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Abstract

This thesis explores how Suetonius, Pliny, and Tacitus make use of the stock figure of the tyrant to support their depiction of Domitian as a tyrant. These sources portray the emperor as a tyrant by means of rumor, omission of fact, and exaggeration in order to convince posterity that they had survived the ‘reign of terror.’ The first chapter concerns the development and influence of the topos of tyranny and political invective. The second chapter deals with Suetonius and a standard definition of a tyrant established by Aristotle in order to show how closely related the Roman concept of tyranny was to the Greek definition of a tyrant. In the third chapter, the Epistles of Pliny are analyzed especially concerning the author’s omissions. Finally, in the Agricola, Tacitus’ use of rumor attributes Domitian with the typical characteristics of the stock tyrant by contrasting the emperor with his father-in-law.
I would like to thank professors Michael Sage and William Johnson for their constant guidance and willingness to read countless drafts. I would like to thank Professor Brian Lavelle of Loyola University of Chicago for his continual guidance over the years and all of his advice. I would also like to thank those Graduate Students of the Department of Classics at the University of Cincinnati who provided their assistance. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their unfailing support and patience. Without their love, I could not have done it. I would like to dedicate this thesis to my sister, Mary McNearney, and my grandmother, Marion McNearney, who passed away before its completion.
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Chapter One: The Fabrication of Roman Tyranny

But then will you say that tyranny is pleasing to sensible men? Not at all, unless all men who find royal power pleasing have had their minds crazed by it.

Euripides, Hippolytus, 1013-15.

I.A: Introduction:

The impact of Greek culture upon Rome was so profound that nearly all of Roman literature had its genesis in the Greek tradition. Roman historians learned their craft from their Greek predecessors; for example, Polybius (c. 200-118 B.C.E.), a Greek, wrote one of the first histories of Rome. Another example is Polybius’ predecessor, the Roman Q. Fabius Pictor (c. 254 B.C.E.-?), who wrote the first Roman history not in Latin, but in Greek. Due to the Greek influence upon Roman history, there are, as expected, Greek overtones in the concepts contained in such works. For instance, many characteristics pertaining to the *topos* of tyranny, the theme of this work, originated in the Greek world and were later carried on by the Romans. Throughout the centuries, the institution of tyranny was affected by the vast changes that occurred in the course of Greek history: during the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E., when tyranny was most conspicuous in the Greek world, it was never seen as negative form of government; however, after the tyranny of the sons of Peisistratus, Hipparchus and Hippias, in Athens in the fifth century, for example, tyranny gained the negative connotations, which it still holds to this day.
The origins of the Greek word τύραννος are explained by various theories.\(^1\) The first mention of tyranny is found in an epigram written in the middle of the seventh century by Archilochus. Hippias of Elis (c. 485-415 B.C.E.) also later credited the poet with the first use of the word.\(^2\) At first, τύραννος was used interchangeably with the word βασιλεύς, but eventually a distinction was made when the former came to possess negative connotations. For tyranny is an entirely different creature from monarchy, and this differentiation eventually caused a turn for the worse in which tyrannos gained all of the present negative connotations.

Modern scholarship views Greek tyranny as falling into two periods: the first being those tyrannies that were held before 400 B.C.E., and the second, those that fall after this date.\(^3\) In the first period, tyrannos is used to describe a reaction to the aristocratic and oligarchic control over the city-states. After the fifth-century B.C.E.,

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tyrants become traditionally regarded as an arbitrary and despotic ruler. Modern negative connotations, such as boundless ambition and greed, are appropriate for the second period of Greek tyranny. In the fifth century B.C.E., a tyranny meant absolute power or, on the other hand, ill-gotten and ill-used power. These tyrannies of the second period agree most often with the modern connotations of the word tyrant.

The best example of the accord of Greek and modern views of tyranny with one another is the historian Thucydides in his History of the Peloponnesian War. Unlike Herodotus, Thucydides makes a clear and consistent differentiation between tyrants and kings. Those whom we refer to as tyrants, Thucydides also names as tyrannoi (for example, the tyrants of Athens, Samos, Syracuse, Gela, Rhegium, etc.) and accordingly

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4 Ferrill, p. 385.
5 White, p. 4.
6 Herodotus, in general, employs the term τύραννος mainly as a neutral term and as an alternative to the word βασιλέας. He uses both terms for barbarian (Alexander I of Macedon (VIII.142), Arganthonius of Tartessus (I.163), Croesus of Lydia (I.6), and Cyaxares of Media (I.73)), and Greek rulers alike, for oriental rulers and satraps, for any form of one-man rule without any implied judgement on the form of rule itself. Herodotus terms Aristophilides, the tyrant of Taras (III.136), Telys, the tyrant of Kroton and Sybaris (V.44), Skythes of Zankle (VI.23), and, finally, Aristagoras, the tyrant of Miletos (V.35), all as βασιλεας, or makes reference to their kingship. Arthur Ferrill argues that Herodotus has an overwhelming hostility towards tyranny and that the historian never uses τύραννος and βασιλεας as synonyms. Ferrill states that in the eight times that basileus refers to a tyrant, four of these examples are in direct discourse: “The fact that these notorious tyrants are referred to in direct speech as basileus suggests that the word “tyrant” had an evil connotation and could not be used in direct address to a ruler. It certainly does not indicate that Herodotus used the terms basileus and tyrannos synonymously and interchangeably. When Herodotus refers to Polycrates, Periander, Cypselus, and Gelon in his own words (rather than in direct discourse) he calls them tyrannos, not basileus” (p. 388). Ferrill goes on to say, “when Herodotus used the word tyrannos, he used it with the connotation of arbitrary, despotic, and evil government, and he was very consistent in using it that way” (p. 391). On the other hand, K.H. Waters argues that “this failure to distinguish a foreign-imposed ruler from a native despot is quite in Herodotus’ manner, and underlines the fact that the ‘constitutional’ aspect of tyranny interested him very little. Similarly, he characterizes by the same terms persons who may well be legally monarchs, e.g. by heredity; τύραννος and βασιλεας, together with their congener of abstract or verbal form are completely interchangeable, with μοναρχος occasionally substituting for either” (Kenneth H. Waters. 1971. “Herodotos on Tyrants and Despots: A Study in Objectivity.” Historia Einzelschriften. Vol. 15. p. 6).

those we call kings, he also terms as kings (βασιλεύς).\(^8\) Thucydides’ clearly defined classifications were continued in the ancient world and even to the present.\(^9\) The historian defines tyrants as usurpers (in contrast with hereditary kingships) who have no regard for the law, but only for their own personal interests.\(^10\) The story of the murder of the tyrant Hipparchus by Harmodius and Aristogeiton in 514 B.C.E., illustrates how tyranny was viewed in the fifth century B.C.E. This murder exemplifies how tyranny seldom endured to the third generation, due to the latter generations being corrupted by their inherited power. Tyranny was a transitional government which lacked the legitimacy of the old monarchy “and though the first tyrant could claim to represent the popular will, he had received no mandate from the people to hand on his position like an estate to his heir, who was always inferior in prestige and usually in ability to his predecessor.”\(^11\) The tyrant slayers, however, struck due to personal reasons and not based at all on any political reasons.\(^12\) Hipparchus was slain due to his increasing greed and depravity, while Hippias, as Thucydides asserts, became the real tyrant on account of his

\(^8\) Thucydides refers to the following list as kings: Mythological kings (Atreus, Theseus, etc): I.9, II.15; Persian kings: I.13-14; Spartan kings: I.20, 79, 89, and 114; and Macedonian kings: I.57, II.29. For more examples see Parker, p.164.

\(^9\) Parker, p.164.


\(^12\) Yet Thucydides contradicts himself when he states that the tyrant-slayers after the rebuke of Harmodius’ sister planned to murder not Hipparchus who had inflicted the insult, but rather Hippias in order to end the tyranny. Both of these men since they are aiming to destroy the tyranny by murdering Hippias “act not strictly for personal revenge as would be natural in view of the erotic nature Thucydides imputes to the crime. In fact, even by killing Hiparchos, the tyrannicides do not actapolitically because they aimed at Hippias first. Thus, in Thucydides, contrary to his own pronouncement about them, the tyrannicides act politically, just as was popularly believed. (If, on the other hand, as the popular tradition held and Thucydides opposed, Hipparchos was the tyrant, the purpose of the tyrannicides was also political, since they had at least succeeded in “loosening the tyranny” of Hiparchos.)” (Brian M. Lavelle. 1993. “The Sorrow and the Pity: A Prolegomenon to a History of Athens Under the Peisistratids, c. 560-510 B.C.” Historia Einzelschriften. Vol. 80. p.54-55).
suspicious and oppressive nature after the murder of his brother. Hippias was also eventually removed from both his tyranny and Athens with the help of Sparta, yet Thucydides by his account of the Peisistratids had shaped the face of tyranny. The presence of tyrant-slayers now becomes an additional facet of the *topos* of tyranny.

I.B: *Tyrannus* and *Rex*: Tarquinius Superbus:

The transition from Greek to Roman tyranny was not at all problematical. The Greek influence upon the earliest Roman historians allowed the Greek *tyrannus* to become associated with the Roman *rex*. Livy’s description of Tarquinius Superbus (I.49-60) best represents how the Roman king and the Greek tyrant were equivalent to each other. It is generally believed that Roman hatred of monarchy was a result of their experiences during the rule of Tarquinius Superbus (circa 6th century B.C.E.). While the other kings of Rome are treated especially well in their tradition, the term *rex* was

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13 VI.54: Πεισιστράτου γὰρ γηραιοῦ τελευτήσαντος ἐν τῇ τυραννίδι οὐχ Ἰππαρχος, ὡς περ οἱ πολλοὶ οἴονται, ἀλλὰ Ἰππίας πρεσβύτατος ἦν ἐσχε τὴν ἀρχήν.

VI.55: Ὅτι δὲ πρεσβύτατος ἦν Ἰππίας ἤρξεν, εἰδὼς μὲν καὶ ἀκοὴ ἀκριβεῖστερον ἄλλων ἰσχυρίζομαι...

VI.59: Τοιοῦτο μὲν τροπὸ δι᾽ ἐρωτηκὴν λύσῃ ἢ σε ἀρχὴ τῆς ἐπιβουλῆς καὶ ἢ ἀλλογιστὸς τόλμα ἐκ τοῦ παραχρήμα περίδεοις Ἄρμοδιῳ καὶ Ἀριστογιατόνι ἐγένετο. Τοῖς δ᾽ Ἀθηναίοις ἀπελευθέρα μετὰ τοῦτο ἡ τυραννίς κατέστη...

It is also interesting to look at Herodotus (V.55-65), who describes the murder of Hippias rather quickly, but is rather detailed in his version of how the tyranny became so oppressive that it demanded Sparta’s intervention in 510 B.C.E. Thucydides has to reassert who was indeed tyrant since “…the murder of Hipparchus was in fifth century Athens a controversial issue. For one party Hipparchus had been a tyrant, and by his death freedom was restored to the city. For the other party Hippias had been tyrant, so that Harmodius and Aristogiton merely made the tyranny more oppressive until the Alemaeoneidae with Spartan help came to the rescue. This latter version was of course proposed by the popular party” (T.R. Fitzgerald. 1957. “The Murder of Hipparchus: A Reply.” Historia. Vol. 6. p. 277).

14 Andrew Erskine states the following on how *rex* gained the negative connotations from *tyrannus* as seen in the example of Tarquinius Superbus: “Tarquinius the ‘Greek tyrant’ developed comparatively late, the product of a merging of the Roman past with Greek ideas...In the Greek world hostility tended to concentrate on the tyrant rather than the king, but Latin does not have the distinction between tyrants and kings. Consequently because there is no Latin word for tyrant, it becomes easier for *rex* to absorb some of the bad connotations of the Greek τιραννος, something which Tarquinius’ dual role as *rex* and τιραννος will have helped to promote” (Andrew Erskine. 1991. “Hellenistic Monarchy and Roman Political Invective.” Classical Quarterly, New Series. Vol. 41. p. 120).

15 Cicero, *De Republica*, 1.62: Scipio: Quid? Tu non uides unius inportunitate et superbia Tarquinii nomen huic populo in odium uezisse regium?

*Laelius*: Udeo uero, inquit.
further affected by the last king of Rome, Tarquinius Superbus, whose tyrannical reign brought an end to the monarchy of Rome. This belief, however, is not completely accurate. The account of his reign in Livy contains several positive points: for example, he is praised as an excellent general, and for his building projects, such as the temple of Jupiter and the Cloaca Maxima.\textsuperscript{16} Such positive aspects are overlooked in the tradition due to the domination of the characteristics of the Greek tyrant. Before these characteristics, the Roman \textit{rex} was merely a single ruler. The term never made reference to the ruler’s personality, while the Greek description of a tyrant relied greatly upon personality (especially when such personality was oppressively despotic and highly immoral). The Greek tyrant enhanced the tradition of Livy’s Tarquinius Superbus as \textit{rex}, as the historian uses the typical qualities (anger, hatred, and pride) to emphasize the king as a tyrant.\textsuperscript{17}

It is uncertain when the legend of Tarquinius Superbus became merged with the Greek tradition of tyranny. The earliest surviving negative reference concerning his reign was by Cassius Hemina sometime during the mid-second century B.C.E.\textsuperscript{18} Until the middle of the second century, the story of Tarquinius Superbus developed under a Greek

\textsuperscript{16} Tarquinius as a good general: I.53; and Tarquinius’ building projects: I.53, 55-56. There are many doubts as to whether these buildings should be actually attributed to Tarquinius based on archaeological evidence. Such debate does not affect this argument since in the ancient sources these buildings were unanimously ascribed to Tarquinius and what matters here is how the ancients perceived his reign.

\textsuperscript{17} Livy, I.LIV.7: seu ira, seu odio, seu superbia…

\textsuperscript{18} Fragment 15: \textit{Serv. (auctus) ad Aen. 12, 603}. Cassius Emina ait, Tarquinium Superbum, cum cloacas populum facere coegisset et ob hanc iniuriam multi se suspendio necarent, iussisse corpora eorum cruci affigi. tunc primum turpe habitum est mortem sibi consciscere (Hermann Peter. 1914-1916. \textit{Historicorum Romanorum Reliquiae}. Lipsiae: B.G. Teubneri.). R.M. Ogilvie in his commentary on Livy states the following: “Such must have been the development of the legend of Tarquin down to the middle of the second century. The accident of time which had Tarquin into a tyrant on a Greek modal was fortunate for the philosophical historians who in their concern to fit Roman history to a cyclic mould welcomed a tyranny already made for the purpose. They did little more than supply further tints suitable to a real tyrant. There was little room for an historian to exercise invention once the main outline was established, and Cassius Hemina had the same material in much the same form as L. retells it” (Ogilvie, R.M. 1965. \textit{A Commentary on Livy: Books 1-5}. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p. 195).
influence. Two elements of the story of Tarquinius support a theory of hellenization: first, the story of L. Iunius Brutus’ assassination of the king is very analogous to the story of the Greek tyrant slayers; and second, the story of Tarquinius’ son’s message to his father asking how to deal with the Gabii. The king answers his son by strolling into a garden and striking off the heads of poppies. This story finds a parallel in Herodotus’ story where Thrasyboulos teaches tyranny to Periander by cutting down great stalks of wheat. Both of these stories illustrate how “Livy’s Tarquinius is really a Greek tyrant in Roman dress.”

I.C: The Greek Tyrant and Roman Political Invective:

After the expulsion of Tarquinius and the establishment of the Republic, the use of rex as political invective antedated the use of tyrannus and, “although the evidence is rather meager, seems to have been preferred to the charge of tyrannus in Roman political invective during the years immediately following the Second Punic War.” Later under Hellenistic influence, by the second century B.C.E., both rex and tyrannus were being used interchangeably as political invective. The Romans, being well acquainted with Greek history, certainly knew how tyranny arose in Greece and applied this knowledge to their own political situation: the concept of the Greek τύραννος and the Roman rex came

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19 “Tarquin had to be painted in the true Greek colours of a tyrant. This hellenization of the character of Tarquin facilitated the insertion of whole incidents from Herodotus and other Greek sources to supplement the meagre notices of Roman tradition” (Ogilvie, p. 195).
20 This story probably developed in the latter half of the second century B.C.E. when Accius’ Brutus was written and probably when his statue was placed on the Capitol. For more information see: Andrew Erskine, p. 110; and Stefan Weinstock. 1971. Divus Julius. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
23 Ibid, p. 156.
24 Ibid, p. 159.
to represent a similar stereotype.\textsuperscript{25} One of the first examples of the accord of rex and tyrannus is witnessed in the accusations by P. Scipio Nasica that Tiberius Gracchus was seeking the kingship in 133 B.C.E.\textsuperscript{26} In Plutarch’s Tiberius Gracchus, the word used in this accusation is τύραννος, which suggests that the Latin word actually used by Nasica was tyrannus.\textsuperscript{27} This example of Tiberius Gracchus demonstrates how the Romans refer to those who sought the kingship as tyrannus, whereas the Greeks term their unjust kings as tyrants. This charge against Tiberius Gracchus of seeking the kingship and tyrannus in their use as political invective designate the same thing.\textsuperscript{28}

Such invective added to the political charge of tyranny the secondary significance of paradigmatic behavior, influenced by characteristic vices: vis, superbia, libido, and crudelitas.\textsuperscript{29} These four characteristics originate from the traditional view of the tyrant and represent a tyrant’s worst behaviors. Vis refers to any use of force, such as the force needed to gain the tyranny or force applied to another citizen. Superbia (arrogance and insolence), besides recalling Tarquinius’ cognomen, is comparable to the Greek tyrants’ hybris. The excessive desires of one man, including examples of sexual lust, is denoted by libido. And, finally, crudelitas does not merely refer to the cruel acts of a tyrant, but

\begin{footnotes}
\item[25] Ibid, p. 156.
\item[26] Cicero, De Republica, II. 49: Habetis igitur primum ortum tyranni; nam hoc nomen Graeci regis iniusti esse uoluerunt; nostri quidem omnes reges uocitaue uoluerunt, qui soli in populos perpetuam potestatem haberent. Itaque et Spurius Cassius et M. Manlius et Spurius Maelius regnum occupare uoluerunt, qui soli et modo Tib. Gracchus…
\item[27] Sallust, Bellum Jugurthinum, XXXI.7: Occiso Ti. Graccho, quem regnum parare aiebunt, in plebem Romanam quaestiones habitae sunt.
\item[28] Dunkle, p. 159.
\item[29] Ibid, p. 151. The author however adds a warning to how such charges are being thrown around in Roman political invective: “However, the sameness of vocabulary (vis, superbia, libido, crudelitas) and the frequency of its use in these charges of tyrannical behavior made against political opponents show that the authors of this invective are dealing in shibboleths and are more concerned with arousing the indignation of their audience than being completely truthful. The extravagant libels which these charges often represent are another reason to suspect their complete accuracy.” (p. 166)
\end{footnotes}
is usually used as a standard epitaph for the tyrant. During the late Republic, Roman orators used these characteristics as a means of deprecating their political opponents, both politically and personally. The best example of tyranny in Roman political invective is observed in Cicero’s orations against Verres. In his prosecution, Cicero aimed to present Verres as an evil tyrant to the jury by using the terms *rex* and *tyrannus* and by describing his various vices: condemning Roman citizens to floggings, death, and numerous accusations of rape. Cicero’s charges of tyrannical behavior were not limited to Verres; in a similar manner he inveighed against Clodius, Piso, Gabinus, and Antony. Lastly, these charges of *rex*, *tyrannus*, *vis*, *superbia*, *libido*, and *crudelitas* were not only by Cicero, but also by other orators who took advantage of them for political and personal reasons. Through exaggerations and rhetorical invention, orators were able to make a political enemy into a tyrant by presenting him as one to his audience.

**I.D: Caesar and Hellenistic Monarchy:**

By the time of Caesar, the tyrannical *rex* was a stock character often manipulated in the rhetorical tradition to illustrate an unjust ruler. It is generally thought that in

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30 A passage from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* describes how orators force their audiences into hatred: Ab aduersariorum persona beniuolentia captabitur si eos in odium, in inuidiam, in contemptionem adducemus. In odium rapiemus si quid eorum spurce, *superbe*, perfidiose, *crudeliter*, confidenter, malitiose, flagitious factum proferemus. In inuidiam trahemus si uim, si potentiam, si factionem, diuittias, incontinentiam, nobilitatem, clientelas, hospitium, sodalitatem, adfinitates aduersariorum proferemus, et his adiumentis magis quem ueritati eos confidere aperiemus. In contemptionem adducemus si inertiam, ignauiam, desidiam, luxuriam aduersariorum proferemus (I. 8).

