# MEMORY, RELIGION AND HISTORY IN NERO'S GREAT FIRE: TACITUS, *ANNALS* 15.41–7*

*Lieux de mémoire* arise out of a sense that there is no such thing as spontaneous memory, hence that we must create archives, mark anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and authenticate documents because such things no longer happen as a matter of course … Without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away. These bastions buttress our identities, but if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need for them.[1]                                                                                      (P. Nora)

Nora's notion is very apposite to Tacitus' account of the fire that swept through Rome in A.D. 64: the temples destroyed in this fire are particularly important, and their loss is particularly lamentable, because of the religious ineptitude of both the emperor and the society he governs. Nero himself, after all, is a fratricide and a matricide.[2] The rainstorm following the funeral of Britannicus (*Ann.* 13.17.1 *in campo tamen Martis sepultus est, adeo turbidis imbribus, ut vulgus iram deum portendi crediderit adversus facinus*) is thought by people at the time to show divine displeasure at this act; with the killing of Agrippina, Tacitus is even more explicit about the gods' opposition to Nero's schemes when he states that they send clear weather in an attempt to reveal the stratagem of the collapsible boat by which the *princeps* intends to take his mother's life (*Ann.* 14.5.1 *noctem sideribus inlustrem et placido mari quietam quasi convincendum ad scelus dii praebuere*). The people of Rome are no better: they ignore various prodigies that seem to point to divine displeasure at Nero's actions (*Ann.* 14.12.2 *quae adeo sine cura deum eveniebant, ut multos post<ea> annos Nero imperium et scelera continuaverit*) and, even worse, they welcome him on his return to Rome with a celebration reminiscent of a triumph (*Ann.* 14.13.2), a religious ceremony that is properly the

[1] General introduction: 'Between memory and history', from *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, vol. 1: Conflicts and Divisions* (New York, 1996; translated by A. Goldhammer from the French *Les lieux de mémoire*, 1992), 7.

[2] Fratricide was a violation of the relationship between brothers, which ought to be controlled by *pietas*. Cicero (*Off.* 1.54–5) notes that brothers are linked by virtue of caring for family graves and worshipping in family cults, implying a religious component to the fraternal relationship; cf. C. Bannon, *The Brothers of Romulus* (Princeton, 1997), 9–10. Matricide fell under the legal umbrella of *parricidium* (cf. *Dig.* 48.9, Quint. *Inst.* 8.6.35), the punishment for which was to be thrown into the sea, presumably to remove from Roman soil the serious ritual pollution adhering to a patricide's remains (cf. E.M. Lassen, 'The ultimate crime: *parricidium* and the concept of family in the Late Roman Republic and Early Empire', *C&M* 43 (1992), 147–61, at 150). Cicero also implies that ritual pollution accrues from killing one's parent: *magnam possidet religionem paternus maternusque sanguis* (*Rosc. Am.* 66).

arena for a victorious commander, not a matricide, to fulfil his vows to the gods.[3]
In such a society and under such a *princeps*, no one knows any longer how to
behave in a pious way, and the temples of Rome, in memorializing the pious and
religiously correct actions of past Romans, provide the 'commemorative vigilance'
Nora mentions. Nero is thus doubly bad: he does not know how to do religious
ritual properly, as we shall see in his handling of the aftermath of the fire, nor can
he preserve the temples that are reminders of how to do religious ritual properly.

But there is another layer here: that of history. For among the casualties of
Nero's fire that Tacitus laments are works of literature, *monumenta ingeniorum
antiqua et incorrupta* (15.41.1), once preserved in the destroyed buildings, and so
we are forced to think about the memorial function of writing (specifically, as I
shall argue, historiography) and how it works alongside the memorial function of
built monuments. According to one view in cultural memory studies, 'history is
dead memory, a way of preserving pasts to which we no longer have an "organic"
experiential relation'.[4] This idea has ancient parallels: in a story of Socrates set
among the gods of Egypt, Ammon famously rebukes Theuth, the inventor of writ-
ing, saying that writing will actually weaken the power of memory as people
become reliant on it (Pl. *Phdr.* 275a 1–6 τοῦτο γὰρ τῶν μαθόντων λήθην μὲν
ἐν ψυχαῖς παρέξει μνήμης ἀμελετησίᾳ, ἅτε διὰ πίστιν γραφῆς ἔξωθεν ὑπ᾽
ἀλλοτρίων τύπων, οὐκ ἔνδοθεν αὐτοὺς ὑφ᾽ αὑτῶν ἀναμιμνησκομένους· οὔκουν
μνήμης ἀλλὰ ὑπομνήσεως φάρμακον ηὗρες).[5] But other theorists prefer to see
history and memory as performing similar functions. To Nora, for example, history
('a matter of sifting and sorting') is what modern societies use to perform the
function of memory ('once the legacy of what people knew intimately') preserved
by institutions that 'have ceased to function as they once did' in an idealized
past, a phenomenon he refers to as 'memory-history'.[6] Tacitus, as I will show,
discusses the temples in ways that recall his historiographical predecessor Livy,
affirming their indebtedness to history. What results is not only a commentary on
the religious ineptitude of Nero and his world, but on the importance and role of
memory and history within that world.

## *TEMPLA* AND *MONUMENTA*

Tacitus' account of the great fire in A.D. 64 follows immediately upon his description
of Tigellinus' depraved party for Nero (*Ann.* 15.38.1 *sequitur clades*),[7] implying

[3] Cf. B. Walker, *The Annals of Tacitus* (Manchester, 1952), 79.

[4] J.K. Olick and J. Robbins, 'Social memory studies: from "collective memory" to the his-
torical sociology of mnemonic practices', *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998), 105–40, at
110, summarizing the opinion expressed by M. Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris, 1950).

[5] Caesar (*B. Gall.* 6.14.4) attributes similar motives to the Druids, who refuse to use writing
in their religious training: *neque eos, qui discunt, litteris confisos minus memoriae studere, quod
fere plerisque accidit ut praesidio litterarum diligentiam in perdiscendo ac memoriam remittant.*

[6] Nora (n. 1), 2; see also 4–5. For an assessment of different theorists' takes on how memory
can serve history (or vice versa), see P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago, 2004),
384–93. J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in
frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich, 1992), 44–5, disagrees with such a sharp distinction; for other
critiques of the history–memory dichotomy see Olick and Robbins (n. 4), 110–11.

[7] A.J. Woodman ('Nero's alien capital: Tacitus as paradoxographer (*Annals* 15.36–7)', in id.
and J. Powell (edd.), *Author and Audience in Latin Literature* (Cambridge, 1992), 173–88, at

a causal relationship between the two 'instead of mere temporal sequence, i.e., the great fire was brought on by the infamy of the emperor'.[8] As the narrative progresses, temples are mentioned only as potential fodder for the flame (15.38.2),[9] and their destruction is compared to loss of human life (15.40.1); only later does their religious and historical significance begin to be considered:

domuum et insularum et templorum, quae amissa sunt, numerum inire haud promptum fuerit; sed vetustissima religione, quod Servius Tullius Lunae, et magna ara fanumque, quae praesenti Herculi Arcas Evander sacraverat, aedesque Statoris Iovis vota Romulo Numaeque regia et delubrum Vestae cum penatibus populi Romani exusta; iam opes tot victoriis quaesitae et Graecarum artium decora, exim monumenta ingeniorum antiqua et incorrupta, <ut> quamvis in tanta resurgentis urbis pulchritudine multa seniores meminerint, quae reparari nequibant. fuere qui adnotarent XIIII Kal. Sextiles principium incendii huius ortum, quo et Senones captam urbem inflammaverint. alii eo usque cura progressi sunt, ut totidem annos mensesque et dies inter utraque incendia numer<ar>ent.          (15.41)

The buildings are important not only for their venerable old age (*vetustissima*), but also for their religious significance, their value as symbols of the piety of Rome's founding figures (*religione*). Tacitus' choice of temples for this list is significant. The temple of Luna, probably to be identified with the temple of Diana on the Aventine,[10] was founded to honour a new alliance of the Latins, but particularly to confirm Rome's pre-eminence in that alliance (Livy 1.45.3 *ea erat confessio caput rerum Romam esse, de quo totiens armis certatum fuerat*). The ancient Ara Maxima, with its origins in the time of Evander, was likewise considered by Livy to have implications for the city's future greatness (Livy 1.7.10 *tibique aram hic dicatum iri quam opulentissima olim in terris gens maximam vocet tuoque ritu colat*).[11] Next comes the temple of Jupiter Stator, vowed by Romulus during a battle with the Sabines in return for the god's aid (*tua praesenti ope*, Livy 1.12.6; cf. *Ann.* 15.41.1 *praesenti Herculi*). It memorializes the divine presence that has

176 n. 7, 177) has seen foreshadowing of the great fire in Tacitus' language in 15.36–7, and has noted that Tigellinus' party on the lake, in attempting to transform sea into land, has much in common with the hubristic river crossings of Herodotus' Persian kings.

