

**AUCTOR NOMINIS EIUS CHRISTUS.
TACITUS' KNOWLEDGE OF THE ORIGINS OF
CHRISTIANITY***

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ABSTRACT

Tacitus' information about the beginnings of Christianity contains details, which may be historically precise. He learnt them, perhaps, from Christian followers of some other than the received tradition, whom he could have tried during his proconsulship of Asia. Dio's account of the trial of Flavius Clemens and others is probably taken from Tacitus, who in his capacity of *quindecimvir sacris faciundis* could have participated or been interested in the trial. Dio's actual formulation of this account omitting Christianity should thus be believed. The implication is that, when treating this affair in his *Histories*, prior to his sojourn to Asia, Tacitus need not have known anything yet about Christianity, and its beginnings in particular. His information would thus come exclusively from Asia and could be treated as such by modern scholarship.

Keywords: beginnings of Christianity; Christianity in ancient Asia Minor; diversity in early Christianity; Cassius Dio and his sources; the Flavius Clemens affair

Tacitus' account of the persecution of Christians staged by Nero¹ constantly attracts interest of scholars, as nicely shown in the recent attempt by T. D. Barnes, who tries to establish therefrom the kind of execution St. Peter was subjected to in Rome.² This attempt proves at least very ingenious, even if it came at a time when Otto Zwierlein revived the almost abandoned opinion that Peter had never actually even sojourned to this city.³ Yet more recently even the very historicity of the Neronian persecution has been questioned by Brent Shaw, albeit in a manner definitely not so decisive as to allow us to label the per-

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¹ Tac. *Ann.* XV, 44, 2–5.

² Barnes (2010: 5–9).

³ Zwierlein (2010).

secution patronisingly as a ‘myth’ at once.⁴ These issues, however, are not the focus of this paper.⁵ Herein two assumptions are going to be presented on which a hypothesis on the source of Tacitus’ knowledge of the origins of Christianity can be based, a slightly more subtle one than those hitherto laid down. This hypothesis, however, is not reconcilable with many particular items upon which another recent student of Tacitus’ account, Richard Carrier, builds his interpretation.⁶ In spite of this, for the time being, his view can only every so often be disputed here, in order to vindicate my opinion on these particular items.

In the latter half of the 20th century Tacitus’ excursus on the origins of Christianity as inserted into his account of the Neronian persecution⁷ has been thoroughly addressed especially by Harald Fuchs⁸ and Erich Koestermann.⁹ Afterwards, attention has been paid rather to the issues connected with the persecution itself. To reopen the discussion here, a few words must be spent on the vexed question of original Tacitus’ orthography of the names *Chrestiani* and *Christus*, as occurring in the passage introducing the excursus and the opening phrase of it: *Nero subdidit reos ... quos per flagitia inuisos uulgus Chrestianos appellabat. auctor nominis eius Christus...*¹⁰ The employment of precisely these two different orthographic forms already by Tacitus himself is the *conditio sine qua non* for my hypothesis.

Nevertheless, the employment of these forms already by Tacitus need not be regarded as elusive, as has been sufficiently explained by Fuchs.¹¹ The crucial point is that Tacitus

⁴ See Shaw (2015). In this paper, in any case, since its bulk has been written prior to publication of that of Shaw, the persecution is still treated as historical. But even if the contrary proves decisively vindicated, rather some minor details and not my main thesis will be affected thereby.

⁵ Excepting only one specific issue to be mentioned here, on which I definitely agree with Zwierlein (2010: 23–24): Tac. *Ann.* XV, 44, 4 and Clem. Rom. *I Cor.* 6, 1 cannot be understood as referring to the number of Christians in Rome. Tacitus’ *multitudo ingens* applies to the number of those sentenced during the persecution as compared with the numbers of those sentenced during common trials. Such was also the opinion of Češka (1969: 239), who pointed to a useful parallel in Tac. *Ann.* XIV, 45, 1: 400 slaves of Pedanius Secundus sentenced to death through the fault of one of them who had killed their master were considered too many even by the majority of the senators. And Clement’s πολὺ πλῆθος need not be localized to Rome, since, although the text is concerned with Peter and Paul, their worldwide activity is emphasized, and Rome is not even mentioned. Vouga (1994: 229–230) further points to *Epist. Rom.* 16, 3–5 and 16, 10–11, according to which the Christians in Rome used to gather in at least three houses at the time. But one of them was not completely Christian, and since the owner of another one is not greeted by name, we can be sure of only one house.

⁶ See Carrier (2014).

⁷ Cit. below p. 98.

⁸ Fuchs (1950).

⁹ Koestermann (1967).

¹⁰ Tac. *Ann.* XV, 44, 2–3. The whole key passage, printed slightly differently in modern editions, is quoted in this paper according to that of Koestermann (1952).

¹¹ Fuchs (1950: 69–74), but see also Renehan (1968). Heubner’s (1959: 226, n. 2) alternative scenario according to which the confusion in orthography is due only to the scribe of the Medicean codex is not ruled out by Fuchs (1963: 223 in n. 69), yet he did have an objection, for whose implication, not fully accounted by Fuchs himself, see below in n. 40. Another difficulty to Heubner’s scenario is brought forth by Murgia’s observation referred to by Renehan (1968: 368 in n. 1), different from that of Lodi referred by Fuchs (1950: 70 in n. 6), that it had not been the hand of the original scribe that had corrected *Chrestiani* to *Christiani*. In spite of this, Renehan (1968: 369) himself counted with rather an intricate version of this scenario according to which the occurrence of those two forms is due to two scribes respectively, each having corrected only one of them. This is, of course, possible, but also less likely in light of the explanation, which follows here and is going to offer a more economic approach. Nevertheless, to be fair, neither this nor Heubner’s scenario can be ruled out definitely, but in every case both remain, despite the certainty affected by Heubner, only unverifiable speculations.

tus himself emphasized that the form *Chrestiani*¹² had been the popular one (used by the *uulgu*).¹³ The common folk had no knowledge of the Jewish concept of a messiah, and thus the Greek term $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ was, unlike $\chi\rho\eta\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$, not comprehensible,¹⁴ while the latter had the meaning of ‘the good one’ and was widely used as a personal name.¹⁵ In contemporary Greek, however, <ι> a <η> were already pronounced in the same manner, and so the pagans, or at least a majority of them, coming across the title $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ certainly considered it a personal name and wrote it down as $\chi\rho\eta\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$.¹⁶ There is even good evidence very likely testifying that precisely such misunderstanding was occurring from time to time: the notorious Suetonian passage featuring the probably never existent Jewish troublemaker Chrestus.¹⁷ The confusion in denoting the early Christians, reflected

¹² What must be emphasized is that the distinction here presented between the two ‘forms’ is the modern point of view put anachronistically under the pen of Tacitus only for the sake of clarity of the exposition. Thus it has been rightly objected by one of the anonymous referees to this paper that Tacitus himself is talking not about the (orthographic) ‘form’, but about the ‘name’ *Chrestiani*. Yet the implication that some others called them by a different name, and so Tacitus’ orthography cannot be thereby established, is not endorsed here, since, as will be clear from what follows, I am persuaded that there was confusion either in orthography and pronunciation, and further that what was later to become to be perceived as a difference in orthography, emerged as a confusion of two names, or rather a name and a religious title understood as a name.