31 2.3.77: *eandem istius, qui se regem Siculorum esse dicebat, licentiam libidinemque fuisset cognoscite.*

2.1.82: *sed tyrannum libidinosum crudelissimumque praebueris*

32 2.1.122-23: *in plebem vero Romanam utrum superbia prius commemorem an crudelitatem? Sine dubio crudelitas gravior est atque atrocior.*

2.2.9: *sed cum perferre non possent luxuriem, crudelitatem, avaritiam, superbia, cum omnia sua commoda, iura, beneficiam senatorum populi Romani unius scelere ac libidine perdiderant…*

33 2.4.116: *mitto adhibitam uim ingenuis, matres familias uiolatas…*

These are just a small number of accusations by Cicero against Verres. For a greater list, see Dunkle, p. 161-162.

34 “The political arena is, of course, where we might expect to find such hostility, but what is significant is that it is largely limited to politics. The unfavourable sense of the term has not, as we have seen, permeated
Roman political thought the word *rex* aroused deep-rooted hatred and great prejudice, but this proves false if we look at examples from the first century B.C.E. *Rex* and its synonyms are most commonly used neutrally to describe legitimate kings or Roman institutions such as the *rex sacrorum* and *rex sacrificorum*, priests who were said to have taken over the religious matters from the Roman kings.\(^{35}\) In his *De Republica*, Cicero describes how tyranny came into being when Tarquinius Superbus began to misuse the powers he already possessed.\(^{36}\) For this reason, it is thought that the title of *rex* came to be deeply hated by the Romans and used as political invective centuries later.\(^{37}\)

There are several factors that allowed for this hostile development of *rex* as political invective. When the Republic first came into contact with the Hellenistic monarchies, hostility towards kingship was already present. Such an attitude towards kings, however, was deeply ambiguous; for example, Hiero of Syracuse had a long and friendly relationship with Rome.\(^{38}\) Other relationships, however, created an increase in hostility towards kingship, especially during the second century when Rome was fighting several wars with eastern kingdoms. Such conflicts caused the antagonism towards kings to increase, but it was further encouraged by Roman propaganda; however this was not

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\(^{35}\) For examples, see Erskine, pp. 111-114.

\(^{36}\) II.51: quare prima sit haec forma et species et origo tyranni inuenta nobis in ea re publica, quam auspicio Romulus condiderit...ut, quem ad modum Tarquinius, non nouam potestem nactus, sed, quam habebat, usus inistue totum genus hoc regiae ciuitatris eueterit...

\(^{37}\) II.47: uidetisne igitur, ut de rege dominus exitterit uniusque utio genus rei publicae ex bono in derrumum conversum sit? hic est enim dominus populi, quem Graeci tyrannum uocant; II.52: iis enim regis quadraginta annis et ducentis paulo cum interregnis fere amplius praeteritis expulsoque Tarquinio tantum odium populum Romanum regalis nominis tenuit, quantum tenuerat post obitum uel potius excessum Romuli desiderium. itaque ut tum carere rege, sic pulso Tarquinio nomen regis audire non poterat.

the “deep-seated hatred of the *nomens regis* described by Cicero. For the hostility to the foreign king to become transferred to the invective of the Roman political arena would take time.”*39* This transmission would occur during the century of the Republic’s decline and reach its culmination with the supremacy and assassination of Julius Caesar.

Caesar’s rise to power caused many to accuse him of seeking the monarchy and they directed against him the standard invective. But his assassination left his contemporaries and modern historians with questions concerning his political intentions to consolidate his position of authority. Historians have often viewed the political situation in 44 B.C.E., as Caesar seeking a monarchy while publicly rejecting such goals. Had he possessed that ambition, his monarchy would have been modeled on those of the Hellenistic east.*40* In 44 B.C.E., however, Caesar rejected the title of king, announcing that he was not *rex*, but merely Caesar, to the great crowd assembled.*41* Caesar again rejected the trappings of kingship when he refused the diadem offered to him by Marc Antony at the Lupercalia.*42* The diadem was a typical attribute of kingship in Hellenistic monarchies, yet Caesar in his rejection realized that he need not seek the outward appearance when he already held the substance of power.*43*

Cicero makes reference to Greek terms, ideas, and people in order to show that Caesar’s seeking of the kingship was similar to what the Greeks experienced under the

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*39* Erskine, p. 118.  
*41* Suetonius, *Divers Julius*, 79: *neque ex eo infamiam affectati etiam regii nominis discutere ualuit, quamquam et plebei regem se salutanti ‘Caesarem se, non regem esse’ responderit…*  
*43* Carson, p. 52.
tyrants. Cicero, in his response to Caesar seeking *regnum*, shows clearly the Greek influence upon Roman thought concerning tyranny by quoting Euripides. Rome’s hostility towards kingship and tyranny was confirmed later when a need arose to justify the assassination of Caesar. The audience applauded Brutus as a tyrannicide during the performance of Accius’ *Tereus* when the play and its numerous references to tyranny recalled to their mind other heroic tyrant-slayers, such as Harmodius and Aristogeiton. Cicero further believes that Caesar was deserving of his death as he sought to be king of the Roman people and that he achieved it by enslaving a state that once was free and ought to have remained free.

**I.D: The Julio-Claudian Tyrants**

After Augustus had firmly established his principate, he finally entrusted the empire that he had built to his successor and stepson, Tiberius. He, Tiberius, along with his successor, Caligula, and later on, Nero, would be remembered as the ‘tyrants’ of the Julio-Claudian reign. These three emperors share many similarities with Domitian (the subject of our study), most especially in the ways that ancient sources present them. These similarities in the sources are hardly surprising when one notes that the Julio-

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44 *Ad Atticus*: IX.7 and 10; X.8; and XIII.28 and 37.

45 *Ad Brutus*, I.16: nonne hoc est in easdem tenebras recidisse, *<si>* ab eo qui tyranni nomen adsciiuit sibi, cum in Graecis ciuitiibus liberi tyrannorum oppressis illis eodem supplicio adficiantur, petitur ut uindices atque oppressores dominationis salui sint?

46 Erskine, p. 114 and 120.

47 Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 16.2.3; Philippics, 1.36.

48 *De Officiis*, III.83: ecce tibi, qui rex populi Romani dominusque omnium gentium esse concupiuerit iisque perfecerit! Hanc cupiditatem si honestam quis esse dicit, amens est…Qui autem fatetur honestum non esse in ea ciuitate, quae libera fuerit quaecue esse debeat, regnare, sed eis, qui id facere possint, esse utile, qua hunc obiurgatione aut quo potius conuiucio a tanto errore coner auellere? Potest enim, di immortales! Cuicquam esse utile foedissimum et taeerrimum parricidium patriae, quamusis is, qui se eo obstrinxerit, ab oppressis ciuiibus parens nominetur?
Claudian emperors and Domitian were described mostly by the same authors; in particular, by the historians, Tacitus and Cassius Dio, and the biographer Suetonius. Tiberius, some have claimed rightly, seems to have been modeled by Tacitus upon his depiction of the tyrant Domitian; furthermore, to a lesser degree Nero and Caligula follow the pattern of the stock tyrant. All of these emperors have many undeniable resemblances to one another, such as, for example, the idea of a turning point in their reign. Tiberius and Domitian also share a “temperamental reserve, the preference for the Empire’s wider interests at the expense of the aristocracy; and there was Domitian’s well-known interest in Tiberius to suggest a sympathy between the two.” And most importantly, in these works there are a number of verbal echoes of the four main characteristics of the stock tyrant: vis, superbia, crudelitas, and libido. After the death


50 A major similarity between these four emperors is the idea of a turning point from a reasonable rule to an oppressive regime. It must also be noted that the sources did not believe that the turning point was a radical change into a tyrant, but merely that the emperors no longer made attempts to hide their natural disposition towards cruelty. Ancient sources, not least of all these writers who are mentioned, believed that character was fixed. In their works, therefore, exaggeration and innuendos are used in order for the portrayal of the emperors to be homogeneous. The use of turning points allows for this same factor. Under the influence of his praetorian prefect Sejanus, Tiberius became a tyrant in 23 C.E. (Tacitus, Annales, IV.1). At the beginning of his reign, Caligula was the golden prince desired by the people (Dio Cassius, LIX.6.7 and Suetonius, Life of Caligula, XIII.1), but after his serious sickness in October of 37 C.E., and due to the increasing absolutism of his monarchy, he became worse than even Tiberius (Dio Cassius, LIX.3-5). Finally, though the senate and the people of Rome had expected a good reign (Dio Cassius, LXI.3-4), Nero, after Burrus had died, Seneca forced into retirement, and Tigellinus made one of two praetorian guards, was free to practice any licentious behavior he wished. Suetonius describes how gradually Nero’s vices grew until he no longer could hide them and broke out into the worst of crimes (Life of Nero, XXVII.1-2). Domitian’s reign also falls into two periods, as in the case of these mentioned Julian emperors. Before the uprising of Antoninus Saturninus, from 81 to 88 C.E., Domitian’s policy was reasonable and mild. After this revolt in 89 C.E., Domitian, aroused by his suspicions, became oppressive in his rule.

51 Walker, p. 217-218. Suetonius states that the emperor Domitian never had a care for history or poetry as he used to read nothing but the memoirs and acts of Tiberius (Life of Domitian, 20: numquam tamen aut historiae carminibusue noscendis operam ullam aut stilo uel necessario dedit. Praeter commentarios et acta Tiberi Caesaris nihil lectitabant…)

52 The following is the briefest of lists of these verbal echoes concerning the four emperors mentioned above in the works of Suetonius and Tacitus:
of Domitian death in 96 C.E., the memory of him as a tyrant clung to their writings, so that not only in their works concerned with the Flavian emperors, but also concerning the Julio-Claudian emperors, the stock tyrant was purposely used in the construction of Roman tyranny.

**I.E: Conclusion:**

The question that tyranny raised in ancient political thought was whether the tyrant actually took the place of the king or, as Aristotle asked, did he merely play the part of a king.\(^53\) Such a question arose due to the origins of tyranny, “because he accedes to power more as an impostor than an embodiment of the traditional king.”\(^54\) Tyranny from Archilochus to Thucydides had a varied past; at first, the tyrant was seen as a mere usurper with none of the modern negative connotations attached. Eventually, though, tyrants came to be seen as political monsters and great threats to the polis; however, “in the popular imagination, the great freedom that the tyrant took from his power gave him a great potential for virtue. He could be benevolent and generous…. But it was the tyrant’s ruthlessness that most characteristically articulated his distinctive freedom…. Tyrants were the masters both of their virtues and their vices.”\(^55\) Literally speaking, a tyrant

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\(^{53}\) Aristotle, *Politics*, 1314a: ἐστι δὲ λαβείν αὐτὸν ἐκ τῆς θηρακας τῆς τῶν βασιλείων. ὅπερ γὰρ τὴς βασιλείας εἰς τρόπος τῆς θηρακας τὸ ποιεῖν τὴν ἁρχὴν τυραννικοτέραν, οὕτω τὰς τυραννίδος σωφρίτη ποιεῖν αὐτήν την βασιλείας ἀλλάξας, ἐν φυλάττοντα μόνον, τὴν δυναμιν, ὅποιος ἁρχὴ μὴ μόνον βουλοµένων ἀλλὰ καὶ μὴ βουλοµένων ποιήσεις γὰρ καὶ τούτο μὲν ὅπερ ὑπόθεσιν δεῖ µένειν, τὰ δ’ ἀλλὰ τὰ µὲν ποιεῖν τὰ δὲ δοκεῖν ὑποκρινόμενον τὸ βασιλικὸν καλὸς.


could be a stock character in whom political and moral excesses were realized and often punished.

The Hellenistic and earliest period of Roman history saw a rising number of tyrannies. Due to this increase in the number of tyrannies and to a rhetorical tradition that used the theme of tyranny for educational purposes, tyranny was an active concept under the Roman Empire. Augustus has often been compared in modern scholarship to Peisistratus, in that both established a monarchy under the pretense of a republic. Augustus, moreover, like Peisistratus, “was careful, especially at first, to observe the outward forms of the constitution which he overthrew, so that the realities of the situation would not be patent to everybody.” After the death of Augustus, the historian Tacitus was able to remark that “there remained few who had beheld the Republic and that, in the quiet of a long reign, beneath the disguise of the old forms, the transition to monarchy had been accomplished.” Later under the Julio-Claudians,

the power of the Princeps became increasingly absolute, and, being absolute, it might at any time become autocratic, despotic, tyrannical. And if from the point of view of libertas the great problem of the Late Republic was to prevent limited power from becoming absolute, the great problem of the Early Empire was to prevent absolute power from

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56 “The Hellenistic and early Roman periods saw many more tyrants than did the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. During this later period of tyranny, cities on the mainland of Greece, in Asia Minor, and on the islands of the Aegean, as well as those further distant, all fell under autocratic rule at one time or another. Unsettled times brought forth “strongmen.” The phenomenon was much longer-lived than we might expect: Strabo writes of a tyrant named Nicias who wielded power in Cos until 30 B.C., while on the Greek mainland, the family of C. Julius Eurycles ran Sparta, with some interruptions, until the reign of Nero” (Nigel M. Kennell. 1997. “Herodes Atticus and the Rhetoric of Tyranny.” Classical Philology. Vol. 92, No. 4. p. 351).
57 The Elder Seneca, Controversiae, I.7; II.5; IV.7; and IX.4.
59 Ure, p. 37.
becoming despotic. This was the crux, and this was the ultimate cause of the conflict between *libertas* and *principatus*.\(^{61}\)

The senatorial class opposed such a loss of their *libertas*, since they suffered more so than any other class under a tyrannical emperor. For this reason and many others, it was always the senatorial class who were the first to reproach a *princeps* as a tyrant. It was this class that was forced to ask what the difference is between kingship and tyranny: *quid interest inter tyrannum ac regem*?\(^{62}\) The answer to that question depends upon how the king or the tyrant makes use of his power.

From the Greeks, the negative portrayal of tyranny would be established in the popular imagination of the Romans. The last king of Rome, Tarquinius Superbus, was molded into a Greek tyrant by intermingling the idea of tyrant and king. During Republican Rome, the accusation of tyranny was common political invective against ambitious Romans, for example, Julius Caesar. With the formation of the principate, the idea of tyranny and kingship was reunited and best exemplified in the Roman consciousness by the Julio-Claudians: Tiberius, Gaius, and Nero. These three emperors, it was believed, perverted Augustus’ *principate* into tyranny, creating the basis by which Domitian, the last of the Flavian emperors, could be portrayed as a tyrant. The representation of Domitian as a tyrant is, therefore, the result then of several centuries of development.

The political invective of the Silver Age makes great use of the *topos* of tyranny. After Augustus, there had been too many emperors who seemed to later observers to compete with one another to outdo their predecessors in cruelty and depravity. By the time of the tyrant Domitian, there were many aspects of the principate to criticize and the

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\(^{62}\) Seneca, *De Clementia*, I.XI.4.
opportunity to do so came with the new, but still somewhat limited, freedom of speech under Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian. The historian Tacitus, the biographer Suetonius, and even the Younger Pliny in his Epistles inject their opinions and feelings of the emperor in their works by means of innuendo. This exploration of the political invective and *topos* of tyranny by these three writers shows how each author contrived to represent the emperor Domitian as a tyrant. Therefore, this thesis has been divided into chapters according to these three writers who had lived under Domitian (Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, and Tacitus), and not thematically. It is our purpose to show how each individual author used this *topos* of tyranny and political invective to fulfill their goal of portraying Domitian as a tyrant. The themes of the *topos* of tyranny are indeed important, but not as important as how the author uses these themes to make a tyrant.

Finally, modern scholarship has been lately concerned with a revision of Domitian and previous assessments concerning the view of his reign. A revisionist history of his reign is not the primary goal of this thesis, but merely a by-product from discussing the current scholarly trends. Instead, the focus of this paper is to use the reign of Domitian as a test case to show how Roman authors used the negative connotations of tyranny as a means by which to fulfill the Senate’s *damnatio memoriae*. Domitian represents the culmination of several centuries of historical thought concerning tyranny, and those authors, who wrote of his reign in such a light, were consciously making the decision to adopt such conceptions. In their creation of the emperor as a tyrant, set characteristics of tyranny (e.g. greed, cruelty, and oppression) were manipulated to align Domitian with earlier tyrants of both the Greek and Roman world, who would have

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formed part of the collective educational background of Roman elite readers. This audience was induced by preconceived notions of the evil tyrant to attach these negative connotations upon the Flavian emperor. To make Domitian conform to such precepts, historical truth had to be exaggerated slightly, and while discussing how Domitian was fashioned into the role of a tyrant some revisionist work will inevitably occur.
Chapter Two: The Definition of a Tyrant

Hybris begets a tyrant.
Sophocles, Oedipus Tyrannus, 873.

II.A: Aristotle’s Tyrant:

Aristotle’s Politics defines three different types of tyranny: first, those that were established in barbarian countries (generally referred to as a form of kingship); second, an elective tyranny as seen in Greece; and, finally, the traditional sort of the selfish and greedy tyrant. Aristotle describes how the third kind of tyranny originates either with a king transgressing beyond the established powers, or elected officials exploiting their offices, or military leaders seeking greater powers. A tyrant, according to Aristotle, is a monarch or any other such leader not necessarily one who has usurped the power who rules despotically for his own personal advantage instead of governing for the common interest as a king does. A tyrant attempts to keep his people meek by policies that limit their political power. Because there is no one to curb his excesses, the tyrant is devoid

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64 See the following sections: III.1285a-b; III. 1295a; V.1310b-1311a; V.1313a-1315b.
65 Such an elective tyranny is termed an aisymneteia by Aristotle and he provides only Pittacus as an example. Romer believes that Aristotle seems to have created the definition of elective tyranny and he seems to have never “doubted that Pittacus was technically a tyrant but was pressed to distinguish the apparent benevolence of Pittacus’ rule from still more repressive regimes. The need to classify separately the good and bad autocrat arises from the considerations of fourth-century theoreticians who viewed kingship and tyranny as distinct and opposed categories of one-man rule” (p. 46)
66 Such oppressive means include discouraging education, employing spies (usually slaves and women), levying huge taxes, confiscation of property, creating work projects and wars to keep the people busy, banning clubs and other forms of gathering, and finally, create a general mistrust among the people (1313b-1314a).
of all virtue. It is this last form of tyranny that most aptly applies to contemporary depictions of Domitian’s reign, especially that of Suetonius in his Life of Domitian.

In this chapter we do not mean to imply that during the composition of his biography of Domitian Suetonius had Aristotle’s Politics by his side and crafted his work to follow explicitly the model of tyranny Aristotle had laid out. Yet Aristotle’s views have had a great impact on Greek and Roman thought and even present Western thought. Aristotle’s traditional tyrant is rather similar to the characteristics of the negative tyrant discussed in Chapter 1 (vis, superbia, libido, and crudelitas). Because he is utterly depraved and wicked, the tyrant lacks restraint over his cruelty and his drive for pleasure. Aristotle does not approve of such a form of rule, and he encourages rulers not to become the traditional tyrant. He, therefore, advises tyrants on two ways in which to preserve their tyranny: one, for the tyrant to become more ‘kingly’, which may destroy the form of tyranny; or two, for the tyrant to become an absolute traditional tyrant. In Aristotle’s discussion of tyranny, common characteristics of tyranny are seen that define how tyranny was viewed in Greco-Roman tradition.

In the writing of his Lives, therefore, Suetonius would also have been influenced by such ideas. For if he had intended to present Domitian as a despotic emperor, he would have made sure to fulfill the traditional model of the evil tyrant. Although Suetonius seems at times to have a lack of interest in political analysis, he does have an

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67 “For Aristotle seems to regard tyranny as such a serious deviation in itself that it immediately lapses into the worst and most perverted variety; in fact, it is even by definition impossible to be a moderate tyrant” (Karin Blomquist. 1998. *The Tyrant in Aristotle’s Politics: Theoretical Assumptions and Historical Background*. Stockholm: Almquist and Wiksell International. p. 9).