[8] W. Allen et al., 'Nero's eccentricities before the fire (Tac. *Ann.* 15.37)', *Numen* 9 (1962), 99–109, at 103. Sometimes in Tacitus *sequor* merely indicates a temporal relationship (e.g. 14.9.1, 15.60.2), but for 'causal *sequor*' cf. *Ann.* 1.76.1, 6.17.3, 14.22.4, 15.47.2. Cf. also the linking of the *clades* of the amphitheatre collapse followed by a fire in A.D. 27 (*Ann.* 4.64.1, which also shares with the present passage the phrase *ignis violentia*), where it is the *vulgus* who sees Tiberian culpability in what Tacitus terms *fortuita*.

[9] R. Ash, 'Victim and voyeur: Rome as a character in Tacitus' *Histories* 3', in D.H.J. Larmour and D. Spencer (edd.), *The Sites of Rome: Time, Space, Memory* (Oxford 2007), 211–37, at 231–2: Tacitus similarly focuses not on the Capitoline temple's historical and religious significance but on its individual components as *materies* for the flame as it burns at *Hist.* 3.71.4.

[10] Diana appears as Luna throughout Latin literature, e.g. Cat. 34.15–16, Hor. *Carm. saec.* 35–6. N.P. Miller, *Tacitus Annals XV* (London, 1973), 92 notes that there was a temple of Luna on the Aventine, but it had no attested connection with Servius Tullius.

[11] The altar seems to have similar significance for Virgil (*Aen.* 8.271–2 *hanc aram luco statuit, quae maxima semper | dicetur nobis et erit quae maxima semper*), a sentiment echoed by Propertius (4.9.67–8 '... *maxima quae gregibus devota est ara repertis, | ara per has' inquit 'maxima facta manus ...'*; cf. G. Hutchinson, *Propertius Elegies Book IV* [Cambridge, 2006], 217). Dionysius of Halicarnassus' (1.40.6) is the only version where Evander founds the Ara Maxima; in Livy and Ovid (*Fast.* 1.579–581) the god himself founds his own altar and cult. This is a conflation of the Ara Maxima with a separate altar to Jupiter that Hercules did found (Hutchinson, 218).

helped Rome during her past military endeavours as she grew into a worldwide imperial power: for Livy, the battle represents the first step along this road of imperialism, for in it the Sabines came under Roman sway (Livy 1.13.4 *imperium omne conferunt Romam*). It is not insignificant that Romulus addresses Jupiter Stator as Jupiter Optimus Maximus (Livy 1.12.7): for Livy, the Capitoline god has important resonances with the eternal supremacy of Rome.[12] The temple of Vesta also has important resonances with the eternal supremacy of Rome, with its *palladium* and eternal flame; the Penates had similar significance.[13] The temple is prominent in Livy's fifth book, when the people of Rome are contemplating a migration to Veii after the invasion and burning of Rome by the Gauls (to which Tacitus explicitly refers as a predecessor of Nero's fire). As Camillus attempts to dissuade the Romans from migrating, he twice cites the temple of Vesta as one of the many reasons they should not leave the city, mentioning her in the same breath with the sacred shield of Mars Gradivus that was kept in the *regia*, a building also mentioned by Tacitus.[14]

Tacitus' list, then, is comprised of temples founded in the early days of the city that are also discussed by Livy, who gives them important associations with Rome's eternal dominion. And Tacitus clearly indicates that he wishes the reader to feel the Livian resonances of these temples by flanking the temple list with Livian allusions. Nero wants to found a new city (*Ann.* 15.40.2 *videbaturque Nero condendae urbis novae et cognomento suo appellandae gloriam quaerere*); and alongside the temples, other casualties of the fire are *monumenta ingeniorum antiqua et* incorrupta (15.41.1). The phrase *urbs nova* runs throughout the beginning of Livy Book 1, almost like a catchphrase for the founding of the city (e.g. 2.3, 3.3, 6.4, 9.8, 19.1); and both *condenda urbs* and *monumenta incorrupta* are reminiscences of a programmatic statement from Livy's proem: *quae ante conditam condendamve urbem poeticis magis decora fabulis quam incorruptis rerum gestarum monumentis traduntur, ea nec adfirmare nec refellere in animo est* (pr. 6). The phrase *incorrupta monumenta* occurs only in these two passages in Latin literature.[15] Tacitus does not explicitly tell us what these *monumenta* comprise, but they probably refer to works of literature, so this could indicate the burning of one of Rome's libraries.[16] It is possible Tacitus could be thinking of documents or other

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[12] Cf. Livy 1.55.4–6.

[13] Vesta's temple was also the resting place of the Trojan household gods brought by Aeneas; cf. Ov. *Fast.* 1.528–30 and 3.415–28, which also refers to the inextinguishable flame; for the *palladium* as guarantor of empire and its association with Vesta, cf. Livy 5.52.7, Ov. *Fast.* 6.435–6. See also M.P. Charlesworth, 'Providentia and aeternitas', *HThR* 29 (1936), 107–32, esp. 122–3. For the relationship between Vesta and the Penates after Augustus moved the goddess's shrine to his own house on the Palatine, see G. Radke, 'Die *dei penates* und Vesta in Rom', *ANRW* 2.17.1 (1981), 343–73, at 352 and n. 73; 362–3.

[14] Livy 5.52.7 *quid de aeternis Vestae ignibus signoque quod imperii pignus custodia eius templi tenetur loquar? quid de ancilibus uestris, Mars Gradiue tuque, Quirine pater?* 5.54.7 *hic Vestae ignes, hic ancilia caelo demissa, hic omnes propitii manentibus uobis di.*

[15] Compare the similar language used by Pliny, *HN* 36.168, in reference to black silex: *iidem et in monimentis scalpti contra vetustatem quoque incorrupti permanent.*

[16] *OLD* s.v. §5 defines *monumentum* as 'a literary work, book; (esp. pl.) writings, literature'. Other examples include Hor. *Carm.* 3.30.1 *exegi monumentum aere perennius* with its overtones of funerary architecture (cf. D. Korzeniewski, 'Exegi monumentum: Hor. *Carm.* 3, 30 und die Topik der Grabgedichte', *Gymnasium* 79 [1972], 380–8); Cic. *De or.* 2.53; Cat. 95.9; Tac. *Ann.* 4.61.1. H. Furneaux, *The Annals of Tacitus, Vol. II: Books XI–XVI* (Oxford, 1907), 368, E. Koestermann, *Annalen Band IV: Buch 14–16* (Heidelberg, 1968), 245 and Miller (n. 10), 93

archival material,[17] but it is more likely to be works of literature, and of history in particular, to which he refers. *Monumentum* in its literary sense can signify a work of history specifically,[18] and Tacitus himself elsewhere refers to works of history as *monumenta*: the term is applied to books treating the deaths of Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus which won death for their authors at the hands of Domitian and were ordered to be burned (*Agr.* 2.1 *monumenta clarissimorum ingeniorum*, the same phrasing as in our *Annals* passage), and ironically to works by pro-Flavian historians (*Hist.* 2.101.1 *monimenta belli huiusce*). And the unmistakeable allusion to Livy strengthens the possibility that works of literature are at the very least included in Tacitus' use of *monumenta* here. While for Livy the phrase *incorrupta monumenta* was meant to draw a contrast between old myths of the pre-foundation and his own more accurate genre of history,[19] Tacitus' distinction is between the venerable historical writings now lost and the new city Nero is founding upon the ashes of the old. For Tacitus, these irreplaceable historical writings were not *incorrupta* after all, no more than the temples were.