¹³ It was rightly pointed out by Fuchs (1950: 72), but not considered by Carrier (2014: 273) to whom it seems unbelievable that Tacitus would have explained the origin of the term *Chrestiani* through the title *Christus*. Yet it can be believed easily as follows below in n. 20 and as Greek etymological practices, starting with Plato’s *Cratylus* and deriving one word from another very loosely, show sufficiently, to which already Tronskij (1972: 38) pointed, and for another illustrative example of which see also Renehan (1968: 368, n. 2). Thus when, to the contrary, Češka (1969: 240) emphasized that later even Tertullian had been aware of the correct etymology (for which see below in n. 19), this is clearly due to the specific attainments on the part of the Christian apologist.

¹⁴ As emphasized already by Fuchs (1950: 71), although not with all the implications which are to be highlighted below.

¹⁵ On which see Koestermann (1967: 460) and Benko (1980: 1058).

¹⁶ This development seems more likely than its slightly nuanced alternative suggested by Renehan (1968: 369), according to whom the Romans understood that a religious title and not a personal name was the case, yet even so, following the pattern of *Bona dea* or *Manes*, they wrote it down as $\chi\rho\eta\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$, since only so it was comprehensible for them. A development completely different, although with the same result, was suggested by Tronskij (1972: 34–38), and at first sight it might seem superior to the one preferred here, although the Marxist view is declared as his point of departure, that masses, and not some individual mistaken Roman magistrate, are the driving force of history. The popular form *Chrestus* Tronskij considered to have been due to the different development of pronunciation of long vowels in Greek and Latin, which had resulted in that the term $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ was pronounced in such a manner by the Greeks that Romans heard it and wrote it down as *Chrestus*. There are, however, obstacles to Tronskij’s explanation: it fares well only with the forms $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ and $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\iota\alpha\nu\acute{o}\varsigma$, he actually without any explanation worked with. The French term *Chrétien* that he considered a result of the same development is one of only two (with the Rumanian *Creștin*) such instances with the *-e-* in modern Romance languages, while in other ones similar terms retained the *-i-*. And the sources Tronskij referred to actually do not support his explanation, to which see below in n. 19.

¹⁷ Suet. *Claud.* 25, 4, which, however, can be addressed here only briefly and not resuming the vast literature on the issue. The most recent piece is referred to by Shaw (2015: 84 in n. 52) and summed up into his statement that “the best ‘original’ reading that we have is indeed ‘Chresto’”. Concerning the orthography, I am persuaded of the same. Yet in spite of the frequency of this name, it is not attested among the Roman Jews, as pointed out by Brown in Brown, Meier (2004: 100–101), and neither seems too likely, due to the similarity in pronunciation with the Greek equivalent for the Messiah, that Jews would have used it at all, and so perhaps only the proselyte could have been its bearer. In spite of the embarrassment of Carrier (2014: 270–271), the meaning of the phrase *Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit* is quite clear: not all the Jews were banished from Rome, but only those who had caused the unrest and who had appealed to one *Christus* (so pronounced in every case) when

in many sources,¹⁸ undoubtedly arose from the same misunderstanding, making at least the western Latin-speaking pagans retroactively pronounce the title of Jesus, as well as denoting his followers, erroneously in the end.¹⁹ The very fact that Tacitus refers to the popular form in a suitable place and uses the correct one in his own explanatory note, testifies at least to some non-superficiality of his information.²⁰

Now, attention is to be directed to what Tacitus actually says about the origins of Christianity:

*auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat; repressaque in praesens exitiabilis superstitio rursus erumpebat, non modo per Iudaeam, originem eius mali, sed per urbem etiam, quo cuncta undique atrocia aut pudenda confluunt celebranturque.*²¹

interrogated by the authorities. It was these authorities and not Suetonius (as disapproved by Benko 1980: 1059) who got so mistaken as to consider this person to have been present in Rome and quite naturally wrote it down as *Chrestus*. Cass. Dio LX, 6, 6 very clearly says that the Jews were not banished from Rome, and so he must have had another affair in mind, and no banishment is thus datable to 41. The correct date, then, has to be 49, although it is rejected by Carrier (2014: 273, n. 25); but it fits well with *Act. apost.* 18, 1–2. In the *Acts* the banishment of (all) the Jews is affected, because in the view of the authorities these Christians were Jews and this came useful to the author of the *Acts*, since thus he could veil a fact otherwise unprecedented in his writing: in a controversy with Christians the Roman authorities sided with Jews for this once. The omission of the affair on the part of Tacitus, and also Josephus, can be due to its low importance, as is suggested also by the use of the rather little expressive verb *tumultuari*, and in the case of Josephus also to the fact that Jewish Christians and not Jews had been involved in the end. The same omission in the *Acts*, pointed out by Benko (1980: 1060), can be explained either with what was mentioned above in this note, or with the known fact that the author of the *Acts* was interested in Peter and especially in Paul, to whom the Christian community in Rome had no relations yet in 49. Finally, the unfamiliarity with this episode in the later Christian milieu, and the mistaken notion that the troublemaker had sojourned to Rome caused the form *Chrestus* to remain in the text of Suetonius, although it was copied by Christians, which is the suggestion of Renehan (1968: 369).

¹⁸ Listed by Fuchs (1950: 71, n. 7), according to whom (Fuchs 1950: 72) it is even likely that the Christians were denoted as *Chrestiani* in Rome.

¹⁹ As explicitly stated by Tert. *Apol.* 3, 5; Tert. *Nat.* I, 3, 9 and Lact. *Inst.* IV, 7, 5. Koestermann (1967: 463), defending his own interpretation of Tacitus' text, emphasized that these sources reflect the situation of only the 2nd and 3rd century, but there is no reason why in the 1st century the situation would have to be different. Tronskij (1972: 37) overlooked the fact that these authors had censured the pagans for their erroneous pronunciation, and not the orthography, while according to his explanation the pronunciation should have already been the same at the time.

²⁰ This fact seems to be underestimated by Carrier (see above p. 96–97 with n. 13), since even if Tacitus had corrected the popular form – by linking it with the title *Christus* – mistakenly, as indeed maintained by Koestermann (1967: 463), still it would have been meant as a correction on his part. Yet see in the following note that not even the notion of a mistaken correction on the part of Tacitus is easily acceptable.

