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Reading Spaces, Observing Spectators in Tacitus' *Histories*

1 Written spaces

“Topography, for Romans, perhaps played a greater role than chronology in making sense of the past”: this statement by Catharine Edwards in her seminal book on “writing Rome”¹ might be contrasted with Marincola’s (and others’) opinion that geography played only a minor role in Roman historiography.² A distinction therefore seems necessary: in Roman historians, precision in geographical (and topographical) detail such as any modern historian would ask for in a historical work, is limited. And this holds true even for geographical/ethnographical digressions (which may again serve other, literary purposes beyond just setting the scene for historical events). Nevertheless, there is indeed a fair amount of references to geographical spaces and topographical places in histories, but, as will be argued, they are always tied to a specific narrative purpose, taking into account the knowledge and expectations of audiences. Geographical and topographical information, inserted strategically and modified according to narrative (and ideological) purposes, may exercise a strong influence on the readers’ imagination,³ thus shaping their perception and interpretation of historical events. The greater or smaller scale and detail of the spaces described is dependent on the focalization in particular passages of the text.⁴ Sometimes it is sufficient to refer to a general structure of the *oikumene* or the Roman Empire in terms of East – West (Near East – Italy, Spain), North – South (Britain, Gaul, Germany – Africa, Egypt),⁵ sometimes a schematic image of a scene for the action (a “spatial inventory”⁶) is created: an example is the Rhine insula as starting point for the Batavian revolt of Iulius Civilis in Tacitus (*Tac. Hist.* 4.12.2).⁷

1 Edwards 1996, 42. In her first chapters Edwards shows that topographical landmarks of the city of Rome formed the Roman’s historical conscience (also as a source of knowledge about historical events) at least as much as literary texts (16–23, 27–43); on the imperial perspective (Tacitus and “the Capitol in flames”) cf. Edwards 1996, 74–85 and below XXX.

2 Marincola 1997, 85: “there is little interest in geography evidenced by any of their major historians”.

3 “Geography often turns out to be a state of mind rather than a collection of empirically verifiable facts” (Pomeroy 2003, 361).

4 More detailed reflection on the terms which are important in this context in Riggsby 2009. On the mutual dependance of the concepts of “space” and “place” cf. Tuan 1977, 6 (space is more abstract, makes movement possible, is open; place implies better knowledge, is endowed with values and more stable); through familiarity, space can experientially become place (73).

5 Cf. e. g. *Hist.* 1.2 and 8–11 with an overview of the situation in the Roman empire; Pomeroy 2003, 371.

6 Riggsby 2009, 154.

Batavi, donec trans Rhenum agebant, pars Chattorum, seditione domestica pulsati extrema Galliae orae vacua cultoribus simulque insulam iuxta sitam occupavere, quam mare Oceanus a fronte, Rhenus amnis tergum ac latera circumluit.

The Batavi were once a tribe of the Chatti, living beyond the Rhine. But an outbreak of civil war had driven them out, and they settled in a still unoccupied district on the frontier of Gaul and also in the neighboring island, enclosed on one side by the ocean and on the other three sides by the Rhine.

Riggsby calls this a “topological” description.⁸ But that there is more to it than just stage-setting is made clear through the reference to the liminal position of this space at the border of Gaul in relationship to the Roman Empire and to the *oikumene* by using the Ocean as limit, stressing the emptiness of the space and its occupation as a result of civil strife: it is already charged with dangerous potential when seen from the Roman perspective. Therefore it is important to stress that spaces as we find them in historiography are always *written* spaces with particular structures, that is, they are created in the imagination of the reader/audience by linguistic/literary means.⁹ The addressee of the description comes thus into view.

2 Readers and spaces

It is always awkward to try to define precisely the audience’s knowledge and expectations in reader-response criticism, but as to the present theme, some assumptions seem appropriate. First, Tacitus’ readership belongs primarily to the upper stratum of Roman society and we can reasonably assume a good knowledge of the city of Rome and the Italian landscape (Tacitus for example does not give any additional information even on small, otherwise insignificant Latin towns when mentioned in his work), and some knowledge of the general geographical layout of the Roman empire (e. g. that Pannonia is North-East of Rome and Britain in the far north). But one qualification is necessary which distinguishes these readers from any modern historian reading Tacitus: there were no maps in the modern sense. This is a somewhat contested field in modern research,¹⁰ but it seems fair to assume that some of the

⁷ Quotations from Tacitus’ *Histories* follow the edition of Heubner 1978 and the translation of Fyfe / Levene 1997.

⁸ Riggsby 2009, 155 f., elaborating on Riggsby 2006.

⁹ Therefore structural methods to describe the relationship of space and (narratological) point of view in literature are applicable also to historiography. In relation to the representation of space, a narrator may assume different positions, “standpoints” within the narrated world (between identification with a hero and authorial omniscience), sharing different spatial “identities” in different passages (van Baak 1983, 120–125).

¹⁰ The optimistic position is represented by Nicolet 1991, esp. 57–84 and 95–122 (Agrippa’s map), sceptical Brodersen 1995, esp. 268–285, and Brodersen 2001. Of course, ethnography and geographical information form an important part in historiography (cf. Miquel in this volume). What is impor-

basic aspects of modern maps were unknown to Tacitus' readers: there were no maps with a unified orientation, no unified scale which would allow one to measure distances, no detailed rendering of shapes of coastlines, riverbeds, mountain ranges etc. What was available were itineraries, which present space as directional and relational: a string of places, with the distances inbetween written out, the connections (roads) marked, thus forming a kind of network.¹¹ These may just be texts with lists of place names and distances, or graphical representations of it (but these would be secondary to the text, they are visual representations of a text, not an abstraction based on a modern-style map). The classical late antique example is the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, the most quoted modern one the design of the London underground map by Harry Beck (originally from 1933, but in principle still in use). This concept of space perception involves also the possibility of movement: historical agents move along this string of places and have a certain goal (e.g. towards Rome or away from Rome).¹²

Second, Roman readers of historiography would be familiar, mostly but not necessarily by autopsy, but certainly through their historical conscience formed also by their literary experiences, with the great symbolic places of Roman history in the city of Rome, the Forum, the temples, the Capitol.¹³ On the other hand, many places where important historical events narrated by the historian took place would in most cases have been unfamiliar to the readers, as for example battlefields, distant towns, remote territories, and could enter historical conscience only via the reading of their description in histories. And while the places in the first category would usually be charged with a historical meaning (the Forum, the Capitol) which the historian can use as a backdrop to his account without necessarily evoking explicitly these connotations, in unfamiliar, "new" spaces he has to make the meaning explicit through their presentation in the text with literary means.