This is where any attempt at creating a dichotomy between 'memory' and 'history' starts to break down. Temples that were vowed in the past are, to be sure, carriers of the kind of memory Nora attributes to the France of the past, where memory was preserved entirely separately from written history. They are the focal points for a tradition of divine worship consisting in rituals repeated continually from their founding through to their destruction, and they thus function as 'bastions buttressing' the (religious) 'identities' of the Roman people, constant visual reminders of the city's religious past. Yet in the passage describing their destruction, Tacitus makes no mention of the temples' place in the rituals performed by the Romans of A.D. 64: the reason their loss is so deplorable is rather their role as reminders of past piety. This is where the 'monumental' historical writings come in: the Livian allusion, and the fact that all the temples Tacitus mentions had such importance for his predecessor, speak of a close relationship between the memory preserved in the temples and Rome's historical traditions. In Tacitus' world, it is implied, history is crucial in making these temples function as *lieux de mémoire*: without Livy and other historians like him, how would we know

support this interpretation of *monumenta* here. Possibilities for the site referred to include the library in the temple of Palatine Apollo (Furneaux's suggestion, although he admits there is no other evidence for its destruction); the one placed by Augustus in the Porticus Octaviae in the late 30s/early 20s B.C. (Plut. *Marc.* 30.6; Ov. *Tr.* 3.1.69–70); or that added to the *atrium Libertatis* by Asinius Pollio when he restored it in 39 B.C. (Plin. *HN* 7.115, 35.10; Ov. *Tr.* 3.1.71–2). Furneaux raises the possibility that the reference here is not to libraries but rather to 'original copies preserved in the archives of an author's family', an interpretation Miller supports.

[17] If the reference is to Pollio's library, Tacitus could conceivably be referring to either literature or documents, as this library possibly contained a public archive also (cf. P. Coarelli, *LTUR* 1.134), and archival matter can certainly also be described as a *monumentum* (*OLD* s.v. §4).

[18] *OLD* s.v. §5b with examples there cited. Cf. Cic. *De or.* 2.53: *hanc similitudinem scribendi multi secuti sunt, qui sine ullis ornamentis monumenta solum temporum, hominum, locorum gestarumque rerum reliquerunt.* Although it is unclear what the relationship was between these early works and the *Annales Maximi* and other public records (cf. A.J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography* [London, 1988], 89), it is clear that the *monumenta* referred to are history as distinct from such records; they are plain, unadorned *monumenta*, but *monumenta* all the same. For Livy's *monumentum* as referring both to history in the abstract and to his own work specifically, see J.L. Moles, 'Livy's Preface', in J.D. Chaplin and C.S. Kraus (edd.), *Livy.* Oxford Readings in Classical Studies (Oxford, 2009), 49–87, at 73–5 (= *PCPhS* 39 [1993], 141–68).

[19] Cf. Moles (n. 18), 64–7; G.B. Miles, *Livy: Reconstructing Early Rome* (Ithaca, NY, 1995), 17–18.

the stories of how Servius Tullius, Evander and Romulus founded the temples? If we did not know these stories, the temples would still preserve some degree of memory as symbols of ritual past and present but, without the Livian emphasis on their connection to the growth and eternity of Roman *imperium*, it would not be possible to appreciate the full significance of these temples for Rome's past and future. Tacitus' implication that history is essential to memory goes counter to the assertion of Plato's *Phaedrus*; the same position is even more explicitly stated by Livy, for whom literature is the *una custodia fidelis memoriae rerum gestarum* (6.1.2).[20] We are firmly in the territory of Nora's 'memory-history' here: in a world like modern France – or Neronian Rome – where memory as embodied in ritual no longer exists, 'history [is] a critical method whose purpose is to establish true memory.'[21]

The primacy of the historian in establishing true memory is also underlined by Tacitus' report of the memories of the *seniores* of his own day.[22] The present beauty of Trajanic (or Hadrianic) Rome[23] dulls in comparison to the ancient buildings that were lost: 'The aesthetic dimension … in this context retreats entirely behind

[20] Again, this has bearing on the relationship between history and source material. The destruction of (physical and literary) *monumenta* in the Gallic sack, says Livy, makes it very difficult to write a clear history of Rome prior to that date; in the absence of these sources, the first five books of his own history are less clear than the *clariora ... gesta* (6.1.3) that will follow. On the historical discontinuity between pre- and post-Gallic sack Rome see J.H.C. Williams, *Beyond the Rubicon: Romans and Gauls in Republican Italy* (Oxford, 2001), 140–1. A. Gowing, *Empire and Memory: The Representation of the Roman Republic in Imperial Culture* (Cambridge, 2005), 25 sees here a fundamental difference in attitude between Greeks and Romans on the relationship of memory to writing; cf. J. le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York, 1992; tr. S. Rendall and E. Claman from the Italian *Storia e memoria* [Turin], 1977), 63–5. Cato (*Origines* F32 Peter) seems to have expressed a similar emphasis on writing as the only guarantor of true memory: *sed ipsi [Ligures], unde oriundi sunt, exacta memoria, inliterati mendacesque sunt et vera minus meminere*. For the notion that 'memories actually have no existence independent of "storage media"', see J. Farrell, 'The phenomenology of memory in Roman culture', *CJ* 92 (1997), 373–83, at 383.

[21] Nora (n. 1), 4.

[22] The sentence as it stands in the MS is difficult to interpret. If, with Orelli, we retain the subjunctive as a potential (*meminerint = meminisse possunt*), the *seniores* must be old men of Tacitus' own day. Most modern editors adopt Halm's insertion of *ut* before *quamvis* and retain the perfect-for-present subjunctive *meminerint*. In this case we must also attribute the thought to people of Tacitus' own day; if it were to refer to people who were *seniores* in A.D. 64, the verb would have to be pluperfect-for-imperfect *meminissent* (cf. E.C. Woodcock, *A New Latin Syntax* [London, 1959], §162). Retaining *meminerint* according to either Halm's or Orelli's readings seems to me preferable, although other editors, wishing the *seniores* to be witnesses to the fire under Nero, do not insert *ut* but amend the text to *meminerant* or *meminerunt*: see Furneaux (n. 16), 522.

[23] For Trajan as a great builder and restorer within the city of Rome, see J.B. Ward-Perkins, *Roman Imperial Architecture* (New Haven and London, 1981²), 84. Tacitus would have been in Rome when the Forum of Trajan was dedicated in 112, and could have returned from his proconsulship in Asia in time to witness the dedication of Trajan's Column, the two most famous examples of Trajanic *resurgentis urbis pulchritudo* (see A.J. Woodman, 'Tacitus and the contemporary scene', in id., *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus* [Cambridge, 2010], 31–43, at 39–41). The Forum of Trajan fits the *seniores*' observations particularly well; as Gowing (n. 20), 146–51 has shown, it was a fundamentally new representation of the principate at odds with the Republican memories embodied in the neighbouring Forum of Augustus. But even if *Ann.* 15 is assigned a Hadrianic date, as seems more likely, *urbs resurgens* still applies: Hadrian's programme of building and restoration (for which see Ward-Perkins, 121–4) included the Pantheon and the Temple of Venus and Rome, and the emperor was an architect in his own right (see J.C. Anderson, Jr., *Roman Architecture and Society* [Baltimore, 1997], 64–5). For the difficult question of the date of the *Annals*, see R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958), 473; M.M. Sage, 'Tacitus'

nostalgic/sentimental feelings geared toward the dawn of Rome.'[24] But since the lost buildings cannot be reconstructed, they now live only in the memory of these *seniores* – and in Tacitus the historian's preservation of this memory of loss. This citation of *seniores* is a manifestation of the familiar historiographical topos of preserving the eyewitness testimony of older people, as well as the wider literary topos, mostly used in dialogues, of using (one's own) memory to back up one's asseverations.[25] Memory, which is the only thing left of the burnt buildings and writings, provides Tacitus with raw material for his own account. We are not told what exactly the *seniores* remember about the lost temples, beyond the fact of their loss; only a historian such as Tacitus, who can combine his reading of Livy with the reminiscences of the *seniores*, is capable of telling us the full significance of these temples. Similarly, all that is remembered about the Gallic sack is its date; those who note the similarity (*qui adnotarent*) may sense that there is some important relationship between the fires, but the *alii* are concerned with counting the months, days and years separating the cataclysms rather than with thinking about their possible resonances, which a work of history might have pointed out to them.[26]

