

# A Prosopographic Study on Cn. Domitius Corbulo

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**Abstract.** This thesis is a prosopographic study on Cn. Domitius Corbulo, which focuses on analyzing his social relations and gives a historical image of him. By combing through the biographies of Corbulo's life, the Corbulo of classical authors is presented and it makes it possible to evaluate his personality. Corbulo's social relations are very complex and most of these relations come from his family, in-laws and those who spontaneously gathered to him when he served as a high-ranking military officer. This complex social relationship made Corbulo an important senator and military chief at the top of the empire at the time, bringing him great political and military influence that did not dissolve even after his death. Instead, after his suicide, this influence mobilised the lower-ranking officers under his influence against the Julio-Claudian dynasty, and contributed to the establishment of the Flavian dynasty.

**Keywords:** Cn. Domitius Corbulo; Nero; prosopography; Julio-Claudian dynasty; Tacitus.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Purpose

Cn. Domitius Corbulo (PIR III, D 142) was a highly renowned Roman senator and general who lived during the Julio-Claudian era of the Roman Empire. During this period, Corbulo was active at the top of the Roman Empire as an outstanding military and political figure and an important aristocrat, who had a great deal of interaction with most of the significant figures of the Empire of that time, leaving behind a network of relationships of his own.

Therefore, a prosopographic study of such a great historical figure is necessary. Through this kind of study, we can grasp the political ecology of the Roman Empire at that time as well as the influence of the senatorial class.

In past studies, the object of study has been limited to a certain period of Corbulo's life or his role in society, such as during the Armenian War or as a member of a senatorial family. In the present study, however, an all-encompassing examination of Corbulo will be undertaken, looking at his entire life course and relationships to explore Corbulo's place in the Roman Empire at the time and in history.

### 1.2. Research Methodology

The main work of this thesis is to summarise and collate the network of Cn. Domitius Corbulo's relationships by digging into ancient literature and previous studies, thus enabling an analysis of his personal experiences and historical influences.

Therefore, the first step is to look for relevant literature resources, which refer to the large number of writings left behind by ancient authors, to serve as a basis for research. Furthermore, inscriptions, must be taken into account. Finally, as a special feature of a prosopographic study, it is important to establish a prosopographical approach which links historical figures. The *Prosopographia Imperii Romani Saeculi* (abbreviated PIR in subsequent citations) are of great assistance in this regard.

### 1.3. Historical Resources

In terms of literature resources, we can rely on the *Annals* of Tacitus, as well as the eighty volumes of *Historia Romana* by Cassius Dio. The most significant account of Corbulo comes from *Annals*, which focuses on two of his experiences commanding armies on the borders of the empire: the first



is a small section of chapter XI where General Corbulo is in the area of Germania Inferior (*Ann.* XI, 18-20); the second, much longer, is found mainly in volumes XIII to XIV, where it focuses on Corbulo's military campaigns in Armenia against the natives and the Parthian Empire (*Ann.* XIII, 8-9, 34-41; XIV, 14-23; XV, 1-31.). However, due to the missing parts of the Annals, especially the latter part of Volume XVI, it is difficult to get a complete biography of Corbulo from the Annals. Therefore, we need other historical sources to supplement it. The most important of these is Cassius Dio's *Historia Romana*, which in Volumes LXI to LXIII contains information about Cn. Domitius Corbulo and adds some of the missing parts of the Annals. Similarly, we can get a small account of his family and origin from Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* (*RH.* LXI. 30; LXII, 19-23; LXIII, 4-6; LXIII, 17.).

Unfortunately, there are no valuable inscriptions on Corbulo that have been found in archaeology, so there is no opportunity to use inscriptions and other archaeological materials in this thesis.

#### **1.4. Previous Scholarship**

Until the middle of the twentieth century, researchers mostly paid attention to Cn. Domitius Corbulo's military successes and contributions, especially his wars against the Parthians in the Armenian lands. One of the earliest researchers to be found on Corbulo as an individual was the French researcher H. de La Ville de Mirmont, who in 1915 wrote a thesis under the general's name, using the general himself as the subject of the study rather than treating General Corbulo as a commander in the Armenian War [1]. However, such a study is a lone example, and it is not possible to locate more studies on Corbulo personally from that time.

The man who reversed this state of affairs was Ronald Syme. He undertook a comprehensive and exhaustive study of Corbulo in the mid-twentieth century, which included a series of studies of his family origins, career, and possible political connections [8]. These studies were part of Syme's research on Tacitus and his writings and also provided the basis for Corbulo's research. These studies became the basis for a consensus or discussion of Corbulo and fuelled the research and discussion of Corbulo by other scholars of the time. However, no scholars carried out targeted research on Corbulo himself, and their discussion of Corbulo was always based on Syme's existing research results [13]. Therefore, we can say that Ronald Syme's series of studies laid the foundation for Corbulo's research.

Around 2000, another Belgian researcher, Frederik Juliaan Vervaeke, launched a new systematic study of Cn. Domitius Corbulo himself published a series of thesis. These studies followed the direction and results of Syme's research and made some discoveries that further advanced Syme's theory on Corbulo [13]. These advances have brought the study of Corbulo to maturity and have further refined the entire historical image of Corbulo.

#### **1.5. Background Information**

Before the top of the thesis, we must introduce some basics about the Roman Empire period.

##### **1.5.1. Consul**

In the political life of ancient Rome, the consul was the highest elected public official [5], the Centuriate Assembly elected two consuls from among the citizens every year, and these two consuls served together for one year. The consul possessed a wide range of powers in peacetime, including the executive, the legislative, and the judicial fields, and even had the highest military command in wartime [5]. If a consul was unable to continue to fulfil his duties during his term of office due to an accident, such as accidental death or removal from office, the Centuriate Assembly would elect another possible candidate to continue to serve as consul for the remainder of the term, i.e., to become a suffect consul [5]. However, in the first century CE, after the imperial period, the consul was still elected by the Centuriate Assembly, but the candidates for election were nominated by the princeps [5].

