Book-Burning and the Uses of Writing in Ancient Rome: Destructive Practice between Literature and Document

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the burning of written material at Rome from the Republican period until the rise of Christianity, using the lens of book history. It considers why and how Romans burned written material, gathering for the first time all testimony of burning any kind of writing, and examines responses to these burnings in ancient discourse. A capacious, book-historical approach to Roman book-burning shows that differences in practice and uses — of books as opposed to documents, for example — account for the different consequences Romans saw for burning different written media.

Keywords: book-burning; books; documents; censorship; memory control; writing

I BOOK-BURNING AND 'THE BOOK'

From time to time, the ancient Romans burned books.[1] They also burned documents, letters, financial records — anything, in fact, that was written on paper or wood.[2] This article seeks to understand the former practice in the context of the latter — to situate the burning of literary text alongside the variety of other Roman practices of burning writing. By considering book-burning as a phenomenon of book-history, rather than prejudicing the inquiry by associating the practice with political or religious history, we will be able to offer an explanation of book-burning's meaning in the broader context of Roman textual culture and practice.

In Roman book history, the categories of 'book' and 'non-book' each describe multiplicities of medium or format: everything from high literary text to mundane sums might be represented or stored on papyrus or wood, in scrolls, tablets, or codices. These soft, quasi-ephemeral and plant-based media of wood and paper all shared an inherent inflammability; and all kinds of wood and paper writing, at Rome, were subject to

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[2] By 'paper' I mean the two paper-like media of antiquity, parchment and papyrus; by 'wood' I mean the various forms of (usually) wax-covered wooden tablet designated *tabulae* or *tabellae*. For an introduction to ancient book formats see Winsbury 2009: 15–21; for tablets, Meyer 2004.

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practices of public burning.[3] I will argue that the fundamental Roman distinctions between 'book' or 'literary' texts and other kinds of writing may be found in the discrete differences in practice around each kind of text — and so, in the practical consequences of burning that Romans postulated for each kind of writing.

Book-burning has been discussed in histories of Roman writing and power, but considering it as a question of book-history *per se* will give us a fuller picture of text in the Roman world.[4] It will also be important to consider not only Roman attestations of book-burning, but also its *recollection* and *commemoration*; the bulk of our literary evidence for practices of burning text are at conspicuous removes from the incidents they describe, and modern analogy suggests that the meaning of something like book-burning is made in its memory;[5] accordingly I will consider contemporary Roman responses to book-burning as well as those sources that enshrine it in memory. The scope of my study is attested Roman practices from earliest recorded memory to the early third century A.D., ending before Christianity—with its many new values of the book—became a mainstream part of ancient Roman culture.[6] To proceed from an assumption that Roman book-burning is best understood as a political or religious phenomenon is, I believe, to beg the question, and modern histories of the book have long relegated the ancient book to an antediluvian precursor status; what is needed is to treat it first and foremost as a phenomenon of book (and writing) culture.[7]

My contentions in this article are threefold. First: the burning of literary books was a relatively short-lived phenomenon that was preceded, accompanied, and followed by a more diverse array of practices by which 'documentary' and other sub-literary written material was burned for reasons both good and bad; and was subject to receptions both positive and negative.

Second: contemporary reaction to literary book-burning by Roman literary culture shows ambivalence. The theoretical threat to memory posed by book-burning is acknowledged, but it is rejected as an actual act of violence in itself, because the nature

[3] My focus here is on intentional burning; I pass over instances of accidental burning of books such as that of Alexandria (on the historical particulars of which see Bagnall 2002; Hatzimichali 2013) or the fire in A.D. 192 that destroyed Galen's books (on which Nicholls 2011), which are important for understanding the significance of books and libraries but do not tell us about intentional destruction. In considering the full spectrum of wood and paper media, I necessarily exclude inscriptions, coins and other mineral media (which nonetheless were also susceptible to fire, if differently).

[4] Most recently and fully on 'writing' or 'literacy' and imperial power, Zadorojnyi 2006. Burning written material and 'literacy' history, see Harris 1989: 128, 211; Thomas 1994: 36–7, where control of the written word is identified with the growing consolidation and expansion of state and imperial power. Most recently, see Rohmann 2013 on book-burning as 'conflict management'.

[5] I follow the work of Fishburn 2008, which chronicles how immediate and ambivalent responses to Nazi book-burning in 1933 evolved into a more condemnatory consensus by 1953, when Ray Bradbury published *Fahrenheit 451*.

[6] Pre-Christian Roman religion made extensive use of writing in various ways, but lacked 'sacred text': Woolf 2012. Christian book-burning is vaguely attested (*Acts* 19:19) as early as the first century A.D., but begins in earnest at the turn of the fourth century (Forbes 1936: 120–2; Sarefield 2006: 291–6). My goal here is to consider the Roman practices that specifically predate Christianity, acknowledging as I do that this closes off lines of inquiry that might trace continuity from pre-Christian to Christian Rome. Rohmann 2016 considers Late Antiquity and Christianity in particular, with an eye toward the consequences for textual transmission; such an approach would be inappropriate for the era presently under consideration.

[7] For ancient books in Western book history, McCutcheon 2015: 18–19. For book-burning and the Roman book, Winsbury 2009: 135–43, which assumes the practice is synonymous with censorship, an assumption also declared in the title of the indispensable Speyer 1981: *Büchervernichtung und Zensur des Geistes bei Heiden, Juden und Christen*. The ur-text on this is Cramer 1945, which expands in explicit wartime rage on book-burning and autocracy (elaborating on the more uncertain pre-War tone of Forbes 1936; see below for more on the historicity of this scholarship). Compare the account at Sarefield 2006: 287–9, and Sarefield 2007, which declares book-burning to always be a rite of purification; Clarke 1968 was the first to make this intervention. Rohmann 2013: 115, like many, notes that 'the history of book burning is almost as old as the history of the book itself'; it seems long past time, then, to consider it as *part* of the history of the book.

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of books renders them impervious (in the aggregate) to suppression, and so it is considered as a kind of rhetoric, subject to both reversal and refutation.

Third: the burning of documents, not books, left the wider and more lasting impression on Roman memory. Document-burning is represented as more effective than book-burning because of the material realities of documents; but as a practice of political spectacle, it was subject to the same scrutiny and scepticism as the burning of books.

A wide range of written media, genres and formats used at Rome fall under the term 'book'. While the difference between a book and a document may be seemingly self-evident, considering the kinds of destruction to which Roman writing was subjected — and the Roman discourses about the implications and efficacy of that destruction — allows us to understand the difference between 'book' and 'document' as a matter not of medium, genre or format, but of practices and circumstances of creation, use and destruction.

II HISTORY OF BOOK-BURNING PRACTICES

In the modern field of book history, 'book' has come to denote the broad spectrum of written media on which the literary codex is one discrete point, on the principle that written objects share common properties that transcend distinctions of literary status.[8] For this reason, I consider here the full breadth of Roman practices of burning written media. Certain distinctions surely pertain: our Roman sources know, and we think we know, that there is a clear difference between a 'book' and a 'document' (although translating those words is not so simple, which should perhaps be our first red flag). Is the difference between book and document one of genre?[9] It is surely the case that, in part, 'books' were considered books because they contained self-evidently literary text. But I intend to show here that the categorical distinction may also be drawn between historically attested variations in practice, and between what Romans believed could be done with or to each kind of writing.

In the meagre material record of texts that do survive from the Roman world, the line between book and document is demonstrably blurrier than we might like. We would not say that Vindolanda tablet 118 is a 'book', yet it contains *Aeneid* 9.473 in what is surely a book-hand. The *Acta Alexandrinorum* straddle the line neatly, consisting of demonstrably literary writing that enjoyed the circulation we associate with literature but nonetheless regularly appears in papyri with the visual and stylistic markers of 'documents'.[10] This should remind us that the book/non-book distinction is more complex than we might imagine: the *Acta* are, stylistically, 'literary' texts that mimic documentary ones, but they are also 'literary' to the extent that they are subject to literary-style circulation — even when individual copies have the visual signifiers of documents.

The *Acta* survive, but without any clear evidence for their reception in antiquity — for what kind of thing ancients thought they were. The reverse applies in book-burning: we have none of the burned books and documents, and instead we have *only* historical testimonia to the burnings and their significance. As we will see below, those testimonia seem to distinguish literary and documentary texts in several ways. First, they are **used**

[8] Suarez and Woudhuysen 2013: xii.

[9] That is to say, a distinction recognized in discourse by consensus among a group with a shared frame of reference (Gitelman 2014: 2).

[10] On the *Acta* generally, Harker 2008. The fluid status of the texts on the spectrum of document-literature parallels the duality implicit in the term *acta*, which indicates both deeds or acts and documentary accounts thereof; Vismann 2008: 49–51.

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differently: literary texts are read (for intellectual, moral or aesthetic value), whereas documents are (or may be) invoked as evidence for the information they contain. Literary texts also have **authors**, which leads them to be conceived of as equivalent or analogous to speech; while letters have senders or writers, documents do not seem to have authors (and financial records, prophecy, and pamphlets clearly do not). Our sources also conceive of literary sources as **circulating**, promiscuously and without centralized control, copied peer-to-peer by owners, readers and booksellers; documents are not (in our sources) conceived of as circulating.[11] Most significantly, our sources on burning emphasize the **authority and primacy** of documents, which derive their evidentiary force from their status as originals, sometimes an autograph and sometimes under seal. Though ancients knew there were more and less authoritative manuscripts of literary texts, in the discourse on burning such distinctions are not raised — one copy is as good as any other.