One could go a step further: Tacitus' conception of the relationship between memory preserved in temples and written history as I have outlined it here is similar to the relationship between 'functional' and 'stored' memory (*Funktionsgedächtnis* and *Speichergedächtnis*) that A. Assmann has attributed to literate societies. The former is in constant use, 'really needed, inhabited, and tended', whereas the second, made possible only by the existence of writing, is a kind of cultural unconsciousness, 'hoards of knowledge that are no longer needed'. Yet, she says, 'the frontier between stored and functional memory is constantly shifting', which is 'the precondition of the possibility of change and renewal'.[27] Similarly, Tacitus' temples, as religious buildings in constant use, are literally 'needed, inhabited, and tended' in the city's religious life; the works of literature contain other important parts of their significance that can only be reaccessed while those works of literature continue to exist.[28] But the relationship between functional and stored memory is

historical works: a survey and appraisal', *ANRW* 2.33.2 (1990), 853–1030, at 954–962; A.R. Birley, 'The life and death of Cornelius Tacitus', *Historia* 49 (2000), 230–47.

[24] Koestermann (n. 16), 245: 'Aber das Aesthetische … tritt in diesem Zusammenhang ganz hinter auf die römischen Frühzeit ausgerichteten wehmütig-sentimentalen Gefühlen zurück.'

[25] See A.J. Woodman and R.M. Martin, *The Annals of Tacitus, Book 3* (Cambridge, 1996), on *Ann.* 3.16.1, where they think the concatenation of these topoi suggests Tacitus 'has given a high degree of authentication' to the anecdote; see also 11.27. One could compare *Ann.* 4.65, where Tacitus preserves the memory (this time in the form of written history) of the former names of the Caelian Hill in the context of a bid to rename it (4.64.3), while highlighting his own historiographical activities of composition (*haud fuerit absurdum tradere*) and research (*nam scriptores in eo dissentiunt*).

[26] For Roman anxiety about the recurring destruction of their city, especially at the hands of the Gauls, and its reflection in literature (especially historiography), see Williams (n. 20), 170–82. In so far as it is possible to tell, given the corruption of the text, the Gallic sack is remembered in more detail by the senators of *Ann.* 11.23.4, who compare the siege of the Capitol with the proposed admission of Gallic senators. For a discussion of the calculation of years, months and days, see Koestermann (n. 16), 245–6.

[27] J. Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies* (Stanford, 2006), 25; A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich, 1999), 130–45.

[28] Cf. A. Assmann (n. 27), 140: a society without libraries, archives, etc. 'cannot build up stored memory'.

one of mutual interdependence: 'Both formations [i.e. types of memory] exist in literate cultures, and for the future of the culture much depends on the fact that they remain in good repair, side by side, even under new medial conditions'.[29] The works of history need the temples, too: without the living memory of the temples to anchor them to the lived reality of Roman religious memory, the information they preserve about the temples' past is without context and irrelevant to the present.[30]

## BROKEN RELIGIOUS *ERINNERUNGSKULTUR*

People have to *want* to read history to find out more about where their temples came from: writing 'is a system of notation in the service of memory, a data-storage system, and it functions only in conjunction with an appropriate memory-based culture (*Erinnerungskultur*) that ensures the enduring readability of texts'.[31] But is Tacitus' Rome in A.D. 64 possessed of a thriving religious *Erinnerungskultur*? An examination of the activities of Nero and his subjects immediately after the fire will help shed light on this question.

Nero's religious reaction to the fire is a reasonable attempt to use the correct ritual propitiation to appease the gods' anger as manifested in the fire:

mox petita [a] dis piacula aditique Sibyllae libri, ex quibus supplicatum Volcano et Cereri Proserpinaeque, ac propitiata Iuno per matronas, primum in Capitolio, deinde apud proximum mare, unde hausta aqua templum et simulacrum deae perspersum est; et sellisternia ac pervigilia celebravere feminae, quibus mariti erant. Sed non ope humana, non largitionibus principis aut deum placamentis decedebat infamia, quin iussum incendium crederetur.

(15.44.1–2)

Religious correctness is being preserved, even in Tacitus' vocabulary: *supplico*, *matrona*, *perspergo*, *sellisternium* and *propitio* are all rare or archaic words specifically connected to ritual.[32] The Sibylline books are duly consulted, and the choice of gods to propitiate seems sound: Vulcan's appropriateness as the god of fire is obvious; Ceres and Proserpina had a temple near where the fire broke out on the Aventine (cf. 15.38.1 and 15.53.3); and Juno too may have had a temple on the same hill.[33] All this certainly points to the continued functioning of some version of an *Erinnerungskultur*: the need to propitiate deities, angered by the destruction of their temples, according to age-old practices. But all this religious correctness and respect for tradition is suddenly and swiftly undercut by the intimation, focalized through Nero's contemporaries, that he set the fire himself.[34] Their judgement

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[29] A. Assmann (n. 27), 141: 'In Schriftkulturen existieren beide Formationen, und es hängt für die Zukunft der Kultur viel davon ab, daß sie auch unter neuen medialen Bedingungen nebeneinander erhalten bleiben.'

[30] For the tendency of written material to fall into irrelevance if it is not reintegrated into functional memory, see A. Assmann (n. 27), 137.

[31] J. Assmann (n. 27), 87.

[32] Miller (n. 10), 96. *Supplico*, *matrona*, *perspergo* and *sellisternium* are all *hapax legomena* in Tacitus; *propitio* occurs only once elsewhere (*Dial.* 9.5).

[33] Koestermann (n. 16), 252.

[34] J.P. Davies, *Rome's Religious History: Livy, Tacitus, and Ammianus on their Gods* (Cambridge, 2004), 200. The religious correctness may also be undermined if we see in the *matronae* propitiating Juno an echo of Roman women beseeching the gods at Luc. 2.30–6 (cf. 2.28 *matrona*), the Trojan women calling on Pallas (Verg. *Aen.* 1.479–82), Latin *matres* offer-

echoes Tacitus' remark about how Nero capitalizes on the destruction caused by the fire to build the Domus Aurea: *ceterum Nero usus est patriae ruinis exstruxitque domum, in qua haud proinde gemmae et aurum miraculo essent, solita pridem et luxu vulgata, quam arva et stagna et in modum solitudinum hinc silvae inde aperta spatia et prospectus* (15.42.1). The historian offers no explicit value judgement, but the evocative description of the fire as *patriae ruinae* suggests Nero is opportunistically capitalizing on the destruction of his own city in order to build something excessively luxurious.