²¹ Tac. *Ann.* XV, 44, 3. According to Carrier (2014) the phrase *auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat* is an interpolation from the 4th century. In some detail, the arguments for and against the whole passage describing the persecution (Tac. *Ann.* XV, 44, 2–5) being an interpolation are discussed in Barrett, Fantham, Yardley (2016: 161–170). Regarding the opinion of the former, there are at least some difficulties: the authority no less than Koestermann (1967: 456 and esp. 464) was convinced of the uniform Tacitean pattern of the chapter in question as a whole. The question arises, why would this interpolator not have corrected also *Chrestiani* to *Christiani*, instead of leaving it to the proof reader of the Medicean codex, or why Tacitus classified the political (as it appears from Carrier's explanation and from those of his forerunners as well) movement of the *Chrestiani* as *superstitio*? Further, this movement would thus be reported to have operated not only in Rome, but also in Judea; but then the silence of Josephus becomes strange, and that of Justus of Tiberias as well, although, thanks to Phot. *Bibl.* XXXIII, 6b, 33–38, it is only certain that he did not mention Christ at all. Yet it is at least another good reason to think of the

This excursus, howsoever brief, is actually also strikingly accurate,²² which fairly disqualifies some of the sources previously suggested to have been drawn upon by Tacitus.²³ Due to their insufficient informedness these are to be excluded: Pliny's letter to Trajan²⁴ or Pliny himself,²⁵ and the same goes for the *Testimonium Flavianum* as well.²⁶ Meier's allowing for the possibility that Tacitus could have repeated what was common knowledge about Christians at the beginning of the 2nd century²⁷ faces the difficulty of why then would Tacitus have inserted this excursus into his text if there were such common knowledge? Wellesley's suspicion that Tacitus had some cognisance of the content of the *Revelation*,²⁸ seems conceivable, but it could not have served him as a source of information about the origins of Christianity.

There is, however, one clearly mistaken detail within the excursus: Pilate's official title – as epigraphically attested – was not yet that of *procurator*, but that of *praefectus*,²⁹ and Tacitus apparently did not verify this piece of information offered by his source.³⁰ This kind of mistake, however, points to a source well informed about the origins of Christianity, but poorly about the nomenclature of the titles of Roman magistrates, or the development of this nomenclature in various regions of the Roman Empire. Such a source can reasonably enough be identified with the Christians themselves,³¹ which notion is by

eventual movement of Christus as completely different from that of Jesus, if Photius did not feel it necessary to mention him in any way, and thus the question of why Tacitus classified this movement as *superstitio* returns yet more urgently. Concerning the exposition in Barrett, Fantham, Yardley (2016: 161–170), I see only one item frankly at odds with authenticity of the passage as a whole: the claim that Nero had never put anyone to death in a public show. Nevertheless, Suet. *Nero* 12, 1 is misreported there, since only one specific show and not any kind of routine practised by Nero is actually being described by Suetonius (for the details see Bradley 1978: 85–86). As for the other arguments, they definitely cast some suspicion over this passage, but none of them can be acknowledged as capable of proving it a unique ancient forgery of totally modern pattern, or even as compelling to concede this even being plausible.

²² As rightly emphasized by Syme (1958: II, 469) and Benko (1980: 1063), and see also Meier's (1991: 90–91, 99 in n. 3 and 101 in n. 11) considerations on what kind of penalty the rather vague phrase *supplicio adfectus erat* can indicate.

²³ As listed by Fuchs (1950: 72–73 in n. 11).

²⁴ Plin. *Epist.* X, 96.

²⁵ Even if he and Tacitus certainly could exchange information, as argued by Shaw (2015: 91 with n. 84). Yet see also below in n. 34 for another divergence between these two magistrates.

²⁶ Although Vidman (1986: 302) declared it unlikely only because of Tacitus' contempt for Jews. But their mutual congruence seemed noteworthy to him, and so he even thought of a common source (thus a literary one?). Meier (1991: 91 and 101–102 n. 12 and 13) lists not only the similarities, but also the differences between the two texts and refutes it as Tacitus' source too.

²⁷ Meier (1991: 91).

²⁸ Referred and approved by Koestermann (1967: 463), but rejected by Češka (1969: 248).

²⁹ As attested to by the so-called 'Pilate's Stone', thus AE 1963, no. 104, to which see also Dubuisson (1999). For the standard view of the capacity of these prefects and also the later procurators of Judea within the administration of the province of Syria see Sartre (2005: 55–60, esp. 56, and also 100).

³⁰ Much rather than that he deliberately used an anachronism, since there is another noteworthy case in which Tacitus was similarly mistaken: the proconsul of Bithynia in 15, Granus Marcellus, whom he titled as a *praetor*, for which see Tac. *Ann.* I, 74, 1 and PIR² G 211, and for the list of governors of this province from the Augustan period to the times of Tacitus with none of them bearing this title see Rémy (1989: 17–50, 54, 57–74, 79 [Nos. 1–33, 36, 40–55, 59]). Thus also Carrier's (2014: 276, n. 31) claim is to be considered weakened, that Tacitus – although according to this scholar actually not Tacitus, but a later interpolator – was trying to pour scorn on the background of Jesus' condemnation by using the less prestigious title.

³¹ Although in the writings which the received tradition is built upon, such a mistake is not to be found, as observed by Dubuisson (1999: 131), at least not until the *Vetus Latina* version came out, to which

no means new: it has already been noticed that nearly at the time of Pliny's proconsulate in Bithynia and his interrogation of local Christians, Tacitus governed the neighbouring province of Asia,³² and so many scholars suppose him to have gained his information there.³³ Yet the question which ought to be raised explicitly, is that of his motivation for such an interest,³⁴ since the answer, apparent enough in my view, that Tacitus, just as Pliny, very likely interrogated Christians too, has been rather only foreshadowed until yet,³⁵ or if clearly laid down, then only with some reserve.³⁶ But is this reserve necessary? There is some passable evidence of interest towards Christians on the part of the Roman authorities during the late years of Trajan's reign not only for Bithynia, but also for Palestine,³⁷ presumably Antioch,³⁸ perhaps Nicopolis in Epirus,³⁹ and certainly some

see Barrett, Fantham, Yardley (2016: 165). Dubuisson's excellent observation is, however, to be taken into account below. According to another interesting observation by the same scholar (Dubuisson 1999: 134) the phrase *per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat* could create the impression as if Tacitus accepted the received tradition in describing Pilate as an instrument in the hands of Jews. Yet I do not suppose this to have been the case and prefer Dubuisson's (1999: 134–136) explanation that Pilate's special capacity as the one responsible directly to the emperor is thereby reflected: *Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum*, even if Meier (1991: 99 in n. 3) is right that it leaves *adfectus erat* without any agent.

³² The dates suggested as yet for their government of these provinces are resumed by Flach (1998: 222), for the date of 112–113 for Tacitus see also Birley (2000: 235–236).

³³ For a summary of the earlier debate see Fuchs (1950: 72–73 in n. 11); the same was preferred by Fuchs himself, and further by Koestermann, Benko, Vidman, no doubt also by Syme, and perhaps Flach as well, whose opinions are referred to in the following notes.

³⁴ The question is raised by Vidman (1986: 297) only implicitly in his remark: "he apparently took the trouble to find out the basic information about the originator of the name of the Christians" (my translation). And similarly in that of Syme (1958: II, 469): "Tacitus (it is a fair surmise) had conducted investigations into the behaviour and beliefs of those malcontents", and Benko (1980: 1063), according to whom Tacitus' information is "the result of careful investigation". Koestermann (1967: 457 in n. 1), from the inverse perspective, considered it unlikely that Tacitus would have been content with superfluous information. On the contrary, Flach (1998: 232) pointed out Tacitus' failure to rise above the popular prejudices, which Pliny had proven to manage.

