

Tacitus on Titus' Visit to the Temple of Venus at Paphos¹

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ABSTRACT: This article deals with Titus' visit to the temple of Venus at Paphos in the second book of Tacitus' *Historiae*. I argue that apart from its other literary intentions already mentioned by scholars, this digression implicitly connects Titus not only with Aeneas but also with Julius Caesar. Titus' affair with Berenice that recalls Caesar's affair with Cleopatra, Tacitus' allusions to Lucan's *De Bello Civili* where Caesar's visit to the tomb of Alexander the Great is described, the *πρόθος*-Motiv and *fortuna*'s favour that characterise both Roman generals, all contribute to connect Titus with Caesar and allow the reader to view a parallel between the Flavian and the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Furthermore, the particular digression allows the historian to present certain aspects of his work and his historiographic practices and to reinforce his credibility.

KEYWORDS: Tacitus – Titus – Lucan – Caesar – Paphian Venus

As a result of its geographical position, cultural contribution and multifaceted presence in historical developments, Cyprus makes a frequent appearance not only in ancient Greek, but also in Latin literature. Roman writers usually view the island as an important point of transition from the Greek world to the East and to Egypt, while they rarely neglect to turn their attention to Cyprus' connection to the worship of the goddess Venus. This fact must have undoubtedly held special symbolic significance for the Romans, as the specific goddess was the mother of Aeneas, their mythological ancestor.

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In this article I shall focus on Tacitus' description of Titus' visit to the temple of Paphian Venus in the beginning of the second book of his *Historiae*, which constitutes a characteristic example of the way in which references to the island can be exploited for literary purposes in Latin literature. It is worth mentioning that Tacitus, in contrast to other historians, rarely narrates temple visits and similar stories and thus the narration of a temple visit is something special in his historiographical works. As I shall attempt to demonstrate, apart from any other aims of the writer that may have been identified till now, the particular episode contributes to the allusive depiction of Titus and to his implicit linking not only with Vergil's Aeneas, but also with Julius Caesar on the basis of allusions to Lucan's *De Bello Civili*. A crucial factor for both intertexts is the inappropriate Eastern love-interest (Berenice for Titus, Dido for Aeneas, Cleopatra for Caesar). At the same time, the particular digression allows the historian to present certain aspects of his work and of his historiographic practices and to reinforce his credibility.

The second book of Tacitus' *Historiae* begins with a reference to fortune (*fortuna*), to its legendary inconsistency and to its ability to either favour or destroy a leader.² Then Titus makes an appearance, son of Vespasian and future emperor of Rome, travelling to the city as a representative of his father who was in Judaea, to bestow honours upon the emperor Galba. While in Corinth, Titus is informed by messengers that Galba has died and that Vitellius is trying to wrest power by force and arms. As soon as Titus received this information, he considered whether it would be wiser to continue his journey to Rome or return to his father in Judaea. He finally decided on the latter option and it is at this point that Tacitus makes the digression in which Cyprus is mentioned and which will be the subject of the present article. On the occasion of Titus' visit to the temple of Venus at Paphos,³ the historian describes the ritual that was observed during the worship of the goddess in her famous temple in Cyprus,⁴ refers to the appearance of the goddess' statue, which is unparalleled elsewhere, and includes information on the origins of her worship on the island and on the founding of her magnificent temple. The episode concludes with a reference to the favourable prophecy Titus received from the temple's priest.⁵

The Latin text (Tac. *hist.* 2, 2-4) runs as follows:⁶

2. [1] His ac talibus inter spem metumque iactatum spes vicit. fuerunt qui accensum desiderio Berenices reginae vertisse iter crederent; neque abhorrebat a Berenice iuvenilis animus, sed gerendis

² On Tacitus' reference to *fortuna* here, see Kivuila-Kiaku (2007). More generally, on the role of *fortuna* in Tacitus' historiography, see e.g. Cupaiuolo (1984) and Griffin (2009).

³ As Ash (2007: 80) notes, we know that this temple was destroyed in an earthquake in A.D. 77 and was repaired by the Flavians, a fact that could be perceived as an additional reason why the historian might want to highlight the interest of a member of the future imperial family in the particular temple a few years earlier (Kantiréa, 2007). On Titus' aristocratic interest in antiquities and curiosities, see Murphy (2003: 305) and Morello (2011: 150-151).

⁴ For more details on this subject, see Linderski (2002).