68 The origins of Suetonian biography, especially whether they are or are not Hellenistic (and, therefore, how much of Aristotle is present in Suetonius), are still contested. For example, W. Steidle argues that in their subject matter and treatment, Suetonius’ Lives are entirely Roman, but in their form they are parallel to Greek standards (Wolf Steidle. 1951. *Sueton und die antike Biographie*. München: Beck). For more information, see: R.G. Lewis. 1991. “Suetonius’ ‘Caesares’ and their Literary Antecedents.” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*. II.33.5. pp. 3623-3674.
interest in his biographies of showing how individual emperors conducted their imperial reigns; especially how they conform to ideals about the behavior of a ruler. It is the goal of this chapter, therefore, to analyze Suetonius’ work with the intention of showing his attempt to portray Domitian as a tyrant using Aristotle’s definition as a guideline.69

II.B: A Tyrant’s Goal is His Own Pleasure:

As mentioned above, the tyrant differs from the king in that he pays no heed to common interest, unless it is to his own personal benefit: a monarch’s goal is all that is noble, while the tyrant aims for all that is pleasurable. Suetonius’ Domitian seeks his own pleasure in two ways, sexually and financially. In the introduction of his Life of Domitian, Suetonius states that even as an urban praetor Domitian exercised an unrestrained power, foreshadowing his behavior as an emperor.70 At this time, he seduced several married women until he forced Domitia Longina, wife of Aelius Lamia, into marriage with himself.71 Domitian eventually would divorce this wife due to her


70 Dom. 1: ceterum omnem uim dominationis tam licenter exercuit ut iam tum qualis futurus esset ostenderet. Ne exequar singula, contractatis multorum uxoribus Domitianam Aelio Lamiae nuptam etiam in matrimonium abduxit.

See also Tacitus (Hist. 4.2, Agr. 7) and Dio (66.3), where Domitian is also accused of being excessively lascivious. Waters states about Domitian’s sex life, the following: “As in the case of his other allegedly vicious tendencies, the blighting generalisations appear to be lacking in support from concrete evidence, or else to refer to behaviour which is smilingly condoned in Titus and others” (p. 59).

71 Vinson believes that this portrayal of Domitia as initially a victim is due to her role as the foil to Domitian, the stock-tyrant. Later negative representations of Domitia were based on a need to slander Domitian’s rule based upon his personal life: “The story of Domitia’s adultery plays a vital role in the retroactive invalidation of Domitian’s regime, for in establishing a pattern of imperial misconduct it reveals that the emperor’s tenure of office was from the very outset a criminal and therefore illegitimate enterprise”
adulterous nature, but would restore her because of his inability to endure their separation, though he alleged that the people had demanded it. Finaly, as emperor, Domitian was allowed to indulge his sexual pleasures, which he termed ‘bed wrestling’, in the manner of a stock-tyrant; yet the evidence provided for Domitian’s lascivious nature is at best superficial.

Suetonius’ description of the imperial finances under Domitian is not very exact and, moreover, contradictory. At first, he praises Domitian for his self-restraint and also his generosity. The emperor refused to accept any inheritances from those who still had remaining children. After Domitian had degenerated into cruelty, Suetonius claims that Domitian had financially drained the treasury through his extensive building program, so

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72 Dom. 3: eandem Paridis histrionis amore deperditam repudiauit intraque breve tempus inpatiens discidii quasi efflagitante populo reduxit.

73 Dom. 22: Libidinis nimiae, assiduitatem concubitus uelut exercitationis genus clinopalen uocabat…

74 Dom. 9: cupiditatis quoque atque avaritiae uix suspicionem ullam aut priuatus umquam aut princeps aliquandum dedit, immo e diuerso magna saepe non abstinentiae modo sed etiam liberalitatis experimenta.

75 Dom. 9: relictas sibi hereditates ab iis quibus liberi erant non receptit.

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he was reduced to plundering: he seized the property from both the living and dead based on any kind of charge, especially if he thought they had spoken or acted against the emperor. And contrary to what Suetonius had stated earlier, Domitian began to confiscate inheritances of unrelated people under the pretext that they had intended to leave their money to Domitian. He exacted severely the *ficus Iudaicus*, changing this annual tax of two denarii on mature men to consist of all people (including women, children, and slaves) from the age of three and up. The harshness of Domitian’s procurators in the collection of this tax caused criticism. Suetonius as young boy remembers when even an old man was dragged before a crowded council to be examined by the procurator in order to see if he was eligible for the tax. Suetonius attributed this financial crisis as one of the many reasons why Domitian became so cruel in the latter part of his rule. The financial crisis, however, is not valid for several reasons, for

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76 Dom. 10: Sed neque in clementiae neque in abstinentiae tenore permansit, et tamen aliquanto celerius ad saeuitiam desciuit quem ad cupiditatem. *Dom.* 12 refers to Domitian’s empty treasury and his need to plunder. Other sources hardly provide any further exact details of Domitian’s treasury. Pliny, (*Pan.* 50.5: qui tam multa concupiscebat, cum haberet superuemacu tam multa) states that Domitian had enough money (especially because of his numerous confiscations), but that he was always wanting more. Dio also comments on Domitian’s confiscations (67.4).

77 *Dom.* 12. Suetonius in his life of Vespasian (16), describes how the emperor had been very greedy for money (really his only fault), by collecting new forms of taxes, such as the *ficus Iudaicus*.

78 *Dom.* 12: interfuisse me adulescentulum memini, cum a procuratore frequentissimoque consilio inspiceretur nonagenarius senex an circumsectus esset.

79 A. Garzetti states that this financial crisis is difficult to believe and due mostly to exaggerations caused by the confiscations among the senatorial class. Domitian was a meticulous administrator, who increased the annual income with every coming year: “Under a Princeps so attentive and precise we must assume that the finances were carefully managed; and in fact we have no reason to suppose that Domitian did anything but follow in his father’s footsteps and continue to run the empire on the same austere lines; the only difference was that his methods aroused greater dislike because of the existence of other motives for hatred” (Albino Garzetti. 1974. *From Tiberius to the Antonines: A History of the Roman Empire, A.D. 14-192*. Translated by J. R. Foster. London: Methuen and Co. p. 281).

80 “It is thus difficult to find any confirmation of the view that Domitian in his last years had fallen into a state of serious financial embarrassment which not merely affected but even determined his policy. The fact of a shortage of money cannot be established, but the causes which Suetonius assigned to it do seem, at first sight, quite reasonable and credible” (Ronald Syme. 1979. “The Imperial Finances Under Domitian, Nerva, and Trajan.” *Roman Papers*, Vol. I. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p. 15). C.H.V. Sutherland, on the other hand, believes that Domitian was not bankrupt, but there was in no way a surplus. Indeed towards the
example, the construction of his many and great public works continued throughout this entire period, so the financial backing must have been there to continue such projects. He appears to have had sufficient resources to allow him to raise the pay of soldiers and hand out several donatives. Most importantly, at his death, Domitian left a full treasury just as Tiberius had done. All these factors, along with a restoration of the coinage, show that there was no shortage of money for Domitian’s reign, especially for the three years before his death. Indeed, the finances must have been sufficient considering that the wars were over, there were only a few building projects, the donatives had all been paid, and there seems to be no new or extraordinary expenses. Suetonius, on the other hand, attributes these factors as the reason for Domitian’s financial problems and consequently a cause for his cruel behavior. His claim by means of trivial evidence does not stand up against the great lack of evidence of any financial difficulties. Aristotle believes that a tyrant shows his own self-interest mainly when it came to financial manners, and yet the evidence of Domitian’s greed presented by Suetonius is questionable and not at all exact.

end of his reign, it was only his confiscations that kept the treasury afloat; thus, Suetonius was correct saying that Domitian grew cruel due to lack of money (C.H.V. Sutherland. 1935. “The State of the Imperial Treasury at the Death of Domitian.” The Journal of Roman Studies. Vol. 25. pp. 150-162). Finally, P.M. Rogers believes that the imperial treasury was not full, but also not that empty. At most, Domitian had stabilized the treasury for Nerva (P. M. Rogers. 1984. “Domitian and the Finances of the State.” Historia. Vol. 33. pp. 60-78).

81 Syme argues that though his buildings, both private and public, demanded a great amount of money, which already had to be present. In Rome’s system of cash economy, Domitian would not have been allowed to run into debt and contract large bills on account of his building program. He also mentions that in the latter years of Domitian’s reign, that there was little expenditure as the only buildings built in the period of 93 to 96 C.E. was a forum and an arch. The great part of his building program had occurred in the earlier part of the reign (Syme, 1979, p. 15-16).

82 Domitian left Nerva a treasury that was able to finance a normal congiarium, a special distribution of corn, a mitigation and remission of certain taxes, new colonies, and various public works (Jones, 1992, p. 73).

83 Syme, 1979, p. 17.

84 Pliny (Panegyricus, 42 and 50) and Dio (67.4) believe also that Domitian’s cruelty was due to greed and financial need. And contrary to the argument presented here, Miriam Griffin argues that there was
II.C: The Warmonger:

*Aristotle, 1313b28-30.*

Aristotle writes that a tyrant is war-maker so that his subjects are kept busy and, furthermore, constantly in need of a leader. As emperor, Suetonius states, Domitian undertook several campaigns, some of his own freewill against the Chatti (83 C.E.) and others due to necessity against the Sarmatians (92 C.E.), and two campaigns against the Dacians (85 and 86 C.E.). If Domitian were indeed guilty of starting unnecessary wars, he would accordingly fulfill Aristotle’s belief, that the emperor was indeed a tyrant and a warmonger for seeking unnecessary wars. For the Romans, on the other hand, a military reputation was of great importance. These wars, therefore, should be purely seen as a pursuit for a glorious name, and not caused by a lust for blood. In the end, Suetonius represents Domitian’s wars as an imperial virtue.

First, it is necessary to compare Suetonius’ account with others concerning these wars. The first war mentioned by the biographer was against the Chatti, a powerful German tribe, which Domitian waged war upon in 83 C.E., of his own accord. At the end of this war, Domitian celebrated a triumph, but otherwise, not much else is known about this war. Dio Cassius claims that Domitian himself went to Germany in order to seek evidence of financial stress and agrees with the ancient sources that Domitian’s rapacity was oppressive and unjust (Miriam Griffin. 2000. “The Flavians.” *The Cambridge Ancient History*. Vol. XI. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 69-76).


*Dom. 6.1:* Expeditiones partim sponte suscepit, partim necessario: sponte in Chattos, necessario unam in Sarmatas legione cum legato simul caesa; in Dacos duas…

The war against the Chatti raises several questions due to a lack of information; such as the actual starting date; the cause of the war; whether it was one continuous war or two campaigns (one in the winter of 83 C.E., and another ending in 85 C.E.); concerning the course of the war; Domitian’s adoption of the name Germanicus; and, finally, Domitian’s imperial acclamations.
more honors for his name, but returned quickly, having seen no hostilities at all.\textsuperscript{88} Yet the reason for the cause of this war is unknown (although there is the suggested pretext of conducting a census in Gaul), making it impossible to judge the necessity of such a campaign.\textsuperscript{89} The next campaign, against the Sarmatians in 92 C.E., was a necessary campaign according to Suetonius.\textsuperscript{90} Tacitus mentions this conflict along with several others in Germany briefly in his introduction to the \textit{Histories},\textsuperscript{91} but nothing more is known.\textsuperscript{92}

The last two campaigns mentioned by Suetonius were made against the Dacians. The first occurred after the consular governor, Oppius Sabinus, had been killed when the Dacians had crossed the Danube into Moesia in the winter of 85 C.E. The second war was caused by the death of Cornelius Fuscus, prefect of the praetorian cohorts, when he invaded Dacia, perhaps in an attempt to avenge Sabinus. Suetonius provides no other details of the war except that Domitian had a double triumph in 89 C.E., after battles of varying outcomes.\textsuperscript{93} Dio provides more information concerning these two wars. The

\textsuperscript{88} Dio 67.4: Εκστρατευόμενος δὲ ἐς τὴν Γερμανίαν καὶ μὴ ἐφορακός που πόλεμον ἐπανήκε. Τὸ γὰρ δεῖ καὶ λέγειν ἃ διὰ τὸν καὶ ἐκείνῳ τότε καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις τοῖς ὅμοιοις αὐτῷ αὐτοκράτοριν ἄεὶ ἐδόθη, ἵνα μὴ προσαπετεύοντες ἐκ τὴς ὁλιγόσπεστος καὶ ἐκ τῆς σμικρότητος τῶν τιμῶν ἐλέγχεσθαι ἀλεποίνωσι...

\textsuperscript{89} Several reasons are presented by modern scholarship: for example, on the one hand, it was all caused by Domitian’s lust for glory, or, on the other hand, the Chatti were a real threat to Rome and it was necessary to secure the frontier.


\textsuperscript{91} Hist. I.2: coortae in nos Sarmatarum ac Sueborum gentes, nobilitatus cladibus mutuis Dacus….

The Suebi are also mentioned in Dio 67.5.

\textsuperscript{92} Eutropius (vii.23.4) mentions the Sarmatian campaign, yet he is merely repeating what Suetonius has already said. Martial (\textit{Epigrams}, VII.2, 6; VIII.11, 15; and IX.101) and Statius (\textit{Silvae}, III.3.171 and IV.7.49-52) make several remarks concerning the victory and triumph, but provide no detail of the campaign itself.

\textsuperscript{93} Dom. 6: in Dacos duas, primam Oppio Sabino consulari oppresso, secundam Cornelio Fusco praefecto cohortium praetorianarum, cui belli summam commiserat. De Chattis Dacisque post varia proelia duplicem triumpham egit…
first war seems to have begun in 85 C.E., when the Dacians, perhaps under Diurpaneus (or Dorpaneus), crossed the Danube, attacked the Romans, and killed their commander (Oppius Sabinus). Domitian immediately went to the Danubian front and, having rejected the peace overtures of king Decebalus, appointed Fuscus as commander of all of the Roman forces;\(^{94}\) Fuscus attempted to cross the Danube on a bridge of boats, but was killed in the process due to his impetuosity. In 86 C.E., Domitian was forced to undertake a second campaign: he entrusted the command to Cornelius Nigrinus and Funisulanus Vettonianus, who were able to achieve some success by the end of the year, allowing for a triumph. The war, therefore, was not conducted as poorly as Suetonius makes it out to be, for in 88 C.E., Tettius Julianus, governor of Upper Moesia, eventually defeated the Dacians at Tapae.\(^{95}\)

Suetonius’ summary of Domitian’s four campaigns omits several factors.\(^{96}\) He provides a brief outline of the campaigns, a few triumphs, and ends with a rather lengthy description of Saturninus’ revolt in 89 C.E. Besides excluding major facts concerning the mentioned campaigns (such as causes that would have informed the reader whether such campaigns were indeed necessary, and actual descriptions of the hostilities), Suetonius

\(^{94}\) Dio (67.6) describes how on this campaign Domitian, in fact, did not have an active role in these hostilities, but passed his time committing various debaucherries.

\(^{95}\) Dio 67.10-13.

\(^{96}\) It must be noted, that as Suetonius is writing merely biography and not history, therefore, such omissions of exact details are expected. Ronald Syme states that “Biography offers the easy approach to history, and some go no further than biography” (Ronald Syme. 1958. *Tacitus*. Vol. I. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p. 91). Although Suetonius and his biographies may be considered less agreeable than history, they still provide a detailed characterization of the emperor. Such omissions have to be accepted, but their motivation questioned.
fails to mention several other wars (for example: the war of Tettius Julianus and the conflicts in Britain and Africa). From such a brief summary is it possible to decide which wars were necessary or unnecessary? And if there were unnecessary, is it accurate to refer to Domitian as a warmonger and, therefore, a tyrant? It is not, especially since Domitian’s wars can be categorized as a virtue; and as a result an altogether different characteristic attributed to tyranny by Aristotle is more suitable for Domitian. In his advice to tyrants on how to be more king-like and thus preserve power, Aristotle states that a king-like tyrant must be sure to excel in military virtue even if he has no regard for other virtues and, furthermore, make for himself a name as a soldier.97 Domitian, therefore, fulfills those requirements of a traditional king and king-like tyrant as he attempts to gain a military reputation, instead of realizing the characteristic of the stock tyrant who is a war-monger.98 And finally, it was expected that Romans, and most especially Roman emperors, were to gain for themselves a great military reputation. Domitian, in Suetonius’ description, fulfills not only Aristotle’s king-like tyrant, but also Roman standard.

II.D: The Tyrant as a Housekeeper:

καὶ τὸ πένητας ποιεῖν τοὺς ἄρχομένους τυραννικῶν ὡσα μὴ φυλακὴ τρέφοται καὶ πρὸς τῷ καθ’ ἴμεραν ὅντες ἀσχολοί ὀοει ἐπιθυμεύειν.
-Aristotle, 1313b18-21.

It is a contrivance of the tyrant to make his people poor in order that they not be watchful. The people, moreover, are to be kept busy with their own affairs, so as not to have leisure in which to plot against the tyrant. Aristotle gives as examples of ‘busy-work’ the Pyramids of Egypt and the temple of Olympian Zeus by the Peisitratidae. L.

97 1314b21-23: τούτου μὲντοι τυχάνειν οὐ ῥάδιον ὄντα εὐκάταφρόντην, διὸ δεῖ κἀγα μὴ τῶν ἄλλων ἄρετῶν ἐπιμέλειαν ποιῆται ἀλλὰ τῆς πολεμικῆς, καὶ δοξα ἐμποιεῖν περὶ αὐτοῦ τοιαύτην
98 The last king of Rome, Tarquinius Superbus, who is also traditionally viewed as a tyrant, is often described as war-like (Livy, I.53, 57).
Iunius Brutus states that the tyrant Tarquinius Superbus has forced the people into ditches and sewers, while the noble Roman warriors were turned into artisans. The numerous building projects executed by Domitian could also be seen as a way of keeping the Romans occupied. Suetonius states that Domitian restored many buildings that had been destroyed by the fire of 80 C.E., including the Capitol, but he adds the indictment that he inscribes only his name and not that of the original builder, thereby giving all credit to the emperor himself. Based upon epigraphic evidence, Suetonius’ claim is shown to be false. Domitian inscribed only that he had restored (restituit) the buildings destroyed by the fire, as was the proper practice. It must also be kept in mind that Suetonius was writing during the reign of Hadrian, who had just finished rebuilding the

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99 Livy, I.59.9-10: Addita superbia ipsius regis miseriaeque et labores plebis in fossas cloacasque exhauriendas demersae; Romanos homines, uictores omnium circa populorum, opifices ac lapicidas pro bellatoribus factos.
101 This fire lasted for three days and three nights. Suetonius in his *Life of Titus* (8) and Dio (66.24) describe this fire that destroyed the following: the temple of Serapis and Isis, the Saepta, the temple of Neptune, the Baths of Agrippa, the Pantheon, the Dribitorium, the theater of Balbus, the stage buildings of Pompey’s theater, Octavian’s buildings, and the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus with it’s surrounding temples.
102 Dom. 5: Plurima et amplissima opera incendio absump ta restituit, in quis et Capitolium quod rursus arserat; sed omnia sub titulo tantum suo ac sine ulla pristini auctoris memoria. Nouam autem excitauit aedem in Capitolio Custodi Ioui et forum quod nunc Neruae uocatur, item Flauiae templum gentis et stadium et odium et naumachiam, e cuius postea lapide maximus circius deustis utrimque lateribus extractus est.
103 Jones, 1996, p. 51: “There is no epigraphic evidence to support Suetonius’ statement but some may contradict it. If Domitian’s name alone was inscribed on the restored buildings, with no reference to the original builder, then it was a practice completely at odds with his father’s, if we are to believe Dio.” M. McCrum and A.G. Woodhead, furthermore, show two inscriptions that have the verb restituit: # 422: a milestone at Thyatira from 92 C.E., and #436: a portico at Megalopolis from 93/4 C.E. (M. McCrum and A.G. Woodhead. 1961. *Select Documents of the Principates of the Flavian Emperors (Including the Year of Revolution) A.D. 68-96.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.)
Pantheon, but had chosen to leave Agrippa’s name on the building. Suetonius attempts by this omission of *restituit* to imply misleadingly that Domitian, as was his greedy nature, attempted to claim all these buildings as his own.\textsuperscript{104}

