

BELLARIA XCVII



Modern statue outside the Austrian parliament building

Publius Cornelius Tacitus (c. AD 56-c. 120)

AGRICOLA

(de vita [et moribus] Iulii Agricolae)

Introduction

Tacitus was born in the early days of Nero's principate, perhaps in Gallia Belgica (Trier?) where his father was procurator. From 75 Tacitus made his career in Rome, and in 76 married the daughter of the famous general Gnaeus Julius Agricola, who was governor of Britain from 77 to 84 and died in 93; Tacitus himself may well have served as a military tribune in Agricola's army there for a few years. He published his life of Agricola in 98, a panegyric concentrating on Agricola's governorship of Britain and fiercely criticising the emperor Domitian for his repression of freedom and treatment of his father-in-law.

Freedom farewell: the years of terror from Nero to Domitian

2 We read that Rusticus the stoic's praise of [the stoic] Thrax, and Senecio's of Priscus [a stoic] were declared a capital offence, so that not only the authors themselves but their books were condemned, and the works of our greatest men assigned to the flames, in the heart of the forum, on the orders of the three-man commission. Perhaps it was thought that the voice of the people, the freedom of the

Senate, and the conscience of mankind would vanish in those flames, since the teachers of knowledge were also expelled and all moral excellence exiled, so that virtue might be nowhere encountered. Indeed we have given signal proof of our subservience; and just as former ages saw the extremes of liberty, so ours those of servitude, robbed by informants of even the ears and tongue of conversation. We would have lost memory itself, as well as speech, if to forget were as easy as it was to be silent.

2 legimus, cum Aruleno Rustico Paetus Thrasea, Herennio Senecioni Priscus Heluidius laudati essent, capitale fuisse, neque in ipsos modo auctores, sed in libros quoque eorum saevitum, delegato triumviris ministerio ut monumenta clarissimorum ingeniorum in comitio ac foro urerentur. scilicet illo igne uocem populi Romani et libertatem senatus et conscientiam generis humani aboleri arbitrabantur, expulsis insuper sapientiae professoribus atque omni bona arte in exilium acta, ne quid usquam honestum occurreret. dedimus profecto grande patientiae documentum; et sicut uetus aetas uidit quid ultimum in libertate esset, ita nos quid in seruitute, adempto per inquisitiones etiam loquendi audiendique commercio. memoriam quoque ipsam cum uoce perdidissemus, si tam in nostra potestate esset obliuisci quam tacere.

Freedom restored, but intellectual life not fully restored



Nerva

3 Now at last our spirits revive; at the birth of this blessed age, the Emperor Nerva at once joined things long disassociated, power and liberty, while Trajan daily adds to the felicities of our times, so that the public has not merely learned to hope and pray with confidence, but has gained assurance as to the fulfilment of its prayers, and strength. Though it is still in the nature of human frailty that the remedy acts more

slowly than the disease, and just as the body is slow to grow, swift to decay, so it is easier to destroy intellectual life than it is to revive it, while idleness has a certain charm, and the apathy we hate at first we later love.

3 nunc demum redit animus; et quamquam primo statim beatissimi saeculi ortu Nerua Caesar res olim dissociabilis miscuerit, principatum ac libertatem, augeatque cotidie felicitatem temporum Nerua Traianus, nec spem modo ac uotum securitas publica, sed ipsius uoti fiduciam ac robur adsumpserit, natura tamen infirmitatis humanae tardiora sunt remedia quam mala; et ut corpora nostra lente augescunt, cito extinguuntur, sic ingenia studiaque oppresseris facilius quam reuocaueris: subit quippe etiam ipsius inertiae dulcedo, et inuisa primo desidia postremo amatur.

We have had our lives stolen from us, but I shall record our slavery and good fortune, and honour Agricola



Gnaeus Julius Agricola (Bath)

4 During the space of fifteen years, a large part of a lifetime, many died from chances of fate, others, the most resolute, by the emperor's savagery: while we few who remain have outlived, so to speak, not merely others, but ourselves; since those years were stolen from our prime of life, while youths reached age, and old men the very edge of the grave, in silence. Even though my speech is hoarse and unpractised, I shall not hesitate to compose a record of our former slavery, and our present blessings. In the meantime this work's intention is to honour Agricola, my father-in-

law: and it will be commended for, or at least excused by, its profession of filial affection.