As an earlier episode had shown, Tacitus' gods do not look very kindly on Neronian *luxus*:

isdem diebus nimia luxus cupido infamiam et periculum Neroni tulit, quia fontem aquae Marciae ad urbem deductae nando incesserat; videbaturque potus sacros et caerimoniam loci corpore loto polluisse. secutaque anceps valitudo iram deum adfirmavit. (14.22.4)

The last two sentences, linked by the repetition of -*que*, emphasize that it both seemed to be and *was* in fact the case that the wrathful gods were punishing Nero for bathing in the spring of the Aqua Marcia; such a clear cause-and-effect relationship is a striking statement about divine retribution in the mouth of Tacitus.[35] In Roman thought, luxury was dangerous 'because it signified the presence of the potentially disruptive power of human desire … which must be policed'; Nero's *luxus cupido* draws the *infamia* of his subjects, and Nero's illness shows that the gods feel the same way about his desire to make trivial use of a revered spring.[36] Nero's flagrant disregard for the spring has clear consequences for both his reputation and his personal safety; by representing these in an unusually clear way, Tacitus emphasizes the potency of the gods to make their displeasure known, and to punish transgressions. Their attitude to Neronian luxury on this occasion is not far off from the observations of Tacitus' *seniores* (15.41.2), in whose memory the *resurgentis urbis pulchritudo* of their own day is a poor recompense for the irretrievable old temples lost under Nero. Compare the judgement of some people at the time on the physical renewal of the city: *ea ex utilitate accepta decorem quoque novae urbi attulere. erant tamen qui crederent veterem illam formam salubritati magis conduxisse* (15.43.5). This new city, the Livian *condenda urbs nova* (15.40.2), is less healthy than the old – literally, and perhaps also metaphorically.[37]

ing gifts to Athena (Verg. *Aen.* 11.477–82) or indeed the Trojan γεραιαί doing the same (Hom. *Il.* 6.293–311): all these women attempted to propitiate the gods with scrupulous ritual, yet all were unsuccessful.

[35] The Marcia was renowned in antiquity for providing the purest water of all the aqueducts; cf. Plin. *HN* 34.41, Vitr. 8.9, Frontin. *Aq.* 7. For reverence for *fontes* generally, and for the unusually clear relationship between cause and effect see Koestermann (n. 16), 70, who calls this 'eine echte religiöse Überzeugung des Tacitus'.

[36] C.J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge, 1994), 63. Tacitus elsewhere (*Ann.* 3.55) tells us that *luxus* reached increasingly great heights under the Julio-Claudians and peaked during the civil wars of 69 before dying out under the Flavians; for discussion of the chronology see the differing views of Woodman and Martin (n. 25), 404–5. Nero's *vetus cupido* for performance (14.15.1) was also religiously problematic: cf. Davies (n. 34), 199: 'Not content with using religion as a pretence, he assaults sanctity by bathing in the source of the Marcian aqueduct.'

[37] *Salubritas* can refer to 'soundness, salutariness' of a policy, etc. (*OLD* s.v. §3). For medical language to describe the health of a state in historiography, see recently A.J. Woodman, 'Community health: metaphors in Latin historiography', *Papers of the Langford Latin Seminar* 14 (2010), 43–61, esp. at 43–9.

Thus Nero with his ritual precision is upholding religious *Erinnerungskultur*, but in the judgement of his subjects this is not enough: his desire for the new blinds him to the significance of the old to the extent that it is possible for his subjects to think that he would deliberately destroy it, an act with serious consequences for the state's relationship with her gods.

After his display of ritual correctness fails to convince the people of his innocence, Nero punishes the Christians, an element absent from the parallel accounts of Dio and Suetonius.[38] Tacitus makes it clear they present a threat; their beliefs are outrageous, an *exitiabilis superstitio* (15.44.3),[39] one among the many species of religious sickness afflicting Neronian Rome (15.44.3: … *sed per urbem etiam, quo cuncta undique atrocia aut pudenda confluunt celebranturque*). To be sure, the violent extermination of religious cults perceived as foreign had a long history at Rome,[40] so Nero's actions are a religious reaction sanctioned by traditional practice. But the very fact that Nero chooses this course of action in order to deflect the *infamia* that his monetary largesse and religious correctness could not wipe out (15.44.2) may already make us feel uneasy about this punishment: Nero's concern is not for the purity of Rome's ancestral religious rites but for his own self-image. Indeed, the people of Rome feel uneasy about such a naked display of power: *unde quamquam adversus sontes et novissima exempla meritos miseratio oriebatur, tamquam non utilitate publica, sed in saevitiam unius absumerentur (Ann. 15.44.5).* Like the reconstructions of the city by the *princeps*, the executions are, they think, not necessarily in the best interest of the state. So, too, are the implications of the illicit bath in the Aqua Marcia; but unlike in that case, the gods do not here back up the human *infamia* of Nero. Furthermore, as we have seen, there is plenty of home-grown religious corruption infecting Rome; it is perhaps little wonder, then, that the city is a breeding ground so rife for such *exitiabiles superstitiones* as Christianity. There is an element of hypocrisy both in a *princeps* who commits impious murders attacking other religious offenders and in a populace which has made a mockery of the triumph ceremony and repeatedly ignored divine signs (*Ann.* 14.12.2) criticizing his actions. Nero does what may have been traditional, but not for the traditional reasons; the populace is completely unaware of what those reasons might be; and the gods do not at present give any indication, either. There is no one in this world who can serve as a real, functional repository of religious memory.

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[38] M. Sordi, 'L'incendio neroniano e la persecuzione dei Cristiani nella storiografia antica', in J.-M. Croisille, R. Martin and Y. Perrin (edd.), *Neronia V. Néron: histoire et légende* (Brussels, 1999), 105–11, at 108.

[39] Christianity was seen as a foreign *superstitio*, and Christians were thought to practice such crimes as magic, incest and cannibalism (M. Beard, J. North and S. Price, *Religions of Rome* [Cambridge, 1998], 1.225–7).

[40] D. Baudy, 'Prohibitions of religion in antiquity: setting the course of Europe's religious history', in C. Ando and J. Rüpke (edd.), *Religion and Law in Classical and Christian Rome* (Stuttgart, 2006), 100–14, at 105–9 sees persecutions of Christians as one in a series of actions against 'foreign' religions beginning during the Republic. A. Momigliano, *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown, CT, 1987), 196–7 also notes this continuity but emphasizes that the severe persecution of Christians, although 'desultory', was a special case. For the banning of religious *collegia* and the expulsion of practitioners of 'foreign' religions from Rome see Beard et al. (n. 39), 1.230–1. Capital punishment for practitioners of foreign cults had a venerable history as well: the death penalty is attested during the repression of the Bacchanalia of 186 B.C. (Livy 39.18.4, *ILS* 18.25).

Nero moves on to even shakier ground[41] as he commits sacrilege to rebuild Rome:

inque eam praedam etiam dii cessere, spoliatis in urbe templis egestoque auro, <u>quod</u> triumphis, <u>quod</u> votis omnis populi Romani aetas prospere aut in metu <u>sacraverat</u>. enimvero per Asiam atque Achaiam non dona tantum, sed simulacra numinum abripiebantur, missis in eas provincias Acrato et Secundo Carrinate.                                   (15.45.1–2)

Temples in Rome itself are robbed of their dedications, which represent a long history of Romans striving to maintain a correct relationship with their gods as they set forth on the campaigns that increased Rome's empire or prayed for their help in bad times; this connection between the gods and historic Roman achievements recalls the Livian temple list (cf. 15.41.1 *quod … sacraverat*; *opes tot victoriis quaesitae*). Whether or not he set the fire, Nero, ignorant of both the ritual significance and memorial function of the temples and dedications he ransacks, is now continuing its work in wiping out even those commemorative dedications it did not destroy. The *princeps* is like an army attacking his own city and his own gods, who in strongly military language yield (*cessere*, *OLD* s.v. *cedo* §§13, 15) like a defeated nation to his quest for war booty (*praeda*, *OLD* s.v. §1).[42] In despoiling Rome's temples of the spoils won in foreign campaigns, he is plundering plunder – not only removing but effectively cancelling out the reminders of past pious conquest.[43] Theft of actual cult statues from Greek temples is even more serious. Cult statues were so closely related to the deities they represented that it was not always possible to distinguish between the two; mishandling a statue could constitute a serious offence against the god himself, and the theft of cult statues is nearly always described negatively by our sources.[44] Greek art plundered during

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[41] Sacrilege in general and temple robbery in particular were actions committed by the proverbial tyrant and thus provided effective accusations for invective of the Republic: see J.R. Dunkle, 'The Greek tyrant and Roman political invective of the Late Republic', *TAPhA* 98 (1967), 151–71, at 160, 162. Use of the topos continued into the imperial period and was a common example of bad behaviour included in the lives of Suetonius' *mali principes* (T. Barton, 'The invention of Nero: Suetonius', in J. Elsner and J. Masters (edd.), *Reflections of Nero: Culture, History, and Representation* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994), 48–63, at 53).