Below, I will distinguish between 'individual' and 'state' authority, in full acknowledgement of precisely the blurring of those two categories that defines the rise of the Principate as a political institution at Rome. 'State' burning is burning carried out as the result of some verdict or *senatus consultum*, or by an individual acting in magisterial or priestly authority (even if at the emperor's behest). 'Individual' burning is carried out by individuals who do not hold such positions, or who act *sua sponte*, or by emperors or generals who do not apparently invoke any authority to do so and who in the eyes of ancient sources are demonstrating a point of personal character rather than policy or procedure.

We will see that distinctly different kinds of burning arise, interrelate, and face distinct fates across the period from roughly the first century B.C. to the third century A.D. Burning writing was polyvalent, deployed as both threat and beneficence. Whether it is treated in our sources as good or bad in its character, credible or implausible in its advertised effect, depends largely on whether the writing being burned was subject to the practices and characteristics of literary or documentary text.

Burning of Literary Writing by Individuals

The earliest Roman burnings of literary text belong to the realm of imagination. These burnings are fraught with figurative meaning and depend on Latin literature's own ideas about how it works. But they also focus on specific concerns about authorship and control, and posit clearly the kind of control an author might or might not have over their own work at a given stage in its publication.[12]

Roman book-burning might be said to begin with the story of the mysterious old woman who sells the original Sibylline books to Tarquinius Superbus, burning two-thirds of them when he scoffs at the price.[13] More common, though, is a literary motif in which authors imagine the burning of their own or another's work, the first

[11] But see Harker 2008: 49–50 *et passim*: in Roman-ruled Egypt, 'documents' circulated freely among what we might call the document-using class. Winsbury 2009: 53–91 surveys how texts circulated at Rome. Briefly: one might make a copy of a friend's book, or receive one as a gift, without involving a bookshop or library. On the survival of 'exemplaren', Speyer 1981: 88, n. 257. See also Fronto, quoted above: 'The work had come into too many hands to be suppressed'. Cf. Horace, *Ars* 389–90: 'delere licebit quod non edideris; nescit vox missa reverti'. Speyer 1981: 90. Commercial circulation surely happened; but the surviving Roman discourse largely emphasizes the world of élite social exchange.

[12] I use 'publication' to refer generally to the process, still poorly understood except in its general outline, by which literary texts reached a reading public. See Winsbury 2009.

[13] Varro *ap*. Lactantius, *Inst. Div.* 1.6.9–10; Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 1.19. Buitenwerf 2003: 99–100. It seems clear that this story, as much as that of Numa's books (see below), underlies Augustus' purge of prophecy when he becomes Pontifex Maximus.

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specimen of which is Catullus 36, where the author muses on burning Volusius' *Annales* as an offering to Vulcan.[14] This motif depends on a broader phenomenon of Latin poetry, a metonymy of the *libellus* in which books stand for poems.[15] It is reported that Vergil on his deathbed wanted the *Aeneid* burned, and whether this posthumous story is a historical reality or something imagined by readers to account for the text's apparent unfinishedness, it implicates both authorial dissatisfaction and Augustus' intrusion in the world of letters.[16] In this way it is inseparable from Ovid's claims to have failed in attempting to burn his *Metamorphoses*, and to have burned other attempts that disappointed him.[17] But Ovid also concludes the *Metamorphoses* with a claim of the text's imperviousness to fire (among other things).[18] And the historian Timagenes of Alexandria is reported burning his own encomium of Augustus in retaliation for being banned from the emperor's presence.[19] Perhaps contemporary is a popular scenario for declamation in which Antony is imagined offering to spare Cicero if he will only burn his own books.[20]

The motif of authorial dissatisfaction remains popular in the Imperial period.[21] For an author to burn his or another's books is also a figurative discourse on the merit of their contents. Individual burning of literature is an act with flexible meaning, open to reinterpretation and reuse. But the author who burns their *own* unpublished book is implicitly holding the only copy of the book — and so doing real damage.[22]

Burning of Literary Writing by the Senate or Emperor

At Rome, the burning of literary texts by those wielding state power ('book-burning') emerges from the fractured and factional Augustan Senate, and is used intermittently and inconsistently along with a wider range of punishments, including exile and execution.[23] Yet its origins and implementation remain shrouded in uncertainty, and it seems unlikely to have ever been a formalized procedure with a clear legal rationale.

Augustan and Tiberian book-burning is marked in our sources by multiple claims of primacy.[24] These claims are not truly in conflict, but give an indication of how difficult it is to trace the origins of the practice. Sometime between A.D. 6 and 8, the works (*studia*) of Titus Labienus, a resentful Pompeian, were burned by *senatus consultum* — a 'new punishment' — at the instigation of a senatorial rival whose own books were subsequently burned in turn.[25] Between A.D. 12 and 14, Augustus ordered the search for

[14] Catullus 36. The sheets of the books are also described as *cacata* (36.1, 20).
[15] See Williams 1992; Roman 2001; Seo 2009.
[16] Most prominently: Pliny, *NH* 7.114; Gellius, *NA* 17.10, but see also Donatus, *Vita Verg.* 38f; *Anthol. Lat.* 653 and 672. Forbes 1936: 116; Krevans 2010.
[17] Ovid, *Tristia* 1.7.15–26; 4.10.60.
[18] Ovid, *Met.* 15.871–2.
[19] Seneca, *Con.* 10.5.22; Seneca, *de Ira* 3.23.6.
[20] Seneca, *Suasoriae* 7. Cramer 1945: 173–4; Kaster 1998; Sailor 2008: 282–91. Rohmann 2013: 136 dates this to the reign of Caligula although it is unclear on what grounds.
[21] Juvenal tells Telesinus to burn his bad poems (*Sat.* 7.24), and Apuleius (*Apol.* 10.7) and Diogenes Laertius (6.95) know stories of Greek philosophers burning their poetic juvenilia.
[22] Ovid's claim that the *Metamorphoses* resisted burning reflects that the book was already circulating among readers.
[23] Rudich 2006. Rohmann 2013 argues persuasively that this is as much a feature of conflict amongst senators, in which the emperor was sometimes involved, as it is of the nascent Principate *per se*.
[24] On several of the figures mentioned here, and the climate of intellectual opposition to or censorship by Augustus, see Raaflaub and Samons II 1990: 436–47.
[25] On the dating of this incident, see Cramer 1945: 173, n. 70, but cf. Hennig 1973 who argues for a later date. Seneca, *Con.* 10.pr.7. but cf. Suet., *Gaius* 16.1. Attempts have been made to identify the unnamed antagonist with Cassius Severus, neglecting the fact that Severus himself critiques the burning of Labienus' books (Seneca, *Con.* 10. pr.8). Scholars have generally sought to conflate known instances of burning where possible, though to what end is unclear.

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and destruction of libellous *biblia*;[26] around the same time, Cassius Severus became the first to be charged with *maiestas* for writing *famosi libelli*, but the common identification of Severus with the anonymous pamphleteer rests on the largely unfounded assumption that *maiestas* charges always resulted in burning.[27] In the 20s or 30s, the *orationes* of Mamercus Scaurus were burned by *senatus consultum*, and he was apparently put to death in A.D. 34 for his tragedy *Atreus*; he may thus be our only known individual to suffer book-burning twice.[28] Suetonius seems to identify the fate of Scaurus under Tiberius with the much-discussed case of Cremutius Cordus, tried in A.D. 25 for praising Caesar's assassins in his historical writing.[29]

Book-burning seems to decline in frequency after Tiberius. In A.D. 62 Nero ordered Fabricius Veiento exiled and his satirical writings burnt;[30] and either Domitian or his loyal senators executed Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio for (respectively) biographies of Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus, which were also burned.[31] No subsequent instances of pre-Christian literary book-burning are attested after the reign of Domitian.

What form did book-burning take? Our sources are evasive, but are largely unanimous in rejecting any long-term consequences as far as the availability of the books burned went. Although Cordus' books were actively sought out and rounded up both at Rome and in other cities, a copy was saved and subsequently made available[32] (Suetonius was able to consult them, and Quintilian knew them, albeit with the inflammatory passages excised), just as Clodia Fannia took into exile some of Senecio's work on Priscus.[33] The ban on Veiento's work was eventually lifted, and likewise Caligula lifted the bans on the work of Labienus, Severus and Cremutius.[34] Book-burning did not erase works from the record or memory, but it did leave a mark, not unlike the ostentatious erasure practices known as *damnatio memoriae*, illustrating an act of excision by making the excisions and erasures visible.[35]

The verb *abolere* often appears in these discussions, and has been considered a '*terminus technicus* für Büchervernichtung'.[36] But on examination of all the testimonia, it seems rather to mean something like 'suppression', describing an *ongoing prescription* of a literary work that may have involved a ban on possession, public reading, or

[26] Cass. Dio 56.27.1. I posit this date range on the basis of Germanicus being made consul one paragraph previously, at Cass. Dio 56.26.1.

[27] Forbes 1936: 123. For *famosi libelli* cf. Suet., *Aug.* 55. Severus was charged with *maiestas (*Tacitus, *Annales* 1.72), and his works were suppressed by *senatus consultum* (Suet., *Gaius* 16.1). Unless Severus is Dio's pamphleteer we have no hard evidence that this included a burning of his works. For Hennig 1973, Dio's pamphlets and Severus' *libelli* are one and the same, and must have coincided with the burning of Labienus' works in A.D. 14. Cramer 1945: 173, n. 70 resists the association of Dio's pamphleteer(s) with Severus, but argues for an earlier date (appealing to the authority of Seneca as regards Labienus) before A.D. 8. For *libelli* in this context, cf. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.5. On Severus see also Rohmann 2013: 131–2.

