

## Imperial Stability and Empirical Similarities: Tacitus' Agrippinae in *Annales* 3.1 and 14.8

In *Annales* 3.1 Tacitus depicts the famous scene of the elder Agrippina disembarking from her boat at Brundisium, clutching an urn filled with the ashes of her dead husband, Germanicus. Crowds of people await her arrival. They rush to the shore, swim out into the water, climb up nearby embankments to get a better look at the incoming Agrippina; everyone questions each other. This scene has striking parallels with *Annales* 14.8 in which Tacitus describes the younger Agrippina disembarking from a boat, after her son, Nero, failed to assassinate her. There, as before, crowds of people await her arrival, rushing to the shore, swimming out to meet her, climbing things to get a better look, and questioning each other. I argue that Tacitus conspicuously frames these scenes in a similar way. He does this through narrative similarities, familial connections, verbal correspondences, and Latin construction. Just as the crowds work hard to get a better picture of the two Agrippinae, so Tacitus urges us to do the same and what we see is more than two women of the imperial family.

Scholars have explored repeated scenes in Tacitus, some arguing for book mirroring, others as intratextuality, and still more as source criticism (Syne 1958: 266-70; Woodman 1979; O'Gorman 2000). Woodman (1979) first took an extended look at the phenomenon in relation to Germanicus' visit to the site of the Varian disaster (*Annales* 1.61-2) and Vitellius' visit to the site of the first battle at Cremona (*Histories* 2.70). Woodman calls this repetition of material 'substantive self-imitation,' which allows Tacitus to fill out the details of an event for which he had little source material. O'Gorman (2000), on the other hand, understands these textual similarities as part of the way readers, both ancient and modern, interact with narrative figures of past, present, and future.

There are two larger sets of evidences for considering *Annales* 3.1 and 14.8. First, narrative setup and familial connection: an Agrippina of the Imperial family disembarks from a boat with a group of people awaiting her arrival. Second, the similarities in Latin vocabulary, syntax, and construction. The following is a side-by-side look at some of these similarities: the people rush to the shore: *ruere* (3.1) / *decurrere* (14.8). Those people fill the physical spaces: *complentur* (3.1) / *compleri* (14.8). They attempt to gain an advantageous spot for viewing: *prospectari poterat* (3.1) / *scandere* (14.8). Questions arise from the crowd: *rogitantium* (3.1) / *rogantium* (14.8), and answers are given: *silentione an voce aliqua* (3.1), *respondentium* (14.8). These correspondences, while similar – and interesting in and of themselves – serve to foreground the differences between the scenes: the imperial women on display.

Tacitus, then, demands that we look on these imperial women the same way his crowds do, inspecting the scenes for every detail they may offer. The difference between the two scenes – and the two women – reveals the instability and inconsistencies inherent in the political system of a principate: one individual may represent well the values and virtues of Rome, another may not. The women of the imperial family represent the same inconsistencies. This is no more evident than in the stark contrast between the elder Agrippina, an *imago* of her grandfather Augustus, a model Roman wife surrounded by her children, and the younger Agrippina, dripping wet from her son's attempt to murder her. My reading of the Agrippinae displays the inconsistency in familial lineage, a problem inherent to Tacitus' contemporary political context, the *Annales* as a text, and the stability of the Roman state. By reading *Annales* 3.1 and 14.8 next to each other, we can see this instability more clearly, and more importantly we can see how Tacitus frames his discussion of imperial ideology and the health of the state through the health of the family, particularly the role of the Agrippinae.

## Bibliography

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