistent with respect to the Roman conception of easternness. Since, for the Roman reader, geography and climate are fundamental to defining the traits of either easternness or westernness, it follows logically that Tacitus would juxtapose various geographic elements in the geography of Judaea if he intended to alter the ethnic or cultural portrayal of the Jews vis-à-vis their easternness or westernness. Consider, for example, the fact that for much of Tacitus' geographic description, it appears as if he is

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[110] *Liberum patrem coli, domitorem Orientis*" (…'that they worship father Liber, conqueror of the Orient').
[111] *Dum Assyrios penes Medosque et Persas Oriens fuit* ('When the East was in the hands of the Assyrians, Medes, and Persians')
[112] *persuasio inerat antiquis sacerdotum litteris contineri eo ipso tempore fore ut valesceret Oriens profectique Iudaea rerum potirentur* ('Most people held the belief that, according to the ancient priestly writings, this was the moment at which the East was fated to prevail: men would now start forth from Judaea and conquer the world')
[113] Dueck, *Geography in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 8

using Pliny the Elder as his main source.[114] Tacitus, however, makes deliberate additions to and omissions from the geography in order to juxtapose within the geography of Judaea eastern and western geographical traits. When Tacitus describes Judaea's geography, the stature of its occupants, and its output of crops, he writes:

> Terra finesque qua ad Orientem vergunt Arabia terminantur, a meridie Aegyptus obiacet, ab occasu Phoenices et mare, septentrionem e latere Syriae longe prospectant. Corpora hominum salubria et ferentia laborum. Rari imbres, uber solum: [exuberant] fruges nostrum ad morem praeterque eas balsamum et palmae. Palmetis proceritas et decor, balsamum modica arbor: ut quisque ramus intumuit, si Vim ferri adhibeas, pavent venae; fragmine lapidis aut testa aperiuntur; umor in usu medentium est. Praecipuum montium Libanum erigit, mirum dictu, tantos inter ardores opacum fidumque nivibus;
> Their land is bounded by Arabia on the east, Egypt lies on the south, on the west are Phoenicia and the sea, and toward the north the people enjoy a wide prospect over Syria. The inhabitants are healthy and hardy. Rains are rare; the soil is fertile: its products are like ours, save that the balsam and the palm also grow there. The palm is a tall and handsome tree; the balsam a mere shrub: if a branch, when swollen with sap, is pierced with steel, the veins shrivel up; so a piece of stone or a potsherd is used to open them; the juice is employed by physicians. Of the mountains, Lebanon rises to the greatest height, and is in fact a marvel, for in the midst of the excessive heat its summit is shaded by trees and covered with snow.[115]

The description of the geography begins, like many other geographical writings, by physically situating Judaea with respect to its neighbors. Notably, Tacitus names four particularly eastern people when situating Judaea: the Arabians, Syrians, Egyptians, and Phoenicians. While problems of categorization may arise from the fact that all of these areas are within the Roman sphere, as opposed to the clarity of the Rhine or Danube frontier, there is little doubt that all four of these peoples were considered 'eastern' in ancient thought and all four were considered neighbors of Judaea. Furthermore, if there

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[114] For a description of Tacitus' sources and alterations and omissions from Pliny's account, see Chilver and Townend *A Historical Commentary on Histories IV and V* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 92-97

[115] Tac. *Hist.* 5.6. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this chapter are found in Tacitus, *Histories IV-V*, *Annals* I-III, rev. ed. Edited by G.P. Goold, Translated by Clifford H. Moore and John Jackson, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931)

were any doubt that Judaea's geography is hot and dry (as the east is meant to be), Tacitus dispels those doubts in the final line of his description when he writes *tantos inter ardores*.

Tacitus, however, begins to juxtapose non-eastern traits with eastern ones in his Judaean geography away from its eastern nature. After situating Judaea in the midst of historically specific easterners and describing its hot and dry climate, Tacitus then describes the Jews as "Corpora hominum salubria et ferentia laborum" – quite contrary to traditional scientific and geographic writings on citizens of the East. Furthermore, despite being situated among hot and dry places, Tacitus undercuts this notion by describing the climate as "*Rari imbres, uber solum: [exuberant] fruges nostrum ad morem praeterque eas balsamum et palmae*" ('Rain is rare; the soil fertile; its products are of the same kind as ours, save that the balsam and the palm also grow there.')[116] This is not accidental. Tacitus deliberately presents a Judaean geography defined by internal contrasts in order to distort the Jews' culture and stature for his own literary purposes (to be discussed below). Indeed the juxtaposition of opposites perhaps reaches its height when Tacitus brings up Mount Lebanon – constantly covered in snow all year round despite being *tantos inter ardores*. In this way, Tacitus creates deliberate internal contrasts in the geography of Judaea. It has a snow-covered mountain, yet is hot and dry. It is located among the classic examples of the orient, and yet produces crops in the same manner as Italy and Rome. As will be discussed below, Tacitus must portray Judean geography with stark internal contrasts which are not in line with Roman stereotypes of the land and its people.

[116] Tac. *Hist.* 5.4

Not only is there a climatic discrepancy (temperate rains compared to excessive heat), there is also a discrepancy in terms of the fertility of the place. When Tacitus first describes the crops of Judaea, they are *exuberant fruges nostrum ad morem*. Later, however, he depicts the desolation of Judaea through two areas in particular: the environs of the Dead Sea and a formerly fertile plain which has since lost all its crop-producing ability when he writes:

> Haud procul inde campi quos ferunt olim uberes magnisque urbibus habitatos fulminum iactu arsisse; et manere vestigia, terramque ipsam, specie torridam, vim frugiferam perdidisse. Nam cuncta sponte edita aut manu sata, sive herba tenus aut flore seu solitam in speciem adolevere, atra et inania velut in cinerem vanescunt. Ego sicut inclitas quondam urbis igne caelesti flagrasse concesserim, ita halitu lacus infici terram, corrumpi superfusum spiritum, eoque fetus segetum et autumni putrescere reor, solo caeloque iuxta gravi
> Not far from this lake is a plain which, according to report, was once fertile and the site of great cities, but which was later devastated by lightning; and it is said that traces of this disaster still exist there, and that the very ground looks burnt and has lost its fertility. In fact, all the plants there, whether wild or cultivated, turn black, become sterile, and seem to wither into dust, either in leaf or in flower or after they have reached their usual mature form. Now for my part, although I should grant that famous cities were once destroyed by fire from heaven, I still think that it is the exhalations from the lake that infect the ground and poison the atmosphere about this district, and that this is the reason that crops and fruit decay, since both soil and climate are deleterious.[117]

What began as a description of agricultural production identical to Rome's devolves into a description of a dead zone. While before Judaea was described as *exuberant fruges*, now it is described as *vim frugiferam perdidisse*. To show the agricultural desolation of the place, Tacitus uses an adjective based on the root of the noun he used to describe agricultural production earlier.

Another aspect of eastern agriculture which Tacitus includes is the presence of the two exotic plants which Judaea produces: balsam and palm. Pliny the Elder describes the

[117] Tac. *Hist.* 5.7

smell of balsam as the finest in the world, a description consistent with the east's reputation for producing not only exotic, but luxury goods. He also claimed that it could only be found in Judaea.[118] Thus, Tacitus creates an agricultural summary of Judaea in which he opens by stating how similar its crops are to those of Rome, and then shifts into a description of an excessively harsh climate, albeit one which produces opulent luxury goods. Tacitus' Judaea is features intense geographic contrasts and will soon produce inhabitants who exemplify ethnographic contrasts.

Tacitus even alters the story of Sodom and Gomorra (when describing the plains destroyed by heaven) by rewriting the story so that rather than the destruction being a product of God's wrath, it is a natural product of the desolation of the lands around the plains.[119] Indeed, while Pliny the Elder's description of Judaea does include a description of the marvels of the place, which included the Dead Sea, Tacitus' language emphasizes words such as poison, disease, and decay. He describes it as *sapore corruptior, gravitate odoris accolis pestifer neque vento impellitur neque piscis aut suetas aquis volucris patitur* ('its water has a nauseous taste, and its offensive odour is injurious to those who live near it. Its waters are not moved by the wind, and neither fish nor water-fowl can live there'). Not only does the land near the Dead Sea (which he describes as a lake as large as a sea, indicating that there are many lands around it) not produce crops, it literally destroyed formerly thriving cities. It is pestilence bringing, decay inducing, and its waters are impervious to the strength of winds.