[28] His *orationes*: Seneca, *Con.* 10.pr.3. His *Atreus*: Cass. Dio 58.24.3–4. We identify Scaurus and his tragedy with the unnamed poet who Suetonius tells us was charged with 'libelling Agamemnon' and was subsequently executed, with his works being suppressed: Suet., *Tiberius* 61.3. Rohmann 2013: 132–3.

[29] Cass. Dio 57.24.4 (cf. 56.27.1); Suet., *Tiberius* 61.3; Tacitus, *Annales* 4.34–5. Moles 1998; Sailor 2008: 250–3; Rohmann 2013: 127–9.

[30] Tacitus, *Annales* 14.50. Speyer 1981: 88. Seneca feared Nero might destroy some of his books after his death but it does not seem to have happened: Cass. Dio 62.25.2, on which Rohmann 2013: 138.

[31] Tacitus, *Agricola* 2.1 accuses Domitian, but note Pliny, *Ep.* 7.19.6 blames the Senate for Senecio's fate.

[32] The rounding-up: Cass. Dio 57.24.4 (cf. 56.27.1). Survival: Tacitus, *Annales* 4.35 ('… set manserunt, occultati et editi'); Seneca, *de Consolatione ad Marciam* 1.3. Rohmann 2013: 128–9 suggests (persuasively) a full round-up, including searches of private residences, seems unlikely and unsupported by the text's subsequent reappearance; see also the discussion here of the censorship implied by Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.104.

[33] Clodia Fannia: Pliny, *Ep.* 7.19.6.

[34] Veiento: Tacitus, *Annales* 14.50: '… mox licentia habendi oblivionem attulit'. Labienus *et al.*: Suet., *Gaius* 16.1.

[35] On *damnatio memoriae*, Flower 1998.

[36] *Terminus technicus*: Speyer 1981: 52, n. 47.

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acquisition, and may also have been initiated by a symbolic burning.[37] But suppression of speech need not always have included book-burning; indeed, corporal punishment seems to have been more common, as when Caligula had the author of offensive mimes burned alive, or when Domitian cut out the middleman by executing Hermogenes for his writing and crucifying his *librarii* — effectively, an act of violence against a different and more corporal part of the material text apparatus.[38] Perhaps more effective at suppression or preventing troublesome literature was to make more bodily threats to those who would write it.

From the final years of the reign of Augustus through the reign of Domitian, literary book-burning seems to have lasted less than a century and to have diminished dramatically in frequency after the reign of Tiberius. Below, we will explore responses to the practice at greater length, but suffice it to say at this point that, in the words of Fishburn, it seems to have functioned far more as advertisement than legislation, and even in that capacity to have quickly diminished in its appeal.

Burning of Documentary Written Material by the State and its Agents

The burning of documentary texts — of which only one copy exists, and whose continued existence is harmful to the state — is treated by our sources as both credibly effective and legitimately beneficial.[39] Here, too, the record gives us an uncertain incident from Republican history, and then a flowering under Augustus, outlining a progression whereby a procedure that arises for the handling of religious materials is adapted to financial and legal documents.

The incident in 181 B.C. in which the 'books of Numa' were unearthed at the foot of the Janiculum, and subsequently burned by senatorial order because their contents were, in some unspecified way, hazardous to the Republic, seems to underlie the first Augustan incident: such burning was, according to one of Livy's characters, among the traditional duties of a Roman magistrate.[40] Newly made Pontifex Maximus in 12 B.C., Augustus oversaw a round-up and review of 'prophetic literature circulating widely that was of Greek or Latin origin and had no or improper authority'.[41] Selecting a few legitimate volumes of Sibylline prophecy, he had the rest burned, and the few chosen texts

[37] Consider Suet., *Gaius* 16.1: 'Titi Labieni, Cordi Cremuti, Cassi Severi scripta senatus consultis **abolita** requiri et esse in manibus lectitarique permisit […].' Writings that were *abolita* were not, apparently, legal to seek out (*requirere*) — this might refer not only to seeking copies in friends' possession, but also soliciting new copies from a bookseller. Note also Augustus' ban on owning Sibylline prophecy (Tacitus, *Annales* 6.12): '… neque habere privatim liceret.' Tacitus and Seneca use compounds of *uro* when they refer to burning *per se*, as does Suetonius (e.g. *Aug.* 32.2). The best evidence for a sense of *abolere* that is associated specifically with burning is the Hadrianic debt-relief coinage discussed below. But note Fronto's use of *abolere* to fantasize about recalling from public circulation a piece of his own writing, *ad Ant. Imp.* 2.8 (LCL: II.221): 'quod ubi primum comperi, curavi equidem abolere orationem. sed iam pervaserat in manus plurium quam ut **aboleri** posset.' Rohmann 2013: 125 is right, therefore, to translate *abolita* at Suet., *Tib.* 61.3 as 'banned' rather than 'destroyed' (as in the Loeb).

[38] Suet., *Gaius* 27.4; *Domitian* 10.1.

[39] Documents such as records and letters are recorded as having a variety of uses in the exercise and overreach of imperial power: Zadorojnyi 2006: 362–71.

[40] The sacrificial technicians (*victimarii*) are enlisted to carry out the burning: Livy 40.29. Other accounts at (*inter alia*) Varro ap. Augustine; Cass. Dio 7.34; Pliny, *NH* 13.84–8 (citing other pre-Livy sources); Valerius Maximus 1.1.12; Plutarch, *Numa* 22.2–5. For a detailed treatment of the story and proposed reconstruction of the reality behind it, Gruen 1990: 161–70. For the theological implications of Numa as a Pythagorean, and the story in particular, Silk 2004: especially 869–72. Livy 25.1.12 for M. Aemelius the praetor confiscating all superstitious religious texts in 213 B.C. (Speyer 1981: 51). The claim that this is part of the magistrate's remit is one book earlier, Livy 39.16. The detail of the *victimarii* carrying out the burnings may be contemporary for Livy: given the risk of urban conflagration at Rome, such fires would presumably need to be carried out by professionals. Rohmann 2013: 120–2.

[41] Suet., *Aug.* 31.1.

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installed in golden book-cases 'under the pedestal of the Palatine Apollo'.[42] Some have seen an attempt to suppress dissent, for which prophecy could be a vector.[43] It seems important, though, that this process creates or reinforces a category of authoritative text over which the priesthood has exclusive control.[44]

Augustus also established a precedent by which emperors burned records of old debt. We hear he burned such records to liberate debtors from the threat of blackmail;[45] arson of the civic archives containing such records may have been a phenomenon of Hellenistic cities beyond Rome.[46] Debt records were likewise burned by Nero and Vespasian.[47] Hadrian's remission of 900 million sesterces of old debts, in or around A.D. 118, was marked by a public burning commemorated on contemporary coinage.[48] The Hadrianic remission is also depicted on the so-called Anaglypha Traiani, featuring the distribution of *congiaria* on one panel and a dramatic burning of large-format *tabellae* on the other, as well as on the so-called Chatsworth Relief, which shows tablets in containers being carried by soldiers.[49] Marcus Aurelius held another debt relief by burning in A.D. 178, and here the history of documentary burning in our period appears to end.[50]

Waxed tablets were the preferred format for the secure long-term recording of financial and legal records that had to be available for authoritative access at some later date.[51] Practices around their creation and storage protected 'master copies' from tampering and housed them under controlled circumstances; for the *fiscus* to bring legal action against a debtor, they would have to produce the original document of the debt.[52] Burning the records, then, truly did destroy the only authoritative copies of the texts, effectively annulling the debts they described.

[42] Augustus' self-fashioning in this act, part of his positioning as a second founder of Rome, conjures not only the story of Numa's books but also the folktale of Tarquinius Superbus and the mysterious old woman (see above), invoking multiple images of religious book-burning from Rome's historical and mythological pasts.

[43] Cramer 1945: 167–8 (but not Forbes 1936: 119, a conspicuous example of the difference in tone between these two influential articles); Harker 2008: 120–1 (citing Buitenwerf 2003 who does not, however, support the claim as far as I can tell). Dio 57.18.5. attributes this motive to Tiberius, who held a review but not a burning.

[44] Cass. Dio 54.17.2; Tacitus, *Annales* 6.17. Augustus also decreed at some point (either simultaneous with or subsequent to this incident) that private ownership of purportedly Sibylline prophecy was illegal: Tacitus, *Annales* 6.12.

[45] Suet., *Aug.* 32.2.

[46] A subsequent fire in the Forum is blamed on debtors seeking remission (Cass. Dio 55.8.6–7). The incident most cited in support of this putative trend is the firing of an archive at Dyme in 115 B.C. (Harris 1989: 128 says that Dyme 'was certainly not a unique event' but cites only one other incident; see Rostovtzeff 1941: 722). On Dyme and the particulars of both the archive and the politics, Kallet-Marx 1995: 149–50. The inscription recording the event is Rizakēs 2008: III.5. There is some grounds for identifying the firing of archives with the Hellenistic era: compare the story, apparently Hellenistic in origin, that Hippocrates burned a temple at Cos (Cnidos?) containing inscriptions of remedies (after copying them himself). See Pinault 1992: 6–7, 11–12; Rosen 2012: 227–8.

[47] Nero: Tacitus, *Annales* 13.23. Vespasian: Cass. Dio 66.10.2a.