4 quid, si per quindecim annos, grande mortalis aevi spatium, multi fortuitis casibus, promptissimus quisque saeuitia principis interciderunt, pauci et, ut ita dixerim, non modo aliorum sed etiam nostri superstites sumus, exemptis e media uita tot annis, quibus iuuenes ad senectutem, senes prope ad ipsos exactae aetatis 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 soceri mei destinatus, professione pietatis aut laudatus erit aut excusatus.

Agricola's early military service



Suetonius Paulinus (Bath)

5 His first military service in Britain (AD 58-62) brought him to the notice of Suetonius Paulinus [governor 58-61], a conscientious and disciplined general, who selected him for assessment as a member of his staff. Agricola was neither slapdash, in the manner of those young men who treat soldiering as a game, nor traded idly on his tribune's role and inexperience to win leave for pleasure; rather he gained knowledge of the province, made himself known to the men, learnt from the experts, followed the best, sought nothing in ostentation, but shrank from nothing in fear, behaving as one eager but cautious.

5 prima castrorum rudimenta in Britannia Suetonio Paulino, diligenti ac moderato duci, adprobauit, electus quem contubernio aestimaret. nec Agricola licenter, more iuuenum qui militiam in lasciuiam uertunt, neque segniter ad uoluptates et commeatus titulum tribunatus et inscitiam rettulit: sed noscere prouinciam, nosci exercitui, discere a peritis, sequi optimos, nihil adpetere in iactationem, nihil ob formidinem recusare, simulque et anxius et intentus agere.

Britain at a time of revolt (Boudica)

5 At no time was Britain more troubled or the situation more in doubt: veterans were slaughtered, colonies burned, forces cut off from their base; one day brought victory, the next a struggle for life. Though the leadership and strategy were another's, though the high command and credit for securing the province were the general's, yet the young soldier gained skill, experience and a sense of purpose. Desire for military glory invaded his spirit, unwelcome in an age which looked unfavourably on those who distinguished themselves and where great reputation was no less a danger than ill-repute.

5 non sane alias exercitior magisque in ambiguo Britannia fuit: trucidati ueterani, incensae coloniae, intercepti exercitus; tum de salute, mox de uictoria certauere. quae cuncta etsi consiliis ductuque alterius agebantur, ac summa rerum et recuperatae prouinciae gloria in ducem cessit, artem et usum et stimulos addidere iuueni, intrauitque animum militaris gloriae cupido, ingratis temporibus quibus sinistra erga eminentis interpretatio nec minus periculum ex magna fama quam ex mala.

After service Aquitania, Agricola is posted to Britain

9 He was retained for less than three years in Aquitania (S.W. France), and then recalled with hopes of an immediate consulship, to an accompanying rumour that Britain would be granted him as his province, not that he ever spoke of it, but simply because he seemed suitable. Rumour is not always in error; sometimes it even determines the choice. The consul (*suffectus*, 77) betrothed his daughter Julia, a girl of great promise, to me, then a mere youth, and on conclusion of his office gave her to me in marriage. He was posted immediately thereafter to Britain, and also appointed to the high priesthood.

9 minus triennium in ea legatione detentus ac statim ad spem consulatus reuocatus est, comitante opinione Britanniam ei prouinciam dari, nullis in hoc ipsius sermonibus, sed quia par uidebatur. Haud semper errat fama; aliquando et eligit. consul egregiae tum spei filiam iuueni mihi despondit ac post consulatum collocauit, et statim Britanniae praepositus est, adiecto pontificatus sacerdotio.

British military strength and tribal disputes



War chariot

12 Their strength is on foot, though certain tribes fight from chariots, the charioteer holding the place of honour, while the retainers make war. Once the people were ruled by kings, now the disputes and ambitions of minor chieftains distract them. Nor do we have a better weapon against the stronger tribes than this lack of common purpose. It is rare for two or three tribes to unite against a mutual danger; thus, fighting singly, they are universally defeated.

