

**Macquarie University Ancient History & Studies of
Religion Teachers Conference
(Art Gallery of New South Wales) May 15th 2018**

Agrippina: a Historiographical Approach



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Option J: Rome – Agrippina the Younger

Content Focus

Students develop an understanding of Agrippina the Younger in the context of her time, through a range of archaeological and written sources and relevant historiographical issues. The Historical concepts and skills content is to be integrated as appropriate.

Content

Students investigate:

Survey

- The historical context, including:
 - geography, topography and resources of Rome and the Roman Empire
 - an overview of Roman social and political structures, the principate
 - role of imperial women in Roman society

Focus of study

- Background and rise to prominence, including:
 - family background and status
 - early life, ambitions and marriages
- Key features and developments, including:
 - basis of her power and influence, patronage
 - role during the reign of Gaius (Caligula), including exile
 - role during the reign of Claudius (ACHAH355)
 - role and changing relationship with Nero during his reign (ACHAH356)
 - relationships with other members of the imperial court: Seneca, Burrus and imperial freedmen
 - impact of her personality on her role and public image (ACHAH355)
 - attempts on her life
 - death: motives, manner and impact of death
- Evaluation, including:
 - impact and influence on her time
 - assessment of her life and career
 - legacy
 - ancient and modern images and interpretations of Agrippina the Younger (ACHAH363)
- ONE particular source or type of source (eg Tacitus – selected excerpts; coinage) for Agrippina the Younger, including:
 - the value and limitations of the source
 - an evaluation of the source in the context of other available sources, including problems of evidence

Reception

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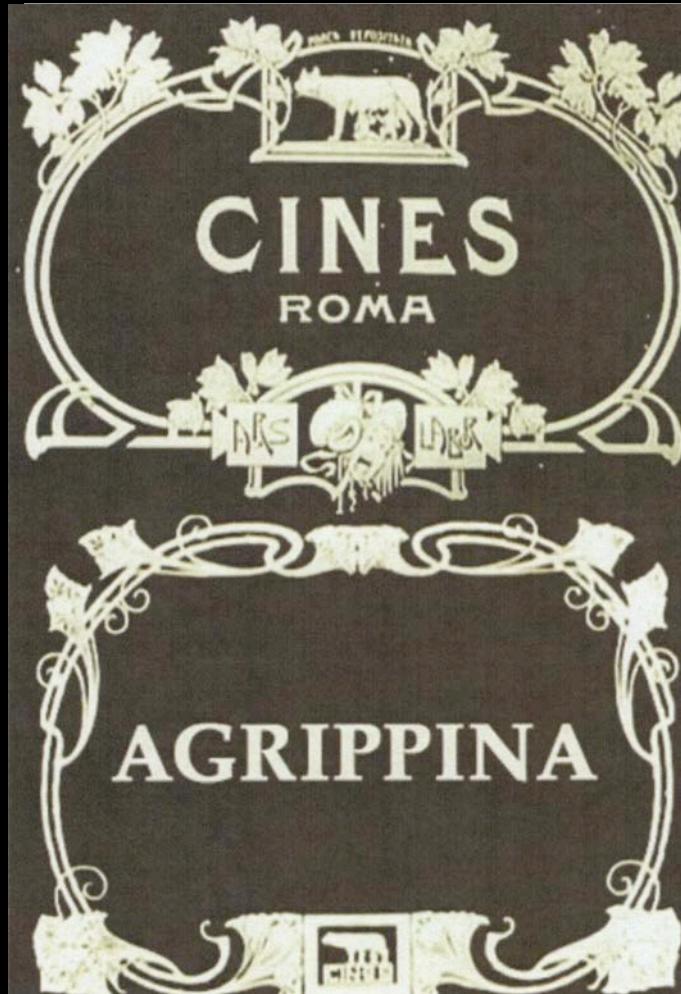


Reception



Enrico Guazzoni

Reception



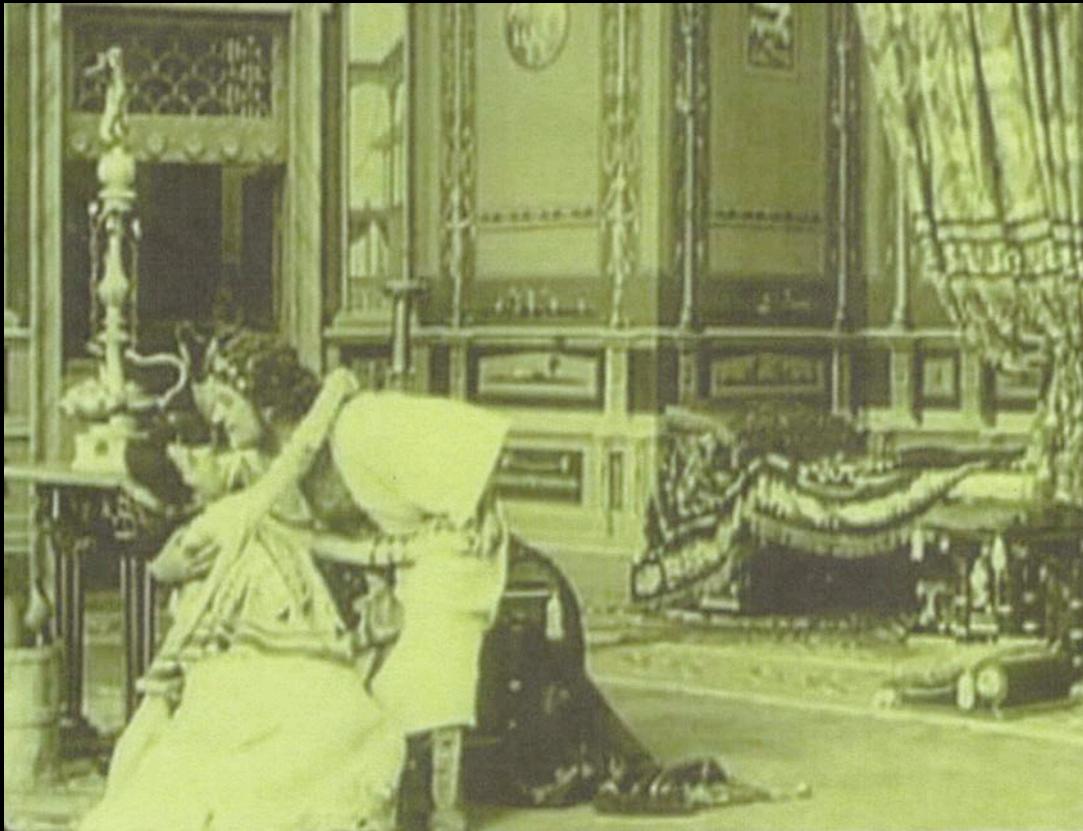
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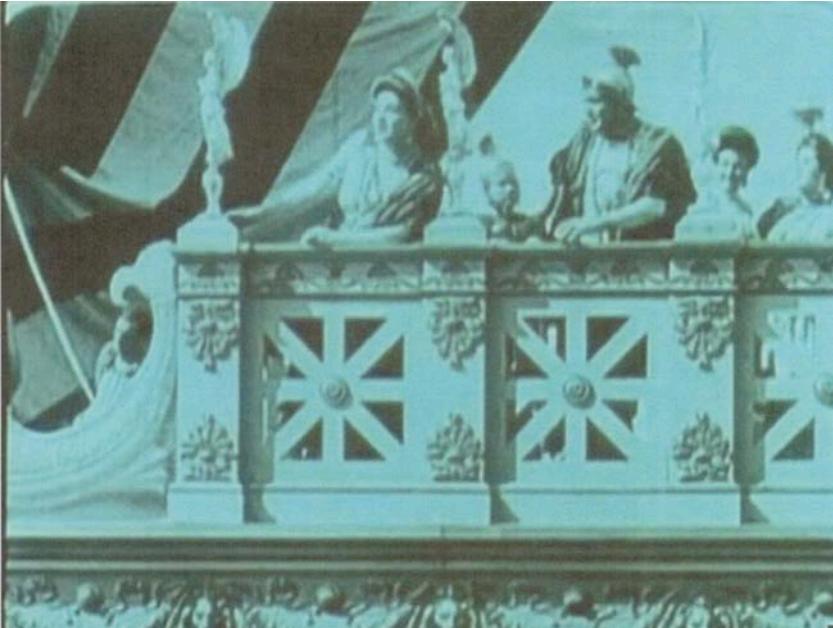
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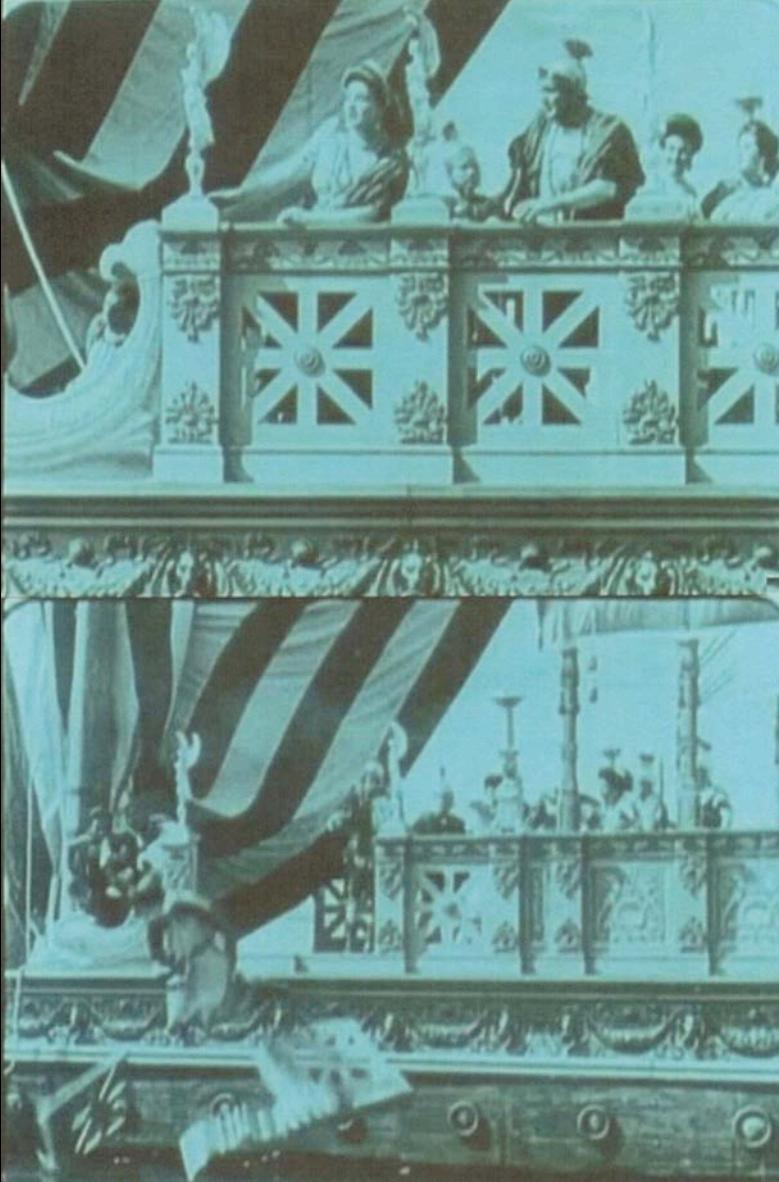
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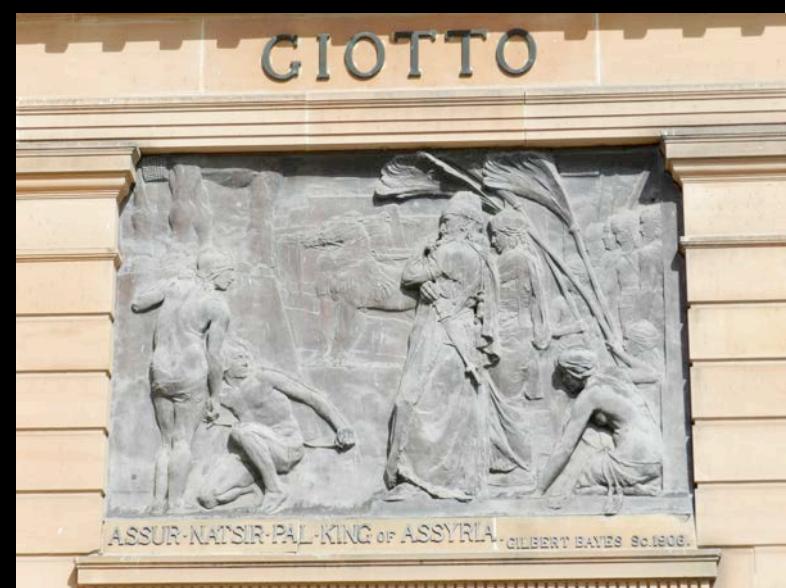