[42] Cf. *Ann.* 4.58.3, where Tiberius 'besieges' (*adsidens*) Rome, with R.H. Martin and A.J. Woodman, *Tacitus Annals Book IV* (Cambridge, 1989), ad loc. For the motif of *principes*, especially Nero and Tiberius, waging civil war on their own cities in the *Annals,* see E. Keitel, 'Principate and civil war in the *Annals* of Tacitus', *AJPh* 105 (1984), 306–25 (at 308 for Nero's plundering of Italy after the fire).

[43] For *spoliare* of a Roman power removing objects from foreign temples, cf. Sall. *Cat.* 11.6, Cic. *Div. Caec.* 11.

[44] The assimilation of god and image is attested by rituals (especially those in which the god/statue was clothed or bathed) and literary testimony: see the important discussions of J. Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text* (Princeton, 2007), 11–12; N. Spivey, *Understanding Greek Sculpture* (London, 1996), 48–51; M. Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York, 1992), 28–36; M.M. Miles, *Art as Plunder: The Ancient Origins of Debate about Cultural Property* (Cambridge, 2008), 174. For example, Cicero could refer to the statue of Ceres at Henna as the goddess herself (*Verr.* 2.4.109 *hoc dico, hanc ipsam Cererem antiquissimam … a C. Verre ex suis templis ac sedibus esse sublatam*) but in the next sentence as a *simulacrum*; cf. his observation (2.5.187) that some of those who saw the statue thought it was the goddess herself. For other examples of this metonymy, see Martin and Woodman (n. 42) on *Ann.* 4.38.2; A.W. Bulloch, *Callimachus: The Fifth Hymn* (Cambridge, 1985) on Callim. *Hymn* 5.35; E. Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (London, 1980), on Juv. 13.113–19. This identification of deity and statue was shifting and incomplete, however, as R.L.

Roman wars of expansion and then dedicated in temples at Rome does contribute to Rome's glory;[45] indeed, Tacitus refers to such artworks not only in his temple list (cf. 15.41.1 *Graecarum artium decora*), but also in this very passage alongside his criticism of Nero's plundering of plunder. But it is far from clear that these were stolen cult statues, and Tacitus' sharp distinction between *dona* and *simulacra*, whose theft is more shocking, suggests a differentiation between objects dedicated *to* a god and objects meant to *represent* the god himself.[46] And Nero is engaging in a warped version of art acquisition, for the lamented *Graecarum artium decora* were acquired in the proper way: they are spoils taken by generals who triumphed over foreign enemies, not plundered from provinces already under Rome's control by a freedman and a dilettante philosopher. These thefts of cult statues undermine the religious correctness Nero strove for at 15.44: he appears to have reverence for cult statues (cf. 15.44.1 *simulacrum deae perspersum est*) only when they are in Rome. Nero's actions are explicitly stated to be religiously bad: Seneca requests to retire to the country so that he can distance himself from the unpopularity of Nero's sacrilege (15.45.3 *quo invidiam sacrilegii a semet averteret*), the only action ever described as such by Tacitus.[47] Seneca is appalled not by the *sacrilegium* itself, but by the *invidia* it produces in the eyes of Nero's subjects: the *princeps* does not remember how Roman leaders are supposed to take spoils from foreigners with the help of the gods, but his subjects, continuing to see the worst in their emperor, have retained enough religious memory to label his behaviour as sacrilege.

The prodigious occurrences that follow make it clear that Nero's behaviour earns the bad opinion not only of the populace, but of the gods themselves:

Gordon notes ('The real and the imaginary: production and religion in the Graeco-Roman world', *Art History* 2 [1979], 5–34, at 16): 'People believed simultaneously that statues were gods and that they were not.' Cf. D. Feeney, *Religion and Literature at Rome* (Cambridge, 1998), 92–7: divinities were 'unsnareable by direct human mimesis.' While some victorious Roman generals of the past had in fact plundered dedications and cult statues from temples, they were nearly always criticized for this in both Greek and Roman authors: see Miles, 73–95.

[45] The statue of Diana in Segesta, returned from Carthage to its original home by Scipio Africanus, is similarly considered by Cicero to be both a religious object and a sign of Roman military achievement: *cum inanis esset basis et in ea P. Africani nomen incisum, res indigna atque intoleranda videbatur omnibus, non solum religiones esse violatas, verum etiam P. Africani, viri fortissimi, rerum gestarum gloriam, memoriam virtutis, monumenta victoriae C. Verrem sustulisse* (*Verr.* 2.4.78). Cf. A. Vasaly, *Representations: Images of the World in Ciceronian Oratory* (Berkeley, 1993), 118. For the tradition of dedicating *manubiae* in temples back at Rome, see Miles (n. 44), 54–5.

[46] Spivey (n. 44) 82 notes that dedications, which can include statues (and even statues of gods), differ from cult statues in that they are intended 'to record and perpetuate a prayer' made by a worshipper, whereas the cult statue itself is believed to be the seat of the god himself (ibid. 49); cf. Miles (n. 44), 176. Barasch (n. 44), 25 rightly observes that 'there is little in classical literature to support an explicit separation of divine images from the images of other beings or objects, and thus to make them into a class of their own' in a lexical sense.

[47] Cf. *Agr.* 6.5, in reference to the same temple looting: *Tum electus a Galba ad dona templorum recognoscenda diligentissima conquisitione effecit, ne cuius alterius sacrilegium res publica quam Neronis sensisset.* While Cassius Dio (63.11.3) seems to share Tacitus' outrage, Suetonius (*Ner.* 32.4 *ultimo templis compluribus dona detraxit simulacraque ex auro vel argento fabricata conflavit, in iis Penatium deorum, quae mox Galba restituit*) lacks the indignant tone and fails to label Nero's act as sacrilege; his reference to the Penates, however, is present in no other accounts and serves to add shock value to his version, given the ideological importance of the *Penates publici* (B.H. Warmington, *Suetonius, Nero* [Bristol, 1977], 89; Radke [n. 13], 363). *Sacrilegium* referred initially only to temple robbery, but gradually expanded to include other crimes such as *parricidium* (cf. *RE* 1A.1678–81).

fine anni vulgantur prodigia imminentium malorum nuntia: vis <u>fulgurum</u> non alias crebrior, et <u>sidus cometes</u>, sanguine inlustri semper Neroni expiatum; bicipites hominum aliorumve animalium partus abiecti in publicum aut in sacrificiis, quibus gravidas hostias immolare mos est, reperti. et in agro Placentino viam propter natus vitulus, cui caput in crure esset; secutaque haruspicum interpretatio, parari rerum humanarum aliud caput, sed non fore validum neque occultum, quia in utero repressum aut iter iuxta editum sit.          (15.47)