³⁵ Fuchs (1963: 223 in n. 69) certainly had it in mind, and perhaps also Koestermann (1967: 462–463), Tronskij (1972: 42 in n. 24) and Benko (1980: 1063 and see also 1067); yet their statements are not explicit enough, and perhaps therefore appropriate consequences were not yet drawn therefrom. Carrier (2014: 267–268 with n. 8) thus can be erroneously convinced that Tacitus could have had no other information about Christians than those from Pliny.

³⁶ See Meier (1991: 91), according to whom Tacitus "might have had judicial contacts with Christians similar to those reported by Pliny", which possibility he enumerates among others without giving preference to any.

³⁷ Hegesippus' account preserved by Euseb. *Caes. Hist. eccl.* III, 32, 1–6 of a hunt for Christians there in 109 is further illustrated by the Jewish postbiblical tradition, according to whom Rabbi Eliezer was interrogated by the local governor owing to the suspicion that he too numbered among the Christians, for which see Herford (1903: 137–145).

³⁸ At some time during Trajan's reign, perhaps in 108 according to Hier. *Chron.* 194h, Ignatius of Antioch underwent martyrdom, and so a more extensive persecution in his homeland can be supposed, as Vouga (1994: 213) does, even if rather in passing.

³⁹ Trials possibly held at that place and time may lie behind the allusion by Epict. *Dissert.* IV, 7, 6 to Christians contemning death, as Arrianus noted it down there, possibly around 108. For the date of the *Dissertations* see Millar (1965: 142, and also 143 and 145), and for the presence of a Christian community in Nicopolis Benko's (1980: 1077) reference to *Epist. Tit.* 3, 12; although this is a pseudograph, the author certainly would not have jeopardized his counterfeited Paulan authority by placing Paul's planned medium-term sojourn somewhere, where no Christian community existed. And even if another possibility cannot be excluded, namely that Epictetus, who sojourned to Rome during his younger years and possibly in the time of Nero's reign, for which see Millar (1965: 141), may have had his persecution in mind, while certainly not that of Domitian, provided that any happened, since

unspecified provinces or the Roman Empire in general.⁴⁰ These circumstances combined with the pattern of Tacitus' information on the origins of Christianity certainly allow us more than only a cautious insinuation.

Nevertheless, there is one item within Tacitus' excursus that at first sight hardly points to Christians as his source: the claim that, immediately following Christ's death, Christianity was temporarily suppressed, but later emerged again, and even not only in Judea, but in Rome as well. Obviously, such a view is not well reconcilable with the received tradition.⁴¹ Yet the origins of Christianity, as maintained by this tradition, were certainly not recognizable to an outsider, and so the explanation that at least this item came from a non-Christian source,⁴² deserves consideration. But there is another note-

probably in 92 or 93 philosophers were banished from Rome and Epictetus left the town, for which see Millar (1965: 142), in light of Brunt's (1977: 19–30) explanation of Epictetus' motivation behind his choice of the *exempla* out of life in Rome, Nicopolis seems slightly more likely in the case of this one.

⁴⁰ Generally to persecutions conducted during the adult age of Pliny the Younger (born in 61 or 62) his own statement testifies, namely Plin. *Epist.* X, 96, 1: *cognitionibus de Christianis interfui numquam*. Although according to Shaw (2015: 90 in n. 82) at least another conclusion following from this one "is hardly a necessary interpretation", it is not clear what other interpretation is possible at all. And if the same Shaw (2015: 91) is persuaded that "the routine fashion in which Pliny phrases his ignorance presumes that the emperor himself did not expect Pliny or any other high-ranking Roman to possess such obvious knowledge of the Christians", I can see no ground at least for extending this presumed non-expectation on 'other high-ranking Romans'. On the contrary, the so-called 'eldest Christian document', thus the POxy XLII, 3057, supposedly attesting to a persecution in Egypt around the turn of the 1st century, is not accepted as Christian in recent scholarship, for which see Blumell (2010). The notion that Tacitus' interest in Christians in 112–113 must have been somehow extraordinarily motivated, may also seem supported by a combination of hypotheses of two recent scholars: Koestermann (1967: 462) pointing to Tacitus' failure to mention any Christians in his Jewish excursus, thus in Tac. *Hist.* V, 1–13, supposed that neither he, as nor Pliny, had met any Christians prior to his coming to Asia. Yet according to Bowersock (1993), Tacitus spent some time in Asia already between the years of 89/90 and 93 as legate to the proconsul (to which period see below in n. 63), which is earlier than when this excursus was written (for the date of the *Historiae* see below in n. 72). However, I do not subscribe to the latter of these hypotheses: for disputing it see Birley (2000: 245–246). The fact that Tacitus gained his information in Asia is pinpointed also by Fuchs in his above (in n. 11) mentioned objection to Heubner; this fact, however, seems not fully exploited. Heubner's scenario fares well only in the case that the pronunciation of *Christus / Chrestus* was already completely equalized in Tacitus' time. But the above (in n. 19) quoted authors attest that in Latin it was not the case even in the 2nd and 3rd century. Plin. *Epist.* X, 96, 4, however, informs us that in the neighbouring Bithynia Roman citizens were interrogated, and according to Plin. *Epist.* X, 96, 9 even *multi ... omnis aetatis, omnis ordinis, utriusque sexus*. Among those interrogated, and paradoxically enough rather in Asia than in Rome, certainly were some who were competent to explain to Tacitus the correct form, if not the origin of Jesus' title. Even if Tacitus despised Christians, it is hard to believe that it never happened.

⁴¹ Most explicitly recorded in *Evang. Marc.* 16, 20 according to whom the disciples started to preach, everywhere and with the support from above, immediately following Jesus' ascension. Nothing eventually identifiable with the temporal suppression in question occurs either in the opening chapters of the *Acts*.

⁴² The contamination theory applied specifically to the excursus on the origins of Christianity I find only by Frolíková (1992: 29); her approach, however, creates no impression that she regarded it as her original contribution to the debate. As such, yet applied to the account of the Neronian persecution as a whole, Italian scholars once favoured it, to which see Questa (1963: 195–198). If, however, the application to the excursus were to be acknowledged, some of the authors suggested as the source for the account as a whole, listed by Fuchs (1950: 72–73 in n. 11), could be partially vindicated: Cluvius Rufus, versed in the *acta senatus*, or Marcus Antonius Julianus (for whom see below in n. 59). Carrier's (2014: 268–269) objection that such a mention in whatever source would not have passed without notice in later controversies, may be justified, but not conclusive (compare, for example, how

worthy detail. According to Brown's good observation,⁴³ Tacitus' excursus creates the impression, as if he supposed that Christianity had come to Rome directly from Judea. Brown himself, however, is convinced too of Roman Christianity's roots there,⁴⁴ which would render even this piece of information very accurate, and so Tacitus' most likely informers would once more seem to have been Christians, although, naturally, rather the followers of the received tradition for this once, since even if through this tradition the origin of Roman Christianity is not revealed, this, of course, does not mean that it was unknown to it.⁴⁵ Yet if we are not prepared to consider Tacitus' excursus an amalgam of details gathered from members of several Christian groups, the most economic hypothesis is to treat the excursus as a whole and suppose that the Christians whom he interrogated in Asia, were not followers of the received tradition,⁴⁶ and thus their view