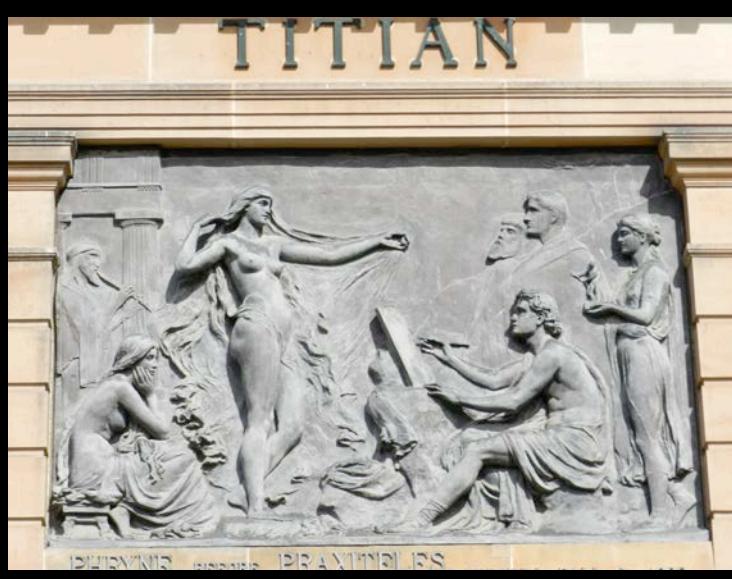
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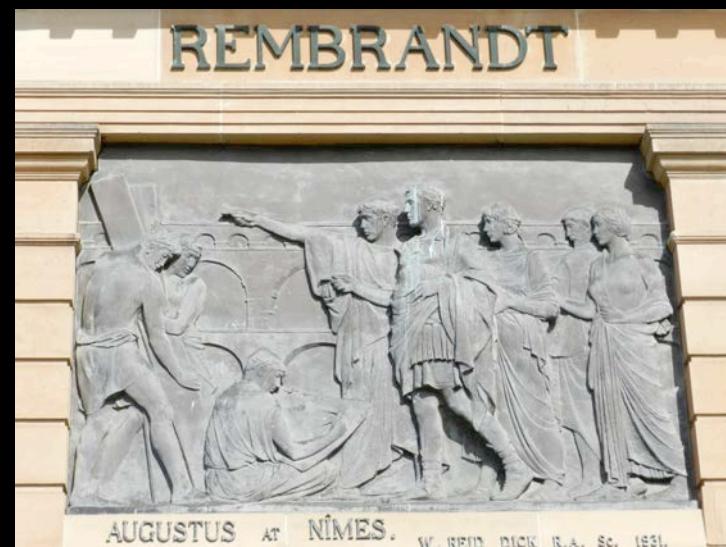
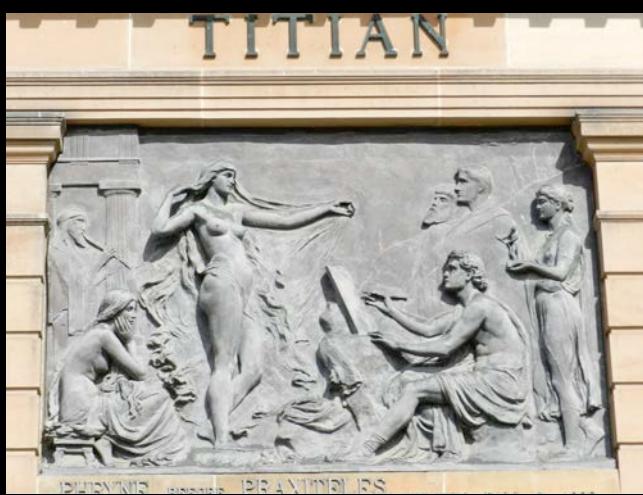






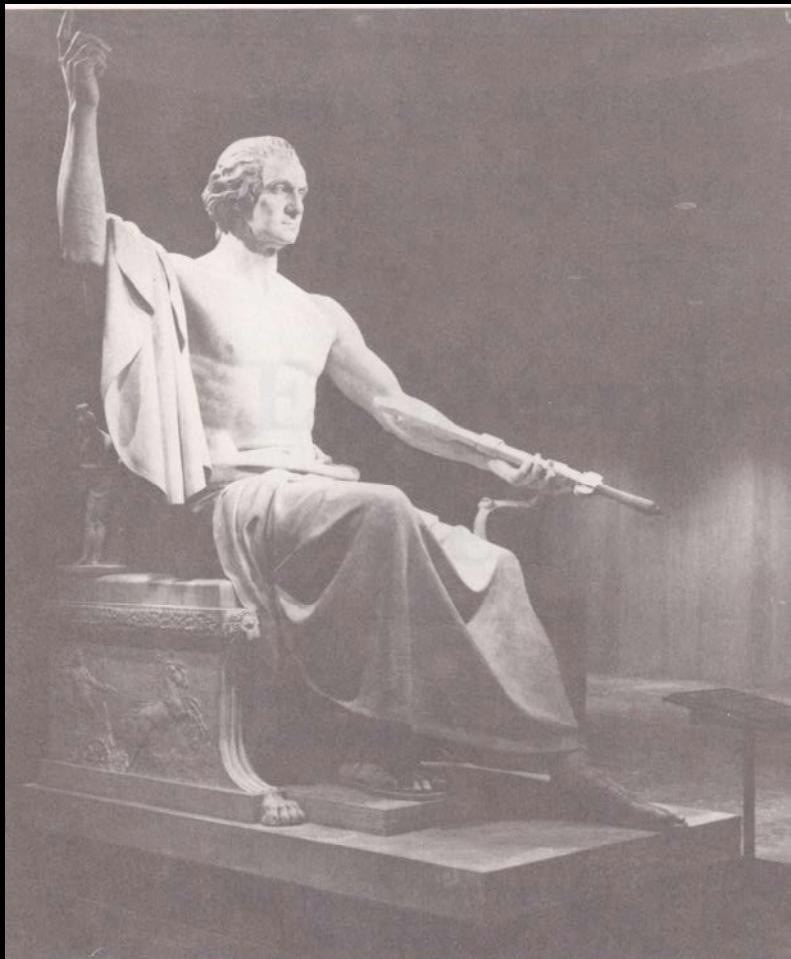








George Washington's Inaugural Presidential Speech (30 April 1789)



“the destiny of the republican model of government [is] deeply, perhaps ... finally, staked on the experiments entrusted to the hands of the American People.”

The Senate, meeting on the Capitol, would “restore the sacred flame of liberty” to the Western world.

George Washington. *The First Inaugural Speech* (30 April 1789), in W.B. Allen (ed.), *George Washington: A Collection* (Indianapolis, 1988), 462 (from Mortimer N.S. Sellers, ‘The Roman Republic and the French and American Revolutions’ in Harriet Flower (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), 347–64

**Macquarie University Ancient History & Studies of
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Reimag(in)ing the Ancient World.

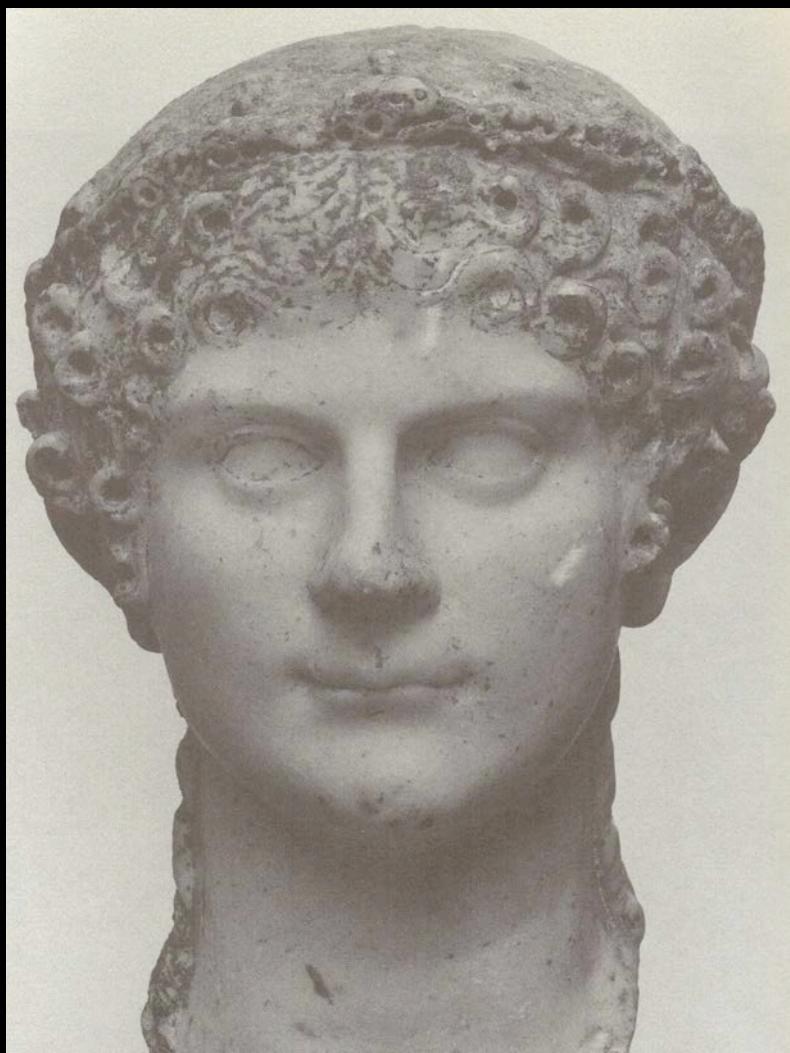
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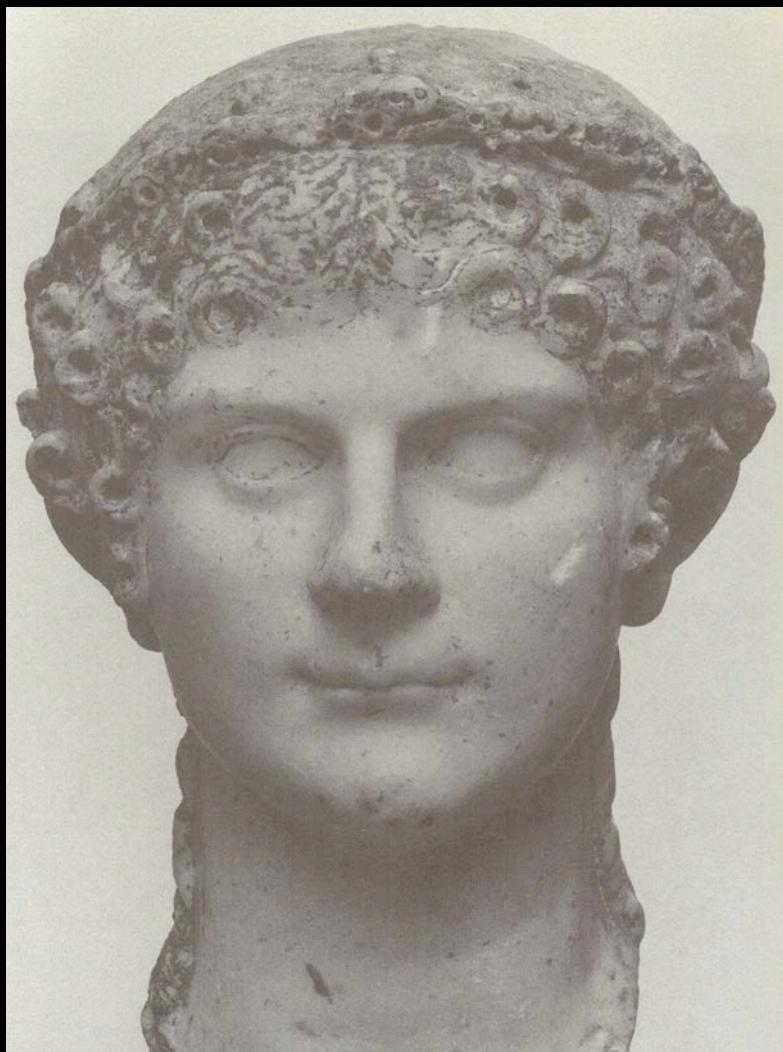
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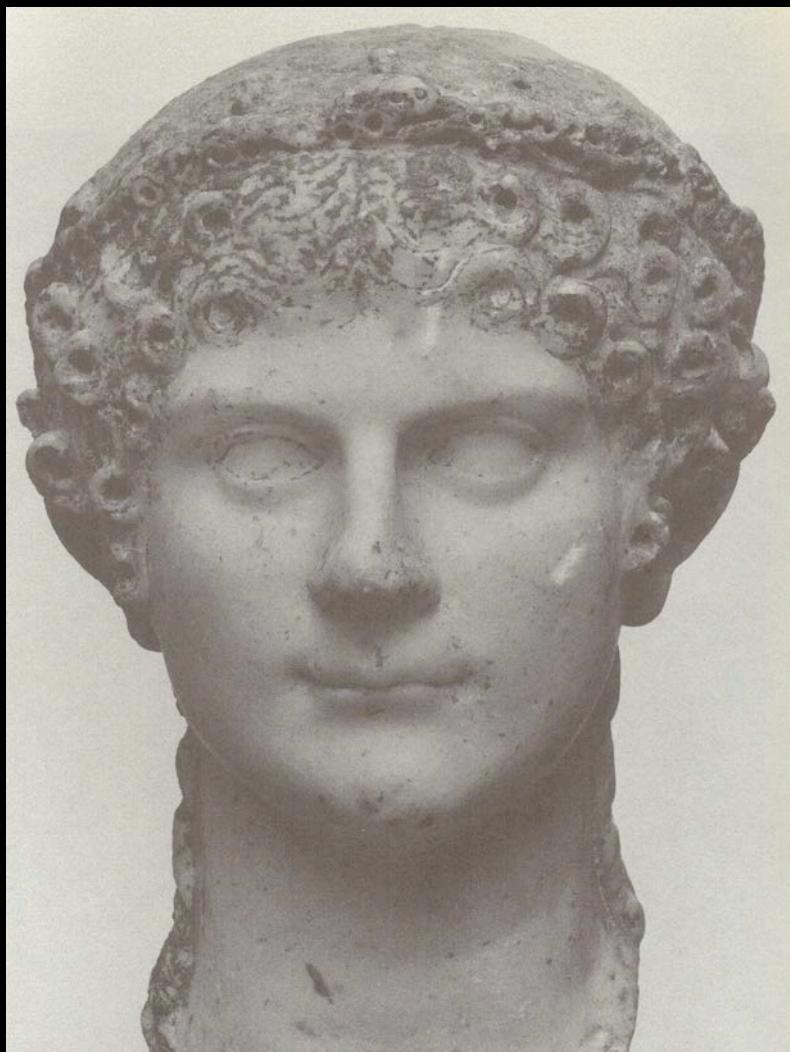
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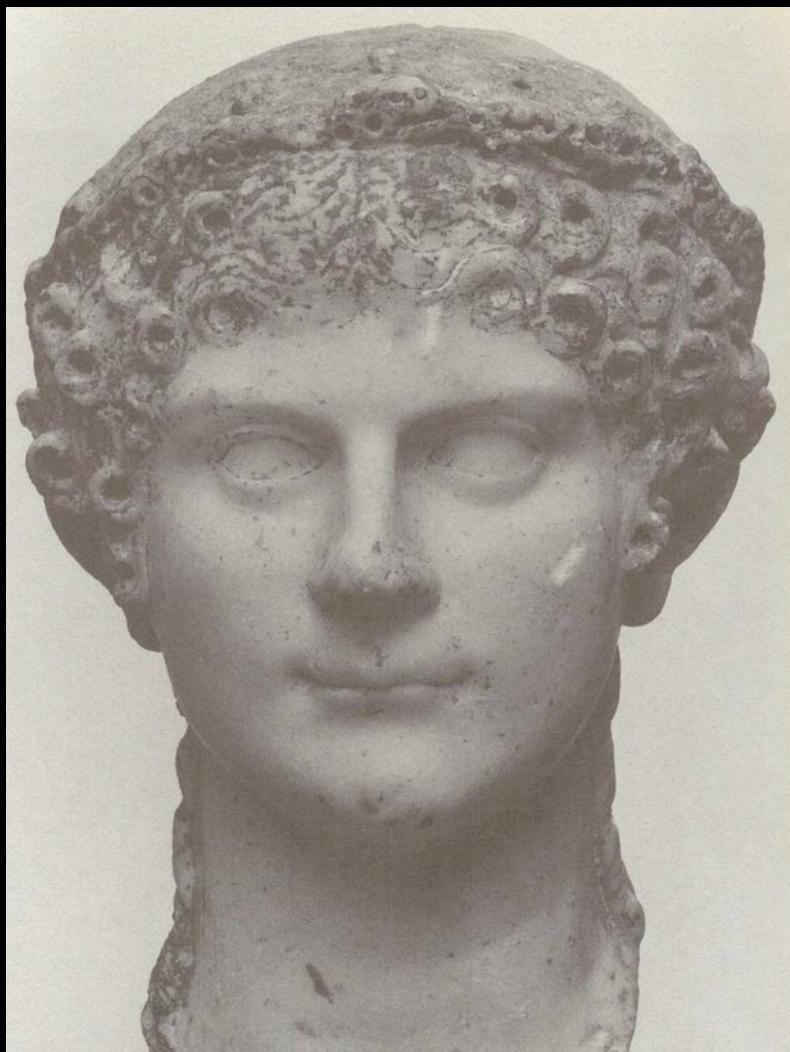
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**Agrippina: a Historiographical
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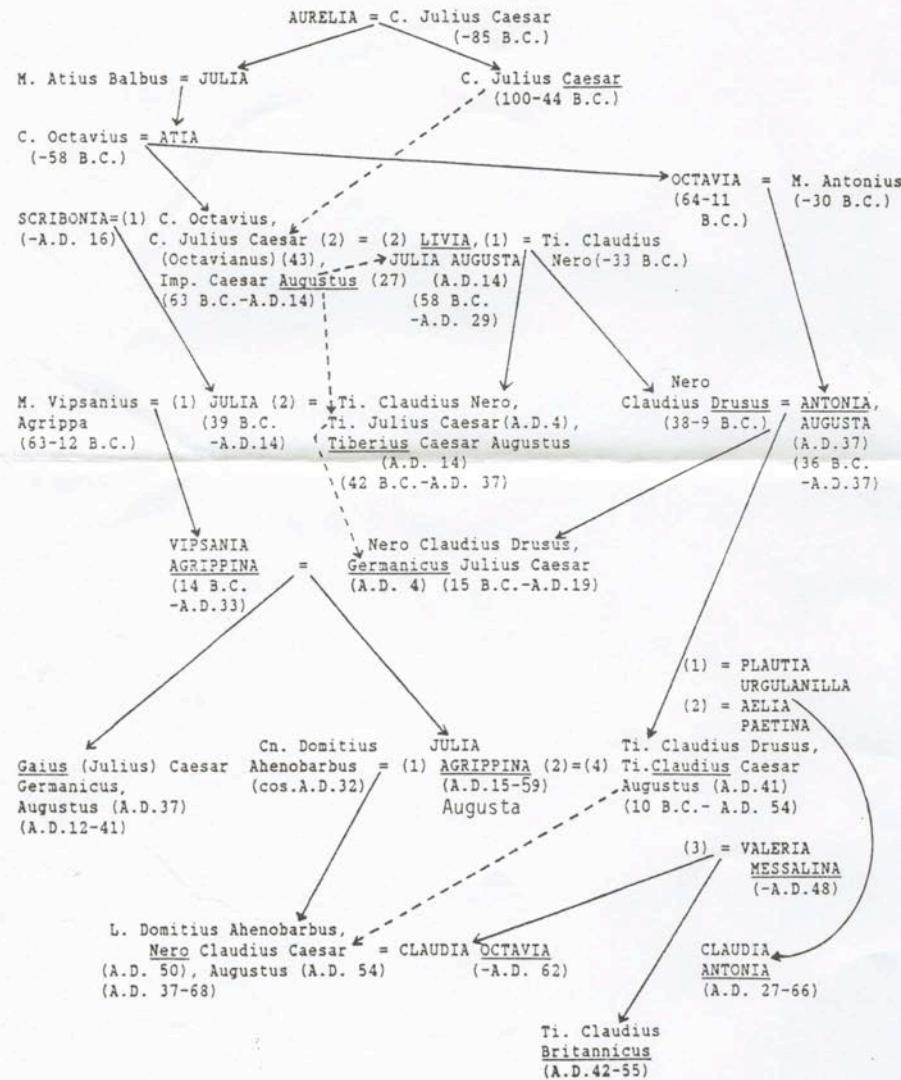


