

JULIO-CLAUDIAN EMPRESSES

by

BERKELEY LITTLE BROWN

(Under the Direction of Naomi J. Norman)

ABSTRACT

This thesis determines whether the Julio-Claudian women were defined by their roles as wives of the current emperors or rather, as mothers of potential emperors. The paper includes a study of women's roles within the family and also of the bias of the primary sources. Chapter One highlights three Republican women as case studies for women's roles at the end of the first century B.C.E. Chapter Two explores how Livia Drusilla used the established norms to identify appropriate roles for imperial women. Chapter Three explains how Agrippina the Younger manipulates the status quo for her personal gain.

INDEX WORDS: Julio-Claudian Empresses, Imperial Women, Roman Women, Roman Mothers, Terentia, Julia, Cornelia, Livia Drusilla, Julia Augusta, Agrippina the Younger

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DEDICATION

To Stewart - once again you have cheered me over a finish line.

To Mom, Dad, Carter and Zane – Thank you for supporting this project simply
because it was important to me.

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INTRODUCTION

The social framework in which Romans lived has been reexamined in recent years. One important focus, the study of Roman women and family, has emerged.¹ Indeed, social historians argue that the roles generally played by wives and mothers are crucial keys to our understanding their value in Roman society.² Specific case studies, however, have been limited, primarily because our sources are restricted to describing elite women of the third century B.C.E. or later. For this reason, certain names reappear: Lucretia, Servilia, Cornelia, Terentia, Tullia, and Clodia. Each of these women served as an *exemplum*, a stereotype meant to teach young Roman girls certain life lessons. In addition, twentieth century research on the Julio-Claudian family and imperial politics has highlighted the roles played by the Julio-Claudian women in the politics of the period. Monographs such as Anthony Barrett's *Livia*³ and Nikos Kokkinos' *Antonia*

¹ See for example, compilations such as Beryl Rawson, ed., *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986) which contains new reconstructions of the Roman family. Hereafter cited as *Family*.

² Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome: a Lifecourse Approach* (London: Routledge, 2002), 90. Harlow and Laurence discuss the Romans' emphasis on a woman's fertility; the transition from a wife to a mother "created another identity within the marriage." They also suggest that the inability to bear children resulted in "low status or social death."

³ Anthony Barrett, *Livia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

*Augusta*⁴ are two examples of the specialized study these women have merited. Within imperial studies, women are mentioned more frequently, in part because imperial families were described more closely, both the males and the females. Some emperors also wrote histories,⁵ in which they often made mention of the women in the household. These spousal and maternal roles were immeasurably valuable because the state looked to imperial women to provide a continuous supply of heirs and thus maintain the imperial line. This study attempts to answer more specific questions: how are typical family dynamics changed when imperial politics are intertwined? Do the women in the imperial family hold greater importance because of the practice of succession? And finally, if the two roles of wife and mother are weighed, which was deemed the more important at Rome?

Chapter One examines the evidence for several wives and mothers of certain patrician (or rising patrician) families in the second and first centuries B.C.E. to establish points of comparison for imperial women. The Julio-Claudian mothers may simply have followed the cultural norms established by upper-class women of the late Republic.

Chapter Two exposes how Livia set the precedent and became the prototype for future

⁴ Nikos Kokkinos, *Antonia Augusta: Portrait of a Great Roman Lady* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁵ Suetonius says that Augustus wrote “some volumes of an Autobiography” (*et aliqua ‘de vita sua’*, *Augustus* 85), that Tiberius wrote “a brief and sketchy autobiography” (*de vita sua summatim breviterque*, *Tiberius* 61), and that Claudius “also composed an autobiography in eight books” (*composuit et ‘de vita sua’ octo volumina*, *Claudius* 41).

empresses in terms of promoting her offspring. This study questions whether Augustus envisioned a dynastic succession from the start, or whether Livia saw the opportunity for a dynasty and developed it during Augustus' reign to advantage her child from an earlier marriage. Was Livia "beloved" primarily as mother of the heir to the throne, as wife of the emperor, or as both? Chapter Three focuses on Agrippina the Younger. Although all of Claudius' wives are noteworthy, Agrippina the Younger is the most intriguing, having modeled herself on her mother Agrippina the Elder, her grandmother Antonia, and her great-grandmother Livia. Other Julio-Claudian mothers were active players in the political drama of succession and worked hard to position their sons for eventual ascendancy, but the strong-willed Agrippina went farther than that. She actually tried to empty the throne so that her son could fill it, and, once she obtained the principate for Nero, she went so far as to try to rule it jointly with him. Combining the worst traits of her ancestors, she was deemed the epitome of evil and treachery by the ancient authors.⁶ This study will investigate how and to what extent she and the other Julio-Claudian mothers were defined more by their roles as imperial mothers than as imperial wives.