During Domitian’s reign, over fifty structures were restored, completed, or erected “by him in a massive and spectacular programme of public building equaled by hardly any other emperor.”\textsuperscript{105} Suetonius lists a temple to Jupiter the Guardian on the Capitol (where Domitian had hid during the turbulent year of 69 C.E.),\textsuperscript{106} Nerva’s forum (the *Forum Transitorium*), an immense temple to Minerva, a temple for the Flavian clan (the house in which he was born and where his ashes were placed),\textsuperscript{107} a stadium, an odeum, and a basin for naval battles.\textsuperscript{108} Later, Suetonius extends Domitian’s building program to include many and large arcades and arches that caused someone to scribble on one, ‘*arci*’ (the Greek *ἀρχεῖ* = enough).\textsuperscript{109} Suetonius, in fact, omits most of Domitian’s extensive building program, especially those reconstruction works due to the fire of 80 C.E.\textsuperscript{110} Though all of his grand building may have kept the people busy, Domitian was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{104} Jones, 1992, p. 80.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Ibid, p. 79.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Dom. 1 and Tacitus, *Hist.*, 3.74.
\item \textsuperscript{107} Dom. 1 and 17.
\item \textsuperscript{108} Dom. 5. For Domitian’s naval battles, see Dom. 4. Another list of Domitian’s building program is from the fourth century by the Chronographer of 354: Domitianus imperavit annos XVII, menses V. dies V. Hoc imperante multae operae publicae fabricatae sunt; atria VII, horrea piperataria ubi modo est basilica Constantiniana et horrea Vespasiani, templum Castorum et Minervae, portam Capenam, gentem Flaviam, Divorum, Iseum et Serapeum, Minervam Chalcidicam, Odeum, Minuciam veterem, Stadium, et thermas Titianas et Traianas, Amphitheatrum usque ad cylepa, templum Vespasiani et Titi, Capitolium, Senatum, ludos III, Palatium, Metam Sudantem et Panteum.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Dom. 13: ianos arcusque cum quadrigris et insignibus triumphorum per regiones urbis tantos ac tot extruxit ut cuidam Graece inscriptum sit: *arci*.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Structures Domitian erected: numerous altars, arches, and gates, the Atria Septem, Equus Domitian, the Forum Transitorium, Horrea Piberataria, Horrea Vespasiani, the Ludi, Meta Sudans, Mica Aurea, Naumachia, the Odeum, the Stadium, the temple Divorum, the temple for Fortuna Redux, the temple for the Flavian Clan, the temple for Ianus Quadrifrons, the temple for Iuppiter Custos, the temple for Minerva Chalcidicia, and a tribunal for the three Flavian emperors. Restored Buildings: Arcus Neroniana, Atrium Vestae, Bibliotheca Apollonis Palatini, Bibliotheca Templi Divi Augusti, Casa Romuli, Circus Maximus, Curia Julia, Domus Tiberiana, Forum Caesaris, Horrea Agroppiana, Pantheon, Porta Capena, the Dei
\end{itemize}
accomplishing, in fact, those characteristics attributed to the ‘kingly-tyrant’ of Aristotle. Such a ruler must adorn the city as if he were a housekeeper and not as a tyrant.\textsuperscript{111} Suetonius highlights Domitian’s building at the start of his biography and believes it an action worth praising.

**II.E: The Religious Tyrant:**

Lastly, according to Aristotle, the ‘king-like tyrant’ must be viewed as greatly enthusiastic in regards to his religious observations; showing such fervor and respect for the gods causes the people to be less afraid of the tyrant and any unlawful treatment at his hands. What is more, the people are less inclined to plot against the tyrant if they believe that the gods are his allies. On the other hand, if he should display a foolish religiosity, he crosses the line from a good tyrant into the negative and depraved form of tyranny. Domitian seems not to have ever crossed the line into the ridiculous in regards to his religious scruples. In addition to building numerous temples to other gods, the emperor had a particular reverence for two of the pantheon, Jupiter and Minerva. Domitian believed that Jupiter had saved his life in 69 C.E., so he had a temple built to \textit{Juppiter Conservator} (replaced by the temple built to \textit{Juppiter Custos}). Having restored the temple to \textit{Juppiter Optimus Maximus} at a great cost, he instituted a festival to be held

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{111} Aristotle, 1314b37-39: κατασκευάζειν γάρ δει καὶ κοσμεῖν τήν πόλιν ὧς ἐπίτροπον ὄντα καὶ μὴ τύραννον
\end{flushleft}
every five years with music, horse racing, and gymnastics. Suetonius describes how
Domitian presided over these games in Greek dress and with a gold crown containing the
images of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva.\textsuperscript{112} Seated beside the emperor were the priest of
Jupiter (\textit{flamen Dialis}) and fifteen priests for the deified Vespasian and Titus (these
\textit{sodales Flauiales Titiales} had been established by Titus for their father) wearing similar
crowns as well as the images of Domitian. Such crowns are consistent with Suetonius’
story of how the emperor only allowed statues of himself in gold and silver on the
Capitoline:\textsuperscript{113} except under the emperors Gaius, Nero, Domitian, Commodus, and
Caracalla, the likenesses of emperors were not officially allowed in precious metals, as it
was regarded as the equivalent of divine honors.\textsuperscript{114}

In his veneration, Domitian worshipped Minerva beyond all other gods and
goddesses.\textsuperscript{115} Suetonius describes how the emperor celebrated an annual festival lasting
five days (beginning March 19) to Minerva at his Alban Villa and how he also

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{112} \textit{Dom.} 4: Instituit et quinquennale certamen Capitolino Ioui triplex, musicum equestre gymnicum, et
   aliquanto plurium quam nunc est coronarum. Certabant enim et prosa oratione Graece Latineque ac praeter
citharoedos chorocitharistae quoque et psilocitharistae, in stadio uero cursu etiam urgines. Certamini
   praesedit crepidatus purpureaque amictus toga Graecanica, capite gestans coronam auream cum effige Iouis
   ac Iunonis Mineruaeque, adsidentibus Diali sacerdote et collegio Flauialium pari habitu nisi quod illorum
coronis inerat et ipsius imago.

\item \textsuperscript{113} \textit{Dom.} 13: Statuas sibi in Capitoliio non nisi aureas et argenteas poni permissit ac ponderis certi.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Jones, 1996, p. 44. See K. Scott. 1931. “The Significance of Statues in Precious Metals in Emperor
\item \textsuperscript{115} Dio. 67.1: θεὸν μὲν γὰρ τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν ἐς τὰ μάλλιστα ἔγαλλε, καὶ διὰ τούτο καὶ τὰ Παναθηναία
   μεγάλας ἑόρταζε, καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς ἄγονας καὶ τοιμᾶς καὶ λογογράφων μονομάχων τε κατ᾽ ἐτος ὡς
   εἰπεῖν ἐν τῷ Ἁλβανῷ ἔποιεῖ.

For Domitian’s worship of Minerva, see: J.-L. Girard. 1981. “La Place de Minerva dans la Religion
Romaine au temps du Principat.” Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt. II.17.1. pp. 203-232; and
II.17.1. pp. 233-245; and Kenneth Scott. The Imperial Cult under the Flavians.
established a college of priests for Minerva.\textsuperscript{116} Domitian built two temples to the goddess (Minerva Chalcidicia, a shrine near the temple of the Deified Augustus, and a temple to her in the Forum of Nerva), and even in his bedroom, he kept a shrine to the goddess.\textsuperscript{117} In the first few years of his reign he named his new legion the \textit{Minervia}, instead of after his father or brother or even himself.\textsuperscript{118} And, finally, on his coinage, four different types were given to Minerva every year in both silver and gold.\textsuperscript{119} There was even a foolish rumor that Domitian was claiming to be her son.\textsuperscript{120} At the end of his life, however, he had an ominous dream that his goddess had departed thus, leaving him unprotected against the conspirators.\textsuperscript{121} Suetonius tells how Minerva came to the emperor to tell him that she had been disarmed by Jupiter and was departing her chapel.\textsuperscript{122} Although Suetonius gives Domitian no credit for proper religious devotion, he is not seen by the biographer to be a ‘foolish practitioner’. The emperor respected religious practices as the

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Dom.} 4: Celebrabat et in Albano quotannis Quinquatria Mineruae, cui collegium instituerat, ex quo sorte ducti magisterio fungerentur ederentque eximias uenationes et scaenicos ludos superque oratorum ac poetarum certamina.
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\textit{Dom.} 15: Mineruam, quam superstitione colebat…
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\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Dom.} 17.
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\textsuperscript{118} Jones, 1992, p. 100; and Dio, 55.24.
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\textsuperscript{120} Philostratus, \textit{Life of Apollonius}, 7.24: ’επερόν δ’ αὐτός ως ἡμᾶς γραφήν φεύγειν, ἕπειδή θῶν ἐν Τάραντῃ, οὐ ἤρχεται, μὴ προσέθηκε τις δημοσίαις εὔχας, ὥστιν Δομετιανὸς Ἀθηνᾶς εἰς παῖς...
\par
Pat Southern: “Domitian’s claims that he was the son of Minerva would nowadays elicit derisory disbelief, and would perhaps be interpreted as manipulative showmanship in order to play the monarch with the support of a deity to give added weight” (Pat Southern. 1997. \textit{Domitian: Tragic Tyrant}. London: Routledge: p. 121.).
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\textsuperscript{121} Dio (67.16) states that Minerva, whose image Domitian kept in his bedchamber, in the emperor’s dream, threw away her weapons, mounted her chariot drawn by black horses, and then plunged into a great abyss.
\par
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Dom.} 15: Mineruam…sonniauit excedere sacrario negantemque ultra se tueri eum posse quod exarmata esset a loue.
kingly tyrant was advised to do by Aristotle and was not a foolish practitioner, but rather a follower of the Augustan standard in his uncompromising attitude towards religion.¹²³

**II.F: Conclusion:**

δύο δὲ οὐσῶν αίτιῶν δι’ ἀζ μάλιστ’ ἐπιτίθενται τοῖς τυραννίσι, μίσους καὶ καταφρονήσεως, θάτερον μὲν ἀεὶ τούτων ὑπάχει τοῖς τυράννοις, τὸ μίσος, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ καταφρονεῖσθαι πολλὰ γίνονται ταῖς καταλύσεωι.


There are two causes, according to Aristotle, that push men to the assassination of a tyrant: hatred and contempt. Hatred is always attached to tyranny, but when a tyrant becomes despised it leads to their downfall. The tyrant aims at three goals in order to avoid such plots: first, that the subjects be humiliated; second, that the people distrust one another; and, lastly, to remove any resources for such an action (for example, a lack of weapons or financial means). Contrary to these goals, however, his rule is a paradox since he is unable to rule alone. Due to this need, therefore, the tyrant is required to rely on men close to him, yet it is from these men that an attack is more likely to arise. It was the various deeds of Domitian, according to Suetonius, that made him an object of fear and hatred to all. In 96 C.E., it was a conspiracy of friends, close freedman, and even his wife that brought about the end of the emperor’s life.¹²⁴ His murder was carried out by a palace conspiracy at the hands of those closest to the emperor.¹²⁵ Contrary to Suetonius

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¹²³ Jones, 1992: “His ideal seems to have been a return to Augustan standards, and not only in monetary matters. He was just as uncompromising in his approach to religion; and he was further influence by two factors, the Flavian’s need to bolster the new dynasty with supernatural support and his personally sincere belief in the traditional religion” (p. 99).

¹²⁴ Dom. 14: Per haec terribilis cunctis et inuisus, tandem oppressus est <…> amicorum libertorumque intimorum simul et uxoris.

Yet it must be noted that Aristotle’s does not believe that slaves and women are able to plot against tyranny: οὐτὲ γάρ επιβουλεύουσιν οἱ δοῦλοι καὶ οἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς τυράννοις (1313b36-37).

¹²⁵ The murderers according to Suetonius (*Dom. 17*) included the following: Stephanus, the freedman of Domitian’s niece, Domitia; Clodianus, attached perhaps to Domitian’s praetorian prefects; Maximus, a freedman of Parthenius; Satur, the head of the servants of the bedchamber; and certain men from the gladiatorial school. Dio (67.15) reports the rumors that Domitia was not unaware of the plot and adds the names of Parthenius (Domitian’s chamberlain), Sigerius (bedchamber attendant), Entellus (a freedman), the
who narrates how all men feared and hated the tyrant Domitian, he also describe how many men mourned him; e.g. his soldiers.\textsuperscript{126}

Suetonius’ portrayal of Domitian is complicated as he attempts, at first, to give the emperor his due through several impartial comments concerning the emperor as compared to other sources. In the beginning of his biography, Suetonius seems to be doing his best to present a reasonable and credible account of the character and government of Domitian, apparently something real and not merely a reflection of that reaction to which popular opinion turns in time after the joy and hope that welcome a new ruler. He therefore seeks to find some cause for the change, and comes to the conclusion that Domitian was not so much naturally evil, but was driven to certain courses by the compulsion of circumstances.\textsuperscript{127}

Suetonius in his \textit{Lives} usually places the virtues before the vices, and there is no exception in his representation of Domitian. The emperor is given a list of good deeds, yet Suetonius moves from his integrity to his \textit{saevitia} and \textit{cupiditas} smoothly without any deliberate dichotomy between \textit{princeps} and \textit{monstrum}.\textsuperscript{128} Suetonius, however, never calls Domitian a tyrant or \textit{monstrum}. He acknowledges, in addition, the positive aspects of his rule before it had collapsed into terror due to the emperor’s fear.\textsuperscript{129} In the second half of the work, Suetonius becomes hostile to the last of the Flavian emperors. The positive and negative aspects of the emperor are contrasted, “however, he chose to surround the positive with critical statements and context, in order to diminish the significance of what Domitian had undeniably achieved….The emphasis falls not on the praetorian prefects Norbanus and Petronius Secundus, and finally that they had discussed their plans with Nerva.

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Dom.} 23: \textit{Occisum eum populus indifferenter, miles grauissime tulit statimque Dium appellare conatus est}…

\textsuperscript{127} Syme, \textit{Roman Papers}, Vol. I, p. 12. This idea of a turning point in imperials reigns is discussed on page 13, footnote 46.

\textsuperscript{128} Baldwin, p. 189.

\textsuperscript{129} In his \textit{Life of Caligula}, Suetonius, contrary to the example provided by Domitian, calls the emperor Caligula a \textit{monstrum} (22.1: Hactenus quasi de principe, reliqua ut de monstro narranda sunt), after he has finished describing the virtues of Caligula and how he as the golden prince had been the hope of the Roman people (13).
virtues but on their corresponding vices, and leads to the account of *saevitia, cupiditas*, and other *vitia* at large.”

The final question is whether Suetonius’ Domitian satisfies the definition of Aristotle’s stock tyrant or that of the ‘king tyrant’. From those categories laid out by Aristotle that were discussed above, Domitian, if indeed he was a tyrant, would have been the kind closer to the royal standard. The traditional tyrant is depraved and wicked, while the king-like tyrant is advised by Aristotle to be a manager of his people. The difference in their rule is the goals of the ruler. As an emperor, Domitian did not seek his own pleasure, but looked after the welfare of the Roman state and his subjects. Suetonius attempts to describe a ruler wholly depraved based upon a long and semi-factual list of vices, while quickly passing over the virtues. At a cursory glance, Domitian is the conventional tyrant until the merits of his rule are considered, revealing him less like a tyrant and more like a steward of Rome.

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III.A: Introduction:

In the crafting of his letters, the younger Pliny cleverly constructs a distorted portrayal through what he does not say concerning the reign of Domitian. In his pandering to the Senate’s decree of the damnatio memoriae and in his flattering of the emperor Trajan, Pliny distorts the past in order to construct certain paradigms regarding Domitian as a tyrant, the Senate in general, his circle of amici in particular, and his own cursus honorum.131 The younger Pliny, therefore, is a fine example of how this characterization was first established. The revolt of Saturninus in 89 C.E., in the common view, heralded the beginning of the ‘reign of terror.’¹³² Pliny portrays Domitian as a cruel despot through the narration of three main events: first, in the case of the Vestal Virgin, Cornelia, charged with incest and found guilty in 90 C.E.; second, in the treason trials of 93 C.E., which involved seven amici of Pliny; and lastly, in the representation of his own career during this period. The treatment of these three events in Pliny’s letters displays that the author’s criticisms of the emperor are often seem exaggerated when compared with those accounts found in other sources, most especially the works of

¹³¹ Boyle, A.J. and W.J. Dominik. 2003. Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text. Leiden: Brill. p. 56: “Several recent historians have treated the testimony of the Roman writers who broke the silence after Domitian’s death with profound skepticism, categorizing the political representations of Tacitus, Suetonius, Juvenal, and the younger Pliny as distorted, unreliable accommodations to the post-Domitianic settlement, literary replays of the senate’s damnatio memoriae.” In line with this statement, this chapter will most definitely coincide with the treatment that other modern historians, such as Brian Jones, have applied to Pliny, Tacitus, Suetonius, etc.

¹³² Tacitus (Agr. 45) claims 93 C.E., while Dio (LXVII) believes that Domitian’s entire fifteen year rule was a ‘reign of terror ‘.
Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio. It must be remembered that these sources were also following a certain agenda in their own works; this will, however, not be a concern for this chapter, but they will be used for comparison with the younger Pliny. Pliny’s goals are the creation of a revisionist past in which Pliny separates himself from the reign of Domitian, while on the other hand entrenching himself with a set group of senators, his amici, who, like many others, were opposed to the emperor. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to discern the motives and methods of how the younger Pliny goes about this process.

**III.B: The Trial of the Vestal Cornelia:**

In Letter 4.11, Pliny writes to Cornelius Minicianus how Valerius Licinianus, previously a senator of praetorian rank and a well-known orator, was teaching rhetoric in Sicily having been exiled by Domitian in 90 C.E. Licinianus had confessed purely out of fear of being charged with a far more grievous accusation - violation of the Chief Priestess of the Vestal Virgins, Cornelia- than the actual crime: having hid Cornelia’s freedwoman in his home. Pliny states that in this year, Domitian, being rather angry since he had been deprived of witnesses in this case, sought to bury alive Cornelia.\(^{133}\) Domitian, as Pontifex Maximus, or as a tyrant and a despot according to the younger Pliny, convened together the other pontiffs not at the Regia but at his Alban villa and proceeded to condemn the absent and unheard Cornelia of incest.\(^ {134}\) Cornelia was then sent to her

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\(^{133}\) Pliny, *Ep.* 4.11, 4-6: Dices tristia et miseranda, dignum tamen illum qui haec ipsa studia incesti scelere macularit. Confessus est quidem incestum, sed incertum utrum quia uerum erat, an quia grauiora metuebat si negasset. Fremebat enim Domitianus aestuabatque in ingenti inuidia destitutus. Nam cum Corneliam Vestalium maximam defodere uiuiam concupisset, ut qui inlustrari saeculum suum eiusmodi exemplis arbitraretur...

\(^{134}\) Pliny, *Ep.* 4.11, 6: ...pontificis maximi iure, seu potius immanitate tyranni licentia domini, reliquos pontifices non in Regiam sed in Albanam uillam conuocavit. Nec minore scelere quam quod uelisci uidebatur, absentem inauditamque damnuit incesti...
death though she protested greatly her own innocence (even to the goddess Vesta herself). Pliny relates her tragic death and, though he does not know whether she was innocent or not, she was believed to be innocent of the charge.\textsuperscript{135} Next the fate of Celer, a Roman knight who had been her accomplice and who also was asserting his innocence in the matter, is mentioned.\textsuperscript{136} Finally, the affair concerning Licinianus is told. Domitian, enraged at the hatred that had arisen from his cruelty and unfairness in this case, had Licinianus charged in this affair.\textsuperscript{137} Licinianus’ friends advised him to plead mercy while Herennius Senecio, as his advocate, pleaded on his behalf in front of the emperor. Instead of being scourged in public, Licinianus was allowed to remove himself into exile with any possessions he wished and, later during the reign of Nerva, he was allowed to move to Sicily.

