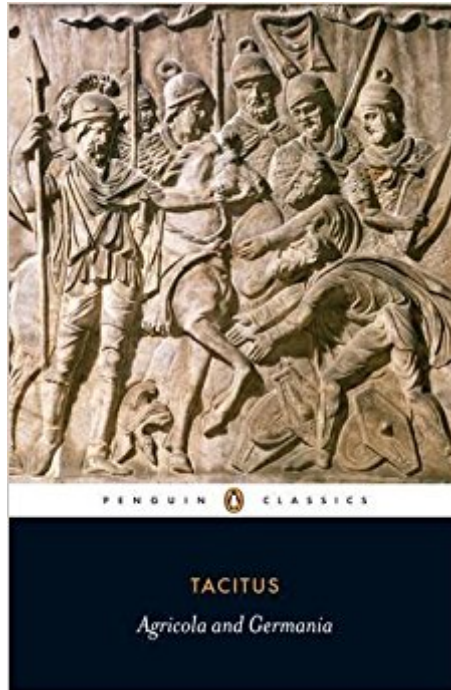


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The Agricola And The Germania (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

"The Agricola" is both a portrait of Julius Agricola - the most famous governor of Roman Britain and Tacitus' well-loved and respected father-in-law - and the first detailed account of Britain that has come down to us. It offers fascinating descriptions of the geography, climate and peoples of the country, and a succinct account of the early stages of the Roman occupation, nearly fatally undermined by Boudicca's revolt in AD 61 but consolidated by campaigns that took Agricola as far as Anglesey and northern Scotland. The warlike German tribes are the focus of Tacitus' attention in the "Germania", which, like the "Agricola", often compares the behaviour of 'barbarian' peoples favourably with the decadence and corruption of Imperial Rome.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A rewarding surprise. Sheer chance dropped this book into my hands. Found it lying in mint condition (with a fair number of other volumes) in the alley behind my building, abandoned and unread by some student who will never recognize his loss. A bit obscure, not being a classicist or an historian, even by my somewhat obscure tastes, but I picked it up, started the introduction, and soon found myself spending an evening intriguingly engaged in a world very different from my own. Whether it be the excellence of the translation or Tacitus' own abilities as a writer, the prose is pleasantly crisp and renders reading the straightforward observations presented here into something not unlike receiving a letter sent a long, long, time ago which has only just finally managed to arrive. While I certainly wouldn't take any of Tacitus' observations of Roman era Britain

and Germany for fact; it is the fact of his very attempt to try to describe these foreign peoples and what he sees in them and how they make him reflect on his own people that comes through as honest and true. A great portrait of virtue in the midst of a bankrupt society -- it is hard not to make contemporary parallels, or to try and take away lessons. Technocrats v. tyrants, assimilation v. tribalism, decadent civilization v. noble barbarism, terrorism v. occupation: Tacitus faces all these issues and can still be surprising after 1900 years. The late Harold Mattingly's introduction is excellent in its own right, providing a clear picture of the Roman Empire of Tacitus' time, and one of the best short overviews of Rome's imperial management and military that I have ever read. After reading it, I had a better understanding of Rome's First Century Legions than I do of the United States' current forces in Iraq. If his monographs on Roman coinage are as good as this, I'd want to read them.

This wonderful little book by Tacitus translated by Harold Mattingly into easily understandable English for the modern man provides a good insight not only into Roman times of the 1st Century but the style and wit of Tacitus himself who must have been widely read in his own times simply for his engaging style, especially because, not in spite of, the moralisation which is promoted throughout the book. Although Mattingly takes some liberties with the translation inserting words or phrases which certainly were not current in Roman times nonetheless he tries to let the book talk of the times and give the correct impression so that a modern reader can understand it, a task which is very difficult and needs considerable thought which is one reason for praising the translator himself. Every translation contains some inputs from the culture and character of the translator, this cannot be avoided. Tacitus describes the exploits of his father in law Agricola who to all accounts was a very successful Governor of Britain, although Tacitus gives the impression that Agricola was just about the be all and end all as a man there must have been some truth to this since such respect must be earned rather than imposed. The Germania is also fascinating almost bringing to life the way of life of Germans living beyond the frontiers, remarkably he manages to portray even those Germans living a long way beyond the frontiers describing even the people who lived in Denmark and Lithuania, this is amazing since no Roman expeditions ever reached this far unless the historians obtained merely hearsay or himself travelled the area in question. But then surprises abound since even the Chinese ambassador was known to have visited the Roman Empire in 160 AD and a similar Roman delegation arrived in China in 180 AD. A remarkable book giving no end of joy in the reading.

In *The Agricola*, Cornelius Tacitus describes in masterful language the fantastically interesting life of his father-in-law, Agricola. As one of the most militarily successful governors of Roman held Britain, the account of Agricola is packed with fascinating descriptions of important Roman military victories. The battles fought and the characters involved ensure that the interest level stays at an elevated level. *The Germania* is almost equally as interesting in its description of the Germanic tribes encountered by the Romans. Their seemingly bizarre military and social traditions provide for a very engaging read. Although *The Agricola* and *The Germania* were the first historical works of Tacitus, they are in no way inferior in style or interest level to his later works. A definite must for history enthusiasts everywhere!

Cornelius Tacitus was born ca. A.D. 56 and died around 115. He had a senatorial career and became consul in 97 and governor of Asia from 112-113. In 77, Tacitus married the daughter of Agricola, governor of Roman Britain. Tacitus wrote *The Agricola* as a sort of eulogy for his father-in-law, and in it he recounts Agricola's career. Tacitus also wrote *The Germania*, in which he provides a colorful description of the indigenous tribes of Germany during the time of the Roman Empire. There is something to be said of the style with which Tacitus writes, and that is to say that his accounts of Agricola and Germania are full of wit. However, there are some problems when analyzing Tacitus as a factual source. For one, he is constantly making social commentaries about the declining role of the Senate in the affairs of the Roman Empire. In addition, Tacitus makes claims about territories that it is difficult to determine if he would actually have been able to visit and study. Therefore, one must think of his analysis of these areas as being hearsay. For instance, in *The Germania*, he discusses tribes of northern Germany where there was not much communication or contact. However, one cannot look past the value of this work, for although biased, it does offer insight into the way the Romans viewed the frontier and the frontier peoples. Up until archaeological discoveries, the works of Tacitus and other Roman historians was all the world knew of the indigenous "barbaric" peoples of Europe. However, as excavations reveal more flourishing pre-Roman cultures in Europe, Tacitus' claims may be validated or viewed as being culturally biased, uninformed and imaginative. However, as a primary source, his view of Roman Britain remains an essential part of the study of Classical Rome.

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