

History 201
Seminar in Ancient History
Semester I, 1986-87

Mr. Clover

TOPIC: TACITUS

Try as he might, Cornelius Tacitus could not write history without passion. He survived the last years of Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96). The resulting fascination and repulsion which he felt for despots caused him to break his promise (Histories 1. 1. 4) to write about good times. The Annals chronicle instead the more somber days of the Julio-Claudian emperors.

Tacitus both elucidates and obscures the history of the early Principate. Participants in the seminar will side-step his more noticeable attempts to obfuscate by several means -- for example, by measuring the behavior of the Julio-Claudians against Roman laws of succession, by constructing a documentary history of Tiberius' reign, and by separating supposition from mendacity in the Germania. A paper (suggested maximum length: 10 to 20 pages) on a pertinent topic will be due at semester's end.

The seminar is open to graduate students and qualified undergraduates. A classicists' reading group will read the Annals once a week, during an hour separate from the seminar's regular meeting time (Mondays, 3:30 to 5:30 P.M.).