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Religio illicita? Roman legal interactions with early Christianity in context

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Religio Illicita?

Roman Legal Interactions with Early Christianity in Context

van K. P. S. (Renske) Janssen

1. The inclusion of the historical context of particular legal measures, including their origins, implementation and possible repetition, is essential when studying Roman law and administration.
2. Far from being the result of coherent and consistent policy, the treatment of religious groups by the Roman authorities was subject to negotiation and re-negotiation.
3. Despite its special status in scholarship, the importance of the Pliny-Trajan correspondence as a precedent for later interactions between Christians and the Roman authorities should not be overestimated.
4. Due to the considerable discretionary powers that could be exercised by provincial governors and other Roman administrators, as well as the importance of negotiations in Roman legal proceedings, the traditional distinction between *flagitia* and the *nomen ipsum* as the legal basis for trials against Christians cannot be properly made.
5. The frequent *a priori* assumption that Christianity was an exceptional, or even unique, movement in the ancient world is misleading, and disguises the extent to which the Roman authorities' response to this group followed familiar and established patterns.
6. Due to the way in which surviving legal measures from the Roman world have been transmitted, Roman law as we know it should be treated as a historical narrative in its own right.
7. If Tacitus had truly been able to compose his works *sine ira et studio*, he would not only have done the impossible by separating history from the historian, but his writings would also have been infinitely less interesting.
8. While the title character of Sophocles' *Antigone* and her uncle Kreon initially appear to be diametrically opposing forces, the play ultimately suggests that the two have more in common than either would like to admit. As such, it is shown that power – whether determined by age, gender, political position, religious authority or social status – is ultimately futile if it does not contribute to the general wellbeing.

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9. The prevalent tendency to idealise classical antiquity serves to hinder a thorough understanding of the period, its authors, and their works.
10. The results achieved by experimental archaeology serve to demonstrate that our understanding of what it means to be an expert should include more than just academic qualifications.
11. Phrases like 'obviously' and 'clearly' should have no place in the humanities – either in research or in teaching.
12. If you're looking for your fatherland, you can find it in a flower pot (after Servatius Janssen).