Finally, this distinction also has some effect on the shape of the historiographical work itself. The most familiar effect is what is usually described as the "annalistic scheme", that of dividing sections of the text into affairs at home (*domi* etc.) and abroad (which is usually military, therefore *militiae*, *bello* etc.), to give a very simplis-

tant however, is that in historiography we are dealing with textual representations of these informations. On Arrian and geography cf. Liotsakis in this volume. For maps in early Greek historiography cf. Purves 2010, 21f., 118–120 *et passim*. She stresses the fictional character of cartography in historiography (21).

11 For the geographical layout of Tacitus' *Histories* and its cultural connotations cf. Pomeroy 2003, *passim*, esp. 362. The concept of "hodological" vs. "cartographic" narrative in Greek historiography (Herodotus) may be compared, cf. Purves 2010, 144–158.

12 Riggsby 2009, 155 calls this type "strategic space"; on a smaller scale still would be the "tactical" space in descriptions of military operations (156) (an example from the battle at Bedriacum will be treated later XXX).

13 Cf. e.g. Ash 2007b, 224–236 on the role of buildings; for the theoretical background cf. Tuan 1977, 101–117.

tic version of it.¹⁴ This involves another problem, that of the chronological order of the narrative: the historian is forced to use prolepses and analepses in the narrative or he has to split up the accounts, especially as the empire grows and simultaneous complex actions take place in Rome and in more than one place outside Rome and/or Italy. Thus the structure of the work may become a metaphorical reflection of its content as has been shown e. g. for Livy's first pentad where the city of Rome is both the content of his history and gives structure to its form in the recurring foundation stories related to the series of pentads continuing the history.¹⁵ It will become evident how Tacitus, too, invites his readers' interpretations through the ordering of his account. When the historian describes how participants in historical events act in these two types of places ("at home" – "abroad"), and how their actions were observed by other persons, either involved with the events or, apparently at least, only acting as bystanders, he invites readers either to construct a relationship between their (presumably ideologically highly charged) vision of known places and the actions of the persons and the observations of the spectators, or to invest unknown places with historical meaning equivalent to that of the familiar venues for the spectacle of Roman history. Two approaches to reading Tacitus' texts are thus combined in these readings: the narratological approach of distinguishing different points of view suggested by the narrator of the text to his addressee and the interpretation of the representation of spaces and places in the historical text in order to mediate historical (and emotional) experience.

3 Observations and observers

Some examples in Tacitus' *Histories* will enable us to look at the relationship between historiographical space, action and explicit references to the observation of the action within these spaces (with particular emphasis on the reactions of the observers) as a way to influence the readership. First, two types of observation may be distinguished: first degree observation is directly concerned with the objects of observation, the observer creates the object through observation (e. g. the narrator of a historiographical work by describing it). Second degree observation is concerned with the way the observation (of a first degree observer) takes place (e. g. the narrator or any focalizer within a narrative commenting on the observation of a person within the narrative).¹⁶ Now, three types of readers' reactions are possible, they can assume different roles within the construction of historical events: they can be drawn into the role of first degree observers or actors (in focalized narrative) of the events them-

¹⁴ Cf. Pomeroy 2012, 145f.

¹⁵ Cf. Kraus 1994, 286f. on Tacitus' reception of this concept in *Ann.* 15.43 (Neronian Rome after the fire).

¹⁶ The terminology uses concepts from Niklas Luhmann's "Systemtheorie" without fully endorsing all aspects of this sociological theory, cf. Krause 2005, 92–96.

selves, assuming the point of view of the observers within the narrative (identifying themselves with the observers, or, if they are not specified, with the authorial perspective).¹⁷ They may become second degree observers (observing the spectators of events, either by identifying with second degree observers within the text or by distancing themselves from first degree observers, especially when the narrator marks the observer as unreliable, or morally flawed). Finally, they may on a third level observe the historical work as a literary and artistic object that represents both the spaces of the historical spectacular narrative and forms a spectacle in itself.¹⁸

4 Rome and the empire – the great perspective

At the beginning of the *Histories* Tacitus gives a survey of the situation after Nero's death and the events he will describe, "zooming in" as in a movie, until he reaches the centre, Rome (Tac. *Hist.* 1.2):

Opus adgredior opimum casibus, atrox proeliis, discors seditionibus, ipsa etiam pace saevum. quattuor principes ferro interempti: trina bella civilia, plura externa ac plerumque permixta: prosperae in Oriente, adversae in Occidente res: turbatum Illyricum, Galliae nutantes, perdomita Britannia et statim ommissa: coortae in nos Sarmatarum ac Sueborum gentes, nobilitatus cladibus mutuis Dacus, mota prope etiam Parthorum arma falsi Neronis ludibrio. iam vero Italia novis cladibus vel post longam saeculorum seriem repetitis adflicta. haustae aut obrutae urbes, fecundissima Campaniae ora; et urbs incendiis vastata, consumptis, antiquissimis delubris, ipso Capitolio civium manibus incenso. pollutae caerimoniae, magna adulteria: plenum exiliimare, infecti caedibus scopuli. atrocius in urbe saevitum: nobilitas, opes, omissi gestique honores pro crimine et ob virtutes certissimum exitium. [...] corrupti in dominos servi, in patronos liberti; et quibus deerat inimicus per amicos oppressi.

