

Cupido incessit: Religion at the Borders of Empire (Tac. *Hist.* 2.2–3, *Ann.* 1.61–62)

Tacitus, at two points in his major historical works, employs an unusual device that mobilizes religious symbolism to create dramatic effect, specifically at *Hist.* 2.2-3 and *Ann.* 1.61-62. These two scenes, which employ parallel construction, both feature a questionably heroic character with familial ties to the principate who is suddenly attacked by a desire for a religious experience: Titus at Paphos and Germanicus in the Teutoberg forest. The character then visits the relevant location in the context of a strong emotion, and is subsequently censured for that emotion. Tacitean scholars have noted the connection (Ash, 2007 and Goodyear, 1981, among others), but have not considered these scenes except as historiographical topoi (Ash and Goodyear) or a possible relationship to Alexander the Great (Guerrini, 1986). In this paper, I will explore these scenes in detail, and discuss the intersection of religion, imperial power, and emotion inherent therein.

At the beginning of the second book of the *Historiae*, Tacitus recounts the Flavian reaction to the events at Rome chronicled in book 1. The Flavians originally sent Titus to show support of Galba's reign, but after the emperor's assassination and civil war between Otho and Vitellius, it is politically impossible for Titus to arrive at Rome or return to his father in Judaea (*H.* 2.1.3). Faced with forced inactivity, Titus undertook a leisurely tour through the Eastern Empire, prompted, according to Tacitus, by his love for Queen Berenice (*accensum desiderio Berenices reginae*, *H.* 2.2.1). At this point (*H.* 2.2.2), a desire comes over him (*cupido incessit*) to visit the famed temple of Aphrodite at Paphos on Cyprus. Tacitus takes this opportunity to provide a description of the foundation of the cult, and its peculiarities (*H.* 2.3). In terms of the larger historical framework this passage is a brief interlude in Tacitus' recounting of politics and battles, and does not affect the later narrative. Thus, its detailed inclusion suggests a deeper

narrative significance than mere historical accounting. Titus' censure for this act is not immediate, occurring after his return to Rome with Berenice as his paramour. Deemed politically damaging, Berenice was dismissed from Rome (related in a lost portion of the *Historiae*; see, e.g., Dio 66.15.3-5). The cause-and-effect nature of these events, as well as the importance of the scene at Paphos, is additionally heightened when compared with Germanicus in the *Annales*.

After the mutiny on the Rhine, Tiberius places Germanicus in charge of several legions to guard the empire's north-western frontier. Just as in the case of Titus, a sudden desire attacks Germanicus (*cupido Caesarem invadit*, *Ann.* 1.61.1) to see the sight of the infamous Varian disaster in the Teutoberg forest. After a tour marked by *enargeia* and Vergilian echoes (Pagán, 1999 and 2002), Germanicus ritually buries the dead, placing the first sod himself (*Ann.* 1.62.1). The episode is rife with emotional language for places and for Germanicus' army (*permoto ad miserationem ... exercitu; maestos lucos; aucta in hostem ira maesti simul et infensi*). Tacitus cuts the somber moment short with Tiberius' disapproval, expressed in a weighted alternative (*Ann.* 1.62.2).

The parallels between these two scenes, both in terms of subject matter and construction, suggest a perceived danger in the intersection of religious practice and power dynamics. In both instances, the key character is a nascent or would-be ruler, and in both cases the experienced religious transport and its emotional context results in censure. At the level of the Latin, where desire attacks/invades the character, Tacitus employs the language of *enargeia* to engage the reader, forcing the audience to experience the emotional impulses that override self-control and reason. The feared loss of control is made more threatening by the proximity of the characters to the borders of the Empire, and the outer non-Roman world. What is at stake is not only emotionalism and dalliance, but a loss of *Romanitas*.

Bibliography

- Andrade, Nathaniel. "Seducing Autocracy: Tacitus and the Dynasts of the Near East." *AJP* 133 (2012): 441–475.
- Ash, Rhiannon, ed. *Tacitus Histories Book II*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Goodyear, Frances, ed. *The Annals of Tacitus, vol. II (Annals 1.55-81 and Annals 2)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Guerrini, Roberto. "Tito al santuario Pafio e il ricordo di Enea (Tac. *Hist.* II,4)." *Atene e Roma* 31 (1986): 28–34.
- Pagán, Victoria. "Beyond Teutoberg: Transgression and Transformation in Tacitus *Annales* 1.61–62." *CP* 94 (1999): 302–20.
- _____. "Actium and Teutoburg: Augustan Victory and Defeat in Vergil and Tacitus." In *Clio and the Poets*, edited by David Levene, 45–59. Leiden: Brill, 2002.