For a better understanding of the trials of Cornelia, Celer, and Licinianus described by the younger Pliny, first the accounts of this situation in other ancient sources must be looked at. Cassius Dio, in Book 67 of his Roman history, relates how Domitian in his madness did not even spare the Vestal virgins. He even caused one pontiff, Helvius Agrippa, to drop dead horrified by the accusations and the punishments that this harsh and cruel emperor was inflicting upon the priestesses.\textsuperscript{138} Dio also states that Domitian was proud that he had not punished the Vestals by burying them alive in the

\textsuperscript{135} Pliny, \textit{Ep}. 4.11, 9: \ldots nescio an innocens, certe tamquam innocens ducta est.

\textsuperscript{136} Pliny, \textit{Ep}. 4.11, 10-11: Praeterea Celer eques Romanus, cui Cornelia obiciebatur, cum in comitio urgis caederetur, in hac uoce perstiterat: \textquoteleft Quid feci? Nihil feci.\textquoteright


\textsuperscript{138} Dio, \textit{Roman History}, 67.3: Οὔδε τῶν ἀειπαρθένων ἐφείσατο ἄλλ᾽ ὡς καὶ ἡνδρομένας ἐτυμωρήσατο, οὕτω καὶ λέγεται, σκληρῆς καὶ τραγείας τῆς περὶ αὐτὰς ἐξετάσας γενομένης καὶ πολλῶν αἰτιαθέντων καὶ κολαζομένων, οὐκ ἐνεγκόν εἰς τῶν ποντιῶν οὐτοῦ ἔχει τὸ συνεδρίῳ, ὥσπερ εἶχεν, ἀποψύξει. (Xiph. 218, 17-22 R.St.)
customary manner, but rather thought of other ways to punish them with death.\textsuperscript{139} In this passage, however, Dio makes no specific comments on the case of Cornelia, but only mentions those vestals that were punished in 83 C.E. In a passage of his \textit{Life of Domitian}, Suetonius claims that at first Domitian punished the unchaste Vestals with capital punishment, but eventually under the ancient custom.\textsuperscript{140} More importantly, Suetonius provides a further detail to the story of Cornelia, which Pliny had left out: she had already been acquitted once for a similar crime. The second time though she was found guilty and buried alive while her accomplices were beaten to death with rods in the Comitium. Yet an ex-praetor, who remains unnamed but most probably is Licinianus, was allowed to go into exile since he had admitted his guilt before the case had been settled.\textsuperscript{141} The last reference to the death of Cornelia is in the \textit{Life of Apollonius}, by Philostratus. Domitian had attempted to purify Vesta by punishing with death three of her priestesses who had betrayed the cult and their vows of chastity (these three Vestal virgins being Cornelia, Oculata, and Varronilla according to Suetonius).\textsuperscript{142}

Great differences concerning some aspects of the trial in these other sources can be seen when compared to Pliny. First of all, how the younger Pliny describes the case against the Vestal Cornelia must be looked at, especially in what is not mentioned by Pliny. There is no mention that this is the second time that Cornelia has been charged of

\textsuperscript{139} Dio, \textit{Roman History}, 67.3: Ὅτι καὶ ἐπὶ τούτῳ ἡγάλλετο, ὁτιτάς ἀειπαρθένους ὡς ἠνδρομένας οὐ κατάφυκεν, ὡς ἦν ἔθος, ἀλλὰ ἄλλως ἀποθνήσκειν ἔκέλευσε. (Exc. Val. 278)

\textsuperscript{140} Suetonius, \textit{Life of Domitian}, 8.3-4: incesta Vestalium virginum, a patre quoque suo et fratre neglecta, uarie ac seuere coercuit, priora capitali supplicio, posteriora more ueteri.

\textsuperscript{141} Suetonius, \textit{Life of Domitian}, 8.4: mox Corneliam maximam virginem absolutam olim, dein longo interuállo repetitam atque conuictam defodi imperauit stupratoresque virgis in Comitio ad necem caedi, excepto praetorio uiro, cui, dubia etiam tum causa et incertis quaestionibus atque tormentis de semet professo, exsilium indulsit.

\textsuperscript{142} Philostratus, \textit{Life of Apollonius}, 7.6: Καὶ μὴν καὶ λόγου ἀφικομένου, ὡς λαμπρὰν κάθαρσιν εἴη Δομετίανος πεποιημένος τῆς Ἡρμαίων Ἑστίας, ἐπειδὴ τρεῖς τῶν Ἑστιάδων ἀπέκτεινεν ἐπ’ αἰτία τῆς ζώνης καὶ τῷ μὴ καθαρεύσαι γάμων, ὡς ἄγνως τὴν Ἰλιάδα Ἀθηνᾶν καὶ τὸ ἐκεί πῦρ θεραπεύειν ἐδει...
breaking her vows of chastity nor about the other Vestals that had been charged at this same time nor the time of the trials.\textsuperscript{143} Pliny provides no other reason except that “we are told that the sole motive of Domitian in his punishment of Cornelia was to glorify his reign by a return to exemplary severitas, and that he acted in his right as Pontifex Maximus...He is anxious to convict Domitian of unjust cruelty.”\textsuperscript{144} Pliny claims that Domitian was burning with anger and had decided to bury Cornelia alive in order to make his reign illustrious. He does not mention Domitian’s goal of improving the religious and sexual morality during his reign, which were similar to the reforms of Augustus, and which he believed to have been neglected during his father and brother’s rule.\textsuperscript{145} In the section concerning the various reforms of Domitian, Suetonius places the trial of Cornelia along with the trials concerned with the other Vestal virgins. He even states that Domitian had offered at first a choice of punishments to the Vestals, but that Cornelia was a special case as this was her second charge of incest. For this reason, he applied the traditional penalty. With its mention of Polyxena, Pliny intends his account “to excite pity and horror, which we may well feel; but Domitian’s view was no doubt the severest possible penalty might prove a more effective deterrent than had his comparative leniency. Pliny’s account also suggests that one at least of the accomplices got off very

\textsuperscript{143} Dio claims that the trials of the Vestal Virgins occurred in 83 C.E., while Pliny only makes a passing indication towards it (qua sacrae faciente uicit triumphauit), yet writes to Cornelius Minicianus as if the event has recently occurred. According to Sherwin-White: “The chronographer Jerome puts the condemnation of the three Vestals in Domitian’s third year, 83-84, and that of Cornelia in his eleventh year, 91-92. The Chronicon Paschale, dating by consuls, puts the second trial in 89. Perhaps the reference in Pliny includes both the German triumph in 83 and the Dacian in 89. Hence CAH xi.37 plumps for 90. It must be before the death of Senecio in 93-4” (A.N. Sherwin-White. 1985. The Letters of Pliny: a Historical and Social Commentary. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p. 283).


\textsuperscript{145} “In later years Domitian gave proof of his fairly strict standard of sexual morality; it is of course open to cynics to declare that the standard he set himself differed widely from that he tried to impose on others, a not uncommon situation for which Domitian could, if necessary, claim an Augustan precedent” (K.H. Waters. 1964. “The Character of Domitian.” Phoenix. Vol. 18, No. 1. p. 60).
lightly.” Licinianus as the accomplice had only been exiled with a few meager possessions rather than beaten to death in the Comitium. But in regards to Cornelia, Pliny attempts to portray her as innocent of all charges and to create great pity in the reader’s mind, especially after he describes her tragic end.

By looking at the legality of this trial, an attempt can be made to discern the motive of Pliny behind this letter; especially considering that it seems to Pliny to have been an unfair trial caused by a cruel despot. From such a viewpoint, it will be seen all the “more clearly the rhetorical manner with which Pliny has distorted and obscured the case. The writers on Roman law and Roman political practice agree that Domitian had acted on safe legal grounds in the punishment of Cornelia, that he followed traditional procedures in the execution of a Vestal.” The trial of Cornelia presented by Pliny in this letter is very similar to the treason trials he also describes (these treason trials shall be discussed later in the paper). The most similar aspect is how Pliny in these trials ignores the legal procedure and warps the facts in order to show Domitian in a bad light. For example, Pliny states that when Domitian summoned the other pontiffs, he convened them at his own villa instead of at the Regia. Pliny suggests that Domitian ignores traditional procedure in conducting the case behind closed doors. Yet there is no

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146 Waters, p. 75.
147 “The whole letter is a remarkable example of special pleading. The reader goes away with a strong impression of the wickedness of Domitian, though even Pliny cannot assert the unequivocal innocence of the parties” (Sherwin-White, p. 282).
mandate that such trials were to be only conducted at the Regia.\textsuperscript{149} A further example is Pliny’s claim that Cornelia and Licinianus were absent from their own trials. Cornelia was charged having gone unheard while Herennius Senecio defended Licinianus in his absence. It is unknown whether it was traditional for such cases concerning Vestals to be conducted in such a manner, but this may have gone against Roman legal procedure. Indeed this alone may be the only justifiable complaint of Pliny. Yet all in all, Pliny has purposely obfuscated the legal procedure by reducing Cornelia’s crime and providing the reason for her death: Domitian’s desire to enhance his reign with “old-fashioned severity. The rhetorical color of the whole account is partly the tyranny of Domitian, partly the innocence of the Vestal, each aiding in the establishment of the other.”\textsuperscript{150}

One last concern of Domitian’s trials against the Vestal virgins is the frequent mentioning of Domitian’s own sexual impropriety. Pliny, in Letter 4.11, mentions Domitian’s own guilt in committing incest with Julia and her subsequent death caused by a botched abortion or miscarriage.\textsuperscript{151} Dio, before he describes the trials against the Vestals, mentions Domitian committing incest with his own niece Julia. In 83 C.E., Domitian divorced his wife Domitia for having committed adultery with an actor named Paris and then proceeded to live with Julia as ‘husband with wife’ until the Roman people

\textsuperscript{149} “Pliny wishes to imply that the trial was \textit{intra cubiculum}. But Roman jurisdiction was not tied to places, and Suetonius hints that secret jurisdiction was not normal with Domitian” (Sherwin-White, p. 283).

\textsuperscript{150} Traub, p. 216.

\textsuperscript{151} Pliny, \textit{Ep.} 4.11, 6-7: Nec minore scelere quam quod ulcisci uidebatur, absentem inauditamque damnauit incesti, cum ipse fratris filiam incesto non polluisset solum uerum etiam occidisset; nam uidas abortu perit. “It is quite reasonable to suppose that Julia’s closeness to, and influence with, Domitian gave rise to ugly rumors, especially after Sabinus’ execution, and her eventual death (whether from a miscarriage or even from something similar-seeming, such as ?cervical cancer) gave Domitian’s enemies the opportunity to accuse him of the vilest hypocrisy” (B. Walker. 1952. \textit{The Annals of Tacitus: A Study in the Writing of History.} Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 218). See also Martha P. Vinson, “Domitia Longina, Julia Titi, and the Literary Tradition.”, for more information concerning Julia’s death due to an abortion/miscarriage and also Domitia’s affair with the actor Paris. For more information concerning Domitian’s own sexual impropriety, see Chapter 2.
forced him to reconcile with Domitia. Even after this Domitian continued his affair with
Julia according to Dio.\textsuperscript{152} Philostratus, in his \textit{Life of Apollonius}, immediately after
mentioning the Vestals, mentions the marriage of Domitian to his niece Julia.\textsuperscript{153}
Suetonius, on the other hand, does not mention Domitian’s own incest in conjunction
with the charge of incest against the Vestal virgins. Later in his work on Domitian,
however, Suetonius describes Domitian’s excessive sexual depravity, especially in
regards to Julia. Suetonius claims that the emperor had been offered Julia often when she
was young, yet he had refused marriage with her on account of Domitia. Later he
seduced her when she was married to another and openly loved her when she no longer
possessed a father or a husband. Eventually, Julia died having been forced by Domitian
to get rid of their child in an abortion. It must be noted that even though Domitian
is charged often with incest and having married his niece, the \textit{Lex Claudia} had legalized
such marriages during the reign of Claudius.\textsuperscript{154} To undermine Domitian’s charge of
incest against the Vestal Virgins, his own presumed guilt is mentioned in a similar
accusation.

\textbf{III.C: The Stoic Opposition:}

Through the trial of Cornelia, Pliny has characterized Domitian as a hypocrite and
a cruel tyrant who persecuted innocent virgins and the upper class of Rome. In other
letters, Pliny will continue this tradition of omissions in order to convince readers of his

\textsuperscript{152} Dio, \textit{Roman History}, 67.3: κάκ τούτου τῇ ἀδελφίδῃ τῇ ἰδίᾳ, ἥγουν τῇ Ἰουλίᾳ, ἀπαρακαλυπτότερον
 ὡς γαμετὶ συνήκει. εἶτα δεσθέντος τοῦ δήμου κατηλλάγη μὲν τῇ Δομιτίᾳ, ἔχριτο δ’ οὐδὲν ἦτον τῷ τῇ
 Ἰουλίᾳ. (Xiph. 218, 10-16 R. St., Zon. 11, 19.).

\textsuperscript{153} Philostratus, \textit{Life of Apollonius}, 7.7: Ἐπεὶ δὲ Σαμβίνον ἀπεκτονοῦς, ἕνα τῶν ἐαυτοῦ ξυγγενῶν,
 Ἰουλίαν ἤγετο, ἡ δὲ Ἰουλία γυνὴ μὲν ἦν τοῦ πεφυγεμένου, Δομετιανοῦ δὲ ἀδελφίδη, μία τῶν Τίτου
 θυγατέρων...

\textsuperscript{154} Dio (67.3) maintains that Domitian lived openly with Julia as though husband with wife; and
Philostratus (\textit{Life of Apollonius}, 7.7) says that they had even set a day for the marriage.
representation of the tyrant Domitian and the climate of Rome at this time.\footnote{155} Pliny goes to great lengths in order to distance himself from the reign of Domitian and to support the senatorial class who had suffered most under this emperor (this support was to cover up for his own lack of persecution, as Pliny had advanced his career greatly during this period; this shall be discussed later). Pliny realizes that

he must sharply distinguish good emperors from bad emperors despite their many apparent similarities; he must distinguish himself, a prominent and successful senator under Domitian, from the loathed collaborators; he must distinguish the all-powerful emperor from the leading senators, any of whom could have occupied his position; and he must ignore the likelihood that conspiracies, executions, and civil war could return at any time given the inherent instability of the imperial system, especially in non-hereditary transfers of power.\footnote{156}

In Letter 4.11, Pliny has already begun this process of separation by presenting Domitian as a bad emperor and detached from the senatorial class. This schism is further illustrated in the letters of Pliny that present the trials of seven of his close amici in 93 C.E. It is after the events of this year that Pliny believes that Domitian finally began to show openly his hatred for good men.\footnote{157}

Pliny’s social relationships placed him in alignment with the Domitianic opposition.\footnote{158} In Letter 3.11 and also in 7.19, Pliny describes the trial against his seven friends who included four men and three women: the younger Helvidius Priscus, the son

\footnote{155} For a comparison of Pliny’s presentation of the treason trials, see how Tacitus describes various treason trials. For “in upwards of a score of trials for treason, involving rather more that that number of defendants, we have seen Tacitus obscure the character of the cases by minimizing this, maximizing that, omitting the other, substituting the refutable for the undeniable, asserting the real to be only ostensible and putting forward as actual and real the result of his own prejudiced thinking. These rhetorical devices and expedients, learned in the orator’s profession where Tacitus had made himself an acknowledged master, enabled him, as historian, to sustain the thesis that the whole history which he narrated in the Annals was the record of one long tyranny exercised by a succession of tyrants. And not Tacitus alone wrote history in this manner carried over from the experience and practice of the law-court” (Robert Samuel Rogers. 1952. “A Tacitean Pattern in Narrating Treason-Trials.” Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association. Vol. 83. p. 310-311).


\footnote{157} Pliny, Panegyricus, 95.

See also Tacitus, Agricola, 45.

\footnote{158} Pliny, Ep., 3.11: atque haec feci, cum septem amicis meis aut occisis aut relegatis…
of the elder Helvidius Priscus who had been charged in 66 C.E. of treason against Nero and then exiled and executed in Vespasian’s reign for sedition and treason; Herennius Senecio (who was mentioned previously as the advocate for Licinianus); Junius Mauricus; and his brother Quintus Junius Arulenus Rusticus; the younger Arria, widow of Thrsea Paetus; Fannia, widow of the elder Helvidius Priscus and stepmother of the younger Helvidius (she was also the daughter of Thrsea Paetus and Caecina Arria, and granddaughter of Aulus Caecina Paetus, who, like Pomponius Secundus, had been involved in the conspiracy of L. Arruntius Camillus Scribonianus against Claudius and who had committed suicide in 42 C.E.); and Verulana Gratilla, probably the wife of Arulenus Rusticus. These seven were condemned in a series of treason trials, and three of these seven were executed (the younger Helvidius Priscus, Herennius Senecio, and Arulenus Rusticus) while the other four were exiled.\textsuperscript{159}

Yet what was the cause for these trials according to the ancient sources? Pliny provides some evidence for the charges that were brought, while there is also Tacitus’ description of the events. Suetonius provides a few meager hints concerning the trials. Finally, there is the evidence supplied by the epitomators of Cassius Dio.\textsuperscript{160} Concerning the four of these seven, who were not punished with death but instead had been forced into exile (Fannia, Arria, Gratilla, and Mauricus), Pliny provides nowhere any reason for their trials. He is not alone in this as no other sources supply sufficient reasons except for their own personal relationship to those who had been executed (Herennius Senecio,


Arulenus Rusticus, and the younger Helvidius Priscus\textsuperscript{161\footnote{Suetonius, who names only Arulenus and Helvidius, and Dio (represented by Xiphilinus and Zonaras), mentioning only Arulenus and Senecio, agree with Pliny on the three deaths” (Rogers, 1960, p. 21)\textsuperscript{162 Seutonius, Life of Domitian, 10.4: Occidit et Heluidium filium, quasi scaenico exodio sub persona Paridis et Oenones diuortium suum cum uxore taxasset…\textsuperscript{163 Brian Jones. 1992. The Emperor Domitian. London: Routledge. p. 187.\textsuperscript{164 Suetonius, Life of Domitian, 10.3: Iunium Rusticum, quod Paeti Thraseae et Heluidi Prisci laudes edidisset appellassetque eos sanctissimos uiores…\textsuperscript{165 Dio, Roman History, 67.13.2: τὸν γὰρ δὴ Ὑστικον τὸν Ἄρουλῆαν ἀπέκτεινεν ὅτι ἐφιλοσόφης καὶ ὃτι τὸν Θρασέαν ιερὸν ὑψόμαζε…}}}. According to several sources, the younger Helvidius Priscus was charged with composing a farce attacking Domitian’s divorce from his wife Domitia due to her adulterous relationship with the actor Paris.\textsuperscript{162 The farce was a clever choice. The main characters were Paris and Oenone; Oenone was the first wife of Paris, whom he deserted for Helen. Later when an arrow had wounded Paris, she refused to return to his side in order to cure him. It is apparent to whom the play was referring: “Paris is Domitian, Helen Julia and Oenone Domitia- and rendered all the more piquant by two factors: Paris was also the name of Domitia’s alleged lover and Domitian himself was known to be particularly fond of archery.”\textsuperscript{163 Pliny, however, makes no mention of this or any other reason for Helvidius Priscus to be brought to trial by Domitian.}

The second of the seven was Arulenus Rusticus, who, according to Suetonius, was charged since he had published a work about Thrasea Paetus and the elder Helvidius Priscus, in which he referred to these two men as the most upright of men.\textsuperscript{164 Dio claims that Arulenus Rusticus was executed because he had been a philosopher and he had called Thrasea Paetus holy.\textsuperscript{165 Pliny, in Letter 1.5, describes how the informer Regulus...}}
had helped in the prosecution of Arulenus Rusticus and afterwards Regulus had delivered a speech in which Arulenus had been labeled a ‘Stoic Ape’. Next are the charges against Herennius Senecio (the last of these three who had been with punished with death). Pliny, in Letter 7.19, states that Herennius Senecio was prosecuted since he had written a work about the life of the elder Helvidius Priscus at the request of Fannia. Dio claims that Herennius Senecio was prosecuted by Domitian for two reasons: first, that he had written the aforementioned work; and second, that during his long career he had not stood for any office after the quaestorship. Herennius Senecio’s retirement (secessio) seems to Dio to outweigh the charge of having written a libelous work since a “neglect of munia publica was conceivably used to great effect against Thrasea Paetus, and it was possibly pressed into service here once more.” A further reason for the trial against Herennius Senecio has been put forth by modern historians, who generally believe that “the trial of Senecio was a sequel and consequence of his prosecution of Baebius Massa for repetundae. Pliny narrated to Tacitus by letter the conclusion of Massa’s trial.” This letter (7.33) describes how Herennius Senecio along with Pliny had been charged by the Senate to act as advocates for the province of Baetica against Baebius Massa, found guilty of embezzlement in his province of Baetica in 93 C.E., is also mentioned in Tacitus, Agricola, 43; Historiae, IV.50; Juvenal, I.35; and Martial, XII.29.2. The details of the actual charge are not known.

