THE FRAGMENTS OF TACITUS' *HISTORIES*

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O F THE original twelve books of Tacitus' *Histories*, only the first four and part of the fifth have survived the hazards of textual transmission, and that by the thread of a single manuscript. The continuous text thus breaks off in the course of the year 70 (5. 26). Eight fragments are also printed in the standard modern editions, viz., the Teubner of C. Halm (4th ed., Leipzig, 1912), C. Fisher's Oxford text (Oxford, 1910), and E. Koestermann's Teubner (2d ed., Leipzig, 1969).[1] But the editors dispense with an apparatus criticus and conceal the principles according to which these *fragmenta "Historiarum"* are included. To be sure, Fisher states, "Vide Bernays, de chronicis Sulpicii Severi, p. 53," in annotation on the first two fragments. Yet he (like other editors) prints as Tacitus' own several words and phrases which Bernays expressly denied that Tacitus either wrote or could have written. More surprising still is the editors' treatment of Orosius. They print five passages from his *Historiae adversum paganos* (frags. 3–7). But other passages too were long ago signaled as deriving from Tacitus' *Histories*, not only in the standard edition of Orosius (by C. Zangemeister, *CSEL*, vol. 5 [Vienna, 1882]), but also in a dissertation of 1888, which still appears to be the only systematic treatment of the knowledge of Tacitus in late antiquity.[2]

The standard "fragments" of the *Histories* clearly need a reconsideration which proceeds from what is known about the habits and sources of the two historians from whom they are mainly culled: Sulpicius Severus and Orosius. First, however, two allusions to Tacitus may be considered which it is hard to describe as fragments, even on the broadest possible definition of the term.

1. FRAGMENTS 7 AND 8

The last fragment in the standard collections (frag. 8) appears unproblematical. Commenting on Virgil *Aen.* 3. 399 ("hic et Narycii posuerunt moenia Locri"), Servius Auctus states:

> [*sc.* Locri] qui autem Libyam delati sunt Nasamones appellantur, ut Cornelius Tacitus refert, oriundi a Naryciis, quod ibi invenies ubi ait [11. 265] *Libycone habitantes litore Locros.*

Tacitus, therefore, recorded the identification of the Nasamones as emigrant Locrians: the historical context must be the campaign which Cn. Suellius Flaccus waged against the Nasamones in about 87.[3]

The preceding fragment (frag. 7) comes from a passage which ought to be quoted in full:

> [sc. Theodosius] omnem fiduciam sui ad opem Christi conferens maximas illas Scythicas gentes formidatasque cunctis maioribus, Alexandro quoque illi Magno, sicut Pompeius Corneliusque testati sunt, evitatas, nunc autem extincto Romano exercitu Romanis equis armisque instructissimas, hoc est Alanos Hunos et Gothos, incunctanter adgressus magnis multisque proeliis vicit. [*Hist. adv. pag.* 7. 34. 5]

Editors of Tacitus mangle the passage by excising the words "omnem . . . conferens" and "nunc autem . . . instructissimas." The collocation of Alans, Huns, and Goths smacks of the later fourth century, and Tacitus could never have written thus.[4] When the passage is read in full, Orosius' reference to the destruction of a Roman army at the battle of Adrianople (9 August 378) becomes clear. Orosius does not ascribe knowledge of the Huns to Tacitus; he identifies the contemporary Alans, Huns, and Goths with the *Scythicae gentes* mentioned in Tacitus and in Justin's epitome of Pompeius Trogus. What he specifically attributes to Trogus and Tacitus is the statement that Alexander avoided the *Scythicae gentes*.

To what lost part of Tacitus is Orosius alluding? If the allusion stood alone, one might perhaps think of a passage, presumably in *Annals* 18, where Tacitus described Nero's preparations for the war against the Albani, for which troops had already in March 68 been dispatched to the Caspian Gates (*Hist.* 1. 6). But an earlier passage of Orosius is also relevant:

> modo autem Getae illi qui et nunc Gothi, quos Alexander evitandos pronuntiavit, Pyrrhus exhorruit, Caesar etiam declinavit . . . [*Hist. adv. pag.* 1. 16. 2]

Pompeius Trogus included in the thirty-second book of his *Historiae Philippicae* a digression on the origins of the Pannonii and the rise of the Daci (*Prologus libri XXXII*), in which he identified the Daci as *suboles Getarum* (Justin 32. 3. 16). By analogy, therefore, Orosius should be alluding to an excursus with which Tacitus prefaced his treatment of the Dacian wars in the reign of Domitian.