⁵ Titus' visit to the temple of Paphian Venus and the favourite prophecy he received by the priest are also mentioned by Suetonius: *Sed ubi turbari rursus cuncta sensit, redit ex itinere, aditoque Paphiae Veneris oraculo, dum de navigatione consulit, etiam de imperii spe confirmatus est* (Suet. *Tit.* 5, 1). His succinct narrative, however, omits the details of Tacitus' description.

⁶ For the Latin text of Tacitus, I follow the Teubner edition of Heubner (1978); for the Latin text of Lucan, I follow the Teubner edition of Shackleton Bailey (2009).

rebus nullum ex eo impedimentum: laetam voluptatibus adulescentiam egit, suo quam patris imperio moderatior. [2] igitur oram Aethiopiae et Asiae ac laeva maris praevectus, Rhodum et Cyprum insulas, inde Syriam audentioribus spatiis petebat. atque illum cupido incessit adeundi visendique templum Paphiae Veneris, inclutum per indigenas advenasque. haud fuerit longum initia religionis, templi ritum, formam deae (neque enim alibi sic habetur) paucis disserere.

3. [1] Conditorem templi regem Aëriam vetus memoria, quidam ipsius deae nomen id perhibent. fama recentior tradit a Cinyra sacratum templum deamque ipsam conceptam mari huc adpulsam; sed scientiam artemque haruspicum accitam et Cilicem Tamiram intulisse, atque ita pactum, ut familiae utriusque posterii caerimoniis praesiderent. mox, ne honore nullo regium genus peregrinam stirpem antecelleret, ipsa, quam intulerant, scientia hospites cessere: tantum Cinyrades sacerdos consulitur. [2] hostiae, ut quisque vovit, sed mares deliguntur: certissima fides haedorum fibris. sanguinem arae obfundere vetitum: precibus et igne puro altaria adolentur, nec ullis imbribus quamquam in aperto madesunt. simulacrum deae non effigie humana, continuus orbis latiore initio tenuem in ambitum metae modo exurgens, et ratio in obscuro.

4. [1] Titus spectata opulentia donisque regum quaeque alia laetum antiquitatibus Graecorum genus incertae vetustati adfingit, de navigatione primum consuluit. postquam pandi viam et mare prosperum accepit, de se per ambages interrogat caesis compluribus hostiis. [2] Sostratus (sacerdotis id nomen erat), ubi laeta et congruentia exta magnisque consultis adnuere deam videt, pauca in praesens et solita respondens, petito secreto futura aperit. Titus aucto animo ad patrem pervectus suspensis provinciarum et exercituum mentibus ingens rerum fiducia accessit.

The digression's relevance has been disputed by many scholars. Others have called it an extraneous description, in keeping with a Roman audience's interest in exotic subjects, while others believe that Titus' trip was not worthy of Tacitus' mention.⁷ However, as Rhiannon Ash (2007: 74) acutely observes, the aims of the digression appear to be numerous and to move in a number of directions: by placing it in the particular section Tacitus stalls the progression of the narrative at an important point, creates a religious foundation for the inception of the Flavians' plans and focuses on Titus' more personal traits. Furthermore, with this digression on the temple of Venus, Tacitus skilfully juxtaposes Titus with the religiously indifferent Vitellius who appears later. Also, as opposed to Otho, who does not waste time on rituals and who is eager to claim power (cf. Tac. *hist.* 1, 89, 3), the Flavians seem to know how to wait. At the same time, there is a tension between the events recounted in the digression and the narrative context in which they appear: while the families of the local Cinyras and the outsider Tamiras cordially work together at the temple of Venus, with the descendants of the second family gradually and respectfully relinquishing control to the first, the Roman leaders embark on a destructive civil war. Cyprus, and the temple of Venus in particular, in this instance become a model of peaceful succession and harmonious coexistence within a context of mutual respect and easy cohabitation which is no longer possible in Rome. Moreover, the fact that Venus is the goddess of love, as well as the mother of Aeneas, who was the mythical ancestor of Augustus, the founder of the first imperial dynasty, adds a further ironic dimension to the actions of the power-hungry Romans.

⁷ See Ash (2007: 74), who cites (and comments on) the views of Syme (1958: 310) and Wellesley (2000: 44) respectively.