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The Women of the Julio-Claudian Caesars

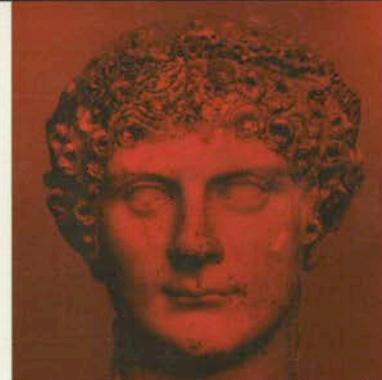
(NOT ALL MARRIAGES OR CHILDREN SHOWN.
Dotted lines for adoptions. Common names underlined. Some dates approximate)



batsford

AGRIPPINA

*Sister of Caligula
Wife of Claudius
Mother of Nero*



Anthony A. Barrett

An irresistible combination of treachery, incest and murder

9

Sources

I Literary Sources

Our understanding of any era depends ultimately on the extent, accuracy and bias of the source materials available. The problem of literary sources is more acute for ancient history than for other periods, since the information is especially fragmentary, confused and tainted by the preconceptions and prejudices of the authors.

Of necessity, we must in the case of Agrippina rely very heavily upon literary evidence. The general issue of the written sources for the Julio-Claudian period, their relationship to one another and their trustworthiness are all highly important matters but they can only be touched on here, to the extent that they relate to the portrait drawn of Agrippina.

The obstacles faced in antiquity by an author wishing to provide authentic and reliable information about Agrippina, or any other important figure of the period with perhaps the exception of the public career of the emperor himself, were enormous. They are well laid out by Dio, when commenting on the changes brought about by the establishment of the principate in 27 BC (loosely translated):

The government was thus transformed then for the better and for the greater safeguard of the people, for under the republic it was quite impossible for them to be protected. But subsequent events cannot be reported like earlier ones. Previously, it is clear, issues were brought before the senate and the citizen body even if they took place far away. In consequence, everybody learned about them and many noted them down and as a result, even if the accounts of some were seriously tainted by fear or favour, partisanship or hostility, a truthful picture of the issues was to some degree manifested in others who wrote of them and also in the public records. But from this time on most things started to become secret and concealed, and though some things might happen to be published they are not trusted, as being incapable of confirmation. For there is a suspicion that everything is said and done in accordance with the wishes of the powerful and their henchmen. Consequently many things that did not happen are spread about and many things that incontestably did happen are not known and virtually everything is broadcast differently from the way it happened (Dio 53.19.1–4).

Tacitus reflects a similar problem at the beginning of the *Histories*, in his observation that with the introduction of the principate the interests of peace required that

all power should be concentrated into the hands of one man. Consequently, independent writers of the stature associated with the republic were no longer found and historical truth was impaired. Tacitus adds, however, that the problem arose as much from the desire to flatter as from ignorance of matters of state. It is certainly observable that, as the Julio-Claudian period progresses, ever-greater emphasis is placed by Tacitus on the details of the life of the emperor at the cost of serious political analysis. All of this reflects the eclipse of the senate's power. As that body declined in importance, so did the political significance of its *acta*. Serious developments now result not from senatorial debate or resolutions but from the political intrigue carried out behind palace walls. And because of the absence of any public accounting it was relatively easy to falsify the record.¹ Dio testifies to how this can happen. Although he is more than happy to believe the worst of Agrippina and Nero, he admits that everything that they did in the palace was spread by rumour and gossip and distorted by conjecture. Any activities that could be dreamt up were spread about as the truth, and simply because a report was *feasible* it was taken as *true*.²

Only a tiny portion of the contemporary, or near-contemporary, historical writings on the Julio-Claudian period have survived. We are led to believe by Tacitus that this was no great loss. He contrasts the now-missing authors with those of the republic and, to a lesser degree, of the Augustan age and says that the records of Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero were falsified through cowardice while the rulers were still living, and vitiated after their deaths by the still potent feelings of hatred.

The writings of the emperors themselves, and of members of their family, were one available source of information. Little use, in fact, was made of them (Suetonius in particular refers to the imperial memoirs dismissively), and most writers generally preferred works that came from a senatorial tradition.³ Suetonius mentions a *commentarius*, a brief autobiographical text of Tiberius, which he seems to have seen and which he says was composed *summatis breviterque* ('sketchily and briefly').⁴ In it Tiberius says that he deposed Sejanus because of his plots against the offspring of Germanicus, an explanation that Suetonius rejects, thus providing a clue to why ancient authorities like himself place little value on imperial memoirs as a viable source. Tiberius left two other sets of writings. Suetonius refers to his *commentarii* (plural), unspecified but probably different from the brief autobiography (*commentarius*) even though the same Latin word is used for both, and his *acta*, probably some sort of political journal. Together they were Domitian's favourite reading.⁵ They are unlikely to have contained much of interest relating specifically and directly to Agrippina the Younger but would doubtless have had a great deal to say about her mother, little of it complimentary.

There are no references to autobiographical writings by Caligula, and even if they had existed they would probably have been suppressed by his successor, Claudius, who was himself a prolific writer. Suetonius and Pliny the Elder make use of a contemporary history by Claudius in forty-one books, which may have covered the forty-one years from the foundation of the empire to the death of Augustus (27 BC–AD 14), thus not relevant to Agrippina.⁶ Claudius also wrote an autobiography in eight volumes. Its potential value for the later career of Agrippina would have been enormous, but Suetonius dismisses it as nonsense, although he conceded its stylistic merits. Nero

of the incumbent emperor. In each case the mother tries to rule through her son, she is rebuffed by her son, and after her death it becomes clear that, for all her faults, she did act as a check on her son. Both emperors seem moderate, but after their mothers' deaths exercise evil tendencies unrestrained.⁵³

Many details in Tacitus's narrative seem to be echoes of other parts. Thus his comment at the beginning of Tiberius' reign, *primum facinus novi principatus fuit Postumi Agrippae caedes* ('the first crime of the new principate was the murder of Agrippa Postumus', *Ann.* 1.6.1) is reprised at the beginning of Nero's, *prima novo principatu mors Junii Silani proconsulis* ('the first death in the new reign was that of the proconsul Junius Silanus', *Ann.* 13.1.1).⁵⁴ Now it may well be that each of the reigns had indeed started off with a murder organized at arm's length by an ambitious woman. But, again, the danger of stereotypical thinking is that the murder of Agrippa Postumus, the fact of which, if not the details, is beyond doubt, might precondition the historian to expect a similar event later. The reference to Tiberius as 'Nero' in the immediately preceding passage (*Tac. Ann.* 1.5.6) was no doubt intended to stress that the circumstances surrounding Tiberius' accession were as sinister as those surrounding Nero's. Note the details of the deaths of Augustus and of Claudius, and in particular the roles of Livia and Agrippina. An explicit comparison is made at *Ann.* 12.69.4, where Agrippina is said to have emulated Livia in providing the exact funeral arrangements that Augustus had enjoyed. The general context of the deaths was the same: the reigning emperor has been persuaded to adopt a stepson as his heir, and the empress mother is alarmed for the safety of the scheme for which she has so long planned and decides to put her husband out of the way. The similarity of *Ann.* 12.68.3 to 1.5.6 is striking: the emperor dies suddenly but the news of his death is kept concealed until the accession of the stepson has been made certain. The empress barricades the house in which the dead emperor lies and issues reassuring reports about his health. Livia: 'Livia blocked off the house and approaches with zealous guards, and reassuring notices were released at intervals. ...' Agrippina: 'She shut off all the approaches with guards, and frequent reports were issued that the emperor's health was improving. ...' Note also that the theme of both accounts bears a resemblance to Livy's account of Tarquinus' death by Tanaquil (*Livy* 1.41.5).⁵⁵

As has been made evident in the preceding narrative, the reluctance of the sources to see women like Agrippina as distinctive personalities with their own individual qualities, and faults, is the most serious obstacle facing the biographer of women of the imperial family.