[48] *HA* Hadrian 7.6; cf. Cass. Dio 69.8.1, who attests the remission but not the burning. The possibility of relating this incident to book-burning is first raised in Clarke 1968: 575, n. 1. The coins, *RIC* II.590–3, credit the debt forgiveness to a *senatus consultum* and contain variations on the motif of a lictor setting a torch to a small pile of documents, and refer to 'reliqua vetera … abolita' ('old unpaid balances deleted').

[49] For general discussion of the Anaglyph, see *LTUR* s.v. 'Plutei Traianei'. It is well-depicted in Hammond 1953 and Tortorella 2013. See also Harris 1989: 211. On the more fragmentary but still relevant Chatsworth Relief, Torelli 1982: 89–118; Speyer 1981: 80–3. Attempts have been made to identify both pieces with a proposed Trajanic debt relief in A.D. 106.

[50] Cass. Dio 71(2).32.3. But note Diocletian's attempt to burn Egyptian alchemical texts (*Suda* s.v. Διοκλητιανός).

[51] Meyer 2004: e.g. 148–63 (*et passim*). On the people involved in creating such records at the civic level, Purcell 2001.

[52] Paulus ap. *Digest* 22.4.2: 'quicumque a fisco convenitur, non ex indice et exemplo alicuis scripturae, sed ex authentico conveniendus …'

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Burning of Documentary Written Material by Individuals

The political book-burning practice best and earliest attested at Rome is the burning of personal correspondence by victorious rivals. The power and decision to burn the letters of one defeated or succeeded is identified not with magisterial power but rather the moral character of the victor, who denies himself access to material with which he (or another) might otherwise persecute those implicated therein. This understanding rests on an understanding of the superior evidentiary value of an original letter; but the impossibility of verifying what has been destroyed leaves the act open to subversion and duplicity, exposing it to a kind of scepticism not unlike the response that attended literary burning.

This practice dates to the late Republic. When M. Perpenna Veiento (*c.* 72 B.C.) offered Pompey the letters of his erstwhile commander, the rebel Q. Sertorius, in exchange for his own life, Pompey instead burned the letters — which would have revealed who had pledged their support to the insurrection — to spare himself and Rome further bloodshed and unrest.[53] Julius Caesar would do the same when he captured the camps of Pompey (48 B.C.) and Metellus Scipio (46 B.C.), making a point of burning these documents unread.[54] The message of clemency is clear: 'I will not seek out or punish those who have supported my vanquished foe.' Octavian seems to have imitated his adopted father when, in 35 B.C., he burned correspondence that included pledges of support.[55]

But the political valence of *claiming* to have burned a rival's letters — meant to earn the affection or at least ease the concern of those implicated therein — was easily divorced from the reality of *actually doing it*. In 29 B.C. Octavian declared that all of Antony's letters had been burned; but if some were, others were not, and were later used against former Antonians.[56] Caligula made a similar and similarly false claim on his accession in A.D. 37 to have burned documents implicating enemies of his family, and similarly proceeded to use the supposedly destroyed documents for prosecution.[57]

In light of the betrayal of deceptive burning by those in power, it seems to have become a defiant gesture against them. On Claudius' accession (A.D. 41), he actually did burn those documents, along with his predecessor's poison collection.[58] Claudius' freedman Narcissus frustrated Agrippina by burning his late patron's correspondence before dying.[59] L. Maximus, suppressing the revolt in Germany of one Antonius (*c.* A.D. 90), risked Domitian's wrath to burn all of the rebel's papers.[60] And like the destruction of debt records, letter-burning also assures the security of those implicated in the documents from any *future* actions: Marcus Aurelius (in A.D. 175) and Commodus (*c.* A.D. 183) both ordered the burning of the letters of rebels and conspirators against them.[61]

We know little of how personal correspondence was archived in antiquity.[62] Letters captured after military defeats are found in cases (Latin *scrinium*, Greek κιβώτιον) that

[53] Plutarch, *Sertorius* 27.3: ἔργον οὖν ὁ Πομπήϊος οὐ νέας φρενός, ἀλλ' εὖ μάλα βεβηκυίας καὶ κατηρτυμένης ἐργασάμενος, μεγάλων ἀπήλλαξε τὴν Ῥώμην φόβων καὶ νεωτερισμῶν (cf. Plutarch, *Pompey* 20.4.).

[54] Pompey: Cass. Dio 41.63.6; Scipio: Cass. Dio 43.12.2 (cf. ibid. 43.17.4, 44.47.5). Seneca, *de ira* 2.23.4: 'quamvis moderate soleret irasci, maluit tamen non posse; gratissimum putavit genus veniae nescire quid quisque peccasset' ('Though he was accustomed to getting rather angry, he preferred to not be able to; he thought the most agreeable kind of pardon was to not even know what someone had done wrong').

[55] Appian, *BC* 5.132: '… καὶ γραμματεῖα, ὅσα τῆς στάσεως σύμβολα, ἔκαιε …'

[56] Cass. Dio 52.42.8.

[57] Suet., *Gaius* 15.4, 30.2; Cass. Dio 59.4.3, 59.6.3, 59.10.8, 59.16.3.

[58] Cass. Dio 60.4.5. Also burned are the papers(?) of a certain Protogenes. For burning poisons, cf. on Nero, Cass. Dio 61.7.5.

[59] Cass. Dio 60.34.5.

[60] This does not stop Domitian from pursuing those he suspects of rebel sympathy: Cass. Dio 67.11.1–2.

[61] Marcus Aurelius: Cass. Dio 71(2).28.4. Commodus: Cass. Dio 72(3).7.4.

[62] Beard 2002: 119, n. 49. The comparison to Cicero, however, is suggestive: to what extent did the narrative of

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enhance the symbolism of the burning: one can make a point of burning the container unopened, further emphasizing the claim to non-reading and so wilful ignorance. The security of documents was important: we hear that Octavian committed a transgression in removing (32 B.C.) from the temple of Vesta and reading — first privately, then publicly — the will Antony deposited there;[63] his transgression lay equally in violating the temple and in violating the document.

Letters were produced in forensic contexts as evidence.[64] Features such as seals, signatures and identifiable handwriting emphasized their metonymic link to their senders but also guaranteed their evidentiary value and authenticity.[65] When Caligula perpetrated his fraud, he burned *something*, but not the 'autograph copies containing the surest proof' (Cass. Dio 59.4.3: τὰ αὐτόχειρα τὰ τὸν ἀκριβῆ ἔλεγχον ἔχοντα).[66] Indeed, a willingness to act on copies rather than originals, or even to fake the destruction of originals, may have constituted a transgression of the normal practices around authoritative originals.

Burning and Power: Toward a More Complete Model

When literary book-burning emerged as a practice, however haphazard, in late Augustan and Tiberian Rome, a generation of Romans was already familiar with letter-burning, and Augustus had already held various beneficent burnings of documents. The spectacle of burning text, and the rhetorical framework in which the thing being destroyed was harmful to the state, had been established as a practice with precedent; it is easy to imagine the burning of scurrilous pamphlets — which may have opened the door for burning literature proper — being advertised as a cognate act to the burning of debt records, spurious prophecy, or even letters.

Burning these various kinds of document, while variously a gesture of concern, beneficence, or *clementia*, is nonetheless a claim of exclusive and individual power — a kind of abstracted *imperium* of life and death, the exact equivalence between having control or possession over a thing (a written document) and having the power to destroy it. The rise of these practices might be explained, then, as an epiphenomenon of the increasing (and increasingly explicit) concentration of power in the hands of individual dynasts and rulers.

The burning of documents was concerned with wilful denial of access to information, and seems to have been largely persuasive in that regard. Literary book-burning, by contrast, was far from the most effective means of information control available to Julio-Claudian emperors, and seems instead to have been an occasional emphatic addition to more bloody and direct forms of persecution and suppression.

It remains to untangle the most prominent of the literary sources from which these histories are drawn, and consider what meaning and afterlife each practice obtained in the literary and historical imagination.

'lost archives' of prominent players in the late Republic and Triumviral periods heighten Imperial readers' interest in collections like Cicero's letters? Official correspondence was another matter: see Radner 2014: 172–208.

[63] Cass. Dio 50.3; 50.20.7; Suet., *Aug.* 17.2; Plutarch, *Ant.* 58.2–3. Dio notes the authenticity of the document, which bore the seals of witnesses, and later has Antony invoke this violation of a private document as an example of Octavian's lawlessness. See Dumont 1959; Johnson 1978.

[64] e.g., Tiberius: Suet., *Tiberius* 50.1; Cass. Dio 58.24.1.

[65] Cicero, *In Cat.* 3.8–11.

[66] For the expression τὸν ἀκριβῆ ἔλεγχον cf. (*inter alia*) Demosthenes 57.13; Diodorus Siculus 4.1; Lucian, *Slander* 14.

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III CONTEMPORARY RESPONSES IN SENECA THE ELDER

Our only contemporary witness to the rise of literary book-burning is Seneca the Elder, whose *Controversiae* and *Suasoriae* document the declamatory culture of the early Principate by collecting popular declamatory topics and relating how prominent declaimers spoke on each one. Much as observers in Europe and around the world reacted to the advent of Nazi book-burning in 1933 with a range of bemusement, dismissal, and anxiety, so too does Seneca offer an ambivalent response to the new practice that expresses concern over its implications.[67] Book-burning rises as a threat, hinting at torture, death, and an end to memory. But it is also subject to the rhetorical techniques of reversal and subversion that characterize the *controversia*: book-burning may be deployed rhetorically or literally by the orator against a rival, or even someone in power, and treating book-burning as a rhetoric that might be inverted — not fixed in its meaning or implications — allows it to be represented as ultimately futile.

