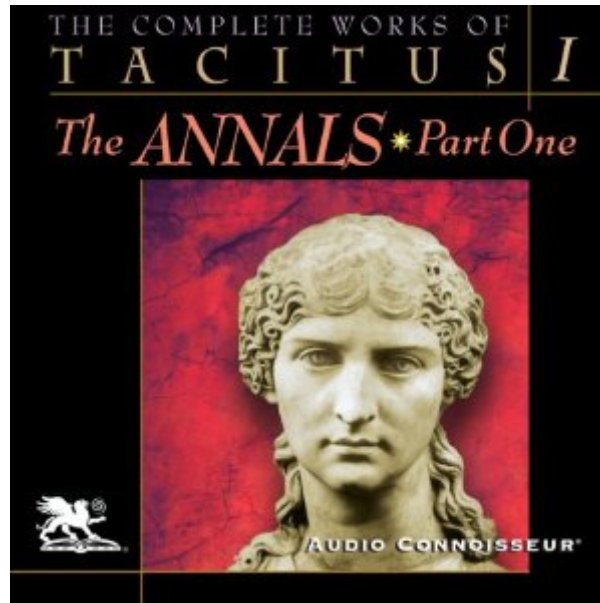


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The Complete Works Of Tacitus: Volume 1: The Annals, Part 1



Synopsis

The Annals Tacitus Translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb
The Annals (Latin: Annales) by Roman historian and senator Tacitus is a history of the Roman Empire from the reign of Tiberius to that of Nero, the years AD 14â “68. The Annals are an important source to modern understanding of the history of the Roman Empire during the first century; it is Tacitus' final work, and modern historians generally consider it his greatest writing. Historian Ronald Mellor calls it "Tacitus's crowning achievement" which represents the "pinnacle of Roman historical writing". Tacitus' Histories and Annals together amounted to 30 books; although some scholars disagree about which work to assign some books to, traditionally 14 are assigned to Histories and 16 to Annals. Of the 30 books referred to by Jerome about half have survived. Modern scholars believe that as a Roman senator, Tacitus had access to Acta Senatusâ ”the Roman senate's recordsâ ”which provided a solid basis for his work. Although Tacitus refers to part of his work as "my annals", the title of the work Annals used today was not assigned by Tacitus himself, but derives from its year-by-year structure. The name of the current manuscript seems to be "Books of History from the Death of the Divine Augustus" (Ab Excessu divi Augusti Historiarum Libri).
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Customer Reviews

This is a monumentally bad translation and Penguin should be ashamed of themselves for having

kept publishing it for forty odd years. While Grant's style is quite good, his awful, clashing, illogical translations of familiar Roman terms renders it unreadable. Everyone who has any interest in Roman History (and let's face it, who else would be reading this book?) knows what a legion is. But how many people know what a division is, or a brigade? The same goes for company commanders instead of centurions. This is not only confusing and anachronistic, its simply innaccurate. As far as i'm aware a modern company numbers about 120 men (please let me know if i'm wrong!) whereas a century had only 80. Also to call a Roman legion either a division or a brigade is also innaccurate. A division is made up of several brigades but a full legion is not made up of two or three smaller legions. Grant is just being difficult. Also the index infuriatingly insists on listing people by their correct family names instead of the names by which they are commonly called. Hence, you look up references to Corbulo and find "See Domitius" so you look up Domitius, go to one of the pages mentioned and there you find "Corbulo", repeatedly called Corbulo on every page by Tacitus. Finally, the maps. Penguin Classics maps are generally bad and these are no different. A one page map of all of Northern Europe with all the various placenames and features squeezed awkwardly in through lack of space, and with no outstanding line to delineate the roman frontier, then on another page a whole page map of africa with a grand total of SEVEN places mentioned on it. This may all seem picky, but it spoils the whole reading experience. I'm afraid it's symptomatic of Penguin Classics who have been resting on their laurels for far too long.

Reading Tacitus' Annals, I frequently remembered Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian wars. An important theme of the latter work was the corrupting effects of prolonged war on the morals and intellect of the Athenian people, who were ultimately degraded so much that they voted the destruction of the people of a small island just because they had chosen to remain neutral. Tacitus, on the other hand, seems to have dedicated himself in this work to examining the corrupting effects of absolutism on the Roman people after the fall of the Republic. He shows how absolute power brought out the worst traits in the character of rulers like Tiberius and Nero, who grew more tyrannical with every year on the throne, and how members of the illustrious Roman senate and other sections of the Roman political society turned into a horde of spineless sycophants, informers and debauches. There were still a few honourable individuals, but as Tacitus shows in an endless series of judicial and non-judicial murders, most of these paid the price of sticking to the ancient traditions of liberty and honour with their lives. Tacitus also deals at length with the relations of the Romans with the subject peoples. I may be wrong here, but it seems to me that in such passages Tacitus draws a parallel between the fate of these enslaved peoples and that of the enslaved

Roman people -the first a slave to the Romans, the second a slave to the tyrant and his bureaucracy, made up of ex-slaves. Many subject peoples rebelled and some like the Cherusci under Arminius (towards whom he does not seem averse at all) could successfully preserve their liberty against the intrusion of the Romans.

Tacitus (AD c.55-117), a Roman senator of the 2nd Century AD and famed historian, has written a brilliant year-by-year account of the Roman Empire from 14 AD to 66 AD. The book begins with the last year of Augustus and the assumption of power by the new emperor Tiberius and concludes with the final years of Nero. While certainly not the fault of either Tacitus or the contemporary editor, it is unfortunate that the book is missing vital chapters that have been lost over the centuries. This is particularly galling because the gaps come in vital transitional years. Thus, the loss of the chapters covering 30 and 31 AD leaves us without a description of the fall of Sejanus, commander of the Praetorian Guard under Tiberius. It gets worse, with the nine years of 38-47 AD also missing. This excludes the entire reign of Caligula and the first six years of Claudius' reign. Finally, the last chapter is missing the years 67-69 AD which cover the fall of Nero and the beginning of civil war. These missing years make the book painful to read because just as a particular section is reaching a climax, the main even is deleted. Thus what remains of the history is mostly the middle years of Tiberius, Claudius and Nero. There is no doubt that Tacitus is a biased historian, despite his claims to impartiality. According to him, Tiberius, Claudius and Nero were all pretty poor emperors, marred by gross personal and moral flaws. This is far too simplistic, particularly given that nowhere does Tacitus espouse pro-Republican or anti-oligarchical opinions. Claudius in particular comes off worse than most readers would expect, after a generally favorable modern image due to Robert Graves' *I Claudius*.

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