Literary citations

Octavia

21: Agrippina was cruel and fierce and murdered Claudius.

44–5: Agrippina murdered Claudius and was murdered in turn by her son.

93–6: Agrippina handed over the empire to her son and was rewarded by murder.

102: Claudius was murdered.

125–9: As a favour to Poppaea, Nero shipwrecked Agrippina then had her finished off with the sword.

141–2: Claudius' marriage to Agrippina was incestuous.

150–67: Agrippina contrived the marriage of Nero and Octavia and thus took control of the empire. There was no crime she would not commit. She eventually murdered her husband, and was in turn murdered by her son.

170–1: Agrippina was grief-stricken over the death of Britannicus.

310–76: Agrippina was shipwrecked by Nero, confessed to the murder of Claudius and responsibility for the murder of Britannicus. Nero despatched assassins who stab her in the womb.

593–617: Agrippina's reward for making her son emperor was to be shipwrecked, then murdered and her statues and inscriptions destroyed. After his death, the ghost of Claudius haunted Agrippina as his and Britannicus' murderer.

634: Agrippina was murdered by Nero.

952: Agrippina once aspired to power but was murdered by her son.

Pliny the Elder

Pliny NH 7, pref.: Agrippina is cited as a source.

Pliny NH 7.45: As the mother of Nero, Agrippina was a misfortune for the entire world.

Pliny NH 7.46: Agrippina wrote that Nero was born feet-first.

Pliny NH 7.71: Agrippina had a double set of canines.

Pliny NH 33. 63: Pliny saw Agrippina in her gold cloak at the Fucine Lake.

Pliny NH 35.201: Agrippina ordered the award of *ornamenta praetoria* to Pallas.

Josephus

Jos. Ant. 20.135: Agrippina interceded on behalf of the Jews.

Jos. Ant. 20.148, 151: Agrippina was rumoured to have poisoned Claudius.

Jos. BJ 2.249: Claudius was persuaded by Agrippina to adopt Nero.

Juvenal

Juv. Sat. 5.147–8, 6.620–4: Agrippina poisoned Claudius with a mushroom.
(Scholiast on:)

Juv. Sat. 1.155: Agrippina was the lover of Tigellinus.

Juv. Sat. 2.29: Claudius arranged a special law to enable him to marry Agrippina.

Juv. Sat. 4.81: (see Suet. *Vita Passieni*)

Juv. Sat. 5.109: cites Probus for statement that Agrippina recalled Seneca as Nero's tutor.

Juv. Sat. 6.124: Nero murdered Britannicus with his mother's connivance.

Juv. Sat. 6.620: Agrippina poisoned Claudius.

Juv. Sat. 6.628: Agrippina poisoned Britannicus.

Tacitus

Tac. Ann. 2.41.4: Germanicus' five children accompanied him on his triumph.

Tac. Ann. 3.2.4: Agrippina and the other children greeted their mother as she returned with Germanicus' ashes.

- Tac. *Ann.* 4.53.3: Agrippina wrote memoirs on her family.
- Tac. *Ann.* 4.75.1: Agrippina married Domitius.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.27.1: Agrippina was born in Oppidum Ubiorum.
- Tac. *Ann.* 11.12.1: Messalina was hostile towards Agrippina.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.1.3, 2.3: Agrippina was Pallas' recommended choice as Claudius' wife.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.3.1–2: Agrippina charmed Claudius and planned the marriage and betrothal of Nero to Octavia.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.5.1: Agrippina and Claudius had an affair.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.6.2: Vitellius lobbied for the marriage of Claudius and Agrippina.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.7.3: The senate validated the marriage of Claudius and Agrippina.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.8.1: Silanus committed suicide on the day of the marriage.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.3.2: Agrippina ensured the betrothal of Nero and Octavia.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.8.3: Agrippina secured the return of Seneca as Nero's tutor.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.7.5–7: The state fell under an almost masculine tyranny. Money was seen as a means to power.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.22.1–4: Agrippina obtained the prosecution and death of Lollia Paulina.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.25.1: Agrippina secured the adoption of Nero with the help of her lover Pallas.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.26: Agrippina received the title of Augusta. Nero's adoption was confirmed. Britannicus was now isolated.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.27.1: Agrippina gave her name to Cologne, where she was born.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.37.5: Caratacus paid homage to Agrippina.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.41.7: On Agrippina's urging, Britannicus' tutors were removed.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.42.1: Agrippina secured the praetorian command for Burrus.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.42.3: Agrippina was granted the *carpentum*.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.42.5: Agrippina protected Vitellius from prosecution.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.56.5: Agrippina attended the draining of the Fucine Lake in a cloak of gold.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.57.4: Agrippina charged Narcissus with embezzlement.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.59.1: Agrippina destroyed Statilius Taurus.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.64.4–6, 65.1–2: Domitia Lepida was eliminated.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.65.2: Narcissus' suspicions about Agrippina's intentions grew.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.65.4: Narcissus claimed that Agrippina had an affair with Pallas.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.66–7: Agrippina poisoned Claudius.
- Tac. *Ann.* 12.68: Agrippina delayed the announcement of Claudius' death to ensure the loyalty of the troops.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.1.1: Agrippina brought about the death of Marcus Silanus.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.1.4: Narcissus was forced to suicide by Agrippina.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.2.3: Seneca and Burrus had to face the *ferocia* of Agrippina. Passionate for power, she enjoyed the support of Pallas.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.2.6: Agrippina received exceptional honours.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.5.2: Agrippina opposed measures that subverted the policy of Claudius.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.5.2–3: Agrippina observed sessions of the senate and attempted to meet the Armenian ambassadors.

- Tac. *Ann.* 13.6.2: There was popular concern that Nero was ruled by a woman.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.12.1: Agrippina's control over Nero began to slip.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.13.1–4: Agrippina opposed Nero's affair with Acte, first aggressively then diplomatically.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.13.5–6: Nero offered Agrippina clothes from the palace and caused offence.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.14: Pallas was removed from office, which reportedly elicited threats against Nero from Agrippina.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.15.1–2: Agrippina's threats provoked Nero to eliminate Britannicus.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.16.6: Agrippina was terrified on the death of Britannicus.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.18.3–5: Agrippina was driven to seek the support of Octavia and amassed money for the coming conflict with Nero. He deprived her of her guard and moved her to the house of Antonia.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.20–1: Junia Silana brought charges of rebellion against Agrippina, who was allowed a hearing and successfully defended herself.
- Tac. *Ann.* 13.42.5: Seneca corrupted the beds of the imperial princesses.
- Tac. *Ann.* 14.1.1–4: Poppaea urged the murder of Agrippina.
- Tac. *Ann.* 14.2: Agrippina planned incest with her son.
- Tac. *Ann.* 14.2.4: Agrippina was the lover of Lepidus and Pallas.
- Tac. *Ann.* 14.3–8: Nero was determined to murder Agrippina; he contrived the device of the collapsing boat and, when that proved unsuccessful, sent agents from the fleet to murder her.
- Tac. *Ann.* 14.9.1: Nero may have inspected his mother's body.
- Tac. *Ann.* 14.9.2–5: Agrippina was cremated, and thus brought about the prophecy that Nero would slay her and rule.
- Tac. *Ann.* 14.10: Thanks were given for Nero's deliverance from Agrippina throughout Italy, but he was haunted by her ghost.
- Tac. *Ann.* 14.11: Nero charged his late mother with plotting against him.
- Tac. *Ann.* 14.12.1–4: Thanksgivings and portents marked Agrippina's death.
- Tac. *Ann.* 14.12.5–7: The old enemies of Agrippina returned from exile.
- Tac. *Ann.* 14.13: Nero was persuaded of the unpopularity of Agrippina.
- Tac. *Ann.* 14.57.1: Tigellinus accused the prefect Faenius of amicitia with Agrippina.
- Tac. *Ann.* 15.50.4: Tigellinus accused Faenius of an affair with Agrippina.
- Tac. *Ann.* 15.67.3: Subrius Flavus explained his participation in the Pisonian conspiracy as a consequence of Nero's murder of Agrippina.
- Tac. *Ann.* 16.14.3: Publius Anteius' affection for Agrippina earned him the animosity of Nero.
- Tac. *Ann.* 16.21.1: Thrasea Paetus was put to death, hated among other things because he walked out of the senate when charges were made against Agrippina.
- Suetonius**
- Suet. *Cal.* 7: Agrippina and her sisters were born *triennio*.
- Suet. *Cal.* 15.3: The sisters were included in oaths and consular proposals.
- Suet. *Cal.* 24.1–3: Caligula committed incest openly with his sisters, gave them to his

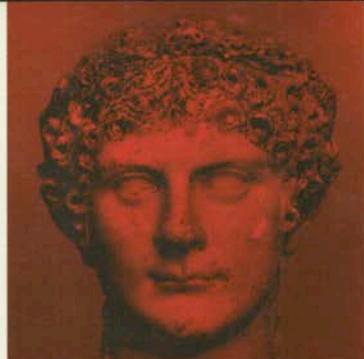
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AGRIPPINA

Sister of Caligula

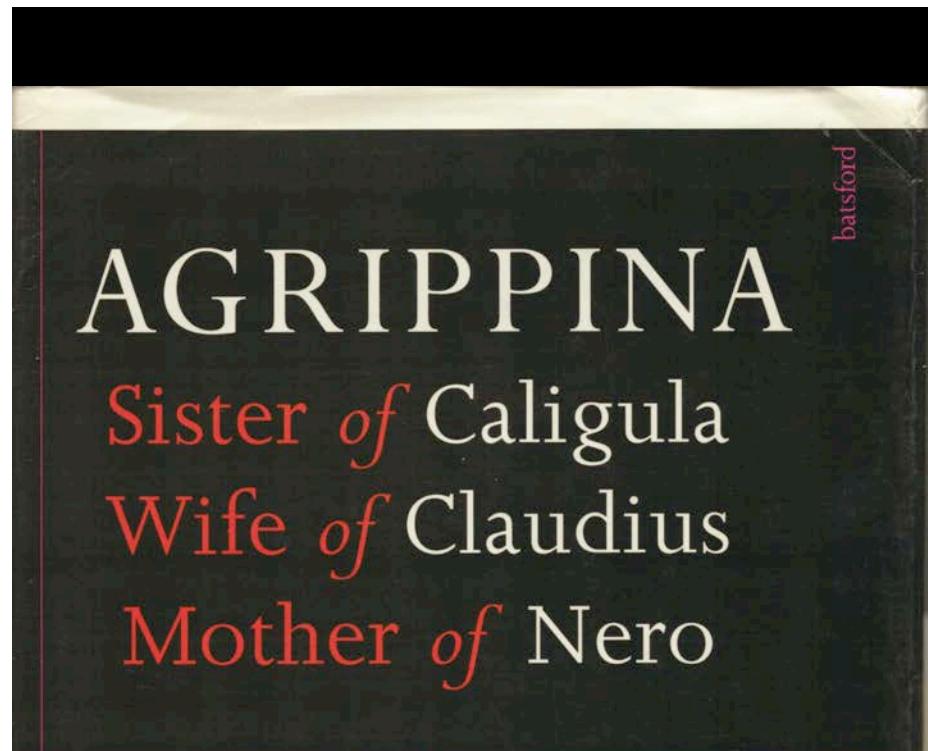
Wife of Claudius

Mother of Nero



Anthony A. Barrett

An irresistible combination of treachery, incest and murder



Anthony A. Barrett

An irresistible combination of treachery, incest and murder

Agrippina
She plotted against her brother as well as sharing his bed

She murdered her husband Claudius with a deadly mushroom

She tried to control a rebellious teenage son, Nero, by sharing his bed too

She was finally eliminated by that same Nero through a scheme as ingenious and outlandish as any in the history of crime – an irresistible combination of treachery, incest and murder

Or so tradition has it...

ISBN 0-7524-6654-8
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Option J: Rome – Agrippina the Younger

Content Focus

Students develop an understanding of Agrippina the Younger in the context of her time, through a range of archaeological and written sources and relevant historiographical issues. The Historical concepts and skills content is to be integrated as appropriate.

