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NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

THE BANISHMENT OF THE ELDER AGRIPPINA

The account of the punishment of the elder Agrippina by Tiberius, and the circumstances under which it took place, have always appeared somewhat confused to students of the history of that period. It is the purpose of this note to draw attention to an error in chronology which has not been sufficiently remarked before. According to the account in *Annals* v. 3, the death of Livia in 29 A.D. removed all reluctance from Tiberius' mind, and he immediately put into action his schemes against Agrippina and her sons: the Senate at first refused to decree any punishment upon the emperor's vague charges, but on the receipt of a second and more urgent letter left the decision to him (v. 5). Here occurs a lacuna in the text, but from Suetonius it is inferred that Nero was declared a public enemy by the Senate (*Tib.* 54, 2, *Cal.* 7), and that both he and his mother were banished, the one to Pontia, the other to Pandataria, where they were treated with great severity (*Tib.* 53, 54). The general impression left is that they were both sent into banishment on unproved charges in the year 29 A.D.

There are however one or two indications that this account is not correct, or at any rate not sufficiently complete, and that there has been some suppression of detail and a confusion of chronology. Thus the elder Pliny casually lets us know that Titius Sabinus and his slaves were punished in connection with Nero, son of Germanicus; the phrase used, "ex causa," is a little ambiguous, but it might mean "in connection with the trial of Nero" (*N.H.* viii. 145). Tacitus merely relates that he was entrapped into making imprudent remarks against Tiberius, and then being charged with bribing certain of the emperor's freedmen and plotting against the person of the emperor himself, was put to death; no mention is made of Nero or of Sabinus' slaves. Again Philo (*Contra Flac.* ed. Wendland, p. 617) declares that Avillius Flaccus was one of the informers against Agrippina. In Suetonius (*Tib.* 53, 2) we read that Agrippina was charged with wishing to flee for refuge to the armies—presumably those on the German frontier. All this does not amount to much owing to the incidental way in which the evidence is given, but this aspect of the case is altered if we turn to Suetonius, *Caligula*, 10, where the historian is tracing the early life of the Emperor Gaius. There we read that he accompanied his father to Syria, then returned with his mother and lived with her until her banishment, after which he took up his residence in the house of his great-grandmother Livia, over whom he pronounced a laudation at her funeral: "unde reversus primum in matris,

deinde ea relegata in Liviae Augustae proaviae suae contubernio mansit, quam defunctam . . . pro rostris laudavit." We are here explicitly told that Agrippina suffered banishment before the death of Livia; this of course is totally at variance with the account of Tacitus, who tries to make out that it was only after Livia's death that Tiberius would proceed against his daughter-in-law. The data given by Suetonius and the elder Pliny suggest that the banishment of Agrippina was earlier than we should imagine from Tacitus' narrative, and this suggestion receives a certain amount of confirmation from the fact that Velleius (ii. 130. 4 and 5) apparently dates the disgrace of Agrippina and Nero before the death of Livia: "quod ex nuru, quod ex nepote dolere, indignari, erubescere coactus est! cuius temporis aegritudinem auxit amissa mater. . . ." Seneca (*Dialogus* v. 21. 5) speaks of a villa at Herculaneum which was torn down by Gaius, "because his mother was once kept under guard there." Weiss in his article on Gaius in Pauly-Wissowa appears to think that the custody at Herculaneum and the "relegatio" of *Caligula*, 10, are the same, and that after Livia's death a trial and banishment took place. Such a view does not seem at all acceptable. In both places (*Tib.* 54, *Cal.* 10) Suetonius uses the word "relegata" and knows of no second banishment. Yet even should Weiss's view be true, the fact still remains that Tacitus says nothing about this earlier "relegatio," but believes the measures were taken against Agrippina and her son only after Livia's death. In fact he appears to be following a different tradition which represents the family of Germanicus as victims of Tiberius' suspicion. From the notices already mentioned we might infer that charges of conspiracy were not altogether unfounded and that Agrippina and Nero were given some form of trial, and that at a date prior to the death of Livia. Our purpose, however, was not to discuss the historicity of Tacitus' narrative, but rather to call attention to this difference in chronology.¹ Suetonius' statement in *Caligula*, 10, is direct and precise and does not admit of question. It looks as though once again Tacitus' obvious liking for the family of Germanicus has caused him to omit or glose over facts which would be to its detriment.

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PLATO *EUTHYDEMUS* 304 E

καὶ περὶ οὐδενὸς ἀξίων ἀναξίαν σπουδὴν ποιουμένων (οὕτως γὰρ πως καὶ εἶπεν τοῖς ὀνόμασι)

"On things of no account an unaccountable zeal bestowing. For it was with some such flourish that he delivered himself." Though I presume that most Platonists must be aware that this is the meaning of the passage it has been so often mistranslated or misinterpreted for argumentative purposes

¹ For a similar difference in chronology, cf. *Ann.* vi. 28 and Pliny *N.H.* x. 2. 5.