

THE POWER AND INFLUENCE OF THE IMPERIAL ROMAN WOMEN OF  
THE JULIO-CLAUDIANS

by

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## I. HISTORIOGRAPHY

### Role of Roman Women

What we understand of the Julio-Claudian women that reaches us through the ancient literature gives us a glimpse of powerful, even dangerously ambitious women, who often wielded power in their own right and for their own ends. Uncovering the truth behind the words of these accounts, delivered to us across the years by often hostile sources can be difficult. There are certain recurring themes that these influential women are frequently framed within, which offer insight into their characters and how they were perceived by their contemporaries, yet ultimately cloud their true natures by simplifying their actions in order to best fit these literary devices. Roman women could not hold political office, and in fact had very few legal privileges at the time. Any power or sway a woman held over Roman society was derived from the prestige of their husbands or male relatives, until certain extraordinary women began to carve out a place for themselves within the political structure. The women who sought positions of power within the evolving power structure in Rome were not easily tolerated, and often faced backlash for their audaciousness. Ancient authors affixed these women with labels such as “frightening,” “savage,” “shrewish,” “ferocious,” “volatile,” “callous and menacing,” and were accused of, “dark practices [witchcraft],” “step-motherly hatred,” and of being “immoral, infamous, and violent.”<sup>1</sup> These insults and more reflect the resentment these women faced for daring to seek power and influence that were perceived as beyond the purview of a Roman woman. However, the shifting political landscape in Rome opened

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<sup>1</sup> Suetonius, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, translated by Robert Graves, (New York, NY: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), *Augustus*, 62.2 ; Tacitus, *The Annals*, translated by A.J. Woodman, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2004), 1.3.3, 1.6.2, 11.12.1, 12.57.2, 12.64.2-3.

up new opportunities for aspiring Roman noblewomen to expand the boundaries once held firm by long standing tradition, and in turn created a new tradition that allowed for a slowly expanding territory over which they held dominion. The previously reserved matron of the Roman republic, best embodied by Cornelia and Lucretia, was both revitalized and remade into the matron of the imperial era, one who retained both the grace and prestige of the former but incorporated the newfound power and political influence held by imperial matrons. This new version of Roman matronhood is best exemplified by Livia, whose public persona had a lasting impact on the perception and expectations of upper class Roman women. Augustus dedicated several pieces of legislation to crafting and shaping the ideal Roman matron of the imperial era in an effort to reshape Roman culture to better suit his moral reforms. He granted social and financial independence to women who had given birth to three or more children and simultaneously introduced punishments for men and women who were not married and bearing children by twenty-five and twenty years old, respectively. Women within childbearing years were encouraged to remarry after being widowed or divorced, and several laws were introduced punishing adultery and extra-marital sex that primarily targeted women in an effort both to increase the number of legitimate children being born and restore a level of morality within Rome. These laws were juxtaposed precariously with the lauded actions of Cornelia and other *univira*, or women who have only had one husband, who had been idealized in the Roman republican tradition but were now in conflict with Augustus's moral reforms and attempts to increase the birthrate. This resulted in a further alteration of the idealized Roman wife; she should marry once, have many children, and then die before her husband so that she would remain a *univira*, or



else she must surrender that older tradition and instead attempt to bear children for all of her husbands.<sup>2</sup>

### **Contemporary Ancient Sources**

There are several different sources for the lives of the Julio-Claudian women, with varying degrees of separation from the actual events they describe as well varying levels of veracity. Antony Barrett perhaps summarizes best the problems we face when dealing with ancient literary sources when he writes, “written material cannot help but be tainted, to a greater and lesser degree, by the prejudices of its author.”<sup>3</sup> The historians of the past did not hold to the same standard of truth and impartiality to which we apply to the study of history today, and tended to make the focal point of the narrative the leading political figure, in this case the emperors. This makes parsing the motives and actions of the Julio-Claudian women who emerge as secondary figures in these accounts difficult, especially when the narrative leaves them in the background. In addition, true contemporaries of the Julio-Claudian women often had motive to alter the version of events presented in their accounts to win over the current emperor and his family, or perhaps to avoid the consequences of straying from the official narrative set in place by the imperial house.

The first and earliest of these authors is Publius Ovidius Naso, known to us as Ovid, born in 43 BC in the final days of the republic, and who was banished to the Black

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<sup>2</sup> Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 159-161, 166.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony A. Barrett, *Livia: First Lady of Imperial Rome*, (New Haven: Yale University, 2002), 229.

Sea in AD 8. The flattering way in which Ovid wrote about Livia is thereby contextualized as an effort to maintain, and later regain, the favor of the imperial house.<sup>4</sup>

The next contemporary source comes from Velleius Paterculus, born in 19 BC and who became a historian only after a career as a military officer. Velleius's service under both the ill-fated Gaius Caesar and Tiberius is reflected in the loyalty he displayed towards the Julio-Claudians later in his writings. His deferential treatment of Livia and Tiberius within his account suggests that he credits his success as both an officer in the military and as a writer to the new regime.<sup>5</sup>

The next contemporary author was also impacted by the actions of the Julio-Claudians, though much more directly. Lucius Annaeus Seneca was born to an aristocratic family, and like Velleius he served under Tiberius as a military quaestor. However, it was Seneca's second career as a skilled rhetorician that attracted the attention of the Julio-Claudians, drawing first the ire of the emperor Gaius and later that of Messalina, who in AD 41 had Seneca accused of adultery and banished. This would naturally taint Seneca's writings on the Julio-Claudians in a negative way, at least until he was recalled to the Roman imperial court by Agrippina in AD 49, where he served as Nero's tutor and then advisor. Seneca's time within the favor of the imperial family was short lived, and in AD 65 was ordered to commit suicide. His colorful life and close proximity to the Roman imperial family gives Seneca's account of Gaius, Claudius, and

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<sup>4</sup> Ovid, *The Art of Love*, edited by James Michie, (New York, NY: Random House LLC, 2002), ix.

<sup>5</sup> Velleius, *Compendium of Roman History*, translated by Frederick W. Shipley, (Loeb Classical Library Edition, 1924), ix-xii.

Nero's tenures as emperors of Rome a unique perspective, influenced directly by his level of favor with each regime.<sup>6</sup>

### **Flavian Sources**

The following group of sources wrote a generation or so after the contemporary authors, and thus had the benefit of drawing on the primary sources that have since been lost as well as the sources we have already discussed for guidance in their narratives. The first and earliest of this secondary group is Gaius Plinius Secundus, known better as Pliny the Elder. Born in AD 23, he began his military career while Claudius was in office, returning to Rome during his semi-retirement under Nero to study law and begin his writings on natural history. After Vespasian, the first of the Flavian emperors, had secured his hold on Rome, Pliny received a naval commission. It was this commission alongside his interest in the natural sciences that cost Pliny his life when Mt. Vesuvius erupted and drew the curious man closer to the poisonous fumes. Within his work is reflected the bias of his time, which viewed Augustus and Livia in a more positive light while casting Gaius, Nero, and Agrippina in a much more negative one.<sup>7</sup>

The next author provides an important perspective completely outside of the Roman political or military realm. Yosef ben Matityahu was born in AD 37 during Gaius's first year as emperor, and fought against the Roman invasion of Jerusalem in AD 67 that was led by Vespasian, the future emperor. He prophesized that Vespasian and his son would become emperors themselves, and when the prophecy came true in AD 69 he

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<sup>6</sup> Seneca, *Moral Essays, Volume I: De Providentia, De Constantia, De Ira, De Clementia*, translated by John W. Basore, (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library Edition, 1928), vii-ix.

<sup>7</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, translated by H. Rackham, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library Edition, 1940), vii-viii.

was freed, adopting the name Titus Flavius Josephus and became a trusted member of Vespasian's court. Josephus's unique perspective of someone who was raised outside the Roman system yet who had benefited greatly from the Flavian emperors is reflected in his writings; he speaks much more harshly of Nero than he does of Augustus.<sup>8</sup>

Continuing in the same vein, Plutarch was a Greek born philosopher and historian, who adopted the name Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus when he became a Roman citizen. Plutarch's political career came under Trajan, who gave him a consular rank, and under Hadrian, who gave him a procuratorship in Greece. Plutarch's own life as both a Greek and Roman were reflected in his most famous work, *Parallel Lives*, wherein he pairs prominent Greeks and Romans in history together to portray certain morals and ethics. Like the other authors of his generation, his successes came from the later emperors and it can be expected that he would have followed the biases expressed above, however his extant work does not include analysis of Augustus or his predecessor, outside of mentioning Octavian in his life of Antony.<sup>9</sup>

Little is known about the life of the next author, Decimus Iunius Iuvenalis, and what can be determined comes from clues within his own works. Known as Juvenal, he lived during the Flavian dynasty in Rome, and was reportedly exiled after insulting a favorite of the emperor Domitian in AD 93, only to be recalled to Rome after Domitian's death in AD 96. His *Satires* were published around AD 110 and contained a scathing

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<sup>8</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, translated by L. H. Feldman, R. Marcus, H. St. J. Thackeray, and A. P. Wikgren, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library Edition, 2015), vii-xi.

<sup>9</sup> Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, translated by Bernadotte Perrin, (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library Edition, 1923), xi-xii.

description of Messalina, thereby aligning Juvenal with his peers in harshly criticizing the later Julio-Claudians.<sup>10</sup>

Like the other sources who had the Flavian emperors to thank for their wealth and prestige, and who therefore had a vested interest in making the current regime appear better than the previous one, Tacitus and his decidedly negative portrayal of Livia has been widely criticized by historians. “Few women of real nobility have received such venomous treatment from historians as Livia has received, in particular from Tacitus... Tacitus, at his irresponsible worst, reported the slanders, careless whether he described them as rumours or facts,”<sup>11</sup> states Balsdon in his book *Roman Women*. This sentiment is echoed by historians who study the women of the Augustan imperial family; for instance, when comparing a speech by Emperor Claudius as reported by Tacitus to the same speech as recorded on a bronze tablet, K. Wellesley writes for *Greek & Rome*, “A careful study, then, of the Tacitean speech convinces us increasingly of its futility and artificiality.”<sup>12</sup> Alexis Dawson, when examining Tacitus’s presentation of the events surrounding Agrippina Minor’s demise for *The Classical Journal* states that, “Tacitean chicanery envelopes us in the very first chapter.” Dawson also notes that Tacitus used his popularity to distract his contemporary readers from closely examining the reasons he provided for Nero turning on his mother in AD 59; notably, he blames Poppaea’s urging of Nero to marry her in AD 59, yet there were not wed until AD 62.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Juvenal, *The Satires*, translated by Peter Green, (New York, NY: Penguin Books Ltd, 2004), xiii.

<sup>11</sup> J. P. V. D Balsdon, *Roman Women: Their history and Habits*, (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1962), 90.

<sup>12</sup> Alexis Dawson, “Whatever Happened to Lady Agrippina?” *Classical Journal* 64, no. 6 (1969), 253-254.; K. Wellesley, “Can You Trust Tacitus?” *Greek & Rome* 1, no. 1 (1954), 32-33.

<sup>13</sup> Dawson, “Whatever Happened to Lady Agrippina?” (1969), 254.

Tacitus's contemporary Suetonius is also scrutinized for his tendency to report all rumors as fact without proper evidence. For instance Antony Barrett, in writing his books on Livia and Agrippina, notes that, "Suetonius was a biographer rather than a historian," and his work tended to be more thematically grouped, as well as literary rather than factual when compared to Dio's record, which was more annalistic.<sup>14</sup> Suetonius has also earned a reputation as a gossip, and Barrett states, "[Suetonius] is quite willing to give an ear to any story that has come down through tradition, no matter how implausible it might appear."<sup>15</sup> This includes reporting with an alarming level of enthusiasm accounts of Nero defiling a Vestal Virgin, desiring an incestuous relationship with his mother Agrippina Minor, and later claimed Nero was even "hounded by his mother's ghost."<sup>16</sup>

### **Nerva-Antonine Sources**

The next generation of authors consists of just two main sources for the Julio-Claudians that will be referenced in this thesis. The first is Appian of Alexandria, who came to Rome around AD 120 and worked as a legal advocate before receiving the office of procurator under the rule of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. Appian's extensive work on Roman history originally spanned 24 books, though much has been lost after his coverage on the civil war at the fall of the republic. With Appian's increased distance

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<sup>14</sup> A. A. Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire*, (London: Taylor & Francis Routledge, 1999), Accessed July 25, 2018, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/libproxy.txstate.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=83906&site=ehost-live&scope=site>, 240.

<sup>15</sup> Barrett, *Agrippina*, 240.

<sup>16</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, 28.1-2, 34.4.

from the Julio-Claudians we begin to see a less biased perspective of the beginning of the empire.<sup>17</sup>

The final and latest source was written by Cassius Dio Cocceianus, who like Appian traveled to Rome as an adult to serve as an advocate in AD 180, though this was half a century after Appian's journey. Dio was also close with several emperors starting with Commodus, and held several high ranking offices due to his friendships including acting as governor to Pergamum, Smyrna, Dalmatia, and Pannonia and holding a consulship in AD 220 and 229. Dio's work *Roman History* covered a broad scope, from the Trojan Aeneas to the reign of Emperor Alexander Severus.<sup>18</sup> In Dio's work we can truly begin to see the benefits of distance from the primary players he writes about, allowing him the perspective to represent all versions of the events he portrays, though sometimes to the detriment of his work when he entertains both believable and outlandish claims. This can best be seen in his account of Augustus's death, where he first recounts an elaborate effort by Livia to kill her husband by feeding him poisoned figs, only to follow it with, "At any rate, from this or some other cause [Augustus] became ill."<sup>19</sup> In spite of all these obstacles, a reasonable timeline of events that likely occurred has been established that seems most plausible when all possible evidence is considered.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Appian, *Roman History: The Civil Wars*, Translated by John Carter, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1996), ix-xi.

<sup>18</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, translated by Herbert Foster, (Troy, NY: Pafraets Book Company, 1905), vii-xi.

<sup>19</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 56.30.3.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix B for further information on the primary authors.

## II. LIVIA

### Early Life of Livia

The first woman discussed in this thesis is perhaps the most important one of all the women who will be addressed. She created and embodied the type of Roman matron idealized by both traditionalists and those of new money within the emerging empire. She was loyal to her husband and family above all else, and exuded a certain level of influence over both that could only hint at the true level of power she possessed. Her actions defined the role Roman matrons of the imperial era were expected to fulfill and the level of poise and dignity that later empresses were compared against. Born on January 30, 58 BC as the daughter of Marcus Livius Drusus Claudianus and Aufidia, the woman who would one day become the first Augusta was in her early life known as Livia Drusilla.<sup>21</sup> She was important from the moment of her birth due to the ancient and powerful family from whence she came, and her subsequent marriages only added to her personal prestige. Her name changed late in life to reflect the privileges she had accrued over the years, and after the death of her husband and her testamentary adoption into his family, she officially became Julia Augusta. The ancient sources referred to Livia by both names as well as combinations of the two, perhaps in an attempt to distinguish her from Augustus's daughter and granddaughter, both called Julia. For the sake of clarity, she will hereafter be called Livia.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 58.2. ; Tacitus, *Annals*, 5.1.1. ; Barrett, *Livia*, 309-310. Barrett observes that although there is a good case for Livia to have been born in 59 BC based on the Tacitus's placement of Livia's death as the first item of significance in the year 29 AD, modern historians almost universally place her birth at the year 58 BC, working backwards from the well documented date of death and her reported age at the time of her death.