The story I now commence is rich in vicissitudes, grim with warfare, torn by civil strife, a tale of horror even during times of peace. Four emperors slain by the sword. Three civil wars: often entwined with these, an even larger number of foreign wars. Successes in the East, disaster in the West, disturbance in Illyricum, disaffection in Gaul. The conquest of Britain, immediately given up; the rising of the Sarmatian and Suebic tribes. Dacia had the privilege of inflicting and receiving defeat at our hands, and a pretender claiming to be Nero almost deluded the Parthians also into declaring war. Now too Italy was smitten with new disasters, or disasters it had not witnessed for a long period of years. Towns along the rich coast of Campania were swallowed by the earth or buried from above. The city was devastated by fires, her most ancient temples were destroyed, and the Capitol itself was fired by Roman hands. Sacred rites were grossly pro-

¹⁷ The textually non-marked observation (presentation through the authorial voice of the text without explicit or implicit reference to an act of observation or a specific observer) implies a kind of simulated autopsy created by the historian through the use of *enargeia*. Scenes of spectatorship within the historical text may by a narratological *mise en abyme* be reflections on the historian's own situation as an "observer" of historical events, cf. Walker 1993, especially 370 – 375 and in this volume Baroud.

¹⁸ Cf. e.g. Shumate 1997. On the performance (through loud reading) of historical works cf. Baroud in this volume.

faned, and there was adultery among the great. The sea swarmed with exiles, and cliffs were red with blood. Worse horrors reigned in the city. To be rich or well born, to hold office or refuse it, was a crime: merit of any kind meant certain ruin. [...] Slaves were bribed against their masters, freedmen against their patrons, and if a man had no enemies, he was ruined by his friends.

The antithetical scheme is immediately detectable (*civilia – externa*) and also structures the strategic view of the provinces which are presented in oppositions with Roman success and failure distributed between them. This contrast is supplemented by a movement from the periphery to the centre: from East, West, the boundaries of the Empire to Italy, then the centre, Rome, then within Rome, from public to private, to the household of the *pater familias*. The image of the empire is arranged in three circles: the provinces in the further distance, Italy as the immediate surroundings of Rome, Rome as the space where the potential observer has his home. And the closer to the centre the observer is led by the narrator, the greater the atrocities are. (The scheme is spelled out in more detail also in the overview of the state of the empire in the following chapters 1.4–11, with the same association of spaces and potential for political unrest.¹⁹) This scheme mirrors a recurrent structure of at least the first three books of the *Histories* which describe the fighting between the contenders for the imperial throne who either occupy the centre (Rome) and have to move out to defend it or move towards it to conquer it.²⁰ And this association of centripetal vs. centrifugal movement is a recurrent theme in the turbulent times of 69/70: for example, it is repeated when Galba, immediately after the introductory overview, moves towards Rome which is full of legionaries from the distant provinces of Britain, Germany, Illyrium (*Hist.* 1.6). In greater length, the troops in revolt from Germany are led by Valens and Caecina towards Italy in *Hist.* 1.63–66 and 67–70 (while Vitellius lags sluggishly behind: slow movement is a key characteristic of Vitellius),²¹ with Caecina acting worse than Valens. In ch. 2.71.1 the principle in action is spelled out by Tacitus (*quantoque magis propinquabat, tanto corruptius iter [...]*, cf. full quotation below). Every centripetal movement of the historic agents is connected with (increasing) violence, culminating in the burning of the Capitol and Vitellius' death at the

19 It starts in Rome (ch. 1.4), with the attitudes towards Galba (1.5) and a recapitulation of his march on Rome, slow and violent (1.6), followed by the effect messages from Africa and Germany create in Rome; chs. 1.8–11 review the provinces clockwise around the Mediterranean: first those with military potential, Spain, Gaul, Germany, Britain, Illyricum, the East with Judaea, Egypt, Africa, then Mauretania and less important provinces (Raetia, Noricum, Thrace and the unspecified rest, cf. Damon 2003, 98–99). Tacitus' geographical treatment of Roman frontiers in his narrative on Germanicus in the *Annals* (Manolaraki / Augustakis 2012, 386–390) would be another example for using the reader's geographical imagination to suggest historical interpretations of the events. On *Histories*, Book V echoing the civil wars of 69 CE through parallels in topographical/geographical descriptions cf. O'Gorman 1995.

20 Pomeroy 2003, 364–369 analyzes in more detail the significance of the narratological organization (centre – periphery) of the geography of the empire for the political struggles in 69/70 CE.

21 On the details of this march (and Tacitus' imitation/parody of Caesar's *Commentarii*) cf. Morgan 1994b.

end of Book III: space has a message for the reader.²² And if this reader happens to live on the trajectory of such movements, he might draw a rather bleak conclusion regarding his personal safety in future internal strife.

