

## The Death of Titus: A Reconsideration

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My purpose in this discussion is to review briefly the ancient evidence for the death of Titus, to consider some of the recent ideas about the circumstances of the event and, finally, to suggest that, from an examination of evidence in our sources which has so far gone virtually unnoticed, one of the most intractable-seeming of the ancient sources may just possibly contain the truth.

The Emperor Titus died on September 13, A.D. 81, after a reign of two years, two months and twenty days (Suet. *Tit.* 11; Dio 66. 18. 4, 26. 4); he was a few months short of his forty-second birthday.<sup>1</sup> The cause of his death is variously reported: according to Plutarch, who may be, chronologically, the earliest extant source to discuss this matter, he died as a result of an addiction to bathing before eating (*Mor.* 123D = *de tuenda sanitate praecepta* 3). By itself, this report is not very informative; however, Suetonius, also writing fairly closely in time to the event, tells us that Titus developed a fever on his way to Sabine territory and died at the same family property as Vespasian had done (Suet. *Tit.* 11): this was at Cutiliae (a few miles east of Reate), a place famed for its very cold springs, of which Vespasian is said to have made too frequent use (Suet. *Vesp.* 24; cf. Pliny *NH* 31. 10). Together, these stories suggest attempts to lower a fever through bathing in cold water, as does a rather strange story found in Dio, where we learn that Domitian is said to have put Titus into a chest full of snow; which again suggests that the illness from which he was suffering demanded some chilling (66. 26. 2).<sup>2</sup>

So far, then, our sources appear to be fairly consistent.<sup>3</sup> However, mention of Domitian in Dio's account brings us to the other narrative string to be found in the ancient sources: Titus was murdered by the evil Domitian. Indeed, in the passage just cited Dio tells us that Titus was put into the snow-filled chest *so that he might die more quickly*, while he was still breathing and had the possibility of recovering. This, of course, may represent no more than a hostile spin put on an earlier, matter-of-fact account of the medical procedures used to treat Titus,<sup>4</sup> but a few of the ancient sources

<sup>1</sup> Titus was almost certainly born on December 30, A.D. 39; for details see B. W. Jones, *The Emperor Titus* (London/Sydney, 1984), 23 nl.

<sup>2</sup> This seems similar to the successful treatment administered to Augustus in 23 B.C. by the physician Antonius Musa (Hor. *Ep.* 1. 15. 2-5; Pliny *NH* 25. 77; cf. 29. 6; Suet. *Aug.* 81. 1; Dio 53. 30. 3). However, there were obviously risks attached to this treatment: it was applied to Augustus' nephew Marcellus later the same year — and he died (Dio 53. 30. 4).

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, most later sources simply state that Titus died 'of a fever' or 'from a disease': cf. *epit. de Caes.* 10. 15; Eutropius 7. 22. 1; Oros. *Hist.* 7. 9. 15; likewise the Chroniclers: Eusebius and Hieronymus on *a. Abr.* 2096 (= A.D. 81).

<sup>4</sup> The development of the tradition of 'Domitian the monster' after 96 is largely hidden from us, but not totally; witness the *Panegyricus* and Letters of Pliny the Younger. However, at *Dom.* 2. 3 Suetonius provides us with what might be a prototype of Dio's somewhat lurid account of Titus' end: ... *quoad correptum [Titum] gravi valetudine, prius quam plane efflaret animam, pro mortuo deseri iussit.*