<sup>22</sup> Suetonius, *Augustus*, 62.2, *Tiberius* 4.3; Dio, *Roman History*, 48.15; Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.2-5.1.1; Barrett, *Livia*, 307-308;



The assassination of Julius Caesar on March 15 in 44 BC was a failed attempt by the Pompeian faction to regain control of Rome and restore power to the Senate. Marcus Antonius, hereafter known as Mark Antony, and Octavian, Caesar's nephew and testamentary heir, were briefly unified as the leaders of the Caesarian faction after this assault. Livia's father had fought on the side of the Pompeian Optimates faction against Caesar and Antony and now sided against Antony and Octavian, which resulted in his suicide at the Battle of Philippi alongside Marcus Junius Brutus in 42 BC.<sup>23</sup> Just a year prior, Livia had married her first husband Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero, who was a member of the Pompeian Optimates. He had supported the assassination of Caesar alongside Livia's father and later would ally with Mark Antony after the defeat of the Pompeian faction at Philippi. Livia was in a unique situation at this time, having fled Rome with her current husband, and evading the man who would later become her second husband.<sup>24</sup> Once peace was established between the two warring factions, the families of the Pompeian supporters returned to Rome in late summer of 39 BC.<sup>25</sup>

Once Livia returned to Rome she began seeking a new husband, as her current husband's status had been greatly reduced following the defeat at Philippi and dissolution of his political faction. Despite being officially welcomed back to Rome after a peace agreement was reached between the Pompeian Optimates and the Caesarian faction, Tiberius Nero, as one of the conspirators, had three quarters of his property and land seized, which left little for his sons and wife to inherit.<sup>26</sup> Whether Livia was driven to rise

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<sup>23</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 48.44.1; Velleius, *Compendium of Roman History*, 2.71.3.; Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), EBSCOhost eBook Academic Collection, accessed March 15, 2018, 199.

<sup>24</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 48.15.3; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 4.2; Velleius, *Roman History*, 2.75-76.

<sup>25</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 21.

<sup>26</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, 5.72.

within the hierarchy of the new power structure or to simply become allied with the dominant political force in Rome, she succeeded at least in part by attracting the attention of the most powerful man in Rome. Octavian was rumored to be completely taken with Livia when the two met, according to Dio, despite the fact that not only was she married but was also pregnant with her second child.<sup>27</sup> Although Octavian's own wife Scribonia was pregnant as well, his hasty divorce so soon after she gave birth to their daughter Julia gave lie to the rumors that blamed Scribonia's shrewish personality for the untenable nature of their marriage, instead leading credence to Octavian's overwhelming desire for Livia. This was further evidenced by his equally rapid courtship and marriage to Livia, so swift some sources including Suetonius and Tacitus have suggested the pair were married three months before Livia gave birth to her son by her previous husband, which would have been a social faux-pas and an easy target for political adversaries.<sup>28</sup>

However, it is unlikely that Octavian would have unnecessarily risked alienating the Roman elites when a little patience provided an acceptable solution. There is also a version of events that places the birth of Drusus, Livia's son by her first husband Tiberius Nero, only a few short days before her marriage to Octavian. This contradicting version of events is best explained by the rapid engagement between Octavian and Livia being called a hasty marriage, most notably by Mark Antony, who ironically is reported to share his birthdate of January 14<sup>th</sup> with the young Drusus according to Suetonius and Dio.<sup>29</sup> Since Octavian and Livia were already cohabitating, the distinction between the engagement and marriage ceremonies was vague to begin with, only to be further

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<sup>27</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 48.34.

<sup>28</sup> Suetonius, *Augustus*, 62.2, Dio, *Roman History*, 48.34-35, 43-44.4, Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.10.5

<sup>29</sup> Suetonius, *Claudius*, 11.3, Dio, *Roman History*, 60.5.1,

muddled by antagonistic rumors.<sup>30</sup> After Drusus was born, Octavian had him sent to Tiberius Nero immediately. This was in accordance to the law that children be raised by their father first and foremost, and from whom they obtained their legal status as citizens of Rome. These children would return to their mother's custody only if their father died while they were still minors.<sup>31</sup>

The political benefits of a marriage to Livia, which connected Octavian to both the ancient patrician Claudii family and the powerful Drusus family, contributed to Octavian's speedy courtship of her, and the apparent affection between the two that persists in accounts from ancient sources further emphasizes the high regard in which Octavian held Livia. Suetonius states that Octavian, "loved her and esteemed her to the end without a rival."<sup>32</sup> The marriage between Octavian and Livia also acted as a physical symbol of the unification, or subjugation, depending on the perspective, of the two formerly opposing political factions.

### **Livia and Octavia**

In the early years of her marriage to Octavian, Livia stayed out of public scrutiny. This is in part due to the focus on the "first lady" of Rome which at the time split between Livia and Octavia, the sister of Octavian and the wife of Mark Antony, arguably the second most powerful man in Rome at the time. Octavia's central role in the events of upcoming years guaranteed her the lion's share of the attention from the Roman public.

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<sup>30</sup> Stewart Perowne, *The Caesar's Wives: Above suspicion?*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1974), 31; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 62, *Claudius*, 11.3; Dio, *Roman History*, 48.15.3.; Barrett, *Livia*, 21, 313-314; Syme, *Roman Revolution*, 229, 378.

<sup>31</sup> Velleius, *Roman History*, 2.95.1; Guigliemo Ferrero, *The Women of the Caesars*, (New York: The Century Co., 1911), 57-58.; Barrett, *Livia*, 23-27.

<sup>32</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 4.34.5; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 62.2, 69.1-70; Ferrero, *The Women of the Caesars*, 48-50.; Syme, *Roman Revolution*, 229, 378.; Barrett, *Livia*, 22-24.

The second part is attributed to her own good political sense and ability to see that any interference during these crucial formative years of the principate by a woman would attract unwanted attention and no small measure of criticism, wisdom gained perhaps through her experience with the Roman rumor mill during her whirlwind engagement.<sup>33</sup> Livia's dramatic engagement lies in marked contrast to the virtuous ideal of an imperial matron that she embodied in her later years, and perhaps served as a personal reminder for her to maintain that noble public persona, in alignment with the moral reforms brought about by Octavian.

In 36 BC Mark Antony, former ally of Julius Caesar and a Triumvir, sent his wife Octavia back to Rome where she raised her children from a previous marriage, his children from a previous marriage, their own children, and later would raise his children by Cleopatra as well. Octavia's portrayal as a dutiful wife despite her husband's flagrant disregard and disrespect won her the support of the general public, no doubt aided by Octavian's propaganda that slandered Antony and Cleopatra. Antony was accused of sacrilegious acts including worshipping the Egyptian gods, abandoning his duties to Rome, and having disgraced his legal wife and family by claiming Cleopatra's children as his own. Cleopatra was viewed as a temptress, and of having complete control over Antony, who by now had twice been accused of being easily led by his domineering wives, Fulvia and Cleopatra. Octavia was not just a former politically advantageous link between these two allies-turned-enemies, but now acted as a mediator, advisor, and messenger between her husband and her brother.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 28.; Ferrero, *The Women of the Caesars*, 57-62.

<sup>34</sup> Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, 53.1-55.1.

In the year 35 BC Livia and Octavia were granted sacrosanctity, an official religious protection from verbal and physical assaults, had statues erected in their honor, and were given the right to manage their own estates without a guardian.<sup>35</sup> There are several explanations offered as to Octavian's ultimate goal in having these privileges given to his wife and sister. Eve D'Ambra notes in her book *Roman Women* that this is the first time women are given the same privileges as a magistrate of Rome and suggests that this meant Octavian wanted his sister and his wife to be able to act independent of an advisor in managing their own affairs.<sup>36</sup> Maureen Flory in an article for *The Ancient History Bulletin* separates the creation of statues in honor of the two women from the rest of the privileges, citing precedence for the Senate to issue honorific statues.<sup>37</sup> Barrett suggests that this may have actually been a way to protect Octavia and make illegal what had happened to Octavia at the hands of Antony in order to prevent it from occurring again.<sup>38</sup> In raising the legal status of his wife and sister, Octavian gained the opportunity to attack Antony under the guise of enforcing the sacrosanctity he had just given to Octavia and Livia and as Dilia Angelova states in her book *Sacred Figures* that this would become, "useful this time in [Octavian's] war of public opinion against [Octavia's] former husband."<sup>39</sup> As this would have been both beneficial to Octavian's feud with Antony and would have protected his wife and sister from any fallout of the growing conflict, this seems the most likely explanation. Granting this privileged status to a

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<sup>35</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 49.38.

<sup>36</sup> Eve D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, (New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 150.

<sup>37</sup> Maureen Flory, "The Deification of Roman Women," *The Ancient History Bulletin* 9.3 (1995): 127.

<sup>38</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 31-32.

<sup>39</sup> Maureen Flory, "The Deification of Roman Women," *The Ancient History Bulletin* 9.3 (1995): 127.; E. Hemelrijk, "Octavian and the Introduction of Public Statues for Women in Rome," *Athenaeum* 93 (2005): 309-317.; Dilia Angelova, *Sacred Founders: Women, Men, and Gods in the Discourse of Imperial Founding, Rome through Byzantium*, (University of California Press, 2015), 70.; Barrett, *Livia*, 31-32.; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 150.

woman, however, was new territory for Rome and became a precedent adopted by future emperors.<sup>40</sup>

The climactic battle between Antony and Octavian took place in the waters surrounding the city of Actium on September 1, 31 BC and put an end to the split in the Caesarian faction, resulting in complete victory for Octavian. Dio and Plutarch both make note of Cleopatra convincing Octavian she had given up on suicide by claiming that some of the jewelry she had hidden was intended for Octavia and Livia, in the hopes that she could use it to persuade them to intercede on her behalf with Octavian.<sup>41</sup> This account of the potentially life-saving influence his wife and sister held over Octavian went untested in Cleopatra's case, as she committed suicide shortly afterwards on August 10, 30 BC. The report does however add to the evidence that Livia as well as Octavia could have swayed Octavian to be merciful towards Cleopatra, and suggests their influence was well known. This evidence is further strengthened when considered beside accounts from before Livia's marriage to Octavian, when an indignant Scribonia had complained that her husband's mistress Livia held an undue influence over Octavian and Scribonia's phrasing implied Livia's influence was a political one.<sup>42</sup>

In January of 27 BC, Octavian "returned" the extrajudicial powers that he had been granted, and in turn the Senate, having been coached on how to respond so as to appease Octavian, elected to give him control of Syria, Spain, and the Gallic provinces for a ten-year term to be renewed every decade. Octavian became the *princeps*, the first man in Rome, and was given the new name *Augustus* which would be passed down to all

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<sup>40</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 136.

<sup>41</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 51.13; Plutarch, *Lives-Antony*, 83.4; Barrett, *Livia*, 33-34.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew Dennison, *Livia, Empress of Rome: A Biography*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010), 131.

the future emperors.<sup>43</sup> Having secured his hold on Rome, Octavian, hereafter referred to as Augustus, now turned to address the issue of his familial legacy and potential heirs. His sister's son Marcellus was his apparent first choice as his heir, having married Marcellus to his own daughter Julia in 25 BC. But when Marcellus died at the age of twenty in 23 BC, this opened the field up to Livia's children from her previous marriage as well as others branches of the Julio-Claudians.<sup>44</sup> Although an account reported by Dio suggested Livia and possibly even Marcus Agrippa were involved in the death of Marcellus, this has been regarded by Barrett and Syme as likely false propaganda, not to mention that eliminating Marcellus did not benefit Livia or her children.<sup>45</sup>

The most obvious solution to Augustus's dynastic troubles would have been his own child born of his marriage to Livia, and yet despite their lack of children Augustus did not divorce her. The decision not to divorce Livia worked both for and against Augustus's moral reforms; Augustus desired to inspire a moral and cultural reform in Roman society by incentivizing marriage and children and had thereby introduced legislation that penalized those who were childless and unmarried. Yet Augustus simultaneously had chosen to remain with a wife who had not and would not bear him any children, implying she was worth more at his side than any potential heirs he could have had with another. This decision has inspired widespread discussion and debate on the clear indication that Livia's value as an advisor and companion must have outweighed his desire for a potential heir, or perhaps Augustus did not wish to risk

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<sup>43</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 49.38.1; Barrett, *Livia*, 34.

<sup>44</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 51.21.3, 53.1.2, 53.30.4; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 66.1-3, *Tiberius*, 6.4; Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.3.1; Velleius, *Roman History*, 2.93; Barrett, *Livia*, 36.

<sup>45</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 53.33.4; Syme, *Roman Revolution*, 342-345; Barrett, *Livia*, 36.

alienating the powerful and well-connected family of Livia's through a divorce.<sup>46</sup> Livia's role was dual-natured and aspects of each often overlapped, making categorizing her as a specific type of matriarch problematic as she evolved throughout the years. Livia acquired a unique status within the imperial court, her dual roles as confidential advisor to her husband at odds with her reputation as a proper Roman matron, sparking the first rumors in what will become a recurring motif of the scheming woman operating behind the scenes.<sup>47</sup>

At this time however, Augustus showed favor to both his adoptive sons and step sons through Livia, having adopted his grandsons by his daughter Julia and Marcus Agrippa in 17 BC, who are henceforth known as Lucius and Gaius Caesar, as well as incorporating Tiberius and Drusus more heavily into the imperial family in 16 BC by marrying Drusus to Antonia Minor, daughter of Octavia and Mark Antony, and marrying Tiberius to Vipsania Agrippina, daughter of Marcus Agrippa and his first wife, Pomponia Caecilia Attica. Although these actions seemed to satisfy Augustus's dynastic plan for now, unfortunately they would not last the test of time, and in a few short years the line of succession would be altered again. Marcus Agrippa, Augustus's closest colleague and advisor, who had personally helped him secure control over Rome during the crisis period and who married Augustus's daughter Julia in 21 BC, died at the age of 51 in 12 BC. Augustus mourned him for over a month formally, gave him an extravagant funeral and had Agrippa interred in the imperial family's mausoleum.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Susan E. Wood, *Imperial Women: A study in public images, 40 BC – 68 AD*, (Leiden: Brill Press, 1999), 76.; Perowne, *The Caesar's Wives*, 37-38.; Syme, *Roman Revolution*, 415-417.

<sup>47</sup> D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 149; N. Purcel, "Livia and the Womanhood of Rome," *Papers of the Cambridge Philological Society* 32 (1986): 78-80; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 84.2.

<sup>48</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 54.10-19; Barrett, *Livia*, 38-40.



Widely praised for the poise and grace she had displayed during in her lifetime, Octavia's death in 11 BC left Livia as the sole female influence on Augustus and his closest advisor. Therefore it was no surprise that after Octavia's death and the mourning period for Agrippa had passed that Augustus married his daughter Julia to one of Livia's sons, Tiberius, thereby solidifying her son's place in the dynasty.<sup>49</sup> This required Tiberius to divorce his beloved first wife Vipsania in order to marry the woman who was at present his own mother-in-law, Julia, which he would regret, according to Dio.<sup>50</sup>

The dedication of Augustus's Ara Pacis took place on January 30, 9 BC, which was Livia's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday and was a prestigious if indirect honor, which Barrett and Flory state was in line with her public persona of quiet dignity through the achievements of her husband and sons.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, this prestigious honor was quickly followed by tragedy in the imperial family when Drusus, the popular younger son of Livia by her first husband, died in 9 BC.<sup>52</sup> During mourning of Drusus, Dio tells us that Livia sought counsel from the philosopher Areus and under his advice opened herself up more to the people of Rome. Livia publicly displayed pictures of her son to demonstrate her grief over his death while simultaneously maintaining the proper level of Roman dignity and poise.<sup>53</sup>

It is at this point in Livia's life that she became a more public and openly powerful figure in Rome. The Senate gave Livia exemption from the legal guardianship

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<sup>49</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 40.