2. SULPICIUS SEVERUS

Sulpicius Severus composed his *Chronica* in A.D. 400 (though he appears to have added at least one passage later and to have published the two books no earlier than 403).[5] The work is largely derivative: if Severus never names

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3. For the evidence, B. E. Thomasson, *Die Statthalter der römischen Provinzen Nordafrikas von Augustus bis Diocletianus*, vol. 2 (Lund, 1960), pp. 158 f.

4. E. Täubler, "Zur Geschichte der Alanen," *Klio* 9(1909): 14, n. 2; B. Bachrach, *A History of the Alans in the West* (Minneapolis, 1973), p. 124.

5. Severus reckons dates from Stilicho's consulate (*Chron.* 2. 9. 2, 2. 27. 5), but incorporates material from a letter of Paulinus of Nola which (it appears) must be dated to 403; cf. P. Fabre, *Essai sur la chronologie de l'oeuvre de Saint Paulin de Nole* (Paris, 1948), pp. 34, 40.

an authority, most of his sources are extant and easily identifiable.[6] The first book is based almost entirely on the Old Testament, with occasional use of Eusebius' *Chronicle*, presumably in Jerome's Latin version (1. 36. 6, 42. 1, 46. 5). The second book is more varied, for it begins with Daniel, Ezra, and Apocryphal books of the Old Testament (Judith and Maccabees), but culminates in an account of Priscillian and his followers which has long been recognized as a valuable piece of contemporary history (2. 46–51).[7] Between these extremes, the matter displays equal variety: Severus uses the New Testament, Rufinus' translation of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, Jerome's *Chronicle* again (2. 5. 7, 6. 1), a letter of Paulinus of Nola (2. 33–34 < Paulinus *Epp.* 31),[8] a collection of documents on the Arian controversy compiled by Hilary of Poitiers[9]—and Tacitus.[10]

The Roman historian is used to supply the background of the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul: Severus summarizes Tacitus' portrayal of Nero's moral turpitude (2. 28. 2 < *Ann.* 15. 37; 2. 28. 3 < *Ann.* 14. 62), and his account of the fire at Rome in 64 and its aftermath, the burning alive of Christians (2. 29. 1–2 < *Ann.* 15. 40–44). In each case, the technique is the same: a rapid summary which nevertheless preserves Tacitean phrases, even whole clauses, virtually unchanged (e.g., 2. 28. 2: "cuncta denique, quae vel in feminis non sine verecundia conspiciuntur, spectata" < *Ann.* 15. 37. 5: "cuncta denique spectata quae etiam in femina nox operit"; 2. 29. 2: "quin ab eo iussum putaretur" < *Ann.* 15. 44. 3: "quin iussum incendium crederetur").

Severus' next chapter (2. 30) also uses Tacitus, in two ways. First, there is a brief summary of the events of A.D. 69 (2. 30. 1–3ª) which appears to be based on the first four books of the *Histories*. Then there is a fuller account of the capture of Jerusalem in 70 (2. 30. 3ᵇ–7) which draws indirectly on Josephus, but differs from the Jewish historian's account of the same episode on a matter of crucial importance: whereas in Josephus the temple is destroyed by accident, against the wishes of Titus (*BJ* 6. 429 ff.), Sulpicius Severus makes Titus himself (as well as some of his advisers) adopt a deliberate policy of destruction. The contradiction poses two questions: Which version is true? And what was Severus' source? Both admit of easy answers. Josephus was writing for a Jewish audience (he originally wrote his *Jewish War* in Aramaic for Jews of Babylonia),[11] and he set out to depict the

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6. The most perceptive discussion of most aspects of the work remains that of J. Bernays, *Über die Chronik des Sulpicius Severus: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der classischen und biblischen Studien* (Berlin, 1861), reprinted in his *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1885), pp. 81–195. What follows here is closely based on Bernays: references will be given sparingly, and then to the pages of the original publication.