12 *In pedite robur; quaedam nationes et curru proeliantur. honestior auriga, clientes propugnant. olim regibus parebant, nunc per principes factionibus et studiis trahuntur. nec aliud aduersus ualidissimas gentis pro nobis utilius quam quod in commune non consulunt. rarus duabus tribusue ciuitatibus ad propulsandum commune periculum conuentus: ita singuli pugnant, uniuersi uincuntur.*

British weather



12 The weather in Britain is foul, with dense cloud and rain; but the cold is not severe. The extent of daylight is outside our usual measure, the nights in the far north of Britain being clear and short, so that there is only a brief time between dusk and the dawn half-light. So, they say, if no clouds intervene the sun's brightness is visible all night, not setting or rising but simply transiting. To be sure, the flat extremities of the land, with their low shadows, project no darkness, and night never falls beneath the sky and stars.

12 *caelum crebris imbribus ac nebulis foedum; asperitas frigoribus abest. dierum spatia ultra nostri orbis mensuram; nox clara et extrema Britanniae parte breuis, ut finem atque initium lucis exiguo discrimine internoscas. quod si nubes non officiant, aspici per noctem solis fulgorem, nec occidere et exurgere, sed transire adfirmant. scilicet extrema et plana terrarum humili umbra non erigunt tenebras, infraque caelum et sidera nox cadit.*

Crops, metals and pearls



12 The land is tolerant of crops, except the olive, vine and other fruit of warmer countries, and is prolific of cattle. The crops are quick to sprout but ripen slowly, for a like reason, the plentiful moisture in the soil and atmosphere. Britain produces gold, silver and other metals, the prize of conquest. The sea produces pearls but somewhat cloudy and lead-coloured. Some judge their pearl-gatherers lacking in skill; for pearls are torn from the living breathing oyster in the Red Sea, while in Britain they are only collected when washed ashore: I can more readily believe that the pearls lack quality than that we lack greed.

12 solum praeter oleam uitemque et cetera calidioribus terris oriri sueta patiens frugum pecudumque fecundum: tarde mitescunt, cito proueniunt; eademque utriusque rei causa, multus umor terrarum caelique. fert Britannia aurum et argentum et alia metalla, pretium uictoriae. gignit et Oceanus margarita, sed subfusca ac liuentia. quidam artem abesse legentibus arbitrantur; nam in rubro mari uiua ac spirantia saxis auelli, in Britannia, prout expulsa sint, colligi: ego facilius crediderim naturam margaritis deesse quam nobis auaritiam.

Julius Caesar's attack on Britain (55-54 BC), ultimately a failure

13 The Britons themselves bear cheerfully conscription, taxes and the other burdens imposed on them by the Empire, if there is no inequity. Of this they are impatient; they are reduced to subjection, not as yet to slavery. The deified Julius, the very first Roman who entered Britain with an army, though by a successful engagement he struck terror into the inhabitants and gained possession of the coast, must be regarded as having indicated, rather than transmitted, the acquisition to future generations.

13 ipsi Britanni dilectum ac tributa et iniuncta imperii munia impigre obeunt, si iniuriae absint: has aegre tolerant, iam domiti ut pareant, nondum ut seruiant. igitur primus omnium Romanorum diuus Iulius cum exercitu Britanniam ingressus, quamquam prospera pugna terruerit incolas ac litore potitus sit, potest uideri ostendisse posteris, non tradidisse.

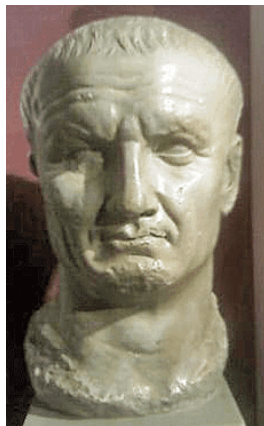
Early imperial policy on Britain and Claudius' invasion (AD 43)

13 Then came [Rome's] civil wars, and the arms of our leaders were turned against their own country, and even when there was peace, there was a long neglect of

Britain. This Augustus spoke of as policy, Tiberius as an inherited maxim. That Caligula meditated an invasion of Britain is perfectly clear, but his purposes, rapidly formed, were easily changed, and his vast attempts on Germany had failed. Claudius was the first to renew the attempt, and conveyed over into the island some legions and auxiliaries, choosing Vespasian to share with him the campaign, whose approaching elevation had this beginning. Several tribes were subdued and kings made prisoners, and destiny learnt to know its favourite.