<sup>50</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 54.31.2-35.4; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 63.2, *Tiberius* 7.2-3; Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.12.6, 1.53.2, 4.40.9; Velleius, *Roman History*, 2.96.1-97.3; also see Appendix A.

<sup>51</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 42.; Flory, "The Deification of Roman Women," 127.

<sup>52</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 55.2; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 50.1, *Claudius* 1.3-4; Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.82.3; Barrett, *Livia*, 43.

<sup>53</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 55.2.1; Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.82.3; Barrett, *Livia*, 43-44.

requirement even though she had not given birth to the requisite three children and decreed the erection of statues in honor of her profound grief. Although Livia had already been given one of the privileges, exemption from the legal guardianship in 35 BC, this latest round of honors from the Senate marked a transition from the reserved and traditional Roman matron of the previous era into something new. The Senate's generosity to Livia occurred in the same year as Augustus's own public demonstration of strength and unity in Rome with the Ara Pacis, which totaled to three public events in the year for Livia after years along the periphery of the spotlight.<sup>54</sup> The transformation of Livia's persona from a reserved and restrained matron of the old republic into a public and influential figure on the imperial political landscape set a precedent that would be adopted by her successors in the imperial family and began altering the perceived role of an imperial woman in Rome.

Livia turned her attention to her remaining son, Tiberius, and with him dedicated a monument in 7 BC that was named after her, the *Porticus Liviae*, or the Portico of Livia.<sup>55</sup> The portico fell in line with the moral themes Augustus was trying to bring to his government, having been dedicated to the goddess Concordia to celebrate good wives and matrimonial harmony. The *Porticus Liviae* played off a similar portico commissioned by Octavia that was dedicated to the ideal mothers of history and myth.<sup>56</sup> Along the expanding eastern edge of the empire, small cult followings had sprung up that were dedicated to Livia, the first such example of a Roman woman being venerated as a deity

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<sup>54</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 55.2.5; Marleen B. Flory "Livia and the History of Public Honorific Statues for Women in Rome." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 123 (1993): 299.; Barrett, *Livia*, 46, 124.

<sup>55</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 55.6-8.2; Barrett, *Livia*, 46.

<sup>56</sup> Wood, *Imperial Women*, 77-78.

more in line with the religions of the provinces than within the Italian peninsula. Back in Rome, Livia enjoyed a faint echo of that elevated religious status, though she was by no means regarded as a living deity. When the Senate had conferred the honorific name and title Augustus, a certain religious significance was conveyed as well. And as Augustus was associated with Apollo, so was Livia associated with Juno, in whose domain lay morality, marriage, the state, and childbirth.<sup>57</sup>

This distinction may have given Livia an advantage when she acted as an advisor and pseudo-ambassador to the royal family of Judea. Livia had developed a friendship with Salome, the sister of King Herrod, and when Salome clashed with her brother's marriage wishes, she reached out to her friend in Rome for help. However, Livia then successfully advised that Salome concede to her brother's wishes, and in the intervening years Livia was rewarded for her counsel and named as a benefactor in both King Herrod and Salome's wills. Though her role was not an official one, these were the first of several steps towards leadership and governance that would be continued by her successors during their own travels in the East.<sup>58</sup>

From what has been preserved of Augustus's personal correspondence, he appears to have prepared notes for discussions concerning politics and policy with Livia just as he would with any other important figure, which reflected her role as an active force behind Augustus as well as the high regard in which he held her advice.<sup>59</sup> Livia's elevated status was further documented both by the diverse topics reportedly discussed between the

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<sup>57</sup> H. G. Mullens, H. G. "The Women of the Caesars." *Greece and Rome* 11, no. 32 (1942): 60-61.

<sup>58</sup> Wood, *Imperial Women*, 79-80; J.A. North, *Roman Religion*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 35-36, 58-62.

<sup>59</sup> Wood, *Imperial Women*, 80; Dennison, *Livia*, 131; Barrett, *Livia*, 32-40.

couple, and by the very fact that recording the nature of the conversations, whether accurate or otherwise, demonstrated the depths to which Augustus trusted his wife.<sup>60</sup> Although most of Livia's influence was confined to the power she wielded through her familial ties and role as the matriarch, there are instances where her reach stretched beyond, into the political landscape of Rome, such as when she advocated on behalf of her friend and client Plancina who was accused alongside her husband of involvement in the death of Germanicus. In the case of Plancina, which will be examined in more detail later on, Livia was able to exonerate Plancina of the charges, at least as long as Livia was alive. Perhaps at first Livia's political power came through her marriage to Octavian and her status as one of, if not the, leading woman in Rome, but it was maintained by her own alacrity and a steadily growing network of friends and allies.

In 6 BC Tiberius refused a command post in the East and instead requested to retire to the island of Rhodes off the coast of Asia Minor, and chose to take a few close friends with him, but not his wife Julia. Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio have suggested a myriad of reasons behind Tiberius's withdrawal from Rome. Tacitus claims his distaste for his wife Julia and her scandalous conduct in Rome was the main reason, while Suetonius and Dio suggest Tiberius feared that Augustus preferred to be succeeded by his grandsons by Julia and Agrippa, Lucius and Gaius, as well as a general weariness of Rome's political infighting and scandals.<sup>61</sup> In any case, Tiberius seems to have felt he lacked a firm place in Augustus's dynastic plan and feared usurpation by Lucius and Gaius. Rather than run the risk of provoking his own death by remaining in proximity to

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<sup>60</sup> Perowne, *The Caesars' Wives*, 38-39; Wood, *Imperial Women*, 80.

<sup>61</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 55.9.1-8; Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.53.2, 3.56.3; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 9.3-11.2; Velleius, *Roman History*, 2.99.1-2.; Barrett, *Livia*, 48; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 20-22.

Augustus as well as his political enemies within Rome, Tiberius yielded to Augustus's preference for Lucius and Gaius and withdrew to the East. This break in relations between Tiberius and Augustus was only repaired due to the extensive efforts of Livia over the course of several years.

### **Julia, daughter of Augustus**

Another strained area within the imperial family concerned the contrast between the penchant for luxury within the younger generation, and that of the older generation's preference for tradition, as showcased by the relationship between Julia and her father, Augustus. While Tacitus only mentions Julia's misdeeds in passing, Velleius describes the growing conflict between father and daughter as a shameful calamity, and said, "His daughter Julia, utterly regardless of her great father and her husband, left untried no disgraceful deed...and was in the habit of measuring her fortune only in the terms of license to sin."<sup>62</sup> Dio records tales of Julia drinking and carousing around Rome, as well as enjoying the favors of many a man who were not her husband.<sup>63</sup> Guglielmo Ferrero observes the striking difference between Livia and Julia, and how each represented different ideals of Roman nobility. "Where Livia was sparing, Julia was prodigal...Where Livia was reserved, Julia dared appear in the provinces in public at the side of her husband and received public homage."<sup>64</sup> Julia defied both the traditional expectations of a Roman noblewoman as well as her father's aim of restoring morality to the noble class as she indulged in extravagance and surrounded herself with luxury.

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<sup>62</sup> Velleius, *Roman History*, 100.2-101.

<sup>63</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 55.9.1-8;

<sup>64</sup> Guglielmo Ferrero, *The Women of the Caesars*, (New York: The Century Co., 1911), 79-80.

In AD 2 Augustus's tolerance of his daughter Julia's supposedly scurrilous behavior came to an abrupt end.<sup>65</sup> Conflicting explanations have been offered as to why Augustus reacted so strongly to this latest bout of rumors concerning Julia's misconduct. Some argue that it was because her lovers were political adversaries of Augustus who sought to gain power through Julia; others suggest that she was being deliberately driven from the imperial family by Livia. The fact that the majority of Julia's reported lovers were summarily executed gives credence to the political angle and would explain why Augustus, who had thus far ignored his daughter's activities, would feel moved to act in such a public way. Despite the accounts that place the blame with Livia, the imperial matriarch did not benefit much from Julia's exile to Pandateria, and in fact the scandal tarnished the reputation of the imperial house and reflected poorly on her son Tiberius, whose reputation was still tied to his disgraced wife Julia despite their separation.<sup>66</sup> Tiberius was also now further displaced from the principate, as Julia's sons were now old enough to be considered in Augustus's long term imperial plan and making them heirs assured the continuation of his bloodline.<sup>67</sup> Julia's banishment did, however, leave Livia as the uncontested preeminent woman in Rome and within the imperial family.

### **Livia in Ascendancy**

Julia's exile weakened the relationship between Tiberius and Augustus even further. Augustus refused Tiberius's petition to return to Rome in 2 BC and had Tiberius

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<sup>65</sup> Suetonius, *Augustus*, 64.2, 65.2, 101.3, *Tiberius* 11.4, 50.1; Dio, *Roman History*, 55.10.12-56.32.4; Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.53.1-4, 6.51.3

<sup>66</sup> Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 11.5-12.1.; Balsdon, *Roman Women*, 84-87.; Syme, *Roman Revolution*, 427.; Ferrero, *The Women of the Caesars*, 95.; Perowne, *The Caesars' Wives*, 50.; Barrett, *Livia*, 50-51.

<sup>67</sup> Harriet I. Flower, *The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 163.

and Julia divorced. Perhaps in deference to Livia's arguments, as Barrett believes, or the more likely explanation of maintaining a united front to their enemies in Rome, Augustus granted Tiberius a command post in the East as an explanation for his continued absence from Rome.<sup>68</sup> Tiberius appealed to Augustus again for permission to return to Rome in 2 AD and was initially refused, suggesting Augustus did not want the inevitable political strife that would arise with Tiberius in Rome, as Tiberius would be an appealing alternative to Augustus's personally groomed heirs. Livia again pleaded on behalf of her son, so Augustus agreed to discuss it with Gaius Caesar, the eldest son of Augustus's daughter Julia and his longtime friend Agrippa. Gaius Caesar also advocated for Tiberius's return to Rome, and finally, Augustus conceded.<sup>69</sup> Tiberius's return however came with the condition that he remove himself from public life and retire politically. During this same year Lucius Caesar, the younger brother of Gaius and one of Augustus's intended heirs to the principate, fell ill on his way to take command of the army in Spain, and died shortly afterward. Though devastating, the death of Lucius did not ultimately change the power of Livia or Tiberius, as Lucius was the younger brother of Gaius and not first in line for the principate. However, Gaius's death early in AD 4 forced Augustus to completely rework his line of succession, which ultimately benefitted Livia and her descendants.

The untimely death of both of Augustus's young and popular heirs ignited the rumor mill in Rome, which promptly accused Livia of killing the brothers in order to facilitate Tiberius's return to Rome.<sup>70</sup> Tacitus blatantly accused Livia of having a hand in

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<sup>68</sup> Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 11.5-12.1; Barrett, *Livia*, 52.

<sup>69</sup> Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 13, 15.1; Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.48; Velleius, *Roman History*, 2.103.1-3.; Barrett, *Livia*, 52.

<sup>70</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 55.10a.10; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 65.1; Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.3.3; Barrett, *Livia*, 53.

their deaths, though Barrett and Ferrero refute this charge due to the lack of evidence and generally exonerate Livia of this slanderous claim. These historians suggest these accusations come from the rumors that circulated when Germanicus died and are being retroactively attributed to the earlier deaths of Lucius and Gaius, noting that the fact that Dio and Tacitus have circulated these claims calls the truth of them into question; Dio due to the over one hundred years having passed between the events and his account of them, and Tacitus due to his extensive and pervasive dislike of influential Roman women.<sup>71</sup> Guy de la Bédoyère echoes these sentiments in his recently published book *Domina: The Women who made Imperial Rome*, and notes that Tacitus suggested that Augustus, in his advancing age, may have become more susceptible to Livia's supposed desire to undermine the descendants of Julia.<sup>72</sup> Despite Livia's network of clients, Ferrero states it would have been difficult for her to pull off the murders of two young healthy heirs who were well outside of the city of Rome.<sup>73</sup>

Augustus, with an ever-dwindling pool of suitable successors within his family, adopted Tiberius as his son and heir in AD 4 on the condition that Tiberius adopt Germanicus. Augustus also adopted Agrippa Postumus, the youngest son of his estranged daughter Julia and Marcus Agrippa, in an attempt to cover all his bases. Germanicus was then married to Agrippina the Elder in AD 5 to strengthen his ties to the Julio-Claudian family. Although Tacitus attributes this adoption choice to Livia's machinations, other historians look to Suetonius, who concedes that although Livia may have voiced her opinion on the matter, she did not hold the deciding vote, rather Augustus himself

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<sup>71</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 53, 239; Ferrero, *The Women of the Caesars*, 108-113.

<sup>72</sup> Guy de la Bédoyère, *Domina: The Women who made Imperial Rome*, (New Haven, New York: Yale University Press, 2018), 118.

<sup>73</sup> Ferrero, *The Women of the Caesars*, 111-112.



believed the contrast between Tiberius's rule and his own would cause history to reflect on him more positively according to a selection Suetonius presents from Augustus's letters.<sup>74</sup> The historians who are persuaded by Tacitus suggest that Livia may have even been at the head of a political faction that had urged Augustus to adopt Tiberius, as it would have united the Julian and Claudian lines within the imperial family, though Tacitus himself admits to Tiberius's many positive traits that lend themselves to Tiberius becoming Augustus's heir in between digs at Livia.<sup>75</sup>

After coming down with another illness in a lifetime of sickness and disease, Augustus died on August 19, AD 14, and with his death Livia's position in Roma was permanently solidified and strengthened. Several ancient sources record rumors that Livia was responsible for the death of her husband Augustus, despite the fact that he never had a particularly healthy constitution whenever it was time for battle, and was seventy-six years old. Tacitus and Dio both report suspicion of Livia following Augustus's death, with Dio claiming Livia had, "smeared with poison some figs that were still on trees from which Augustus was wont to gather the fruit with his own hands; then she ate those that had not been smeared, offering the poisoned ones to him."<sup>76</sup> Pliny the Elder planted the seeds of doubt in his summary of the deeds of Augustus, mentioning Augustus's regret over the banishment of Postumus, his secrets being shared by a trusted friend, and the general machinations of Livia and Tiberius. Plutarch elaborates on this version of events a few decades later, which culminated in the suicide of the friend of Augustus who had spread the rumor out of shame when his failure to keep Augustus's confidence was

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<sup>74</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.3.3; Dio, *Roman History*, 55.13.2; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 64.1-65.1, *Tiberius* 15.2-16.1, 21.2-3.; Barrett, *Livia*, 55.

<sup>75</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.3.3; Ferrero, *The Women of the Caesars*, 108-114.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 24.

<sup>76</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.5.1; Dio, *Roman History*, 30.2.

revealed. Dio implies over a century afterwards that the reconciliation between Augustus and Postumus was much closer than Pliny or Plutarch tell us, stating, “[Augustus] had secretly sailed over to the island to see Agrippa and seemed about to become completely reconciled with him.”<sup>77</sup> Tacitus’s earlier account seems to support this by giving the names of the supposed friends who let it slip to Livia, though again Barrett criticizes Tacitus for his lack of evidence and convincing arguments. Barrett has repudiated this version of events when compared with Augustus’s verifiable actions in the months prior to his death, suggesting these accounts relied on rumors that presented Postumus as a challenge to Tiberius’s claim on the principate.<sup>78</sup>

Livia’s culpability in the death of Postumus remains difficult to determine, occurring so closely to Augustus’s own passing. When it became clear that Augustus was dying at their villa in Nola, Livia was said to have ordered soldiers to blockade the street and prevent any word on Augustus’s health to spread outside of the official updates Livia provided. This may have helped Livia control the transfer of power and ensure there was no opportunity for a chaotic coup attempt, as it allowed her to delay the announcement of Augustus’s death until after Tiberius had arrived. The confusion surrounding Augustus’s exact time of death also calls into question who exactly issued the death order on Postumus Agrippa; of the varied accounts from Tacitus, Dio, Suetonius, and Velleius, most convey that Tiberius did not reach Augustus before his death.<sup>79</sup> Livia may have issued the order for the execution of Postumus Agrippa under Augustus’s name before

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<sup>77</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 56.30.1-.3.