7. On this episode, see now J. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court A.D. 364–425* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 160 ff.

8. Severus adapts Paulinus, slightly but deliberately; cf. P. Fabre, *Saint Paulin de Nole et l'amitié chrétienne* (Paris, 1949), p. 328, n. 1.

9. *Chron.* 2. 35. 3 = *CSEL*, 65:149. 11–13 (Arius' teaching), and the names of bishops in 2. 38. 3 come from the synodical letter of the Council of Serdica (*CSEL*, 65:119. 5 ff.).

10. Bernays, *Chronik*, pp. 53 ff.

11. Josephus *BJ* 1. 3; cf. 1. 6.

Roman authorities in a favorable light: the Flavian poet Valerius Flaccus had no inhibitions about praising Titus for willing the deliberate destruction of the temple (*Argonautica* 1. 13–14: Domitian describes in verse "Solymo nigrantem pulvere fratrem, / spargentemque faces et in omni turre furentem"). That is surely correct.[12] As for Severus' source (in 2. 30. 6), at least three considerations point strongly to the lost portion of Tacitus *Histories* 5: Severus has already employed Tacitus in the immediately preceding chapter; Orosius has something very similar (*Hist. adv. pag.* 7. 9. 4–6), which may also most naturally be supposed to come from Tacitus; and Severus reproduces Tacitean vocabulary.[13]

Severus' differences from Orosius, however, suggest a somber inference:

fertur Titus adhibito consilio prius deliberasse, an templum tanti operis everteret. etenim nonnullis videbatur, aedem sacratam ultra omnia mortalia illustrem non oportere deleri, quae servata modestiae Romanae testimonium, diruta perennem crudelitatis notam praeberet. at contra alii et Titus ipse evertendum in primis templum censebant, quo plenius Iudaeorum et Christianorum religio tolleretur: quippe has religiones, licet contrarias sibi, isdem tamen ab auctoribus profectas; Christianos ex Iudaeis extitisse: radice sublata stirpem facile perituram. [Sulpicius Severus *Chron.* 2. 30. 6–7 = frag. 2]

quod tamen postquam in potestatem redactum opere atque antiquitate suspexit, diu deliberavit utrum tamquam incitamentum hostium incenderet an in testimonium victoriae reservaret. sed Ecclesia Dei iam per totum orbem uberrime germinante, hoc tamquam effetum ac vacuum nullique usui bono commodum arbitrio Dei auferendum fuit. itaque Titus, imperator ab exercitu pronuntiatus, templum in Hierosolymis incendit ac diruit. [Orosius *Hist. adv. pag.* 7. 9. 5–6]

If both passages quoted derive from the same passage or passages of Tacitus, then the original text cannot be reconstructed with any confidence.

So far Severus on the destruction of the temple. The beginning of his account of the siege may also be claimed as deriving from Tacitus:

Iudaei obsidione clausi, quia nulla neque pacis neque deditionis copia dabatur, ad extremum fame interibant, passimque viae oppleri cadaveribus coepere, victo iam officio humandi: quin omnia nefanda esca super ausi ne humanis quidem corporibus pepercerunt, nisi quae eiusmodi alimentis tabes praeripuerat. [*Chron.* 2. 30. 3 = frag. 1]

Again Severus diverges from Josephus, who presents Titus as eager for a negotiated surrender up to the end (*BJ* 5. 356, 6. 93 ff., 6. 323 ff.), and the Sallustian echo in "omnia nefanda esca super ausi" points to Tacitus as the source.[14]

12. For further arguments, E. Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, revised by G. Vermes and F. Millar, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1973), pp. 506–7, n. 115.

13. Most obviously *at contra*: cf. *Ann.* 4. 28. 3: *at contra reus* . . .

14. J. Bernays, "Zu Sallustius und Sulpicius Severus," *RhM*, ser. 3, 16 (1861): 319–20 = *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, 2:204–5. The manuscripts of Priscian (who quotes the relevant fragment) have "multa nefanda casu super ausi": Maurenbrecher accepts Bernays' emendation, based on Severus, *esca super* (Sallust *Hist.* 3. 86).