The digression also serves to prepare the ground for the meeting between Titus and Sostratus the priest and in this way facilitates the connection between the first and Vespasian, his father, who in two passages in the *Historiae* (2, 78 and 4, 82-84) is shown to be seeking the counsel of priests. Thus, while Vespasian and Titus share similar interests, Domitian is completely absent from such scenes. Consequently, even though the digression does not advance the action, it provides an opportunity for certain conclusions to be drawn concerning the entire Flavian dynasty; it also allows for certain of the dynasty's traits to be highlighted, introducing themes that will be developed later in the narrative.⁸

The aims of the particular digression, however, do not end here, as it also facilitates even further the attempted depiction of Titus' literary image. Referring to the reasons why the latter changed direction, Tacitus confirms Titus' love affair with Berenice,⁹ hastening to point out, however, that this affair did not hinder him from conducting his duties. It would be reasonable to assume that Titus' decision to visit the temple of Venus, goddess of love, constitutes an additional indication that the love affair weighed heavily on the mind of the future emperor. The poetic language of the Tacitean passage, and especially the echoes of Vergil's *Aeneid*, facilitate an implicit connection between Titus and Aeneas, and Berenice and Dido respectively.¹⁰ Thus, an analogy could be drawn between Tacitus' remark that this love affair did not stand in the way of Titus' progress and the fact that Aeneas' romantic involvement with Dido did not hinder him from realising his great goal; therefore, this connection between the two men with regards to their love for a foreign queen could serve as foreshadowing as to Titus' and his dynasty's future successes. Just as in the *Aeneid* the favourable outcome of Aeneas' mission is predetermined by *fatum*, as clearly stated from the very first book of the epic in Jupiter's famous prophecy to Venus,¹¹ so the favourable outcome of Titus' plans is predetermined by superior forces and is stated in the prophecy of Sostratus, Venus' priest at her temple at Paphos. As is well known, the influence of the *Aeneid* on Tacitus' work is especially significant and the historian often likes to lend a Vergilian colour to episodes of his narrative.¹²

This analogy between Titus and Aeneas, however, is not the only one Tacitus seems to attempt with the particular digression. Certain facts concerning Berenice, such as her Eastern origins, her allure, her wealth and influence, all recalled in the minds of Roman audiences another Eastern queen, Cleopatra.¹³ As I shall attempt to demonstrate in due course, Tacitus appears to be using this parallel and the theme of the inappropriate Eastern love-interest so as to draw another implicit analogy: that

⁸ All these aims are succinctly mentioned by Ash (2007: 74); cf. also Miravalles (2004: 8-31).

⁹ For the Jewish princess Berenice, daughter of King Herod Agrippa I and sister of King Herod Agrippa II, and her affair with Titus, see Macurdy (1935); Crook (1951); Rogers (1980); Braund (1984); Ilan (1992); Keaveney – Madden (2003); Freisenbruch (2010: 133-154); Anagnostou-Laoutides – Charles (2015).

¹⁰ See Guerrini (1986), where possible echoes of Vergil's *Aeneid* in Tacitus' passage are cited, and more recently Miravalles (2004: 19-20); cf. Ash (2007: 78), who is less willing to accept the view that Titus is cast as Aeneas and Berenice as Dido. Macrae (2015) has eloquently demonstrated that Suetonius also compares Titus and Berenice with Aeneas and Dido at Suet. *Tit.* 7, 2: *Berenicen statim ab urbe dimisit invitum invitam.*

¹¹ Verg. *Aen.* 1, 257-296 and esp. 1, 257-258: *manent immota tuorum / fata tibi*; cf. also Verg. *Aen.* 1, 1-3: *Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris / Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit / litora.*

¹² For Vergil's influence on Tacitus, see e.g. Miller (1961-1962); Baxter (1971); Baxter (1972); Miller (1987); Woodman (1988: 169ff.); Henry (1991); Foucher (2000: 305-320); Joseph (2012a); Joseph (2012b); Ginsberg (2020).

¹³ Mommsen (1885: 540) calls her "Kleopatra im kleinen"; cf. Ash (2007: 79).

between Berenice's lover Titus and Cleopatra's lover Julius Caesar. In order for this aim to be achieved, a crucial role is played by allusions to Lucan's *De Bello Civili*, another epic to have impacted Tacitus' historiography extensively.¹⁴