do talk of poison, sometimes plain and sometimes exotic. The prime example of the exotic is to be found in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*, where the sage of Tyana meets Titus at Antioch early in 71 and warns him that he will die, like Odysseus, 'from the sea' (VA 6. 32). Philostratus then glosses this cryptic statement with an interpretation from Damis, a disciple of Apollonius, who says that Titus was to guard against the tail-spike of a fish called the 'trygon'; the account then states that Titus, in fact, died from the effects of a 'sea-hare', which Domitian had introduced into his food, imitating Nero's practice as a poisoner.<sup>5</sup> As always, it is hard to know how much attention to pay to any story in Philostratus, especially with the apparent muddle between two different marine sources of poison, but F. W. Grosso seems to suggest that Dio was perhaps influenced into an anti-Domitianic version of events by Philostratus.<sup>6</sup> In my view, this seems quite unlikely, especially if we compare Dio's account and Suet. *Dom.* 2. 3 (above, n. 4). However, it is clear that the idea of poisoning originated in the literary record some time after 96, though we cannot say when; but, in fact, it is not common in our sources and, apart from Philostratus, it is completely without detail.<sup>7</sup>

To summarise the sources in Greek and Latin, we may conclude that Titus was believed to have died of a fever, perhaps exacerbated by cold bathing or harsh medical treatment; furthermore, Domitian was suspected of some involvement in hastening his end, but actual accusations of poisoning were not, apparently, contemporary.

There is, however, another body of material on Titus and his death which is extremely hard to assess from a strictly historical viewpoint. This is from Jewish sources and is contained in the Babylonian Talmud:<sup>8</sup> we are told that, to punish Titus for his destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, God sent a gnat which entered his nose, burrowed into his brain, and plagued him day and night for the next seven years. Furthermore, a Rabbi, Pinchas ben Aruva, is quoted as saying that he was 'in company with the notables of Rome' and was told that after Titus' death his skull was opened and inside was found something resembling a sparrow.<sup>9</sup> This Talmudic material is

<sup>5</sup> For Λαγώς ὁ θαλάττιος (Sea-hare; i. e., not a fish but a sort of seaslug or mollusc) and Τρυγών (Sting-ray) see D'A. W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Fishes* (London, 1947), 142-143, 270-271.

<sup>6</sup> F. W. Grosso, 'La morte di Tito', in *ANTIΔΩΡΟΝ Hugoni Henrico Paoli Oblatum* (Genova, 1956), 137-162: after wondering whether there was a narrative appearing between the time of Suetonius and that of Dio which could have led to Dio's anti-Domitianic account, Grosso (143) describes Philostratus' version of events and adds: '... e così disponiamo di una nuova versione della morte di Tito, la quale veniva narrata da Filostrato dopo il 217, qualche anno prima che Cassio Dione provvedesse alla statura della sua opera'.

<sup>7</sup> Aur. Vict. *de Caes.* 10. 5 says simply *veneno interiit*; John of Antioch, fr. 105M (for a text see U. P. Boissevain, *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani Hist.* 3 [Berlin, 1901; repr. 1955], p. 759) states that Titus νόσῳ τελευτᾷ ('died from illness') and then speaks of Domitianic plots against him, citing Apollonius of Tyana and mentioning the 'sea-hare'.

<sup>8</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Gittin* 56b. The relevant passages are quoted in English translation by Ruth Jordan in *Berenice* (London, 1974), 205-206, 220. The most recent edition of the Babylonian Talmud is the 'Schottenstein Edition'; viz., Y. M. Schorr, Ed., *Talmud Bavli: Tractate Gittin*, Vol. 2, with Hebrew/Aramaic text, and English commentary by Y. Isbeel and M. Kuber (New York, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> This is based on the new translation by W. G. Braude in the recent edition of H. N. Bialik and Y. H. Ravnitzky, *The Book of Legends: Sefer Ha-Aggadah* (New York, 1992), 192, which quotes *Gittin* 56b entire from the Babylonian Talmud, and from the commentary in the Schottenstein Edition of the Talmud

noteworthy for two characteristics: everything is seen as the result of divine intervention in the world; and the hostility displayed towards Titus, the destroyer of the Temple, the profaner of the Holy of Holies,<sup>10</sup> the 'wicked man, son of a wicked man, descendant of the wicked Esau', is palpable and unrelenting.

