

Devotiones: The Deaths of Galba and Otho in Tacitus' Histories
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When discussing Tacitus' treatment of Galba's death at the Lacus Curtius, Scott noted the connection to the *devotio* of M. Curtius (*Religion and Philosophy in the Histories of Tacitus* 59 n. 34; contra Sage *ANRW* II.33.2 944 n. 464). One of the explanations for the name of the Lacus Curtius involved M. Curtius hurling himself into a chasm in the earth in order to appease angry gods (Livy 7.6.1-6 et al.). When Galba falls from his chair at the Lacus (*Hist.* 1.41.2), it evokes Curtius' *devotio*, but in this particular instance the gods are not appeased. In addition to the symbolic location, there are also Galba's last words, that the soldiers of Otho should kill him (Galba) *si ita re publica videtur* (*Hist.* 1.41; cf. Suet. *Galba* 20.1 *quando ita videretur*). Since Galba agrees to die for the sake of his country, his death bears resemblance to other *devotiones*. A similar sentiment is expressed by Otho, who defies expectations by sacrificing himself to end the civil war. As Otho prepares to commit suicide, he urges his men to live—*este superstites* (2.47.3). However, once he is dead, some of his men show their devotion by killing themselves at his funeral pyre. The expression Tacitus uses to describe this phenomenon—*aemulatione decoris et caritate principis*—recalls language used by Livy (10.17.3) to describe the affection felt by the soldiers of Decius Mus after his *devotio* (Ash ad loc.).

Thus, as has already been theorized by other scholars, Tacitus indicates that the deaths of Galba and Otho are *devotiones*. I would like in this paper to explore the deeper implications of this premise, in particular, the notion that the *devotus* sacrifices himself not just to save the state, but also to bring down the enemy army. If Galba and Otho are *devoti*, then their deaths would bring about the destruction of their enemies, in this case, fellow Romans. Throughout the *Histories*, Tacitus plays upon the oxymoronic notion of the *domesticus hostis*. Thus, when *devotiones* take place, they bring destruction down upon every Roman. Moreover, Versnel reasoned that *devoti* were like scapegoats, so that “disease or death may be averted by offering a substitute” (*Mnem.* 29 (1976): 391). The *devotiones* of Galba and Otho “infect” the armies of their enemies, as well as the Lacus Curtius (2.55) and other places. The *rabies hominum* rages until it results in the destruction of the Capitolium at the hands of the Romans themselves.