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[118] At Pliny *NH*. 16.135

[119] D. S. Levene believes this to be a reference to the Sodom and Gomorra story. See D.S. Levene, trans., *The Histories of Tacitus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 289. As previously mentioned, I also believe Tacitus had access to the biblical narrative of events.

A final, though significant, geographic omission on Tacitus' part lies in his lack of description of the regions of Judea which are not Jerusalem or the Dead Sea's environs. Chilver and Townend have pointed out that two separate accounts which Tacitus likely used as sources, Josephus and Pliny the Elder, go into great detail concerning the environs of Judaea.[120] Pliny the Elder discusses the toparchies of Judaea and Josephus states that there were two hundred and four cities and villages in Galilee alone.[121] Not only do Josephus and Pliny emphasize that there are many villages, there are also cities of significance, such as Philistia, Pompey's Decapolis in Galilee, and Caesarea. Why does Tacitus omit so many significant cities and such pertinent information which would have been readily available? The answer may lie partially in his desire to over-civilize the Jews – a particularly eastern trait – by focusing on the sprawling metropolis of Jerusalem rather than the outskirts of the province. Furthermore, by focusing his description of Judaea on Jerusalem, Tacitus enables the implicit comparison with Rome which he attempts to draw, discussed in a limited manner in the previous chapter and to be discussed at length in the following chapter.

There must, however, be one caveat when discussing Tacitus' geography of Judaea: the causal link between the Jews' geography and culture is never stated outright. While the scientific notion linking geography to culture and comportment was well rooted in ancient thought and historiography, Tacitus never once links Judaea's geography to Jewish culture.[122] The Jews' geography is described at length, then their culture is described at length. There is no causal link drawn between the two. At no point does Tacitus connect his extensive description of Judaea and its climate to its inhabitants

[120] Chilver and Townend, *A Historical Commentary on Histories IV and V*, 93
[121] At Plin. *NH* V. 68ff and Jos. III. 54-5 respectively
[122] Dueck, *Geography in Classical Antiquity*, 48

and their comportment. This lack of connection is notable, as in other places in Tacitus' *oeuvre* he certainly attests the link between climate and comportment.[123] Given the fact that Tacitus certainly appears to believe in the link between climate and culture, I would argue that Tacitus does not directly link his Judaean geography with his Jewish ethnography because both the geography and the ethnography are taking part in a deliberate blending of eastern and western traits. Thus, since his portrayals of the Jews' geography and culture are both internally inconsistent (he claims a certain thing about the geography only to contradict himself later, and does the same thing with the Jews' culture) he is unable directly to link one to the other. Rather, the confused geography of Judaea is left to produce the chaotic portrayal of the Jews' culture to follow without a deliberate statement of the relationship between the two.

How do Tacitus' Jews fit into this Paradigm of Easternness? – Political Indolence and Laziness

Tacitus' portrayal of the Jews' culture – just like his portrayal of Judaea's geography – juxtaposes and blends eastern and western traits. Just as Tacitus jarringly transitions from describing a mild fruitful climate to a harsh dry dead zone, Tacitus also interweaves heavily easternized traits with westernized, or even Roman, traits for the Jews. Consider, for example, the trait of political indolence and sloth which are meant to be inherent to easterners. Before the Jews make any kind of contact with Greeks or Romans, they are under the leadership of Moses – frequently described by ancients as an ideal leader.[124] Moses, however, at least in Tacitus' account, uses the Jewish laws as a

[123] For example, at Tac. *Ger*. 3; Tac. *Ag*. 11;
[124] For a description of Moses as ideal leader, see Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 233-287

means of holding power over his people. Tacitus writes "*Moses quo sibi in posterum gentem firmaret, novos ritus contrariosque ceteris mortalibus indidit*." ('To establish his influence over this people for all time, Moses introduced new religious practices, quite opposed to those of all other religions.')[125] The Jews, in this way, are portrayed as a people who are deceived by religion and, worse yet, by *novos ritus*. The next time anything pertaining to the political status of the Jews is mentioned in Tacitus' narrative is when they are described as "despectissima pars servientium" of eastern empires ('the meanest part of slaves.')[126] In contrast to how the Romans' perception of themselves was one in which they were destined to conquer others and rule, the Jews are portrayed as destined to be conquered and be submissive. When Cicero described the Syrian, stating that he was a 'natural slave', he included Jews in this category.[127] Tacitus' portrayal, in this instance at least, is congruent with traditional Roman writings on the Jews.

Tacitus' Jews eventually, however, reject this political complacency and it is at this moment that Tacitus begins to blend in Roman traits for the eastern Jews. There is a marked shift in the text when, after first contact with Greeks and Romans, the Jews become lovers of liberty rather than a subject people. After installing kings over themselves, for the purpose of expelling other kings, they are described, in a gross oversimplification of the events of First and Second Maccabees, as

> Tum Iudaei Macedonibus invalidis, Parthis nondum adultis—et Romani procul erant—, sibi ipsi reges imposuere; qui mobilitate vulgi expulsi, resumpta per arma dominatione fugas civium, urbium eversiones, fratrum coniugum parentum neces aliaque solita regibus ausi superstitionem fovebant, quia honor sacerdotii firmamentum potentiae adsumebatur.
> Later on, since the power of Macedon had waned, the Parthians were not yet come to the strength, and the Romans were far away, the Jews selected

[125] Tac. *Hist.* 5.4
[126] Tac. *Hist.* 5.8
[127] Cic. *De Provinciis Consularibus.* 5

> their own kings. These in turn were expelled by the fickle mob; but recovering their throne by force of arms, they banished citizens, destroyed towns, killed brothers, wives, and parents, and dared essay every other kind of royal crime without hesitation; but they fostered the national superstition, for they had assumed the priesthood to support their civil authority.[128]

Levene has pointed out that Tacitus' narrative and language are more a Roman trope than an actual representation of Jewish history.[129] For the rest of the narrative, the Jews are frequently described as preferring liberty to autocracy. Tacitus describes the Jews as preferring war to any form of emperor worship of Caligula, as revolting against Gessius Florus, and deliberately building their city in peacetime with an eye towards war and revolt.[130] Tacitus' description of the Jews' history can be divided into two phases: pre-contact with Greeks and Romans (from 5.2 to 5.8, when they preferred to be slaves) and post-contact (from 5.9 to 5.13, when they become liberty-loving instigators). This phenomenon will be expanded upon in fuller detail in the following chapter, including a discussion of the transmission of ethnic traits.

Tacitus' Jews also exhibit general indolence and laziness. When describing the practice of the Sabbath, Tacitus also explains the sabbatical year as well when he writes that, "*dein blandiente inertia septimum quoque annum ignaviae datum*" ('then, on account of the pleasant laziness, even the seventh year was given to sloth').[131] One is left to question whether Tacitus honestly mistakes the laws concerning letting the fields lie fallow, or whether he deliberately omits the real reason. Certainly, in other points of his narrative it appears as if Tacitus had access to the biblical version of events of Jewish

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[128] Tac. *Hist.* 5.8
[129] D.S. Levene, trans., *The Histories of Tacitus*, 238
[130] Tac. *Hist.* 5.9, 5.10, and 5.12, respectively.
[131] Tac. *Hist.* 5.4

history.[132] Considering that the laws concerning the Sabbatical year are found in two books of the Pentateuch, it is not unreasonable to posit, if one assumes Tacitus had access to the Bible (as I do throughout this thesis) that he would also have had access to the true source of the Sabbatical year.[133] It is a marked change to assert that rather than having the Jews let their fields lie fallow on account of divine law, they do so out of slothfulness. This is especially marked considering that Tacitus is operating within the confines of a calendar which is riddled with *fas* and *nefas* days (for religious reasons). Rather than drawing an easy parallel between the Romans and the Jews, Tacitus 'easternizes' the story of the Sabbath and sabbatical year, ascribing these rites to laziness rather than religious observance. Further, even the wealth which the Jews do produce is not the result of their own labors, but rather results from their proselytizing to the Romans and extracting wealth and riches from them.[134]

Just as when Tacitus' Jews begin as politically subservient but eventually transform into liberty-lovers, the Jews eventually radically change from idle peoples whose wealth derives from the exploitation of others into a ruthlessly efficient force of resistance against the Romans. Tacitus writes that after the Jews were conquered their walls were torn to the ground.[135] By the time of the Jewish revolt, however, they had built them back up for several decades already, with only the most recent wall being completed in AD 44.[136] This is an impressive feat which could and be accomplished by idle people. Tacitus' Jews accomplish the feat in a very short time. The walls are

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[132] See Tac. *Hist*. 5.1-4 for some of the myths with biblical precedent, as well as the previous chapter of this thesis.
[133] The references in the bible are found at Leviticus 25: 2-7 and Deuteronomy 15: 1-18
[134] Tac. *Hist*. 5.9
[135] Tac. *Hist*. 5.9
[136] D.S. Levene, trans., *The Histories of Tacitus*, 240

regularly described with adjectives indicating the incredible amount of labour required to build them. For example, the walls of the temple are described as "*propriique muri, labore et opere ante alios*" (its own walls, which were more laboriously constructed than the others).[137] Tacitus also writes of the Jews' actions during peacetime, stating "*Atque per avaritiam Claudianorum temporum empto iure muniendi struxere muros in pace tamquam ad bellum*" ('Moreover, profiting by the greed displayed during the reign of Claudius, they had bought the privilege of fortifying their city, and in time of peace had built walls as if for war').[138] Tacitus' Jews do not remain idle in peacetime, but rather prepare for war.

