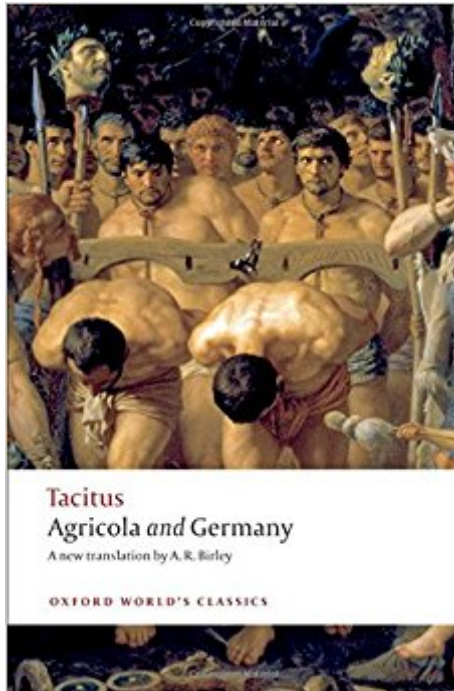




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# Agricola And Germany (Oxford World's Classics)



## Synopsis

Cornelius Tacitus, Rome's greatest historian and the last great writer of classical Latin prose, produced his first two books in AD 98, after the assassination of the Emperor Domitian ended fifteen years of enforced silence. Much of *Agricola*, which is the biography of Tacitus' late father-in-law Julius Agricola, is devoted to Britain and its people, since Agricola's claim to fame was that as governor for seven years he had completed the conquest of Britain, begun four decades earlier. *Germany* provides an account of Rome's most dangerous enemies, the Germans, and is the only surviving example of an ethnographic study from the ancient world. Each book in its way has had immense influence on our perception of Rome and the northern barbarians. This edition reflects recent research in Roman-British and Roman-German history and includes newly discovered evidence on Tacitus' early career.

About the Series: For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics has made available the broadest spectrum of literature from around the globe. Each affordable volume reflects Oxford's commitment to scholarship, providing the most accurate text plus a wealth of other valuable features, including expert introductions by leading authorities, voluminous notes to clarify the text, up-to-date bibliographies for further study, and much more.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Latin --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Anthony Birley was Professor of Ancient History at Manchester University 1974-1990. His most recent book is "Hadrian, the Restless Emperor" (1997).

Tacitus provides an interesting ethnography of both Britons and Germans, none of which is complementary to the Romans. Furthermore, in *AGRICOLA*, an oration on his father-in-law's life, Tacitus holds up a mirror of virtue by which one can see the corruption and degeneracy of the current Roman emperor in particular and Roman elites in general. He gets some digs in against Domitian, which make a reader wonder how he survived, but Tacitus knew how to play the game. He himself is something of a model, as he makes his father-in-law, for engagement with a corrupt system without losing virtue. Tacitus knew how to write, too. Even in translation, a reader can see how crisp and clean his prose is.

Finally after 91 years of "scholarly" and mediocre translations of *The Agricola* by self appointed "learned academics" A. R. Birley has produced a work that demonstrates why Tacitus has been regarded as among the best historians and rhetoricians of antiquity. The beauty and the elegance of the original is apparent in this translation, that has been lacking since the translation of W. H. Fyfe in 1908. The love and the sense of loss that Tacitus had for his father in law is still apparent to us, who live two thousand years after them. To illustrate the superiority of this translation a few examples follow: The first example is the translation of the term "divus" as in "divus Augustus" or "divus Claudius". Fyfe translated this term as sainted, and Birley as deified. Both of these seem to be adequate renditions of the term. However the Leob Classical Library's translation, by M. Hutton, translates the term as "of happy memory." This is curious because in their edition they compare the original Latin on the left with the English on the right. One would think that one of Leob's editors would have just looked at the Latin to see if it at least resembled the English. But this is even preferable to the Penguin translation, by H. Mattingly revised by S. A. Handford, wherein they just dropped the term altogether. Apparently Messrs. Mattingly, Handford, and Hutton felt that we the reading public wouldn't understand roman titles of respect and sought to protect us from this pagan ritualism. A second example occurs near the end of the third chapter when Tacitus laments the passage of fifteen years due to the tyranny of Domitian. Birley's (and Fyfe's was similar) translation reads; "So many years have been stolen from the middle of our lives, years in which those of us who were youths have become old men and the old men have reached almost the end of their allotted span - in silence." The Penguin translation reads; "since so many of our best years have been taken from us - years in which men in their prime have aged and old men have reached the

extreme limit of mortality, without ever uttering a word." The Leob translation has, "for out of our prime have been blotted fifteen years, during which young men reached old age and old men the very bounds almost of decrepitude, and all without opening their lips." Apparently the Leob and Penguin translators wanted us (the reading public) to understand that the young are now old and the old almost dead, but in their haste to "dumb-down" the original they sacrificed the beauty, the brevity and the profound nature of Tacitus. Furthermore the Leob and Penguin translators apparently didn't realize that it was "us" that had aged and not other "young men" who had aged. The final example is from the last paragraph of the *Agricola*. Birley's translation reads; "Many of the men of old will be buried in oblivion, inglorious and unknown. Agricola's story has been told for posterity and he will survive." The Penguin translation is close and reads; "With many it will be as with men who had no name or fame: they will be buried in oblivion. But Agricola's story is set on record for posterity, and he will live." But the Leob translation gives us; "Many of the ancients will forgetfulness engulf as though neither fame nor name were theirs. Agricola, whose story here is told, will outlive death, to be our children's heritage." The remarkable thing about the Leob translation is that it doesn't even resemble the Latin original with spurious details about children's heritage and engulfing forgetfulness. That is bad but Penguin is worse because the editors added a note that this last passage is "strange". They didn't realize that Tacitus had lifted a line from Horace. One must wonder why these "scholars" learned Latin in the first place if they weren't going read and study the classics. Maybe Penguin's editors simply thought we, the public, would be oblivious to other classical writers and would learn to hate the Romans as they so obviously do. There are many other examples in both the *Agricola* and the *Germania* that I could quote however; that would serve no purpose. In conclusion this translation of the *Agricola* reminds me of why I admire and respect the writers of antiquity. Perhaps the reason that the ancients are no longer esteemed isn't because they are no longer relevant to our age but because of the miserable quality of recent translations.

This tacitly completed my Tacitus.

I love learning all about *Germania* and my ancestors from any source, this is a great source book, and is a book normally used for colleges.

An absolute must read for anyone with Germanic ancestry seeking to understand the deep history of their ancestors.

The cover is weird but great translation!

I bought this for my 22 year old grandson. He said he wished there were more pictures but he was getting into the reading of it. He is a history buff. He liked it.

This is an excellent translation of a great work. Birley's notes add much needed insight for new readers as well as those more familiar with the work.

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