### 1.5.2. Senate

In addition, the Senate was an important part of political life in ancient Rome [5]. During the Republican period, senators of the Senate were appointed by the Roman magistrates but were permanent appointees. During the Republican period, the Senate grew in power and became the centre of Republican politics. By the time of Augustus, the Senate had been monopolised by the nobility due to the strict rules for becoming a senator [5]. And upon entering the imperial period, the power of the imperial emperor continued to grow. As a result, although the political system of the Republican period was still preserved, the power of the Senate had shrunk under the constant squeeze of the emperor and eventually became irrelevant [5].

### 1.5.3. A brief history of the Roman Empire in the first century CE

In 27 BCE, the Senate made Octavian princeps ("first citizen") with proconsular imperium [5], thus ending the history of the Roman Republic and giving birth to the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire in the first century CE was dominated by the Julio-Claudian dynasty [5], which after Octavian had four emperors: Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero. But in 69 CE, the Julio-Claudian dynasty suffered the horrific Year of the Four Emperors [5] - the first civil war of the Roman Empire - and then the former imperial general Vespasian put an end to the internal chaos and was elected emperor, thus creating the Flavian dynasty [5]. With this, the Flavian dynasty was created. The figure discussed in this paper, Cn. Domitius Corbulo, was also active in this period of history, mainly from the Caligula to the Nero period, and the Flavian dynasty that followed also had a significant impact on him.

## 2. Biography of Cn. Domitius Corbulo

In launching the first part of the discussion, it is necessary to show the life of Cn. Domitius Corbulo and his biography give an idea of his unique and important position and significance in the political area of the Roman Empire at the time and reinforce the need to focus on Cn. Domitius Corbulo.

### 2.1. Origins and family of Cn. Domitius Corbulo

Cn. Domitius Corbulo was born within a senatorial family somewhere in Italy [9]. His father (PIR III, D 141), who shared the same name and is mentioned in the Annals in the year 21, erupted in conflict with a young nobleman over the allocation of places in a gladiatorial show (*Ann.* III.31). At the same time, this Corbulo launched a complaint about the state of the roads in the Italian region, from which he was given a position of management over the cause, but his rough and aggressive management has been criticised by historians -- 'quod haud perinde publice usui habitum quam exitiosum multis, quorum in pecuniam atque famam damnationibus et hasta saeviebat.' (*Ann.* III.31) Dio Cassius gives a different account. He believes that it was done by his son as a means of raising money for Caligula (*RH.* LIX. 15), most likely because Dio did not distinguish between these two father and son of the same name. But all this is of no importance, for the father of this great general is recorded in history only in this small part.

However, his mother, Vistilia (PIR VIII, V 491), is more recognisable in history than his father. Cn. Domitius Corbulo was her sixth child from her fifth marriage (*NH.* VII, 39). His half-siblings were full of figures of great historical renown, which included the two Pomponius (PIR VI, P 756, P757) brothers, Publius Suillius Rufus (PIR VII, S 700), and one of the most famous of all, Milonia Caesonia (PIR V, M 590), who would eventually become the fourth wife of the then Roman Emperor Caligula, and who, along with her husband, was conspired to 41 assassinations (*RH.* LIX. 23).

### 2.2. Early career of Cn. Domitius Corbulo

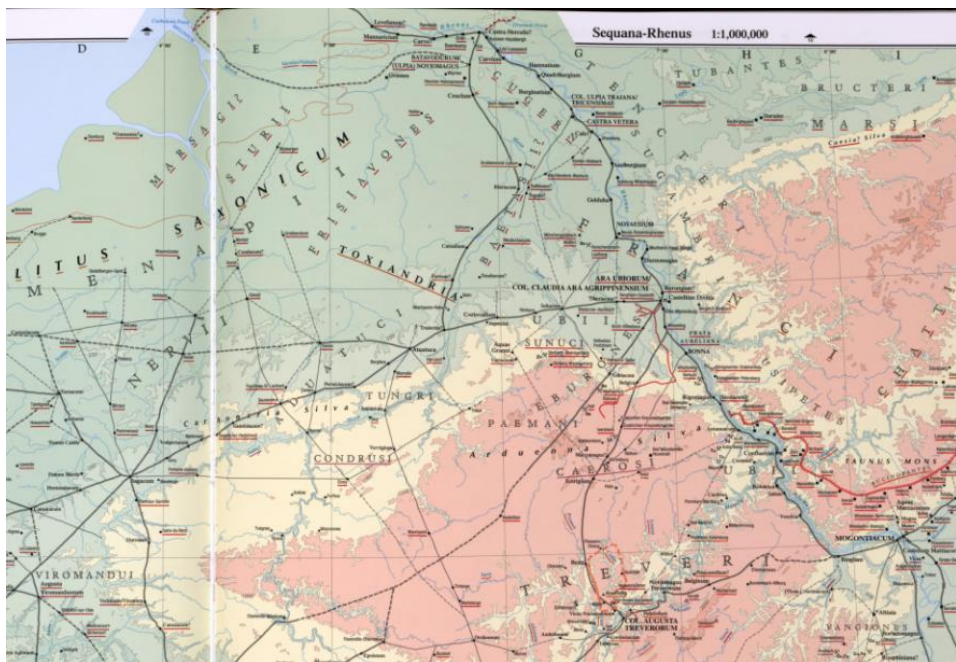
We know very little about the early experience/education of Cn. Domitius Corbulo, especially during the periods when Tiberius and Caligula were emperors. Since in the subsequent account in the Annals, Tacitus uses the name Corbulo directly - 'dum Corbulo adventa' (*Ann.* XI, 18) - we have reason to believe that the missing portion of the account does indeed include Corbulo's early career. In Ronald

Syme's speculation, certain inscriptions and coins do reveal a part of his early experience, which includes serving as suffect consul in 39 and as proconsul somewhere in imperial Asia for six years around 30. In addition, Syme implies that because of Tacitus' re-welcoming of Corbulo's appointment as special commander in late '54, he suspected that Corbulo had served as legate of one of the Syrian legions, either quaestorian or praetoria [9].