How do Tacitus' Jews fit into this Paradigm of Easternness – Military Cowardice

Cowardice was also an important trait which ancient writers accentuated in the eastern subject. Tacitus' Jews, however, are brave and display martial ability. Tacitus' description of their tactics echoes Greco-Roman warfare rather than 'easternized' warfare. For example, Tacitus' description of the Jews' expulsion of kings – including asides on the fickleness of the crowd and descriptions of traditionally 'kingly' crimes – is hardly rooted in actual Jewish history. Levine has pointed out that Tacitus' style and content are more reminiscent of tropes for Greek and Roman writing of history. As previously mentioned in the discussion of political indolence, the Jews are not at all afraid of revolt against Caligula when he threatens to place his image in the temple. The Jews' lack of fear in war is even represented in the description of the actual physical construction of their capital city, Jerusalem. Tacitus describes the impressive fortifications at length as a means of describing the arduousness of the ask facing the

[137] Tac. *Hist.* 5.12
[138] Tac. *Hist.* 5.12

Romans. When he describes the temple, he elaborates on the Jews' proclivity for war and its effect on the construction of their city, stating:

> Templum in modum arcis propriique muri, labore et opere ante alios; ipsae porticus, quis templum ambibatur, egregium propugnaculum. Fons perennis aquae, cavati sub terra montes et piscinae cisternaeque servandis imbribus. Providerant conditores ex diversitate morum crebra bella: inde cuncta quamvis adversus longum obsidium; et a Pompeio expugnatis metus atque usus pleraque monstravere. Atque per avaritiam Claudianorum temporum empto iure muniendi struxere muros in pace tamquam ad bellum.
> The temple was built like a citadel with walls of its own, which were constructed with more care and effort than any of the rest; the very colonnades about the temple made a splendid defence. Within the enclosure is an ever-flowing spring; in the hills are subterraneous excavations, with pools and cisterns for holding rain-water. The founders of the city had foreseen that there would be many wars because of the ways of their people differed from those of their neighbours: therefore they had built at every point as if they expected a long siege; and after the city had been stormed by Pompey, their fears and experience taught them much. Moreover, profiting by the greed displayed during the reign of Claudius, they had bought the privilege of fortifying their city, and in time of peace had built walls as if for war.[139]

The Temple is described by Tacitus as more of a citadel than a temple. Sailor recently has pointed out the implicit comparison between the impenetrable Jewish temple and the temple of Juppiter Optimus Maximus at Rome – burned to the ground by Romans during their civil war in the previous books of the *Historiae*.[140] This comparison between Jew and Roman will be expanded in the following chapter. The most important statement Tacitus makes in this passage, however, is when he writes that *Providerant conditores ex diversitate morum crebra bella* – that because of the *mores* of the Jews and their expectation of frequent wars, they must construct the holiest of their temples as a fortress. The Jews, contrary to being cowards, are described as destined to wage war against

[139] Tac. *Hist.* 5.12
[140] Dylan Sailor, *Writing and Empire in Tacitus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 205-217

foreigners, whereas the Romans' most sacred temple was not constructed as a fortress and was burnt to the ground by the Romans themselves.

One final point on the Jews' martial proclivity and lack of cowardice lies in the only instance in which Tacitus describes the Jews' actual strategy for fighting.

> Iudaei sub ipsos muros struxere aciem, rebus secundis longius ausuri et, si pellerentur, parato perfugio. Missus in eos eques cum expeditis cohortibus ambigue certavit; mox cessere hostes et sequentibus diebus crebra pro portis proelia serebant, donec adsiduis damnis intra moenia pellerentur.
> The Jews formed their line close beneath their walls, being thus ready to advance if successful, and having a refuge at hand in case they were driven back. Some horse and light-armed foot were sent against them, but fought indecisively; later the enemy retired, and during the following days they engaged in many skirmishes before their gates until at last their continual defeats drove them within their walls.[141]

Tacitus' Jews are not the cowardly, hit-and-retreat easterners they ought to be according to conventional Roman concepts; rather they form a battle line (*aciem*) in much the same manner as the Romans do. The Jews anticipate the possibility of retreat (*parato perfugio*), partake in several battles (*crebra proelia*), and then retreat behind their walls to wait out and withstand a siege. While Fyfe is certainly accurate in choosing to translate *proelium* as skirmish – particularly with the modifying adjective *crebra* – I think that the language around the word implies larger battles as well. While *crebra* can mean repeated, I prefer its meaning of close-packed, since these battles take place after the Jews draw up their battle line before the gates of their city – presumably in an area with not a lot of space for mobility. Furthermore, Tacitus' choice of verb – *sero*, to join together, bind, interweave – is only found in Latin to describe joining battle here. Tacitus is describing the Jews as standing among the fore-fighters in defending their city rather than using the cowardly hit-and-run tactics of the Persians. Tacitus' Jews, who previously installed kings over themselves for protection, then spent time infighting amongst one another, now present a

[141] Tac. *Hist.* 5.11

unified front against the Romans and fight them in a style reminiscent of Greco-Roman tactics.

How do Tacitus' Jews fit into this Paradigm of Easternness – Religious Superstitio

While Tacitus may reject the eastern stereotypes of cowardice for the Jews, he enthusiastically embraces for them another trait of 'easternness', that of religious *superstitio*. Since the Jews' religion is described as contrary to all other religions, it stands to reason, given that *superstitio* is a term used predominantly to describe non-Roman rites, that it will be considered *superstitio* by the Roman. The Jews' religion is described in a particularly inconsistent manner in Tacitus. He thrice describes the religiosity of the Jews and the image of god which they choose to worship. First, Tacitus claims that the Jews worship the image on an ass, as it is the enemy of an Egyptian deity and the Jews are still resentful from their days in Egypt.[142] Second, he claims that the Jews worship one god whom they are not allowed to depict in any way.[143] Third, he claims that the temple is empty and there is nothing, that their *superstitio* is *vana*.[144] In one sentence, Tacitus describes the Jews' religious rites as defended on account of their antiquity, base and abominable, and owing their persistence to their depravity.[145] The Jews' religion is variously described as Egyptian, the opposite of all religions, or empty rites. The only unifying factor in the portrayal of their religion is its easternness. Tacitus makes the Jews' religious folly abundantly clear when he describes prodigies. He writes "*Evenerant prodigia, quae neque hostiis neque votis piare fas habet gens superstitioni obnoxia, religionibus adversa*" (Prodigies had indeed occurred, but to avert them either

[142] Tac. *Hist.* 5.5
[143] Tac. *Hist.* 5.5
[144] Tac. *Hist.* 5.9
[145] At Tac. *Hist.* 5.5

by victims or by vows is held unlawful by a people which, though prone to superstition, is opposed to all religious rites.)[146] This passage is marked with words loaded with religious meaning (*fas, vota, piare, supertitio, religio*) for the Romans, while the Jews reject entirely all that is religiously correct. Tacitus provides the Jews with a warning of their destruction which, on account of their superstitious religious rites, they reject entirely. In fact, the *prodigia* which appear in the Jews' most sacred temple pertain to Vespasian and Titus. For Tacitus, the Jews' superstitious religion not only enables them to ignore portents, it enables them to misread the fact that the cosmos is appointing the Flavians as victors and abandoning the Jews in the course of the war with Rome.

