

## Seeing Caesar and Hannibal in Tacitus' Agrippina

At the opening of *Annales* 13, Tacitus reintroduces Agrippina the Younger as a dangerous antagonist against the forces of Burrus and Seneca in guiding Nero. While Tacitus' use of rhetorical stereotypes in crafting Agrippina and his intratextual echoes of earlier transgressive women have been well studied on a macro-level (e.g. Rutland 1978; L'Hoir 1994; Ginsburg 2006; Foubert 2010), there is more one can say about Agrippina's microlevel characterization at key points by an author who, to quote Syme, "had a memory for words that never failed. He can blend echoes of different writers without danger of incongruity." This paper analyzes a phrase that defines Agrippina's approach to playing *mater Augusti: cunctis malae dominationis cupidinibus flagrans* (*Ann.* 13.2.2). With this comparatively rare combination of this word for burning (*flagrare*) with the *topos* of lust for power, I argue, Tacitus creates a two-pronged allusion to two previous enemies of Rome as commemorated by two important predecessors, Lucan's Caesar and Livy's Hannibal.

I begin with Tacitus' echoes of the beginning of Pharsalus from Book 7 of Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. On the verge of boredom from lack of battle, Caesar suddenly sees the Pompeians in battle formation and realizes that the day he has prayed for is at hand. Lucan lingers on Caesar's psychology at the moment he knows he will return victorious (*flagransque cupidine regni*, *Luc.* 7.240). Tacitus' Lucanean echo invites us to view Agrippina in terms of an ancestor who waged war on his own country and who overturned the state from within. On such a reading, Nero's mother becomes both the natural heir to the power politics of Caesar and the replicator of those politics in Neronian Rome, the logical culmination of her family's storied history of civil war destruction and tyranny as narrated elsewhere in Tacitus. I then turn to Livy: scholars have recognized that Lucan borrowed his own image of burning political desire from Livy's Hannibal as part of a wider assimilation of Hannibal to Caesar in the epic (Roche 2019). This too has implications for Agrippina. At the start of Book 21, the Carthaginian Hanno warns of Hannibal's destructive ambition: a youth burning with ambition for tyranny (*iuvenem flagrantem cupidine regni*, *Liv.*

21.10.4). Hanno's critique of Hannibal comes from inside the Carthaginian political system and articulates a concern that Hannibal's uncontrollable passion, though aimed at Rome, might burn Carthage down with it. This echo too, I suggest, lies as a window reference (Thomas 1986) behind Tacitus' Agrippina.

Tacitus' assessment of Agrippina involves not only Lucan's pessimistic account of the empire's foundation but also Livy's portrait of a foreign warrior whose ambitions would bring Rome and Carthage to their knees. For those recognizing the Hannibalic aspects of Lucan's Caesar, Tacitus' combinatorial allusion highlights the barbarism of Agrippina's Julian heritage. Caesar's Hannibalic passions and the replication of this language at the opening of *Annales* 13 tie Agrippina and her burning ambition to two men, one foreign, one Roman, who became Rome's greatest enemies and tie her reintroduction to the very moment in which the danger of both men was at its height in the texts that commemorate them. The cumulative weight of this combined intertext suggests that attacking Rome is in Agrippina's blood. By seeing the Hannibal and Caesar in Agrippina, Tacitus' reader understands that Nero's mother is no ordinary woman who may seem threatening merely by attempting to make a place for herself in the early imperial political system. Rather, she embodies a toxic energy and a violent hunger seen only in Rome's most dangerous enemies, internal and external.

Much attention has been paid in recent years to Tacitean intertextuality on the one hand and to the memory of the Republican civil wars in Tacitus' works on the other (see: Keitel 1984; O'Gorman 2009; Damon 2010; Joseph 2012; Ginsberg 2020). Echoes of Livy and Lucan have been particularly fruitful sites of competitive *imitatio et aemulatio* that shed light on Tacitus' historical arguments. This paper builds on such current interest to suggest a new way of understanding Tacitus' re-presentation of Agrippina at the start of Nero's reign the stakes of maternal domination within his historical argument.

## Works Cited

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