

Vergilian Resonances in Tacitus' Jewish Excursus

There has been a great deal of discussion of Tacitus' Jewish excursus in book V of the *Historiae* focused on its historicity, accuracy, and perceived anti-Semitism. This paper is more concerned with the text as a piece of literature and its interactions with epic. Tacitus frequently alludes to epic throughout his oeuvre. These allusions are meant to draw attention to the generic interplay and shared content between historiography and epic. For example, when describing Tiberius' vacillations in the *Annales*, Tacitus uses Vergilian intertext from the Dido episode in *Aeneid* book four, describing both characters' wills with the construction *fixum immotumque* as a means of implicitly comparing Tiberius to Dido. This paper focuses on how the Jewish myths of origins are no exception to this use of Vergil and epic.

Throughout the excursus, as Tacitus describes the Jews' tremendously ancient and illustrious origins he uses Vergilian intertext, epic allusion, and mythic synchronistic markers. Each myth features a different synchronistic marker. These markers, by which Tacitus synchronizes Roman and Jewish histories, also form an important literary aspect of Tacitus' excursus. This paper analyzes not only the synchronistic goals Tacitus achieves by means of these synchronisms, but also the literary goals he pursues.

This paper argues, through a close reading of Tacitus' use of epic intertext and of mythic synchronism, that Tacitus attempts to describe the ancient Jews as proto-Romans. He describes the Jews in this manner as a means of making the negative traits he associates with them in the present all the more stark. Tacitus' Jews thus share many qualities with the archaic Romans of Vergil and Livy. Tacitus achieves his goal of making the Jews into Romans through interacting, with respect to both style and content, with the most Roman of Roman authors, Vergil.