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166 Pliny, Ep. 1.5, 2: Rustici Aruleni periculum fouerat, exsultauerat morte; adeo ut librum recitaret publicaretque, in quo Rusticum insectatur atque etiam ‘Stoicorum simiam’ appellat…

167 Pliny, Ep. 7.19, 5: Nam cum Senecio reus esset quod de uita Heluidi libros composuisset rogatumque se a Fannia in defensione dixisset…

168 Dio, Roman History, 67.13, 2: καί Ἐρέννιον Σενεκίονα ὃπε ὀúdeμιάν ἀρχήν ἐν πολλῷ βίῳ μετὰ τὴν ταμείαν ἠχήκει καὶ ὃτι τοῦ Πρίσκου τοῦ Ἐλουδίου τὸν Βίον συνέγραψεν.


170 Rogers, 1960, p. 20.

Henry Traub believes that in this letter of Pliny is attempting to show how he is running a great personal risk and, moreover, that Pliny attempts to redefine himself for posterity: “Pliny obviously wishes to appear in history as another Helvidius Priscus, Lucius Piso or Thrasea Paetus. One wonders what Tacitus felt about his friend’s request. Tacitus makes clear in the Agricola that at the time Baebius Massa was accused for res repetundae there was nothing to be feared from him” (p. 227).
Massa, who was found guilty and his property made state property. Later, however, Massa applied for restitution of his property, so Senecio and Pliny again went to the consuls. Massa in these deliberations claimed that Herennius Senecio had spoken more as his personal enemy than was honorable for a defendant. Massa pressed that Senecio be charged with treason.\textsuperscript{171} Pliny states that he announced then that he too should be charged with treason with Senecio as he agreed with all that Senecio had spoken.\textsuperscript{172} Pliny ends this narration never mentioning whether Massa was allowed his property back nor if Senecio and he were charged with treason. Moreover, when Herennius Senecio was brought to trial, it was not by Baebius Massa, but by the well-known informer, Mettius Carus (according to Pliny in Letter 7.19).\textsuperscript{173} This reason, therefore, for the charge against Herennius Senecio is invalid.

The trials probably took place after the prosecution of Baebius Massa, which is known not to have been finished before the death of Agricola on August 23, 93 C.E.\textsuperscript{174} As for the details of the trials, the sources offer very little details. All that is known is who was charged and the consequences of these trials, since we know who was executed and who was exiled. A further consequence mentioned by Tacitus, early in his work the \textit{Agricola}, is the burning of the books that had supposedly led to the execution of three

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{171} Pliny, Ep. 7.33, 7: Vixdum conticueramus, et Massa questus Senecionem non aduocati fidem sed inimici amaritudinem implesse, impietatis reum postulat.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Pliny, Ep. 7.33, 8: Horror omnium; ego autem ‘Vereor’ inquam, ‘clarissimi consules, ne mihi Massa silentio suo praeuariationem obiecerit, quod non et me reum postuluit.’
\item \textsuperscript{173} Pliny may not fully provide the exact charges for these three men nor will he provide sufficient detail of the trials, but in all three cases he has provided the name of the informer: Publicius Certus was the accuser of the younger Helvidius Priscus, Aquilius Regulus for Arelunus Rusticus, and, finally, Mettius Carus for Herennius Senecio.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Rogers, 1960, p. 19.
\end{itemize}
Although the Senatorial court decreed the burning of these books, it need not imply that these books were alone the basis of the indictment. For the eulogies or the biographies by Arulenus Rusticus would not have been published until the very year of the trial, 93 C.E., considering the fact that in the previous year he had been a suffect consul, thus denoting imperial favor. Based upon this date, either the writings of Senecio and the younger Helvidius were now published, or, if they had been published earlier, they now gained more popularity on account of Arulenus. But what was the reason for the other four members, who had written nothing, to be charged with treason? Fannia was thought to have supplied material for Herennius Senecio’s biography of Helvidius Priscus (Pliny, Letter 7.19), but what was the cause of the indictments for Mauricus, Arria, and Gratilla? The ancient sources never provide a cause. Are they simply being accused for being related or married to these authors? This is not a legitimate reason for the indictments, and “thus the writings, which alone are named by our ancient sources as the basis of the charges against the seven, are by no means satisfactorily acceptable as the content of the actual indictment in the court. Undoubtedly the indictment was treason.”

The history of the group influenced these charges. The treason trials are often cited as the “pre-eminent examples of the tyrannical suppression of free speech by the Roman emperors in general and by Domitian in particular, and of the extension of the law

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175 Tacitus, *Agricola*, 2.1: Legimus, cum Aruleno Rustico Paetus Thrasea, Herennio Senecioni Priscus Heluidius laudati essent, capitale fuisse, neque in ipsos modo auctoresm sed in libros quoque eorum saeuitium, delegato triumuiris ministerio ut monumenta clarissimorum ingeniorum in comitio ac foro urerentur.

176 It must be noted, that Tacitus’ report of this decree is suspect as he was not in Rome at this time, but was abroad for these years (See Chapter Four).

177 Rogers, 1960, p. 21.

178 Rogers, 1960, p. 22.
of treason by abuse to comprehend the criticism of the Emperor. There are good reasons
for rejecting such an interpretation. The main reason for rejecting this opinion is the
fact that these seven were not unjustly persecuted, but rather had come from families well
known for their treasonous behavior. The younger Helvidius Priscus was the son of
Helvidius Priscus, who had been executed during the reign of Vespasian, since he would
“not cease his violent attacks both on the principate and princeps; but in most modern or
ancient sources we do not find Vespasian described as a tyrant, because he put to death a
senator like Helvidius Priscus.” Before his death, the elder Helvidius Priscus had spent
years studying philosophy. He had also married his second wife, Fannia, the daughter of
Thrse Paetus. Both were exiled by Nero from 66 until 69 C.E., but returned to Rome
under Galba. Fannia, who had joined her husband during his first banishment, was
forced into exile after his death by Domitian from 93 to 96 C.E. Her father, Thrse
Paetus, had been a member of the Stoic circle and had stood for the old republican ideal,
libertas, until he was condemned by Nero in 66 C.E. He, however, took his own life.
Thrse Paetus had been married to Arria II, who was the daughter of Arria I and Caecina
Paetus. Her mother had been the famous Roman matron who had uttered, “Paete, non
dolce” while holding the knife to her husband after having stabbed herself. This dramatic
scene occurred because Claudius had condemned Caecina Paetus for being a member of
Camillus Scribonianus’ conspiracy in 42 C.E. Finally, let us return to the younger
Helvidius Priscus, who had married Anteia (it must be noted that she was not a member

179 Rogers, 1960, p. 19.
181 For more information concerning Thrse Paetus: Jocelyn M.C. Toynbee. “Dictators and Philosophers in
the First Century A.D.” Gcece and Rme. Vol. 13, No. 38/39. pp. 43-58; and also: Robert Samuel
182 Pliny, Ep. 3.16.
of the treason trials of 93 C.E.). Anteia was probably the daughter of P. Anteius Rufus or three other possible Anteii. Three of these four men were accused of involvement in various types of conspiracies against several emperors.\(^{183}\)

The younger Helvidius Priscus, therefore, had descended from treasonous families. The trials of 93 C.E., were directed at this close circle of adherents to the Stoic ideal, which involved supporting republican ideals along with cherishing the memory of their own martyrs, Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus.\(^{184}\) Herennius Senecio and Arulenus Rusticus were executed on account of their works concerning these two men, since “subsequent to the fate of Helvidius, the group might have loosened, being held together mainly by personal relationships, by regard for two widows and by the cult of two heroes.”\(^{185}\) This group that centered around Thrasea Paetus continued his set of beliefs, which were mainly centered on the state; especially in directing abuse against the emperor, propagating an anti-monarchical stance, and possessing a great contempt for authority.\(^{186}\) Many members of this group had come into contact with such philosophers while performing service abroad, as tourists, or as students in Greece. For example, the younger Helvidius Priscus had been a quaestor in Asia and also legate for a Syrian

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\(^{186}\) “It was expedient for Caesar to hold the balance between rival combinations and factions, to avoid being beguiled by a powerful minister or entrapped by a helpful company of eager adherents. Assessment of these deplorable transactions should not neglect factional rivalries, though not perhaps provoked by the Emperor himself yet developing to his gratification. Freedom to prosecute was one of the last vestiges of Republican ‘\textit{libertas}.’ The senators under attack professed allegiance to a tradition of liberty, of integrity and courage; and they further paraded the teaching of the Stoics. While fortifying character in the evil days, that doctrine engendered arrogance and conceit, with a danger of incautious political activity or attitudes. And some perhaps were thrust further into paths of opposition of ‘\textit{contumacia}’ than they intended, through the zeal of the younger partisans. The group easily inspired animosity. For their own part, no recent or personal grievances can be discovered” (Ronald Syme. 1988. “Domitian: The Last Years.” \textit{Roman Papers}. Vol. IV. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p. 255).
legion; and even better, the younger Pliny had close friendships with well-known philosophers Euphrates and Artemidorus, son-in-law to Musonius Rufus.\textsuperscript{187} Domitian, according to Pliny, brought his friends to trial in order to erase such opposition. The treason trials probably
came about as a reaction to anti-imperial Stoicism, possibly not only on the part of Domitian but also on the part of a Senate irritated by utopian extremism, which only succeeded in exasperating the Emperor’s vicious inclinations with consequent danger to everyone. It was in the Senate that the trials were conducted and senators upheld the charge, even if tradition speaks of a senate-house encircled by soldiers and of the grim presence of Domitian.\textsuperscript{188}
The significance of these treason trials is that they provide the best examples of how Pliny plays with events in his letters in order to convey to his readers his particular past; especially in his representation of the Senate during the reign of Domitian.

\textbf{III.D: The Senate under a Tyrant:}

This representation is best displayed in Letter 8.14 and also in the panegyric that Pliny had composed for the praise of Trajan. Pliny creates a highly tendentious version of the atmosphere of the Senate during Domitian’s reign, “so tendentious that it is difficult to assess its worth as historical evidence. Pale and apprehensive (\textit{Ep.} 8.14.8), no senator there dared open his mouth (\textit{Pan.} 76\textsuperscript{189}), and any who were not his favorites he hated, treating them like slaves (\textit{Pan.} 62.3, 68.2). Those admitted to the palace were no better off.”\textsuperscript{190} Domitian is seen as massacring the most distinguished members of the Senate, including those seven friends of Pliny’s, causing the rest to fear for their lives and creating a general sense of terror. Pliny, in Letter 8.14, implies that the senate was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{187} Syme, 1991, p. 573.
\item \textsuperscript{188} Garzetti, p. 292.
\item \textsuperscript{189} Pliny, \textit{Panegyricus}, 76.3: Ceteri quidem defixi et attoniti ipsam illam mutam ac sedentariam adsentiend\n\item \textsuperscript{190} Jones, 1992, p. 162.
\end{itemize}
cowering at Domitian’s feet, since the entire curia was *trepida* and *elinguis*. Yet Pliny is most definitely exaggerating this characterization of the Senate. He hopes to attach himself to those groups who were opposed to the emperor and, therefore, had something to fear. Besides this, Pliny was also presenting these opinions to Trajan’s Senate and even to Trajan himself. On the other hand, the criticisms of the senatorial members against Domitian might have justification as he had executed at least eleven senators and exiled numerous others. Domitian was blamed and members of the Senate, who had felt his wrath and who composed most of the ancient records of his reign, depicted the emperor as a monster.

These beliefs that Pliny promoted concerning Domitian were not based on fact but his own hostile feelings towards the emperor. Domitian in his relationship with the Senate followed the examples of his father (just as Trajan would later follow Domitian’s policies\(^1\)), but he lacked tact in his dealings. Domitian was unable to share governmental responsibility with the Senate and unable to communicate with them effectively. He took harsh and autocratic measures against them, as “he completely lacked the diplomatic skills of Titus and had inherited none from those expert practitioners Vespasian and Sabinus I; worse still, he left no heir to deify him and so, unlike Nerva, he was not able to ‘guide’ the literary tradition to the ‘correct’

\(^{191}\) Pliny, Ep. 8.14, 8: Iidem prospeximus curiam, sed curiam trepidam et elinguem, cum dicere quod uelles periculorum, quod nolles miserum esset.

“It follows that Domitian could not help disliking certain senatorial groupings. In the course of time this dislike, fostered by an innate tendency to be at the helm himself, developed into a deep-seated hatred, which ended in a real terror for those senators who ventured to resist” (Pleket, p. 312-313).

\(^{192}\) Trajan was “an emperor not only probably related to the Flavians, but also one whose administrative policies were similar to Domitian’s and, in many ways, a continuation of them. Any difference was superficial. Both sought to reduce the senate’s real power and, at the same time, to pay a certain amount of lip-service to its traditional significance” (Jones, 1992, p. 163).
interpretation of events." On the contrary, his efforts to gain the senatorial support in seen in his consular appointments despite the revolt of Saturninus and the treasonous behavior of the Senate in the last years of his reign. Vespasian and Titus had monopolized the consulship previously, since the Flavians had held all but six out of twenty-four ordinary consulships between the years of 70 and 81 C.E. Domitian, on the other hand, in his effort to acquire senatorial support, allowed senators to hold these positions once again. During the last eight years of his reign, Domitian only held three of the sixteen ordinary consulships.

Furthermore, Domitian even went so far as to award consular appointments to those senators who could be labeled the ‘opposition.’ For example, Pliny neglects to mention that Arulenus Rusticus was granted a suffect consulship in 92 C.E. (three years after the revolt of Saturninus and a year before Arulenus Rusticus was charged with treason “at a time when Domitian is supposed to have suspected the Senate of plotting

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193 Jones, 1992, p. 163.
194 “Furthermore, while the literary sources refer to a curiam trepidam et elinguem, there is in fact no reliable evidence of the percentage of senators actually opposed to him in 96 or, indeed, in the previous years. On the other hand, we can use the unbiased evidence of his consular appointments as an indication of what his intentions were towards the senate. On this basis, it would seem that he sought its approval and approached the problem of gaining it in two different ways. First, he gradually abandoned the Flavian monopoly of the ordinary consulships so as to admit loyal or deserving senators to this greatly-prized position….Secondly, and more boldly, potential opponents were also honoured with suffect (rather than ordinary) consulships in an effort either to silence or neutralize them or even to gain their support” (Brian W. Jones. 1973. “Domitian’s Attitude to the Senate.” The American Journal of Philology. Vol. 94, No. 1. p. 91).
195 Domitian’s assuming the title of the censor perpetuus along with being elected consul for ten years could be seen as the emperor throwing off the disguise for his autocracy (Dio, 67.4). The powers of the censor allowed control over admission and expulsion of the senatorial and equestrian orders along with a general censorship over conduct and morals. Domitian held the position as censor perpetuus from 85 C.E. until his death, but little is known about how he used the censorship during his reign, especially considering that the censor’s powers were already part of the emperor’s imperium. Perhaps Domitian sought the position for prestige and propaganda. Yet there is no difference between Domitian’s perpetual censorship and his annually renewed position as censor (Brian W. Jones. 1973. “Some Thoughts on Domitian’s Perpetual Censorship.” Classical Journal. Vol. 68, No. 3. pp. 276-277). Regardless of how few consulships he actually held, the title of censor perpetuus with the consulships could not have caused any goodwill between the emperor and his senate.
against him.”\(^\text{196}\) The year of the consulate of the younger Helvidius Priscus is
unknown, but it might fall in 93 C.E.; though some claim it may have been in 87 C.E.\(^\text{197}\)
Herennius Senecio, however, never held a consulship, but was merely quaestorian (Dio
reports this as one of the charges that was applied to Senecio). The promotions of
Arulenus Rusticus and the younger Helvidius Priscus show Domitian attempting some
form of appeasement towards the Senate; and “far from being suspicious of the senate,
the emperor was confident, and perhaps foolishly over-confident, of having wide-spread
support in the body.”\(^\text{198}\) So contrary to the senatorially biased ancient sources, Domitian,
regardless of his despot-like personality, went to great effort to please the Senate, even
allowing representatives of ‘opposition’ to hold suffect consulships.

**III.E: The Younger Pliny’s Career:**

Besides omitting the details of his friends’ careers and misrepresenting
Domitian’s relationship with the Senate, Pliny also obscures his own career during this
period. Pliny, in Letter 3.11, describes how seven of his friends had been executed or
exiled (these seven being the ones involved in the treason trials of 93 C.E.), and that he
himself stood amidst threatening thunderbolts that at any moment might strike him. Pliny
claims that there were clear signs that Domitian soon would condemn him and that a
similar end was awaiting him.\(^\text{199}\) In Letter 7.27, Pliny alleges that if Domitian had lived
longer he would have been brought to trial, since papers had been found in his desk that

\(^{196}\) Jones, 1973, p. 89.

\(^{197}\) For 93 C.E. for the consulship, see: Syme, 1988, p. 255 and for 87 C.E., see Birley, A.R. 2000. 

\(^{198}\) Jones, 1973, p. 85.

\(^{199}\) Pliny, *Ep.* 3.11, 3: Atque haec feci, cum septem amicis meis aut occisis aut relegatis, occisis Senecione
Rustico Heluidio, relegatis Maurico Gratilla Arria Fannia, tot circa me iactis fulminibus quasi ambustus
mihi quoque impendere idem exitium certis quibusdam notis augurarer.
included information against him by the delator Mettius Carus. Finally, Pliny declares that in his own case he had experienced advancements and dangers since he had been a friend of honest men (this had helped him under good emperors, but had injured him under bad emperors- Domitian). Finally, in the closing part of his panegyric, Pliny claims that he had advanced under the most treacherous of emperors, Domitian, but that his career had been halted. Pliny claims to have refused to act as an informer for Domitian against honest men and, therefore, he took the long way instead of accepting any short cuts in his cursus honorum. For this reason, Pliny was hated by the most evil of emperors, Domitian, but on the other hand loved by the best, Nerva and Trajan.

These claims of Pliny of having suffered under the reign of Domitian and having been halted in his career are gross embellishments when compared to his actual career. In 82/83 C.E., the younger Pliny served as military tribune of the Third Gallic Legion in Syria. In 89/90 C.E. (the year of Saturninus’ revolt), he was made quaestor imperatoris (membership to the senate was gained by holding the office of quaestor). The quaestor imperatoris were two positions out of a total twenty per year and were usually given to young men of distinction personally chosen by the emperor. In order to gain this position, the younger Pliny must have received special favor from Domitian. In 91/92

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200 Pliny, Ep. 7.27, 14: Nihil notabile secutum, nisi forte quod non fui reus, futurus, si Domitianus sub quo haec acciderunt diutius uixisset. Nam in scrinio eius datus a Caro de me libellus inuentus est.

201 Pliny, Ep. 4.24, 4-5: Circa nos ipsos quam multa mutata sunt! Studiis processimus, studiis pericilitati sumus, rursusque processimus: profuerunt nobis honorum amicitiae, honorum obfuerunt iterumque prosunt.

202 Pliny, Panegyricus, 95.3-4: Vos modo fauete huic proposito et credite, si cursu quodam prouectus ab illo insidiosissimo princeps, ante quem profiteretur odium honorum, postquam professus est substiit, cum uiderem quae ad honores compendia paterent longius iter malui; si malis temporibus inter maestos et pauentes, bonis inter securos gaudentesque numeror; si denique in tantum diligo optimum principem, in quantum inuisus pessimo fui.