little the alleged testimony by Thallus to the miracle following Christ's death had been employed). Perhaps only Pliny the Elder could be excluded, if indeed the ignorance of his likely reader, Pliny the Younger, can be judged as compelling. Yet perhaps the historical writing of his uncle he need not have read as thoroughly as Carrier apparently supposes, since in the list of Pliny the Elder's writings by Plin. *Epist.* III, 5, 3–6 solely his historical writing *A fine Aufidi Bassi* is mentioned without any additional information, and Plin. *Epist.* V, 8, 5 says only that it was written *religiosissime*, which does not necessarily imply thorough reading. Shaw's (2015: 82) emphasizing that Pliny the Elder nowhere else in the indeed great amount of his preserved writings mentions any Christians, is obviously justified, but why should Pliny be expected to have mentioned them also elsewhere only because he could have mentioned them in his historical writing? Robertson (1954: 92–93) counted with "the official view of the origin of Christianity" as existing already in the last quarter of the 1st century and conveyed to Tacitus by his "colleagues in office and in the senate". Yet the very existence of anything the like is questioned once more with Pliny's ignorance, despite his means to get acquainted with it, as they are resumed by Carrier (2014: 267), even if, on the other hand, it is not ignorance of precisely the origins of Christianity what Pliny shows. Another possibility is insinuated by Bruce (1943: 118), according to whom if Pilate had sent to Rome a report of Jesus' trial, Tacitus could have known about it rather than other writers, and Sordi (1965: 25–26), who plainly considered as fact that Pilate had sent to Tiberius a report of the subsequent spreading of Christianity in Palestine which Tacitus had drawn upon, although she referred to Euseb. *Caes. Hist. eccl.* II, 2, 1f., where in turn Tertullian is referred to as an authority. The issue, however, of the very existence of whatever Pilate's *relatio* is not necessary to deal with here: to adduce only two objections, according to Češka (1969: 240–241), Tacitus would, if drawing upon it, have used the name *Jesus* and not *Christus*, since the official document would certainly have stated *Jesus qui et Christus* (rather so, Češka quotes Greek with reference, inappropriate in this connection, to *Evang. Matth.* 1, 16, yet perhaps with *Evang. Matth.* 27, 17, or 27, 22 in mind), and according to Meier (1991: 91), Tacitus would, if directly citing any official record, have not made a mistake in Pilate's title. Yet even if any such document really existed, the solution offered here is more economic in every case. For Bruce's conviction that Tacitus could have known about it, there is simply no reason, and Sordi's suggestion requires a situation in which Tacitus is concerned with the burning of Rome and blaming Christians therefor, and since he needs to explain who these Christians are, he goes to the archive, seeks information on their origin and almost miraculously discovers it. On the contrary, according to the solution offered here, Tacitus naturally exploited the information he had learnt previously.

⁴³ See Brown, Meier (2004: 104).

⁴⁴ And see also the remarks by Vouga (1994: 95–96 and 171–172).

⁴⁵ There is even one concrete channel through which the information on the origin of Roman Christianity could have reached Asia via the followers of the received tradition, or at least the persons presented so therein: the couple Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish Christians expelled from Rome in 49 (see above in n. 17) as mentioned in *Act. apost.* 18, 2 who later sojourned to Ephesus according to *Act. apost.* 18, 18–19 and 18, 24–26 and see also *I Cor.* 16, 19.

⁴⁶ It is hardly necessary to consider the entourage of Aquila and Priscilla, if indeed they had brought the information on the origin of Roman Christianity to Asia, to remain the only ones there in possession of it. Furthermore, this supposition is well reconcilable with the observation of Dubuisson as referred above (in n. 31), as well as with the phrase *per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum* as understood by him,

of the earliest moments of Christianity was different,⁴⁷ and perhaps historically more credible.⁴⁸

Tacitus' sojourn to Asia, however, may not have been the first occasion for him to meet some Christians and, eventually, learn from them the information on the origins of their religion. Another account is to be taken into consideration as well, even if only to eventually dismiss this possibility in the end: the famous one by Cassius Dio reporting the affair of Flavius Clemens and others:

κάν τῷ αὐτῷ ἔτει ἄλλους τε πολλοὺς καὶ τὸν Φλάουιον <τὸν> Κλήμεντα ὑπατεύοντα, καίπερ ἀνεπιόν ὄντα καὶ γυναῖκα καὶ αὐτὴν συγγενὴ ἑαυτοῦ Φλαουίαν Δομιτίλλαν ἔχοντα, κατέσφαξεν ὁ Δομιτιανός, ἐπιπνέχθη δὲ ἀμφοῖν ἔγκλημα ἀθεότητος, ὕφ' ἧς καὶ ἄλλοι ἐς τὰ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἦθη ἐξοκέλλοντες πολλοὶ κατεδικάσθησαν, καὶ οἱ μὲν ἀπέθανον, οἱ δὲ τῶν γούν οὐσιῶν ἐστερήθησαν· ἡ δὲ Δομιτίλλα ὑπερωρίσθη μόνον ἐς Πανδατερίαν. τὸν δὲ δὴ Γλαβρίωνα τὸν μετὰ τοῦ Τραϊανοῦ ἄρξαντα, κατηγορηθέντα τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ οἷα οἱ πολλοὶ καὶ ὅτι καὶ θηρίους ἐμάχετο, ἀπέκτεινεν. ἐφ' ᾧ που καὶ τὰ μάλιστα ὄργην αὐτῷ ὑπὸ φθόνου ἔσχεν, ὅτι ὑπατεύοντα αὐτὸν ἐς τὸ Ἄλβανὸν ἐπὶ τὰ Νεανισκεύματα ὠνομασμένα καλέσας λέοντα ἀποκτείνειαι μέγαν ἠνάγκασε, καὶ ὄς οὐ μόνον οὐδὲν ἐλυμάνθη ἀλλὰ καὶ εὐστοχώτατα αὐτὸν κατειργάσατο.⁴⁹

As can be seen and is notoriously known, Dio does not mention any Christians, and yet the victims of the affair are considered to have been ones by a number of scholars.⁵⁰ Moreover, the affair already was mentioned directly in connection that is considered below, for example in the essay published in the *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, and thus of a non-negligible impact. According to its author, it seems, the victims were Christians, and Tacitus, who certainly heard about the affair, may thus have registered the existence of Christianity and the menace to the state on its part already at this time.⁵¹ Here, however, this very connection is going to be rendered yet more relevant by a factor not yet observed to my knowledge: Tacitus himself may have been the original author of this account.

since these Christians need not have shared the effort to make the Jews responsible for Jesus' death, and thus exculpate Pilate in his capacity as the representative of the Roman Empire.