How do Tacitus' Jews fit into this Paradigm of Easternness – Lax Sexual Mores

Tacitus' description of the Jews' sexual mores is rooted in neither eastern or western stereotypes stemming from geography but rather from a unique interpolation to ancient ethnography of the Jews, that is, of exclusivity. For the sexual mores of the Jews, the exclusivity which they practice (that is, their penchant for only eating, sleeping, or associating with other Jews which in turn stems from their religious rites) enables them to engage in any sort of perverse sexual act they might wish. While this lax sexual attitude was certainly a stereotype of the East, Syrians, while still considered eastern, were not criticized for their exclusivity like the Jews. In fact, the Syrians were quite integrated into the Roman Empire, providing the Romans with slaves, luxury goods, and even producing an emperor by the third century.[147] The Jews, however, were regularly slandered for their exclusivity, even before Tacitus' time. This trait is said to be causal for the Jews' sexual mores when Tacitus states

[146] Tac. *Hist*. 5.7
[147] Baldson, *Roman and Alien*, 66-67

> Hi ritus quoquo modo inducti antiquitate defenduntur: cetera instituta, sinistra foeda, pravitate valuere. Nam pessimus quisque spretis religionibus patriis tributa et stipes illuc congerebant, unde auctae Iudaeorum res, et quia apud ipsos fides obstinata, misericordia in promptu, sed adversus omnis alios hostile odium. Separati epulis, discreti cubilibus, proiectissima ad libidinem gens, alienarum concubitu abstinent; inter se nihil inlicitum. Circumcidere genitalia instituerunt ut diversitate noscantur. Transgressi in morem eorum idem usurpant, nec quicquam prius imbuuntur quam contemnere deos, exuere patriam, parentes liberos fratres vilia habere. Augendae tamen multitudini consulitur; nam et necare quemquam ex agnatis nefas, animosque proelio aut suppliciis peremptorum aeternos putant: hinc generandi amor et moriendi contemptus.
>
> Whatever their origin, these rites are maintained by their antiquity: the other customs of the Jews are base and abominable, and owe their persistence to their depravity. For the worst rascals among other peoples, renouncing their ancestral religions, always kept sending tribute and contributions to Jerusalem, thereby increasing the wealth of the Jews; again, the Jews are extremely loyal toward one another, and always ready to show compassion, but toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity. They sit apart at meals, and they sleep apart, and although as a race, they are most impelled to lustfulness, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women: yet among themselves nothing is unlawful. They adopted circumcision to distinguish themselves from other peoples by this difference. Those who are converted to their ways follow the same practice, and the earliest lessons they receive is to despise the gods, to disown their country, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account. However, they take thought to increase their numbers; for they regard it as a crime to kill any late-born child, and they believe that the souls of those who are killed in battle or by the executioner are immortal: hence comes their passion for begetting children and their scorn of death.[148]

For Tacitus, exclusivity is the reason for the Jews' depravity, and depravity is the reason for the success of the Jewish religion. The language Tacitus uses to describe the Jews' sexual license is particularly vivid. He writes that *proiectissima ad libidinem gens* (a people most impelled lustfullness). Tacitus makes it clear this is not limited to the actions of certain individuals (such as rich urbanites or elites), but rather the entire *gens* is cast down into servile pleasures. He then continues, "*alienarum concubitu abstinent; inter se nihil inlicitum*" ('they abstain from relations with foreigners; among themselves nothing

[148] Tac. *Hist.* 5.5

is forbidden'). Once again, the language Tacitus chooses is intense, ending his sentence without a linking verb, simply stating "*nihil inlicitum*". Tacitus does not attribute the Jews' sexual license to any sort of geographical reasons, but rather their rites (to be discussed below). He even describes this exclusivity as the cause for circumcision (apparently a Tacitean interpolation) and describes the Jews' comportment towards one another as "*et quia apud ipsos fides obstinata, misericordia in promptu, sed adversus omnis alios hostile odium*." The juxtaposition between the *fides* Jews show towards one another (a particularly loaded word for the Roman reader) and the *odium* which they show to every other human being could not be starker. Tacitus takes loyalty – for all intents and purposes a positive trait – and brings it to a superlative level of exclusivity and intolerance towards others. While sexual license was certainly a trait Roman authors associated with the east, for the Jews it is believed to stem from their exclusivity, which, in turn, stems from their religious rites.

The allure of luxury and the east is not unique in terms of Romans writing about foreigners. The uniqueness of the Jews, rather, is in their proselytizing and their ability to make 'bad' Romans renounce their family, fatherland, and all that they ought to hold dear. Tacitus describes this proselytizing process at section 5.5. Supposedly, the allure of Jewish rites stems from the fact that nothing is forbidden among Jews – hence Tacitus makes it clear that it is the *pessimus quisque* who converts to Judaism. The *pessimus quisque* in question must adopt circumcision as a means of being integrated into Jewish society and religion. Presumably, however, another aspect of the allure of Judaism is the fact that they become wealthy off of their converts and hold that wealth in the – highly exclusive – collective. Tacitus uses the causal conjunction *unde* to connect the payment

of tribute with the statement *auctae Iudaeorum res.* The corrupting influence of the Jews, in this way, manifests itself both in the wealth of the collective, the *fides* among them, and the fact that everything is permitted among them. While exclusivity is a uniquely Jewish trait, the other two aspects – luxury and sexual license – remain decidedly eastern traits which Tacitus applies to the Jews.

Conclusion

Tacitus' description of the Jews' culture, religion, and tradition indulges in a great deal of blending and juxtaposition of ethnographic traits of both east and west. Consider, in terms of their politics, the Jews install kings over themselves, throw them out, and then fiercely resist the Romans. In terms of sexual license, they refuse to interlope with foreigners but among themselves all is permitted. In terms of religion they variously worship one god, an ass, or nothing, and misread the portent which signals their doom. Tacitus' Jews are a people defined by contradictions. I would like to postulate that for many aspects of this portrayal the sea change, as it were, occurs after the Jews make first contact with Greeks and Romans. The notion that traditional cultural and ethnic traits can be warped by contact with foreigners is well attested in ancient literature. The corrupting nature of the East was considered a particular threat for the Romans. Tacitus' Jews, on the contrary, are de-corrupted by contact with the Greeks and Romans. While they were servile before, they reject complacency. While they were formerly lazy, they abandon laziness for the purpose of resistance. While at the beginning of the war against the Romans they fought amongst themselves, they soon put aside their differences in order to resist the Romans. The Jews exemplify *metus hostilis*, the Romans' ability to put aside differences in the face of foreign war, while the Romans have since forgotten it. The

following chapter will analyze the effects Jews have on Greeks and Romans and vice versa in detail, but, in short I believe that Tacitus deliberately blends ethnographic traits of the Jews as a means of showing the effect barbarians are purportedly having on Romans and vice versa.

FAMOSAE URBIS SUPREMUM DIEM: IDEALIZATION, ANXIETIES OF EMPIRE , AND ETHNIC DISTORTION IN TACITUS' JEWISH EXCURSUS

Introduction

The blurring of ethnic lines is one of the most important themes in Tacitus' *Historiae*. As Rome nearly destroys itself through civil war, Tacitus regularly draws attention to how un-Roman the Romans have become. He points out that it is the Romans who destroyed the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus – not foreigners.[149] He also notes that the Vitellian and Othonian troops were unable to speak to one another before the first battle of Bedriacum, requiring translators.[150] The Romans even murdered one of their own emperors, a practice which Tacitus explicitly compares to Persian *modus operandi*.[151] All of this blurring of ethnic lines takes place under the shadow of two significant *res externae*: the revolt of Julius Civilis in the north, whose Germans proceed to act more and more Roman and whose name literally means 'civil'; and, the revolt of the Jews in the east, whose distorted ethnic traits form the subject of this chapter.[152]

This phenomenon – of Romans acting foreign and foreigners acting Roman – clearly manifests itself in Tacitus' Jewish excursus. Tacitus' Jews begin to resemble archaic Romans as the Romans of AD 69 begin to resemble corrupted easterners. This blurring of ethnic lines results in a reversal of roles for the two peoples – Romanized Jews and 'Judaized' Romans. This chapter analyzes this collapse of ethnic boundaries in

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149 Tac. *Hist*. 3.72
150 Tac. *Hist*. 2.37
151 Tac. *Hist*. 1.40
152 For Julius Civilis in the *Historiae*, see Tac. *Hist.* 4.12-37, 4.54-79, 5.14-26

Tacitus' Jewish excursus (Tac. *Hist*. 5.1-13). That is to say, I will analyze the methods by which Tacitus Romanizes the Jews and Judaizes the Romans and discuss the literary goals Tacitus achieves by so doing. The driving questions behind this chapter will be: what effects does Judaea and its inhabitants, as a conquered people, have on the Romans and the Greeks, and what effects do the Romans and the Greeks have on Judaea and its inhabitants in their roles as conquerors and governors. Before addressing the blending and dissolution of ethnic boundaries, a brief discussion of theoretical approaches is imperative.