<sup>78</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 56.26.2-30.2; Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.5.1-3; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 19.2, 76.1, 97.2-100.1; Barrett, *Livia*, 62-67.

<sup>79</sup> Suetonius, *Augustus*, 98.5-99.1, *Tiberius* 21.1; Dio, *Roman History*, 56.30-31.1; Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.5, 1.13.2; Velleius, *Roman History*, 2.123.1; Barrett, *Livia*, 67-70.

Tiberius arrived to help ensure there was no question to his succession. The edict that announced the death of Augustus also declared Tiberius as his recognized successor.<sup>80</sup>

The act of guarding Augustus's death and possibly concealing his death for a time created another precedent that would be imitated with varying degrees of success by later Roman imperial women.

The order to kill Postumus was received by the commanding officer of the guards on Planasia the same day or shortly after Augustus died, and was carried out accordingly. When the officer reported his completion of the task to Tiberius, Tiberius denied having authorized the death of his rival. The officer was said to have credited the order to Augustus, with the added instructions to carry it out upon word of Augustus's death and to give a report of the event to the Senate. While Tacitus claims that the order was fabricated by a senator working with Livia to ensure Tiberius's ascension, both Tacitus and Suetonius note that Tiberius avoids discussing the matter with the Senate. This display of reluctance from Tiberius suggested some level of involvement with the order, however most historians have cleared Livia of responsibility in the death of Postumus, some going so far as to imply Tacitus knowingly recorded the false accusations against Livia, as Livia had never before acted in an executive fashion, outside of concealing Augustus's death until Tiberius arrived, and view these accusations in the same light as those against her concerning the deaths of Lucius and Gaius.<sup>81</sup> What also must be noted concerns Velleius's deliberately vague report on the death of Postumus, which was

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<sup>80</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.5.3-1.6.1, 2.39.1-2; Dio, *Roman History*, 56.30-31.1, 57.3.5; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 98.5-99.1, *Tiberius* 21.1-22; Velleius, *Roman History*, 2.112.7-123.1; R. A. Bauman, "Tanaquil-Livia and the Death of Augustus," *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 43, no. 2 (1994): 177-88.

<sup>81</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.6.1, 2.39.1-2; Velleius, *Roman History*, 2.112.7; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 22.; Barrett, *Livia*, 66-70. Syme, *Roman Revolution*, 341-342.

perhaps a calculated decision to avoid attracting Tiberius's notice, as Velleius is one of only a few ancient authors we have who lived and wrote during the Augustan principate.<sup>82</sup> Although Livia may have seized temporary control during Augustus's final days, it seems that she did not seek to enact policy during this time and instead used her momentary power to ensure her son Tiberius's claim on the principate. Though some ancient sources have implied Livia utilized this opportunity to eliminate Postumus, when compared with other accounts and the observations of modern historians, we are left instead with a Livia who may have known about the arrangement but was not the primary voice behind this decision, falling in line with Barrett's interpretation, and who instead sought to prevent political upheaval by ensuring a smooth transition between Augustus and Tiberius.

### **Livia Augusta**

In the accordance with Augustus's will his widow Livia was adopted into his imperial family, the Julian *gens*, and though her legal name became Julia Augusta both modern and ancient sources continued to call her Livia as well. Through this adoption Augustus sought to preserve his wife's personal authority and status after his death by making her legally his daughter and therefore a permanent member of the imperial family. Angelova states that, "the adoption of Livia strove to extend the honors of founders to the most important woman in Augustus's family," and that in adopting her, "he at last recognized Livia officially as his female counterpart, a descendant of the Julii—the Augusta to his Augustus."<sup>83</sup> Livia also inherited a third of Augustus's estate,

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<sup>82</sup> See Appendix B

<sup>83</sup> Angelova, *Sacred Founders*, 66.

while Tiberius was granted the other two thirds. Julia was to remain disinherited and barred from future burial in Augustus's family mausoleum, where his own ashes had been interred. Augustus had an elaborate state funeral, and was deified and inducted into the Roman pantheon as *Divus Augustus*.<sup>84</sup> Livia never remarried after Augustus died, possibly to maintain her independence and personal wealth, and her decision not to remarry was met with approval and viewed as befitting her personal prestige and the moral improvements she and Augustus had sought to bring to the nobles of Rome.<sup>85</sup> Her exclusion from the marriage market only served to further Livia's legacy, echoing the actions of the famous Roman matron Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi brothers, who had refused an offer of marriage from a foreign king during the waning days of the Republic so that she could stay and raise her sons as proper Romans. Although Livia's decision to remain loyal to the memory of Augustus was technically in defiance of a marriage law concerning Roman noblewomen, Livia, it seemed, perceived that marriage to anyone else would mean surrendering a certain level of power to her new husband. Livia's permanent state of widowhood after the death of Augustus also marked the beginning of how Tiberius differed from his step-father in managing the imperial family.

After Tiberius became emperor, he stopped paying to have food shipped to his former wife Julia the Elder on her island exile. Though Livia had reportedly interceded on Julia's behalf before by appealing to Augustus, she was unable or unwilling to do so this time which resulted in Julia's death by starvation or malnutrition later in the year 14 AD.<sup>86</sup> From the moment Tiberius assumed the principate, his relationship with Livia

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<sup>84</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.8.1; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 101.2; Dio, *Roman History*, 56.46.1; Velleius, *Roman History*, 2.75.3.

<sup>85</sup> Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 161.; Barrett, *Livia*, 76.

<sup>86</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.53.2; Dio, *Roman History*, 57.18.1; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 50.1; Barrett, *Livia*, 72.

began deteriorating, though to what degree and how quickly is open to discussion. Mother and son appeared to have been natural allies at the beginning of Tiberius's reign, unified against both the rumors of a mutiny in Pannonia and the ever present political factions vying for power and favor with the new leading man in Rome.<sup>87</sup> Tension between the two slowly began to build however, perhaps due to the precariousness of Livia's position within the new power structure coupled with Tiberius's rumored disapproval of women who held positions of power that then formed cracks that spread to irreparably damage their relationship.

The first of these stressors came in the form of the widely popular Germanicus, whom Tiberius dispatched by assigning to a diplomatic commission in the East in 18 AD. The ancient sources disagree on whether this was a display of favoritism towards Germanicus or was instead a strategic decision that manufactured the removal of his popular rival from Rome. The latter explanation, offered by Tacitus, is plausible and explained Tiberius's actions as a direct response to the fear that he would be usurped by Germanicus.<sup>88</sup> The second stressor emerges when examining Tiberius's methods for managing the women in the imperial family, and how he differed from Augustus. Augustus, left with few options, had used the women of the imperial family as political tools, often marrying and divorcing them from husbands as it suited his needs, and in general did not let an eligible woman within the family go without a suitable husband. Tiberius on the other hand more often refused their requests to get remarried following the death of a husband, perhaps preferring to narrow and restrict access to the potential

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<sup>87</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 74-76.

<sup>88</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.40.3-44, 1.49.5-51.9, 1.69.3, 2.41-2.42.1; Velleius, *Roman History*, 2.129.2; Barrett, *Livia*, 77-79.

imperial power these women could bestow. Before retiring to Capri, Tiberius denied proposals concerning both Agrippina Major and his brother's widow Julia Livia, called Livilla. Tiberius also disapproved of the growing independence of the women of the imperial family.

### **Agrippina Major**

Several of these instances as recorded by Tacitus involved Germanicus and Agrippina Major's legions abroad, wherein Agrippina stepped forward and took on important leadership roles when facing insubordinate soldiers or taking charge of the retreating forces and organizing aid for the wounded and stabilizing the disorganized legions. Tacitus used disparaging language regarding the actions of Agrippina during these instances, calling them, "womanly affronts," and claimed that, "nothing was left for commanders when a female visited the maniples...Already Agrippina was more influential with the armies than the legates, than leaders: the woman had suppressed a mutiny which the princeps's name had been unable to stop."<sup>89</sup> Tacitus goes on to state how these incidents burned in the mind of Tiberius and were kept stoked and ready by Sejanus so he could use the growing hatred to his own ends.<sup>90</sup> Barrett states that these events enraged Tiberius who heavily disapproved of women stepping into the role of commander or even legate. Despite Tiberius's stance on politically powerful women, historians note that since Tiberius had no wife at the time of his principate, Livia maintained her position as the leading woman in Rome. However, she was recast to fill the role of the scheming woman manipulating the emperor behind the throne by the

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<sup>89</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.33.2, 1.69-1.70.

<sup>90</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.69.3-1.70.

gossipmongers who tended to favor the archetype, in which Agrippina the Younger and Messalina are often categorized as well.<sup>91</sup>

Suetonius and Tacitus have suggested Tiberius resented the perception within Rome that Livia acted as his co-ruler, and that after learning of her efforts in directing the firefighters when a fire threatened her house in AD 16 as she would have while Augustus was alive, encouraging them as they suppressed the flames, Tiberius began to openly break with Livia.<sup>92</sup> Perowne concedes in his book *The Caesars' Wives* that Livia's firefighting actions were probably unnecessary as they did not create much impact on the actions of those present, and that they fell in the same vein as Agrippina's actions just a few years earlier.<sup>93</sup> These served to further Tiberius's animosity towards these prominent women making public names for themselves through such widely popular displays.<sup>94</sup> With Livia easy to monitor within Rome, Tiberius delegated the task of reining in her younger counterpart and ensuring her popular husband did not succumb to grandiose ideas while abroad.

In AD 17 Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso was appointed the governor of Syria, and Tacitus claimed that Piso's wife Plancina was a close friend of Livia's, with orders to keep an eye on and harass Germanicus and his wife Agrippina. Although Piso was alleged to have acted as Tiberius's eyes and ears on Germanicus, Germanicus's relative youth and impulsive personality would have warranted the placement of an older, more seasoned politician to temper and guide the young heir apparent. Piso's appointment

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<sup>91</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.42.1; Barrett, *Livia*, 77, 79-81, 147.

<sup>92</sup> Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 50-51.

<sup>93</sup> Perowne, *The Caesars' Wives*, 39.

<sup>94</sup> Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 51.1.



acted as a counter balance to the power Tiberius had given Germanicus, the political equivalent to the younger man's military command. Despite the official equality between the two, in reality Germanicus had the greater imperium which would have compounded the tension between the two even if Piso had only been appointed to provide advice and counsel.<sup>95</sup> In addition, Tiberius also had to contend with the volatile and widespread political factions in the greater Roman state, which included factions for Germanicus and Piso each in the East as well as within Rome itself that opposed his reign. These factions hampered Tiberius's ability to minimize the damage of the growing tension between his heir and his ally.<sup>96</sup>

After a series of escalating incidences occurred between Piso and Germanicus, the relationship between the two men reached a new level of animosity when Germanicus returned to Syria in AD 19 to find that Piso had countermanded his orders for the provinces and troops, and so Germanicus demanded that Piso be recalled to Rome. To his credit Piso did embark for Rome after only a brief delay, but before he arrived in Italy, Germanicus fell ill and publicly accused Piso of having him poisoned before dying on October 10, AD 19. The reported accusations that were levied against Piso and his wife Plancina by Germanicus and his allies were strengthened by the viciousness of his symptoms and his popularity.<sup>97</sup> In Tacitus's account of the events he is suspiciously vague in his wording as to whom Germanicus accused of poisoning him, causing Barrett to suspect Tacitus of deliberately obfuscating the record so as to indirectly blame Livia

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<sup>95</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.13.3, 2.43.2, 3.12.1-16.4.; Barrett, *Livia*, 82; Ferrero, *The Women of the Caesars*, 141-144.

<sup>96</sup> Ferrero, *The Women of the Caesars*, 143-144.

<sup>97</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.59-2.69.; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 52.2.; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.2.5.

alongside the more obviously implicated Plancina.<sup>98</sup> Others state the faction loyal to Germanicus, so close to destruction after his death, had begun circulating and elaborating on the poisoning rumors, turning Piso and Plancina from spies into assassins for Tiberius and Livia in an attempt to weaken their power.<sup>99</sup> Here again the theme of Livia as the scheming woman behind the throne, murdering potential rivals in order to place her own children in the best possible positions is revisited.

One outspoken believer was Germanicus's wife, Agrippina Major, so convinced that someone poisoned her husband some historians note that her vehement allegations began to persuade the populace of Rome that already adored her as well as her husband.<sup>100</sup> Tacitus in particular relates how Agrippina was lauded in Rome for upholding the old fashioned virtues of Rome in her grief and how she stood apart from all others, and that Livia and Tiberius were notably absent from the public ceremonies for Germanicus. Tacitus writes of how the soldiers of Rome adored her, saying, "Agrippina, whom they called the glory of the fatherland, the sole blood of Augustus, the one and only manifestation of ancient times."<sup>101</sup> True to form, Tacitus suggests that Livia and Tiberius felt their faces would give away their guilt in Germanicus's death if they were to attend, and that they prevented Germanicus's mother Antonia Minor from public appearances while they were abstaining.<sup>102</sup> This version of events has been refuted on multiple levels, both by Barrett as well as Julian Gonzales, who wrote for *The American Journal of Philology* on evidence of collaboration between them that was preserved on a

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<sup>98</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 84.

<sup>99</sup> Ferrero, *The Women of the Caesars*, 144-145.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 35-36.

<sup>100</sup> Ferrero, *The Women of the Caesars*, 148-149.

<sup>101</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.3-5.

<sup>102</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.82-88.3, 3.1-2.

bronze tablet. Although Agrippina may have challenged Livia's place as the publicly favored example of imperial Roman womanhood, it was far more distressing to Livia and Tiberius to have heard Agrippina called the last of Augustus's descendants.<sup>103</sup> In addition, the epigraphical account preserved on the *Tabula Siarensis* documents Tiberius conferring with Livia and Agrippina the Elder about which honors to publicly convey onto Germanicus. The bronze tablet was discovered in 1981 in Spain, and the evidence presented by Gonzales leads Barrett as well as Nikos Kokkinos, author of *Antonia Augusta: Portrait of a great Roman lady*, to suggest Tacitus deliberately disregarded this tablet displaying the coordination between Agrippina, Livia, and Tiberius in order to further his own bias against the principate.<sup>104</sup> In spite of this blatant alteration of the historical record, there must have been a significant amount of popular discontent about how Tiberius handled the tragedy for Tacitus to have taken such a harsh position, and suggests the emotionally distant and restrained nature of Tiberius was a possible cause for the discontent.<sup>105</sup> Livia's own generally reserved public persona may have contributed as well to Tacitus's chosen position.

Another point of contention concerned the rumor that Tiberius and Livia forbade Germanicus's mother, Antonia Minor, from public appearances and mourning, on the pretext that all three members of the family had been equally overcome with grief. Although Antonia could have been controlled by Tiberius and Livia for their own political and social ends, this opinion is most heavily advocated by Tacitus and a few

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<sup>103</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 85.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 28-29, 37.