The Elder Seneca's writings provide cumulative biographies of the declaimers of his day, presented in snapshots as each one speaks up on a given topic, and fleshed out in the biographical prefaces to each volume of the work. Not bound by historical chronology, he tells the story of book-burning as a growing — and catching — conflagration. First, we hear of Scaurus, whose speeches (*orationes*) were burned, although notes (*libelli*) survive.[68] We then hear how the books (*libri*) of Labienus were burned, which prompts a condemnation of those who would seek to condemn intellectual literary efforts (*studia*) to the flames.[69] The effect is of escalating threats, as the flames consume first simply speeches, then actual books, whose nature as true products of labour is emphasized. Agency and cause also become more specific: Scaurus' books were burned 'by *senatus consultum*', but Labienus' were burned by 'his enemies', and finally we hear of an anonymous book-burner who would later have his own books burned. The implied narrative is one that tends from vagueness about those responsible, and dubious consequences, toward describing a full-scale attack on literature *qua* literature by bad actors.

Seneca's treatments of these incidents of burning are not without humour and rhetorical flourishes. He jokes that because Scaurus made up for his shoddy composition with his passionate delivery, the summary pamphlets that survived the burnings of his speeches 'have all of the carelessness, but none of the heat (*calor*)' of the real thing.[70] 'You'll have to burn me now, I know those books by heart', quips Severus when Labienus' books are burned.[71] And when he tells of Labienus' fate, Seneca pivots neatly from an outraged condemnation of 'the savagery that puts the torch to literature, … unsated by other fuel' to praising book-burning as a fitting punishment for those who would inflict it on others (*Con.* 10.pr.7):

> eius, qui hanc in scripta Labieni sententiam dixerat, postea viventis adhuc scripta combusta sunt, iam non malo exemplo, quia suo.
>
> Afterwards, the writings of the one who pronounced this sentence against the writings of Labienus were burned while he was still living, a punishment no longer wicked, now that it was his.

[67] Fishburn 2008: 73–96, with discussion on pp. 80–1 of Forbes 1936. Not until the 1940s would a consensus form in the Allied powers of Nazi book-burning as monstrous. Forbes's outlook must be compared in that light with that of Cramer 1945 a decade later; Cramer was also German-born and fled Germany in the late 1930s.
[68] Seneca, *Con.* 10.pr.3. *Libelli* here are to be distinguished from, say, *libri*; these are either pre-publication notes, bootleg transcriptions, or some other account of the content or *capita* (main points) of the speech. The debate over pre-publication and publication formats of Roman literary texts is most extensive and specific in the case of Martial: see Fowler 1995 and White 1996.
[69] Seneca, *Con.* 10.pr.6–7.
[70] Seneca, *Con.* 10.pr.3.
[71] Seneca, *Con.* 10.pr.8. Labienus was not blind to the risks he took with his words.

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In true controversial fashion, Seneca is prepared to argue both for and against book-burning; or at least, to subject it to a reversal and implicit paradox that invites further scrutiny.

Concern about book-burning and rhetorical reversal of it against its villainous users is also a theme in the fifth *controversia* in Book 10, which concerns an artist who tortures a slave to death so as to have a realistic model of Prometheus bound (*Con.* 10.5). Seneca's quotations from different orators' treatments inevitably turn to fire as one of the canonical means of torture: 'Prometheus, now would be a good time to steal fire!'[72] quips Craton, a witty Asianist who rebukes Augustus for only hearing him speak in the cold weather: 'You are using me as a furnace.'[73]

Free association from Craton brings up his rival Timagenes, the champion of reversing book-burning. Timagenes, embittered by his former servitude, was over-free with his speech, and ended up banned from the emperor's presence for something he said (*Con.* 10.5.22):

> … cum illi multis de causis iratus Caesar interdixisset domo, combureret historias rerum ab illo gestarum, quasi et ipse illi ingenio suo interdiceret: disertus homo et dicax, a quo multa inprobe sed venuste dicta.
>
> … when Augustus, angry with him for a lot of reasons, prohibited him from entering his house, Timagenes burned up his histories of Augustus' great deeds, as if to prohibit *him* in turn from access to Timagenes' own talent: an eloquent man and quick-witted, who said many wild but charming things.

The *controversia* about Prometheus is a bleak one, raising questions of excess and brutality that Craton is not afraid to gently implicate Augustus in. The Timagenes incident is not datable, but whether or not Augustus (or the Augustan Senate) had already ordered books burned by this date, the burnings of letters, prophecy and debt records were already identifiable with Augustus; Timagenes' over-free speech is matched only by his willingness to turn the tactic back on the Princeps.[74]

As a coda to the preface of Book 10, which seemed to favour a dim view of book-burning, 10.5 emphasizes the way it might be turned against those inclined to use it. Book-burning's susceptibility to inversion (not to mention its general prominence in the political landscape) seems to have fostered at least one fictional scenario: in the last of Seneca's *Suasoriae*, the declaimers of Rome address a popular counterfactual premise, in which it is imagined that Antony has offered to spare Cicero's life if the orator will but burn his own books.[75]

Most speakers on the topic value the books more than the man, Seneca says, and there was only one especially effective (*efficacius*) treatment of the subject: that of Pompeius Silo (*Suas.* 7.11):

> Silo Pompeius sic egit ut diceret Antonium non pacisci sed inludere: non esse illam condicionem sed contumeliam; combustis enim libris nihilominus occisurum; non esse tam stultum Antonium ut putaret ad rem pertinere libros a Cicerone conburi, cuius scripta per totum orbem terrarum celebrarentur; nec hoc petere eum, quod posset ipse facere (nisi forte non

[72] Seneca, *Con.* 10.pr.21: 'Craton furiosissime, qui dixit: Προμηθεῦ, νῦν ἔδει σε πῦρ κλέψαι.'
[73] Seneca, *Con.* 10.5.21.
[74] In his former life, incidentally, Timagenes had been acquainted with the use of fire: he was a cook.
[75] For more on 'Cicero's choice' generally, Sailor 2008. Seneca explains (*Suas.* 6.14–15) that the scenario of Cicero burning his books is a pure fiction — popular with students, but a result of Asinius Pollio's attempt to portray Cicero as desperately seeking reconciliation with Antony in his final days. Cicero, Pollio suggested, was willing to write new speeches praising Antony as strongly as the *Philippics* attacked him. Pollio was re-writing history to suggest that Cicero would happily re-write history.

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esset in scripta Ciceronis ei ius cui esset in Ciceronem); quaeri nihil aliud quam ut ille Cicero multa fortiter de mortis contemptu locutus ad turpes condiciones perductus occideretur.

Pompeius Silo handled it so as to say that Antony was not negotiating with Cicero, but taunting him: that this was not a deal, but a humiliation; for even with his books having been burned, Antony would kill him anyway; that Antony was not so stupid as to think it mattered for the books to be burned by Cicero, whose writings were famous all over the world; and that Antony was not really seeking from Cicero something that he himself might equally do (unless he for some reason lacked over Cicero's writings the power he had over Cicero); and, that Antony was seeking no ends other than that Cicero — the same Cicero who had boldly said so much about his contempt of death — should only be killed once he had been reduced to such disgraceful terms.

Only here does Seneca begin to identify book-burning explicitly with the figure of the tyrant, but he also offers the most forceful rejection of it as a practice: that great books cannot really be destroyed because of the important rôle that *readership* plays in their lives — whether in the memories of readers, or in reputation and copying, literature spreads quickly beyond the confines of one material copy. In *Con.* 10, book-burning was subjected to inversion, in keeping with the general mode of controversial declamation: it might be wielded by any party against any other, whether senator against senator or author against emperor. *Suas.* 7 extends this rejection by empowering declamatory rhetoric (embodied by Silo) to explicitly reject book-burning and deny it any power — and, through the rôle-play inherent in suasorial declamation, to at least imagine saying so in the presence of an actual tyrant.

Book-burning is not without its threats for Seneca. He frames his work as a last-ditch intervention to set down all his recollections before the people he knew are forgotten, the work of an old man whose memory is failing.[76] These *studia* are thus a link between past and present, and yet around the end of this last roll, the flames of book-burning seem to be licking — burning that has spread from the infighting of the Senate to the household of the emperor. When he decries the outrage of setting fire to *studia* (as opposed to just *orationes*), we might hear a real concern. But thinking and remembering rhetorically allows Seneca to conceive of book-burning as a fundamentally rhetorical phenomenon, one subject to all the inversions and repurposings of any other rhetorical construct. It acts on the real material world, and accompanies other, bloodier acts in the same material world; but it is also limited in its real power, and, as Silo would explain to Cicero, is specifically ineffective exactly where it claims to be most threatening. 'Books cannot be killed by fire', Roosevelt declared:[77] Silo and Seneca, it seems, would quite sombrely agree. And it is not those who burn the books, but those who describe and remember the burning, who get to decide what it truly means to do so.

IV MEANING AND MEMORY OF BURNING IN ANTONINE AND SEVERAN WRITING

The literary sources that attest practices of pre-Christian Roman book-burning span more than two centuries. The various practices by which Romans burned written material are *remembered* far more than they are *documented*; that is to say, much of our evidence for the burning of writing is related at a remove, by authors inhabiting a different historical context from the time they describe. Examining these later sources in turn, with an eye toward their own interests, and how the burning of written material might

[76] Seneca, *Con.* 10.pr.1.
[77] Fishburn 2008: 105 (with pl. 5).

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relate or not to those interests, will help us to contextualize the linear narratives in the first section, and will show how Roman cultural and political memory constructed the idea of book-burning.