Before we examine these specific case studies, it is important to understand the nature of our sources and the structure of the Roman family. The Julio-Claudian women

⁶ For descriptions of her lust for power, see Tac. *Annales* 12.7; for false allegations against others because of her greed, see Tac. *Ann.* 12.59.

have been described by ancient sources as noble and base, honorable and promiscuous, devoted and conniving.⁷ These sources, especially Suetonius and Tacitus, include obvious biases for and against these women, biases to some extent based on the sources they themselves used and the rumors reported to them many decades after the events, but also reflecting their own literary intentions and programs. Do these authors really believe that Livia, Antonia the Younger, Agrippina the Elder and the wives of Claudius possessed traits so diametrically opposed?⁸ Or do they exaggerate on purpose? Can we identify the biases for and against the imperial court that underpin the works of both Suetonius and Tacitus? For example, Barrett accuses both Suetonius and Tacitus of thinking stereotypically and distorting the perception of Agrippina the Younger, rather than documenting the facts of her life.⁹ Both mention her crimes, but Suetonius does not brand her as Tacitus does.¹⁰ Did they use the same sources and simply draw conflicting conclusions from them? Or does the difference in their genres, biography and history, account for their different directions? This chapter explores to what degree the imperial

⁷ For Livia's description as "Ulysses in petticoats", see Suet. *Gaius* 23; for her apotheosis, see Seneca *Apocolocyntosis* 9; for the pity shown Agrippina the Elder during her persecution by Messalina, see Tac. *Ann.* 11.12; for the accusation of many crimes against Agrippina the Younger, see Suet. *Claud.* 43-4.

⁸ For example, Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.9) says that Livia was a "catastrophe", but Velleius Paterculus (2.75) describes her as the "most eminent of Roman women in birth, in sincerity and in beauty."

⁹ Anthony Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power and Politics in the Early Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). For Suetonius' use of anecdotes for effect, see Barrett, *Agrippina*, 204; for Tacitus' stereotyping of imperial women, see Barrett, *Agrippina*, 206.

¹⁰ Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.66-7) says that Agrippina not only planned the murder of Claudius but also that she had a secondary plan, in case the first one failed. Suetonius' version (*Claud.* 43-4) is milder, claiming that "some say" Agrippina was involved in Claudius' murder.

court itself played a role in influencing both Suetonius and Tacitus, since they each wrote under Trajan and Hadrian.

General family studies highlight the irregularities in the family tree brought about by divorce, adoption, and remarriage and argue that they played a role in defining motherhood for patrician women.¹¹ Such changes in the family may have created a feeling of paranoia in the women, coupled with a strong desire to protect and promote their children. It is likely that the actions of the Julio-Claudian women were motivated by their roles as mothers. I suggest that these maternal machinations in these women supplanted their roles as wives and led to extreme sacrifices for their children.

Source Bias

It is the nature of imperial history to reflect extremes; an emperor is either a vilified tyrant or a flattered hero.¹² The reader must determine the biases of the writer, that is the particular slant of a story based on the writer's experiences and exposure to the topic, in order to extract a more accurate historical depiction. Writers cannot separate themselves from their experiences, and it is unreasonable to expect impartiality in these works.¹³ But determining these biases of ancient writers is difficult; often we do not have the complete work preserved and the authors' own biographical information is scarce.

