

**Tacitus' Germania: Background**  
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<b>Biography</b>	Life	55-117 AD
	Career	Son-in-law of Gnaeus Julius Agricola
	Emperors	Vespasian==>Titus ==>Domitian ==>Trajan

**The Agricola**

- Tacitus takes advantage of the revival of freedom under Domitian to publish his first historical work, in honor of his father-in-law, Agricola, the conqueror of a large part of Britain
- Contents: in it he briefly summarizes Agricola's career, focuses on the conquest of the island and takes sometime out for ethnographic and geographic digressions.
- Genre: predominately a res gestae (focuses on remarkable deeds), but also is an intersection of several other genres: biography, laudatio funeraris, history, ethnography.
- Purpose: teaches how to serve honorably under a terrible princeps

**The Germania**

- Topic: barbarian virtue and Roman corruption
- Ethnography: derived from written sources NOT direct observation: he improves upon and embellishes the style of earlier accounts (e.g. the Bella Germaniae of Pliny the Elder), adds details to bring the work up to date.
- Theories about his intention:
  1. The "glorification of a primitive, naive culture, one not yet corrupted by the refined vices of a decadent civilization"
  2. In stressing the untamed strength and valor of the Germans in war, Tacitus intends to stress the threat they pose, not to praise them
  3. In stressing the "nobleness" of the primitive, Tacitus is really critiquing the notion of "civilization" and undermining the notion of aristocracy in general (application of Hayden White's notion of the "Noble Savage Theme as Fetish").

**Bibliography**

Conte, Gian Biagio. Latin Literature: A History

White, Hayden, "The Noble Savage Theme as Fetish," Tropics of Discourse.