Can anything be made of this? Recently, S. J. Bastomsky, using the story of the gnat (*yattush* — used indiscriminately in the Talmud for flies, gnats and mosquitoes), has suggested that Titus died of malignant malaria.<sup>11</sup> The corollary of this theory is, of course, that mosquitoes were known, at least in the eastern parts of the ancient Mediterranean world, to be involved in the spread of malaria! For this view, Bastomsky cites the weighty authority of the medical historian Arturo Castiglioni;<sup>12</sup> but ultimately such a theory is built upon the meaning implicit in the Hebrew term Baal-Zebub ('Lord of the Flies'), applied to the Philistine god of Ekron (2 Kings 1. 2-17). However, in the Greek New Testament at Matt. 12. 24, 27, the form of the name is Βεελζεβούλ, which appears to mean 'Lord of the High House' or, possibly, 'Lord of the Underworld';<sup>13</sup> and it is at least possible that Baal-Zebub is no more than an insulting Hebrew pun on the original Baal-Zebul.<sup>14</sup> All in all, this is rather too slender a peg on which to hang so weighty a theory: consequently, Bastomsky's connection of malignant malaria with the Talmudic gnat must be abandoned.

However, there is a more obvious interpretation of the Talmudic account: Titus died of a brain tumour.<sup>15</sup> Of course, there is no direct hint of this in our other sources; but if we examine the accounts in both Suetonius and Dio of events leading up to Titus' death, this proposition may not seem so farfetched.

Suetonius speaks of what looks like depression (*Tit.* 10.1): *spectaculis absolutis in quorum fine populo coram ubertim fleverat, Sabinos petiit aliquanto tristior, quod sacrificanti hostia aufugerat quodque tempestate serena tonuerat* ('After the Games were finished, at the end of which he had wept copiously in the presence of the people, he made for the Sabine territory in a somewhat gloomy mood because a victim had escaped while he was sacrificing and also because it had thundered while the sky was clear'). From this quotation it looks as if Titus presided at some games and then left for Sabine territory, where he died. However, in Dio's account (66. 26. 1) it is clear that the games at which Titus 'wept so copiously on the last day that all the people saw him' were those which marked the formal dedication of the Flavian Amphitheatre (the

(above, n. 8). Jordan, however, (above, n. 8), 220, quotes the Rabbi as saying: 'I was present, with the other notables of Rome, when after Titus' death his head was cut open ....'

<sup>10</sup> Titus is said to have taken 'hold of a harlot, entered the Holy of Holies, spread out a Torah scroll, and fornicated with her on it' (*The Book of Legends* [above, n. 9], 192).

<sup>11</sup> S. J. Bastomsky, 'The Death of the Emperor Titus—A Tentative Suggestion', *Apeiron* 1,2 (1967), 22-23.

<sup>12</sup> A. Castiglioni, *A History of Medicine* (Engl. trans. by E. B. Krumbhaar; New York, 1941), 41, 71.

<sup>13</sup> Hence the phrase 'Beelzebub, the prince of the devils' in the King James version of Matt. 12. 24.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. P. Harvey, *Oxford Companion to English Literature*<sup>4</sup> (Oxford, 1967), s.v. 'Beelzebub'; M. Grant, *The History of Ancient Israel* (New York, 1984), 69.

<sup>15</sup> As Jordan (above, n. 8), 219-220, concludes.

Colosseum; cf. Dio 66. 25. 1-5), which began by late April, 80.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Dio goes on to say: οὐδὲν ἔτι μέγα ἔπραξεν, ἀλλὰ τῷ ἐπιγιγνομένῳ ἔτει μετήλλαξεν ... (66. 26. 2 : '... he accomplished nothing further of importance, but in the following year ... he died').

All of this suggests that Titus was depressed by, at the latest, the end of July, 80. The reasons for his depression are not given: perhaps he felt the way a small child today feels as Christmas Day comes to an end! Of course, it is possible that Dio has made a mistake about the occasion on which Titus wept in public, since Suetonius does not refer to this weeping in his brief notice of the games to celebrate the dedication of the Colosseum (*Tit.* 7. 3), but puts it at the beginning of his account of Titus' death (*Tit.* 10. 1); the reference, then, may be to some games in the summer of 81.

