

GALBA'S COMMISSION RELATING TO TEMPLES (TACITUS, *AGRICOLA*, 6.5.)

Tum electus a Galba ad dona templorum recognoscenda diligentissima
conquisitione fecit ne cuius alterius sacrilegium res publica quam Neronis
sensisset.

fecit codd.: effecit Heinsius

The word *dona* is an embarrassment here. If Agricola was appointed to 'check the gifts of the temples', that is, gifts which temples had received, it seems an odd restriction in a phrase which one would expect to refer to temple possessions in general. What the context, especially in the word *sacrilegium*, makes clear, as commentators have duly noted, is that the temples suffered losses through the plunder of their works of art by Nero and also by others, although the result (*effecit* commends itself) tended to obliterate the guilt of others. This was after the fire at Rome in A.D. 64. See H. Furneaux rev. J. G. C. Anderson (1922), pp.55 f.; R. Till (1961), p.62; I. Forni (1962), p.108; R. M. Ogilvie and Ian Richmond (1967), p.152.

One expects, then, a reference not to gifts but to losses. One might be tempted to read *damna* instead of *dona*. However, the existence of the phrase and custom of *dona templorum* reminds us that a part of the property of temples usually consisted of gifts made to them by private persons. Cf. *Thes. L. L.* 5.1.2017–18 (B). Yet Tacitus himself, when he describes the plunder of the temples by Nero in *Ann.* 15.45, expressly gives it a wider reference than *dona*: 'enimvero per Asiam atque Achaïam non dona tantum, sed simulacra numinum abripiiebantur.' Cf. Suetonius, *Nero*, 32: 'ultimo templis compluribus dona detraxit simulacraque ex auro vel argento fabricata conflavit, in iis Penatum deorum, quae mox Galba restituit.' These two constituents of temple property are mentioned also in other allusions; cf. Cicero, *Verr.* 2.1.21 (55), 'templaque deorum omnesque Italiae partes illorum donis ac monumentis exornatas'; *ibid.* 2.5.72 (184), 'duo fana . . . omnibus donis ornamentisque nudavit'; Suetonius, *Vitell.* 5, 'dona atque ornamenta templorum subripuisse et commutasse quaedam ferebatur.' One of the boards mentioned by Livy, 25.7.5, likewise has a double application: 'triumviri bini, uni sacris conquirendis donisque persignandis' ('one to recover sacred objects and register temple gifts'). Ronald Syme, (*Tacitus*, i (Oxford, 1958), 21), remarks that 'Galba appointed him to a commission that called for integrity and accuracy'—qualities that imply a full-scale inquiry of all temple possessions.

One expects, therefore, a wider term than *dona*. I suggest that the word originally used was *bona*, a word easily corrupted graphically into *dona* in a process furthered by the more familiar phrase *dona templorum*. Two at least of the translators of the *Agricola*, although ostensibly following the accepted text, show that they have sensed the need of a wider term. The phrase is rendered by E. de Saint-Denis (Budé, 1948), p.5, as 'pour inventorier les richesses des temples', and by Herbert W. Bernario (Indianapolis, 1967), p.7, as 'to conduct an investigation of temple-holdings'.