### 2.3. Cn. Domitius Corbulo as legate of Germania Inferior's legions

After the assassination of Caligula, Corbulo's career may have received a period of hindrance. It was not until around 46-47 AD that the emperor Claudius [7], Caligula's successor, commissioned him to Germania Inferior to serve as legate of the local legions, whose headquarters were set up in Colonia (*Ann. XII, 18*). The local legions under Corbulo's command included V Alaudae and XV Primigenia in Xanten, XVI Gallica in Neuss and I Germanica in Bonn.

The most primary reason for Corbulo's commissioning by the emperor was the massive rebellion of the local Cherusci and Chauci tribes, led by Gannascus, a former Roman auxiliary. They plundered the coastline of Gaul and invaded the neighbouring regions of Germania Inferior, including the Rhine Delta and southern Holland (*Ann. XII, 18*). The Figure 1. below shows the Germania Inferior and its adjacent areas in the first century CE.



**Fig. 1** Germania Inferior and its adjacent areas [10]

After careful preparations, Corbulo sailed into the rebellious area and quickly gained a victory over the Germans. Using triremes to occupy the Rhine channel and smaller vessels to control the remaining rivers and canals, he destroyed the enemy flotilla in one fell swoop and drove Gannascus and his men away. After the military victory, Corbulo attempted to assassinate the leader of the Chauci during negotiations, which aroused the ire of the other side, so Emperor Claudius, to prevent further aggravation of the situation, issued a ban on all hostilities against Corbulo and withdrew his troops back to the left bank of the Rhine (*Ann. XII, 18-19*).

During the war, Corbulo purified the army of Germania Inferior and strengthened their military discipline so that the local legions would do what they were ordered to do (*Ann. XII, 18*). To keep his legions disciplined and out of inertia after the emperor ordered a retreat of the defences, Corbulo ordered his legions to dig a canal of 23 Roman miles between the Rhine and the Meuse, which became known as the Fossa Corbulonis (*Ann. XII, 20*).

## 2.4. Cn. Domitius Corbulo in the Roman-Parthian War of 58-63

When Emperor Claudius died in 54 AD, Nero took his place. As soon as he took the throne, Nero was confronted with tensions on the eastern borders of the empire: since the end of Claudius's time, there had been chronic political instability in Armenia, and Rome and its eastern neighbour, the Parthian empire, had become increasingly conflicted over Armenia. King Mithridates, who had been supported by the former Pilates, was overthrown by his nephew Rhadamistus in 51, and with the intervention of Sabbatian troops, the situation in Armenia became one of a struggle for the throne between Rhadamistus and his Parthian-supported brother, Tiridates (*Ann.* XII, 50-51).

In this situation, Nero delegated Corbulo to the eastern provinces to deal with the Armenian problem (*Ann.* XIII, 6). After diplomatic delaying tactics, the start of the war was postponed until 58. In the meantime, Corbulo reorganised his army, eliminating any soldiers who were too old or physically weak, and adapted them to the natural environment of the Caucasus through training (*Ann.* XIII, 35). Eventually, Corbulo launched an attack on Armenia in '58, in which he achieved rapid victories in Armenia with great military prowess and captured the two Armenian capitals, Artaxata and Tigranocerta, and supported Tigranes VI, a Cappadocian royal house, was the new leader of the Cappadocians. Tigranes VI of the Cappadocian royal house as the new king of Armenia (*Ann.* XIII, 41).

The conflict between Rome and Parthia finally broke out in 61 when Tigranes VI invaded the Parthian kingdom of Adiabene (*Ann.* XV, 1). The first Parthian attack was aimed at the Armenian capital of Tigranocerta, but the Parthians were defeated by Corbulo's blockade. After a failed truce negotiation, the two sides clashed again in 62 (*Ann.* XV, 3). Meanwhile, a new governor of Cappadocia, L. Caesennius Paetus, took office hoping to solve the eastern border problem, wanting to place Armenia under direct Roman administration. The new governor wanted to compete with Corbulo for honours, and as a result, there was a rift between the two men, with Paetus leading a legion into Armenia while Corbulo stayed in Syria to defend against a possible attack from Parthia. But while Corbulo did an excellent job of defending Syria, Paetus, due to his poor military skills, caused the Roman army to suffer a major defeat at the Battle of Rhandeia, and Armenia came under de facto Parthian control (*Ann.* XV, 10-13).

After this humiliating defeat against Rome, Paetus was recalled and command was once again given to Corbulo, who crossed the Euphrates in 63 A.D. with a large, reorganised Roman army. In the face of the massive Roman army, the Parthian-supported Tiridates refused to fight and met with representatives of the Roman army at Rhandeia to make peace. A peace treaty was signed and Tiridates submitted to the Roman Empire (*Ann.* XV, 28-30).