C.E., Pliny was tribune of the plebs. In 93 C.E., the same years as the treason trials of seven of his close friends, Pliny was praetor. Yet this is the very year that Pliny recalls with fear for his own fate. It is the next position, however, which causes one to question Pliny’s allegations that he had been halted in his career towards the end of Domitian’s reign. Pliny received the position of praefectus aerari militaris in 94 C.E., though he never mentions it in his letters. This was usually a three-year position that provided for the pensioning of discharged soldiers and also was chosen by the emperor. The younger Pliny would have held this position until the year of Domitian’s death in 96 C.E.; therefore, “if he was in fact uninterruptedly in office during Domitian’s last, worst phase, the ‘terror’, he must be held guilty of deliberately propagating a false version of his position in writings.” Thus, Pliny creates a false version of his position of honor and his fear during the last few years of Domitian’s reign since he had received impressive positions of Imperial favor from one which, after death, he had labeled ‘insidiosissimus princeps.’ It seems as if Pliny is trying to apologize for that fact that he had held office under Domitian while his friends had suffered.

**III.F: Conclusion:**

The younger Pliny was twenty at the beginning of the reign of Domitian and, therefore as a contemporary of the emperor, could have provided for his readers an

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204 It is commonly agreed that the younger Pliny’s praetorship was in 93 C.E. (Birley, p. 11-13; Syme, 1958, p. 76; and Sherwin-White, 1957, p. 126-130), while others have argued for later dates, such as 94 or 95 C.E. (W. Otto, 1919. “Zur Lebensgeschichte des jüngeren Plinius. Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.” pp. 43-54). R.H. Harte has argued that Pliny’s praetorship was in 90 or 91 C.E. (R.H. Harte. 1935. “The Praetorship of the Younger Pliny.” Journal of Roman Studies. Vol. 25. pp. 51-54).

205 *CIL* V 5262 contains three positions nowhere mentioned by Pliny: decimvir stlitibus iudicandis, sevir equitum Romanarum, and praefectus aerari militaris.


207 Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 95.
honest account of this period. Instead, he provides a biased account crafting Domitian into a tyrant based upon his own personal animosity, his compliance with the Senate’s decree of the *memoriae damnatio*, and in his flattering of Trajan. His personal animosity was caused by Domitian’s prosecution of seven of his close friends and a need to align himself with the senatorial group who had suffered during the emperor’s tyrannical reign. These seven ‘good men’ were members of a long line of treasonous families who were well-known for their Stoic opposition to emperors. Pliny, however, is at great pains to show himself as a member of this group. After Domitian’s death and the return of numerous exiles, Pliny, neglecting to mention his own advancement, attempts to apologize to those who had been punished. Moreover, Pliny tries to establish a new tradition concerning this period by means of his omissions and distortions of the actual events. Yet, when the facts are weighed and other sources are compared with the recollections of the younger Pliny, a new version of the past is seen. Domitian should not be seen as a cruel despot caring for his own glory, but an adherent to the Augustan reform concerning morality. Domitian, furthermore, is seen seeking some form of a compromise with the senators in his choice of appointments for the suffect consulship. And, finally, Pliny is not the victim he claims under a horrid tyrant, but rather a man who merely knows how to turn a phrase.
Chapter Four: Tacitus and Tyranny (Agricola, 39-46)

It is not tolerable, but indeed it is better to die; For it is a milder fate than tyranny.
-Aeschylus, Agamemnon, 1364-1365.

IV.A: Introduction:

Although written during the early part of Trajan’s reign, Tacitus’ Agricola is concerned with the Flavian period, in particular the years from 77 to 93 C.E., and the emperor Domitian. Like Suetonius and the Younger Pliny, Tacitus, having spent his early adulthood under this emperor, has decided to finally break the fifteen years silence imposed by Domitian. His goal is to write about the glory of his father-in-law, Gnaeus Julius Agricola. The opening chapters of the work record how Tacitus aims to present not only the recent past- Rome’s despair under the tyranny of Domitian and the slavery he demanded- but also what was regained at the emperor’s death. Yet it is the last eight chapters of this biography that provide the only surviving descriptions of Domitian’s rule by Tacitus; although there are a few passing references made to the emperor in his Histories, the books concerned with this period are included in that part of the text which has been lost. As the historian’s first work, the Agricola is essential for an understanding of Tacitus’ development, but these few chapters also provide the only evidence of how Tacitus viewed the last of the Flavian emperors as a tyrant.

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208 Agricola, 3.2-3: quid, si per quidecim annos,…exemptis e media vita tot annis, quibus iuuennes ad senectutem, senes prope ad ipsos exactae terminos per silentium uenimus? non tamen pigebit uel incondita ac rudi uoce memoriam prioris seruitutis ac testimonium praesentium bonorum composuisse. hic interim liber honori Agricolae soci erit aut excusatus.
R.M. Ogilvie believes that since the Agricola was Tacitus’ first work that he was clearly feeling his way both politically and stylistically. For these reasons, the biography is “something of an uneven experiment, uneven in style and in character” (1991. “An Interim Report on Tacitus’ ‘Agricola’.” Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. II.33.3. pp. 1715).
IV.B: The Use of Rumor:

After telling of the successes that had been achieved in Britain, Tacitus states that Domitian had received Agricola’s humble dispatches with outward happiness, but that secretly the emperor was rather anxious (Agr. 39). Such trepidation was caused by the comparison of Agricola’s triumphs with Domitian’s triumph over the Germans, which Tacitus states was a false triumph and an object of derision. These triumphs were held for the conquest of the Chatti in 83 C.E., a war that had been deemed unnecessary by those hostile to the emperor.\(^{210}\)

Besides the legitimacy of the emperor’s triumph now being questioned, Domitian, according to Tacitus, had even purchased people whose hair and clothing was adapted so that they could play the role of captives.\(^{211}\) Tacitus continues building the grounds for Domitian’s hatred against Agricola by stating that the emperor greatly feared any man who might be exalted above him. Owing to his great and true victory, in fact, Agricola had already surpassed his princeps in military glory, a thing not allowed since the reputation of a good general was usually reserved as an imperial quality.\(^{212}\) At this time, however, Domitian decided it was best to hide his anxieties and his hatred, since Agricola was still so popular with the army and he currently possessed Britain.\(^{213}\)

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\(^{210}\) See chapter 2 where the issue of Domitian’s military successes are discussed more thoroughly.

\(^{211}\) Suetonius (C. Caligula, 47), mentions a similar deception by the emperor Caligula for his triumph for his successful battle against the ocean. For this occasion, the emperor, having chosen the best of the Gauls, ordered them to grow their hair out and to dye it red. This is so close to Tacitus’ description of how Domitian had his ‘captives’ change their hair and clothes for his triumph that it casts great doubt on the veracity of this story.

\(^{212}\) Agr. 39.3: ducis boni imperatoriam uirtutem esse.

\(^{213}\) Agr. 39.3: talibus curis exercitus, quodque saeuae cogitationis indicium erat, secreto suo satiatus, optimum in praesentia statuit reponere odium, donec impetus famae et favor exercitus languesceret: nam etiam tum Agricola Britanniam obtinebat.
It is necessary to return to the beginning of Domitian’s rule in order to reevaluate Tacitus’ comparison between the emperor and Agricola. In September of 81 C.E., when he had succeeded to the throne, Domitian had also inherited the ongoing war in Britain. At first the governor Petillius Cerialis, who eventually subdued northern England, had carried out Flavian policy in Britain.\textsuperscript{214} He was replaced by Julius Frontinus in 74 C.E., who went on to pacify most of Wales, until Agricola took over for him in 77 C.E.\textsuperscript{215} When he had become emperor, Domitian could have recalled Agricola from his command because he had already fulfilled the usual length of service (5 years), but instead he chose to allow Agricola to remain in his office.\textsuperscript{216} Domitian may have even followed Agricola’s advice that he remain on the island for another campaigning season as it was almost within his grasp. So the emperor allowed him to finish the task and, more importantly, gain the credit for the conquest; Domitian was not jealous of his general’s successes, but rather granted him a chance for greater glory.

This chance for greater glory came at the battle of \textit{Mons Graupius} in the latter part of 83 C.E., and it was through this battle that Agricola gained his reputation as a general.\textsuperscript{217} It was after this battle that Agricola was recalled unwillingly to Rome. His

\begin{footnotes}
\item[214] Agr. 17.
\item[215] Agr. 17.
\item[217] I.A. Richmond argues that Agricola’s decision to fight using the auxiliary troops while leaving the legions in reserve showed the value of this new wing, "and may well explain why Domitian very shortly felt able to reduce the British garrison by a legion" (I.A. Richmond. 1944. “Gnaeus Julius Agricola.” \textit{The Journal of Roman Studies}. Vol. 34, Parts 1 and 2. p. 42). W.S. Hanson does not believe that Agricola won at Mons Graupius based upon his new tactic of using only the auxiliaries, rather that keeping the legions in reserve had a long history. Cerialis, for example, “had also kept his legionaries in the second rank when facing Civilis in AD 70 (Tacitus, \textit{Hist.} 5. 16). That he was obliged to employ them, while Agricola was not, merely reflects the relative weakness of the opposition at Mons Graupius” (W.S. Hanson. 1987. \textit{Agricola and the Conquest of the North}. London: B.T. Batsford Ltd. p. 175). For more information on the Battle of Mons Graupius, see the following: Catherine M. Gilliver. 1996. “Mons Graupius and the Role of Auxiliaries in Battle.” \textit{Greece and Rome}, 2nd Series. Vol. 43, No. 1. pp. 54-67; and A.R. Birley. 1976. “The Date of Mons Graupius.” \textit{Liverpool Classics Monthly}. Vol. 1, No. 2. pp. 11-14.
\end{footnotes}
withdrawal from the governorship, however, was not due to malice: Domitian could not
have known that the Dacian war would break out at the same time as Agricola’s victory
at Mons Graupius; nor could he have foreseen the approach of two great disasters, which
are mentioned by Tacitus (Agr. 41). The first was the Dacian invasion of Moesia during
which Oppius Sabinus was killed in 85 C.E., and the second occurred when the Dacians
cut down Domitian’s forces at the Danube and another general, Cornelius Fuscus, was
lost in 86 C.E. The disaster of 86 C.E. was probably worse than the first, since it had
occurred within such a short time span. It must be remembered that trouble on the
Danube affected Rome more directly than any conflicts in Britain, so, for these reasons,
Domitian made the decision to abandon the island and Agricola’s conquests. Finally,
the recall of Agricola was not caused by Domitian’s hatred, but by the completion of
Agricola’s conquests. Agricola himself, no doubt considered that he had accomplished
his conquest of Britain, as he himself says at the beginning of the speech given before the
battle of Mons Graupius. Domitian had allowed Agricola to continue in Britain as
long as it was feasible (both in the matters of resources available and the likelihood of
success), but when these legions were needed for other matters (for example, the Dacian
troubles in the Danube region), the legions were pulled out and redeployed.

After his unusually long governorship of seven years, during which he had
achieved a great deal, Agricola was eventually recalled to Rome where Domitian

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218 Southern, p. 74-75.
219 Agr. 33: “Septimus annus est, commilitiones, ex quo uirtute et auspiciis imperii Romani, fide atque
opera nostra Britanniam uicistis.”
A.G. Woodhead states that “‘Mopping-up’ and minor pacification were regarded as incidental. Thus
Cerialis was withdrawn from Britain before the Brigantes were really quiet, Frontinus with the Ordovices
unsubdued, and Agricola before the Caledonians were completely pacified. Agricola had already enjoyed a
long term of office, and Domitian, who in fact did not require a British legion until A.D. 86, withdrew him
because he considered not that this work was unprofitable but that it was finished” (A.G. Woodhead.
awarded him triumphal decorations, the honor of a statue, and whatever else was usually given for a triumph to successful generals (Agr. 40). Domitian gives Agricola due recognition for all of his achievements in Britain - despite his alleged jealousy - when he reports them to the Senate and proposes himself that Agricola should receive the traditional honors of victorious generals. According to Tacitus, Agricola had been deprived of the customary honors because they would have presented an uncomplimentary comparison with Domitian’s fake triumphs of 83 C.E. What must be kept in mind is that, in the long run, Agricola’s successes in Britain were not as important for the well-being of the empire as a whole as Domitian’s wars on the frontier, which during the reign of Domitian, “was long and difficult to guard, it had been neglected for generations, and the tribes that lay beyond it, the Sarmatians, the Suevi, and the Dacians, were numerous, powerful, and well organized.” The emperor’s campaigns against these tribes and, moreover, the strengthening of the frontier lines were of far greater importance than any expansions gained in the far-off island of Britain.

Lastly, concerning Agricola’s successes in Britain, Tacitus underplays the achievements of Agricola’s predecessors and, furthermore, depreciates them through his use of innuendo. Agricola had been successful, yet three things should be kept in mind. First, concerning his first two campaigns in Wales and northern England, Agricola

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220 It is agreed that the recall of Agricola was legitimate, and that it is not necessary for us to “believe Tacitus when he avenges Agricola’s disappointment on his recall by charging his Imperial master with jealousy, envy, and apprehension” (Bernard Henderson. 1927. *Five Roman Emperors*. Cambridge: The University Press. p. 82).


222 T.A. Dorey. 1960. “Agricola and Domitian.” *Greece and Rome*, 2nd Series. Vol. 7, No.1. p. 67. Dorey states that Agricola’s successes had been well earned, but that “their contribution to the general welfare and military security of the Empire had not been particularly important.”

had merely put down a minor insurrection and then continued the work of Cerialis and Frontinus who had accomplished the major conquests in these areas. Such minor matters are greatly enhanced by means of Tacitus ‘willful vagueness.’ Secondly, in the regions of Lowland Scotland, there was actually little resistance, perhaps also due to previous conquests by Agricola’s predecessors. The third matter- Agricola’s abnormally long governorship- has been previously discussed. Failure in Britain, therefore, under these circumstances was a remote possibility.

Tacitus attempts to present Agricola as being robbed of proper glory due to the emperor’s jealousy and, moreover, arousing the emperor’s suspicions. This implies that it was not just Agricola’s success that caused the emperor anxiety, but also the fear of a military coup. Domitian needed to separate Agricola from his loyal army of four legions to prevent a threat to his position. He had learned well the lessons of his father and the year 69 C.E. When he returned to Rome, Agricola, according to Tacitus, went straight to Domitian after having entered the city under the cover of night and, having kissed the emperor, snuck away from the mob. Afterwards he dressed in an unassuming manner, spoke with only a few friends at a time, and maintained so modest a life that it led people

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224 Agr. 18-20.
Hanson states that “Agricola’s second ‘campaign’, like his first, would appear to have been based almost entirely upon the work of his predecessors” (p. 68).
225 Hanson, p. 174.
226 Tacitus (Agr. 20: ex aequo egerant) hints that previously these tribes had lived on equal terms (it has been suggested by Ogilvie and Richmond that the prepositional phrase be translated adverbially as ‘equally’. R.M. Ogilvie and I.A. Richmond. 1967. Cornelli Taciti: De Vita Agricolae. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p. 219). Hanson believes that this translation can mean that “some of the Scottish tribes had actually come into contact with Roman forces before Agricola’s second campaign. In addition, the fact that Agricola is not credited with encountering new tribes until his third season of campaigning, during which he penetrated as far north as the Tay, or previously unknown tribes until his fifth, would seem to support the view that previous governors may have been active in Scotland” (p. 55-56). See Agr. 22 for the third season and Agr. 24 for the fifth.
227 Agr. 40.3-4.
to wonder at how he gained such a reputation.\textsuperscript{228} Agricola, it is assumed, took all these precautions in order to avoid Domitian’s wrath; but in the end, Agricola was pushed back into the prominence, not of his own will, but by the people. After great national losses and the growing threat in the Danube, according to Tacitus, the people called for the general Agricola.\textsuperscript{229}

Agricola was once again in danger of incurring Domitian’s jealousy, but there was no need to fear, as most of the tyrant’s ‘victims’ fell into two groups: the so-called Stoic opposition and the families connected with them, or members of Domitian’s own household.\textsuperscript{230} The three generals whose deaths are known from this period bear no resemblance in their actions to Agricola: the first, Antonius Saturninus, was killed after an unsuccessful military revolt in 89 C.E. (Suetonius, \textit{Life of Domitian}, 10); the second, Vettulenus Civica Cerialis, proconsul of Asia, was executed for an attempted revolution in 87/8 C.E. (\textit{Agr.} 42); finally, Sallustius Lucullus, the governor of Britain, was put to death for giving his name to a new type of lance, the ‘Lucullan’ (Suetonius, \textit{Life of Domitian}, 10).\textsuperscript{231} Domitian’s relationship with his other successful generals (Julius Frontinus, Tettius Julianus, Verginius Rufus, who had been offered the imperial position twice in the past, and the future empire Trajan) was not at all envious or given to any fear that they were seeking to usurp his position.\textsuperscript{232} Agricola had done no wrong in fulfilling

\begin{footnotes}
\item[228] \textit{Agr.} 40.4: adeo ut plerique, quibus magnos uiros per ambitionem aestimare mos est, uiso aspectoque Agricola quaerent famam, pauci interpretarentur.
\item[229] \textit{Agr.} 41: ita cum damna damnis continuarentur atque omnis annus funeribus et cladibus insigniretur, poscebatur ore uulgi dux Agricola…sic Agricola simul suis uirtutibus, simul uitiis aliorum in ipsam gloriem praeceps agebatur.
\item[230] Dorey, p. 69.
\item[231] For a discussion of some of these victims, see Chapter 3.
\item[232] The dates for his command and death are unknown.
\end{footnotes}
the precepts of the good general;\footnote{Holly Haynes. 2003. \emph{The History of Make-Believe: Tacitus on Imperial Rome}. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 165.} and, furthermore, if Agricola had even considered a military revolt, such an act would have been against Tacitus’ characterization of Agricola’s moderation and obedience.\footnote{T.A. Dorey. 1969. \textit{“Agricola and Germania.”} Tacitus. Edited by T.A. Dorey. London: Rouledge. p. 6. Tacitus emphasizes these qualities of Agricola as a “deliberate and consistent shunning of the limelight, with consequent aviodance of envy and enmity on the part of superiors, inferiors, and most of all the emperor himself” (W. Liebeschuetz. 1966. \textit{“The Theme of Liberty in the Agricola of Tacitus.”} The Classical Quarterly, New Series. Vol. 16, No. 1. p. 127).} Perhaps if the general had defied his orders, there would have been a probable reason for Tacitus’ claim of Domitian’s hatred.

When Domitian awarded Agricola his triumphal ornaments, Tacitus states that the emperor also ordered that the suggestion be added that the province of Syria was being set aside for Agricola. The post had become available by the death of Atilius Rufus in 83 C.E. and was typically reserved for older men.\footnote{Agr. 40: decerni in senatu iubet addique insuper opinionem, Syriam prouinciam Agricolae destinari, uacuam tum morte Atili Rufi consularis et maioribus reseruatam. Ogilvie and Richmond state that the decree of Domitian hinted at further honors, and Tacitus just assumed Syria since the post was open. Regarding the province of Syria. The governorship was usually held by men over the age of 50; Agricola at this time was only 44 years old (p. 288) \footnote{Agr. 40: credidere plerique libertum ex secretioribus ministeriis missum ad Agricolam codicillos, quibus ei Syria dabatur, tulisse cum praecepto ut, si in Britannia foret, traderentur; eunque libertum in ipso freto Oceani obuium Agricolae, ne appellato quidem eo ad Domitianum remeasse, siue uerum istud, siue ex ingenio principis factum ac compositum est.}} Tacitus further implies (\textit{credidere plerique}) that a freedman of the emperors had been sent with dispatches to the general in which Syria was offered; however, the freedman never delivered these letters to Agricola. They were only to be delivered to Agricola if the general was still in Britain with his legions, but by this time he was already under sail towards the coast of the Channel.\footnote{Agricola at this time was only 44 years old (p. 288) \footnote{Agr. 40: credidere plerique libertum ex secretioribus ministeriis missum ad Agricolam codicillos, quibus ei Syria dabatur, tulisse cum praecepto ut, si in Britannia foret, traderentur; eunque libertum in ipso freto Oceani obuium Agricolae, ne appellato quidem eo ad Domitianum remeasse, siue uerum istud, siue ex ingenio principis factum ac compositum est.}} The idea here that Domitian was attempting to lure Agricola away from Britain with the promise of the province of Syria is not at all believable, but merely based upon Tacitus’ use of insinuation. There is no way that Agricola could reasonably have expected to receive the governorship of Syria after his rather long tenure as governor of Britain.
Agricola was further deprived of a province when the time came to draw lots for
the governorship of Africa and Asia. At this time, friends of the emperor approached
Agricola to ask if he wished for either of the provinces. Later they advised him to make
peace, then offered to assist him in excusing himself, and eventually dragged him before
the emperor with mixed warnings and advice. Domitian, prepared with his hypocrisy,
listened to and granted Agricola’s petition to excuse himself from accepting a post. Yet
the salary (salarium) usually given to proconsuls was not given to Agricola. Tacitus
claims it was not given because the emperor was offended that Agricola had not asked for
it or that he did not wish it to appear as if he had bribed Agricola to excuse himself from
the provinces. Though the emperor’s nature was usually of a rather violent and secretive,
nonetheless he was pacified by Agricola’s moderation so as not to bring instant ruin upon
the successive general.