Content

Students investigate:

Survey

- The historical context, including:
 - geography, topography and resources of Rome and the Roman Empire
 - an overview of Roman social and political structures, the principate
 - role of imperial women in Roman society

Focus of study

- Background and rise to prominence, including:
 - family background and status
 - early life, ambitions and marriages
- Key features and developments, including:
 - basis of her power and influence, patronage
 - role during the reign of Gaius (Caligula), including exile
 - role during the reign of Claudius (ACHAH355)
 - role and changing relationship with Nero during his reign (ACHAH356)
 - relationships with other members of the imperial court: Seneca, Burrus and imperial freedmen
 - impact of her personality on her role and public image (ACHAH355)
 - attempts on her life
 - death: motives, manner and impact of death
- Evaluation, including:
 - impact and influence on her time
 - assessment of her life and career
 - legacy
 - ancient and modern images and interpretations of Agrippina the Younger (ACHAH363)
- ONE particular source or type of source (eg Tacitus – selected excerpts; coinage) for Agrippina the Younger, including:
 - the value and limitations of the source
 - an evaluation of the source in the context of other available sources, including problems of evidence



Tacitus

- B. Walker, *The Annals of Tacitus. A Study in the Writing of History* (Manchester, University of Manchester Press, 1952, revised 1960)
- Ronald Syme, *Tactus* (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1958)
- Donald R. Dudley, *The Word of Tacitus* (London, Secker & Warburg, 1968)
- Ronald Syme. *Ten Studies in Tacitus* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970)
- F.R.D. Goodyear, *Tacitus* (Greece & Rome New Surveys 4, Oxford, Clarendon, 1970)
- Ronald Mellor, *Tacitus* (New York and London, Routledge, 1993)
- A.(Tony) J. Woodman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Recent translations:

- A.J. Woodman, *Tacitus. The Annals* (Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett, 2004)
- J.C. Yardley (trans.) *Tacitus. The Annals. The Reigns of Tiberius, Claudius and Nero* (Oxford World's Classics, 2008)

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics

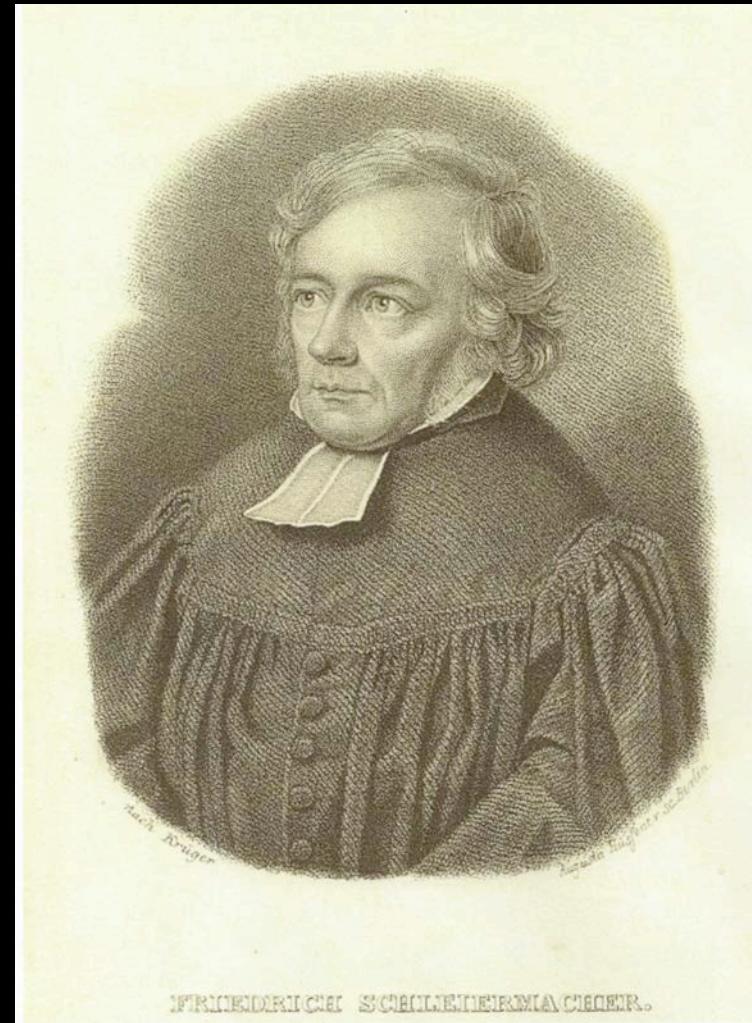
- The art — or the science — of interpretation, commonly distinguished from *exegesis* or practical exposition, and from commentary (*OED*, adapted)

Hermeneutics

- The art — or the science — of interpretation, commonly distinguished from *exegesis* or practical exposition, and from commentary (*OED*, adapted)
- Its patron is Hermes, messenger of the gods, the tutelary deity of speech, writing and traffic.

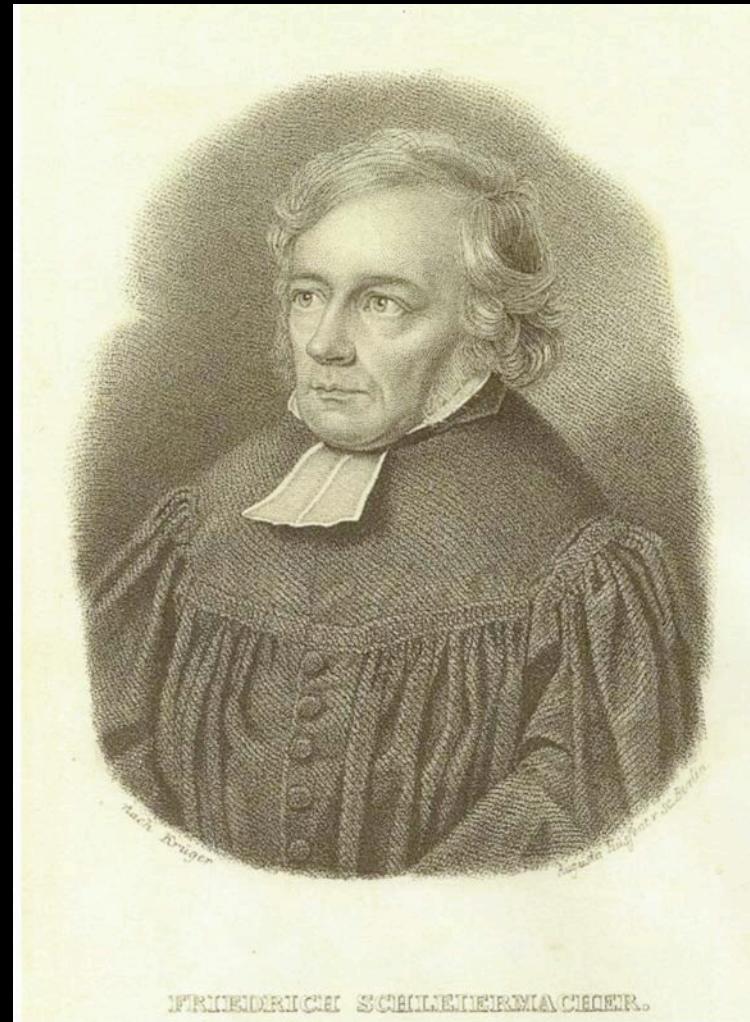
Hermeneutics

- Friedrich Schleiermacher
(1768–1834)



Hermeneutics

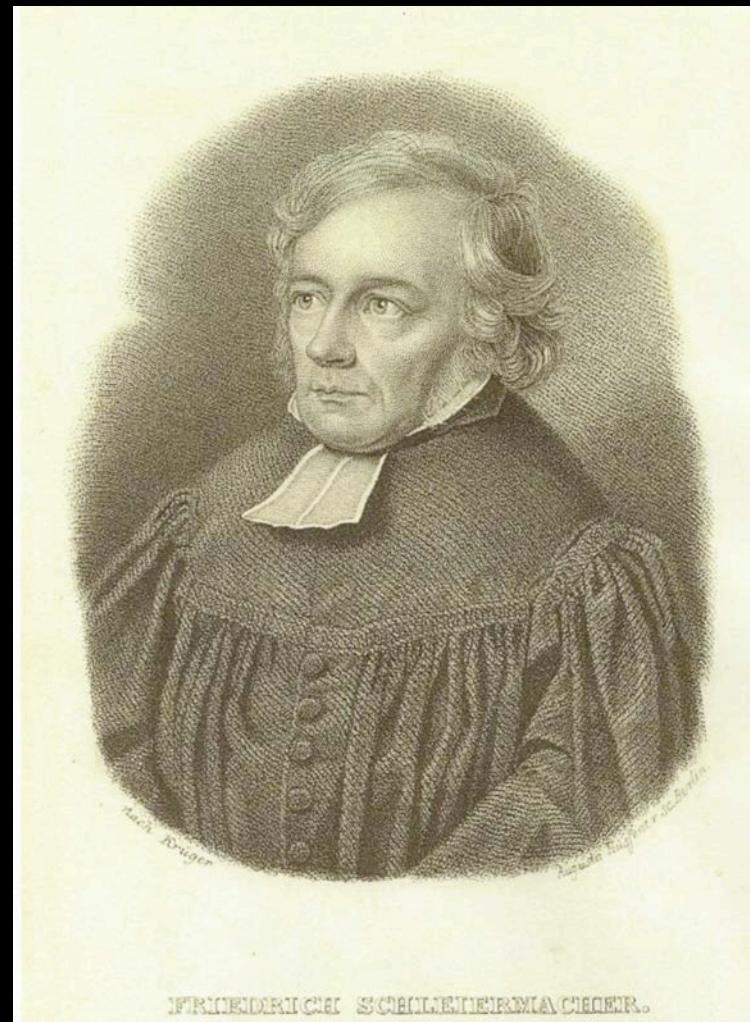
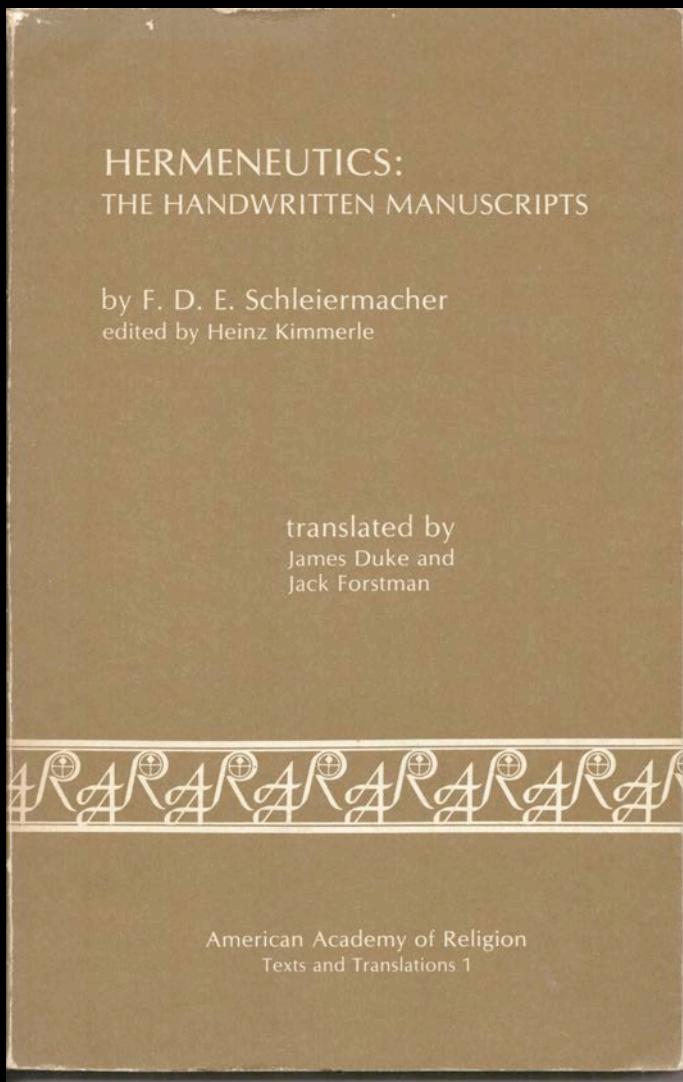
- Friedrich Schleiermacher



— reconciling the criticisms of the **Enlightenment** with traditional **Protestant Christianity**