13 *mox bella ciuilia et in rem publicam uersa principum arma, ac longa obliuio Britanniae etiam in pace: consilium id diuus Augustus uocabat, Tiberius praeceptum. agitasse Gaium Caesarem de intranda Britannia satis constat, ni uelox ingenio mobili paenitentiae, et ingentes aduersus Germaniam conatus frustra fuissent. diuus Claudius auctor iterati operis, transuectis legionibus auxiliisque et adsumpto in partem rerum Vespasiano, quod initium uenturae mox fortunae fuit: domitae gentes, capti reges et monstratus fatis Vespasianus.*

Early history of the province



Cogidubnus (or not)

14 The first consular governor appointed was Aulus Plautius (43-47), soon followed by Ostorius Scapula (47-52), both distinguished military men; and the nearest regions of Britain were gradually enhanced to the condition of a province; a colony of veterans being founded also. Certain areas were handed over to King Cogidubnus (he has remained loyal down to our own times) according to the old and long-accepted custom of the Roman people, which even employs kings as useful tools.

14 *consularium primus Aulus Plautius praepositus ac subinde Ostorius Scapula, uterque bello egregius: redactaque paulatim in formam prouinciae proxima pars Britanniae, addita insuper ueteranorum colonia. quaedam ciuitates Cogidumno regi donatae (is ad nostram usque memoriam fidissimus mansit), uetere ac iam pridem recepta populi Romani consuetudine, ut haberet instrumenta seruitutis et reges.*

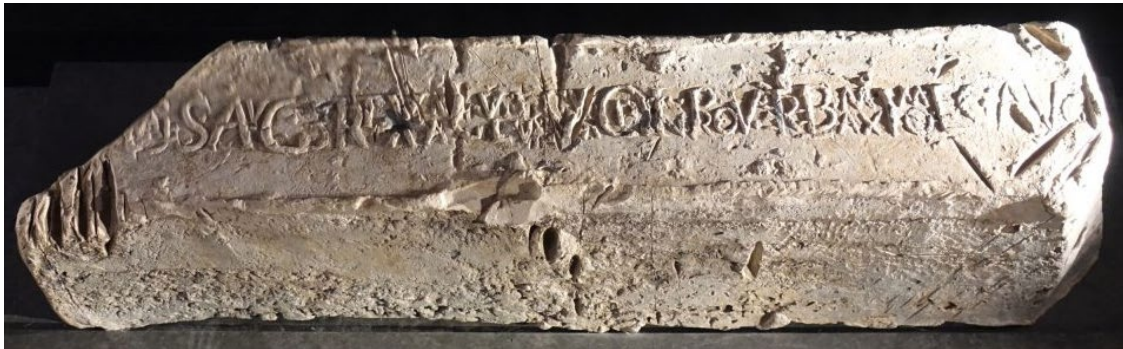
Boudica's revolt suppressed

16 Fired by such arguments as these, the whole nation took up arms, under the leadership of Boudica, a woman of royal blood (since they recognise no distinction of gender among their rulers). After attacking the troops sparsely distributed

among the Roman forts, and overcoming the garrisons, they invaded the colony itself (Colchester, 60/61), as the seat of oppression; no variant of barbarous savagery was omitted in their victorious rage. Had Suetonius Paulinus not learned of the uprising in his province and rushed to the rescue, Britain would have been lost.