However, there may have been some confusion about the exact sequence of events in Titus' principate. The large marble slab which constitutes *CIL* 6. 2059 (= *MW* 11) and gives us the Acts of the Arval Brethren for 80-81 is laid out in a very odd manner: there are entries for 29 May, 30 May and 7 December, 80, followed by entries for 15 January, 1 May and 13 May, 81;<sup>17</sup> there then follows, in larger letters, the material describing the seating arrangements in the Colosseum (cf. above, n. 16); finally, we get the names of the consuls of 81 in enormous letters with an entry for 3 January, 81, which contains the usual New Year's sacrifices and prayers for the well-being of the Emperor and his family. With the material about the Colosseum, then, coming in the middle of material pertaining to the year 81, there may have been some uncertainty among later historians as to the actual year in which the great amphitheatre was dedicated. Suetonius, with his 'generic' and non-chronological composition of *Titus' Life*,<sup>18</sup> manages to avoid any signs of uncertainty. By contrast, Dio seems to get himself in a tangle: after telling us of Titus' weeping on the last day of the games which inaugurated the Colosseum and stating that Titus subsequently did nothing of importance, Dio continues: 'but in the following year, in the consulships of Flavius and Pollio [these are actually the *coss. ord.* of 81], after dedicating the buildings mentioned, he passed away ...' (66. 26. 1). Dio seems to be hedging his bets about whether the dedications occurred in 80 or 81, and the whole sentence looks rather like a dog chasing its tail!<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> These games, Dio tells us, lasted over a hundred days and seem to have commenced during March or April of the year 80: there is a sort of appendix (so G. Henzen, *Acta Fratrum Arvalium* [Berlin, 1874; repr. 1967], p. CVI) to the *AFA*, following the entry for 13 May, 81, which details the allocation of seating in the Colosseum, and which begins: *Loca adsignata in amphitheatro. L Aelio Plautio Lamia Q. Pactumeio Fr<o>ntone cos.* These consulships coincided in March and April of 80: cf. P. Gallivan, 'The Fasti for A.D. 70-96', *CQ* 31 (1980), 186-220; see 189, 195-196, 215.

<sup>17</sup> It is noteworthy that, at this point, the right-hand page, the 'written-out' version, of *CIL* 6. 2059, gives the year incorrectly as '80'.

<sup>18</sup> Suetonius' description of the dedication of the Colosseum and the Baths of Titus comes under the rubric of 'largesse'; and it *precedes* his account of the eruption of Vesuvius in August, 79, and the great fire in Rome early in 80; cf. *Tit.* 7. 3 with 8. 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> The fact that for these events we have the epitome of Xiphilinus rather than Dio's *ipsissima verba* is probably not significant, since Xiphilinus produced his epitome by striking out words and phrases in his original copy of Dio rather than by writing what today would be termed a *précis*; for discussion see P. A. Brunt, 'On Historical Fragments and Epitomes', *CQ* 30 (1980), 477-494, esp. 488-492.

So far, then, we have seen that, since the games to mark the dedication of the Colosseum certainly took place in 80, it seems likely that Titus was depressed around July of that year; but can this have had anything to do with his death? This brings us to the nub of the whole matter. In two passages Dio belittles Titus' achievements: καὶ ἐπὶ μὲν τοῖς ἄλλοις οὐδὲν ἐξαιρέτων ἔπραξε ('In general, he did nothing that was noteworthy' [i. e., apart from dedicating the Colosseum]; 66. 25. 1), and, after the dedication, οὐδὲν ἔτι μέγα ἔπραξεν ('he accomplished nothing further of importance'; 66. 26. 1). He is correct to do so, because the record from July, 80 until Titus' death on 13 September, 81 is, with one trivial exception, a total blank:<sup>20</sup> we know of *nothing* that happened! Titus' principate was brief, a mere twenty-six months and twenty days. The fact that virtually nothing happened during almost fourteen of these months surely demands explanation.<sup>21</sup>