That this tension between periphery and center might be a key to the understanding of the civil war in 69/70 CE had been stated by Tacitus at the beginning of *Hist.* 1.4.2: *evulgato imperii arcano posse principem alibi quam Romae fieri* (“it had divulged a secret of state: an emperor could be made elsewhere than at Rome”). *Alibi* is a remarkably open expression which needs to be filled with concrete substance by the reader when following the course of the narrative.²³ And it proves rather too simple for an explanation of what happens: it can be (and in fact is) many places (Spain, Germany, Judaea). A dichotomy between Rome and the rest of the empire is not sufficient any more to structure the history – Tacitus hints at the limits of the annalistic scheme: it becomes more and more difficult to mirror the structure of Roman history in the structure of a literary text. His vision, which he puts into the mind of his readers, is that of a circle of provinces around a dominating, but no longer uncontestedly, Rome. Every time Tacitus gives a survey of the situation in the provinces, he seems to make a kind of circular movement around the Mediterranean, and rather than the center of power (which may already have shifted towards Germany or the East), Rome is a centre of narratorial perspective. Tacitus does not try to make chronological simultaneity the basic structuring principle of the book by precise synchronisms (instead, he is often rather vague: *interim* etc. occurs more often than exact dates), but rather the spatial outline of the empire: events are presented to the readers’ eye as they affect the city of Rome. Temporal and spatial categories interact. Simultaneity of events is relative and only possible when the spatial focus is fixed at one point (e.g. Rome). One might compare the situation of the astronomical observer in the universe: the further distant a star is, the more its observer looks into the past. Ancient communication was much slower than modern telecommunication. Pomeroy, followed by Riggsby,²⁴ has suggested that the chronological and the spatial axes collapse in the *Histories*. This focalization would point to a reader who is sitting in Rome and whose experience of state affairs in his own time is mirrored by Tacitus in his book: this serves the purpose of a history which aims to teach the readers a (political) lesson. Again, this has its effect on the structure of the *Histories* as a book. Let three examples suffice: 1: As Galba is killed in mid-January 69, it is unknown in Rome that in the beginning of January the German troops had promoted Vitellius as their candidate. Tacitus reports the details of the Vitellian story only after the events surrounding Galba, and after a short hint that Vespasian is already lurking in the east, in chs. 1.51–60 (in ch. 1.12 he relates some rather imprecise news

²² Pomeroy 2006, 176–180; Ash 2007b, 218f. with more examples of generals marching on Rome (e.g. Antonius Primus).

²³ Pomeroy 2003, 365.

²⁴ Pomeroy 2003, 366; Riggsby 2009, 159f.: as information travels longer from distant places, the spatial extension simultaneously signals temporal sequence.

about troubles with the troops in Germany, but does not mention Vitellius). 2: As the beginning of the contest between Otho and Vitellius takes us to March 69 at the end of Book I (symbolically closing with Otho's departure from Rome, 1.71–90 – centrifugal movement), the beginning of Book II takes us back to July 68 to tell the early stages of the Flavian rebellion (2.1–9). 3: Book IV starts with the victorious Flavians in Rome (at the end of the year 69, 4.1–11), only to take us back to the beginning of the insurrection of Civilis in July of the same year in chs. 4.12–37.²⁵ Of course it is necessary to split the narrative of parallel events into several units, but the choice of the spatial/chronological intersections in relation to the structure of the book creates a literary effect for the reader²⁶, who will give beginnings and endings a privileged meaning in his interpretation of events.

5 Spectacles and spectators

The effects described so far may be regarded as more intellectual than emotional, but Tacitus is also capable of creating *enargeia* with stronger emotional appeal on the level of smaller narrative units, where the theme of visual perception of space and the different roles of observers become evident in the wording of the text. The theme of civil war in Books I–III of the *Histories* is closely associated with the question of what it means to be Roman: since the army is a decisive force in this fight and since the army has more and more soldiers with a non-Italian provenance, i. e. from the provinces (Germany, the east), the result is a mixture of Italian and non-Italian soldiers which can make it difficult to distinguish between Roman and non-Roman, let alone between foreign and interior enemies, of civil war and external war (as Tacitus had hinted at already in the preface of the *Histories*, cf. above). Let us consider a passage from the second battle at Bedriacum between Vitellian and Flavian troops. The fighting takes place at night (Tac. *Hist.* 3.22.3):

proelium tota nocte varium, anceps, atrox, his, rursus illis exitiabile. nihil animus aut manus, ne oculi quidem provisus iuvabant. eadem utraque acie arma, crebris interrogationibus notum pugnae signum, permixta vexilla, ut quisque globus capta ex hostibus huc vel illuc raptabat.

²⁵ Pomeroy 2003, 365–366; Ash 2007a, 8–12; Ash 2009, 88f. speaks of a “top-heavy” structure of the *Histories*, concentrating the narrative on the fight for power in 69 in Books I–III, postponing e. g. the Batavian revolt to Book IV. It is also remarkable that even within this story-line, the Flavian bid for power is deliberately played down for much of the first two books – moved to the periphery both spatially (little information about the east), narratively (no extended narrative with causes and decisions) and structurally (in focus only from ch. 2.74). On the other hand, Domitian's entry at the beginning of book IV is quite ominous, cf. Babcock 2000, 576f.

²⁶ The reader's journey through a narrative could be compared to the way through a labyrinth (Jaeger 1999 on Livy), both on a larger scale and in the different perspectives on the city of Rome (cf. below, ‘Roman sights’).

All the night the battle raged with varying fortune, never decided, always savagely contested. Disaster threatened now one side, now the other. Courage, strength were of little use: their eyes could not even see in front of them. Both sides were alarmed alike; the watchwords, constantly demanded, soon became known; the standards were all in confusion, as they were captured and carried off from one band to another.

The situation is perceived through the eyes of a combatant, and the reader is put in the same situation of not being able to form a mental image of the situation (*nihil [...] provisus*). This is also the authorial position as Tacitus had confessed shortly before our passage (3.22.3). But what had been a problem for the researching and reporting historian in the face of unreliable reports (giving the precise battle order), turns out to have been already a problem for the historical agents themselves: it was difficult to discern on which side one stood. With the rising moon the focalization changes (Tac. *Hist.* 3.23.3–24.1):

neutro inclinaverat fortuna donec adulta nocte luna surgens ostenderet acies falleretque. sed Flavianis aequior a tergo; hinc maiores equorum virorumque umbrae, et falso, ut in corpora, ictu tela hostium citra cadebant: Vitelliani adverso lumine conlucentes velut ex occulto iaculantibus incauti offerebantur. Igitur Antonius, ubi noscere suos noscique poterat, alios pudore et probris, multos laude et hortatu, omnis spe promissisque accendens.