Postcolonial Theory and Tacitus - Idealization

Let us briefly consider some aspects of postcolonial theory and how they may apply to the analysis of Tacitus' writings on the Jews. Ethnographic writing is frequently defined by the dichotomy of identity-difference.[153] This dichotomy, however, is often undermined by the idealization of the conquered barbarian 'other'. This is especially true of Tacitus' work, as he was writing as a provincial at the Romans' peak of empire and he frequently engaged in ethnographic digressions in his historical works. Let us consider some instances of Tacitus engaging in the idealization of barbarians vis-à-vis his discussion of both the Romans and barbarians. Tacitus' belief that the Romans had degenerated in terms of sexual mores is well documented.[154] In the *Germania,* Tacitus describes German law, the punishment for certain crimes among the Germans, and the rationale for such punishments.[155] He claims that under German law there are two main

[153] Nancy Schumate "Postcolonial Approaches to Tacitus" in *A Companion to Tacitus*," ed. Victoria Emma Pagán (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) 482. For a discussion of the language of description, see *The Mirror of Herodotus*, 212-258

[154] For example, his description of Nero marrying one of his male freedmen at Tac. *Ann*. 15.37 or his description of Nero's institution of Greek games at Tac. *Ann*. 14.14-15

[155] Tac. *Ger*. 12

punishments for criminals: hanging in public or throwing the condemned into the bogs. The rationale for the latter – the punishment for sexual degeneracy or homosexuality – is that the crime, and thus the punishment, ought to be covered and hidden from sight.[156] This is one instance of the postcolonial *topos* of idealization. Idealization, however, is not limited to sexual mores. Tacitus regularly engages in the idealization of the northern barbarians' political institutions (a lack of tyranny), of their poverty (since luxury is considered a corrupting influence), and of their bravery in warfare.[157] This *topos* of Idealization is one tool by which I intend to analyze Tacitus' Jewish excursus.

Idealization and the Jewish Excursus

Tacitus in fact partakes in some idealization of the Jews within the Jewish excursus. This claim may at first appear bold, considering Tacitus (at various junctures) describes the Jews as perverse, lazy, and politically complacent.[158] Indeed, in the *Annales,* when Tacitus describes the Jews' exile from the city of Rome, he stresses that their death would be a cheap loss.[159] Needless to say, there is no love lost between Tacitus and the Jews. That does not, however, prevent him from taking part in the idealization of conquered peoples, particularly with respect to their political views on tyranny and their perceived moral superiority to contemporary society at Rome. Tacitus' idealization stems not from the fact that the Jews are uncorrupted by civilization, but rather that they are able to reject this corruption in order to fight the Romans (who, in turn, are slavish, criminal, and oppressive). The Jews are able to put aside their infighting

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[156] Tac. *Ger*. 12

[157] For an example of praise for the Germans' political institutions, see Tac. *Ger*. 7; for examples praising the Germans' poverty, see Tac. *Ger*. 5.3, 26.1; for an example of Tacitus' praise of the northern barbarian in warfare, see Tac. *Ger*. 6;

[158] At Tac. *Hist*. 5.5, Tac. *Hist*. 5.4, and Tac. *Hist*. 5.8, respectively

[159] Tac. *Ann*. 2.85 "*actum et de sacris Aegyptiis Iudaicisque pellendis factumque patrum consultum ut quattuor milia libertini generis ea superstitione infecta quis idonea aetas in insulam Sardiniam veherentur, coercendis illic latrociniis et, si ob gravitatem caeli interissent, vile damnum*"

in the face of foreign war,[160] they are able to arm every member of their nation to fight the Romans,[161] and they are able to hold off the Romans for a protracted siege by constructing their city like a citadel.[162] By contrast the Romans, throughout the *Historiae*, are unable to put aside their internal struggles in the face of foreign wars and many of the Romans' soldiers are recruited from other nations fighting on their behalf. Finally, the Romans are unable to preserve their most sacred temple in their capital city.[163] There is a clear progression for Tacitus' Jews from infighting amongst themselves to relentlessly resisting the Romans. The Jews are akin to the Roman plebs with their relentless secession attempts which were always terminated in the face of a foreign enemy. Tacitus romanticizes the Jews' commitment to resisting tyranny (be it in the form of Caligula demanding they worship him or in the form of a corrupt freedman governing them), idealizes their martial ability to defend their city from foreigners, and draws attention to their ability to put aside their differences to fight for the fatherland rather than fighting each other. Indeed, Tacitus' negative views of the Jews as a whole (towards their religion, sexual mores, work habits, etc) make his idealization of their other traits all the more striking. The contrast between the Jews and the Romans could not be starker: after four books of describing the Romans fighting each other in civil war, Tacitus emphasizes the Jews' unyielding resistance to tyranny and autocracy.

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[160] Tac. *Hist.* 5.12
[161] Tac. *Hist.* 5.13
[162] Tac. *Hist.* 5.11-12
[163] For foreign troops fighting on Rome's behalf, see Tac. *Hist.* 2.37. For the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, see Tac. *Hist.* 3.72

Postcolonial Theory and Tacitus – Anxieties of Empire (hybridization)

Related to the notion of idealizing the barbarian is the notion in postcolonial theory described by Nancy Schumate as the "anxieties of empire."[164] While the postcolonial author frequently asserts the superiority of the conqueror over the conquered – for ethnic, geographic, or institutional reasons – there may frequently be anxiety concerning the conquerors' role as ruler and the role of the conquered as subject. A key example of this anxiety is in the story of Scipio and the sack of Carthage. Polybius relates that after the destruction of Carthage, Scipio (after dwelling on the destruction of the great empires of the east) quotes lines from the Iliad which predict the fall of Troy.[165] All the material wealth and power which the Romans had accrued at the expense of other empires were just as liable to be lost for the Romans. This is one example of the Roman anxiety concerning empire. Consider, also, that in order for the dichotomy between (Roman) conqueror and (foreign) conquered subject to continue, clear distinctions must continue to exist between the two.[166] The Romans, however, use the civilizing mission as one of their justifications for empire, blurring the line between conquerors and conquered through the hybridization of the Romanized subject. Indeed, it is apropos that Tacitus himself displays this anxiety as he is the Roman historian who famously declared that the emperor could be made in the provinces and who was himself probably from an elite provincial family in Gaul.[167] Furthermore, characters in the *Historiae* frequently illustrate this hybridization of the Roman subject and the 'other', such as Julius Civilis, the Roman citizen who leads a German revolt, or Vespasian's troops on the eastern frontier, who do

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[164] Nancy Schumate "Postcolonial Approaches to Tacitus" in *A Companion to Tacitus*, 491-494
[165] This anecdote may be found at Plb. 38.5
[166] Ibid., 493
[167] For his declaration see, Tac. *Hist*. 1.5. For a succinct summary of Tacitus' origins, life, and career see Rhiannon Ash, *Tacitus* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2006), 9-51

not wish to be transferred to Germany on account of the families they had established within the local population.[168] Tacitus' Roman world, especially the Roman world of AD 69 is one in which the provinces are displaying more and more "Romanness" with a resulting concern in the minds of some traditional Romans.

Hybridization - Civilization

Let us begin our discussion of hybridization in Tacitus by describing the ways in which barbarians are influenced by Roman 'civilization' in Tacitus' works. In Tacitus' world, barbarians are frequently influenced in a variety of ways by the governance of the Romans. Consider, for example, the famous passage in the *Agricola* (Chapter 21) in which the provincials vie with each other for the Romans' favor. The Britons learn Latin, wear the toga, and assume all the trappings of civilization. Considering the weather of the British Isles, one can reasonably assume that Tacitus is using hyperbole when he stresses that the Britons compete with one another to appear the more Roman, as the toga is hardly practical for the British climate (unless one chooses to wear woolen stockings underneath). The overall result of the Romans' civilizing mission, however, is that not only do the Britons learn eloquence from their education, they also learn all the vices of the Romans, or as Tacitus puts it, *paulatimque discessum ad delenimenta vitiorum* (gradually, too, they wandered into the charms of evil ways).[169] Tacitus vividly describes this ascent into civilization and, eventually, the corresponding descent into decadence by continuing to state that they took to loving "…*porticus et balinea et conviviorum elegantiam. Idque apud imperitos humanitas vocabatur, cum pars servitutis esset*." (…The porticoes, baths, and elegant banquets. The Britons, who had no experience of

[168] For Vespasian's troops, see Tac. *Hist.* 2.80
[169] Tac. *Ag*. 21. All translations of the Agricola may be found in A.R. Birley, *The Agricola and Germania of Tacitus*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

this called it civilization, when in reality it was a part of their enslavement.')[170] Some scholars have attempted to argue that Tacitus is stressing the that luxuries of the Romans are the corrupting influence, rather than Roman rule and Romanness itself, since the *Agricola* is an attempt to glorify his father-in-law.[171] This reading, which hinges on the fact that the *luxuria* forms only a *pars* of slavery, fails to account for the overarching evidence in the text pointing to the submission to Roman rule in the provinces as a whole as a form of slavishness. References to Roman rule as slavery are ubiquitous in the *Agricola*, but let us consider one in particular. When Agricola wishes to conquer Ireland, he says that he wishes to deny the Britons even the sight of liberty.[172] While civilization and luxury are important to Tacitus' description of Roman rule in the provinces, it is not simply the corrupting influence exerted by extravagance which leads to slavish conditions, but Roman rule itself.