<sup>104</sup> Julian Gonzalez, "Tacitus, Germanicus, Piso, and the Tabula Siarensis," *The American Journal of Philology* 120, no. 1 (1999): 128.; Nikos Kokkinos, *Antonia Augusta: Portrait of a great Roman lady*, (New York: Routledge Press, 1992), 23-24, 38-40.; Barrett, *Livia*, 85-86.

<sup>105</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 86-87.

supporters. Tacitus states he could find no mention of Antonia in the official records nor in any prior writings of the events.<sup>106</sup> Others have stated that the relationship between Livia and Antonia must have been affectionate, as the two shared interests in the success and growth of their own friend and client networks and in handling their personal properties independently.<sup>107</sup> However, the archaeological evidence uncovered in the *Tabulae Siarensis* refutes Tacitus's version of the events and suggests that there must have been an official account of Antonia's involvement for the tablet to even exist. The overwhelming conclusion holds that Antonia was publicly involved in the funeral activities for Germanicus.<sup>108</sup>

Having finally arrived in Rome in 20 AD, Piso was charged with the death of Germanicus and placed on trial.<sup>109</sup> Ferrero observes that Tiberius watched the trial of Piso with a certain apathy and malice, reasoning that any leniency Tiberius showed Piso would be construed as culpability in the crime.<sup>110</sup> Tiberius declined to oversee the trial personally and deferred it to the Senate to determine Piso's fate. Tacitus claimed that it was during the course of the trial that Piso's wife Plancina, who thus far had remained his ally and co-defendant, persuaded Livia to intervene and through Livia's extensive patron-client network the charges against her were dropped.<sup>111</sup> The Pisones, along with the Claudii, had allied with Augustus after his marriage to Livia, and Livia's ever-growing

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<sup>106</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.3.

<sup>107</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 57.12.6; Baldson, *Roman Women*, 95.

<sup>108</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.82-3.3.; Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula*, 5.1-6.; Kokkinos, *Antonia Augusta*, 23-24, 38-40.

<sup>109</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.75-81.

<sup>110</sup> Ferrero, *The Women of the Caesars*, 149-150.

<sup>111</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.15.

influence allowed her to help her client Plancina. Shortly after learning of his wife's abandonment, Piso committed suicide.

However, that did not end the trial and the Senate continued to investigate the allegations against Plancina and the adult sons of Piso. Tiberius himself testified on behalf of Plancina, and according to Tacitus cited his mother Livia's appeals for leniency, which then drew the ire of those who believed Livia participated in Germanicus's death and was now protecting her agent.<sup>112</sup> Modern historians conclude both that Livia's pleas were successful and that it was clearly Livia who was Plancina's ally, as shortly after Livia's death Plancina faced a new round of allegations in AD 33 on the death of Germanicus and she subsequently committed suicide.<sup>113</sup> The conclusion of the trial did not end the rumors that Livia and Tiberius were involved, and historians suggest the continued dissonance within the imperial family may have helped keep those rumors circulating.<sup>114</sup> The trial of Piso and his wife does provide clear evidence that Livia's power and influence was vast enough that her wishes within Rome would not go unfulfilled, at least as long as she remained alive.

In AD 22 Livia fell ill from an unknown disease, and her condition was dire enough that it drew Tiberius, who had begun his partial retirement already in Campania, back to her side in Rome. Tacitus implied that Tiberius returned only to maintain his public charade of love for his mother, and subsequently denied the Senate's attempt to grant her more honors upon her recovery.<sup>115</sup> The continued suspicion and informal

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<sup>112</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.17.

<sup>113</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 88-90.

<sup>114</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 90-91.

<sup>115</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.64.

accusations by Agrippina and her allies of his role in the death of Germanicus were in part responsible for having driven Tiberius away from Rome, rather than staying to compete against his mother for influence amidst growing interfamilial conflicts exacerbated by Sejanus, as illustrated by Dio and Suetonius.<sup>116</sup> This growing tension is also demonstrated in how the two leading ladies of the imperial family conducted themselves and their affairs. Shotter summarizes the difference best in his article, stating, “The rumours and suspicions frequently related regarding Livia's behaviour show that she worked 'traditionally' (and no less effectively) from behind the scenes; Agrippina, however, evidently required visibility and preferred a high public profile.”<sup>117</sup> The fine line that Tiberius walked between not openly disagreeing with his mother while at the same time not lauding her with praise and honors suggests that he feared challenging Livia directly for control over Rome and that he may have resented her high level of *dignitas*, or the personal dignity and prestige she possessed.

In AD 23 Tiberius's son Drusus Caesar died, depriving Tiberius of his official heir. Tiberius mourned the loss of his trueborn son, and despite earlier attention given to the older sons of Germanicus, Tiberius did not name either as his new heir. Tiberius retired from Rome in AD 26, preferring life on his villa in Capri. A plethora of possible reasons for Tiberius' withdrawal from Rome can be found in the ancient sources, from his very appearance to the growing influence of Tiberius's advisor Sejanus, or perhaps even to indulge in cruel and twisted acts without close scrutiny, and lastly his fragmented relationship with Livia. The ancient sources offer a variety of ways in which Livia was

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<sup>116</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.31.2, 64.1, 4.57.3; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 51.1; Dio, *Roman History*, 57.12.6. ; Barrett, *Livia*, 96-98.

<sup>117</sup> David C. A. Shotter, “Agrippina the Elder: A Woman in a Man's World,” *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 49, H. 4, (2000), 345.

blamed for Tiberius's retreat: she had an intolerable passion for power, an overwhelming energy concerning domestic issues, or that she even had preserved letters from Augustus that were critical of Tiberius that she would hold over his head.<sup>118</sup> The latter is difficult to disprove without Augustus's original letters, and the conclusions that are drawn rely on little more than speculation and can offer no verifiable proof. The ancient sources also offer another cause for Tiberius's withdrawal, that of his prefect Sejanus, who urged him to escape the demands of Rome and thereby leave the daily tasks to Sejanus instead. It is difficult to determine the deciding factor in Tiberius's decision, and the ancient sources' speculation can only offer potential causes. Barrett summarizes that, "In many ways the departure seems psychologically sound, the action of a man who found political life thoroughly distasteful yet who throughout his life had demonstrated an inability to resist the appeal of power. As an absentee emperor he could enjoy the best of both worlds."<sup>119</sup> In any case Livia herself it seems was not the main cause of Tiberius's retreat from Rome, though there was little affection left in their relationship at this point.<sup>120</sup>

There is little evidence presented by any of the ancient sources that suggests Livia held any real distain for Agrippina, and seems instead to exonerate her from direct involvement in the imperial feuding that had been instigated by Sejanus and resulted in the demise of many of Tiberius's remaining relatives. Even Tacitus begrudgingly admitted that Livia's presence in Rome gave Agrippina and her family some protection from Sejanus and later Tiberius.<sup>121</sup> After Agrippina was placed under house arrest in AD

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<sup>118</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.31.2, 3.64.1, 4.57.3.; Dio, *Roman History*, 57.12.6.; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 51.1.

<sup>119</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 97.

<sup>120</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 97-98.

<sup>121</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 5.3.1.; Barrett, *Livia*, 98; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 36-37.

27 by Sejanus, Livia took in her youngest son Gaius and possibly his sisters Drusilla, Agrippina Minor, and Livilla in order to shield them from Sejanus's agents.

### **Death of Livia**

Unfortunately, the protection she afforded them was all too brief, and two years later in AD 29 Livia again fell ill to an unknown disease and this time succumbed, dying on September 28 at the age of 86. Livia's death would result in fatal consequences for Agrippina Major and her elder sons Nero and Drusus.<sup>122</sup> The ancient authors related how Tiberius refused to come to his mother's deathbed, claiming a heavy workload prevented him from attending. Instead he sent young Gaius to lead the modest funeral orations in her honor.<sup>123</sup> Tiberius then proceeded to minimize the honors the Senate sought to award her, including denying her an imperial cult and ignoring her last will. Tacitus, Suetonius, and Barrett all conclude that Livia's final illness and death resulted in a break in Tiberius's previously deferential treatment that then spiraled quickly into a despotic regime, retreating to his lair on the island of Capri.<sup>124</sup> Regardless of Tiberius's intent, the contrast between Livia and Octavia's state funerals was a drastic insult.<sup>125</sup> The suggestion that Livia desired a modest funeral for herself does not line up with the evolution her public persona had undergone during her life and the preeminent position she occupied at the time of her death.

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<sup>122</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 99, 221.

<sup>123</sup> Though his formal name was Gaius Caesar, he is more commonly known as Caligula, a childhood nickname that stuck with him throughout history. I will refer to him as Gaius. See Appendix A, formatted in deference to the popularity of the name Caligula and Suetonius's own use of the name.

<sup>124</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 5.1.3-3.3.; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 51.2.

<sup>125</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 216.



Tiberius was accused by Tacitus of targeting Livia's friends and allies after her death, citing the fate of Plancina after she lost her biggest supporter in Rome, and the accusation of *maiestas*, or sacrilege, he made against a male protégé of Livia's who had taunted Tiberius previously, that now resulted in the deaths of both the man and his wife.<sup>126</sup> Dio reports that the Senate, in an unprecedented and singularly unique demonstration of their appreciation of Livia and her contributions to Rome, voted for an arch to be constructed in her honor despite Tiberius declining any additional religious honors for his mother.<sup>127</sup> Livia was the sole woman granted the honor of a posthumous arch, and is among just a small number of people who received such a distinction from the Senate, although her arch was never physically constructed due to interference from Tiberius.<sup>128</sup> This bestowing of a posthumous arch in her honor is perhaps the highest honor given to Livia in that it was the only honor she was granted that was not made into a precedent, further highlighting its significance.

It would be some time before the projects and honors granted to Livia by the Senate after her death were given their proper respect, and Rome suffered under two harsh rulers before Livia was fully honored. As Livia's grandson by Drusus and Antonia, historians believe Claudius sought to strengthen his control over the principate by venerating his grandmother and granting her an imperial cult, including her statue in the Temple of Augustus, and it became custom to invoke her name whenever a woman took an oath.<sup>129</sup> In AD 41, the year that would have been Livia's hundredth birthday, she was at last consecrated and stood as a deity beside Augustus, a precedent that would be

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<sup>126</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 220-221.

<sup>127</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 58.2.

<sup>128</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 173, 218.

<sup>129</sup> Barrett, *Livia*, 222.

adopted by several successors to the principate of Rome as a way to solidify their own reigns by tracing them back to that of the original *imperator*, and to honor and protect their own wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters. The presence Livia held within Roman society was one she had carefully crafted that allowed her to achieve her own goals, which included supporting Augustus's moral reforms by deliberately shaping her public persona to reflect these goals, while at the same time distinguishing herself from the traditional Roman matrons of the Republic. Livia's influence on the perception of the proper place of a woman in the imperial period allowed for the role of women to continue to grow.

### III. ANTONIA MINOR, AGRIPPINA MAJOR, AND LIVILLA

#### Antonia Minor

After the death of Livia, the imperial family was left to an increasingly paranoid and withdrawn Tiberius and the growing power of Sejanus. Within the imperial family Antonia Minor, the widow of Tiberius's son Drusus, appears to have taken on the role of matriarch. As the daughter of Mark Antony and Octavia, Antonia Minor represented both the unification of two of the Triumvirs bloodlines and through her marriage to Drusus in 16 BC, the elder son of Livia and her first husband Tiberius Claudius Nero, represented a fertile union between Livia and Augustus's bloodlines as well. Her children Germanicus, Julia Livilla, and Claudius would in turn each be in a position to take control of the principate, though only the most unlikely had succeeded. Antonia would become the mother of the later Julio-Claudian emperors: the direct mother to one, grandmother to another and great-grandmother to the last. After her husband Drusus's death in 9 BC she refused to remarry despite Augustus's urging – he preferred to have all the women in the imperial family married to political allies. In AD 29 Antonia took on the care of her surviving grandchildren by her son Germanicus and Agrippina Major, the future emperor Gaius and his sisters Drusilla, Agrippina, and Livilla.<sup>130</sup>

Despite the protection afforded to her youngest children, Agrippina Major could not escape the final stages of Sejanus's systematic removal of her and her elder sons from the political field. She had been placed under house arrest at her villa in AD 27, but Sejanus waited until after Livia's death to escalate to open attacks on members of the

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<sup>130</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.64.-65.; Dio, *Roman History*, 44.5.3, 46.38.52.

imperial family.<sup>131</sup> A letter was reportedly delivered to the Senate containing a false charge against her in AD 29 and she was subsequently banished to Pandateria, the same island that had been the final prison for her mother Julia. At the same time charges were also leveled against her eldest son Nero, who was exiled to the island of Pontia, and in AD 31 he was either urged to commit suicide or killed on Sejanus's orders. In AD 30 Sejanus repeated the exercise with Drusus, her second eldest son, who was imprisoned within Rome until his death in AD 33.<sup>132</sup> Agrippina's remaining son, Gaius, was sent to live with his uncle Tiberius. Some historians, such as Perowne, suggest that Gaius was too public to be removed as easily as his brothers and mother had been. He was known and loved by both the people of Rome and the soldiers after growing up within their camps as a pseudo-mascot complete with a miniature uniform.<sup>133</sup> Gaius was viewed as the living legacy of his equally popular father Germanicus, thereby ensuring his survival.

### **Death of Agrippina Major**

His mother Agrippina, however, would not survive to see her son acclaimed as *imperator*. Ancient sources tell us that during her confinement, she attempted to starve herself to death, was force fed, and was beaten by a centurion so badly she lost an eye. Though most sources agree on the cause of her death in AD 33 as starvation, they disagree as to whether it was a deliberate choice or deprivation.<sup>134</sup> Agrippina may have held on to hope of release after Sejanus's plot was exposed and he was executed, and that

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<sup>131</sup> Barrett, *Agrippina*, 43-44.

<sup>132</sup> Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 52.3-54.2.; Tacitus, *Annals*, 6.1-25.

<sup>133</sup> Perowne, *The Caesars' Wives*, 53-54.;

<sup>134</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 58.11.7.; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 53.1-54.; Tacitus, *Annals*, 5.3-6.25.

Tiberius or Antonia Minor through him would grant her clemency, only to be disappointed.<sup>135</sup>

### Death of Livilla

In AD 31, Antonia Minor uncovered a plot involving Sejanus and her own daughter Claudia Livia Julia, known as Livilla. The pair had conspired to seize control of the principate by killing Tiberius and his heir, Gaius, the future emperor more commonly known by his nickname Caligula. Antonia Minor brought forth evidence that implicated Livilla in her husband Drusus's death in AD 23, having apparently poisoned him in order to eliminate him as a rival for Sejanus's chance at the principate, according to Suetonius, Tacitus, and Dio.<sup>136</sup> When analyzing Tacitus's portrayal of the events, modern historian Patrick Sinclair writes, "Fundamental to Tacitus' portrayal is the fact that Livi[ll]a's adultery with Sejanus and her subsequent complicity in his plans to murder her husband, Tiberius' son Drusus, are seen by the historian as a complete abdication of her moral responsibilities."<sup>137</sup> Sinclair observes that these moral responsibilities were not at the level of those expected of Livia or Antonia, but rather the responsibilities expected of a member of the imperial family, which is to behave in a manner above reproach.<sup>138</sup> When Tiberius was confronted with the evidence provided by Antonia, he had Sejanus denounced in the Senate and executed, then purged Rome of Sejanus's family and

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<sup>135</sup> Hawley, R. and B. Levick, eds, *Women in Antiquity: New Assessments*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 188.; Balsdon, *Roman Women*, 96.; Perowne, *The Caesars' Wives*, 53.