Apart from 'business as usual' the most plausible explanation for a possibly lengthy period of depression comes from F. H. Cramer who argues, in his well-known study of the importance of astrology in the Roman Empire,<sup>22</sup> that both Vespasian and Titus were firm believers in 'fatalistic astrology' and had received precise information about their futures (Suet. *Vesp.* 25; *Tit.* 9. 1-2); he suggests that Titus had received warning of an early death and that only this can explain his behaviour when, stricken by his final fever on his way to Cutiliae in 81: "... ad primam statim mansionem febrim nactus, cum inde lectica transferretur, suspexisse dicitur dimotis pallulis caelum, multumque conquestus eripi sibi vitam immerenti ('Stricken by a fever at the very first stopping-place, as he was being conveyed from there in a litter, he is said to have opened its curtains and, looking up to heaven, to have bewailed bitterly the fact that his life was being taken from him though he did not deserve it'; Suet. *Tit.* 10. 1). Cramer then describes certain people who can be so convinced that they will die by a predicted time that they believe themselves to be magically 'sentenced to death'; and he claims that Titus was one such.

If we accept the basic premiss that Titus believed totally in 'fatalistic astrology', this argument may well seem plausible.<sup>23</sup> However, not all Romans believed in divination, and probably even fewer were convinced by the claims of astrology (Cicero and Pliny the Elder spring readily to mind).<sup>24</sup> For emperors to make use of astrological

<sup>20</sup> The exception is Titus' participation in the second day of the annual rituals of the Arval Brethren to Dea Dia (*AFA* 19 May, 81); he had appeared on the corresponding day the previous year (*AFA* 29 May, 80). In 81 there were six members of the College present.

<sup>21</sup> M. Fortina, *L'Imperatore Tito* (Torino etc., 1955), 141, is aware of this void; after mentioning the dedication of the Colosseum in 80, he says: '... il regno del secondo principe flavio trascorreva ordinato e tranquillo, senza peraltro che imprese degne di speciale menzione venissero a distinguere l'opera dell'imperatore. Nel mese di maggio dell'anno 81 Tito apparve ancora tra i componenti il collegio dei Fratelli Arvali; alcuni mesi più tardi ....' But should things have been *this* routine?

<sup>22</sup> F. H. Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics* (Philadelphia, 1954), 138-143.

<sup>23</sup> The fact that most people today would regard such a prediction as utter claptrap is, of course, wholly beside the point: it is *Roman* belief that matters here.

<sup>24</sup> Cf., for example, Cic. *de Div.* 2. 43. 90; 2. 45. 94; *de Fato* 14. 32 ff.; Cramer (above, n. 22), 69-73, 139-141, discusses at length the scepticism of Cicero and Pliny the Elder, the latter, of course, being an *amicus* of Vespasian.

predictions of their greatness to come was as obvious and useful a public relations 'image-building' device as was their habit of publicising favourable omens and portents from their earlier lives;<sup>25</sup> but this tells us nothing about their personal beliefs, and the *exempla* presented by Cramer could perhaps imply a faith on the part of Vespasian and Titus in 'fatalistic astrology', but they certainly *need* not. For example, Vespasian's famous remark 'Either my son will succeed me or no one will' (Dio 66. 12. 1) fits perfectly well into a discussion of the succession and the problems which Vespasian's obviously dynastic intentions were causing; equally, it can be used, as Suetonius does (*Vesp.* 25), to argue for Vespasian's steadfast belief both in his own horoscope and in those of his immediate family.<sup>26</sup>

However, in his recent commentary on Suetonius' *Life* of Titus, H. Martinet follows this line of argument and, indeed, expands on it,<sup>27</sup> suggesting that Titus' depression was caused not only because his enjoyment of life was overshadowed by the knowledge that it would end soon, and suddenly, but also: 'Seine Lage wurde noch durch die Tatsache erschwert, dass er wüsste, wer sein Nachfolger sein würde und welchen Charakter dieser Mann besass'.