The reference to Titus' desire to visit the temple of Paphian Venus (*illum cupido incessit adeundi visendique templum Paphiae Veneris*) allows us to make the connection between it and the strong desire of Alexander the Great's to visit famous locations, creates a thematic parallel with similar visits of the Macedonian general to various temples¹⁵ and constitutes a common motif in instances of *imitatio-Alexandri*.¹⁶ Thus, subtly, the historian imparts a sense of grandeur to Titus' personality and implicitly points to his leadership qualities.¹⁷ Still, we could consider the fact that Tacitus' aim is not so much to link Titus to Alexander the Great, but to one of his main imitators, Julius Caesar, who is strongly associated with the Macedonian leader in Lucan's epic.¹⁸ He too visits famous sites, such as the ruins of Troy, as had Alexander the Great in fact;¹⁹ he too wishes to discover the sources of the Nile river, as had Alexander.²⁰ The connection between the two leaders, however, becomes especially evident when Julius Caesar is shown to visit the tomb of Alexander the Great in Alexandria (Lucan. 10, 14-52). During this visit Lucan stresses Caesar's strong desire to see Alexander's tomb in lines 10, 14-19:

tum vultu semper celante pavorem
intrepidus superum sedes et templa vetusti
numinis antiquas Macetum testantia vires
circumit, et nulla captus dulcedine rerum,
non auro cultuque deum, non moenibus urbis,
effossum tumulis cupide descendit in antrum.

¹⁴ For Lucan's influence on Tacitus, see e.g. Robbert (1917); Borgo (1976); Borgo (1977); Borzsák (1980); O'Gorman (1995); Foucher (2000: 305-320); Tzounakas (2005); Manolaraki (2005); Joseph (2012a); Joseph (2012b); Daly (2020).

¹⁵ Curtius Rufus uses the same vocabulary in the context of Alexander's visit to the *templum Iovis* where he finds the Gordian knot: *cupido incessit animo sortis eius explendae* (3, 1, 16). In recent scholarship the reign of Vespasian is believed to be a possible date for Curtius Rufus. Titus' association with Alexander the Great seems to be further reinforced by the phrase *inter spem metumque iactatum* at Tac. *hist.* 2, 2, 1, since Alexander is characterised with similar words in Curtius Rufus: *quidquid in utramque partem aut metus aut spes subiecerat* (3, 6, 5).

¹⁶ For the πτόθος-Motiv here and its presence in the mechanism of the *imitatio-Alexandri*, see Guerrini (1986: 28) with a relevant bibliography. For Titus' *cupido* as evoking Alexander the Great's interest in visiting famous sites, see also Miravalles (2004: 20-21) and Ash (2007: 80). It is worth noting that a similar *cupido* is also shared by Vespasian, when he seeks the counsel of a priest in Alexandria at Tac. *hist.* 4, 82, 1: *Altior inde Vespasiano cupido adeundi sacram sedem ut super rebus imperii consuleret*.

¹⁷ More generally, with regards to Tacitus' habit to give samples of an 'alternative history', implying that Titus could have become emperor, which many believed at the time, see Ash (2007: 73).

¹⁸ For this association in Lucan's *De Bello Civili*, cf. Morford (1967: 13-19); Ahl (1976: 222-230); Schmidt (1986: 31-32); Croisille (1990); Berti (2000: 21-24); Auhagen (2001); Narducci (2002: 240-247); Tesoriero (2005: 205-206); Rossi (2005: 238-252); Galtier (2007); Maes (2009); Welch – Mitchell (2013: 99-100); Tracy (2014: 93-94, 117-127, 234-235); Celotto (2018); McClellan (2019: 155, 158).

¹⁹ Cf. Zwierlein (1986); Gagliardi (1997); Rossi (2001).

²⁰ Cf. Lucan. 10, 268-274: *Quae tibi noscendi Nilum, Romane, cupido est, / et Phariis Persisque fuit Macetumque tyrannis, / nullaque non aetas voluit conferre futuris / notitiam; sed vincit adhuc natura latendi. / summus Alexander regum, quem Memphis adorat, / invidit Nilo, misitque per ultima terrae / Aethiopum lectos* and see mainly Berti (2000: 212-214); Manolaraki (2011); Manolaraki (2012: 80-117), with a rich bibliography on the imperialistic parallels between Alexander, Caesar and Nero; Tracy (2014: 118-119, 184-189, 197, 254-255).

Lucan's *cupide* that refers to Caesar here²¹ corresponds to Titus' *cupido ... adeundi visendique* in Tacitus' account and thus the two Roman leaders share a similar *cupido*. The similarity of the two scenes continues when both accounts stress the wealth of the temples: *et nulla captus dulcedine rerum, / non auro cultuque deum, non moenibus urbis* (Lucan. 10, 17-18) and *Titus spectata opulencia donisque regum quaeque alia laetum antiquitatibus Graecorum genus incertae vetustati adfingit* (Tac. *hist.* 2, 4, 1). Furthermore, similar verbal choices make the similarity of the two passages even more striking (cf. *vetusti* and *vetustati*, *antiquas* and *antiquitatibus*).