Fortune had favoured neither side when, as the night wore on, the moon rose, revealing and deceiving the armies. Shining from behind the Flavians the moon was in their favour. It magnified the shadows of their men and horses so that the enemy took the shadow for the substance, and their missiles were misdirected and fell short. The Vitellians, on the other hand, had the moon shining full on them and were unaware that they were exposed to the Flavians, shooting as it were out of cover. Antonius was thus enabled to recognize his own men, and to be recognized by them. He fired some by taunting their honour, many by words of praise and encouragement, all by promising hope of reward.

First the Flavian soldiers are in the better (visual) situation, they can orient themselves within the space of the battlefield, then the focus is further narrowed down to the Flavian commander Antonius Primus, whose action is only possible because he now can recognize his own troops (*noscere, nosci*): only now is the enemy recognized and the moral exhortation can take place. I would regard this narrative detail as a symbol both for the general situation of political disorientation during the civil war and a reflection of the historian's task. The point of view of reader – soldier – narrator finally converges in this episode of the battle, while at the same time the authorial perspective over the course of the battle as a whole is preserved.²⁷

While in this example the reader will share the disorientation of the spectator within the narrative, the next example gives the view of an observer which results

²⁷ Another example of this narrative technique is the fighting over an island in the middle of a river between Othonian and Vitellian soldiers (*Hist.* 2.35.1–2): the emotions of the soldiers of both sides watching the fighting around the island could easily be shared by the reader.

in diverging evaluations: Vitellius visits the battlefield near Cremona after the first battle of Bedriacum (Tac. *Hist.* 2.70 – 71.1):²⁸

Inde Vitellius Cremonam flexit et spectato munere Caecinae insistere Bedriacensibus campis ac vestigia recentis victoriae lustrare oculis concupivit, foedum atque atrox spectaculum. intra quadragensimum pugnae diem lacera corpora, trunci artus, putres virorum equorumque formae, infecta tabo humus, protritris arboribus ac frugibus dira vastitas. nec minus inhumana pars viae quam Cremonenses lauru rosaque constraverant, extractis altaribus caesisque victimis regium in morem; quae laeta in praesens mox perniciem ipsis fecere. aderant Valens et Caecina, monstrabantque pugnae locos: hinc inrupisse legionum agmen, hinc equites coortos, inde circumfusas auxiliorum manus: iam tribuni praefectique, sua quisque facta extollentes, falsa vera aut maiora vero miscebant. vulgus quoque militum clamore et gaudio deflectere via, spatia certaminum recognoscere, aggerem armorum, strues corporum intueri mirari; et erant quos varia sors rerum lacrimaeque et misericordia subiret. at non Vitellius flexit oculos nec tot milia insepultorum civium exhorruit: laetus ultro et tam propinquae sortis ignarus instaurabat sacrum dis loci. Exim Bononiae a Fabio Valente gladiatorum spectaculum editur, advecto ex urbe cultu. quantoque magis propinquabat, tanto corruptius iter immixtis histrionibus et spadonum gregibus et cetero Neronianae aulae ingenio.

Leaving Ticinum, Vitellius turned off to Cremona. There he witnessed Caecina's games and conceived a wish to stand upon the field of Bedriacum, and to see the traces of the recent victory with his own eyes. Within forty days of the battle, it was a disgusting and horrible sight; mangled bodies, mutilated limbs, rotting carcasses of men and horses, the ground foul with clotted blood. Trees and crops all trampled down: the countryside a miserable waste. No less heartless was the stretch of road which the people of Cremona had strewn with laurel-leaves and roses, erecting altars and sacrificing victims as if in honour of an Oriental despot. The rejoicings of the moment soon turned to their destruction. Valens and Caecina were in attendance and showed Vitellius over the battlefield: this was where their legions had charged: the cavalry launched their attack from here: this was where the auxiliaries had outflanked the enemy. The various officers each magnified his own exploits, adding a few false or, at any rate, exaggerated touches. The common soldiers, too, turned gaily shouting from the high road to inspect the scene of the struggle, gazing with wonder at the huge pile of arms and heaps of bodies. There were a few who reflected with tears of pity on the shifting chances of life. But Vitellius never took his eyes off the field; never shuddered at the sight of all these thousands of Roman citizens lying unburied. On the contrary, he was very well pleased, and, unconscious of his own impending doom, he offered a sacrifice to the local deities. They next came to Bononia, where Fabius Valens gave a gladiatorial show, for which he had all the apparatus brought from Rome. The nearer they drew to the city, the greater became the depravity of the march, which was now joined by troops of actors, eunuchs, and the like, all in the true spirit of Nero's court.

The “spectacular” aspect is more than obvious: before and after the visit to the battlefield, Vitellius attends actual gladiatorial spectacles organized by his generals Caecina and Valens (2.67.2; 2.71.1).²⁹ The battlefield serves as a kind of interlude between

²⁸ On this frequently studied passage cf. e.g. Morgan 1992; Keitel 1992; Haynes 1996, 93–101 (88–147 on the “spectacular” in general); Manolaraki 2005; Ash 2007a, 270–279; Joseph 2012, 144–152.