## 2.5. Death of Cn. Domitius Corbulo

In 65 and 66, the nobles and senate conspired twice to overthrow Nero but failed, and Corbulo's son-in-law, Annius Vinicianus (PIR I, A 701), was involved with his brother, Annius Pollio. The two conspiracies were Coniuratio Pisoniana and Coniuratio Vinicianiana, the former being one of the most famous conspiracies of the Nero era, and the latter a conspiracy generally underestimated by historians [14]. In the Coniuratio Pisoniana, a large number of Corbulo's relatives were already implicated, as was Annius Pollio in this conspiracy; while the Coniuratio Vinicianiana was directly linked to Corbulo, and became the immediate trigger for his death sentence [14]: in this conspiracy, the In this conspiracy, Annius Vinicianus, who had been sent to Rome by Corbulo to show his loyalty to Nero, improvised and gathered a group of senators to overthrow Nero, perhaps even hoping to support Corbulo, Vinicianus' father-in-law, to become the new emperor [14]; Coniuratio Vinicianiana had no chance of success. Coniuratio Vinicianiana did not have any chance of success, and the plot was quickly quelled by Nero and Annius Vinicianus committed suicide. Originally, Nero trusted and favoured Corbulo, a general who was loyal to him, but now that Corbulo was at the peak of his imperial prestige due to his victory in the Armenian War, which was a direct threat to Nero, an emperor who had no military achievements but was a despot, Nero's trust in Corbulo diminished day

by day. Eventually, after these two conspiracies, especially the *Coniuratio Viniciania*, which was closely linked to Corbulo, Nero was ready to confront Corbulo and eliminate this threat to his throne [14].

Finally, in 67, the emperor Nero, who was travelling to Greece, stopped at Corinth, and he wrote a letter asking Corbulo to leave his province and come to him in Greece, in which the emperor referred to Corbulo as his father and benefactor, and gave him great respect and friendship. When Corbulo arrived at Cenchræe, the harbour of Corinth, he met Nero's emissary and received orders to commit suicide, after which he seized his sword and impaled himself on it, exclaiming 'Axios!' (*RH. LXII. 17*), a word that means "I'm worth it!" [7]

The reason why Corbulo would go willingly to his death has long been discussed in history. The most classic view comes from Cassius Dio, who believes that it was due to the great qualities of the general himself, and his infinite loyalty to his emperor, although this cannot be understood (*RH. LXII. 4, 17-18*). However, the situation could have been much more complex; Corbulo did not rebel against Nero's orders because militarily Corbulo could not guarantee that he could overthrow Nero quickly enough to become emperor, and the areas he could not control might have put up other contenders, which would have led the empire into civil war and division [14]. On top of this, Corbulo's strong belief in *amicitia* pushes him to choose suicide as a way of protesting against Nero's ungrateful tyranny [14]. This tragic death shows that Emperor Nero has turned his back on General Corbulo, who brought him glory through the Armenian War, rather than General Corbulo's disloyalty in rebelling against orders from the Emperor [14].

### **3. The historical image of Cn. Domitius Corbulo**

Before exploring the various relationships that Cn. Domitius Corbulo may have had, but it is possible to focus on him as an individual to try to describe Corbulo's personality. If this description is to go through, it is necessary to disentangle the ancient authors' descriptions of Corbulo from their texts and to distinguish his own real experiences from the intentions of these authors in their writing.

#### **3.1. Cn. Domitius Corbulo in historical accounts**

The accounts of Corbulo are concentrated, mainly in *Annals* and *Historia Romana*, both of which were written relatively close to the time in which Corbulo himself lived. In addition to this, it is also important to note the accounts of Corbulo by other ancient authors, which may represent a further change in Corbulo's image in the centuries following his death [14].

##### **3.1.1. Tacitus' account in *Annals***

Tacitus' account of Corbulo is one of the most detailed, and in particular, General Corbulo's experiences in Armenia are recorded in great detail by Tacitus. The fact that such a large section of Tacitus's *Annals* is rare and that Corbulo's accomplishments in Armenia did not earn him so much attention, may be an indication of Tacitus's unique intentions [15].

The first appearance of Cn. Domitius Corbulo in the extant text of the *Annals* is in Book XI (*Ann. XII, 18-20*): Corbulo was sent to Germania Inferior under Emperor Claudius to deal with the Chauci. Tacitus does not devote much attention to this period of Corbulo's military career. He briefly recorded the general course of Corbulo's quelling of the rebellion. What he does record carefully are the administrative and military measures Corbulo took in the area, including the reorganisation of the discipline of the local legions and the construction of a canal (*Ann. XII, 18, 20*). The experience ends with a short story: Emperor Claudius ordered the army to pull back because he feared that Corbulo's actions would further exacerbate the local conflict, but also because he feared that it would bring more prestige and glory to Corbulo and affect the emperor's image (*Ann. XII., 19-20*). Corbulo carried out the emperor's order perfectly, but he left a jokey remark, 'beatos quondam duces Romanos' (*Ann. XII, 20*), meaning "Happy the Roman generals of old", which Tacitus describes in this passage. Tacitus' portrayal of Corbulo in this passage is already very distinctive: a general who loves honour

and glory, but who does not seek them blindly, but who is mature and steady, and who is above all loyal to his country and the emperor.

The campaign in Armenia is the focus of Tacitus's account of Corbulo's life, which is found in Books XIII to XV (*Ann.* XIII, 8-9, 34-41; XIV, 14-23; XV, 1-31.). It is noticeable that Tacitus's account of the war is very detailed, including the preparations made by the commanders of the two sides before the war, the attack on each city by the Roman army during the two phases of the war, and the important battles, as well as how the two sides negotiated peace through diplomatic means towards the end of the war [15]. Tacitus describes the war in great detail, including the preparations made by the commanders before the war, the attack on each city by the Roman army during the two phases of the war, the important battles, and how the two sides negotiated a peace through diplomacy after the war came to an end. But what we find very important in these detailed descriptions is that Tacitus' account of Corbulo's campaign in Armenia is full of peculiarities. On the one hand, at the outset of Corbulo's involvement in the Armenian war, 'entre les éloges dont Tacite couvre le général et la réalité de son action' [15]; on the other hand, Corbulo appears on several important occasions, such as the siege of Volandum or Corbulo's lack of speeches in front of the army [15]. Either way, it seems that Tacitus wanted to convey to his readers, through his remarkably detailed report on Corbulo's Armenian campaign, something more than a mere portrayal of a disciplined and disciplined general. The most likely reason for this deeper meaning is that Corbulo's actions in the Imperial East fit perfectly with the most correct policy line Tacitus had in mind for the Parthians, namely "la prudence et le réalisme commandent l'entente avec les Parthes ". Tacitus's political views are also expressed through an exhaustive description of General Corbulo's Oriental policy [15].