16 *his atque talibus in uicem instincti, Boudicca generis regii femina duce (neque enim sexum in imperiis discernunt) sumpserunt uniuersi bellum; ac sparsos per castella milites consecrati, expugnatis praesidiis ipsam coloniam inuasere ut sedem seruitutis, nec ullum in barbaris ingeniis saeuitiae genus omisit ira et uictoria. quod nisi Paulinus cognito prouinciae motu propere subuenisset, amissa Britannia foret.*

Paulinus replaced by a less severe governor



Lead ingot, naming Trebellius Maximus

16 The outcome of a single battle restored its former submission; though the majority remained under arms, conscious of their failure, and in personal terror of the governor, fearing that despite his virtues he might deal ruthlessly with those who surrendered, punishing them severely as one who never overlooked an injury done to himself. Petronius Turpilianus was therefore appointed to the province (61), being less inflexible and new to any prior hostile actions, so more lenient if they repented of them. He settled their differences, and taking no further risks handed over the province to Trebellius Maximus.

16 *quam unius proelii fortuna ueteri patientiae restituit, tenentibus arma plerisque, quos conscientia defectionis et proprius ex legato timor agitabat, ne quamquam egregius cetera adroganter in deditos et ut suae cuiusque iniuriae ultor durius consuleret. missus igitur Petronius Turpilianus tamquam exorabilior et delictis hostium nouus eoque paenitentiae mitior, compositis prioribus nihil ultra ausus Trebellio Maximo prouinciam tradidit.*

AD 77: Agricola take over as governor, puts down a revolt of the Ordovices (northern Wales) and wins the surrender of Anglesey.

Agricola begins by reforming Roman rule in Britain and checking abuse

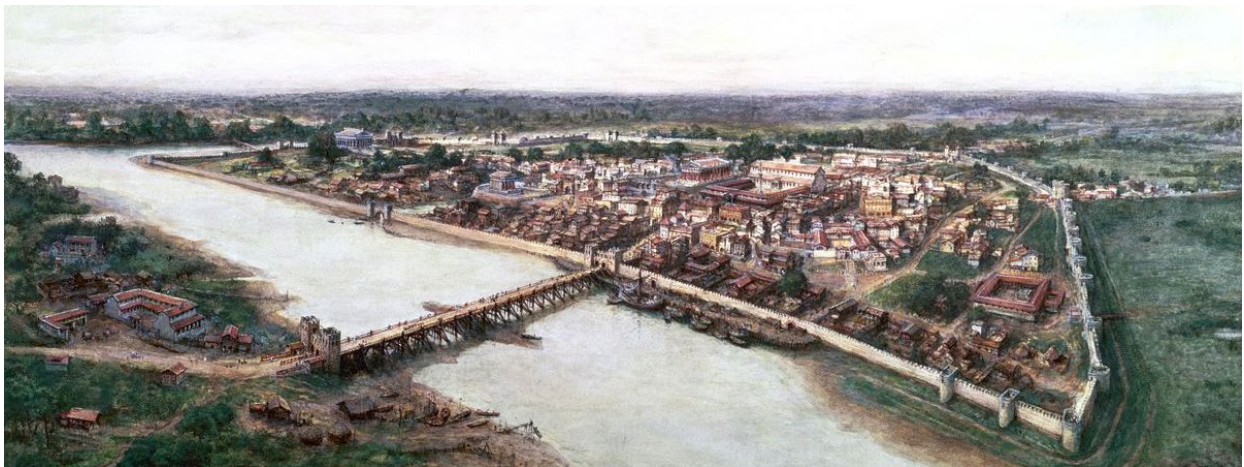
19 Be that as it may, he was aware of the attitude of the provincials and, learning from others experience that force achieved little if injustice followed, he decided to eliminate the reasons for conflict. Beginning with himself and his entourage, he set his own house in order, which is as difficult a thing for most as to rule a province. He

conducted no public business through slaves or even freedmen, admitting no soldier or officer to his staff through personal affection, or recommendation, or entreaty: but only the best of those he considered most loyal. Knowing everything, but not pursuing everything, he showed indulgence to small sins, severity towards the greatest, content often with a show of penitence, rather than forever exacting punishment; advancing to office and position those unlikely to offend rather than condemning those who did.

19 ceterum animorum prouinciae prudens, simulque doctus per aliena experimenta parum profici armis, si iniuriae sequerentur, causas bellorum statuit excidere. a se suisque orsus primum domum suam coeruit, quod plerisque haud minus arduum est quam prouinciam regere. nihil per libertos seruosque publicae rei, non studiis priuatis nec ex commendatione aut precibus centurionem militesue adscire, sed optimum quemque fidissimum putare. omnia scire, non omnia exsequi. paruis peccatis ueniam, magnis seueritatem commodare; nec poena semper, sed saepius paenitentia contentus esse; officiis et administrationibus potius non peccaturos praeponere, quam damnare cum peccassent.