²⁹ And it may be an example of Tacitean irony that the equipment for the games at Bononia was transported from Rome (2.71.1), that Vitellius afterwards moves towards Rome in the company of ac-

these spectacles. Expressions for visual perception pervade the beginning of the text (*lustrare oculis*, *spectaculum*, *later intueri*, *mirari*, *flectere oculos*), references to the place of the battle are frequent (*via*, *spatia*). Vitellius is in fact repeating the act of gazing at his victim from Otho who had looked with great pleasure at the severed head of his enemy Piso,³⁰ and he will become himself a spectacle in his last moments, when his gaze is not free any more, but he is forced to lift his eyes to see the downfall of his statues and the places where his victims Galba and Flavius Sabinus died (3.85, cf. below).³¹

But most interesting is the way in which Tacitus makes a spectacle out of Vitellius watching a spectacle. First he deviates to Cremona (*flexit*), but he does not move his eyes from the horrible sight (*flexit*), when exactly the opposite actions would have been appropriate, as the word-play suggests. Tacitus gives first the gruesome details of decaying bodies, then contrasts them with the decorated roads in honour of Vitellius. The site is loaded with foreboding: the end of the Cremonans and of Vitellius. Both are not able to perceive this meaning of the sight, it is only visible for the observing reader alerted by authorial comments (70.3 and 4); both will themselves become spectacles.³² But Tacitus adds another level by introducing the generals as tour guides who give as it were a reenactment of the battle for Vitellius (*hinc – inde*) (Tacitus had described it in detail 39–43, so the reader will remember his description³³): the deviation spreads to the soldiers who deviate from their way and recognize the places where they had fought, but unlike Vitellius are now deeply moved.

The whole passage is a literal, narrative, and symbolic deviation or digression and offers multiple overlaying perspectives to the reader/spectator: Vitellius is the observer of the battlefield, but the meaning of the observation for the reader lies in the observation of how Vitellius performs the act of observation. As far as the reconstruction of the battle is concerned, Vitellius can be seen as a deceived observer as his generals distort the events: the reader is already familiar with Tacitus' description of the battle so that he would be able to correct the distortions. So Vitellius' deception and lack of compassion are what comes to the foreground, the latter hinted at as a possibility through the soldiers' reaction: the internal and the external observ-

tors and other disreputable people (2.71.2; 2.87.2) and that thus the spectacle returns to Rome together with his troops who enter the city like gladiators (2.88).

30 1.44.1: *oculis perustrasse*, cf. Joseph 2012, 146. Another typical incident for the connection of Vitellius with viewing is the episode with Iunius Blaesus (*Hist.* 3.38–39.1) when Tacitus stresses that Vitellius himself boasted of his watching Blaesus' death: *se (ipsa enim verba referam) pavisse oculos spectata inimici morte iactavit*. On Vitellius and the concept of sight cf. McGillicuddy 1991, 160–171.

31 Keitel 1992, 349f; Manolaraki 2005, 264.

32 Especially Vitellius, who becomes a "*foedum spectaculum*" himself in 3.83f., cf. Borzsák 1973, 65; Perkins 1990; Keitel 1992; Joseph 2012, 147. But it is remarkable that in the whole chapter no direct verbal expression of active viewing is connected with Vitellius (Manolaraki 2005, 259).

33 For a detailed analysis of the divergences cf. Manolaraki 2005, 249–256 (also on intertextual links with Latin epic and historiography); the flawed vision is a characteristic of Vitellius' behaviour.

er share their view on the horrors of civil war.³⁴ The representation of the battlefield has little topographical detail, but is also not just a place of horror³⁵: the reader is led to see it from three different points of view at the same time (Vitellius, his generals, the soldiers, possibly also the Cremonans), none of which can be seen as the correct one (in fact, not even Tacitus could claim autopsy for his version). Tacitus adds *atrox*, *foedum*, which could be interpreted in several ways: a) Either Vitellius is the first degree observer and this is his judgement, reported by the narrator, or b) it is the narrator's perspective (again first degree observer) who passes judgement on the object of his description, or c) it is the perspective of a second degree observer who judges the whole scene of the visit to the battlefield. The reader can now identify with both these roles: perceiving the battlefield as first degree observer results in *enargeia*, accepting the role as second degree observer heightens the emotional impact and suggests moral judgement. Finally, he can as a kind of third degree observer judge Tacitus' presentation of the scene as an element within the literary structure of the *Histories*. Tacitus leaves it to the audience to pass their judgement on the other observers on the scene, all of them doomed to destruction. And the intratextual connections suggest that this is something that has happened (Galba) and will happen again (Vitellius, Cremona): very similar complexities arise in other passages as *Hist.* 2.88.3 where the Vitellian (foreign, German) soldiers rushing to the Forum to the place of Galba's death are themselves a *saevum spectaculum*, and *Hist.* 3.83.3 where the people watching (*spectator populus* 83.1) the street-fighting during the Flavian invasion of Rome are *malis publicis laeti*.³⁶ Repetition is the true nature of civil war.³⁷

34 Manolaraki 2005, 255; Levene 1997 shows how the absence of an explicit description of emotional reaction in the narrative can serve to rouse emotions in the reader

35 Furley 1996, 74–77 shows how, contrary to Tacitus' method, Thucydides gives sparse but precise and telling details of the topography of Sphacteria (Thuc. 4.3–39), which support and highlight his narrative concept (*enargeia*).

36 *Malis publicis* could be (first degree observation) a description of the atrocities in the city, but also (second degree) referring to the behaviour of the people, cf. Heubner 1963–1982, vol. 3, 195; Keitel 1992, 344–348. Quite unequivocally Tacitus calls Vitellius himself an *ostentum* in 3.56.2 (in the context of his centrifugal – centripetal movement away from and back to Rome); Vitellius' movements around Rome during his attempted abdication (3.67–68) furnish a further example of history as spectacle, cf. Haynes 1996, 122.

37 The “spectacular” behaviour where the reader/second degree observer might distance himself from the first degree observer recurs for example also in 3.32.2 (hatred against the Cremonans because of their role in the games) and the plebs of Rome; 1.32.1 (people flock in the Palatium as in the theatre or circus to demand the death of Otho); 3.68 (Vitellius attempted abdication). Often a spatial contrast has an ethical connotation, the opposition between foreign (almost un-Roman) soldiers or the rabble of the city (*vulgus*), behaving in un-Roman ways, and Roman places as embodiments of Roman history and virtue is played out.