This mention of Domitian will help us resolve the question of whether or not Titus believed in 'fatalistic astrology' and knew that he would die soon after his accession. There are two points worth making here, one general and one specific to this case. Generally, a person who knows that his life will end in the near future makes sure that his 'affairs' are in order. Specifically, in Titus' case this would surely imply that some careful attention be given to the question of the succession and that, at the very least, an heir be named.<sup>28</sup> There is absolutely no sign that this happened during 79-81.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, if Titus really believed that he was due to die early in his principate, this seems incredibly remiss.

However, Jones' comments on the succession paint an altogether different picture.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Suet. *Galba* 4. 1-3; 9. 2; 10. 4; Dio 64. 1. 1-3; Suet. *Vesp.* 5. 2-6; Dio 66. 1. 2-2. 1.

<sup>26</sup> We should also remember that astrological predictions tend to become more 'precise' with each subsequent retelling: for example, at Suet. *Vit.* 14. 4 we are told that Vitellius ordered astrologers to quit Rome and Italy before 1 October (69) and that the astrologers had countered this by 'ordering' Vitellius to quit his life by the same date. Obviously, this did not happen; yet in Dio's account (65. 1. 4) the astrologers responded by ordering him to quit his life within the very day on which he actually died! The same consideration probably applies to Suetonius' remark that Domitian had in his youth received from astrologers predictions not only of the last year and day of his life but also of the hour and manner of his death (*Dom.* 14. 1).

<sup>27</sup> H. Martinet, *C. Suetonius Tranquillus Divus Titus: Kommentar* (Königstein/Ts, 1981), 108-109.

<sup>28</sup> It is noteworthy that from 17 B.C., when Augustus adopted his grandsons Gaius and Lucius, emperors tended to see the question of the succession in terms of 'an heir and a spare': in A.D. 4 Tiberius and Germanicus; from A.D. 14 Germanicus and Drusus; at the end of Tiberius' reign Caligula and Tiberius Gemellus; at the end of Claudius' reign Nero and Britannicus; and, of course, under Vespasian Titus and Domitian.

<sup>29</sup> In fact, Domitian seems to have come tearing back to Rome as soon as Titus died and went straight to the Praetorian camp, clearly intending to forestall any possibility that the Senate might try to make someone else emperor. It is clear from Dio 66. 26. 3 (and from Suet. *Dom.* 2. 3) that Domitian was at Cutiliae when Titus died. For details of his dash to Rome see Grosso (above, n. 6), 154-162.

<sup>30</sup> B. W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London/New York, 1992), 20.

'Titus did promise that he [sc. Domitian] would be his *consors* and *successor* (*Titus* 9. 3), but carefully avoided doing anything about it .... In any case, no longer married and only 40, he was some ten years younger than Claudius had been when he took his third wife and produced two children. Possibly, Titus preferred to keep his options open ... and ... he could expect to rule for another thirty years ....' If we look at Domitian's patent frustration under Titus' rule (e.g., Suet. *Dom.* 2. 3, and if we try to ignore the denigration which later came to accompany almost every statement about Domitian), the obvious conclusion is that Titus did *not* expect to die soon after his accession.

What, then, becomes of our earlier observations that Titus was depressed in about July, 80, and that he seems to have accomplished little or nothing in the remaining fourteen months of his life? My conclusion is that Titus did indeed die of a brain tumour, but that this was undiagnosed in his lifetime.<sup>31</sup> Although profoundly depressed (and probably suffering from prolonged and severe headaches), could Titus have continued to function at a routine level? Here we can only proceed by analogy — and it is, of course, rather hard to find a well-documented modern case of an individual dying of a brain tumour without any serious medical intervention.