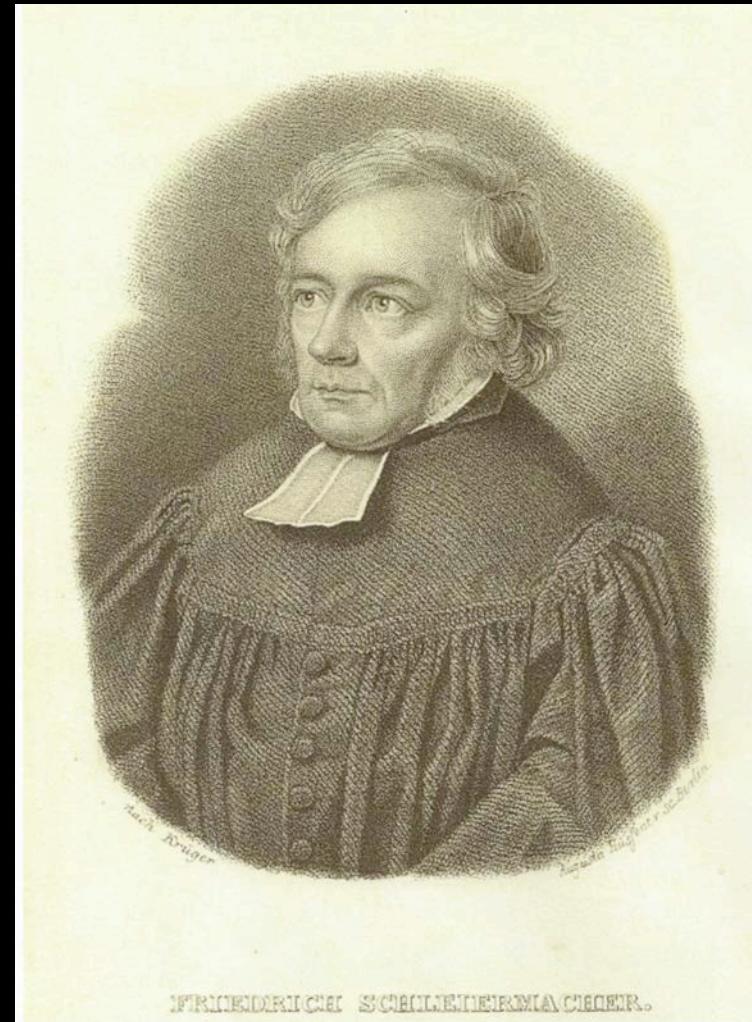
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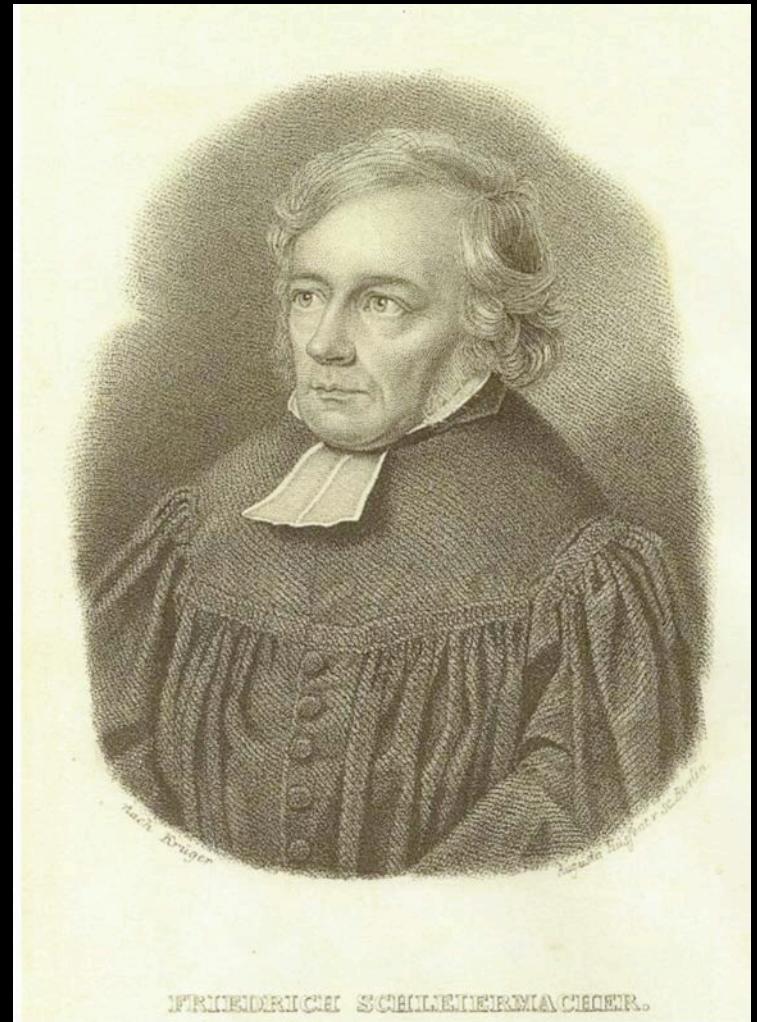
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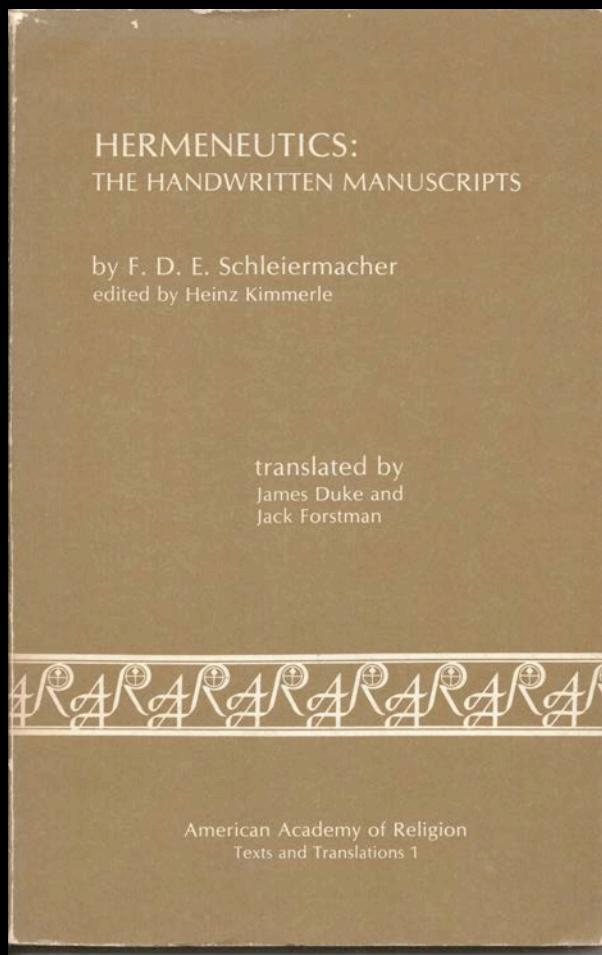


Encyklopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften. Lectures 1809–1865 (1877)

Hermeneutics

A Simplified Checklist for TACITUS (*a la* Schleiermacher)

- What do we know the author?



When was Tacitus writing?
What were his life experiences?
What were his idiosyncrasies?
Why was he writing?
To whom was he writing?
What did he expect his audience
to know?
What was the genre?
What were the expectations of the
genre?

Hermeneutics

- A Simplified Checklist for TACITUS
- What do we know the author?

Hermeneutics

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Thucydides
Polybius
Sallust

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— rhetorical style

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The Moral Purpose of ‘History’

Tacitus:

“As I see it, the chief duty of the historian is this: to see that virtue is placed on record, and that evil men and evil deeds have cause to fear judgement at the bar of posterity.” (3.65.1; trans. D.R. Dudley)

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Ronald Syme:



“The conviction that it all had to happen is indeed difficult to discard. Yet that conviction ruins the living interest of history and precludes a fair judgement upon the agents.”

(Roman Revolution [1939], 4)

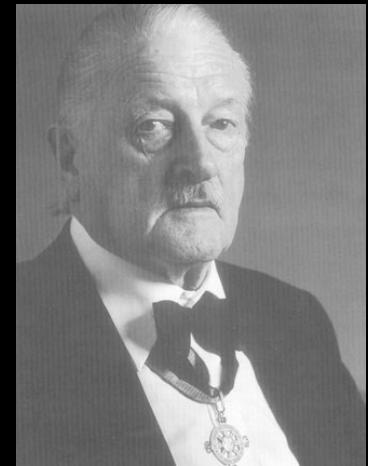
The Moral Purpose of ‘History’

Why was he writing?

Ronald Syme. *Ten Studies in Tacitus* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970)

Chapter 1 ‘The Senator as Historian’

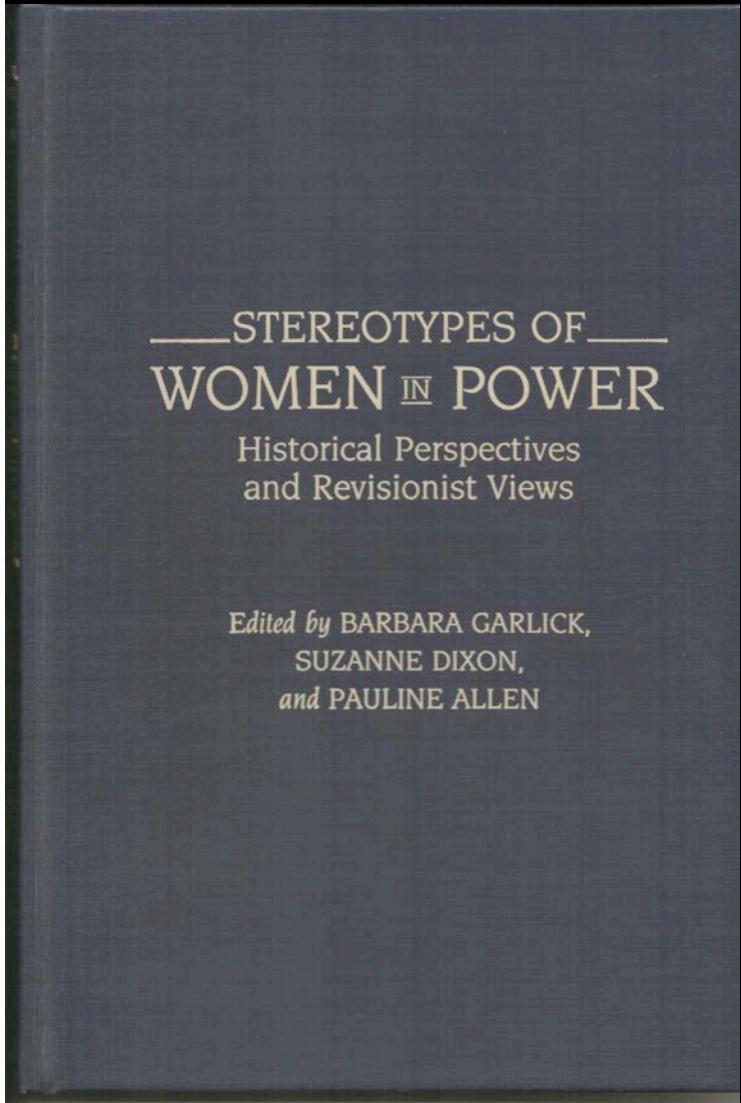
Chapter 2 ‘How Tacitus Came to History’



Ronald Syme

Does the Text Come Between Us and the
Past?

Does the Text Come Between Us and the Past?



- Amy Richlin:

“When we look at texts and objects to discover reality, it is as if we looked at a scene through a screen on a window; as we become interested in the screen and its properties, we suddenly notice that the scene is in fact painted on the screen itself. What lies beyond is unknown.”

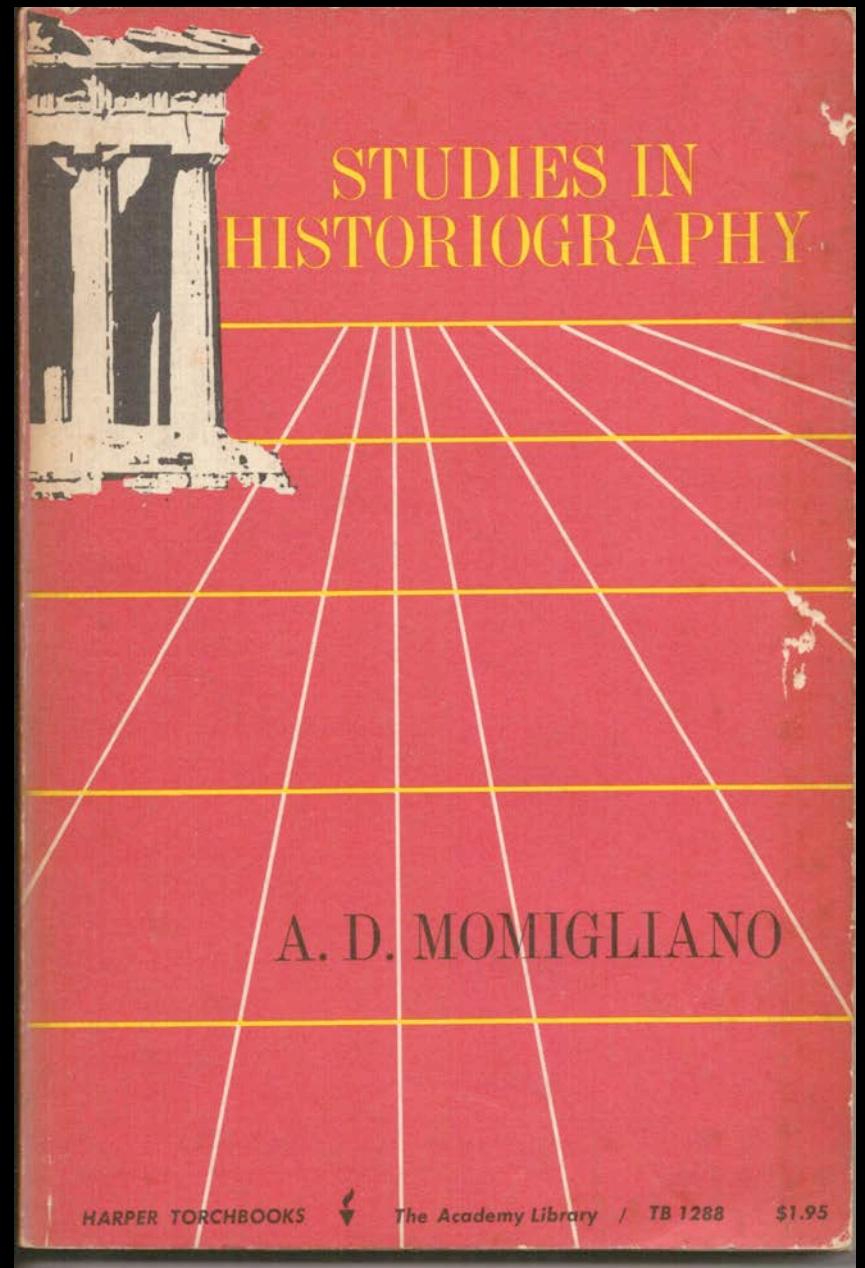


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 - **Was he a primary source?**

Primary and Secondary Sources

- Arnaldo Momigliano



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“The whole modern method of historical research is founded upon **the distinction between original and derivative authorities**. By original authorities we mean either statements by eye-witnesses, or documents, and other material remains, which are contemporary with the events which they attest. By derivative authorities we mean historians or chroniclers who relate and discuss events which they have not witnessed but which they have heard of or inferred directly or indirectly from original authorities. We praise the original authorities or sources – for being reliable, but we praise non-contemporary historians — or derivative authorities – for displaying sound judgment in the interpretation and evaluation of the original sources. This distinction ... became the patrimony of historical research only in the late seventeenth century.”