Hadrianic Rome: Tacitus and Suetonius

The period encompassed by the reigns of Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian seems to mark the end of literary book-burning under imperial or senatorial authority. It also sees the two Latin writers who furnish most of our detail of the early Julio-Claudian period in which the practice flourished. The memory of literary book-burning is fluid and open to negotiation: Suetonius, not one to mince words about the tyrannical excesses of earlier Caesars, is virtually silent on the matter, while Tacitus offers the greatest Roman critiques of book-burning — which are, in turn, also their most effective commemorations. For condemnation of book-burning's depravity is of a piece with rejection of its laughable futility: in fulfilment of the Senecan model, Tacitus finds in book-burning a powerful rhetorical motif for valorizing his projects of imperial historiography and biography. Yet for all the moral outrage of Tacitus, Suetonius finds documentary rather than literary book-burning to be the most dramatic index of an emperor's moral failings.

The surviving writings of Tacitus feature two prominent episodes of book-burning.[78] Each is deployed carefully, to focus the reader's attention on Tacitus' own project, as Tacitus carefully describes the burning of books very much like the one his reader is currently holding. Tacitus does not chronicle every instance of historical book-burning; the episodes he describes, the details he furnishes, and where he places them figure prominently in his reflexive programme.

In the opening lines of his *Agricola*, Tacitus describes the burning of two biographers' works under Domitian. As Seneca's accounts foreshadow, this episode is marked by book-burning's rhetorical nature. Tacitus both reflects on one set of meanings with which the book-burners (so he says) fashioned their act, and himself fashions another set of meanings for the episode in the context of the programmatic opening of his own biographical writing (Tacitus, *Agricola* 1.3–2.3):

> legimus, cum Aruleno Rustico Paetus Thrasea, Herennio Senecioni Priscus Helvidius laudati essent, capitale fuisse, neque in ipsos modo auctores, sed in libros quoque eorum saevitum, delegato triumviris ministerio ut monumenta clarissimorum ingeniorum in comitio ac foro urerentur. scilicet illo igne vocem populi Romani et libertatem senatus et conscientiam generis humani aboleri arbitrabantur, expulsis insuper sapientiae professoribus atque omni bona arte in exilium acta, ne quid usquam honestum occurreret.
>
> dedimus profecto grande patientiae documentum; et sicut vetus aetas vidit quid ultimum in libertate esset, ita nos quid in servitute, adempto per inquisitiones etiam loquendi audiendique commercio. Memoriam quoque ipsam cum voce perdidissemus, si tam in nostra potestate esset oblivisci quam tacere.
>
> I have read that when Thrasea Paetus was praised by Arulenus Rusticus, and Helvidius Priscus[79] by Herennius Senecio, it was made a capital offence, with wrath falling not only on the authors themselves, but even on their books, with the duty having been assigned to the *triumviri*[80] that they should burn in the *Comitium* and Forum these monuments most

[78] Domitian's burning of biographies at *Agricola* 1–2 and the fate of Cremutius Cordus at *Annales* 4.34–6. See also Nero's burning of tax records at *Annales* 13.23 and the works of Fabricius Veiento at *Annales* 14.50. On the *Agricola* and the Cordus episode especially, see Haynes 2006.

[79] See Pliny, *Ep.* 7.19.

[80] Perhaps the *triumviri capitales*. Forbes 1936: 124, n. 47; see Lintott 1999: 105.

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> outstanding characters. Naturally they imagined that in that fire were destroyed the voice of the Roman people, the freedom of the Senate, and the conscience of the entire human race (with the teachers of philosophy and every good art having been sent into exile besides, so that no honest thing might be found anywhere).
>
> We have provided a substantial proof of our suffering; and just as an earlier age bore witness to the extremes of freedom, so we have seen the extremes of servitude, with even the exchange of speaking and listening to one another having been taken from us by domestic surveillance. We might well have lost memory itself along with speech, if forgetting were as easy as keeping silent.

The burners, we hear, understood the books to represent *vox*, *libertas* and *conscientia*. Really at stake for Tacitus, however, is *memoria*, which cannot be destroyed as easily as *vox* can be temporarily suppressed. The books, in fact, were *monumenta clarissimorum ingeniorum* — monuments of most outstanding characters, that is, the subjects of the biographies that were burned. This too is a precise figuring of book-burning's meaning: for Seneca, the *ingenia* threatened by book-burning were those of authors, rather than subjects.[81] Book-burning sought in vain to suppress biography; in rhetorical terms, Tacitus here deploys the practice as a particular *color* in service of the theme of 'the value and hazards of political biography under tyranny'.

Equally precise in its rhetorical features is the use of book-burning in *Annales* 4, where it is the much-discussed punishment faced by Cremutius Cordus.[82] Here, again, book-burning is used as the grotesque climax of a shocking story; but here too book-burning is quickly dismissed as futile, this time for reasons that specifically relate to the nature of the book. After a digression about historiography (4.32–33), the trial of Cordus and the writer's speech in his own defence (4.34–35.2), in one breath, Tacitus describes how 'the Senators ordered his books to be burned by the aediles, but they remained, hidden and were then brought out again'.[83] This burning gets barely a glance, and even more than the *Agricola* example, it is immediately refuted as pointless. The implied claim is simple: it is impossible to burn all the copies of a book, and as long as one can be hidden during the suppression, it will return to circulation. The burning itself is not what offends the sensibilities, but rather what the burning is meant by the Senate to signify: an attack on the *libertas* of speech.

Books' imperviousness to burning is guaranteed by two inherent qualities Tacitus sees in them: first, the peer-to-peer system of copying and distribution ensured the repopulation of libraries after the threat passed, and second, demand for such copies would be governed by a book's reputation, the second-order life it enjoyed in the minds of readers and would-be readers (only heightened by its persecution).[84] This is a principle Tacitus articulates most clearly, in passing, in the case of Fabricius Veiento (*Annales* 14.50):

> quae causa Neroni fuit suscipiendi iudicii, convictumque Veientonem Italia depulit et libros exuri iussit conquisitos lectitatosque, donec cum periculo parabantur: mox licentia habendi oblivionem attulit.
>
> … For this reason Nero took up the judgement himself: Veiento, convicted, he exiled, and he ordered his books to be burned. The books were sought out and much read, so long as it was dangerous to get one's hands on them; only the eventual lifting of the ban brought oblivion upon them.

[81] Seneca, *Con.* 10.pr.6–7.
[82] Tacitus, *Annales* 4.34–5. Moles 1998; Sailor 2008: 250–313.
[83] Tacitus, *Annales* 4.34.4: 'libros per aediles cremandos censuere patres; set manserunt, occultati et editi.' See discussion in Section I with note 32, above.
[84] Per Cassius Severus: 'I know those books by heart, now I'd better be burned too' (Seneca 10.pr.8: 'nunc me, inquit, vivum uri oportet, qui illos edidici').

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Suppression attracts attention and bestows fame.[85] Like the Elder Seneca, Tacitus indicts book-burning for its violence against memory even as he denies it any real power; it is precisely at this interface of serious anxiety about attacks on knowledge and rhetorical culture's confidence in its own resilience that the *memory* of book-burning becomes meaningful.

Suetonius' interests in the past and how he writes about it differ from Tacitus', and so too does his eye for what book-burning can be made to mean. Suetonius' *Lives* of the early emperors are structured around episodes and make use of anecdotes, or what Romans call *exempla* — brief fragments of narrative that illustrate some moral principle of one or more of the key actors.[86] But for Suetonius, book-burning is not as monstrous an *exemplum* of Tiberius' character as his other crimes.

The most dramatic (or dramatized) burning in the *Lives* is Caligula's farcical burning of letters, in which the deception which lurks as latent possibility in the unverifiability of documentary burning is made into a dramatic revelation of Caligula's true monstrous character. Caligula on his accession, seeking to 'fire up' (*incendebat*) the zeal of the people, announces his clemency (*Gaius* 15.4):

> pari popularitate damnatos relegatosque restituit; criminum, si quae residua ex priore tempore manebant, omnium gratiam fecit; commentarios ad matris fratrumque suorum causas pertinentis, ne cui postmodum delatori aut testi maneret ullus metus, convectos in forum, et ante clare obtestatus deos neque legisse neque attigisse quicquam, concremavit.
>
> With the same populism he recalled those who had been condemned and exiled; he issued a blanket pardon for all crimes that remained untried from an earlier time; and he burned up all documentation pertaining to the cases of his mother and brothers (so that no fear should remain for either witness or informer), the documents having been brought into the Forum, and he himself having first sworn loudly that he had neither read nor even touched any of them.

Where Dio relates the claim and its dishonesty in one breath, Suetonius here delays resolution of this episode:[87] the reader is allowed to believe, with the other Romans at the time, that Caligula's burning is the grand public gesture of clemency it seems to be. The *Lives* are often structured around contrasts, for example between Augustus the public man and the private one. In the *Gaius*, Suetonius turns from the emperor Caligula to the man — or, as he says, the 'monster'.[88] Among the revelations of the emperor's true nature is that he did not burn what he said he did (*Gaius* 30):

> saepe in cunctos pariter senatores ut Seiani clientis, ut matris ac fratrum suorum delatores, invectus est prolatis libellis, quos crematos simulaverat […]
>
> He often attacked all the senators as clients of Sejanus, and informers against his mother and brothers, having brought out the papers which he had pretended to have burned […]

The way Suetonius draws out the revelation of the deception, and of the true nature of the act of letter-burning, enacts not only its essential duplicitousness, but also Rome's growing, horrified awareness of its erratic ruler.[89] A fundamental reality of the written

[85] Rohmann 2013: 130 finds evidence of the same effect in the fate of Labienus.
[86] Langlands 2014; Gunderson 2014.
[87] Cass. Dio 59.4.3, 59.6.3, 59.10.8, 59.16.3.
[88] Suet., *Gaius* 22 ('hactenus quasi de principe, reliqua ut de monstro narranda sunt'). For a similar reversal, see Suet., *Tiberius* 51. 'Gaius' is the given name by which Suetonius refers to the emperor we call Caligula (see *Gaius* 9.1).
[89] We might note too that Dio attributes a similar deception to Octavian, of which no mention is made by Suetonius.