### **3.1.2. Cassius Dio's account in the *Historia Romana***

Cassius Dio's account of Cn. Domitius Corbulo in *Historia Romana* is perhaps too brief compared to the richness of the *Annals*. Corbulo had been dead for more than 150 years when Cassius Dio wrote his book, so this provides a new third-century perspective on how the people of the time viewed the famous Roman general of more than 100 years ago [14].

After eliminating the part of Book LIX in which Cassius Dio makes a mistake, Cn. Domitius Corbulo is mentioned only in Book LXI to Book LXIII (*RH.* LXI, 30; LXII, 19-23; LXIII, 4-6; LXIII, 17.). What is said about Corbulo in Book LXI is also about his experiences in the Germania Inferior, a section that is in content much the same as Tacitus' account in much the same way. But Dio consistently ratchets up his irony concerning the emperors: he illustrates Corbulo's line 'beatos quondam duces Romanos' and interprets it as a lament for the jealousy of the emperors (*RH.* LXI, 30). Book LXII and Book LXIII consist mainly of Corbulo's experiences in the Armenian war and his final death (*RH.* LXII, 19-23; LXIII, 4-6; LXIII, 17.). Dio's account of the war in Armenia is confined to the chronology of events, and he briefly describes the general course of the war. Most importantly, Dio's account adds a missing piece to the *Annals*: the death of Cn. Domitius Corbulo.

In Dio's description, Corbulo is portrayed as a perfect Roman general possessing noble qualities: 'He resembled the early Romans in that, besides coming of a brilliant family possessing great strength of body, he was still further gifted with a shrewd intelligence; and he displayed great bravery and great fairness and good faith towards all, both friends and enemies.' (*RH.* LXII, 19) At the same time, Dio again praised the general through the mouth of Tiridates, the king of Armenia, Corbulo's enemy: 'Master, you have in Corbulo a good slave.' (*RH.* LXIII, 6) It can be fully assumed that these depictions are not only because Dio genuinely believed that Corbulo possessed such qualities, but also because they were Dio's way of conveying the mediocrity and chaos of Nero's time.

### **3.1.3. Descriptions by other classical authors**

In addition to the two mentioned above, during the centuries following Corbulo's death, a succession of ancient authors referred to the Roman general in their works, but without exception, Corbulo was portrayed in a positive and glowing light, and all his actions were honoured as *monumentum uirtutis aere perennius* [14].

There are many examples of this [14]: Julius Frontinus held Corbulo up as a great military commander and model of military ability within the empire at the time; in the fourth century Ammianus Marcellinus described Corbulo as "ut quondam Domitius Corbulo dicitur caesus, in conluuione ilia Neroniani saeculi prouinciarum fidus defensor et cautus."; and Themistius compares Corbulo to the fourth-century militarist Flavius Saturninus, claiming that Corbulo's military campaign to subjugate the natives in Armenia was easy compared to Flavius Saturninus' military campaign against the 'Scythians' (Visigoths).

### 3.2. Remarks on the personalities of Cn. Domitius Corbulo

After discussing Corbulo in the historical texts, it is finally possible to surmise some of the personality he possessed from some of his remaining deeds. It is important to realise that this speculation is to exclude the perception of the ancient authors who adulterated their texts with their own and their times.

Firstly, Cn. Domitius Corbulo was a military general who demanded strict discipline from his troops. Before he embarked on a military campaign, he was bound to train the local troops to restore their morale and discipline. Among the Germanic and Oriental armies, General Corbulo set a tough example for his soldiers by forcing them to observe strict discipline (*Ann.* XI. 18-20; XIII. 35; XIV. 24.). Likewise, he punished or rewarded them according to their behaviour (*Ann.* XIII. 35.), he won their admiration with his great military skill (*Ann.* XIII. 35.), and he saved their lives by sacrificing the auxiliary corps for their benefit (*Ann.* XIV. 23.); but on the other hand, the strict discipline which Corbulo had taken great pains to establish was sometimes not enforced with vigour: the cries of the soldiers compelled an old centurion to take part in the battle, despite the chief's clear instructions, and the whole army pressed for the restoration of morale and discipline, and the urgency of the whole army compelled the chief himself to pardon the officers and men who had been punished (*Ann.* XIII. 36.).

In terms of military achievements, however, Corbulo had nothing extremely special or significant to show for it. In Germania Inferior, his military campaigns quickly suppressed a local rebellion, but he was unable to push the front line further to achieve results because of local conflicts that were constantly fuelled by himself (*Ann.* XII. 18.); in Armenia, Corbulon never won any major battles, and the large amount of territory he conquered did not directly translate into imperial territory. In the subexpedition, Corbulo employed a far more numerous and prominent diplomatic strategy than military action. But such actions had no further military results than to bring the kingdom of Armenia back under Roman suzerainty (*Ann.* XIII. 8.). Corbulo's boastfulness about his military achievements is thus partly indicative of his arrogance and his obsession with glory and prestige [1].