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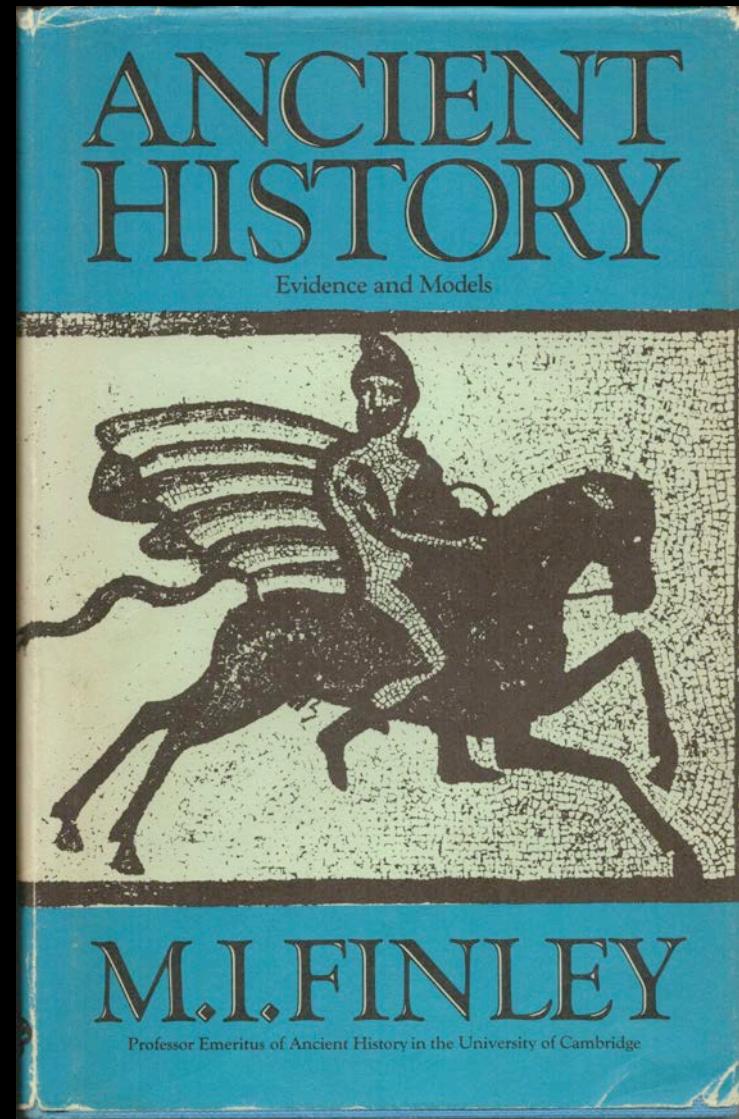
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- Moses Finley:
“The modern historian of antiquity ... cannot write a history of Rome by reworking in modern language the Latin of Livy as Livy had paraphrased or translated the Greek of Polybius.”



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“It is ... a strange aberration when a reputable Roman historian, writing the volume on the early Romans and Etruscans (down to 390 BC), in a series edited by an equally reputable colleague, prints an appendix headed ‘primary sources’ which consists of thumbnail sketches in four to ten lines each of a dozen authors, ranging in time from Timaeus, whose long career spanned the end of the fourth century BC and the first half of the third, to Festus, who flourished about AD 150. I cannot imagine that, even as a slip, a Renaissance historian would compile a list of primary sources made up of John Addington Symonds, Burckhardt and Chabod. I suspect that Ogilvie’s slip reflects, no doubt subconsciously, the widespread sentiment that anything written in Greek or Latin is somehow privileged, exempt from the normal canons of evaluation.”

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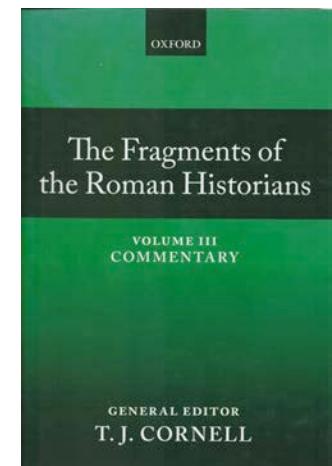
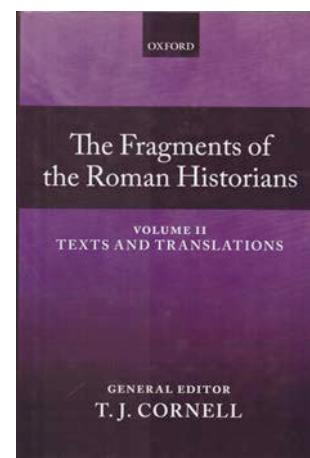
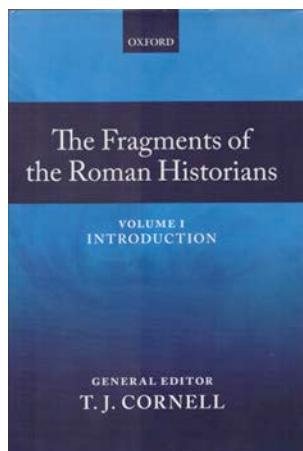
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- What was the genre?
- What were the expectations of the genre?
- **Was he a primary source? NO**
- **Did Tacitus have access to —and *use*—primary sources?**

Agrippina's Memoirs or *Commentarii*

- R.G. Lewis, ‘Imperial Autobiography, Augustus to Hadrian’, in Wolfgang Haase (ed.) *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt (ANRW)* 34.1 (Berlin, 1993), 629–706, at 652–8
- Barbara Levick, ‘Agrippina’ in T.J. Cornell (ed.) *The Fragments of the Roman Historians* (Oxford University Press, 2013), Vol. 1, 515–17. A translation is provided in Volume 2; and a commentary in Volume 3.



Agrippina's Memoirs or *Commentarii*

- T. Ann. 4.53 (Loeb translation, modified):
“... Agrippina [the Younger — Agrippina’s mother], obstinately nursing her anger, and attacked by physical illness, was visited Caesar [sc. Tiberius]. For long her tears fell in silence; then she began with reproaches and entreaties ...

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Agrippina's Memoirs or *Commentarii*

- Pliny, *Natural History* 7.45–6:

“It is contrary to nature to be born feet first ... Nero also, who was emperor recently and was throughout his whole *principatus* an enemy of the human race, was, as his mother Agrippina writes, born feet first.”

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- (47) “It is a better omen when the mother dies in giving birth to the child.”

Agrippina's Memoirs or *Commentarii*

Can we spot sections in Tacitus where the *memoirs* may have made their mark? Lewis thinks so.

Annales 4.3? (Drusus' *contretemps* with Sejanus)

— Agrippina's *oratio recta* at *Ann.* 13. 20–21?

Agrippina's Memoirs or *Commentarii*

Agrippina's *oratio recta* at *Ann.* 13. 20–21?

Lewis, 657:

- “It yields one or two items of unusual and perhaps idiosyncratic vocabulary
 - *labefactare* (nowhere else in Tacitus)
 - *parare* (in Tacitus only otherwise at *Ann.* 11.7)
- *conscientia subeunda*: “is not perhaps entirely orthodox”
- — and *benevolentia certare*, “while entirely orthodox, also looks idiosyncratic.”
- On peculiarities of her mother’s diction, Suet, *Aug.* 86.

Agrippina's Memoirs or *Commentarii*

Agrippina's *oratio recta* at Ann. 13. 21:

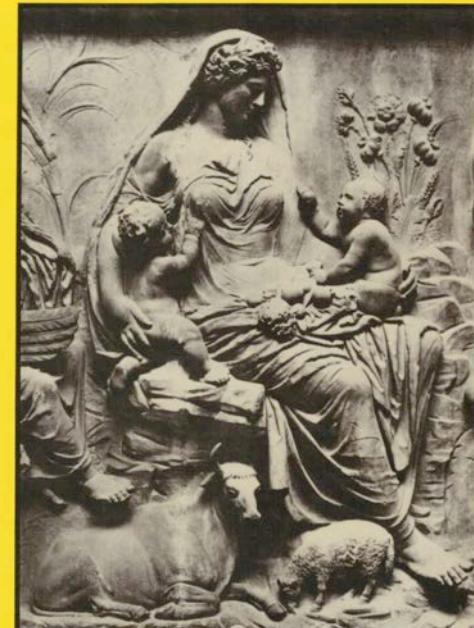
- When the emperor's fears had been thus calmed, at break of day a visit was paid to Agrippina; who was to listen to the charges, and rebut them or pay the penalty. The commission was carried out by Burrus under the eye of Seneca: a number of freedmen also were present as witnesses to the conversation. Then, after recapitulating the charges and their authors, Burrus adopted a threatening attitude. Agrippina summoned up her pride:—"I am not astonished," she said, "that Silana, who has never known maternity, should have no knowledge of a mother's heart: for parents do not change their children as a wanton changes her adulterers. Nor, if Iturius and Calvisius, after consuming the last morsel of their estates, pay their aged mistress the last abject service of undertaking an accusation, is that a reason why my own good repute should be darkened by the blood of my son or Caesar's conscience by that of his mother (*ideo aut mihi infamia parricidii aut Caesari conscientia subeunda est*)? For as to Domitia—I should thank her for her enmity, if she were competing with me in benevolence to my Nero (*si benevolentia mecum in Neronem meum certaret*), instead of staging this comedy with the help of her bedfellow Atimetus and her actor Paris. In the days when my counsels were preparing his adoption, his proconsular power, his consulate in prospect, and the other steps to his *imperium* (*et cetera apiscendo imperio praeparentur*), she was embellishing the fish-ponds of her beloved Baiae.—Or let a man stand forth who will argue that I tampered with the cohorts (the Guard) in the city—who will argue that I shook the allegiance of the provinces (*qui provinciarum fidem labefactatam ... arguat*)—or, finally, of seducing either slave or freedman into crime! Could I have lived with Britannicus on the throne? And if Plautus or another shall acquire the empire and sit in judgement, am I to assume there is a dearth of accusers prepared to indict me, no longer for the occasional hasty utterances of an ill-regulated love, but for guilt from which only a son can absolve?"

Back to Hermenutics

Pessimists *versus* Optimists

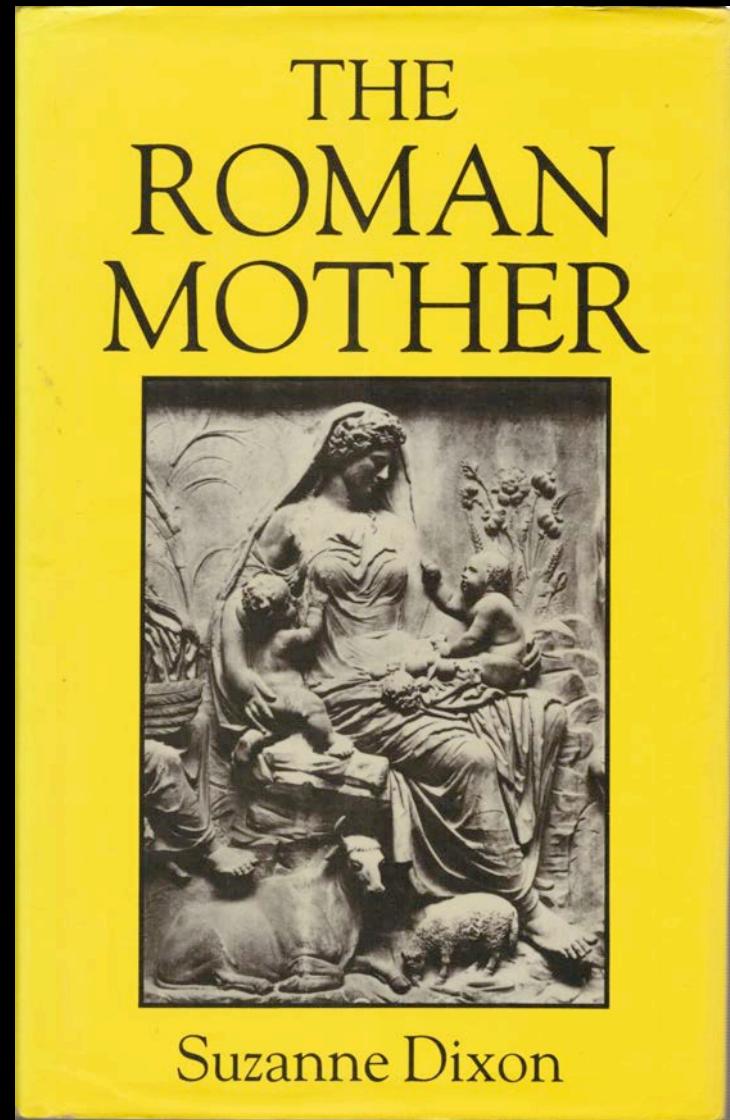
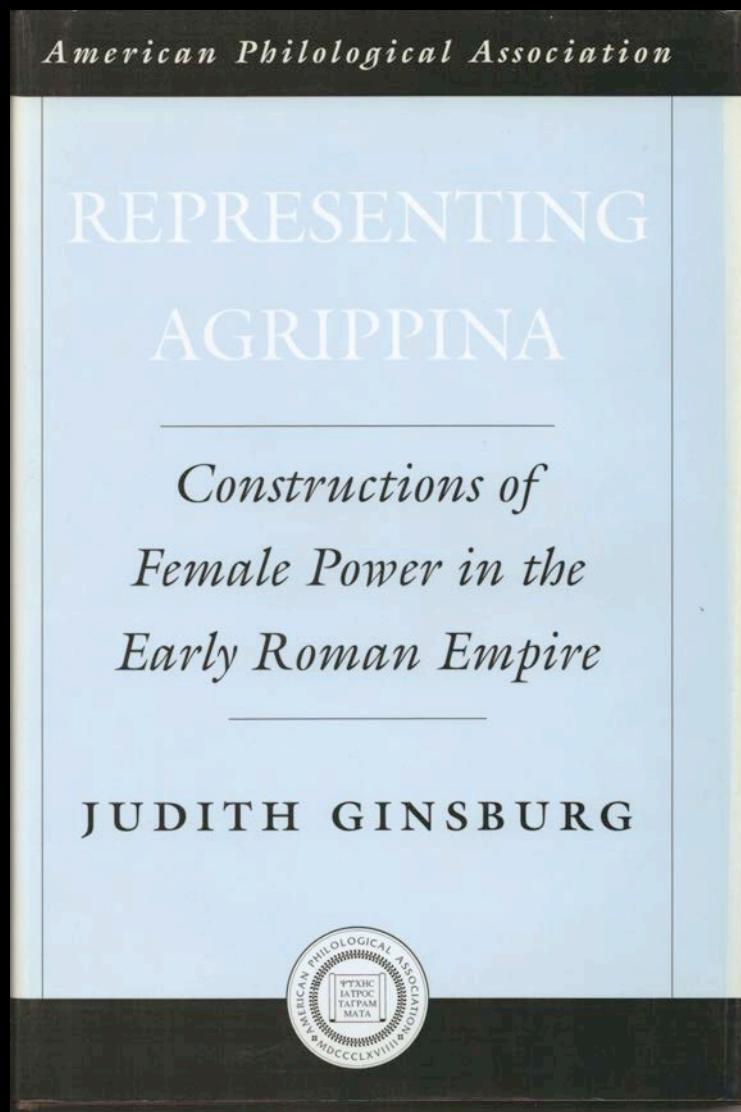
Pessimists *versus* Optimists

THE
ROMAN
MOTHER



Suzanne Dixon

Pessimists versus Optimists



Possible Case Studies

Possible Case Studies

- Tacitus *Annales* 12.7.5–7
 - on the legitimation of uncle-niece marriages (AD 49):

“From this moment it was a changed state, and all things moved at the command of a woman —but not a woman who, as Messalina, treated in wantonness the Roman empire as a toy. It was a tightly drawn (*adductum*), almost masculine enslavement (*quasi virile servitium*): in public, there was austerity and not infrequently arrogance (*saepius superbia*); at home, no trace of unchastity, unless it might contribute to power/control (*dominatio*).”