In this passage, Tacitus implies several things: the most important being that
Agricola’s refusal of the governorship raises the questions whether it was out of the
ordinary, and whether it was due to Domitian’s hatred that Agricola was denied the
customary salarium. Neither of these statements, it can be argued, is acceptable as
historical truth. This passage seems to show that under Domitian there was an
established procedure by which to refuse a governorship. Agricola first had to appear
before the emperor in order to explain the reasons for the refusal and then ask permission

237 Agr. 42: qui paratus simulatione, in androgantiam compositus, et audiit preces excusantis et, cum
adnuisset, agi sibi gratias passus est, nec erubuit beneficii invidia. salarium tamen proconsulare solitum
offerri et quibusdam a se ipso concessum Agricolae non dedit, siue offensus non petitum, siue ex conscience,
ne quod uetuerat uideretur emisse.

238 Agr. 42: proprium humani ingenii est odio quem laeseris: Domitiani uero natura praeceps in iram, et
quo obscurior, eo irreucabiliior, moderatione tamen prudentiisque Agricolae leniebatur, quia non
contumacia neque inani iactatione libertatis famam fatumque prouocabat.

Philology. Vol. 49, No. 4. p. 255.
for this rejection of the position.\textsuperscript{240} Was Agricola’s refusal of the governorship on account of Domitian and his personal enmity towards the general?\textsuperscript{241} There are a few examples of others refusing a governorship, which show that Agricola’s refusal was not necessarily abnormal.\textsuperscript{242} It is even argued that Agricola had refused the governorship due to ill health caused by over exertion, yet there is no substantial evidence for such a claim.\textsuperscript{243} Finally, there is reason to doubt Tacitus’ claim that Agricola had been forced to refuse the governorship indirectly by Domitian. First, that Agricola would have to be dragged before the emperor, instead of willingly refusing the post, seems contradictory with Tacitus’ statement that Agricola did not like to take part in affairs of state (\textit{Agr.} 42). Secondly, it appears strange that Domitian’s freedmen would encourage Agricola to seek peace and quiet (\textit{ac primo occultius quietem et otium laudare}), nearly the same words Tacitus uses to describe Agricola’s retirement.\textsuperscript{244} It seems more probable, therefore, that Agricola would have wished to refuse the governorship.\textsuperscript{245}

That Agricola was not awarded the \textit{salarium} was not due to Domitian’s jealousy, as Tacitus claims, but simply because Agricola had never asked for it, as he knew he was not entitled to it. The \textit{salarium} was offered only to proconsuls-elect who for some reason

\textsuperscript{240} The \textit{salarium} is not found earlier then in the works of the elder Pliny (\textit{Natural History}, XXXI.89). Other examples are in Cassius Dio, 52.23.1; 53.15.4; and 79.22.5.
\textsuperscript{241} Hanson argues that another reason, if indeed Domitian had blocked Agricola’s career both concerning employing him in Germany and the Danube in the later 80’s and also the governorship of Asia or Africa, is due to his lack of experience outside of Britain. Agricola had gained his military experience, first as military tribune, then as legionary legate during the governorships of Vettius Bolanus and Petilius Cerialis, and finally as governor of Britain himself. Such limited experience may have made him unsuitable for posts in other places (p. 184).
\textsuperscript{242} Tacitus, \textit{Annales}, 3.71 and 6.40; Suetonius, \textit{The Life of Galba}, 3.4; Dio Cassius, 60.25.6 and 78.22.4-5. See Traub for more information for other examples of refusals of governorship.
\textsuperscript{243} Dorey, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{244} \textit{Agr}. 40: tranquillitatem atque otium penitus hausit...
\textsuperscript{245} Traub, p. 256.
had to refuse the position, not to candidates from the proconsulship. Agricola had never held a senatorial proconsulship and is shown in this passage as denying the proconsulship of Africa or Asia even before the sortitio had taken place. Both of Tacitus’ complaints against the emperor are without substance and mostly the creation of Tacitus’ own imagination. Having received his excusatio and thanked the emperor for such a beneficium, Agricola was then to ask for the salarium in lieu of the office. Domitian, if this was the regular procedure, may have been offended justifiably by Agricola’s proud silence concerning the salarium; however, Tacitus’ skill in innuendo has turned what must have been an insult to the emperor to a ‘righteous act’ by Agricola. Such a use of innuendo has clouded a regular procedure by means of the hypocritical attitude assigned to the emperor by Tacitus. Tacitus, it will be remembered, was abroad, and therefore did not personally witness any of the events that occurred at this time.

After his refusal of the governorship, Agricola spent the next nine years of his life in retirement. Yet Tacitus was so effective in his representation of Agricola’s persecution at this time, that it was subsequently accepted by later writers; for example, Cassius Dio, who claims that the general spent the remainder of his years in disgrace and want, since

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246 Dio (79.22.5) makes clear that the salarium was granted to proconsuls-elect who for some reason had to deny the position, and not to candidates for the proconsulship.
247 Evans, p. 81.
248 Ibid.
249 Traub, p. 256.

In Agr. 45, Tacitus describes how he was not in Rome when Agricola passed away.
his victories had been too great for a mere general to have gained.\textsuperscript{251} After these nine years, Agricola passed away a few weeks after his fifty-third birthday on August 23, 93 C.E., probably due to natural causes, and not, as Tacitus claims, from any plot by the emperor. Tacitus reports the rumor that he was poisoned, perhaps by the emperor, but there is no independent evidence.\textsuperscript{252} It has been argued that the equation of Agricola with his father, Julius Graecinus, who had incurred the hatred of the emperor Caligula, could have caused Tacitus to make the insinuation of poisoning.\textsuperscript{253} Yet as Domitian was a far worse tyrant than Caligula ever was and Agricola had incurred a level of hate beyond that of his father, in Tacitus’ view, Agricola’s death by foul play was expected.

It has already been stated, however, that Domitian had no cause to be jealous or even afraid of Agricola, so why then would the emperor have reason to have Agricola killed? There is no motive. The nine years after Agricola’s recall from Britain until his death were spent in a quiet retirement, a fact that provides serious doubts about why the emperor would have waited so long to take action against this threat (if Agricola was perceived as such). Tacitus, moreover, mentions that Domitian showed concern for Agricola by regularly sending his freedman and physicians throughout the illness—though Tacitus questions whether this was out of actual concern or espionage.\textsuperscript{254} Tacitus seems to lean towards the latter since in the next sentence he states that no one believed that the

\textsuperscript{251} LXVI.20: ὁ δὲ ἀγρικόλας ἐν τε ἀτυμίᾳ τὸ λοιπὸν τοῦ βίου καὶ ἐν ἔνδειᾳ, ἀτε καὶ μείζονα ἢ κατὰ σφατηγόν καταπαράξας, ἔζησε, καὶ τέλος ἐσφάγῃ δι᾽ ταῦτα ὑπὸ Δομιτιανοῦ, θεία τάς ἐπινικίους τιμὰς παρ᾽ αὐτὸν λαβὼν.

\textsuperscript{252} Agr. 43: augebat miserationem constans rumor ueneno interceptum: nobis nihil comperti adfirmare ausim.


\textsuperscript{254} Agr. 43: ceterum per omnem ualentudinem eius crebris quam ex more principatus per nuntios uisentis et libertorum primi et medicorum intimi uenere, siue cura illud siue inquisitio erat.
emperor would be at all saddened at the news of Agricola’s passing. Domitian’s concern for his general is subverted by Tacitus’ innuendos and becomes just another example of the emperor’s hostility. Tacitus states several times in his conclusion that Agricola was fortunate on account of his timely death, since this allowed him an escape from the worst of Domitian’s tyranny.

IV.C: The Careers of Agricola and Tacitus:

Like Pliny the Younger (and, to a lesser degree, Suetonius), Tacitus faced the same difficulties in attempting to reconcile his description of Domitian’s crimes with his own prospering under the tyrant. Agricola’s successes have often been attributed to his close relationship with the emperor Domitian and Tacitus himself may have benefited from such a relationship. That Agricola was close to the emperor’s father and brother is possible, especially on account of his prolonged offices in Britain, but there is no proof that he was a courtier of Domitian, as he was in the imperial court only briefly before he went into retirement. On the other hand, Domitian was named in Agricola’s will (Agr. 43), and Agricola was the only one of the emperor’s generals to be awarded the *ornamenta triumphalia* (Agr. 40). That Agricola had enjoyed a successful career under the emperor Domitian creates contradictions in Tacitus’ account. These conflicts can be

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255 *Agr.* 43: Supremo quidem die momenta ipsa deficientis per dispositos cursores nuntiata constabat, nullo credente sic acelerari quae tristis audiret. Speciem tamen doloris animo uultoque prae se tuli, securus iam odii et qui facilius dissimularet gaudium quam metum.

256 *Agr.* 44.5-45.2.

257 *Agr.* 45.3: Tu uero felix, Agricola, non uitae tantum claritate, sed etiam opportunitate mortis. Ut perhibent qui interfuerunt nouissimis sermonibus tuis, constans et libens fatum excepisti, tamquam pro uirili portione innocentiam principi donares.

258 For the career of the Younger Pliny, see pp. 55-57.

259 Dio (67.2) states that Domitian regarded any one that was honored by his father and brother as enemy, so “Agricola was doomed to rejection by Domitian, as a friend and protégé of Titus. Nor need one doubt that Agricola’s feelings about Domitian were less then cordial” (Jones, 1979, p. 147).

seen as an attempt by Tacitus to justify his father-in-law’s success and, moreover, friendship with the tyrant Domitian.

Through his defense of Agricola, in addition, Tacitus was attempting to explain his own successes during the reign of Domitian. Like others (e.g. Pliny the Younger), Tacitus’ own career did not at all suffer under Domitian, and he reluctantly admits that the emperor promoted him. Either before the death of Titus or upon Domitian’s accession, Tacitus must have held the quaestorship, the tribunate, and the aedileship. He then received a praetorship in 88 C.E., while already holding the priesthood (Annals, XI.11: quindecimuiiri sacris faciundis). After this Tacitus received an appointment of service abroad (probably as a legatus pro praetore for one of the imperial provinces), so that at the time of Agricola’s death he had already been absent from Rome for four years (Agr. 45). Lastly, he held the consulship at the age of forty in 97 C.E., mostly likely having been nominated by Domitian himself before his death in 96 C.E. There is no doubt that Tacitus had received most of these posts due to imperial favor, and for this reason he strains to defend himself and his father-in-law so as not to seem to have acquiesced to the tyranny of Domitian. After the death of the emperor, such success

261 Histories, I.1: Dignitatem nostram a Vespasiano inchoatam, a Tito auctam, a Domitiano longius prouectum non abnuerim…
For Tacitus’ career, see the following: Dorey, 1960, p. 69-70; and 1969, p. 5; Hanson, p. 183; Walker, p. 162-164; and Furneaux, p. 5-6.
262 Syme, 1958, p. 68; and Ogilvie and Richmond, p. 9.
263 Syme, 1958, p. 70. For an earlier example, see Histories (I.77), in which Vittellius keeps the consuls for the most part as their were assigned by Nero and/or Galba in 69 C.E..
264 Dorey argues that in the Agricola there is a strong element of special pleading in order to defend their careers and, moreover, defend the memory of Agricola from criticism (Dorey, 1969, p. 4). That Tacitus was in danger of prosecution however is very unlikely even if “after the death of Domitian there was a release of pent-up indignation, and a call for vengeance was raised by the friends and relatives of the dead tyrant’s victims…The attack was not and could not be directed against mere office-holders under Domitian, because these men continued to hold positions of power, and Nerva and Trajan had been among them.” (W. Liebeschuetz. 1966. “The Theme of Liberty in the Agricola of Tacitus.” The Classical Quarterly, New Series. Vol. 16, No. 1. p. 129).
perhaps would have needed some explanation: therefore, in the *Agricola*, Tacitus provides a defense of Agricola and by analogue of himself. Agricola’s conduct as the devoted public servant is contrasted with and, furthermore, serves as a ‘frame’ for Domitian the tyrant.265

**IV.C: Conclusion:**

Because Tacitus sees Domitian as a bad emperor, he attributes to the emperor the typical characteristics of the stock tyrant by contrasting the emperor with his father-in-law, Agricola. In the *Agricola*, Domitian is presented as the cruel and jealous tyrant, while Agricola stands as the epitome of the good Roman.266 By extension, this panegyric for Agricola, therefore, means a condemnation of Domitian’s reign.267 Tacitus’ use of insinuation and rumor distorts the image of Domitian and builds Agricola up to such an extent that not only is the representation of the emperor as the archetype of the evil and crafty tyrant questionable, but also the ideal representation of Agricola. Tacitus’ attempt to prove Domitian’s jealousy and hostility towards Agricola falls short as it rests purely upon deliberate and doubtful distortions. And, finally, Tacitus should not be hailed as a dissector of Domitian’s despotism, since “the despotism he dissects is believed to have been largely the invention of himself and his senatorial compeers. He becomes the

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265 “The figure of Domitian serves as a frame for the life of Agricola. The emperor’s actions not only threatening Agricola in the biographical narrative, but in the preface as well serve as an obstacle to Tacitus’ memorial to him. Domitian is both a type of the *malus princeps* and an individual who stands in stark contrast to the *virtus* of the victorious governor” (Michael M. Sage. 1990. “Tacitus’ Historical Works: A Survey and Appraisal.” *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*. II.33.2. p. 857).


267 “It is the mark of political literature under the Empire, especially when it happens to be written by Cornelius Tacitus, that it should not carry its meaning on its face. The *Agricola* purports to be a composition in praise of Tacitus’ father-in-law. Being that, it cannot fail to be an attack on Domitian” (Syme, 1958, p. 29).
mouthpiece of narrow class interest or, even less forgivable, of Trajanic propaganda.\textsuperscript{268} Tacitus needs Domitian to be the crafty tyrant and the evil \textit{princeps} so that by contrast Trajan is seen as the \textit{optimus princeps}. But even more significant, Agricola, his father-in-law becomes the paragon of virtue, as he is one of the few good and wise men that survived Domitian’s reign with all his principles and greatness of soul intact.\textsuperscript{269}


\textsuperscript{269} Agr. 46.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

And it is not possible to learn thoroughly the character, Thought, and judgment of a man, until he appears Tested both by rule and by law-giving.
-Sophocles, Antigone, 175-178.

This thesis has explored how the ancient sources made use of the stock figure of the tyrant to support their depiction of Domitian as a cruel, greedy, and unrestrained tyrant. In recent scholarship a desire to emend the traditional portrait of Domitian as a tyrant has developed. In this context, a new objective has become to reconcile modern scholarship, which reconstructs a more benign Domitian, with the views presented by the ancient authors. The three ancient sources that form the base of the present study-Suetonius, younger Pliny, and Tacitus- having survived the ‘reign of terror’ under the last Flavian emperor, present Domitian as a tyrant. The motivations for such a portrayal could have been many, but perhaps among the leading causes was the need to reconcile their successful careers under the emperor and to flatter the new regime. This hostile tradition eulogizes Trajan and, therefore, indirectly inveighs against Domitian. In order to praise the optimus princeps, his virtues needed to be contrasted with the vices of the malus princeps. The account of Domitian’s reign by these sources greatly exaggerates the vices of the emperor, with the result that the tradition of Domitian as a tyrant thoroughly permeated later histories. Fully trusting these sources and determining the veracity of their anecdotes and criticisms is indeed a difficult task.

The problem arising in Suetonius is how one weighs the vices against the virtues; compared to the other sources, his picture of the emperor as a tyrant is perhaps not so concrete. Suetonius alone seems to present the most objective and fairest account of the
emperor. At the beginning of the biography, the emperor’s actions are praised and his good qualities listed: the emperor’s games, benefactions, and public works are considered valuable imperial virtues (Dom. 4-7). Moreover, Domitian, at first, dispensed justice fairly, applying himself with diligence and industry (Dom. 8). Unlike the younger Pliny and Tacitus, Suetonius acknowledges, albeit often neutrally, many of Domitian’s military exploits (Dom. 6). According to the model of Suetonian biography, virtues come before vices, so that the rest of the biography is spent cataloguing the emperor’s crimes. Suetonius through an assemblage of miscellaneous anecdotes now supports the traditional negative impression of Domitian, the bad emperor. Suetonius presents no explicit turning point for Domitian’s reign, but rather a general deterioration throughout the entire reign. From his previous clemency, self-restraint, and great generosity, Domitian degenerated into cruelty, cupidity, and avarice (Dom. 10). For Suetonius, there seem to be two causes for such a decline: cruelty stemming from his increasing fear and avarice in response to financial needs. This shift from virtue to vice in the biography overwhelms and obscures much of the author’s former praises. In the end, Suetonius in his Life of Domitian was unable to escape from retrospective hatred present after the emperor’s death.

The younger Pliny passes beyond a view of Domitian as merely a bad emperor and paints him as the immanissima belua (Panegyricus, 48.3). From the sporadic evidence provided by Pliny’s letters, the general picture of Domitian’s reign that can be gleaned is rather dubious. Compared to Suetonius’ more moderate account, the younger Pliny is far more spiteful in his hatred of the emperor. Although not a historical account, the younger Pliny’s letters are an expression of the senatorial distaste for their previous emperor. Domitian is shown in these letters savagely attacking innocent Romans-
especially well-known senators who were, more importantly, friends of the younger Pliny. Because of Domitian’s tumultuous relationship with the Senate, his reign has been perverted by senatorial bias. Domitian kept the senate pale and apprehensive with his tyrannical ways and the emperor’s despotic rule allowed for no other form of authority but his own, or so Pliny would have us believe. There is not one iota of praise for the emperor who had provided a rapid advance for Pliny in his career, nor is there evidence of the careful and judicious administrator as described by Suetonius. In Pliny’s view, there was only vice and no virtue at all in the tyrant Domitian.

Finally, there is the representation of Domitian by Tacitus through the biography of his father-in-law, Gnaeus Julius Agricola. Domitian in the *Agricola* is not only a bad emperor, but also a hypocrite: he had hidden his tyrannical ways behind lies and false qualities. When Agricola lay sick and dying, the emperor feigned concern by sending his own doctors; but, in truth, according to Tacitus, the emperor was more concerned to see the threat of Agricola finally removed (*Agr.* 43). Agricola was never a real threat to Domitian: compared to the numerous other conspiracies, especially that of Antonius Saturninus in 89 C.E., Domitian had no cause to fear from this general. Yet it was fear in the end that caused Domitian to reveal his true nature— the traditional tyrant. In the last chapters of the *Agricola*, Domitian is seen as bloodthirsty and unrestrained in his cruelty, for after 93 C.E., Domitian’s tyranny gripped the senate and city of Rome with fear. Agricola was fortunate to have escaped from this ‘reign of terror’ by his early death (*Agr.* 45). Besides the contrast of the good *princeps* to the bad *princeps*, Tacitus, like the younger Pliny, claims that even good men, such as Agricola, can live even under bad emperors. It is unfortunate that the latter books of Tacitus’ *Historiae* have been lost; it
would have been enjoyable to see how the historian further developed his portrayal of Domitian as the cruel tyrant.

These ancient sources, Suetonius, the younger Pliny, and Tacitus, have portrayed Domitian as the traditional stock tyrant by means of rumor, omission of fact, and exaggeration in order to convince posterity that they had survived the ‘reign of terror’ and, moreover, how fortunate it was to live under the reign of the *optimus princeps*, Trajan. Like Agricola, they assert that they were good men, who had been able to survive under a bad emperor. To portray their own moderation, praise Trajan, and fulfill the *damnatio memoriae*, Domitian had to be pressed into the mold of the tyrant by these authors through the use of the *topos* of tyranny and the characteristics (*vis*, *superbia*, *libido*, and *crudelitas*) ascribed to a tyrant by political invective.

-Fin-
Bibliography


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