⁴⁷ For the diversity of contemporary Christianity in Asia Minor, see Vouga (1994: 215–227). The dependence of the received tradition on the specific figures, which these Christians possibly need not have accepted, follows from the exposition by Vouga (1994: 23–28, 146–148 and 188–190). Some candidates to be eventually identified with the followers of this competing tradition may be conjectured from *Apoc. Ioh.* 2–3: the false apostles in Ephesus (2, 2), the Nicolaites perhaps in Ephesus (2, 6) and undoubtedly in Pergamum (2, 14–15), or the followers of the prophetess Jezebel in Thyatira (2, 20). Tacitus' informers may have also been the local Jews, whose anti-Christian activities are mentioned as well, in Smyrna (2, 9) and Philadelphia (3, 9), and for their alleged activities of this kind see also Justin. *Tryph.* 17, 1 and 108, 2. Yet more suitable candidates are the docetists remembered in connection with Smyrna by Ignat. Antioch. *Smyr.* 5–7, since they did not believe in resurrection, and thus they can be easily credited with some specific conception understood by Tacitus as a 'temporal suppression of Christianity'.

⁴⁸ A certain hiatus between the crucifixion of Jesus and the renewal of the activities of his followers is at least of some *a priori* likelihood, and the more so since even the received tradition offers some leftovers reflecting a shock inflicted on his followers by the events leading to Jesus' crucifixion, such as Peter's denial, or the absence of most of them during the crucifixion.

⁴⁹ Cass. Dio LXVII, 14, 1–3.

⁵⁰ See e.g. the references by Smallwood (1956: 12, n. 24) and Eck (1971: 392 with n. 59).

⁵¹ See Benko (1980: 1063).

Tacitus' authorship of the account – despite the declinatory statements by some of the modern authorities concerning the question of whether Dio drew upon Tacitus in general⁵² – seems to me even rather likely following this series of observations and considerations: Dio himself claims that he read great many books, if not all the available, and spent ten years collecting material, plus twelve more on the work itself,⁵³ and for example Hose indeed credits him with having used all the available historiography.⁵⁴ On the contrary, Dio probably did not study the official documents in the archives.⁵⁵ It is clear that his actual source could not have been Suetonius whose account is too brief,⁵⁶ nor Plutarch, whose biographies broke off with that of Vitellius,⁵⁷ nor Bruttius referred to by Jerome, whose information certainly differed from that known to Dio.⁵⁸ Tacitus, on the other hand, can very safely be supposed not to have omitted this affair, since many similar ones are described at length in what is preserved of his writings. Other contemporary writers, about whom we have some information at all, even if their works are not preserved, are few in number, and although some of them might appear too as plausible candidates at first sight, closer examination rather excludes them.⁵⁹ There may, however, have also been some of the non-preserved writings of the 2nd century at Dio's hand,⁶⁰ but they are less

⁵² The most peremptory one is that of Schwartz (1957: 438), according to whom Tacitus as a source to Dio “dürfte heutzutage wohl einstimmig von der Urteilsfähigen verneint werden.” According to Martin (1981: 199–207) both followed one common annalistic source, according to Sage (1990: 999–1007) common sources. Matthews (2007: 293) considered Syme's supposition that Dio had known and utilized Tacitus, scarcely convincing. Martin, however, allowed at least for an isolated direct drawing upon Tacitus on the part of Dio.

⁵³ For the first of these claims see Cass. Dio LIII, 19, 6; its absolute version depends on how mutilated fragment in Cass. Dio I, 1, 2 is to be supplemented, whether with something in the sense of ‘I have read’, for which see Boissevain (1895: 1, comm. ad vers. 1), or ‘I have collected’, as suggested by Millar (1964: 33). For the latter claim see Cass. Dio LXXII, 23, 5.

⁵⁴ See Hose (2007: 464). Not even Murison (1999: 12) doubts in any way the veracity of this Dio's claim.

⁵⁵ At least Millar (1964: 37) has found no trace of them. Martinelli's (1990: 431) assertion to the contrary is not supported otherwise than perhaps by her unconvincing argument as a whole, for which see below in n. 68.

⁵⁶ See Suet. *Dom.* 15, 1: *denique Flaviium Clementem patrualem suum contemptissimae inertiae ... repente ex tenuissima suspicione tantum non in ipso eius consulatu interemit.*

⁵⁷ See Lampr. *Catalog. libr. Plut.* 26–27 and 29–33 (Sandbach 1967: 2).

⁵⁸ See Hieron. *Chron.* 192e: *scribit Bruttius plurimos XPianorum sub Domitiano fecisse martyrium. inter quos et Flaviam Domitillam, Flauii Clementis consulis ex sorore neptem, in insulam Pontiam relegatam, quia se XPianam esse testata sit.* In this account especially other victims than the alleged niece of Clemens are missing, which in fact can be due to two reasons: either Bruttius did not mention them at all, or he did not mention them as Christians. In the latter case, eventually, Dio could have drawn upon him, but the effect for the possibility that Tacitus could have met some Christians prior to his sojourn to Asia, would in the end be the same as of the argument developed here below.

⁵⁹ For the list see the discussion by Murison (1999: 17–20). Especially Gnaeus Octavius Titinius Capito could appear as one, since he wrote about the *exitus illustrium uirorum* according to Plin. *Epist.* VIII, 12, 4, including some victims of Domitian as observed by Murison (1999: 19). But the account by Cass. Dio LXVII, 14, 1 opens with the words ἐν τούτῳ τῷ χρόνῳ ἡ ὁδὸς ἢ ἀπὸ Σινωέσσης ἐς Πουτεόλους ἀγούσα λίθοις ἐστορέσθη. κὰν τῷ αὐτῷ ἔτει..., which almost inevitably postulates that his actual source was annalistically arranged. This would probably not apply either to Marcus Antonius Julianus, whose writing is mentioned by Min. Fel. 33, 4: *scripta ... si Romanis magis gaudes, Antoni Iuliani de Iudaeis require*, but even if he indeed were Dio's actual source, it would make the victims of the affair Jews rather than Christians, whose effect were in the end once more the same as of the argument developed here below.

⁶⁰ Among those listed by Baldwin (1986), some only cannot be completely excluded: Apuleius' *epitome historiarum*, a history or biographies of Roman kings and emperors by the mysterious Clemens, and perhaps Favorinus' παντοδαπή ἱστορία, or some of the lost books of Appian. Two others, however, are

likely to have been utilized by him, since he himself shows from time to time a glimpse of interest in primary sources.⁶¹ To describe the reign of Flavians, however, Tacitus probably was the first, and so he must have collected the material himself.⁶² This is even more likely to be true for the final years of the reign of Domitian, and so too for the affair which occurred in 95. Moreover, Tacitus may actually have come across it as a member of the college of the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis*,⁶³ which, among others, oversaw the foreign cults introduced officially in Rome, or, if this implication should seem too arbitrary,⁶⁴ his membership in this college at least allows us to suppose his interest in religions and superstitions.⁶⁵ And in addition, even some traces of the possibly Tacitean description of some events occurring earlier in Dio's text have been detected.⁶⁶