<sup>136</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 57.22.1-4; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 62.1.; Tacitus, *Annals*, 4.3.

<sup>137</sup> Sinclair, P., "Tacitus' Presentation of Livia Julia, Wife of Tiberius' son Drusus," *The American Journal of Philology* 111, N. 2, (1990), 256.

<sup>138</sup> Sinclair, "Tacitus' Presentation of Livia Julia," *The American Journal of Philology*, (1990), 256.

friends. Livilla was surrendered to the care of her formidable mother, who according to Dio had her ambitious daughter locked in her room until she starved to death.<sup>139</sup>

### **Antonia and Tiberius**

Antonia outwitting Sejanus changed her status in the imperial house, evidenced by the subsequent respect with which Tiberius treated her afterwards.<sup>140</sup> When Antonia's role in the downfall of Sejanus is examined, a range of conclusions as to her level of responsibility have been presented. Nichols and Balsdon, drawing on accounts by Dio and Suetonius, conclude she would have been given official recognition by the Senate alongside Tiberius for saving the principate and the heir Gaius, and for having become the guardian of Gaius and his three sisters. However, her importance may have been deliberately emphasized by authors of the Claudian and Flavian eras, who could have drawn more significance from an official declaration thanking Antonia and Tiberius for preserving the lives of Gaius and his sisters, as suggested by Nichols.<sup>141</sup> Others argue that Antonia's prominence in the undoing of Sejanus would explain her presence in certain archaeological sites that date from the time period, and would reflect the open knowledge of her prominence in Rome and the high regard in which Tiberius reportedly held her.<sup>142</sup> In acting to thwart Sejanus, despite the lethal implication of her own daughter, Antonia had assumed the mantle that had been left vacant after Livia's death.

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<sup>139</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 58.11.7

<sup>140</sup> Dio, *Roman History*, 58.11.7-65.14.1.; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.6.1-18.6.10.; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 61.1-62.1, 65.1-66.; Tacitus, *Annals*, 6.1-6.2.;

<sup>141</sup> John Nicols, "Antonia and Sejanus," *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 24, H.1 (1975): 57-58.; Balsdon, *Roman Women*, 96.

<sup>142</sup> Kokkinos, *Antonia Augusta*, 25, 42, 91-93, 95, 128.

Two years after the death of his mother Agrippina, Gaius was named heir alongside his cousin Tiberius Gemellus, the son of emperor Tiberius's only child Drusus. Gaius ascended to the principate after the death of Tiberius in AD 37. Some ancient authors have alleged Gaius was involved with Tiberius's death, suggesting poisoning and pillow smothering as possible causes other than the old age that was reported by Gaius himself during the funeral oration.<sup>143</sup> After being welcomed into Rome with open arms and formally accepting the principate, Gaius then began restoring and elevating the women of the imperial family. He had his mother's body and what remained of his brothers' ashes interred in the Mausoleum of Augustus. Gaius also conveyed onto his grandmother Antonia Minor all the honors and privileges that had previously been given to Livia, including the title of Augusta that she reportedly declined.<sup>144</sup> Gaius it seemed decided to elevate Antonia to a similar level of importance and prestige that Livia had once held within the imperial court.

### **Death of Antonia Minor**

Accounts differ as to why, however all conclude that after six months into his reign, Gaius's temperament had changed drastically. He began spurning the advice of his recently honored grandmother Antonia and was suspected of beheading his cousin, the former co-heir and current heir apparent Tiberius Gemellus. Upon hearing of Gaius's rumored involvement, Antonia was reported to have been incensed, as she was grandmother to both. Antonia seemed to perceive the oncoming chaos of Gaius's brief reign, and reportedly committed suicide in the fall of AD 37 to escape both him and the

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<sup>143</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 13.1-15. ; Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.53.; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.6.9

<sup>144</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 15-15.3.; Dio, *Roman History*, 59.3.4.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 60. Kokkinos, *Antonia Augusta*, 27-28.

anticipated cruelty emperors had begun to show towards women of the imperial family who had outlived their usefulness, as demonstrated by Tiberius's treatment of Agrippina Major. Conflicting reports from Dio and Suetonius declared Gaius was Antonia's killer, claiming respectively that he had forced her to kill herself or even poisoned her himself after growing weary of her outspoken criticisms.<sup>145</sup> Setting aside the precise cause of Antonia's death, her passing marked the start of another period of vacancy for the role of imperial matriarch.

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<sup>145</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 16.1-18, 23.1-24.; Dio, *Roman History*, 59.1-59.3; Kokkinos, *Antonia Augusta*, 27-28, 160.



#### IV. JULIA DRUSILLA, AGRIPPINA MINOR, AND JULIA LIVILLA

##### Julia Drusilla

Gaius was not married when he assumed the principate in AD 37, so the traditional duties typically managed by the wife of the principate fell to his three younger sisters; Julia Drusilla, Agrippina Minor, and Julia Livilla. The trio were raised to a status that was elevated above that previously occupied by former sisters of the princeps. They had received the privileges of a Vestal Virgin, inclusion in the sacred oaths of loyalty sworn yearly to the principate, and been featured on the coinage produced during Gaius's reign.<sup>146</sup> Agrippina, Drusilla, and Livilla had surpassed the level of importance achieved by their imperial predecessors when they were added to the sacred oaths.<sup>147</sup> The three sisters now embodied the weight and significance of the principate in tandem with their brother.

Prior to Gaius's principate, each sister had been married; first was Agrippina to Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus in AD 28, followed by Livilla's marriage to Marcus Vinicius and Drusilla's to Lucius Cassius Longinus in AD 33. After Gaius became emperor, he dissolved Drusilla's marriage to Longinus in order to have her married to his friend Marcus Aemilius Lepidus in AD 37.<sup>148</sup> Gaius had also altered his will during his dire illness in AD 37, naming Drusilla as his legal heir. This unique choice, to place the hopes of the empire as well as the future line of succession under the control of his sister, raises several intriguing inquiries as to his decision. One possible explanation is that

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<sup>146</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 15.3, 23.1-24.

<sup>147</sup> Judith Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina: Constructions of Female Power in the Early Roman Empire*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11.

<sup>148</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 16.1-18, 23.1-24.2.; Dio, *Roman History*, 59.11.1-59.13, 59.22.

Gaius feared he would succumb to his illness and therefore wanted to entrust the empire to his sister and friend, and that their children would be the eventual inheritors and would continue the bloodline. This falls in line with Gaius having Drusilla remarried to his friend, suggesting he had wanted Lepidus included in his long term dynastic plans.<sup>149</sup> The other explanation relies on Gaius's favoritism towards Drusilla, noting that he chose her out of all his sisters to be named as the benefactor in his will.<sup>150</sup> Gaius had apparently trusted Drusilla's husband Lepidus over the husbands of his other sisters, despite the fact that Agrippina was pregnant at the time and could have provided a suitable heir more quickly.

### **Diva Drusilla**

This preventative measure was never utilized, as Gaius recovered from his illness only to lose his seemingly favorite sister Drusilla to the disease in AD 38. He is said to have mourned her death deeply, and there were rumors reported by Suetonius and Dio, of an incestuous relationship between Gaius and all three of his sisters, though with Drusilla in particular.<sup>151</sup> However, accusations of sexual impropriety and deviancy are well known slanders commonly voiced by political adversaries, and the lack of mention by the more contemporary sources, along with Tacitus's silence on such an easy target, advances the conclusion that these are fabrications. Gaius buried Drusilla with all the ceremony that had come to be expected of an Augusta, had the Senate deify her as "Diva Drusilla," a

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<sup>149</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 24.1-2; Dio, *Roman History*, 59.11.1, 59.22.6-7.; Susan Wood, "Diva Drusilla Panthea and the Sisters of Caligula," *American Journal of Archaeology* 99 (1995): 457-460.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 59-61.

<sup>150</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 24.1-2; Dio, *Roman History*, 59.11.1, 59.22.6-7.

<sup>151</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 24.1-3.; Dio, *Roman History*, 59.11.1, 59.22.6-7; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 19.2-4.; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 11-12.

representation of Venus, and consecrated as “Panthea,” or goddess of all. This coupled with his own close brush with death seems to have altered Gaius fundamentally. He began acting erratically, eliminating anyone that could become a threat, and he no longer showed any favor toward his remaining sisters.<sup>152</sup>

Perhaps in response to the drastic change in behavior witnessed in Gaius, an infamous conspiracy was formed in AD 39 to remove him from the principate. The plot involved his remaining sisters Agrippina and Livilla, and the widower of Drusilla, Lepidus. Although little is known about the actual plot, at the trial Gaius had readily produced letters from his sisters detailing how they intended to kill him and that they were intimately involved with Lepidus, despite their own marriages. The adulterous charges against Agrippina and Livilla echoed the earlier charges that had been laid against Julia, the daughter of Augustus, only differing by openly associating the sisters with the treasonous accusations alongside their male compatriot.<sup>153</sup> The trial resulted in the execution of Lepidus and the exile of Agrippina and Livilla to the Pontine Islands, after being stripped of their wealth, titles, and property.<sup>154</sup>

It has been maintained by Suetonius and Dio that Gaius may have revived the treason trials of Tiberius with the intent of replenishing the imperial coffers he had so rapidly depleted, though some evidence suggests the coffers were never truly emptied, as his successor Claudius was able to spend lavishly early into his reign.<sup>155</sup> The revived

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<sup>152</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 23.1-24.2; Dio, *Roman History*, 59.11.1-59.12.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 65-66.; Wood, “Diva Drusilla and the Sisters of Caligula,” 459-460.

<sup>153</sup> Barrett, *Agrippina*, 67, 69, 71-72.; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 12-15.; Wood, “Diva Drusilla and the Sisters of Caligula,” 460-461.

<sup>154</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 28.; Tacitus, *Annals*, 14.2;

<sup>155</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 26-30.; Dio, *Roman History*, 59.28-29.

trials may have been a reflection of Gaius's growing mental instability and paranoia, and the reports on Gaius's increasingly erratic behavior were wide and varied. These included stealing away the wife of the man he had invited over for dinner, only to return and boast about sleeping with her, causing a food shortage in Rome after commandeering the grain vessels to build a floating bridge, demanding that he be worshipped as a living god, and placing his statue in the Temple of Jerusalem.<sup>156</sup> These accounts are repeated and embellished by our later sources, with reports of incestuous relations between Gaius and his sisters, including that he prostituted them out to his friends and political allies, and the infamous tale that Gaius considered making his own horse a consul but settled for a priesthood.<sup>157</sup> As mentioned earlier, these accusations are both unconfirmed by contemporary sources and were among the commonly used slanders in political propaganda campaigns in Rome, and must therefore be treated with suspicion if not completely disregarded.<sup>158</sup>

### **Milonia Caesonia**

Around the same time, Gaius became involved with a woman by the name of Milonia Caesonia and married her in late AD 39 or early 40, though she was an unpopular choice for the emperor's wife. Caesonia was reportedly a well-suited match for Gaius temperamentally, and was said to have possessed an equal level of extravagance and wantonness to match his own.<sup>159</sup> These accusations are commonly deployed when writers of the following regime seek to distance their contemporaries from those of the

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<sup>156</sup> Seneca, *Moral Essays*, De Ira xviii.1; De Constantia vxiii.1.

<sup>157</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 55.; Dio, *Roman History*, 59.14-28.;

<sup>158</sup> Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 12.

<sup>159</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 25-33, Dio, *Roman History*, 59.23-28.

earlier one, and must therefore be viewed with a healthy dose of skepticism. As it was with his three sisters, similar accounts of sexual perversion are reported concerning Gaius's wife, which stated she was paraded in front of the troops by Gaius and displayed nude before certain friends for his amusement. Caesonia was pregnant when they married, giving birth only a month afterwards, if not the same day, to Gaius's only legitimate child, a daughter he named Julia Drusilla after his beloved sister.<sup>160</sup> Gaius's marriage to Caesonia has been suggested by Susan Wood as serving his own aims of ensuring that his succession and personal lineage were assured, and through marriage to the mother of his daughter, legitimizing their claims to the principate and his own bloodline.<sup>161</sup> After Agrippina's husband died in AD 40, her only son Lucius remained in Rome to be raised by his paternal aunt Domitia Lepida the Younger while Agrippina lived in exile.

In late January of AD 41, Gaius's enemies within the Senate and greater Rome had at last acted on a plot to free themselves from this erratic tyrant, with the hope of restoring the Senate to its former republican powers. Gaius was assassinated by the Praetorian Guard, led by Cassius Chaerea, who then sent a detachment to eliminate the two remaining claimants to the principate by virtue of their relationship to Gaius: Caesonia and his infant daughter Drusilla. Caesonia was said to have stoically offered her throat, overcome with grief for her husband, while Drusilla died by having her head smashed against the wall. Although the senators who had participated in the conspiracy apparently had designs to restore the power of the Senate, the Praetorian Guard quickly

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<sup>160</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 25-33.; Dio, *Roman History*, 59.23-28.; Juvenal, *The Satires*, 6.615-620.; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 19.2-4.

<sup>161</sup> Wood, "Diva Drusilla and the Sisters of Caligula," 460.

ended that impossible dream by hailing the only remaining male from the imperial family, Tiberius Claudius Nero, as emperor. Claudius was the brother of Germanicus, the popular former heir of Augustus, and was uncle to Gaius and his remaining sisters Agrippina and Livilla.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 24; *Claudius*, 30-35.;

## V. AGRIPPINA MINOR, JULIA LIVILLA, AND VALERIA MESSALINA

### Restoration of Agrippina Minor and Julia Livilla

After being chosen as the next principate, Claudius rescinded the exiles of Agrippina and Livilla, and restored them to their rightful place within the imperial family as well as socio-economically. This unification of the remaining members of the imperial family acted as a way to strengthen Claudius's claim to the principate and emphasized his familial ties to Augustus.<sup>163</sup> Claudius further highlighted this connection by deifying his grandmother Livia as Diva Julia, and confirming the bestowment of the name Augusta on his mother Antonia. Claudius's decision to promote the standing of the imperial family by honoring those already beloved and restoring those who remained would become a theme in his principate. However, Gaius's two remaining sisters did not resume their duties as the premier imperial women, for Claudius was married to Valeria Messalina. Claudius had married Valeria Messalina in AD 38, and the couple had two children together, a daughter named Claudia Octavia in early AD 40, and the following year a son named after his father that was subsequently dubbed Britannicus after Claudius's successful campaign in AD 43-44.<sup>164</sup>

Claudius's early life within the imperial family not only sheltered him from the untimely deaths experienced by his fellow members, but also furthered the impression that Claudius would be a poor ruler, weak and easily manipulated if he could even handle the stress of politics. These suspicions were furthered by his physical deformities as

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<sup>163</sup> Ginsberg, *Remembering Agrippina*, 15-17.; Hawley & Levick, *Women in Antiquity*, 184-185.; Mullens, "The Women of the Caesars," 60-62.