From this perspective, perhaps Corbulo should be seen more as a prudent and shrewd diplomat, or a mature and sophisticated policymaker, than as a great conqueror. He knew how to interact with his enemies, and his interactions with the Tiridates illustrate this well: he was able to skilfully avoid Tiridates' rude condescension and potentially insolent behaviour, and avoid making enemies for him (*Ann.* XIII. 38-39.); he kept abreast of the Vologase's plans, and skilfully used this intelligence to his advantage in negotiating with him (*Ann.* XV. 5.); and on top of all this he had a very sensible policy towards his enemy tribes. always adopted a very judicious policy towards the enemy tribes (*Ann.* XI. 19.): he was merciless to the rebellious, and kind to the obedient (*Ann.* XIV. 23.).

Finally, it is important to emphasise the quality of Cn. Domitius Corbulo is repeatedly mentioned: his loyalty. This important quality of his was already demonstrated when he received Emperor Claudia's order to retreat to Germania Inferior (*Ann.* XI. 18-19.). After this, the story of Corbulo's famous death is often interpreted as a sign of loyalty to the Empire and the then Emperor Nero. What is certain is that Corbulo was indeed a loyal general, otherwise, he would not have chosen to commit suicide when ordered to do so, rather than use his overwhelming influence within the Empire to initiate a usurpation (*RH.* LXIII. 17).



#### **4. Cn. Domitius Corbulo's connections at the top of the empire**

For anyone who occupies a position of power in a country, the intertwined relationships with those around him are natural and essential. The same applies to Cn. Domitius Corbulo. He is also amid such social relations and is also influenced by the social relations that come from him. This section explores Corbulo's social relations and discovers his prosopographical approach.

##### **4.1. Cn. Domitius Corbulo and members of his family**

Cn. Domitius Corbulo's family was extremely complex, thanks to his mother, Vistilia, who had seven children from six marriages, each of which resulted in a large and complex extended family. The mother impressed Pliny the Elder with her fertility and relatively short pregnancies, and Syme created a chronology of the mother and her children, including Syme's assumptions about their birth years and basic information [9]:

1. Glitius, born c. 15 B.C.
2. Q. Pomponius Secundus, born c. 14 B.C.
3. P. Pomponius Secundus, born c. 12 B.C
4. Orfitus, c. 1 1 bc
5. P. Suillius Rufus, c. 10 (at the latest c. 7) bc; suff. 41?
6. Cn. Domitius Corbulo, c. 4 bc - ad 1 ; suff. 39
7. Milonia Caesonia, born c. A.D. 5

In Syme's view, it is likely that Vistilia's children were grouped only as ordinary blood relatives, and that they may not have been organised into an interconnected political group among themselves; even the good and bad of their relationship is unclear: they may have been on good terms, or they may have been on very bad terms. In short, it is difficult to see them as a unified whole [9]. Perhaps in some respects, this blood and kinship played some part in history, such as the close connection of some of them with the factions of Germanicus or L. Vitellius [9].

Frederik Juliaan Vervaet, however, has found in historical sources that the children of Vistilia most likely existed as a closely related political group of in-laws [13]. In his thesis, Vervaet uses Corbulo's personal connections as a basis for his argument and discovers the family's close relationship with the royal family of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, especially the line of Nero Claudius Drusus (PIR II, C 857), of which the vast majority of the members of the family were devoted supporters, except for Q. Pomponius was utterly opposed to the Drusus fathers and sons, with one exception [13].

The reason Vistilia and her children remained close to the Drusus family may have been a strong connection to Sextus Vistilius [13]. This ex-praetor remained close friends with Nero Claudius Drusus, and Vistilia was likely his sister (or at least a closer relationship). This somewhat increases the value of the nobles' association with Vistilia, and may perhaps explain why she had so many marriages. It was with such a relationship that Vistilia's children were accepted in such large numbers into the factions of Drusus and his descendants (including Germanicus and the former's son, Caligula, and brother, Claudius, who became emperor.) Suillius Rufus was once the praetor of Germanicus; and P. Vitellius, who was a close friend of Germanicus, was also close to these brothers and sisters, and who helped Q. Pomponius Secundus, who opposed the former after Claudius became emperor, and who had also received the services of Suillius Rufus [13].

At the same time, Corbulo actively used the relationships and influence that his mother and family had brought to him [13]. Shortly after his half-sister Milonia Caesonia married Gaius Caesar, also known as Caligula, Cn. Domitius Corbulo became consul suffectus in April 39 [9]; in 47 he was entrusted with the task of going to Germania Inferior to quell the Germanic rebellions and plundering there (*Ann.* XI, 20). This was the first time he commanded a major military operation in the empire at a time when L. Vitellius was at the height of his power throughout the empire. This battle on the

imperial frontier won Corbulo the *ornamenta triumphalia*, and as a result, he was appointed the highly respected viceroy of Asia around the year 52 [13]. Likely, Corbulo's reappointment by Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus and his acquisition of a major command in Cappadocia in the following late 54 years was because through the loyalists of Germanicus's daughters Agrippina Minor, Afranius Burrus and the recommendation of Annaeus Seneca [13].

Having seen the innate closeness to royalty brought about by Cn. Domitius Corbulo's own family, we must also value the acquired ties brought about by his in-laws. Fortunately, Cn. Domitius Corbulo's marriages were just as much a reflection of his close connection with the royal family of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. He married Cassia Longina, daughter of Gaius Cassius Longinus (PIR II, C 501), a famous jurist and statesman of the time, and Junia Lepida (PIR IV, I 861), great-granddaughter of Augustus [13]. Corbulo's father-in-law and mother-in-law's families were closely politically connected to the emperor's family, and Junia Lepida's sister, Iunia Calpurnia, was even the wife of L. Vitellius [13]. These deeply nested connections undoubtedly enhanced Cn. Domitius Corbulo's political position throughout the Julio-Claudian dynasty. And in the case of Lucius Annius Vinicianus, the man Corbulo chose for his daughter's hand in marriage, their families were also linked to Drusus' son. His surname suggests a closer kinship with M. Vinicianus, perhaps they were uncle and nephew. More importantly, M. Vinicianus was the husband of Julia Livilla (PIR IV, I 674), a daughter of Germanicus. This deep relationship may reveal why Corbulo was willing to marry his daughter to a man whose father had been involved in the assassination of Caligula and his opposition to Claudius as emperor [9].