Yet if Tacitus indeed was the original author of the account of the affair, then it had to have been twice taken over, and thus also possibly twice distorted, since even the account by Dio is preserved only within the *epitome* by Xiphilinus. This epitomizer, however, apparently used to not distort Dio's version,⁶⁷ but Dio himself has indeed been suspected of deliberately avoiding any mention of Christianity, in my view, however, unjustly.⁶⁸

plausible indeed: some Chryseros, according to Theophil. Antioch. *Autolyc.* III, 27 ὁ νομεγκλάτωρ, ἀπελεύθερος γενόμενος Μ. Αὐρηλίου Οὐήρου, ὃς ἀπὸ κτίσεως Ῥώμης μέχρι τελευταίας τοῦ ἰδίου πατρωνος αὐτοκράτορος Οὐήρου σαφῶς πάντα ἀνέγραψεν καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα καὶ τοὺς χρόνους, and a certain Amyntianus, known to us thanks to Phot. *Bibl.* CXXXI, 97a, 9–22 as a contemporary of the reign of Marcus Aurelius, who wrote, among others, παραλλήλους ... βίου, ὡς περ Διονυσίου καὶ Δομυτιανοῦ ἐν δυσὶ λόγοις. Both, however, apart from what is going to be argued here below and apart from his writing's not having been annalistically arranged in the case of the latter, definitely must have used some primary source for the events of the reign of Domitian.

⁶¹ Schwartz (1957: 439) pointed out the single clear contact between Dio and Suetonius: the anecdote claimed by Suet. *Otho* 10, 1 to have come from his father who had participated in the events, and occurring also in Cass. Dio LXIV, 11, 1–2. According to Guillaumin (1985), Dio used the reports by eyewitnesses when describing Caesar's activities in Gaul. And Millar (1964: 34) pointed out that only Augustus and his biography and Hadrian's writings on the deaths of Vespasian and Antinoos are undoubtedly quoted as his sources by Dio.

⁶² So Martin (1981: 199), similarly Sage (1990: 898–900), and see also Plin. *Epist.* V, 8, 12, according to whom the contemporary historian could have been interested either in *uetera et scripta alii*, or *intacta et noua*.

⁶³ His membership in 88 follows from Tac. *Ann.* XI, 11, 1; for his absence from Rome in 89/90–93, which is not an obstacle to his having been there in 95, see Birley (2000: 234 with n. 25, and 235). According to a conjecture by the same scholar (2000: 235), however, Tacitus may have been absent also in 94–96/97, while, on the contrary, his presence in Rome is counted on by Benko (1980: 1063).

⁶⁴ For this piece of authority of the college see Wissowa (1912: 543), whose exposition also makes clear wherefrom, and how little, we are in fact informed about it. For the second half of the 1st century there are, however, two poetical outlines of the duties of the college (see Wissowa 1912: 543, n. 3), which do not support the notion in question. Moreover, Judaism, and all the less so Christianity, did not, of course, fall among the religions officially introduced in Rome, and so the kind of eventual engagement of the college could only be speculated upon; yet it might seem that it would have been more likely if those accused declined being Jews, since Judaism was at least a *religio licita* and one sufficiently known in Rome, while the college could perhaps have been consulted in the case of a religion as yet unknown. However, the explanation by Smallwood (1956: 3–6) makes it clear that during the reign of Domitian the treatment of Jews changed. Perhaps then, the need to discern who really was a Jew and who was not or need not to have been treated as one (to which see below in n. 73) could have lied behind an eventual consultation of the college?

⁶⁵ This observation I owe to one of the anonymous referees to this paper.

⁶⁶ See the cross references by Murison (1999: 20 with n. 75) who thus arrived at the same persuasion concerning Dio's use of the lost part of the *Histories* of Tacitus.

⁶⁷ So Gowing (1997: 2561 with references to other authorities in n. 9) and see also Murison (1999: 1–2).

⁶⁸ See the comments and the references by Smallwood (1956: 7 and 12, n. 27 and 28) who herself opposed it, pointing out Cass. Dio LXXII, 4, 7: ἰστορεῖται δὲ αὕτη πολλά τε ὑπὲρ τῶν Χριστιανῶν σπουδάσαι

Nevertheless, it is also obvious that once Xiphilinus found out that Dio's silence had been to the detriment of the glory of Christianity, he did not hesitate to intervene: amidst the description of the miraculous rain of Marcus Aurelius, the Christian version thus can be found as well.⁶⁹ Hence, while the possibility that Tacitus identified the victims as Christians, with Dio ingeniously, if not rather enlighteningly, substituting ἀθεότης and Ἰουδαίων ἦθη for this charge, seems safely negligible, the fact that Xiphilinus added no Christian version of the affair, may be evidence that he knew none, or linked none together with this one. The latter is, of course, more likely, since somewhat like a Christian version had been available (at least) by Eusebius.⁷⁰

Following all this, I consider it key that the Ἰουδαίων ἦθη as preserved in Dio's phrase seems not to be a quotation of the official charge – this was certainly the ἀθεότης – but rather an author's, perhaps then Tacitus', comment on this charge: ἐτηνέχθη δὲ ἀμφοῖν ἔγκλημα ἀθεότητος, ὅφ' ἦς καὶ ἄλλοι ἐς τὰ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἦθη ἐξοκέλλοντες πολλοὶ κατεδικάσθησαν.⁷¹ The comment is therefore of such kind, that it seems that the author had some detailed information at hand (perhaps gained during his personal participation in the investigation of the affair?). Were this author Tacitus, then this comment would most likely have preceded his sojourn to Asia,⁷² and thus would not yet have been influenced by the information on Christianity he was to learn there. Even so, however, I see no reason not to take Tacitus at his word and consider the victims of the affair to have been

καὶ πολλὰ αὐτοὺς εὐηργετηκέναι, ἅτε καὶ παρὰ τῷ Κομμόδῳ πᾶν δυναμένην. See, however, the following note, too. Explanations of later authorities are summarised by Martinelli (1990: 432), whose own one (see esp. Martinelli 1990: 435–442) has similar consequence concerning the affair in question: if indeed Dio preferred an 'official' version, it could have been there where the eventual Christianity of the victims had been suppressed. Yet Martinelli's argument is developed oddly: Dio is claimed to have demonstrably followed the 'official' version when describing the miraculous rain of Marcus Aurelius, although he omitted the prayers of the soldiers (for the reference see the following note) whose involvement in the 'official' version follows from the depiction on the Column of Marcus Aurelius, as argued by Martinelli (1990: 440) herself. Recently, Barnes (1991: 232) is once more convinced of Dio's own deliberate silence, as if proven by the oblique reference in Cass. Dio LII, 36, 2: τοὺς δὲ δὴ ξενίζοντάς τι περὶ αὐτὸ καὶ μίσει καὶ κόλαζε, μὴ μόνον τῶν θεῶν ἔνεκα, ὧν <ὁ> καταφρονήσας οὐδ' ἄλλου ἂν τινος προτιμήσειεν, ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ καινὰ τινα δαιμόνια οἱ τοιοῦτοι ἀντεσφύροντες πολλοὺς ἀναπειθοῦσιν ἀλλοτρινομεῖν, κάκ τούτου καὶ συνωμοσίαι καὶ συστάσεις ἑταιρεῖαι τε γίνονται, ἅπερ ἥκιστα μοναρχία συμφέρει. μήτ' οὖν ἀθέω τινὶ μήτε γόητι συγχωρήσης εἶναι. But even if Christians certainly can be those referred to thereby, it is not necessarily because their name was meant to be suppressed, but simply to specify why they were to be treated in the manner described. The whole debate, however, stems from the allegedly suspicious silence about Christianity on the part of Dio. Here therefore must be emphasized that even in Dio's time I do not see any reason for considering this silence suspicious.