6 Roman sights

The last passages treated here belong to the first category of places, those which readers will be most familiar with, in the city of Rome. Two examples will be considered: the death of Galba (*Hist.* 1.40–41), and the fire of the Capitol (*Hist.* 3.71). First, Galba:

Agebatur huc illuc Galba vario turbae fluctuantis impulsu, completis undique basilicis ac templis, lugubri prospectu. neque populi aut plebis ulla vox, sed attoniti vultus et conversae ad omnia aures; non tumultus, non quies, quale magni metus et magnae irae silentium est. Othoni tamen armari plebem nuntiabatur; ire praecipitis et occupare pericula iubet. igitur milites Romani, quasi Vologaesum aut Pacorum avito Arsacidarum solio depulsuri ac non imperatorem suum inermem et senem trucidare pergerent, disiecta plebe, proculcato senatu, truces armis, rapidi equis forum inrumpunt. nec illos Capitolii aspectus et imminentium templorum religio et priores et futuri principes terruere quo minus facerent scelus cuius ultor est quisquis successit. Viso comminus armatorum agmine vexillarius comitatae Galbam cohortis (Atilium Vergilionem fuisse tradunt) dereptam Galbae imaginem solo adflixit: eo signo manifesta in Othonem omnium militum studia, desertum fuga populi forum, dextra adversus dubitantis tela. iuxta Curtii lacum trepidatione ferentium Galba proiectus e sella ac provolutus est. extremam eius vocem, ut cuique odium aut admiratio fuit, varie prodidere. alii suppliciter interrogasse quid mali meruisset, paucos dies exolvendo donativo deprecatum: plures obtulisse ultro percussoribus iugulum: agerent ac ferrent, si ita <e> re publica videretur. non interfuit occidentium quid diceret.

Galba was driven hither and thither by the tide of the surging mob. Everywhere the temples and public buildings were crowded with spectators, who viewed a sorry scene. No shouts came from the common people: astonishment was on their faces, and their ears open to every sound. There was neither uproar nor quiet, but the silence of strong anger and alarm. However, a report reached Otho that the populace was arming. He bade his men fly headlong to forestall the danger. Off went the Roman soldiers as if they were going to drag Vologaesus or Pacorus from the ancestral throne of the Arsacids – and not to butcher their own Emperor, a helpless old man. Savage and armed, they broke at full gallop into the Forum. Scattering the populace and trampling senators under foot. Neither the sight of the Capitol nor the sanctity of the temples towering above them, nor the thought of Roman emperors past and to come, deterred them from committing that crime which the next successor always avenges. Seeing the armed ranks now close at hand, the standard-bearer of the cohort to guard over Galba – tradition says his name was Atilius Vercilio – tore off the effigy of Galba and flung it to the ground. This signal clearly showed that all the troops were for Otho: the people fled, deserting the Forum, and swords were drawn against any who lingered. Near the Lacus Curtius Galba was precipitated from his chair by the panic of the bearers and flung to the ground. The accounts of his last words vary according as they are prompted by hatred or admiration. Some say that he begged and asked what harm he had deserved, imploring for a few days' respite to pay the troops their largesse. The majority say that he deliberately offered his neck to the blow and bade them, 'Come, strike, if it serves the country's need.' Whatever he said mattered little to his assassins.

In Galba's demise we encounter the familiar motive of the spectacle³⁸, but in a variant way: the reader watches an audience silent and inactive (it will take action only after the event, in ch. 1.43, in order to rush to the victor, Otho, and to congratulate him – in terms of historical causation a non-action). Action and movement are what characterize Otho and his soldiers. Soon the point of view is that of a person overlooking the Forum, which has almost undergone a mutation: as Roman soldiers enter the Forum, they act as if in a foreign space, in Parthia, and consequently they do not perceive the Capitol nor the temples as what they should be. Their perception and the perspective adopted by the narrator and the audience diverge. As the drama heightens, we have again a zoom-in effect (1.41.1) as we see Galba, and finally the spot of the killing, the Lacus Curtius – suggesting a sacrificial context for the death of Galba (and the day had started with a sacrifice performed by Galba himself).³⁹ Here the contrast between the motionless (or at best fleeing or trampled down) population and the individual who becomes a sacrifice, or the military mob, is mirrored in the change in scale of the observer's frame of visual perception (from the panorama of the silent crowded city center to the single dead body beside Lacus Curtius).

The significance of Galba's death is confirmed by the repetition of the theme of seeing in the forced gaze of Vitellius at his death with explicit reference to Galba's death near the same spot at the end of the book (3.85):⁴⁰ *Vitellium infestis mucronibus coactum modo erigere os et offerre contumeliis, nunc cadentes statuas suas, plerumque rostra aut Galbae occisi locum contueri, postremo ad Gemonias, ubi corpus Flavii Sabini iacuerat, propulere* (“With the points of their swords they forced Vitellius to hold up his head and face their insults, then to watch his own statues hurtling down, but above all to look at the Rostra and the site of Galba's murder. At last he was thrust along to the Gemonian Steps, where the body of Sabinus had lain”). The theme of obliterating traditional values in the course of civil strife becomes visible in the repetition of the act of gazing at the atrocities, drawing the reader as an observer into the process just as we saw in the scene at the battlefield of Bedriacum.

Finally, the destruction of the Capitol. Immediately after the description of the fire Tacitus gives us an obituary for the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitol which summarizes its meaning for Roman history. But also the detailed fighting description elucidates the way a well-known place can be made the object of an observation through the vividness of the description (*enargeia*). Even without explicitly suggesting a point of view for the reader (he may choose a standpoint from his experience of autopsy or from his imagination of the place formed through literature), the scene unfolds in dramatic detail (Tac. *Hist.* 3.71):

³⁸ Cf. Morgan 1994a.

³⁹ Tac. *Hist.* 2.29.1; cf. Damon 2003, 159, 183f., comparing 2.55.1; 2.88.3; 3.85.1: usually annual vows for the emperor's safety were associated with this place.

⁴⁰ Joseph 2012, 98.