Possible Case Studies

Tacitus *Annales* 12.37.5 (AD 51):

“The answer (to the British king Caratacus’s plea for clemency) was the Caesar’s (sc. Claudius’) pardon for the prince, his wife, and his brothers; and the prisoners, freed from their chains, paid their homage to Agrippina also—a conspicuous figure on another tribunal not far away (*haud procul alio suggestu conspicuam*)—in the same terms of praise and gratitude which they had employed to the *Princeps*. It was an innovation, certainly, and one without precedent in ancient custom (*novum sane et moribus veterum insolitum*), that a woman should sit in state before Roman standards (*feminam signis Romanis praesidere*): it was the advertisement of her claim to a partnership in the empire (*imperii sociam*) which her ancestors had created.”

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- Tacitus *Annales* 13.5:

“The latter point, though opposed by Agrippina as a subversion of the acts of Claudius, was carried by the Fathers, whose meetings were specially convened *in Palatium*, so that she could station herself at a newly-added door in their rear, shut off by a curtain thick enough to conceal her from view but not to debar her from hearing. In fact, when an Armenian deputation was pleading the national cause before Nero, she was preparing to ascend the dais of the Commander (*suggestum imperatoris*) and to share his presidency (*praesidere simul parabat*), had not Seneca, while others stood aghast, admonished [Nero] to go and meet his approaching mother: thus, an assumption of filial piety averted a scandal (*ita specie pietatis obviam itum dedecori*).”

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Possible Case Studies

- Tacitus *Annales* 13.5:

“The latter point, though opposed by Agrippina as a subversion of the acts of Claudius, was carried by the Fathers, whose meetings were specially convened *in Palatium*, so that she could station herself at a newly-added door in their rear, shut off by a curtain thick enough to conceal her from view but not to debar her from hearing. In fact, when an Armenian deputation was pleading the national cause before Nero, she was preparing to ascend the dais of the Commander (*suggestum imperatoris*) and to share his presidency (*praesidere simul parabat*), had not Seneca, while others stood aghast, admonished [Nero] to go and meet his approaching mother: **thus, an assumption of filial piety averted a scandal** (*ita specie pietatis obviam itum dedecori*).”

Option J: Rome – Agrippina the Younger

Content Focus

Students develop an understanding of Agrippina the Younger in the context of her time, through a range of archaeological and written sources and relevant historiographical issues. The Historical concepts and skills content is to be integrated as appropriate.

Content

Students investigate:

Survey

- The historical context, including:
 - geography, topography and resources of Rome and the Roman Empire
 - an overview of Roman social and political structures, the principate
 - role of imperial women in Roman society

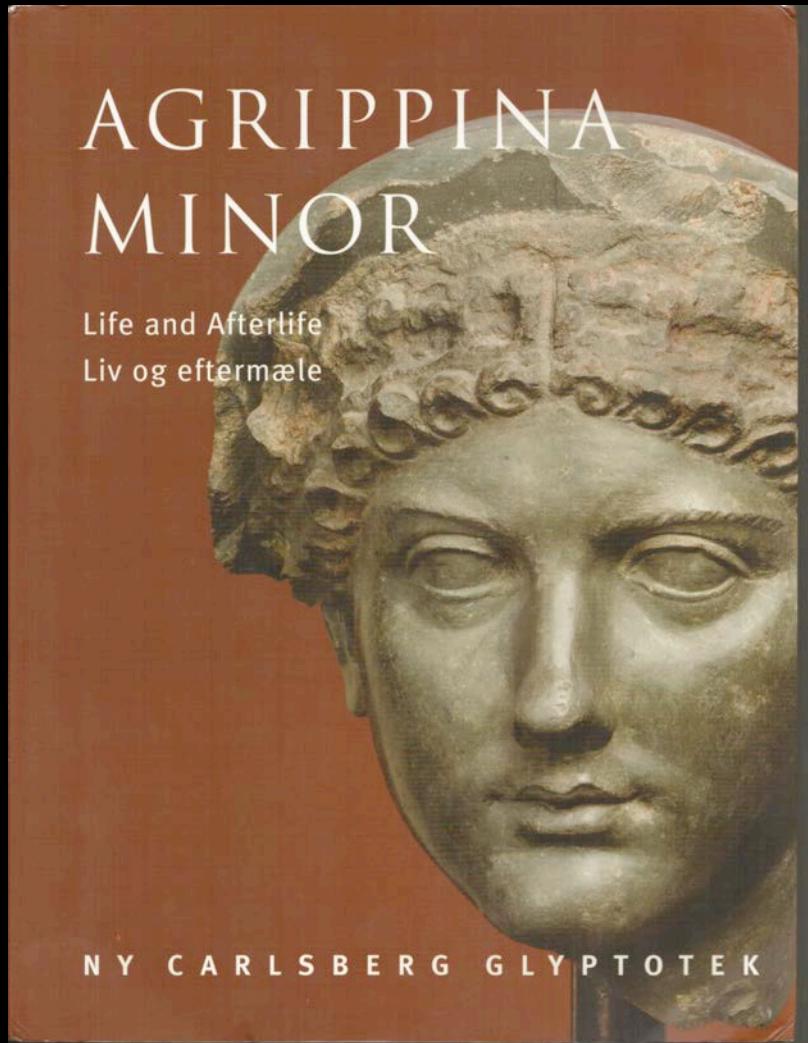
Focus of study

- Background and rise to prominence, including:
 - family background and status
 - early life, ambitions and marriages
- Key features and developments, including:
 - basis of her power and influence, patronage
 - role during the reign of Gaius (Caligula), including exile
 - role during the reign of Claudius (ACHAH355)
 - role and changing relationship with Nero during his reign (ACHAH356)
 - relationships with other members of the imperial court: Seneca, Burrus and imperial freedmen
 - impact of her personality on her role and public image (ACHAH355)
 - attempts on her life
 - death: motives, manner and impact of death
- Evaluation, including:
 - impact and influence on her time
 - assessment of her life and career
 - legacy
 - ancient and modern images and interpretations of Agrippina the Younger (ACHAH363)
- ONE particular source or type of source (eg Tacitus – selected excerpts; coinage) for Agrippina the Younger, including:
 - the value and limitations of the source
 - an evaluation of the source in the context of other available sources, including problems of evidence

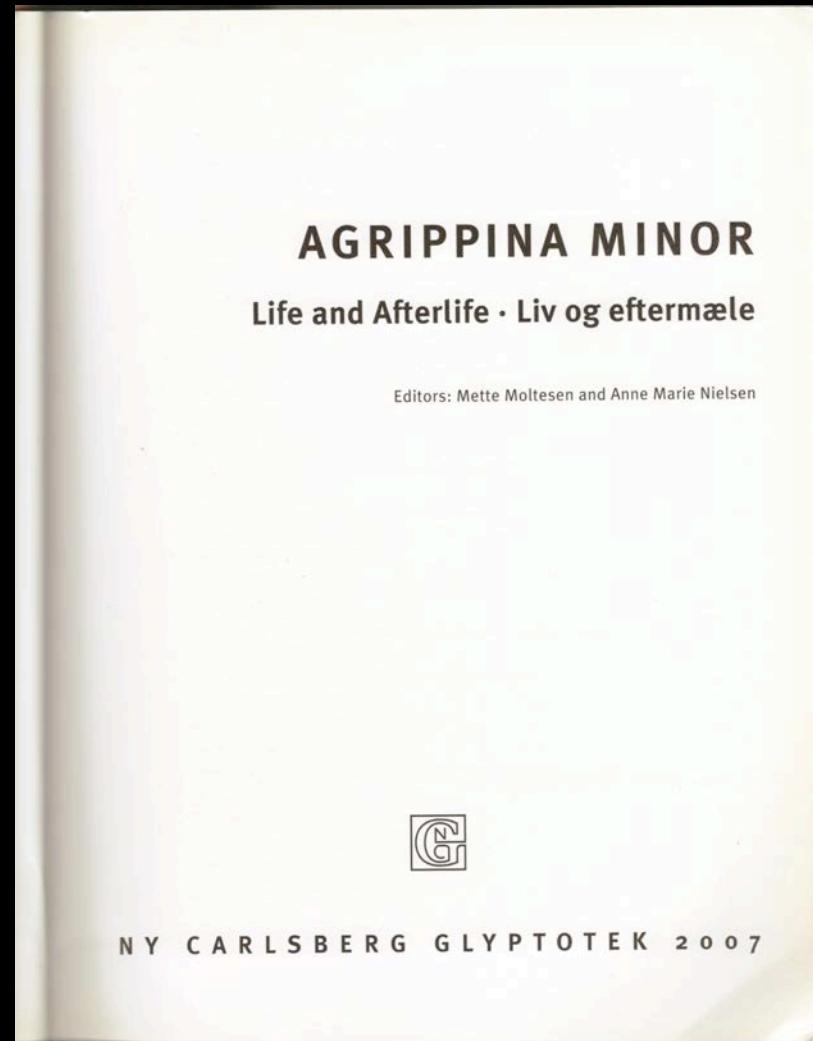
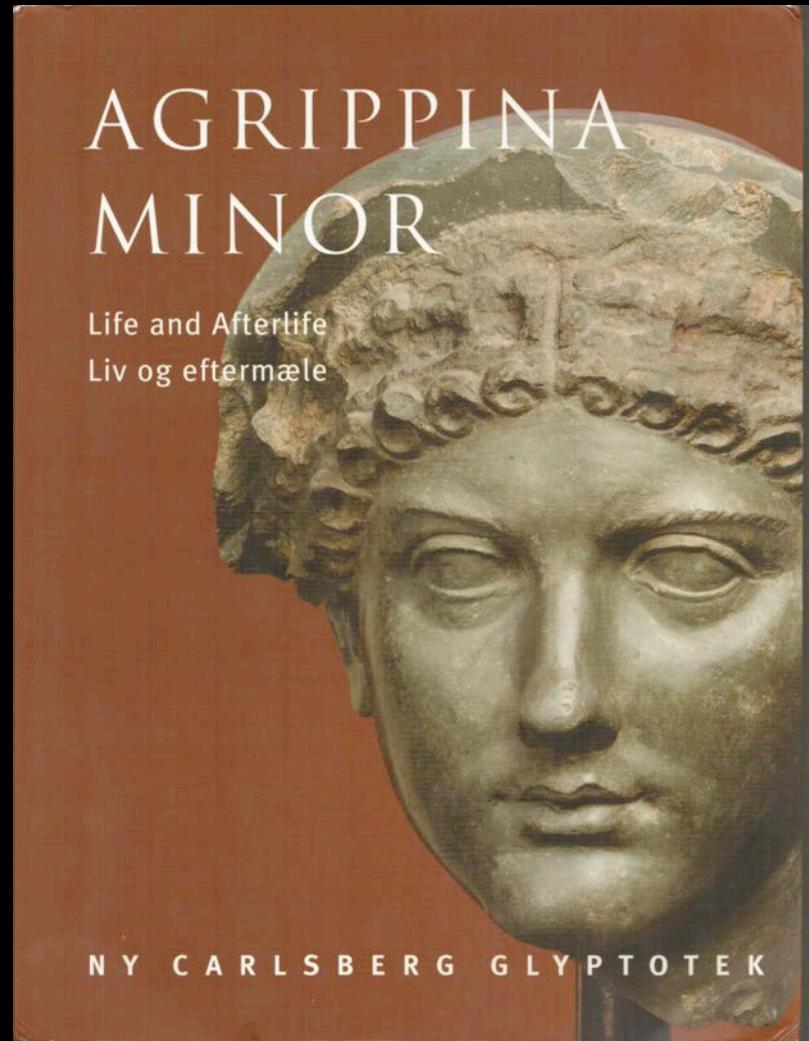


Does the primary evidence
back Tacitus up?

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Does the primary evidence back Tacitus up?



Does the primary evidence back Tacitus up?

The Aphrodisias Reliefs



Does the primary evidence back Tacitus up?

The Aphrodisias Reliefs



Does the primary evidence back Tacitus up?

Cologne Cameo



Does the primary evidence back Tacitus up?

Numismatic Evidence



Does the primary evidence back Tacitus up?

Numismatic Evidence



Does the primary evidence back Tacitus up?

Numismatic Evidence



Does the primary evidence back Tacitus up?

Numismatic Evidence



The Melancholy Finale: *ventrem feri !*



The Melancholy Finale: *ventrem feri !*



Tacitus, *Annals* 14.8

The Melancholy Finale: *ventrem feri !*



Tacitus, *Annals* 14.8
— what could be more singular?

The Melancholy Finale: *ventrem feri !*



Tacitus, *Annals* 14.8

Seneca, *Oedipus* 1025–31; 1036–39