Hybridization - Slavishness

In Tacitus, both civilization and slavishness are products of the hybridization between Roman conqueror and subject. As we have seen, Tacitus frequently describes submission to Roman rule over the provinces as a form of slavery. Lavan has recently discussed slavery and its role in Tacitus vis-à-vis three separate accounts of provincial resistance to Rome: Boudicca's revolt in *Annales* 14, the Batavian revolt in *Historiae* 4-5, and Agricola's campaigns against Calgacus and the Britons in the *Agricola*.[173] Consider, for example, that Tacitus is consistently conscious of slavish punishments being used

[170] Tac. *Ag*. 21
[171] For this argument, see Braund, *Ruling Roman Britain: Kings, Queens, Governors and Emperors from Julius Caesar to Agricola* (London: Routledge, 1996) 161-5
[172] Tac. *Ag*. 24
[173] For argument, see Myles Lavan, *Slaves to Rome: Paradigms of Empire in Roman Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 124-155

against non-slaves during the Boudiccan revolt, such as when the Britons avenge themselves on the Romans by using the cross (*patibulum*), the burning of captives (*ignes*), and torture (*cruces*).[174] The Britons are also described as wishing to give punishment to the Romans before they themselves receive retribution – implying that they are accustomed to being treated with the punishment of slaves at the hands of the Romans and intend to pay them back in kind.[175]

An imperative notion of slavishness in Tacitus, however, is that slavishness is not reserved for only the subjects of Rome who have become slaves, but the entire senatorial class which has become enslaved to the principate.[176] This parallel makes the comparison all the more jarring. While the conquering Romans are able to inflict whatever penalties they wish upon the conquered, they too are slaves in some capacity. In all of Tacitus' historical writings, the servility and spinelessness of the senate forms an integral part of the overall narrative. This anxiety concerning empire, in which 'good' Romans have become servile just as their conquered subjects are slaves to them, is omnipresent in Tacitus. The trappings of civilization and cultural accoutrements which the Romans export to the provinces are to be lamented, as is the decadent and servile Roman society which produced them. While the barbarians of the north (with their reputation for hatred of tyranny and relentless love of liberty) were most readily suitable for the purpose of this comparison, the motif also occurs in the Jewish excursus.

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[174] Tac. *Ann*. 14.33
[175] Tac. *Ann*. 14.33
[176] For a fuller discussion of this phenomenon, see Myles Lavan, *Slaves to Rome*, 139-142

Slavishness and Civilization in the Jewish Excursus

In the Jewish excursus it is not the Jews, but rather the Romans who are described as slaves by Tacitus. Slavishness in Tacitus, as has been noted, is frequently described in parallel: while the barbarians suffer under the Romans, the senatorial class at Rome also suffers under the *principes*, their freedmen, and their sycophantic hangers-on. Sadly, in the extant passages of the Jewish excursus, Tacitus does not write a speech for one of the Jewish leaders in the same way he did for Boudicca, Julius Civilis, or Calgacus (who debates Agricola on the merits and pitfalls of Roman governance).[177] This is not, however, a mistake. It enables Tacitus to portray the Jews as somewhat amorphous. Consider an important fact of the Jewish excursus: they are only described as slaves once, and that instance occurs very far back in the past (when they were the meanest part of the slaves of the east). The only other use of any word for slavery in the passage describes a Roman, Gessius Florus.[178] Tacitus' Jews, at the moment of their revolt are anything but slaves while their Roman ruler is described as a slave in a reversal of role, considering his connection to the ruling imperial family. Rather than learning to be slaves from the Romans, the Jews, who were supposed to be natural slaves before making contact with the Romans, have learned to become instigators, preferring death over slavishness.

Hybridization in the Jewish Excursus – Jews Influenced by Romans

In the Jewish excursus, hybridization occurs as the Jews begin to conduct their war like Romans, and the Romans – with some notable exceptions to be discussed below – begin to resemble foreigners (particularly easterners). First, the Jewish war effort begins to resemble the Romans' own civil war. Consider, in the same way that Tacitus

[177] Specifically at Tac. *Ag*. 30
[178] At Tac. *Hist*. 5.9

introduced the Jewish revolt (with the Romans only now beginning to care about foreign affairs),[179] he also has the Jews (eventually) put aside their internal differences for the conduct of foreign war.[180] Tacitus writes concerning the Jews' behavior in the war: "*Ita in duas factiones civitas discessit, donec propinquantibus Romanis bellum externum concordiam pareret*" ('Thus into two factions the city split, but with the approach of the Romans, foreign war produced peace').[181] After an entire section describing the various factions of the Jews, Tacitus describes their unification employing a single phrase, the ablative of cause '*propinquantibus Romanis'*. The Jews, like archaic Romans, fight on behalf of their *civitas*, and, most unlike contemporary Romans, are able to put aside internal struggles in order to resist foreigners. The Jews remember the *metus hostilis*, the fear of enemies by which the Romans were able to put aside their struggles, while the Romans have since forgotten it. Indeed, the use of the loaded word *concordiam* may also make the reader consider the secession of the plebs and the eventual reconciliation. The Jews also appear to take on the Romans' imperialistic proclivities, believing that they themselves are destined not only to beat the Romans, but to conquer the entire world. After the Jews misinterpret some *prodigia* Tacitus writes: "*pluribus persuasio inerat antiquis sacerdotum litteris contineri eo ipso tempore fore ut valesceret Oriens profectique Iudaea rerum potirentur*" ('There was a belief among many, according to the ancient priestly writings, that this was the moment at which the East was fated to prevail: men would now start forth from Judaea and conquer the world.')[182] Tacitus appears to be referencing messianic thought in many strands and sects of Judaism that the Jews will

[179] At Tac. *Hist*. 5.10
[180] At Tac. *Hist*. 5.12
[181] Tac. *Hist*. 5.12 Trans. Ben Nikota, 2014
[182] Tac. *Hist*. 5.13 Trans. Ben Nikota, 2014

eventually conquer the world, even perhaps referencing the scripture with *antiquis sacerdotum literris*. The Jews, in effect, have been hybridized with Roman traits. Rather than the Jews of *Historiae* 5.1-8, when the Jews were perpetually slaves and subjects, the Jews of the later sections (after prolonged contact with Greeks and Romans) have adopted a series of Roman traits: resistance to tyranny, unity as a people, and imperialistic ambitions – traits which were absent from Tacitus' former description of the Jews.

Anxieties of Empire – Cycles of Rise and Decline

Another type of postcolonial anxiety of empire is that exemplified by cycles of rise and decline. For many ancient Romans, there was an apprehension that the Romans had been corrupted by peace, luxury, and over-civilization. This "metropolitan malaise and self-doubt," as Schumate describes it, manifests itself in literature through the motif of the noble savage. While this term is loaded with meaning from 17th and 18th century imperialism, for my purposes I simply mean when the colonial subject is portrayed as uncorrupted by civilization and by the vices of contemporary society.[183] Another result of these feelings concerning the contemporary social order is that the colonial subject is used by authors as a critique on the social and moral dysfunction of the society of the conqueror. This notion produced a view of the frontier for Roman elite writers that once the Roman aristocrat escaped the trappings of a decadent society, he might reclaim lost traditional virtues. Consider, for example, two figures from Tacitus' *oeuvre* who engaged in conquest of the barbarians: Germanicus and Agricola. Germanicus and Agricola both exemplify a return to lost Republican values, the most important of which is that of

[183] Nancy Schumate, "Postcolonial Approaches to Tacitus" in *A Companion to Tacitus*, 495

martial prowess. The former puts down a munity and proceeds to avenge lost legions (employing somewhat questionable means in both case), the latter engages in a military campaign in England and is only held back by the corrupt at Rome.[184] Martial prowess, however, is not the only virtue believed to be capable of being revived on the frontier. Good governance of the provinces – as opposed to theft and rapine – is practiced by Agricola as a means of righting the wrongs (including robbery and rapine) of his predecessors.[185] Fecundity, supposedly in a freefall since the late republic, is also represented by Germanicus' actions as he displays his five children in triumph.[186] For a Roman possessing a more conservative outlook on the world, in which old-time values are dying and being corrupted, the frontier offers an escape and barbarians act as the vehicle by which criticisms of society can be made. This is another motif through which I intend to analyze the Jewish excursus.