Positioning such a prodigy list at the end of a narrative year was usual practice for Livy but is rarer for Tacitus. Yet coupled with this apparent traditionalism is the close linkage between the content of these prodigies and the surrounding narrative, as the nature of the deformed calf is linked closely with the nature of the subsequent Pisonian conspiracy: the prodigies not only may be seen as a divine reaction to Nero's impious behaviour in the past, but also warn of bad things to come.[48] Lightning and thunder coupled with comets immediately call to mind earlier omens thought to portend the rise of Rubellius Plautus as Nero's rival for the principate (cf. *sidus cometes* [14.22.1] and *fulguris* [14.22.2], each used only in these two instances in the *Annals*).[49] This comet is stated even more explicitly than the earlier one to be among *prodigia imminentium malorum*, leaving the reader in no doubt about Nero's eventual downfall.[50] But prodigies like comets should be expiated by the sacrifice of animals, not of one's own political rivals: Nero the suspected temple arsonist and actual temple robber is, perhaps unsurprisingly, capable only of a sick parody of religious correctness. The Roman people, who knew enough about the religious customs Nero was violating to react with *invidia* against him, now themselves fail to perform proper expiations. Their disposal of deformed foetuses, thought to indicate a rupture of the *pax deorum*, is described not in the language of expiation but in that of child exposure: *abicere* is used elsewhere of the practice, and exposed children were usually deposited in a public place (cf. Tacitus' *in publicum*) so that someone might find them and bring them up.[51] But the traditional way to expiate a monstrous deformed child is by drowning it in the open sea, as with several hermaphrodites reported by Livy (27.37.5–6,

[48] On Livian placement of prodigy lists at year ends versus the thematic uses Tacitus generally makes of these chapters, see J. Ginsburg, *Tradition and Theme in the* Annals *of Tacitus* (New York, 1981), 33–4, 35–52. For this prodigy list as both backward- and forward-pointing, cf. Davies (n. 34) 156 n. 36 and 200. D.S. Levene, *Religion in Livy* (Leiden, 1993), 4 notes that for Livy, as in Roman religion generally, prodigies 'did not as a rule have any content' in relation to the actions of a narrative – 'they did not foretell anything in particular, but merely put forward a general warning of disaster'. Yet his placement of such lists can imply a linkage with events, as in the prodigies before Trasimene (21.62; 22.1.5–10, 22). Tacitus reports fewer prodigy lists than his predecessor, yet the ones he *does* report are almost always 'related to the nexus of events' of the narrative (Syme [n. 23], 312).

[49] *Sidus cometes* occurs nowhere else in Tacitus; *fulgur* also appears at *Hist.* 1.18.

[50] This is in contrast with Suetonius' account of the same comet (*Ner.* 36.1), which he separates from other prodigies and does not explicitly call a *prodigium*, probably because of his tendency to minimize authorial intrusions (K.R. Bradley, *Suetonius' Life of Nero: A Historical Commentary* [Brussels, 1978], 268).

[51] Sen. *Controv.* 10.4.16: (on deformed children) … *quos parentes sui proiciunt magis quam exponunt. aliqui etiam … corpore invalidos abiciunt.* For public disposal see E. Eyben, 'Family planning in Graeco-Roman antiquity', *AncSoc* 11/12 (1980/1), 5–81, at 17. R. Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World* (London, 1995), 68–71 notes that deformed human babies were thought to indicate a rupture of the *pax deorum*, and the detailed expiation procedures for hermaphrodites during the Republic seem to indicate that they were particularly troubling, although state-sponsored expiation ceremonies died out under the empire.

31.12.6–8).[52] The ineffectiveness of the Romans' disposals is emphasized by Tacitus' phrasing: try as they might to get rid of one set of monstrosities, they keep being confronted with another in their sacrifices, which begin to look like vain attempts at expiation. The Roman people, while they may know Nero is in error, are no more knowledgeable than he is himself about the correct response to these prodigies. The authors of the Pisonian conspiracy are no exception, since they ignore what turns out to be an extremely accurate interpretation by the *haruspices* of the deformed calf.[53] Experts who should be heeded as authorities on the future are completely ignored; Tacitus by his juxtaposition is able to communicate the significance of their pronouncements to the reader, but the Romans within the text have no such interpreter. The reactions to these prodigies show the ultimate failure of religious memory: neither Nero nor his subjects see the problems with their methods of expiation, and so there is no one within the narrative who can see their inappropriateness and ineffectiveness.

## CONCLUSIONS: CREMUTIUS AND THE CAPITOLINE

I hope to have shown how Tacitus' account of the fire in Rome in A.D. 64 weaves threads of history and memory together into an important nexus of meaning. The temples destroyed have good Livian credentials, and in fact only reveal their complete significance when 'read' with Livy. But alongside the temples perish works of literature of precisely the sort that are needed to make such interpretations. Nero and the people of Rome are clueless about how to worship their gods properly; they are in particular need of the memories of a well-maintained *pax deorum* preserved in their temples and in their histories, but it is precisely these *monumenta* that they have lost. The issue of preserving memory is further problematized by the fact that throughout this section, the Roman people's religious memory seems quite selective: they are aware enough of traditional attitudes that the destruction and robbery of temples arouses their *invidia*, but when it comes to the traditional rituals necessary to regain the favour of the gods, they are as ignorant as Nero himself. All the more reason, we might think, why Rome needs her historians: the temples may have served as memory sites, but it is only in texts that the horrors of temple robbery or the proper procedure for expiating hermaphrodites can be preserved.

   To conclude, I turn briefly to two Tacitean *comparanda*, one for the burning of a work of history, the other for the burning of a temple, which shed light on and provide interesting contrasts with Tacitus' account of Nero's fire. The most famous book-burning in the *Annals* is not the destruction of *monumenta* in A.D. 64 but the censorship following the trial of Cremutius Cordus in A.D. 25.[54] He gives voice to the comparison between the memory-making power of physical memorials (*imagines*) and historical writing that lies implicit in *Annals* 15 (*Ann.*

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[52] In the second case, even the traditional drowning expiation is not enough, and the decemvirs are mandated to consult the Sibylline books as well. On hermaphrodites see J. Briscoe, *A Commentary on Livy, Books XXXI–XXXIII* (Oxford, 1973), 89.

[53] Davies (n. 34), 157: 'That it would be neither healthy nor secret … just underlines the stupidity of those who immediately (in the text) begin plotting to overthrow Nero. Tacitus' superior knowledge textually crushes the conspiracy even before it appears.'

[54] For literary CREMation as an apt punishment for CREMutius the 'incendiary', see J. Moles, 'Cry freedom: Tacitus *Annals* 4.32–35', *Histos* 2 (1998), 95–185, at 153.

4.35.2 *quomodo imaginibus suis noscuntur … sic partem memoriae apud scriptores retinent*); not even Augustus, he says, destroyed the physical *imagines* of Brutus and Cassius. And Tiberius' attempts to destroy Cordus' writings, Tacitus tells us, are ultimately vain:

libros per aediles cremandos censuere patres: sed manserunt, occultati et editi. quo magis socordiam eorum inridere libet, qui praesenti potentia credunt exstingui posse etiam sequentis aevi memoriam. nam contra punitis ingeniis gliscit auctoritas, neque aliud externi reges aut qui eadem saevitia usi sunt nisi dedecus sibi atque illis gloriam peperere. (4.35.4–5)

When *ingenia* are destroyed by a tyrannical ruler, their books undergo exactly the opposite experience: authoritarian censorship does not succeed. The Cordus episode's implications for the role of the historian in creating memory are similar to those in our passage. Unlike other authors' accounts of Cremutius, Tacitus' suppresses his non-literary offences, making him into 'an *exemplum* of a purely textual *libertas*' and 'punished historiography'.[55] Furthermore, Tacitus places the story of Cremutius immediately after his famous historiographical digression (4.32.1–33.4), showing a strong connection between his own project and the intentions of Cremutius.[56] He is the embodiment of the power of historiography to memorialize, and his presence invites the reader to reflect on Tacitus' ability to do the same: just as Tacitus by reporting the episode helps to create the *memoriam sequentis aevi* that will not suffer Cremutius or his writings to be obliterated,[57] so in our passage Tacitus himself preserves the memory, if not the content, of the works of history lost in the fire. The books of *Annals* 15 are also historiographical works lost because of an autocrat; yet they do not burn because of an active persecution, but are indirect casualties of Nero's incompetence. Memory and history perish, and no one knows how to repair Rome's relationship with her gods; in its way even more chilling than Tiberius' execution of Cremutius, Nero's fire is a deep rent in the fabric of Roman society which only a historian has any chance at attempting to rectify.