#### **4.2. Cn. Domitius Corbulo and his subordinate officers**

It is not difficult to think of a political figure who would always form for himself a circle of influence or counterpart within his office, to consolidate his power and try to seize a greater one. In the political and military spheres of the Roman Empire, there was a complex relationship between the senior military governors and their subordinate officers: on the one hand, the senior military governor was the representative of all the subordinate officers under his command and faced the emperor and the centre of the empire to claim the interests of his subordinates, and the promotion of the subordinate officers was very much connected with their military director [13]: on the other hand, most of these subordinate officers came from the senatorial class of the Roman Empire, and each of them had the support of one or even several noble families behind them, and the senior military governors were happy to establish relations with these nobles through their subordinates to stabilise or expand their own political and military power in their own hands. At the time, Cn. Domitius Corbulo may have cultivated his circle of influence within the legions he always controlled, and these junior officers were more likely to follow Corbulo's orders than those of the emperor. This idea was first suggested by Syme and is outlined in his *Tacitus*. [8]

Syme's view is very clear: there is no doubt that Corbulo, in the course of his military career in Nero's time, especially among the legions in Asia, had been cultivating his power and posing a direct threat to the emperor Nero, which became an important reason for his later tragic end [9]. Corbulo was appointed legate of the Cappadocia in late '54 and later concurrently held the post of governor of Syria [9]. Commander of Galatia in late '54, and later held the post of Governor of Syria at the same time, which totalled roughly two years from '60 to '62. Thereafter, he ceded the governorship of Syria to Caesennius Paetus (PIR II, C 173), but was soon reinstated in that position as a result of Caesennius Paetus's great defeats on the battlefields. In '63 he was again appointed commander of the Syrian armed forces, with a special authorisation and greater powers. During this period he remained commander of the East until he died 67. His twelve years as a general in the army on the eastern frontier of the empire afforded him unrivalled opportunities to extend his influence among the troops and officers [8].

By '68, a significant number of the legates who had served in the legions under Corbulo had changed in office, some promoted and some demoted. But among the six legion legates in Judea and Syria who championed Vespasian's inauguration in July 69, there were still those who might have known

Corbulo, or even his old men, since not all of them had been newly appointed after Corbulo's death in '67: Including Aurelius Fulvus, who led III Gallica in Moesia, and in Judaea Sex. there were Vettulenus Cerialis and M. Ulpius Traianus who led V Macedonica and X Fretensis respectively, and Cn. Pompeius Collega (PIR VI, P 600), who was acting governor and commander of the nearest legion to Antioch, IV Scythica, in Syria [8].

Cerialis, Traianus, and Collega look like high-ranking officials. Traianus may have played an important role in Vespasian's proclamation: Vespasian took Traianus with him to Egypt, which on the first day of July was subordinated to Vespasian's men in Syria. The Prefect of Egypt was Ti. Julius Alexander (PIR IV, I 140), who had held a prominent position in Corbulo's staff in 63 [8].

After Vespasian's success, the generals who had followed him were given the promotions and rewards they deserved, and they became governors of the empire. The emperor Vespasian reused these people who had fostered him before his success and allowed them to enjoy the first distribution of benefits [8].

It is also possible that two other men could have been included in Corbulo's sphere of influence [8]. The first was C. Rutilius Gallicus (PIR VII, R 248), who ruled as Corbulo's legate subordinate in Galatia for nine years and was legate to the proconsul of Asia for two years, either in 68-70 or 69-71. There is evidence that he was the legate of Germania in May 78. The second is Sex. Julius Frontinus, a consular who has not written much about the war, but who has a great deal to say about Corbulo, including a particularly detailed account of his time in Tigranocerta. Of the seven men found and enumerated here by Syme, four were provincials, perhaps Cn. Pompeius Collega was the fifth. At the same time, Syme argues that C. Licinius Mucianus should be included in the Corbulo circle of influence as well and that he assumed an important role in Vespasian's emergence as Roman emperor [8]. Regarding how Licinius Mucianus (PIR V, L 216) crossed paths with Corbulo, Licinius Mucianus followed Corbulo in the war in Armenia in 58 because of his talent for being able to report on the headwaters of the Euphrates River. Syme argues that whatever Corbulo's origins, he had strong support among his followers, and it can be surmised that he had various connections with reputable men in the metropolis, which made him a threat to the Roman emperor at the time [8].

On this issue, however, the later Frederik Juliaan Vervaeet summarised the arguments of Syme's other successors concerning the so-called "Corbulo-group". Vervaeet begins by criticising Syme's over-confidence, seeing Vespasian's manifesto to a considerable extent as a product of the discontent of Cn. Domitius Corbulo's supporters and their way of taking revenge [13].

Following this, Vervaeet compares the views of two important scholars on Syme's hypothesis: J. Nicols, who was a staunch supporter of Syme, and E. Flaig, who was a sharp critic of it.