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word pertains here: once a document has been burned, who is to say what it originally contained?

Tacitus and Suetonius are united by their specific and intentional deployment of book-burning as a dramatic motif. Acts of burning the written word, inherently spectacular, capture the reader's attention in the narrative just as they (presumably) drew crowds in actual fact. But the implications of burning extend beyond the fire, playing out specifically in the material realm in ways governed by the material realities of the texts burned. The burning of books and documents, respectively, furnish productive images to each author. And both recall and commemorate the burning of written materials as inherently dramatic but rarely effective in the ways that its practitioners advertise it to be. In historical accounts, the meaning of book-burning is a collaboration between those who undertook the burning and the historiographer who incorporates the burning into his own literary account.

The Long View: Cassius Dio

The history of burning the written word at Rome suggests that far more information control was at stake in the burning of correspondence and other documents than speech control ever was in the burning of literary texts. That document-burning was a recurrent feature of imperial power at Rome since before the formal advent of the principate is a clear theme of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*. Document destruction, Dio seems to suggest, is a hallmark of how powerful Romans retain their power. But unlike the destruction of debt records, the burning of letters is a deeply untrustworthy act, one at risk of being deceptive and, even when not deceptive, conspicuous for its rhetorical significance. Documents such as letters may be produced or destroyed at crucial moments, and should be subject, Dio suggests, to inherent scepticism.

Dio alludes only in passing to Augustan and Tiberian book-burning: Augustus' suppression of 'pamphlets' is listed among the policies enacted towards the end of his life, while Cordus' fate — the result, Dio explains, of a conflict with Sejanus — is one of the longer anecdotes on Tiberius' problematic character. The two episodes are marked by a suggestive intratext.[90]

The political burning of letters seems to arise, for Dio, with Julius Caesar.[91] Dio contrives to return to Caesar the letter-burner four times: after the defeats of Pompey (Cass. Dio 41.63.6) and Metellus Scipio (43.13.2), in Caesar's own words (43.17.4) and, after his assassination, in Antony's (44.47.5). Two things must be noted about this cumulative account. The first is that Dio is conspicuously detailed in the particulars of what it means to burn letters: we hear that Caesar 'neither read nor copied, but burned them straightaway' (41.63.6) and that if he read them he might be 'forced to do something terrible' (ibid.). We also hear that Caesar was perfectly capable of getting rid of enemies through unofficial or extrajudicial means, and so his burning of Scipio's letters was an explicit statement of his intent to be clement. Antony is made to explain that if the letters survived, anyone — not just Caesar — might make use of them (44.47.5). Antony is also explicit about the fact that Caesar might simply have claimed to burn the letters, but did not; the facts, though, bear out that this is not what happened (ibid.). Dio's accounts of Caesar's letter-burning, then, are those of an author well-versed in the various implications and potentials of having and burning (or claiming to burn) such letters.

[90] Cass. Dio 56.27.1: … ἐν τῇ πόλει εὑρεθέντα πρὸς τῶν ἀγορανόμων τὰ δὲ ἔξω πρὸς τῶν ἑκασταχόθι ἀρχόντων, κατέφλεξε. 57.24.4: … ἐν τῇ πόλει εὑρεθέντα πρὸς τῶν ἀγορανόμων καὶ τὰ ἔξω πρὸς τῶν ἑκασταχόθι ἀρχόντων ἐκαύθη. Does this serve to cast the end of Augustus' rule as a premonition of Tiberius'?

[91] If Dio related the tale of Pompey and Perpenna, it would have been in the last of the lost books that now exist only in small fragments.

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Second, we must note the literary effect of returning to the episode so often. The first incident, after Pompey's defeat, might be isolated, but it is echoed after Scipio's defeat with a greater narrative emphasis on *clementia*; then, not long after, Caesar is allowed to articulate his own letter-burning as a *specimen* of his own lack of interest in bearing grudges. After Caesar's death, Antony returns to the topic, hitting notes of refrain with the earlier episodes (only the Scipio episode does not mention and refute the possibility that Caesar might have saved the letters[92]). The act grows in the telling: Dio's redeployment of it encourages his reader to understand letter-burning not only as an act, but as an advertisement, something one (or one's eulogist) might point to as exemplary of virtue.

Two qualities of these accounts are echoed in subsequent episodes. The unverifiability of letter-burning, implicit in Antony's words ('this is not only what he said but what he did'),[93] is borne out by Octavian's false claims to have burned Antony's letters (52.42.8). Octavian was seeking to put Antony's former partisans at ease, and held some kind of burning, but did not burn everything he had. Second, the way it is amplified into an advertisement of Caesar's character highlights it as the kind of performative act than can be used to mislead — as indeed Caligula does. Where Suetonius' treatment of this episode emphasizes the horrifying revelation of Caligula's true character, Dio instead points to the way that Caligula's boasts (59.6.3) about the burning (that he has made himself unable to harbour ill will) earn him the active praise of the Romans. Caligula holds a burning, but actually retains the originals and also makes copies; describing how the Romans were taken in by this, Dio turns the story into an indictment not so much of Caligula's character as of the Romans' insufficiently critical response to the emperor's youthful acts of beneficence.[94]

After Caligula's death, document-burning takes on two forms. It is a positive act for an emperor to perform:[95] Claudius burns poisons from the imperial residence, and opens Caligula's entire archive of the purportedly burned letters, allowing everyone implicated therein to see them, before truly and finally destroying them (Cass. Dio 60.4.5). Vespasian (66.10.2) and Marcus Aurelius (71.32.3) burn records of outstanding debts to the treasury. Marcus Aurelius was so clement, in fact, that after putting down the uprising of Flavius Cassius (71.28), he confined Cassius to an island but imprisoned no one else, had no one killed, and burned up all the paperwork that had been generated in the course of the affair;[96] Commodus followed suit (72.7.4) in refusing the confessions and destroying the paperwork of a certain Manilius.

But it is also something deployed in defiance of the powerful: after the death of Claudius (Cass. Dio 60.34.4–5), his freedman *ab epistulis*, Narcissus, managed before dying himself to burn secret documents belonging to the late emperor, thus denying Agrippina and Nero access to information that they would presumably have used to pursue others implicated in the papers.[97] This was, Dio says, a 'magnificent deed' (λαμπρὸν ἔργον). Similar praise is heaped (67.11.1–2) on the Lucius Maximus who was sent by Domitian to suppress the insurrection of a certain Antonius, then governor of Germany. Maximus' victory itself is not especially praiseworthy, but Dio cannot praise highly enough what Maximus did

[92] Cass. Dio 41.63.6: … οὔτ' ἀνέγνω οὔτ' ἐξεγράψατο ….; 43.17.4: … μήτ' ἀναγνοὺς μήτ' ἐκγραψάμενος ἀλλ' εὐθὺς κατακαύσας; 44.47.5: … μήτ' ἀναγνούς τι αὐτῶν μήτε τηρήσας …

[93] Cass. Dio 44.47.5: … οὐκ εἶπε μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔπραξε …

[94] It is worth noting that in both mentions of this episode, Caligula's burning of letters is mentioned immediately after his apparent end to Tiberian *maiestas* policies; as we have seen, *maiestas* may have been the formal structure under which books were burned in the reign of Tiberius.

[95] The exception is a peculiar episode at Cass. Dio 61.7.5, where Nero, punishing a purported poison-pedlar, holds a public burning of the alleged poisons. Here including a burning in one's persecutory pursuits seems to be a mark of especial excess. For poison-burning, cf. Cass. Dio 79.5.5.

[96] Cass. Dio 71.28.4: … τὰ δὲ ὑπομνήματα τὰ περὶ αὐτοῦ γενόμενα κατέκαυσεν.

[97] Millar 1967: 14–15 on Narcissus.

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after his victory: finding in the rebel's camp boxes of correspondence, he burned them all, risking his own safety to ensure that no one implicated in the documents could be blackmailed. Here, though, we find the true limits of documentary burning: for even without the documents, Domitian killed countless (alleged or real) co-conspirators.[98]

Literary book-burning, which often accompanied corporal punishment, is a threat or promise to take further action. The burning of letters, by contrast, is a promise to take *no* further action. Caligula broke that promise, betraying a similar cynicism to that underlying Silo's account of 'Cicero's choice' in Seneca, *Suas*. 7: the burning of the written material is a stunt, an advertisement, paling in significance next to the tyrant's exertion of his power over life and death. Dio, it seems, would agree with Silo, and with Seneca: although genuinely exemplary of character when performed in good faith, the burning of correspondence has as much of the rhetorical about it as the burning of literary books, and so is essentially suspect.

The final books of Dio's history, preserved only fragmentarily by Xiphilinus, hint at what may have been Dio's recent personal experience with emperors and documents. Letters and documents seem to have figured prominently in the brief reign of Macrinus in particular: a missed letter prompts Macrinus' revolt (78.4), and Macrinus seems to do something of great concern that involves documents of informers that may have been at the imperial residence (78.21.11). References to letters and notebooks crop up in the most damaged parts of the text: (78.16.2, 78.23.2, 78.36.1, 78.37.1). And most tellingly, a key part of Elagabulus' attempts to discredit Macrinus and his rule involves distributing 'notebooks of the soldiers' as well as letters of Macrinus (79.5.2).[99] The political use of letters, particularly around contentious regime change, loomed large in Dio's memory, and Dio identifies control over correspondence with the essence of Roman emperors' power, and the most crucial moments in such power's transmission from one regime to the next.