Sulpicius Severus, therefore, read and used a lost portion of Tacitus' *Histories*. The proof was first formulated by Jacob Bernays in 1861, and the only attempt to gainsay it must be pronounced a hopeless failure.[15] But, as Bernays stated very clearly, the passage of Severus describing Titus' council of war contains phrases (e.g., Christianity described as a *religio*) which Tacitus cannot have written.[16] Hence it is misleading to print (as editors do) the unchanged text of Sulpicius Severus as if it were authentic Tacitus. Where Severus' habits can be verified, as in his use of the *Annals*, he has abbreviated so drastically and introduced so many small changes that the original continuous text could not be reconstructed from his report alone. His treatment of Tacitus' account of the siege of Jerusalem and Titus' deliberations was clearly similar, as a comparison with Orosius implies. Hence, although Tacitus' actual words cannot be recovered, part of the substance of what he wrote can be inferred with some confidence.

An important substantive problem remains. Sulpicius Severus presents Christianity as a crucial factor in Titus' calculations, and Orosius mentions the Christian church at precisely the same juncture. That is not likely to be an accurate analysis of Titus' actual motivation.[17] But it might seem to follow from the preceding arguments that Tacitus mentioned Christianity when reporting (or inventing) Titus' deliberations. The inference is not imperative. Tacitus introduces Christianity in his *Annals* (15. 44) as if he had not mentioned it before in his writings.[18] And the differences between Severus and Orosius are such as to permit the hypothesis that each has independently introduced a reference to Christianity. Tacitus' *Histories* (it may still be held) eschewed all mention of the new religion.

A passage which stands between the material which Sulpicius Severus took from *Annals* 15 and that which he took from the *Histories* deserves attention. Severus states that Nero died "incertum an ipse sibi mortem consciverit" (2. 29. 5). No reader of Suetonius would be left in any uncertainty: Nero cut his own throat with the aid of the freedman Epaphroditus (*Nero* 49. 3). Moreover, Severus employs a common Tacitean device (*incertum an* appended to the main verb of the sentence)[19] and a turn of phrase which Tacitus used of the suicide of L. Junius Silanus in 49 (*Ann.* 12. 8. 1: "die nuptiarum Silanus mortem sibi conscivit"). It may be suggested, therefore, that Severus is perhaps drawing on Tacitus' account of Nero's death in the lost *Annals* 18—a book which some recent scholars have denied that Tacitus ever lived to compose.[20]

15. H. Montefiore, "Sulpicius Severus and Titus' Council of War," *Historia* 11 (1962): 156–70. He argues that Severus' source for the council is the Antonius Julianus who wrote *de Iudaeis* (Minucius Felix *Oct.* 33. 4). That is totally implausible; cf. A. Momigliano, "Jacob Bernays," *Mededelingen der koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, Afd. Letterkunde, n.s. 32, no. 5 (1969): 167.

16. Bernays, *Chronik*, p. 57.

17. Montefiore, "Sulpicius Severus and Titus' Council of War," pp. 167 f.

18. Hence the bizarre theory that the sentence "auctor nominis eius . . . confluunt celebranturque" (*Ann.* 15. 44. 3) originally stood in Tacitus' *Histories* (C. Saumagne, "Tacite et Saint Paul," *RH* 232 [1964]: 67 ff.).

19. A. Gerber and A. Greef, *Lexicon Taciteum* (Leipzig, 1903), p. 614.

20. E. Koestermann, in his commentary, vol. 4 (Heidelberg, 1968), p. 410, argues that Tacitus died before he could write beyond 16. 35 (where the manuscripts break off).