The context of the journey and the motif of turning aside from one's journey because of *cupido* is a crucial theme which strengthens the parallels and seems to play a significant role in creating intertextual echoes of Aeneas in Vergil's *Aeneid* and of Julius Caesar in Lucan's epic. There is an interplay between goal-oriented movement and digressive movement which is central to the poetic/historical parallels. Aeneas is bound for Italy and his sojourn with Dido is off-track; similarly, Caesar has specific goals in Egypt, and he turns aside from these to visit Alexander's tomb. In his case, whether Cleopatra is a goal or a digression is more ambiguous. So in Tacitus Titus' return to Judaea seems to be a goal-oriented action, since he comes back to his father to report the changing balance of power. Likewise, whether Berenice is a goal or a digression is also ambiguous. In another analogy, we could see Titus' visit to the temple of Venus as a clear turning aside from his main path, and that is also signalled by the form of Tacitus' digression, who marks the future emperor's digression with one in his narrative. Implicitly and on a symbolic level, however, Titus' visit to the temple of Venus in Cyprus is goal-related, as Venus corresponds both with the *fortuna* which the Flavians must now court and at the same time, potentially, with his love affair with Berenice.

As has already been mentioned, the second book of the *Historiae* begins with a reference to *fortuna*. In Roman minds fortune is closely associated with the goddess Venus²² and, consequently, the favourable outcome of Titus' visit to the temple of the goddess at Paphos functions on an allusive level, foreshadowing even more clearly how fortune favours the plans of the future imperial dynasty. In fact, the placement of this digression in the emphatic position of the beginning of the second book facilitates the programmatic dimension of the particular literary concept even more. As is well known, the support *fortuna* shows Caesar is a theme that dominates the whole of Lucan's *De Bello Civili*.²³ Even at the beginning of the tenth book, just before the description of Caesar's visit to Alexander's tomb, the *fortuna* of the Roman general is clearly referred to: *pugnavit fortuna ducis fatumque nocentis / Aegypti* (Lucan. 10, 3-4). Thus, the favour of *fortuna* is one more element connecting Caesar and Titus. The connection of the two figures allows the reader to see in Titus elements of Caesar and the Flavian dynasty in analogy with the Julio-Claudian dynasty. This analogy is further reinforced by Titus' choice to visit the temple of a goddess who is regarded as the mythical ancestor

²¹ Cf. also Lucan. 10, 268: *Quae tibi noscendi Nilum, Romane, cupido est*, where Caesar's *cupido* is highlighted again.

²² See e.g. Ahl (1976: 288-293); Murphy (1985-1986).

²³ See especially Dick (1967); Berti (2000: 63) with a relevant bibliography. More generally, for Caesar's connection with *fortuna*, see Murphy (1985-1986).

of Julius Caesar. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Alexander, Caesar, and Titus all die prematurely. It would be reasonable to assume that this further parallel is as much about prefiguring that early death as it is about political evaluation.

All these implicit parallels between Titus and Caesar allow the reader to draw out the further meanings and the political/historical judgements conveyed by this episode and explore their potential significance either for the Tacitean narrative or for the historical evaluation of Titus. Here it is important to keep in mind that Tacitus is not just writing literature: he is engaging in a (sometimes polemical) representation of recent imperial history. Without doubt, there is a difference between evoking Augustus (the true founder of the Julio-Claudian dynasty) and Julius Caesar, whose legacy is more tightly bound up with civil war. Alain Gowing gives an excellent account of how useful the Augustan precedent would be to the Flavians as they inaugurated their new dynasty.²⁴ The parallel with Caesar could run counter to this precedent at times, as it could point to the turbulent final years of the Republic, and Tacitus seems to be well aware of it. In all likelihood, in a pro-Flavian literary work a connection with Caesar would aim to 'de-activate' the problematic aspects of Caesar (civil war, assassination) so that he becomes an *exemplum* of imperialist conquest rather than tyranny. In such a case, the comparison with Alexander could help with such 'de-activation', as is evident, for example, in Statius' equestrian statue poem *Silvae* 1, 1, 84-87, where Domitian is positioned alongside Caesar/Alexander.²⁵ The case of Tacitus, however, seems to move in a different direction. By choosing to draw a parallel between Titus and Caesar, the historian seems to 'correct' the Flavian emphasis on the Augustan precedent and to invite his readers to judge the future emperor as a second Caesar with his problematic aspects 'activated'. In fact, as the historian looks for the parallels not so much in the historical Caesar, but rather in his peculiar persona in Lucan's epic on the horrific civil war, the kind of second Caesar evoked by Tacitus is even more strongly associated with civil war and comes closer to the notion of tyranny that dominates the image of Caesar in Lucan's poem.²⁶ Moreover, since Lucan's Alexander is clearly associated with tyranny, as is skilfully pointed out by Jonathan Tracy (2014: *passim*),²⁷ Tacitus' intertextual allusions to Caesar's pilgrimage to Alexander's tomb in Lucan's epic naturally lead to the idea that the historian is competently attempting to attach the implication of tyranny to Titus and more generally to the Flavian dynasty.

