

Rome at the Crossroads: Liminal Spaces in Tacitus' *Histories*.

In his *Histories*, Tacitus conveys the upheaval of the civil wars of 69 CE by creating Rome as a liminal space. Liminality is a concept with roots in the anthropological theories of ritual as developed by Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep. I believe that throughout the *Histories*, Tacitus paints civil war a liminal moment for the Roman Empire, one fraught with transitions, transgressions, and reversals.

In this paper, I look specifically at the role the city of Rome plays as liminal space that serves as a witness to, victim of, and stage for the transitions from emperor to emperor. My particular focus will be on the transition from Galba to Otho in *Histories* 1. The key players in this episode face “Rubicon” –like moments in which they transform Rome by crossing a boundary (figuratively or literally). One such example is that of Otho’s walk across Rome at *Histories* 1.27. Fraser (2007) has analyzed this scene and the significance of the close attention it pays towards the physical fabric of the city. This walk represents the beginning of the end for Galba, and therefore the episode binds together the city’s structures with its fate. Otho, and his soldiers, furthermore, are depicted as crossing important moral boundaries, and treating their emperor like a foreign ruler (1.40). The events of *Histories* 1 are ultimately a prelude to the destruction of the Capitolium in *Histories* 3. This event provides the most obvious metaphor for destruction of the city as destruction of the state.

Liminality in Tacitus has been explored by several scholars. I build on the work of Clarke (2001), Pagan (1999, 2006) and von Stackelberg (2009), who examine liminal landscapes in the *Agricola* and *Annales*, as well as Haynes (2003) and Master (2008) who look at the breakdown of identity in the *Histories*. Especially relevant to this paper is O’Gorman’s (1995) study on the confusion inherent in civil war battlefield landscapes. I argue that the city represents another

important civil war landscape. Indeed, as the emperorship transfers from Galba to Otho, the Forum itself becomes a critical battlefield in the topsy-turvy world of civil war.

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