<sup>164</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 24; *Claudius*, 30-35.

reported by Dio and Suetonius, that of a weak neck, a limp, and a tendency to drool when eating or speaking, though again the sources for these remain as ambiguously trustworthy as always when referring to the rulers of the previous era.<sup>165</sup> Those shortcomings to some extent opened him up to manipulation by the more powerful personalities that were around him, as well as criticism for succumbing to those manipulations.<sup>166</sup>

### **Death of Julia Livilla**

In the first few years of Claudius's reign, he succeeded in expanding Rome's territory and reach, incorporating Britain as a province in AD 44, as well as the annexation of Thrace and Mauritania two years later. However, Claudius's reputation in Rome was steadily declining, in part due to his own wife's promiscuous affairs and intrigues, one of which was aimed at the recently restored Livilla. In late AD 41, Livilla was said to have fallen out of favor with Messalina, resulting in accusations of treason and adultery being levied against her and her lover, the historian Seneca. Livilla was exiled again, this time to the same island that had held her mother, Pandateria, where she would die via starvation ostensibly under the orders of her uncle Claudius who had her exiled without the opportunity for her to defend herself or stand trial. She was executed at the same time as her cousin Livia Julia, the daughter of Julia Livilla who was starved to death by her mother Antonia Minor.<sup>167</sup>

Unlike her erstwhile sister, the restored Agrippina did not attract the attention of Messalina as she began accruing power and increasing her own social standing by

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<sup>165</sup> Suetonius, *Claudius*, 30-31.; Dio, *Roman History*, 60.2.2.

<sup>166</sup> Suetonius, *Claudius*, 29-40.; Dio, *Roman History*, 60.2-8.; Ramsay MacMullen, "Women in Public in the Roman Empire," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 28 (1980), 216.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 88-89.

<sup>167</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 24.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 93, 99.



seeking a new husband. Agrippina's second marriage was to Gaius Sallustius Passienus Crispus, who was a wealthy and older Roman nobleman. Agrippina was accused of poisoning Crispus, and as the primary beneficiary in Crispus' will his death left her and her son much better off, though this accusation falls in line with the host of allegations commonly levied against powerful women.<sup>168</sup> There is also the lack of supporting evidence within the sources for Agrippina having a proclivity for poisonings, and from the more widely known accusations concerning her involvement with Claudius's death there are none who link the two charges.

### **Valeria Messalina**

While Claudius worked to improve Rome's standing, his wife's affairs were steadily growing in their audacity. Several ancient sources offer various accounts of Messalina's scandalous and sexually voracious activities. They also suggest that Claudius was easily lead around by her and that he was unaware of her numerous affairs.<sup>169</sup> Pliny the Elder reports a story that Messalina supposedly once competed against a prostitute and won, with a score of 25 partners in 24 hours, and Juvenal tells us that Messalina used to work in secret all night in a brothel under the name She-Wolf.<sup>170</sup> These disparaging activities culminated in her openly marrying her latest suitor, Senator Gaius Silius in AD 48 while Claudius was away from Rome. When Claudius learned of the incident, and that Messalina had all but had him supplanted by marrying Silius in an attempt to make him Emperor, his reaction was muted. Claudius's decision to offer his wife a second chance was perceived as weak, and so one of his officers instead ordered her execution. Upon

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<sup>168</sup> Suetonius, *Galba*, 11-14.; Ginsberg, *Remembering Agrippina*, 16-17.

<sup>169</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 11.10.; Dio, *Roman History*, 61.31; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 88, 90.

<sup>170</sup> Pliny, *Natural History*, 10.63.; Juvenal, *Satires*, 6.166-185.

hearing of Messalina's death, Claudius is said not to have reacted much at all, merely asked for more wine.<sup>171</sup> In Fagan's analysis of Messalina's downfall, he states that crediting Messalina's sexual exploits to her reportedly carnal nature was the wholesale belief of the ancient sources, but that in fact these could have been the machinations of a politically savvy woman using sex as one of several tools in her arsenal. To support this theory, he notes Messalina's deliberate elimination of both male and female rivals, displaying her political shrewdness and that the actions taken after her death such as stripping her name from public record falls more in line with someone accused of treason rather than adultery. He tentatively advances the theory that there was a conspiracy between the freedmen of Claudius to eliminate Messalina, but readily admits that with the sources as they are today this cannot be determined conclusively.<sup>172</sup>

The execution of Messalina opened up the imperial house to potential outside influences, dependent on who was chosen as the next wife of the Emperor. Several potential candidates were offered, but Claudius decided to prevent the dissemination of imperial power by marrying within the family. His choice of Agrippina Minor, however, was met with a mixture of reactions from the Roman public; marriage between an uncle and niece was an Egyptian and Hellenistic custom, not a Roman one, and was met with more than a little aversion. That aversion was coupled with the growing sentiment that the younger Agrippina had the same decidedly unfeminine political drive as her mother who had once stepped into the space reserved for military leaders when traveling with her husband on his campaigns by commending the soldiers, inspecting camps, and

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<sup>171</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 11.8-25. Barrett, *Agrippina*, 104-106.

<sup>172</sup> Garrett G. Fagan, "Messalina's Folly," *The Classical Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2002), 571-579.

distributing uniforms. This same spirit is evidenced within her daughter by the same name by her ever-upward marriages, steadily increasing wealth, and the ability to elude becoming ensnared in a messy scandal.<sup>173</sup>

### **Agrippina Minor in Ascendance**

Agrippina had displayed her influence over Claudius even before they married, and had an engagement between Claudius's daughter Claudia Octavia and a senator named Silanus dissolved in favor of a later marriage to her own son Nero, resulting in Silanus committing suicide the day Agrippina married Claudius. Despite the recalcitrant sentiment within Rome at the incestuous nature of the marriage and fear that Claudius would again be dominated by his wife, Claudius and Agrippina were wed on January 1 AD 49. Agrippina it seems wasted little time in acting within her new role and exercising her power and soon had her former rival for Claudius's affection, Lollia Paulina, accused of witchcraft, stripped of her property and wealth without a trial, and ordered to commit suicide after being exiled from Rome.<sup>174</sup> This complete removal of a former rival with the support of the emperor, wittingly or otherwise, is merely the first demonstration of the extent of Agrippina's influence over her new husband, or at the very least a deliberate attempt by Tacitus to showcase this influence.

Later in AD 49 Agrippina was granted the same formal honors as her husband by the captive Celtic King Caratacus during a public ceremony they both attended, and in AD 50 she was given the title Augusta, the third to ever receive it and only the second woman to be called Augusta while still living. That same year, Claudius had founded a

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<sup>173</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 7, 8.3, 55.; Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.1.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 109-110.

<sup>174</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.22; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 114, 120.; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 22-25.

Roman colony and named it *Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium*, after his wife Agrippina who had been born there, which is today known as Cologne.<sup>175</sup> This is the only Roman colony to have been named after a Roman woman. Agrippina had also persuaded her husband to adopt her son Lucius, legally becoming Nero Claudius Caesar Drusus Germanicus, who would become the Emperor Nero, and urged Claudius to select him over Claudius's own son Britannicus as heir apparent. Agrippina seemed determined to guarantee her son's future within the imperial court, and did so by slowly pushing Britannicus away from his father and the principate. She had arranged for Seneca to return from exile to tutor Nero in AD 50, only to then have Britannicus's tutor Sosibius executed the next year for confronting her about actions involving Claudius choosing her son over his own for the succession.<sup>176</sup>

In AD 51, Agrippina was granted the privileges of a Vestal Virgin, again, as she had been by her brother Gaius during his reign. That same year she was said to have appointed a new head of the Praetorian Guard, Sextus Afranius Burrus, who was loyal to her and her son, having removed the previous one for harboring loyalty to Messalina, according to Tacitus.<sup>177</sup> In this Agrippina extends her reach into the Roman cohorts, both stretching the bounds of imperial matriarch to their furthest limits and fulfilling the most commonly feared image of the stereotypical powerful woman controlling Rome through her feeble husband. In AD 53, Nero and Claudia Octavia were married, further solidifying Nero's place as the heir to the principate. The imperial marriage that tied her son ever more intimately with the line of succession was said by Barrett and Ginsberg to

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<sup>175</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.22-26.; Dio, *Roman History*, 61.32-34.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 130-131.; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 23-24, 26.

<sup>176</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.25-26.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 120-121, 127-128.

<sup>177</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.42, 13.2-3.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 138-139.; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 26-29.

have been Agrippina's ultimate goal and believed that this would secure her own future power.<sup>178</sup>

At this point it is purported that Claudius had begun to regret his marriage to Agrippina and adoption of Nero, and had started showing favor to his son Britannicus over Nero. When Claudius began making moves towards supplanting Nero with Britannicus as heir to the principate, Agrippina was alleged by Tacitus and Suetonius to have been driven to action, embodying to the fullest extent the politically minded woman scheming to obtain power for herself and her son.<sup>179</sup> In October of AD 54 Claudius was murdered, and the consensus of the ancient sources was that he had been poisoned by his wife Agrippina, though it was impossible to prove at the time.<sup>180</sup> One modern scholar in particular advances the hypothesis that Claudius was not deliberately poisoned by Agrippina or anyone else but died by ingesting a mushroom that was only poisonous to him due to a particular medical condition he may have had according to recent scholarship. Aveline's strongest argument in favor of this theory points to Agrippina's lack of preparation for Claudius's death, noting that had she been responsible she would have had Nero in Rome ready to assume the principate.<sup>181</sup> While this theory does have some merit, the reliance on a modern diagnosis given to Claudius which cannot be verified, on top of correctly identifying the type of mushroom that would have been safe for others but not for Claudius to eat with this medical condition, does not bear weight when faced with the overwhelming body of ancient sources that suggest a simpler answer

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<sup>178</sup> Barrett, *Agrippina*, 122-124.; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 26.

<sup>179</sup> Barrett, *Agrippina*, 157-158, 162-165.; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 29-31.

<sup>180</sup> Suetonius, *Claudius*, 43. 44.; Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.64, 66-67.; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.8.1-3.; Dio, *Roman History*, 60.34.; Pliny, *Natural History*, 2.25, 11.37.115, 22.46.1-3.

<sup>181</sup> John Aveline, "The Death of Claudius," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 53, H 4, (2004), 471-474.

in Agrippina. In killing Claudius before he could officially alter his will and line of succession, Agrippina had preserved her son Nero's claim to the principate.

Agrippina then orchestrated a similar ruse to the one used by Livia after the death of Augustus, and concealed the death of Claudius until she could be certain Nero had the right amount of support, as well as enough allies within the Senate and the city of Rome itself to ascend to the principate. She prevented anyone from getting close to Claudius's body, perhaps to conceal her poisoning attempts or to prevent Britannicus from being acclaimed before Nero could arrive, as Tacitus suggests.<sup>182</sup> Agrippina issued reports on his improving health to boost morale, and may have even had Claudius's body covered with tinctures and blankets to further the ruse, until Nero was publicly presented with the news of the emperor's death and his ascendance to the principate was easily accepted.<sup>183</sup>

When Nero became the emperor, he at first behaved with all the expected decorum and reverence, holding funerary games for his predecessor and appointing his mother Agrippina the head priestess of the cult of the now deified Claudius.<sup>184</sup> Agrippina's power and control of Rome now exceeded all prior limits as she was granted further privileges such as being allowed to attend Senate meetings and listen in from behind a curtain. She was also granted two lictors that acted as bodyguards and accompanied her everywhere.<sup>185</sup> De la Bédoyère suspects that the deference Nero showed his mother at the onset of his regime was merely to placate her and lull her into a false

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<sup>182</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.66–69.

<sup>183</sup> Suetonius, *Claudius*, 44–45.; Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.64, 66–69.; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.8.1–3.; Dio, *Roman History*, 60.34.; Pliny, *Natural History*, 2.25, 11.37.115, 22.46.1–3.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 170, 172.; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 31–33.

<sup>184</sup> Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 33–38.

<sup>185</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.25–26.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 179, 181; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 38–39.

sense of security in her hold over her son. “Her possession of power was now blatantly displayed. More significantly, she was allowed to present herself this way, the purpose perhaps being to give her enough rope to hang herself.”<sup>186</sup> Agrippina appeared to have an unprecedented level of power and control over Rome and the principate through her son, at least for the first few months of his reign in which she could control and manage Nero.

### **Agrippina Minor’s Descent**

The split between mother and son was reportedly caused by an affair Nero had been carrying on with a freedwoman named Claudia Acte, to the immense and open displeasure of Agrippina. After failing to separate Nero from his lover, Agrippina began publicly supporting Britannicus and his political faction’s bid for the principate. Agrippina’s support of Britannicus may be explained in part by the growing rift caused by Claudia Acte, but may also have been an act of self-defense, having acutely noted how fickle her son’s favor could be and the fragile nature of her own power without his support.<sup>187</sup> Agrippina echoed the actions of her own mother, leading a faction and seeking a proper nominee to the principate that she could elevate and would elevate her in turn. In addition, as Agrippina’s own influence and control over Nero waned, Seneca and Burrus became Nero’s closest advisors and strongest influences, turning against the very woman who had placed them within Nero’s inner circle.<sup>188</sup> In retaliation for his mother’s betrayal, Nero had Britannicus poisoned at a banquet in front of her and Claudia

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<sup>186</sup> Bédoyère, *Domina*, 228.

<sup>187</sup> Barrett, *Agrippina*, 198-199.; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 40-41.

<sup>188</sup> Barrett, *Agrippina*, 201-202.; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 39-41.

Octavia in AD 55, removing the potential threat and Agrippina's next best chance at ruling through a young *princeps*.<sup>189</sup>

By AD 57, the relationship between mother and son seemed irreparable, as Agrippina was forced to leave the palace in Rome that year, and was deprived of her earlier honors and privileges as well as her bodyguards. Barrett and Ginsberg suggest Agrippina's removal from the imperial house was due to her growing relationship with Claudia Octavia, who was still Nero's legal wife, despite his numerous affairs, and who would therefore have the only legally recognized sons of Nero.<sup>190</sup> Had Agrippina succeeded in engineering a political coup against Nero with Claudia Octavia, the daughter of the previous emperor and wife of the current emperor, any co-conspirator would have had a serious claim to the principate by marrying her with the support of Agrippina. Despite the growing influence of Seneca and Burrus, and her forced retreat from Rome, Agrippina remained popular and influential in her own right, and continued to employ a vast network of clients.

### **Death of Agrippina Minor**

In AD 59, Nero had decided to rid himself of his powerful mother through an elaborate scheme after becoming involved with a woman named Poppaea Sabina, though some sources blame Agrippina's continued intrusion into Nero's life as the reason he sought to remove her permanently. When considered with the fact that Poppaea was not yet pregnant and did not marry Nero until three years later when she was pregnant, the theory that Agrippina was simply too dangerous a political opponent to be left alive holds

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<sup>189</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 13.12-17.; Suetonius, *Nero*, 28.1; Dio, *Roman History*, 61.7.1.

<sup>190</sup> Barrett, *Agrippina*, 204-205.; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 42-43.



more weight.<sup>191</sup> Nero was reported to have invited his mother across the bay from her residence at Bauli to a banquet he was hosting in Baiae, and had constructed a special boat for her voyage, one that would collapse and sink on cue. Agrippina was able to survive her orchestrated drowning, having avoided being crushed by the collapsing boat and being a naturally strong swimmer, she was able to make it to shore with only a minor shoulder wound. Upon hearing of his mother's survival from one of her own freedman, Nero then had the man arrested on charges of treason after a blade was surreptitiously dropped behind him while in Nero's presence. This pretense allowed Nero to justify his decision to send more of his men to kill Agrippina outright.<sup>192</sup>

Nero sent a missive to the Senate detailing the supposed plot against him by his mother and her servants and his elaborate actions against her, causing doubt amongst ancient and modern historians alike as to the veracity and reality of Agrippina's treasonous plot.<sup>193</sup> The senators under Nero then turned on Seneca, and accused him of penning not a defense of the emperor but an admission of guilt through his poor diction, though Seneca likely did not author Nero's missive, as evidenced by its incoherency. The performance Nero gave in the Senate echoed his favored role of Orestes on stage, and according to modern historian Edward Champlain this was deliberate, designed to evoke a comparison between the pair of matricides and frame the conversation around his guilt.<sup>194</sup> Nero denied Agrippina the proper funeral rites as demanded by her status and

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<sup>191</sup> Barrett, *Agrippina*, 214-215, 217, 220-221.; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 43-46.