Finally, we could consider the fact that through this episode Tacitus is exploiting the opportunity to promote aspects of his own work and historiographical practices. It is worth noting that the case in

²⁴ See Gowing (2005: 102-131).

²⁵ On this complimentary comparison in Statius' poem, see e.g. Newlands (2002: 65-66).

²⁶ For the depiction of Caesar in Lucan's epic, see e.g. Tzounakas (2013) with a rich bibliography.

²⁷ Cf. e.g. Tracy (2014: 29: "for Lucan as for his uncle Seneca, Alexander is an archetype of tyranny and megalomania", or 119: "Another significant departure in Lucan from Seneca's portrait of Alexander lies in his emphatic and close association of Alexander with Caesar as exemplars of tyranny, an association driven home through the probably fictitious account of a pilgrimage by Caesar to Alexander's grave"). Lucan's invective against Alexander culminates in his *vituperatio Alexandri* at Lucan. 10, 20-52, for which see also Schmidt (1986: 33-92) and Berti (2000: 71-92).

question is one of few found in Tacitus where the historian mentions famous temples,²⁸ contrary to other historians who dedicated extensive passages to such subjects and digressions. With the apology and excuse that nowhere else does the goddess appear in this way, Tacitus piques the interest of his readers and justifies his digression. At the same time, the phrase *neque enim alibi sic habetur* could, on another level, be interpreted “nowhere else is she presented this way”²⁹ and mean that there is no description of the goddess’ statue in any other work.³⁰ Thus, Tacitus is shown to be offering something that was lacking, while also demonstrating his faith in the originality and timelessness of his work which will preserve for posterity something non-existent in other sources. This context also highlights the reference to king Aerias as founder of the temple of Venus at Paphos, who is not mentioned in any earlier literature.³¹ Furthermore, the particular digression allows Tacitus to promote the credibility³² of his work and his historiographic method implicitly. The emphasis he lays on the divergence between *vetus memoria* (“old memory”) and *fama recentior* (“a more recent tradition”) and his covert criticism of the practice of the Greeks to delight in ancient tales and to attribute various things to an “uncertain antiquity” (*incertae vetustati*) reveal a historian who is less than eager to adopt the credibility of such information, but is merely passing on what is handed over. Admitting that he cannot express an opinion or confirm certain facts, Tacitus lets it be implied that the rest of what he mentions is verified.

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²⁸ Cf. e.g. Tac. *ann.* 3, 60-63, where famous temples of Cyprus are also mentioned. Generally, for the role of religion in Tacitus’ historiographical works, see recently Davies (2004: 143-225); Shannon (2014); Shannon-Henderson (2019). For Tacitus’ interest in *mirabilia*, see Shannon (2013: 11-15).

²⁹ For the use of *habeo* with the meaning “to include (in an account, narrative, etc.)”, see *OLD*, s.v. *habeo* 13, d.

³⁰ All of the extant sources postdate Tacitus; cf. e.g. Serv. *Aen.* 1, 720: *apud Cyprios Venus in modum umbilici, vel ut quidam volunt, metae colitur*. Townend (1962: 362) suspects an influence from Pliny the Elder, since at *nat.* 2, 210 it is mentioned that the altar in the temple of Paphian Venus is never wetted by rain, a piece of information repeated by Tacitus.

³¹ Cf. also Tac. *ann.* 3, 62, 5 and see Pirenne-Delforge (1994: 288-289).

³² Commenting on the phrase *ratio in obscuro* at Tac. *hist.* 2, 3, 2, Ash (2007: 83) mentions that Tacitus knows and admits the limits of his knowledge; she also observes that religious matters frequently lead writers to admit ἀπορία and cites Quint. *inst.* 9, 2, 19, who notes that declarations of doubt due to unsuccessful enquiry are a literary device that allows writers to maintain their credibility.

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