

In this paper, I examine Tacitus' vivid use of sudden transition and its effect on the reader of the *Annales* through the analogy of the cinematic quick-cut and by comparison to the nearly contemporary Column of Trajan. The quick-cut is extremely common in film, when a sudden change from one discrete scene to another forces the audience to make sense of the juxtaposition through the notions of thematic connection, cause and effect, and contemporaneous time (Bazin). In this paper, I use the quick-cut to examine similar transitions in the Column of Trajan and the *Annales* of Tacitus. Such scholars as Syme, Devillers, Martin, Woodman, and Pagán have noted Tacitus' use of sudden transition. Yet while these writers comment on the narrative impact of this device, they pay less attention to its visual resonance and its historiographical impact.

Richard Brilliant's discussion of the cinematic and historical qualities of Trajan's Column suggests that the Column is an extremely appropriate analog to Tacitus' *Annales*. The Column of Trajan contains several scenes in which abrupt transition is signaled only by a change in the direction figures face or by a vertical line. These sudden transitions forcefully juxtapose two scenes either by highlighting similarity, as between the Roman and Dacian camps (scenes 67 – 68 and 140 – 141), or by exposing difference, as when obeisance to Trajan is placed literally back to back with images of Dacians torturing Roman captives (scene 44 – 45). Eugenie Strong has noted these sudden juxtapositions between scenes in the Column of Trajan, but has not connected these to narrative historiographical techniques. The designer of the Column clearly appreciated the narrative effect that such quick-cuts have on viewers. Tacitus, much like the designer of the Column of Trajan, uses the quick-cut transition to undercut the preceding scene in order to establish a vivid historical account. After the excursus on the phoenix, for example, Tacitus draws the reader's vision to the slaughter of Tiberius' Rome with only two words of transition (6.29.1). Again, immediately after Tiberius' (ostensibly) laudable speech refusing divine honors, Tacitus turns the reader toward a more insidious facet of the principate of Tiberius: Sejanus (4.39.1). During the extended episode of the murder of Agrippina, Tacitus quick-cuts to Nero, showing not only contemporaneous action, but also the mutual and reciprocal fears of mother and son (14.7.1). Like both the modern film director and the designer of Trajan's Column, Tacitus understood the power of the quick-cut as yet another device capable of altering the reader's perception of the narrative. Tacitus says much in the *Annales* not only in each unforgettable scene, but also in the abrupt manner that he shifts between them.