3. OROSIUS

Orosius' *Historiae adversum paganos* are less a history than a polemical tract: their purpose is to absolve Christianity of blame for Alaric's sack of Rome in 410 by showing that the Roman state encountered many disasters before Christ was born and that Christians had nothing to do with recent disasters (the pious Stilicho is conveniently supposed a secret pagan).[21] There are seven books, with the birth of Christ deliberately and symbolically placed at the very end of the sixth (6. 22. 5 ff.), so that Book 7 covers more than four hundred years, down to A.D. 417 (7. 43. 19). Orosius uses comparatively few sources: the bulk of his material can easily be identified as deriving from the Old and New Testaments, Caesar's *Gallic Wars* (including the eighth book which A. Hirtius added), Virgil, Livy (probably in epitome), Suetonius, Florus, Justin, Eutropius, Jerome's *Chronicle*, Rufinus' *Ecclesiastical History*, and the early books of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*.[22]

Tacitus is also employed, but only (so it appears) the *Histories*. One section, in particular, was important for Orosius, who provides the only direct quotation to be found among the standard fragments:

> deinde, ut verbis Corneli Taciti loquar, sene Augusto Ianus patefactus, dum apud extremos terrarum terminos novae gentes saepe ex usu et aliquando cum damno quaeruntur, usque ad Vespasiani duravit imperium. hucusque Cornelius. [*Hist. adv. pag.* 7. 3. 7 = frag. 4]

The context was clearly a digression on the temple of Janus and its closures and openings, which Tacitus appended to his description of Vespasian's closure in 71.[23] Orosius later notes that Tacitus reported Vespasian's reopening of the temple after a year (*Hist. adv. pag.* 7. 19. 4 = frag. 5), but he had probably already drawn on the passage to prove that when Christ was born the world was at peace:

> itaque anno ab Urbe condita DCCLII Caesar Augustus ab oriente in occidentem, a septentrione in meridiem ac per totum Oceani circulum cunctis gentibus una pace compositis, Iani portas tertio ipse tunc clausit. quas ex eo per duodecim fere annos quietissimo semper obseratas otio ipsa etiam robigo signavit, nec prius unquam nisi sub extrema senectute Augusti pulsatae Atheniensium seditione et Dacorum commotione patuerunt. [6. 22. 1–2]

The chronology is fraudulent, for it was in about 2 B.C. that the temple of Janus, probably closed since 8, was reopened.[24] The rebellion of the Athenians presumably comes from Jerome's *Chronicle* (p. 170[h] Helm), from which Orosius has probably also deduced the twelve years of closure. Nevertheless,

21. Similarly Claudian, the panegyrist of Stilicho, is damned as *paganus pervicacissimus* (7. 35. 21). On the difficult problem of discovering his real religious beliefs, see A. Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 189 ff.

22. See Zangemeister's "Index scriptorum quibus Orosius usus est," *CSEL*, 5: 684–700.

23. The date, nowhere directly attested, is secure; cf. P. Weynand, s.v. "Flavius (206)," *RE* 6 (1909): 2644 ff.

24. R. Syme, *Danubian Papers* (Bucharest, 1971), pp. 38–39.

Tacitus may have ascribed the reopening to a *Dacorum commotio*, whose true date was about 2 B.C.[25]

Orosius uses the *Histories* more extensively for the geography of Palestine (1. 5. 1–14 quotes *Hist.* 5. 7; 1. 10. 3–4 quotes *Hist.* 5. 3) and in his account of the reigns of Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. The following brief analysis notes all of Orosius' sources in this section, but quotes and discusses only the material which is probably Tacitean:

7.	8.	9	Perhaps a summary of *Hist.* 4. 1
	9.	1	Orosius' own
	9.	2	? Rufinus *HE* 2. 26. 1; then Suetonius *Vesp.* 5 and 4
	9.	3	A complex paragraph. The first sentence is taken from Suetonius *Vesp.* 4. The second appears to combine Jerome *Chronicle* p. 187ᵃ Helm and Suetonius *Vesp.* 5 with a brief summary of events narrated in Tacitus' *Histories:* the details that Vespasian took power "hortatu plurimorum regum et ducum" and that he "cognita interfectione Vitelli paulisper Alexandriae substitit" reproduce the substance of *Hist.* 2. 74 ff., 3. 48, 4. 81 ff.
	9.	4–6	The siege and sack of Jerusalem: probably based exclusively on Tacitus, but summarized and rephrased by Orosius himself.
	9.	7	Orosius quotes Tacitus and Suetonius as giving the Jewish casualties in the rebellion as 600,000 killed, in contrast to Josephus' figures of 1,100,000 killed and 97,000 taken captive (*BJ* 6. 420). (Orosius quotes Josephus from Jerome *Chronicle* p. 187ᵃ Helm.) But there is no figure in Suetonius, and Tacitus gives 600,000 as the number besieged in Jerusalem (*Hist.* 5. 13). It is surely to this extant passage which Orosius alludes: the "fragment" should accordingly be discarded.
	9.	8–9	The triumph of Vespasian and Titus and the closure of the temple of Janus clearly come from Tacitus: hence the precise detail that theirs was the first triumph out of three hundred twenty celebrated by a father and son together.[26] It may also be noted that Tacitus disallowed (and presumably omitted) Nero's well-attested closure of the temple of Janus in 66 (Suetonius *Nero* 13; cf. *B.M. Coins, Rom. Emp.*, 1:215, 229 ff., 238 f., 243 f., 263, 267, 273, 398 f.).
	9.	10–12	The rest of the reign of Vespasian (from Jerome *Chronicle* p. 188 Helm).
	9.	13–15	Titus (from Jerome *Chronicle* p. 189 Helm, and Eutropius *Brev.* 7. 21–22).
	10.	1–2	Domitian's domestic policies (from Jerome *Chronicle* pp. 189–91 Helm; Eutropius *Brev.* 7. 23; and Suetonius *Dom.* 22).
	10.	3–4	Orosius refers to Tacitus' account of Roman disasters at the hands of the Dacians, and preserves some precise details: that Fuscus fought against Diurpaneus, *rex Dacorum;* that Tacitus justified his omission of casualty figures with appeal to Sallust; and that Domitian "pravissima elatus iactantia, sub nomine superatorum hostium de extinctis legionibus triumphavit" (cf. Tacitus *Agr.* 39. 1; Dio 67. 9. 6). Editors print the first two of these items as fragment 6; but Orosius is surely also drawing on Tacitus in what immediately precedes and follows.[27]

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25. In favor of this date (but not invoking Tacitus), Syme, ibid., p. 39.

26. That Orosius is here adapting Tacitus is allowed by S. Borszák, s.v. "P. Cornelius Tacitus," *RE*, suppl. 11 (1968): 445–46.

27. R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958), p. 215, n. 4. Koestermann's latest edition (Leipzig, 1969) appends to frag. 6 the observation that "insequentia quoque Orosii verba *Domitianus . . . triumphavit* fortasse quodam modo ad Tacitum referenda sunt."

10.   5–6   Domitian's persecution of the Christians and seeking out the descendants of
              David (from Jerome *Chronicle* p. 192 Helm).
10.   7   The death of Domitian (from Eutropius *Brev.* 7. 23 and Suetonius *Dom.* 17).

4. CONCLUSION

A firm distinction must always be drawn between fragments which preserve
the actual words of a lost work, reports of its contents, and traces of it
surviving in later writers. When this distinction is applied to Tacitus'
Histories, the standard collection of eight *fragmenta "Historiarum"* shrinks
to a single fragment in the narrow sense.

Of the standard eight "fragments," only one (frag. 4) preserves Tacitus'
original text unchanged. At the other extreme, one (frag. 3) appears to derive
from an extant passage. The remaining six adapt Tacitus or reproduce only
the substance of what he wrote. But there are other passages, too, which
probably preserve Tacitean material from the lost portion of the *Histories*
in exactly the same way, viz., Orosius *Hist. adv. pag.* 6. 22. 1–2, 7. 9. 8–9,
and the rest of 7. 10. 3–4.[28] Editors of Tacitus who wish to print *fragmenta*
"Historiarum" have a clear duty to do justice to the true complexity of the
facts.

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28. The name Diurpaneus (Orosius *Hist. adv. pag.* 7. 10. 4) recurs (perhaps in a corrupt form) in
Jordanes *Get.* 76–78. This passage has been printed as a fragment of Dio of Prusa's lost *Getica* by
H. F. A. von Arnim, in his edition of Dio, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1896), p. ix, and by F. Jacoby, *FGrHist* 707,
Anhang F 5. There is an outside chance that it, too, might ultimately derive, if only in part, from
Tacitus.