AD 78: Agricola brings recalcitrant tribes to heel, showing them the advantages of peace.

State-sponsored Romanisation



Roman London

21 The following winter was spent in winning the peace. So that a scattered and uneducated population, always ready on that account for war, might become accustomed through amenity to a quiet and peaceful life, he exhorted individuals and encouraged tribes to construct housing, market-places, and temples; praising the prompt, rebuking the idle, such that rivalry for compliments replaced coercion. Moreover he began to educate the chieftains' sons in the liberal arts, preferring native British intellect to any training obtained in Gaul, so that a nation which previously rejected the use of Latin began to aspire to eloquence therein. Furthermore the wearing of our clothing was seen as a distinction, and the toga became fashionable. Gradually they succumbed to the allurements of promenading, bathing, and fine dining. Inexperienced as they were, they called these aspects of their subjugation, 'civilisation'.

21 *sequens hiems saluberrimis consiliis absumpta. namque ut homines dispersi ac rudes eoque in bella faciles quieti et otio per uoluptates adsuescerent, hortari priuatim, adiuuare publice, ut templa fora domos extruerent, laudando promptos, castigando segnis: ita honoris aemulatio pro necessitate erat. iam uero principum filios liberalibus artibus erudire, et ingenia Britannorum studiis Gallorum anteferre, ut qui modo linguam Romanam abnuebant, eloquentiam concupiscerent. Inde etiam habitus nostri honor et frequens toga; paulatimque discessum ad delenimenta uitiorum, porticus et balinea et conuiuiorum elegantiam. idque apud imperitos humanitas uocabatur, cum pars seruitutis esset.*

i.e. as Tacitus made some Germans say of the Romans, the pleasures that Rome offered were far more effective in enslaving populations than any military might (*Histories* 4.64.3).

Reflections on Ireland

24 In the fifth year of campaigning (81), he crossed first by ship, and reduced hitherto unknown tribes in a series of successful battles. He manned with troops that part of Britain [Galloway?] which faces Hibernia rather in hopes of further activity than from fear, for Hibernia, sited between Britain and Spain and open to the Gallic Sea [Gulf of Lyon], could unite two of the most worthwhile provinces of our empire, to their mutual advantage.

Hibernia is smaller in size when compared to Britain, but larger than the islands of the Mediterranean. The soil, the climate and the character and manners of its inhabitants differ little from those of Britain, while its approaches and harbours are better known through trade and commerce.

24 *quinto expeditionum anno, naue primum transgressus, ignotas ad id tempus gentis crebris simul ac prosperis proeliis domuit; eamque partem Britanniae quae Hiberniam aspicit copiis instruxit, in spem magis quam ob formidinem, si quidem Hibernia medio inter Britanniam atque Hispaniam sita et Gallico quoque mari opportuna ualentissimam imperii partem magnis in uicem usibus miscuerit.*

spatium eius, si Britanniae comparetur, angustius nostri maris insulas superat. solum caelumque et ingenia cultusque hominum haud multum a Britannia differunt; in melius aditus portusque per commercia et negotiatores cogniti.

24 Agricola had given sanctuary to a minor chieftain driven from home by local rivalry, and held him, under the cloak of friendship, until occasion [i.e. an invasion of Ireland] demanded. My father-in-law often said that with one legion and a contingent of auxiliaries Hibernia could be conquered and held; and that it would be useful as regards Britain also, since Roman troops would be everywhere, and the prospect of independence would fade from view.

24 *Agricola expulsum seditione domestica unum ex regulis gentis exceperat ac specie amicitiae in occasionem retinebat. saepe ex eo audiui legione una et modicis auxiliis debellari obtinerique Hiberniam posse; idque etiam aduersus Britanniam profuturum, si Romana ubique arma et uelut e conspectu libertas tolleretur.*

Next week: The battle of Mons Graupius