Imperial Text-Burning in the Post-Domitianic Cultural Imaginary

We may see glimpses in our period of Christian book-burning practices encroaching on the non-Christian world, as individuals are occasionally recorded as considering book-burning as a form of sectarian assault, but always with some bemusement.[100] But certainly document-destruction captures the imagination of later Antonine prose authors. In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (8.22), the enraged wife of an adulterous *villico* burns all of the household documents for which her cheating husband was responsible, before throwing herself and their child into a well.[101] Apuleius' contemporary Aulus Gellius also grants (*Noctes Atticae* 4.18.7–12) a dramatic moment of document-destruction to Scipio Africanus, who, indignant at being called to account for booty taken in war, rises in the Senate and shreds in front of everyone the scroll he says contains the asked-for information.[102] The former story adds colour to the rising grotesquery of his tale, and

[98] The language of Xiphilinus' fragment is unclear (… ἀφορμῆς ἐντεῦθεν εὐπορήσας …) but it seems Domitian found the mere existence of such an archive to be sufficient pretext.

[99] Compare Cass. Dio 79.5.2 where Elagabulus mentions he will not bother to send the documents that will prove some defendants' guilt. On Elagabulus' management of information, Scott 2013.

[100] The prophet Alexander's public attack on Epicurus by burning his books in an elaborate ritual was, Lucian tells us, 'the single most hilarious (ἓν … γελοιότατον) thing' Alexander did. See Clarke 1968: 578; Speyer 1981: 31; Sarefield 2007: 163–5, with especially 164, n. 22. Alexander's heyday was during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Something similar may lie behind Dio's note that Caracalla thought of burning Aristotelian works to show his distaste for the sect (Cass. Dio 77.7.3: … ὥστε καὶ τὰ βιβλία αὐτῶν κατακαῦσαι ἐθελῆσαι).

[101] The husband 'burned with love' ('flagrabat cupidine') for a neighbouring freewoman, but fire was his undoing (8.22): 'quo dolore paelicatus uxor …. rationes et equicquid horreo reconditum continebatur admoto combussit igne.'

[102] The notoriously bookish Gellius has nothing to say about Imperial book-burning, but then, he has virtually nothing to say about anything that happened between the death of Cicero and the reign of Hadrian. He relates the

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the latter, though not a burning, shows the destruction of a document having powerful dramatic effect.[103]

Two accounts in Greek literature of the Imperial era describe practices of textual burning that closely resemble the Roman practices examined in this paper, but locate them in Classical and Hellenistic Greece. It is worth considering the extent to which the associations of textual burning with Roman power may have influenced these accounts.

In his *Life of Agis IV* (*c.* 262–241 B.C.), Plutarch describes (*Agis* 23.1–3) how Agis is persuaded to hold a remission of debts.[104] The documents recording the debts (for which Plutarch relates the Spartan word) are piled in the agora and burned, to the dismay of the wealthy and the money-lenders. The detail of the unique Spartan term gives the story an air of authenticity; but Plutarch lingers on the burning, describing it with a sense of spectacle that recalls the images of Hadrianic debt remission on the Anaglypha Traiana and Chatsworth Relief (discussed above).

We saw in the previous section that Dio's accounts of Augustan and Tiberian book-burning give a glimpse, unparalleled in its procedural detail, of how Roman imperial power was leveraged to orchestrate the collection and burning of suppressed books. That image is recalled by the account in Diogenes Laertius of the suppression in Athens of the writings of Protagoras in which he said he did not know if the gods existed (9.51–2):[105]

> διὰ ταύτην δὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ συγγράμματος ἐξεβλήθη πρὸς Ἀθηναίων· καὶ τὰ βιβλία αὐτοῦ κατέκαυσαν ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ, ὑπὸ κήρυκι ἀναλεξάμενοι παρ' ἑκάστου τῶν κεκτημένων.
>
> For this introduction to his book the Athenians expelled him; and they burnt his works in the market-place, after sending round a herald to collect them from all who had copies in their possession.

The episode is famous as a specimen of Athenian anti-intellectualism.[106] But the particulars are poorly attested: the detail of the Athenians' *desire* to burn the books is Hellenistic in origin, but the Roman-style practices enter the tradition later.[107]

The written word surely was intentionally destroyed by fire in the Greek world before Roman rule. But these two instances that most seem to anticipate later Roman practice have in their particulars clear parallels to Imperial-era accounts of such practice. Control over the fate of written materials, literary as well as documentary, was closely identified with the kind of power wielded by Rome and her agents. And in the broader Roman cultural imagery of material text and its destruction, documents and paperwork were at least as prominent (if not more so) as literature and 'books'.

tale of Superbus and the Sibylline books (*NA* 1.19) and muses on the burning of the library at Alexandria (*NA* 7.17) with no apparent horror or concern that the loss of books to flames is of any present concern.

[103] For shredding rather than burning, compare Plutarch, *Eumenes* 16.4; where his Plutarchan parallel Sertorius sees his letters burnt by Pompey (*Sert.* 27.4–5, see above), Eumenes simply 'tears up' (κατέσχισε) his paperwork, lest his correspondents be prosecuted based on their contents.

[104] Plutarch is our only witness to the event. Marasco 1983: I.300 ad loc. simply notes 'la distruzione dei documenti era evidentemente il metodo più sbrigativo per attuare la remissione dei debiti, anche perché non lasciava possibilità ai creditori di sperare in successivi rivolgimenti politici, che permettessero loro di recuperare il proprio capitale'.

[105] Trans. Hicks, LCL.

[106] Schiappa 1991: 143–5.

[107] e.g. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.63 specifies the marketplace, and only Diogenes has the round-up. Dover 1988: 142–3; Harris 1989: 91, n. 123.

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V CONCLUSIONS

Comparison between Augustan/Tiberian Rome and Hitler's Germany dominated the most influential twentieth-century scholarship on this topic.[108] Directly equating Hitler and Tiberius seems, on balance, to complicate rather than clarify our understanding of this period in Roman history. Perhaps the most productive comparison concerns not the act of book-burning, but the afterlife it achieves in cultural memory — not May of 1933 and the 20s–30s A.D., but the later twentieth (and early twenty-first) century, and the turn of the second (and third). Book-burning today is still a potent signifier of small-minded bigotry, but also removed enough from mainstream society to be easily figured as a joke;[109] for Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio, literary book-burning was a memory, something to be invoked rhetorically with force but also with the cynicism of the *longue durée* and the safety of distance in time.[110]

Modern scholars have grappled with the problem of how to categorize, distinguish, and associate the various Roman practices of book-burning discussed here. But these practices are undoubtedly distinguished by the Romans themselves. The effects — both real and putative — of destroying written materials vary substantially depending on the kind of document burned, because kinds of written material themselves vary substantially in the practices to which they are subject and so the extent, nature and implications of their longevity or lack thereof. Literary texts are conceived of as immune to material destruction: élite book-users argue forcefully that their own culture of book-use and circulation makes books impervious to destruction, granting books a 'life' that is constituted in practice and reading, beyond a single given copy. Not only are they frequently copied in a peer-to-peer fashion, but they are read, both in groups and alone, seeding reflections of themselves in readers' minds, and establishing for themselves a reputation well beyond the bounds of the physical book. Documents and correspondence are deeply susceptible to destruction because they are, by and large, not frequently duplicated, and because their binding legal force is heavily constrained by the circumstances of their creation or duplication; some, moreover, are never opened, and their destruction is accompanied by the twin assurances that they have not been opened and never will be.

Here, then, at the end of an inscribed object's life, we find its creation and use most clearly implicated, and so its essential nature most clearly emphasized. What we conventionally term 'book-burning' at Rome is part of a nexus of interrelated practices, practices which are subject to layers of response and reception over the centuries covering not only their advent but their reception in Roman memory. When we speak of Roman 'books', or 'writing', or even 'text', we must be careful to distinguish the objects and phenomena we are discussing in the terms the Romans might have used — the processes of destruction or preservation to which those objects might be susceptible, and so the practices and circumstances that define their creation and use. For scholars to whom the book is second nature, it is always tempting to assume that a historical book functioned and signified as a modern one does. By looking at what Romans believed

[108] Forbes 1936; Cramer 1945. One might even say that Nazi book-burning, with its combination of shocking novelty and provocative resemblance to Christian book-burning of days gone by, reified 'book-burning' for twentieth-century ancient historians as a historical concept and practice.

[109] President Barack Obama, 28 April 2013: 'I am not giving up. In fact, I'm taking my charm offensive on the road — a Texas barbeque with Ted Cruz, a Kentucky bluegrass concert with Rand Paul, and a book-burning with Michele Bachmann.'

[110] It seems remiss to make no reference to the current ascendance of right-wing and Neo-Nazi politics in the USA and Europe, but I am wary of doing so carelessly. I will note only that the election of Donald Trump prompted swift action by researchers to begin archiving and preserving data on topics like climate change to protect them from governmental purge, as happened under Canada's Harper administration (2006–2015). Indeed, in the first months of the Trump administration, data have begun to disappear from the websites of agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency.

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they could and could not do with *and to* a written object, we see more clearly what the nature of such objects was for Romans, and how the idea of 'book' functioned in the larger world of Roman practices with text.

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