The fire of A.D. 64 is also not the first time Tacitus discussed the burning of temples: in the *Histories* he recounted the burning of the Capitoline temple during the civil wars of A.D. 69.[58] Like the temples of *Annals* 15, the Capitoline is very important in the early books of Livy, for whom the temple has important resonances with the eternal supremacy of Rome, as reflected in the story about the discovery of a head during the digging of its foundations that indicates Rome will become

[55] See the discussion of D. Sailor, *Writing and Empire in Tacitus* (Cambridge, 2008), ch. 5, especially 297, 312. Cf. W. Suerbaum, 'Der Historiker und die Freiheit des Wortes: Die Rede des Cremutius Cordus bei Tacitus, Ann. 4, 34–35', in G. Radke (ed.), *Politik und literarische Kunst im Werk des Tacitus* (Stuttgart, 1971), 61–99, at 67.

[56] Moles (n. 54), 125: 'The literary form of the digression … dramatises simultaneously the literary and political restrictions under which Tacitus now labours, and his desire – and ability – to exercise … literary and political freedom.' Cf. J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge, 1997), 251–2; C. Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome* (New Haven, 2007), 140–1.

[57] H. Canick-Lindemaier and H. Canick, 'Zensur und Gedächtnis. Zu Tac. Ann. IV 32–38', in J. and A. Assmann (edd.), *Kanon und Zensur* (Munich, 1987), 169–89, at 174. Sailor (n. 55), 303–4 sees the immediately succeeding episode, recounting Tiberius' refusal of a temple to himself and his mother in further Spain, as a relevant example of Tacitus' power to create memory.

[58] For a survey of the literary and archaeological evidence for the destruction and rebuilding of the temple see R.H. Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture: A Study of Flavian Rome* (Brussels, 1996), 41–7.

the *caput rerum* (Livy 1.55.4–6).[59] Tacitus even flags up the building's Livianness with the phrase *post conditam urbem* and reference to the Gallic sack (*Hist.* 3.72.1), as in the *Annals* passage.[60] Sailor has noted how the Capitoline temple, with its dedicatory inscription preserving the name of Catulus, is the sole surviving memory of a Caesarless Rome where the emperor's name did not grace the architraves of all the city's important buildings; its loss, like that of pre-Neronian buildings, represents irreparable damage to the city.[61] But the loss of the Capitoline is also symbolic of the loss of a political system: its cycle of rebuilding by great men of the Republic is now no longer possible in the principate, since 'the matrix of relations between men that might have allowed it to burn countless times and still be replaced, and have the same memory replaced in it, existed in 69 CE *only in the temple itself*, as part of the memory it conveyed'.[62] Here there are no *seniores* or historians who could recover for the actors in the narrative the memory of the Capitoline: while we the readers have access to Tacitus' authorial observations on the burned temples' significance, for the characters of A.D. 69 the Capitoline temple itself is the only carrier of memory.

The issue of reconstruction and its bearing on religious memory is another important parallel between the fires. Vespasian's rededication of the temple (*Hist.* 4.53.1–2) has all the markers of religious correctness[63] and none of the dire prodigies that followed Nero's expiation. Yet Tacitus' description of Domitian's later construction of a shrine, notorious for its use of gold and Pentelic marble, to Jupiter Custos on the site where he himself was preserved from the fire (3.74.1) undermines this: 'building Jupiter Guardian … seem[ed] to mean … that his own safety was more important than the god's', and the placement of this notice before the description of the reconstruction of the Capitolium proper 'draw[s] our attention to the ineptitude of Domitian that would later come to mar the second Flavian incarnation of the temple'.[64] As in the case of Nero's reconstruction, the contrast between new *pulchritudo* and archaic venerability undercuts any attempt at correct preservation of religious memory, whether in the form of rebuilding a temple or of conducting a ceremony of expiation. The ultimate failure of reconstruction to restore lost memory is strongly linked with Tacitus' observations on contemporary

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[59] See C. Edwards, *Writing Rome: Textual Approaches to the City* (Cambridge, 1996), 69–72 for a discussion of the temple's resonances.

[60] On *post conditam urbem* see Edwards (n. 59), 80. On the Gallic sack see Williams (n. 20), 140–84.

[61] Sailor (n. 55), 205–18.

[62] Sailor (n. 55), 216. Cf. his observations (215) on the lost memory of Nero's fire, which is much less overtly political: 'Here we mourn not so much because we never saw the Republic as because we never saw the monument that bore the memory of a time before the Principate.'

[63] Religiously correct details include the consultation of the *haruspices*, the *fausta nomina* of the soldiers (cf. Cic. *Div.* 1.102, Plin. *HN* 28.22) and the employment of children with both parents living (cf. *CIL* 6.32323.147–8). The inclusion of the Vestal Virgins implies a contrast with Vitellius' recent use of those priestesses as messengers (*Hist.* 3.81.2), and Vespasian's choice of 21 June for the dedication, a day with no bad connotations, is an improvement on Vitellius' decision to be sworn in as consul on the ill-omened *dies Alliensis* (*Hist.* 2.91.1; cf. G.E.F. Chilver and G.B. Townend, *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus' Histories IV and V* [Oxford, 1985], 64). Similarly, the good weather at the dedication (*Hist.* 4.53.2 *serena luce*) marks an improvement over the religious incorrectness of Galba, who ignored an ominous storm on the day he adopted Piso (*Hist.* 1.18.1).

[64] Sailor (n. 55), 220–1. For the importance of Jupiter and his temples to Domitian's image see Darwall-Smith (n. 58), 105–15.

Romans' relationship with their gods: *id facinus post conditam urbem luctuosis-simum foedissimumque rei publicae populi Romani accidit, nullo externo hoste, propitiis, si per mores nostros liceret, deis* (*Hist.* 3.72.1). The apodosis of the condition is condensed into an ablative absolute, making the sentence ambiguous. If reconstructed as a past unreal with imperfect subjunctive in the protasis,[65] it means: 'If it were destined to be allowed through our behaviour, the gods would have been propitious (but, as it was, they definitely were not).' Civil wars had aroused now-irreversible *ira deum* (one manifestation of which was the burning of the Capitoline), although this was not the only possible outcome and might have been prevented if humans had not ruined things.[66] But if the condition were to be reconstructed as a present general, it would be translated: 'The gods were propitious (and would therefore have seen to our prosperity), if our behaviour were to make that possible.' On this interpretation, the burning of the Capitoline temple and other disasters could have been prevented by the gods, but human negligence caused them to happen anyway; heavenly favour exists and will be perfectly capable of making itself felt in the future, if humans will learn not to give into *potentiae cupido* (*Hist.* 2.38.1).[67] Tacitus' ambiguity here reinforces his observations about reconstruction: Rome's gods are disposed in such a way that a proper relationship between deities and city could potentially be restored, but the Neros and Domitians of the world have forgotten how to do religion properly; and in the *Annals* fire, the destruction of both memory and history means that no one has the knowledge to do anything about it.

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[65] Woodcock (n. 22), §199. Cf. A. Draeger, *Über Syntax und Stil des Tacitus* (Leipzig, 1882), §197a.

[66] Cf. K. Wellesley, *Cornelius Tacitus, The Histories Book III* (Sydney, 1972), 172; J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford, 1979), 162.

[67] Cf. *Hist.* 2.38.2: *non discessere ab armis in Pharsalia ac Philippis civium legiones, nedum Othonis ac Vitellii exercitus sponte posituri bellum fuerint: eadem illos deum ira, eadem homi-num rabies, eaedem scelerum causae in discordiam egere*. The civil wars of 69 are part of a larger pattern of human behaviour that began in the Republic but carried on into the princi-pate. The gods are certainly involved, but they are not totally to blame: it is the *combination* of *deum ira* and *hominum rabies* that perpetuates this behaviour (cf. R. Ash, *Tacitus* Histories *Book II* [Cambridge, 2007], 183). On the passage's affinities with Sall. *Cat.* 10–11, cf. G.E.F. Chilver, *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus'* Histories *I and II* (Oxford, 1979), 203; Ash, 181.