In 1978, J. Nicols put forward the interesting hypothesis that Vespasian's rapid takeover of Cn. Domitius Corbulo's circle of influence, which was overly disturbed and fearful of Corbulo's sudden downfall and death by those in and outside the circle of influence, led to the rapid expansion of Corbulo's influence and made him a flagship for Vespasian's usurpation of the imperial throne [13]. Corbulo's influence swelled rapidly, and he became a banner that greatly facilitated Vespasian's usurpation of the imperial throne. At the same time, J. Nicols also suggested that the marriage of Domitian and Domitia Longina in 70 may have been a soft gesture and a powerful signal to Corbulo's former supporters, creating the possibility that the general's grandson could become emperor. However, J. Nicols goes too far on some levels to the point of deviating from the truth [13]. For example, J. Nicols argued that Corbulo's legates had become unthreatening in Nero's eyes after losing their leader, and had already compromised with their emperor, no longer wishing to further their cause. But in reality, they had simply lost a very influential leader. In losing the leader's unparalleled influence, they had lost the opportunity to gain rapid promotion to positions of power and honour.

Sharp criticism against his claims comes from E. Flaig, who seeks to disprove J. Nicols' assumptions about the "Corbulo-group" [13]. E. Flaig first establishes that a special cohesion did exist among the Vespasian legates in the East but then goes on to question whether Cn. Domitius Corbulo laid the

groundwork for the foundation for the formation and development of this cohesion, and whether Vespasian proclamations were the result of a "Corbulo-group" behind the scenes [13].

E. Flaig has done so by examining the group of legati who held office in Syria and Iudaea at the time of the Vespasian proclamation, and argues that none of them could have been appointed under Corbulo and that therefore there could be nothing like a "Corbulo-group" among them [13]. Thereafter, E. Flaig briefly reviews the cases of M. Ulpius Traianus, T. Aurelius Fulvus, and Ti. Iulius Alexander, and argues against Syme's definition of the identity of these important men in various ways. He eliminates these men from the possible "Corbulo-group", with only Ti. Julius Alexander as the guarantor of Corbulo. Thus, Vespasian's announcement was not at all the work of a former supporter of Corbulo. E. Flaig then responds to Nicholls's risky assumption that the "Corbulo-group" was formed before '69 and that this organisation was unanimous in its support of the Flavian cause in that year. 'who were not immediately allied with Vespasian, but who were rapidly and spectacularly promoted under the new emperor', as support for his argument that Vespasian in no way treated his legate and partisans from the East as 'groups' of any kind.

In conclusion, Vervaet acknowledges E. Flaig's corrections on the uncritical aspects of the first two, but he still agrees more with the first two that there was indeed a "Corbulo-group" of political groups active behind the Vespasians and aiding the Flavian cause [13]. He refuses to see the "Corbulo-group" as an absolute existence of historical facts with clear boundaries or to make hypothetical reconstructions of them. First, he reveals the importance of influential senior patriarchal patrons for soldiers, subordinate officers and officials [13]. Being related by marriage to a highly influential patriarch meant a certain promotion. Although the majority of legionaries serving in the East at the time of Vespasian's proclamation did not serve directly under Corbulo, E. Flaig completely fails to take into account career soldiers, especially centurions - a class of officers who depended on the operations of their patrons more than any other to advance their careers [13]. With the aid of some illuminating examples selected from Plinius's *Epistulae* Vervaet reasonably surmises that Corbulo's unexpected forced suicide was disastrous for the prospects of his legions, and especially so for the cadre of professional officers and veterans who were the core of the Roman army. Indeed, it does not matter whether these men constituted a loyal, coherent 'Corbulo-group' or not: while they did not lose all their chances of promotion, they certainly lost a huge residual value in terms of promotion opportunities, as well as an exceptionally powerful and well-connected patronus [13]. In any case, Corbulo's officers and men had good reason to be dissatisfied with Emperor Nero and the political situation of the time, and may even have chosen to co-operate with the Vespasians in the first place [13].

### **4.3. After the death of Cn. Domitius Corbulo**

After Cn. Domitius Corbulo's death, his network of relationships became his legacy and continued to be effective, the most immediate effect of which was the remarriage of his daughter Domitia Longina (PIR III, D 181), which may have demonstrated the possibility that Corbulo still left a certain amount of influence and cohesion in politics after his death, allowing later Flavian dynasty princes could still increase their chances of becoming emperor by marrying his daughter [6].

At the same time, in another, more far-reaching way, Corbulo's far-reaching influence is of even greater historical significance [13]. Although there is no direct or clear evidence that the Flavian dynasty was founded with the support of what may have been a similar "Corbulo-group", we can find with certainty that the close associates of the venerable general acted with a similar code of conduct, hardly without the influence of their former masters [13]. Their years of common service under Corbulo, their unanimous interest in Corbulo's cause, and the rise of those who became powerful backers after Corbulo's death were the basis of their joint action. After Domitian's marriage to Domitia Longina in 70, the interests of Corbulo's erstwhile subordinates were once more firmly secured and continued to be loyal supporters of the Flavian dynasty. In this sense, Cn. Domitius Corbulo had become the forerunner of the Flavian dynasty in the Roman Empire, and in some ways influenced the outward appearance of Roman politics at the top for decades to come [13].

## 5. Conclusion

By analyzing, it is possible to get a glimpse of the political ecology and the senatorial class of the first-century Roman Empire. What can be seen is that, as a typical aristocrat in the Julio-Claudian dynasty, Corbulo's personality was based on the general values of the aristocracy and the senatorial class at that time; his social relations were also based on the aristocracy and the senatorial class of the whole empire, which were deeply intertwined with the political power of the empire's top level. His social relations were also based on the nobility and senatorial class of the whole empire, and they were all intertwined with the political power at the top of the empire. As a representative of the senatorial class, Corbulo managed to stand out in history as a significant figure in the history of the empire and gained significant influence. These influences also shaped the political world of the Roman Empire under Nero, and ultimately and inevitably drove the course of history, greatly influencing the Flavian dynasty that followed, and even the Roman Empire hundreds of years later.

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