Romans Corrupted by the Jews and the Frontier

The frontier, however, does not always necessitate a return to virtue. Romans and Greeks could just as easily be corrupted by the softness of the climate and the allure of its luxury. Let us now observe the Romans of the Jewish excursus who exemplify corrupted individuals and deteriorated social mores. The provinces – particularly the eastern frontier provinces – could have a corrupting effect on Greeks or Romans. When proceeding through his inventory of governors of Judaea up to the time of Titus, Tacitus frequently chaacterizes poor governorships conducted by corrupt, incompetent, or otherwise inefficient Romans (with some exceptions to be pointed out). The Romans

[184] See, Tac. *Ann*. 1.40-43 for Germanicus' speech to the troops; Tac. *Ann*. 1.55-71 for Germanicus' conduct in the war against the Germans; Tac. *Ag*. 18, 20, 37 for Agricola's comportment in battle.
[185] Tac. *Ag*. 19.1
[186] Tac. *Ann*. 2.41

whom he names in the history of Judaea are: Gnaeus Pompey, Mark Antony, Publius Ventidius, Gaius Sosius, Quintilius Varus, Antonius Felix, Gessius Florus, Cestius Gessius, and, finally, Vespasian and Titus.[187] The history of the relations between these Romans and the Jews is fraught with conflict and revolt. All of these Romans, save Vespasian and Titus, have direct links with the Julio-Claudian dynasty and the civil wars which destroyed the republic. Pompey and Mark Antony have obvious connections to the east – where they made their bases of operation – and to the losing sides of civil war. Publius Ventidius was one of Mark Antony's main lieutenants, so the connection between civil war losers and the Julio-Claudians continues with him.[188] With that being said, Publius Ventidius did achieve moderate successes in his wars against Parthia, although he was not awarded any honors because of his status as a lieutenant.[189] Gaius Sosius was a governor of Syria who worked to install the house of Herod, but, more importantly, was also a staunch ally of both Pompey and Mark Antony.[190] Quintilius Varus was governor of Syria 6-4 BC and his only other mention in Tacitus comes during a speech from Julius Civilis during his revolt.[191] In the speech, Civilis first slanders the eastern provinces – stating that they can have their kings – and then boasts about Quintilius Varus' death at the hands of Germans. Quintilius Varus is, once again, associated with military defeats. Antonius Felix is described by Tacitus as a freedman who married into the imperial family – stressing in particular his relationship to Mark Antony. Gessius Florus, whose inept governing leads to all-out-war between the Romans

[187] In sections Tac. *Hist*. 5.9-10
[188] Publius Ventidius defeated the Hasmonean king Antigonus in 38 BC. For more on Publius Ventidius, see Plut. *Ant*. 33-36
[189] For more on Publius Ventidius' military campaigns against the Parthians, see Cassius Dio, 39-40
[190] For more on Gaius Sosius, see Plut. *Ant*. 34; Jos. *AJ*. 14.15, 14.16
[191] At Tac. *Hist*. 4.17

and Jews, was appointed to the governorship thanks to the influence of Poppea, and Cestius Gessius was most known for his ineffectual attempts to quell the revolt.[192] These last figures, Cestius Gesius, Gessius Florus, and Publius Ventidius are also associated with Romans of lower-standing. There is something of a decrescendo in status from Pompey Magnus down to the freedmen of the imperial house. These are the Romans Tacitus chooses to include in his history of Roman interactions with Judaea and the Jews.

This cohort of Roman conquerors and governors does not have a fruitful relationship with either the subject Jews or the senatorial aristocrats at Rome. Aside from Publius Ventidius, all of these men are associated with military defeats, rather than victories or traditional military valour and virtue. Indeed, even Ventidius, who was a successful general, was denied his triumph and honors on account of his relatively low social status and military rank. Not only are there military defeats for most of these men, but their failed attempts at governing Judaea are also a significant mark against their character. These Romans were either already corrupt individuals – such as the freedman Antonius Felix who married into the family of Mark Antony – or were corrupted by their ruling of the east – for example, the governor Gessius Florus. Florus' crimes were described at length by Josephus and include excessive taxation in exchange for access to the synagogue (a commitment which he later reneged upon), robbing the temple, and, most significant for the Roman reader, the scourging and crucifixion of some Jews who were Roman knights.[193] Tacitus presents a view of imperial administration in which the governance of Judaea and the eastern frontier is dominated by immoral individuals associated with the imperial family rather than by the anachronistic 'good' characters of

[192] For more on these Gessius Florus, see Jos. *AJ* 20.11; Jos. *BJ* 2.11. For more on Cestius Gallus, see Tac. *Ann*. 15.25
[193] Jos. *AJ*. 20.11

Corbulo, Germanicus, or Agricola. It is particularly striking that it is inept governance which Tacitus focuses on, rather than an outright description of some of these men's crimes (as found in Josephus). For Tacitus, it is poor governance and men of low-status holding power that is morally repugnant, rather than their actual crimes.

Romans excelling on the Frontier – Titus and Vespasian the Conquerors

Tacitus does, however, provide many examples of traditional virtues thriving on the frontier, including in the characters of Titus and Vespasian in the Jewish excursus. In Tacitus, the frontier exists as a region where traditional martial and republican virtues may thrive – perhaps best exemplified by the story of Agricola in the *Agricola*. This phenomenon is also present in the Jewish excursus in the form of Titus. Indeed, the excursus itself opens with the comment by Tacitus that "*Eiusdem anni principio Caesar Titus, perdomandae Iudaeae delectus a patre et privatis utriusque rebus militia clarus, maiore tum vi famaque agebat, certantibus provinciarum et exercituum studiis*." ('Early in this same year Titus Caesar had been entrusted by his father with the task of completing the reduction of Judaea. While he and his father were both still ordinary citizens, Titus had distinguished himself as a soldier. Now his efficiency and reputation were steadily increasing, while the provinces and armies vied in their enthusiasm for him.')[194] This fourteen section digression on the Jews is not inspired by the actions of the Jews, but rather by the actions of a Roman commander. Indeed, the freighted word *clarus* is used to describe not only Titus' skill, but also his renown for that skill. Consider the entire opening of section 5.1:

[194] Tac. *Hist.* 5.1. Found in *The Histories of Tacitus*, Trans. W.H. Fyfe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). All translations are from this volume unless otherwise noted.

> Atque ipse, ut super fortunam crederetur, decorum se promptumque in armis ostendebat, comitate et adloquiis officia provocans ac plerumque in opera, in agmine gregario militia mixtus, incorrupto ducis honore. Moreover, in his own conduct, wishing to be thought greater than his fortune, he always showed himself dignified and energetic in the field; by his affable address he called forth devotion, and he often mingled with the common soldiers both at work or on the march without impairing his position as general.[195]

Titus is the exemplary field commander. He is concerned with his reputation, that his victories not appear to be by chance, that his soldiers love him (not on account of fear), and that he is able to mingle with the soldiers without dishonoring his rank. Finally, the gerundive *perdomandae*, formed off of *perdomo*, predominantly has connotations of subduing an animal. The anticipated defeat of Titus' enemy is described in language evocative of taming wild animals.[196]

Vespasian, too, is described as persistently resourceful and capable in his conquest of Judaea. Tacitus writes "*Vespasianus fortuna famaque et egregiis ministris intra duas aestates cuncta camporum omnisque praeter Hierosolyma urbis victore exercitu tenebat*." ('Vespasian, who, within two summers, thanks to his reputation, good fortune, and able subordinates, had the whole of the flat country and all the towns except Jerusalem under the heel of his victorious army.')[197] Like his son, Vespasian has fortune, reputation, excellent subordinates, and a powerful army. There is no description of rapine or misconduct – vices which Titus' troops will later be described as contemplating. Rather, they move with gusto, conquering the entire country (which has just been described as possessing many villages) in a mere two summers. Vespasian exemplifies

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[195] Tac. *Hist*. 5.1 Trans. W.H. Fyfe
[196] *S.v.* P*erdomo*, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, edited by P. G. W. Glare (New York: Oxford University Press), 1982
[197]‘ Tac. *Hist*. 5.10

traditional virtues and remains the ideal Roman field commander, excelling on the frontier while would-be emperors like Otho focus only on the pleasures of Rome.