However, there is one notable example — the great Scottish athlete Eric Liddell, the man who, famously, would not run on a Sunday, the man who thereby abandoned his excellent prospects of winning the 100m. race at the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924, the man who then switched to the 400m., where he won the gold medal in record time.<sup>32</sup> Liddell, the son of Scottish missionary parents, was born in N. China in January, 1902, and although educated in Britain, after theological study which followed his graduation in science from Edinburgh University he returned to China in 1925 to teach in a Mission school. At the end of March, 1943, he and the fellow-members of the Mission were moved by the Japanese to an internment centre at Weihsien in Shantung Province. Liddell did not perish from cruel treatment at the hands of the Japanese, nor did he starve to death. The internment centre had about 1800 people in it, most of whom survived the war; the place was small, but it had some medical facilities. Liddell worked tirelessly to help with teaching and coaching of the young people in the centre. However, by the latter part of 1943 people arriving at Weihsien who had known him earlier remarked that he was walking slowly and talking slowly. In January, 1945, Liddell suffered what was thought to be influenza with acute sinusitis, accompanied by agonizing headaches; this was followed by a partial stroke and severe depression. By the latter part of February he seemed to be somewhat better and on 21 February he went for a walk, chatted to friends and posted a telegraphic type of message to his wife and family (whom he had sent to Canada for safety in 1941). In part it reads: 'Slight nervous breakdown. Am much better after month in

<sup>31</sup> Ancient medical texts do not seem to speak of brain tumours as a recognised pathological condition; instead, the various symptoms as they appeared would be treated as signs of separate ailments.

<sup>32</sup> His achievements in Paris are commemorated in the film *Chariots of Fire* (1981). The biographical information given here is from Sally Magnusson, *The Flying Scotsman* (New York, 1981), 21, 40-56, 148-170.

hospital'. That same evening he had violent spasms of pain, followed by convulsions and vomiting; he then lapsed into a coma and died very quickly. A postmortem examination the following day revealed an inoperable tumour on the left side of his brain, which had caused the massive haemorrhage which led to his death. He was forty-three years old.

Although there are many different types of brain tumour, the similarities between the cases of Eric Liddell and the Emperor Titus are striking: both suffered from depression, both seem to have 'slowed down' to a considerable extent and both may, towards the end, have believed that their general condition was improving. (This would explain why Titus failed to do anything definitive about the succession.) However, Titus' doctors may have been more concerned than he and, if they had warned him that a further illness — a fever, say<sup>33</sup> — might prove fatal, it would explain Titus' sudden despair on the way to Cutiliae (cf. Liddell's 'influenza' in January, 1945). As for the Talmudic material, we should remember that, more than any other group in the Empire, the Jews had cause to hate Titus and any whisper about what 'really happened' to him will have been seized upon and related as the vengeance of God: hence, perhaps, the story of the gnat, which will reflect the hideously painful headaches which usually accompany a brain tumour.

Finally, there is the question of an autopsy. After the early Alexandrian period human dissection does not appear to have been at all common.<sup>34</sup> However, we cannot be sure that autopsies were not performed under some circumstances: if there had been a complete rejection of such procedures, it is unlikely that the Talmudic story would have been invented, let alone circulated with any hope of credence. Titus' physicians, and Domitian too, may have been sufficiently curious, given the rather odd circumstances of the last part of the Emperor's life, to request, and to permit, an autopsy.

All in all, then, while certainty is obviously not attainable, I would argue that the Talmudic suggestion that Titus died of a brain tumour fits the facts, known and deducible, of the last fourteen months of his life better than any other hypothesis.

<sup>33</sup> It is quite likely that Titus 'officially' died of a fever, but this may well have been what nowadays is referred to as an 'opportunistic infection'; and it should be noted that people do not always die of what is entered on a Death Certificate.

<sup>34</sup> A useful discussion 'On Human Dissection in Roman Medicine' forms App. 3 in John Scarborough, *Roman Medicine* (London, 1969), 168-170: Cicero seems to have had no qualms about the dissection of corpses (*Acad.* 2. 122) and Galen in the second century A.D. may himself have dissected cadavers.