Vixdum regresso in Capitolium Martiale furens miles aderat, nullo duce, sibi quisque auctor. cito agmine forum et imminetia foro templa praetervecti erigunt aciem per adversum collem usque ad primas Capitolinae arcis fores. erant antiquitus porticus in latere clivi dextrae subeuntibus, in quarum tectum egressi saxis tegulisque Vitellianos obruebant. neque illis manus nisi gladiis armatae, et accessere tormenta aut missilia tela longum videbatur: faces in prominentem porticum iecere et sequebantur ignem ambustasque Capitolii fores penetrassent, ni Sabinus revulsas undique statuas, decora maiorum, in ipso aditu vice muri obiecisset. tum diversos Capitolii aditus invadunt iuxta lucum asyli et qua Tarpeia rupes centum gradibus aditur. improvisa utraque vis; propior atque acrior per asylum ingruerat. nec sisti poterant scandentes per coniuncta aedificia, quae ut in multa pace in altum edita solum Capitolii aequabant. hic ambigitur, ignem tectis obpugnatores iniecerint, an obsessi, quae crebrior fama, dum nitentis ac progressos depellunt. inde lapsus ignis in porticus adpositas aedibus; mox sustinentes fastigium aquilae vetere ligno traxerunt flammam alueruntque. sic Capitolium clausis foribus indefensum et indireptum conflagravit.

Martialis had hardly returned to the Capitol when the furious soldiery arrived. They had no general to lead them: each was a law to himself. Their column marched at full speed through the Forum and past the temples overlooking it. Then they advanced up the hill in front of them, until they reached the lowest gates of the fortress on the Capitol. In those days there was a series of colonnades at the side of this slope, on the right as you go up. Emerging onto the roof of these, the besieged overwhelmed the Vitellians with showers of stones and tiles. The attacking party carried nothing but swords, and it seemed a long business to send for siege-engines and missiles. So they flung torches into a projecting colonnade and, following in the wake of the flames, would have burst through the burnt gates of the Capitol, if Sabinus had not torn down all the available statues – the monuments of our ancestors' glory – and built a sort of barricade on the very threshold. They then attacked the Capitol by two opposite approaches, one near the 'Grove of Refuge' and the other by the 100 steps which lead up to the Tarpeian Rock. This double assault came as a surprise; but that by the Refuge was closer and more vigorous. Nothing could stop the Vitellians, who climbed up by some adjoining buildings, which in the days of prolonged peace had been raised to such a height that their roofs were level with the floor of the Capitol. It is uncertain whether the houses at this point were fired by the assailants or – the most common account – by the besieged in trying to dislodge their enemies who had struggled up so far. The fire spread to the colonnades adjoining the temple; and then the gables supporting the roof, which were made of very old wood, caught the flames and fed them. And so the Capitol, with its doors fast shut, undefended and unplundered, was burnt to the ground.

The Capitol, defended by Flavius Sabinus (Vespasian's eldest son), becomes the scene of fighting. The details of the topography are not commented on (with the exception of the porticoes, presumably not existing any more at the time of Tacitus' report⁴¹), but assumed as known and invested with meaning. All these elements are perverted in their usage: the statues of the *maiores* used as building blocks, the *Asylum* and the stairs to the Tarpeian rock are used as routes for attack (one may recall that Tarpeia had played her role in an abortive attack on the Capitol). Climbing the Capitol had been part of the attack of the Gauls: but that was old Republican Rome, when an *arx* still was an *arx*, not surrounded by peaceful buildings. So Tacitus' presentation of the attack on the Capitol already contains for a Roman reader all the

41 Wellesley 1972, 170.

signposts which the obituary in ch. 3.72 will spell out in more detail. And it invites him at the same time to imagine an older Capitol in an older Rome with a different constitution where this catastrophe would have been impossible (although old age is not everything: the old dry beams of the gable cause the fire to spread). And one can hardly avoid noticing the similarities in the description of space in this scene and in the scene of Galba's death (ch. 1.40: disregard for the temples, lack of discipline in the soldiers): the literal decapitation of Galba thus prefigures the metaphorical self-decapitation of Rome (the Capitol as *caput mundi*, *Hist.* 2.32.2).⁴² It is only logical that the Capitol is treated like a human being and credited with an elaborate obituary.⁴³

Conclusion

To conclude, some observations on the effect created through the literary construction of space for the reader may be summarized:

- All spatial orientation is provided through textual means, which can take into account pre-existing conceptions of spaces and places.
- The scale of spaces entails different modes of spatial representation (topographical – strategic – tactical), which nevertheless carry further significance beyond mere orientation (suggesting a point of view for the observer and a structure for the empire, depending on the point of view). Centripetal or -fugal movement may carry a message depending on the focus (standpoint) of the reader.
- The spatial organization of the content is reflected in the spatial organization of the literary work, and traditional schemes for ordering the material may become problematic as the spatial outlook changes.

The role of the observer can be used to give multi-perspective views of the same action, either putting the audience in the role of the authorial observer or into that of any participant of the action or even into several roles at the same time. In all these cases, emotional reactions and historical judgements ascribed by the historian to the observers in historical space challenge the reader to position himself in relation towards them. This need not necessarily entail identification with the values and evaluations expressed, but could equally well, due to the previously established symbolic meaning of spaces, result in a critical response. The recurrent theme of the observation of spectacular action throughout the text adds a dimension to the interpretation of the action through the motive of repetition: similar movements, similar

⁴² On the implicit personification of Rome's buildings and especially the significance of the Capitol, cf. Ash 2007b, 229–236. The Druids in Gaul had interpreted the fire of the Capitol as the end of Rome (*Hist.* 4.54.2), which in turn fired the Batavian revolt.

⁴³ Döpp 2003; Joseph 2012, 99 n. 53.

scenes, similar places – in the case of the civil wars they make the reader wish he was *not* there.⁴⁴

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