Not only are Titus and Vespasian exemplary commanders, their achievements are rendered all the more superlative through two comparisons which Tacitus draws: first, the comparison between the two Flavians and their predecessors, i.e. the list of military failures and low-status commanders discussed above; second, the comparison between Titus and Vespasian and the Jews whom they are fighting. The Jews' war effort in the face of siege at the hands of Titus is described by Tacitus as:

> Tres duces, totidem exercitus: extrema et latissima moenium Simo, mediam urbem Ioannes [quem et Bargioram vocabant], templum Eleazarus firmaverat. Multitudine et armis Ioannes ac Simo, Eleazarus loco pollebat: sed proelia dolus incendia inter ipsos, et magna vis frumenti ambusta. Mox Ioannes, missis per speciem sacrificandi qui Eleazarum manumque eius obtruncarent, templo potitur. Ita in duas factiones civitas discessit, donec propinquantibus Romanis bellum externum concordiam pareret.
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> They had three armies, each with its own general. The outermost and largest line of wall was held by Simon; the central city by John, and the Temple by Eleazar. John and Simon were stronger than Eleazar in numbers and equipment, but he had the advantage of a strong position. Their behavior towards each other mainly consisted of fighting, treachery, and arson: a large quantity of corn was burnt. Eventually, under pretext of offering a sacrifice, John sent a party of men to massacre Eleazar and his troops, and by this means gained possession of the Temple. Thus Jerusalem was divided into two hostile parties, but on the approach of the Romans the necessities of foreign warfare reconciled their differences.[198]

Significantly, Tacitus has already mentioned the Jews' tendency toward infighting when he describes their internal struggles with their kings and when he described their abortive attempts at fighting the Romans in the field.[199] Now, when facing a siege, the Jews still cannot put aside their differences to fight the Romans. The words which Tacitus uses to

[198] Tac. *Hist.* 5.12
[199] At Tac. *Hist*. 5.8 and 5.11 respectively

describe the Jews' struggles among themselves are particularly marked: *proelia* (battles, the same word he uses to describe the fighting between the Romans and the Jews), *dolos* (tricks, a word with strong negative connotations in Latin), and *incendia* (fires).[200] Indeed, the leader of one faction must literally be murdered within the Jews' sacred temple – something which would be particularly potent for the Roman reader, especially in a work in which the destruction of the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus is described. Compared to the disorganized rabble that is the Jewish war effort and compared to the previous fecklessness of Roman government in Judaea, Titus and Vespasian's conquests appear all the more superlative. They exemplify traditional martial virtues, they treat their subordinates with respect, and they engage in good governance.

Finally, and uniquely to Vespasian and Titus in the *Historiae,* the two Flavian commanders represent, in a strange way, something of a collapse of ethnic identities. The Roman world of AD 69 is one which has become chaotic and disordered, especially in terms of ethnic identity in relation to Romanness. In the *Historiae*, Titus and Vespasian, who 'save' the Roman world after the excessively old-fashioned Galba, the perverse Otho, and the cruel Vitellius have all failed, are Roman conquerors who are inextricably linked to the east and to the Jews. When the reader of the text first encounters Titus and the description of his character, he is longing for his Jewish lover Bernice,[201] Vespasian sacrifices with Jewish priests on Mount Carmel,[202] Titus Alexander (himself a Jew) is the first to swear an oath of allegiance to Vespasian and his cause.[203] Finally, and perhaps

[200] *S.v. Dolus, Oxford Latin Dictionary*, edited by P. G. W. Glare (New York: Oxford University Press), 1982
[201] At Tac. *Hist.* 2.1
[202] Tac. *Hist.* 2.78
[203] Tac. *Hist.* 2.79

most significantly, Vespasian is supported by the portents of the east, as Tacitus describes a booming voice in the temple stating that the gods are leaving.[204] Thus, in the topsy-turvy world of the *Historiae* the saviours of the state are men who are able to excel on the frontier, exemplify traditional Roman values, but are also themselves influenced by the provinces they are conquering. The notion of a moderate principate, which Tacitus seems to ascribe to, with strong men who exemplify traditional virtues and whose power is rooted in the provinces, is certainly well illustrated by the Flavian commanders. Perhaps Tacitus is telling his reader that the ideal leader must necessarily adopt some customs of the conquered and engage with them. While Galba represented traditional virtue, Tacitus claims he would have only been a successful ruler had he never ruled (*omnium consensū cāpax imperiī nisi imperasset*).[205] The world of AD 69 (and afterwards) had changed too much for Galba to be able to be successful, despite any fairness or morality he may have displayed in his reign. It is only the Flavians, who represent an amalgam of provincial and Roman, who are able to excel and succeed. Indeed, it is perhaps telling that Jews whom the Flavians are conquering are portrayed as archaic Romans, as it is the contemporary system of the principate which eventually triumphs over the ancient virtues of the republic.

Conclusion

In his history of interactions between Romans and Jews, Tacitus portrays a Judaea which has the ability to corrupt Romans, and Roman governors who are able to reject contemporary society and excel on the frontier. Through these figures, Tacitus draws a stark comparison between the civil-war waging Romans of AD 69 and the Jews with

[204] Tac. *Hist.* 5.13
[205] Tac. *Hist.* 1.49

whom they fight. The Romans have spent the year slaughtering each other nearly to the point of destruction. Even in the course of their foreign war (brought on by their own corruption and ill-governance), they are more focused on the plunder of Jerusalem than on proper conduct in war and good governance. The Jews, inversely, are able to put aside their differences in order to resist the Romans. Their conduct in the war is not limited to resistance to the invaders. The Jews develop their own imperialist ambitions. They refuse to bow to the tyranny which the senatorial class at Rome has bowed to. The only exceptions to this rule are the figures of the Flavian dyasty: Titus and Vespasian, who excel on the frontier in their conduct of the war against the Jews. The resulting portrayal is one in which the roles for the two peoples have been switched. The Jews act like archaic Romans, entirely dedicated to the cause of liberty. The Romans, contrariwise, care only for the plunder of Jerusalem and even leave Judaea in revolt in order to fight their civil war. Through this erasing of ethnic lines, Tacitus is able to criticize contemporary Roman society, the Romans' penchant for civil war, and the principate which led to civil war. He is also able to portray something of a 'middle-ground' in the form of the Flavians, Romans who exemplify traditional Romanness, while at the same time being supported by and connected to the portents and peoples of the East. Thus, Tacitus is able to use deliberately distorted ethnic roles to achieve his own literary goals.

CONCLUSION

The study of Tacitean ethnography is important because it provides the reader of Tacitus with insight into the author's worldview not only regarding foreigners, but also concerning his outlook on Roman society, ethnic identity, and history. Tacitus' ethnographies are purely literary constructs and ought to be read as such. Once the modern reader has disabused himself of the notion of finding historical veracity in ethnographic digressions, the reading and analysis of ethnography becomes a more fruitful exercise. The modern scholar can study the influence of poetry on ethnography, the influence of scientific and geographical texts on ethnography, and the influence of antecedent historiographical texts. This is especially true of the *Historiae*. As I have attempted to show, the Roman world of the *Historiae* is one in which the boundaries between foreigner and Roman are being blurred if not (in some cases) erased.

Moving forward from this project, there are aspects of all three of my chapters whose scope I would to expand. One interesting avenue of future research is the use of Vergilian intertext within the Jewish excursus vis-à-vis other references to Vergil throughout the *Historiae*. The study of how the rest of the text interacts with Vergil and how the Jewish excursus interrelates with other sections of the *Historiae* would be a productive exercise. Another useful exercise would be to perform a more thorough analysis of environmental determinism in Tacitus and apply some of those findings to the geographical sections in the Jewish excursus. Finally, I would like to employ more postcolonial readings in order to provide an examination on the characters of Vespasian

and Titus, perhaps with an eye towards their reception in other texts and how their role in the *Historiae* and the Jewish excursus effects their treatment. Ultimately, there is a great deal of potential for expanded analysis of the Jewish excursus which I look forward to performing in the future.

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