⁶⁹ See Cass. Dio LXXI, 8–10 with the Christian version inserted as chapter 9. The gloss concerning Marcia quoted in the previous note therefore possibly can be Xiphilinus' own addition as well, but at least it does not stand out from the text so clearly. Cass. Dio LXX, 3, 1–2 also mentions Christians, but this is an acknowledged addition on the part of Xiphilinus.

⁷⁰ See Euseb. Caes. *Hist. eccl.* III, 18, 4 and above in n. 58 the quotation from Jerome's translation of Eusebius' *Chronicle*. This account, however, certainly could have been regarded by Eusebius' readers as complementary to that of Dio rather than the Christian version of it.

⁷¹ Cass. Dio LXVII, 14, 2.

⁷² For the overview of the reasons leading to the year 110 or not too later, as the year of completion of Tacitus' *Histories*, whereas it is not clear when and how they were published (whether e.g. some instalments not earlier), see Sage (1990: 859–863). Also Birley (2000: 241), whose exposition follows the reconstruction of Tacitus' life, considers it reasonable to place the completion of the work around 109 or 110.

the Godfearers.⁷³ Another account by Dio supports this option, since it is certainly – and even by the choice of vocabulary – independent of that ascribed here to Tacitus, and so his account can be considered as attested to by another, clearly also well informed, source drawn upon by Dio: ὁ Νέρουας τοὺς τε κρινομένους ἐπ’ ἄσεβείᾳ ἀφῆκε ... οὐτ’ ἄσεβείας οὐτ’ Ἰουδαϊκοῦ βίου κατατιθῆσθαι τινὰς συνεχώρησε.⁷⁴

Finally, another argument, not following the discussion here, is only to be remarked: that the Christian tradition usurped the Jewish martyrs seems so much more likely than the contrary.⁷⁵

The very probable fact, however, that Christianity was not the object of the affair obviously does not completely exclude the possibility that Tacitus could have been somehow confronted with it already at this time. Yet it is certainly not likely, and all the less likely is the possibility that he had already gained his information on the origins of Christianity by then.

With all this having been discussed the conclusion could already be laid down, but before proceeding thereto, there is one forgotten suggestion of Koestermann which the notion here suggested of Tacitus’ well-informedness following his sojourn to Asia may seem to possibly vindicate, and so my opinion on it should be clearly stated. In his above-mentioned paper, Koestermann⁷⁶ wondered whether, when describing the years of 29–31, thus somewhere in the lost book V, Tacitus had not mentioned even the crucifixion of Jesus.⁷⁷ One possible hint he saw in Tacitus’ mention of Pilate lacking any specification as to his term of office.⁷⁸ The loss of the book V would also become well explicable then: some monk angry about the way Tacitus had spoken of Jesus in it would have damaged it.⁷⁹

Nevertheless, for my part, I do not believe that the accurate basic information on the origins of Christianity gained by Tacitus would have led him to such, howsoever little systematic, treatment of its history. Two objections offer themselves: the mistake concerning Pilate’s official title tells us that the events he participated in were of little importance to Tacitus. Further, Tacitus’ sufficiently known main focus had been the events in Rome, especially at the court and in the senate, while in provinces and the affairs therein he was interested only as far as they had some impact on the situation in Rome.⁸⁰ Jesus’ crucifixion, however, was not an occurrence of that kind. Only the account of the Neronian

⁷³ Rather than proselytes, since, as argued by Smallwood (1956: 5–9), precisely the Godfearers, unlike Jews themselves with the proselytes included, Domitian forced into practising the imperial cult.

⁷⁴ Cass. Dio LXVIII, 1, 2.

⁷⁵ For the Jewish tradition treating Clemens and Domitilla as its own followers see Smallwood (1956: 8).

⁷⁶ Koestermann (1967: 463–464).

⁷⁷ Meier (1991: 89) too held it plausible: “Barring the discovery of a fuller manuscript, we will never know whether Tacitus mentioned Jesus in his treatment of the years 30–31”.

⁷⁸ See the quotation above p. 98. Syme (1958: I, 449 with n. 7, and see also II, 469), however, was convinced that Tacitus had mentioned Pilate in the, also lost, book VII, thus in connection with the events in Syria and Palestine, and Pilate’s return to Rome. While describing it, Tacitus certainly pointed to some events and wrongdoings of Pilate’s ten years’ sojourn in the province.

⁷⁹ Not even the remark by Tac. *Hist.* V, 9, 2 that during Tiberius’ reign there was quiet in Judea, disqualifies Koestermann’s suggestion. To a far-away Roman witness Jesus’ crucifixion may not have seemed such disturbance of this quiet as to single it out, or, as argued here, Tacitus may have learnt about it in the time between his completion of the *Histories*, and taking up the *Annals*, thus during his sojourn to Asia.

⁸⁰ For a detailed analysis, free from all modern contempt, see Sage (1990: 1018–1024).

persecution was to have been supplied with an explanatory note, and that is why Tacitus inserted his excursus on the origins of Christianity there.

For this excursus, it can be now concluded, Tacitus used the information he had probably learnt in Asia from Christians he was interrogating there. These Christians had not accepted the received tradition of the origins of Christianity, while possessing their own one, perhaps closer to the genuine historical process of the emergence of this religion. No earlier opportunity when Tacitus could have gained this information can be considered plausible, and thus the followers of this alternative tradition can be located in Asia with quite a sufficient degree of certainty.

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**AUCTOR NOMINIS EIUS CHRISTUS.
TACITOVY ZNALOSTI O POČÁTCÍCH KŘESŤANSTVÍ**

Tacitovy informace o počátcích křesťanství se vyznačují detaily, které mohou být historicky přesné a mohou svědčit o tom, že je získal od křesťanů, ale stoupenců jiné než stávající tradice, které zřejmě vyšetřoval v době svého asijského prokonsulátu. Zpráva Cassia Diona o procesu s Flaviem Clementem a dalšími je zřejmě převzata od téhož Tacita, který se k tomuto procesu mohl coby *quindecemvir sacris faciundis* nachomýtnout osobně, nebo se o něj aspoň zajímat. Dionova formulace této zprávy, v níž křesťanství není zmíněno, by proto měla být brána vážně, čehož důsledkem je, že když se aférou Tacitus při psaní svých *Historií*, a tedy před svým pobytem v Asii, zabýval, nemusel se ještě o křesťanství a jeho počátcích dozvědět nic. Své informace by tak získal opravdu až v Asii a moderní badatelé by s nimi jako takovými mohli zacházet.

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