<sup>192</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, 34.; Dio, *Roman History*, 61.14.3.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 222-224.

<sup>193</sup> Alexander, William H., "The Communiqué to the Senate on Agrippina's Death," *Classical Philology* 49, no. 2 (1954): 94-97.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 225-226.

<sup>194</sup> Edward Champlain, "Nero Reconsidered," *New England Review* 19, no 2, (1998), 100.

did not allow her to be buried in the imperial mausoleum, instead letting her estate at Misenum construct a small tomb. He also did not elevate her to the imperial pantheon.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, 34.; Tacitus, *Annals*, 14.; Barrett, *Agrippina*, 230.; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 51.

## VI. THE LAST OF THE JULIO-CLAUDIAN WOMEN

### Death of Claudia Octavia

Agrippina's presence suggests she was a restraining influence on Nero's behavior, even as she lived in exile from Rome. Nero's remaining advisors allowed him to devolve into drunken revelries and lavish parties while the treason trials were revived in order to exploit political adversaries for their wealth and properties.<sup>196</sup> In AD 62 Poppaea became pregnant, so Nero divorced Claudia Octavia after declaring her barren in order to marry Poppaea. Claudia Octavia was first exiled to the Campanian region in northern Italy, then to Pandateria, which had become the final residence of several significant women from the imperial family. Claudia Octavia's banishment was widely unpopular, and the populace of Rome protested her treatment and paraded decorated statues of her through the streets. These acts led to her death on the orders of Nero, who feared a rising political opposition would form around her if she was permitted to live. Claudia Octavia was restrained while her wrists were slit, and she was subjected to hot steam in order to speed up her death, then her head was cut off and taken to Poppaea. According to Murgatroyd in his analysis of Tacitus's account, the extensive brutality in which Tacitus relates the death of Claudia Octavia at every turn places her in sharp contrast to her murderers; she remains a paradigm of virtue and innocence against whom this powerful and corrupted duo appear all the more horrifying.<sup>197</sup> In any case the duplicitous and brutal killings of his first wife and mother were said, according to Suetonius, to have haunted Nero.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 46-47.

<sup>197</sup> Paul Murgatroyd, "The Death of Octavia," *Greece & Rome* 55, no. 2, (2008), 263-273.

<sup>198</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, 34.1-35.3.; Tacitus, *Annals*, 14.62., 16.6.; Ginsberg, *Representing Agrippina*, 48-49.

## **Death of Poppaea Sabina**

Poppaea's tenure as the leading woman within the imperial family was brief but colorful. She gave birth to a daughter in AD 63, who was named Claudia, and Nero granted both mother and child the title Augusta, though baby Claudia died four months later. Just two years later, in AD 65 Poppaea was pregnant with her second child by Nero when he reportedly kicked her in the stomach, resulting in the death of both Poppaea and the unborn child.<sup>199</sup> Keeping in mind the inherent hostility towards Nero found within our sources, it is equally possible that Poppaea died from complications of childbirth or a miscarriage. Her death devastated Nero, as evidenced by the lavish funeral he held for her and the divine honors he gave her that he had denied his mother, as well as his desire to reclaim her in the form of an unfortunate young boy who resembled Poppaea.<sup>200</sup> The extravagant funeral held for Poppaea may also have been an attempt to garner sympathy and support from the people of Rome and distract from the horrific death of Nero's previous wife Claudia Octavia with his open and ardent mourning for Poppaea.

## **Pythagorus, Statilia Messalina, and Sporus**

Nero's final partners did not last as long, for political adversaries had begun gathering strength and support. Nero had reportedly married a man named Pythagorus in AD 64, with Nero playing the role of wife in a public wedding ceremony, much to the consternation of his contemporaries. Nero married again in AD 66 to Statilia Messalina, the daughter of the infamous Valeria Messalina who was the wife of Claudius, though unlike her mother Statilia herself did not seek acclaim and political power. Nero's final

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<sup>199</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 16.6; Pliny, *Natural History*, 12.28; Suetonius, *Nero*, 48-49.

<sup>200</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, 35.1-4.; Tacitus, *Annals*, 16.6.; Balsdon, *Roman Women*, 127.

partner was a young boy named Sporus who was said to have resembled Poppaea. In AD 67 Nero had Sporus castrated and then married him as well, this time acting the role of husband with Sporus as his new bride. None of Nero's newest brides (or husband) had embodied the true role of an imperial matriarch, though they had little opportunity to fulfill the obligations due to the rapid dissolution of Nero's principate in AD 68, culminating in Nero's suicide and the deaths of most members of his allies and inner circle.<sup>201</sup> With Nero's death the Julio-Claudian era ended and created a power vacuum that several different men attempted to fulfill before one of them, Vespasian, succeeded and established his own dynasty.

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<sup>201</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, 49.; Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.72-76.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The actions and events surrounding and even perpetrated by the women of the imperial family altered Roman perception as to their proper role and function within the courts of the Julio-Claudian emperors. What had been started during Livia's lifetime had been taken ever further by each successor, not always with the best results or most effectively; however, they continued to stride forward, carving out their own place within the complex social, political, and cultural boundaries of Rome. It is possible to chart the level of power and influence held by each of the women featured, and how it varied depending on the ever-changing circumstances each individual faced. Livia held an ever-increasing amount of power throughout her marriage to Augustus, and by the time he died she had acquired enough influence and prestige so that even without a clearly defined role or tie to the principate, she still held an important place within the imperial family and in the eyes of the Roman people. After Livia's death, the imperial matriarch became Antonia Minor, although Antonia did not impact policy as openly or publicly as Livia had, she still made her wishes known as well as preventing Sejanus's coup from unseating Tiberius. Antonia also had a direct influence on the next several emperors, having raised both her son Claudius as well as her grandchildren Gaius, Agrippina Minor, Julia Drusilla and Julia Livilla.

Despite this seemingly influential role Antonia filled, she did not wield the same clout as Livia publicly, and privately she quickly lost what little control she held over Gaius early in his reign. In her place, Gaius's three sisters stepped forward to fulfill the duties of the imperial matriarch, though none of the trio had the age or experience to truly enact significant change. When the favored sister Drusilla died, any semblance of control

or leverage his remaining sisters had held was lost. In a desperate attempt to reclaim that power, Agrippina and Livilla conspired with Drusilla's widower, Lepidus, but ultimately failed, which resulted in the exiles of Agrippina and Livilla and the execution of Lepidus. This left the Imperial family without a true matriarch who held a level of power independent of her ties to the current emperor, despite the fact that Gaius had later married a woman named Caesonia and had with her a recognized heir in the form of a daughter named Drusilla. Caesonia's occupation of the role of imperial matriarch was brief, her ending as violent as her husband's lest someone use her and her daughter to garner a political advantage in a bid for control of Rome.

The next to fill the place of feminine power established by Livia fell to Messalina, who utilized the less than stringent restrictions Claudius had placed on her, as well as the precedent established by the previous matriarchs to amass personal power and influence. Eventually Messalina felt her position as empress was strong enough to overthrow her husband and retain her place of power alongside her conspirator and latest lover, though these dreams would be short lived.<sup>202</sup> Claudius's next wife already had a reputation for political intrigues, but since Agrippina Minor came from within the imperial family her ascension to the role of imperial matriarch meant the imperial power did not spread beyond the current limits. Agrippina then succeeded where Messalina had failed, gaining enough influence to ensure the continuance of her personal power even as she plotted to replace Claudius with her son Nero as emperor.

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<sup>202</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 11.8-25, Pliny, *Natural History*, 10.63.; Juvenal, *Satires*, 10.480-505.; Dio, *Roman History*, 61.31.

Upon Nero's assumption of the principate, Agrippina continued as the imperial matriarch, ensuring her will was carried out through her son and the advisors she herself had placed within the inner circle. However, this too came to an end, and as Nero began to shirk his mother's guidance, Agrippina's control and power began slipping away, ultimately culminating in her death under Nero's orders. This once again left the role of imperial matriarch open, to be filled nominally by Nero's many wives including Claudia Octavia and Poppaea Sabina, though neither held even close to the level of independent power and influence that their predecessors had held. With the death of Poppaea, possibly by Nero's own hand again, no other woman truly attained anything close to what had been painstakingly achieved by Livia, Antonia, and Agrippina within the Julio-Claudian emperors, and it wouldn't be until the Flavian dynasty was established that another imperial matriarch would emerge that would win over the people of Rome and hold a place of significance within the imperial structure.



## Appendix A: The Julio-Claudian Family Tree



## **Appendix B – Ancient Authors:**

Appian (born c. AD 95, died c. AD 165) – Little is known about the life of Appian, who referred to himself as Appian of Alexandria in his preface of *The Civil Wars*, as his autobiography has not survived. He is said to have been born in Alexandria to an aristocratic family. Appian moved to Rome around AD 120 and worked as a legal advocate for some time, before receiving the office of procurator under the co-rule of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. His major literary work, *Roman History*, originally consisted of 24 books on the subject, of which only the latter half survived.<sup>203</sup>

Cassius Dio (born c. AD 155, died AD 235) – Cassius Dio Cocceianus was born in the town of Nicaea in Bithynia, and after his father's death traveled to Rome in AD 180, where he served as an advocate under the emperor Commodus. Cassius Dio held several high-ranking offices due to his friendship with several emperors, serving as governor of Pergamum and Smyrna, becoming consul in AD 220, acted as proconsul of Africa, then later served as governor of Dalmatia and Pannonia, and in AD 229 was named consul a second time. His work *Roman History* covers a broad scope, beginning with the former Trojan Aeneas arriving in Italy and ending with the reign of Emperor Alexander Severus.<sup>204</sup>

Josephus (born AD 37, died AD 100) – Born as Yosef ben Matityahu during Gaius's first year as emperor, the historian known as Josephus fought against the Roman invasion of Jerusalem until his capture by Vespasian's forces in AD 67, where he prophesized that Vespasian and his son would one day become emperors

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<sup>203</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*, ix-xi.

<sup>204</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vii-xi.

themselves. When this prophecy came true in AD 69 he was freed, and adopted the name of the man who freed him, becoming Titus Flavius Josephus, and was a trusted member of Vespasian's entourage.<sup>205</sup>

Juvenal (born c. AD 55, died c. AD 130) – Few details are known about the life of Decimus Iunius Iuvenalis, and his birth and death dates are equally uncertain and rely upon the publication dates of his own works as clues. Juvenal was reportedly exiled after insulting a favorite of the emperor, most likely Domitian in AD 93, and was probably recalled after Domitian's death in AD 96. His first *Satires* book was published around AD 110, and his second was most likely published after his death, though whether the second book was incomplete when published or parts were lost over time is unclear.<sup>206</sup>

Ovid (born 43 BC, died AD 17) – Publius Ovidius Naso was born in Sulmo, Italy, to a fairly wealthy family. Ovid was educated in Rome, and traveled to Athens, Sicily, and Asia Minor, before returning to Italy to hold a few minor offices. He soon turned from a potential career in public politics to poetry, writing extensively on love and lovers despite Augustus's moral reforms at the time. He then began writing his most famous work, *Metamorphoses*, but in AD 8 before he could complete his final revisions he was banished to the Black Sea. He continued writing poems in exile until his death in AD 17.<sup>207</sup>

Pliny the Elder (born c. AD 23, died AD 79) – Gaius Plinius Secundus was born in the city of Como northern Italy to a wealthy and privileged family. He began his

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<sup>205</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, vii-xi.

<sup>206</sup> Juvenal, *The Satires*, xiii.

<sup>207</sup> Ovid, *The Art of Love*, ix.

military career at age 23, and rose to the rank of commander of a cavalry unit. Afterwards Pliny returned to Rome where he studied law, and was semi-retired during the majority of Nero's rule when he began writing his books on the natural history of Rome, though at the end of it he was named procurator of Spain. After Vespasian secured the principate, Pliny returned to Rome and became one of Vespasian's advisors, receiving a naval commission. This commission, as well as his lifelong interest in the natural sciences would cost Pliny his life, for when Mt. Vesuvius erupted Pliny decided to sail across the harbor to have a closer look at the eruption, and was killed by poisonous fumes.<sup>208</sup>

Plutarch (born c. AD 46, died c. AD 120) – Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus was born in central Greece at Chaeronea in Boeotia and studied philosophy at Athens. He then came to Rome to teach philosophy, and under the emperor Trajan was given consular rank and later held a procuratorship in Greece under the emperor Hadrian. Plutarch traveled and wrote extensively, visiting much of the greater Roman Empire during his life. His most popular works are his *Parallel Lives*, which places the lives of a prominent Grecian next to that of a Roman in order to portray ethical and moral examples within a biographical context.<sup>209</sup>

Seneca (born 4 BC, died AD 65) – Lucius Annaeus Seneca was born to an aristocratic family, and spent most of his childhood within Rome. He was skilled in rhetoric and philosophy, and attained the quaestorship under Tiberius. Seneca's gift for debate and speech earned him the ire of Gaius and later Messalina, who in AD 41 had Seneca accused of involvement with the sister of Gaius, Julia Livilla, and

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<sup>208</sup> Pliny, *Natural History*, vii-viii.

<sup>209</sup> Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, xi-xii.

subsequently banished. Seneca was recalled by Agrippina in AD 49 to serve Nero first as a tutor, and after AD 54 as an advisor, though he failed to prevent some of Nero's most heinous acts. In AD 65 he was implicated in a plot against the emperor and was ordered to commit suicide. Seneca wrote fairly extensively, and intermixed within his *Moral Essays* and *Epistles* are valuable accounts of the history of Rome, both past and up to his own present day.<sup>210</sup>

Suetonius (born c. AD 69, died c. AD 122) – Gaius Suetonius Tranquillius was the son of a military tribune, and was first a law advocate and teacher before becoming Emperor Hadrian's personal secretary. He was close friends with Pliny the Younger, the nephew of the Elder, who helped him obtain a position in the Hadrian's court. Suetonius was dismissed from Hadrian's court in AD 121, and it is unclear how long afterwards he lived. His most famous work was *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, though other partial works have survived as well.<sup>211</sup>

Tacitus (born c. AD 56, died AD 120) – Publius Cornelius Tacitus was born to an equestrian family, and owed much of his personal and political success first under the Flavians and later under the Nerva-Antonine dynasty. Tacitus was able to scale the military and political hierarchy from quaestor all the way to consul by AD 97, and held a sacred priesthood. Later Tacitus was appointed to govern the province of Asia as proconsul. As a Roman of a privileged class, his presentation of the history of the Roman Empire is decidedly more emotional and derisive than other sources.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Seneca, *Moral Essays*, vii-ix.

<sup>211</sup> Suetonius, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, 2-5.

<sup>212</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, ix-xi.

Velleius Paterculus (born 19 BC, died AD 31) – Marcus Velleius Paterculus was a lesser known Roman historian, who began his career as an author after living the first half of his life as a military officer. He served as a military tribune in Thrace and Macedonia, and accompanied Gaius Caesar to the eastern provinces in AD 1, and later served under Tiberius as well. In writing his take on the history of Rome, Velleius has provided a brief but useful perspective on Rome, especially the era of Roman history that encompassed Julius Caesar's dominion up to Velleius's own time. Velleius is also known for his loyalty to the Julio-Claudian emperors; in particular his treatment of Livia, Tiberius, and Sejanus is more deferential than later authors.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Velleius, *Compendium of Roman History*, ix-xii.

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