¹¹ Harlow and Laurence (23) say, "the possibility of disruption, dysfunction, and domestic argument should not be ignored or forgotten when observing the domestic environment of past societies. The Roman home was a place of change and fluidity in terms of occupants, size, decoration, and fortune, but above all a focus of emotion, value and identity." For studies of family dynamics, see, for example, Suzanne Dixon, "Conflict in the Roman Family," in *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space*, eds. Beryl Rawson and Paul Weaver, 149-167 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), Sarah Pomeroy, "The Relationship of the Married Woman to Her Blood Relatives in Rome," *Ancient Society* 7 (1976): 215-227, and Beryl Rawson, ed., *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). Hereafter cited as *Marriage*.

¹² Ronald Syme, *Tacitus*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 281.

¹³ John Wilkes, "Julio-Claudian Historians," *The Classical World* 65 (1972): 186.

Generally, historians are the educated elite of their society; sympathetic reporting of imperial activities is not likely, given the fact the existence of a monarch diminished the power of that class.¹⁴ The idealistic hope for emperors was that they would maintain the order and prosperity of the Roman state. Roman historians tend to judge emperors by their measures which, they believed, revealed an emperor's true character; in general if an historian did not approve of newly created laws, he would present that emperor in a negative light.¹⁵ Of all the Julio-Claudian emperors, Augustus alone is credited, in most of the sources, with maintaining some stability in his reign. Wallace-Hadrill¹⁶ believes that the tradition is kinder to Augustus because the civil war had reached its peak, making almost any governance seem more stable and thereby preferable. The easiest way to determine bias is to study accounts of the same events as portrayed by different authors; for example, Augustus' *Res Gestae*, Suetonius' *Divus Augustus* and Tacitus' *Annales* all discuss the reign of Augustus and present individual views of the monarch. Augustus records that

Per consensum universorum (potitus rerum omn)ium, rem publicam ex mea potestate in senat(us populique Romani a)rbitrium transtuli.

After receiving by universal consent the absolute control of affairs, I transferred the republic from my own control to the will of the senate and the Roman people. (*Res Gestae* 34)¹⁷

Suetonius says that Augustus considered restoring the Republic to the people.

De reddenda re p. bis cogitavit . . . sed . . . in retinenda perseveravit, dubium eventu meliore an voluntate.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Bartman, *Portraits of Livia: Imaging the Imperial Women in Augustan Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), XXII.

¹⁵ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and His Caesars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 139.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁷ All translations in this thesis come from the Loeb Classical Library.

He twice thought of restoring the republic . . . but . . . he continued to keep it in his hands; and it is not easy to say whether his intentions or their results were the better. (*Aug.* 28)

Tacitus is the toughest, accusing Augustus of pursuing a course of self-advantage which cast a heavy shadow.¹⁸

Caesar Augustus, potentiae securus, quae triumvirate iusserat abolevit deditque iura quis pace et principe uteremur. Acriora ex eo vincla . . .

Augustus Caesar, feeling his power secure, cancelled the behests of his triumvirate, and presented us with laws to serve our needs in peace and under a prince. Thenceforward the fetters were tightened . . . (*Tac. Ann.* 3.28)

These citations are typical of variations found in sources: the extremes of optimism and pessimism accompanied by a “neutral” account.¹⁹

In this study not only do we have to deal with historians’ biases against the imperial family, but also with the traditional bias against women. Traditionally, ancient historians portrayed women in stereotypical fashion: beautiful women were considered evil²⁰ and ambitious women were thought always to be plotting mischievous actions behind the scenes.²¹ Upper-class women in the late Republic played key roles by manipulating the powerful men in their lives.²² Republican women who endured disruptions (such as exiles) with honor and bravery were treated well by writers.²³ In fact, Hallett²⁴ says that women are frequently credited with a tremendous impact on politics, for better and for worse, with such exaggeration that the truth is difficult to

¹⁸ Wallace-Hadrill (111) presents these three examples as a strong demonstration of source bias.

¹⁹ While it is unusual to consider Suetonius a neutral account, relative to the other authors presented here, he seems somewhat impartial.

²⁰ Barrett, *Agrippina*, 206.

²¹ Susan Elliott Wood, *Imperial Women: A Study in Public Images* (Boston: Brill Publishers, 1999), 10. For example, Agrippina’s seduction of her own son, see *Tac. Ann.* 13.13.

²² Barrett, *Agrippina*, 9.

²³ Syme, *Tacitus*, 535.

²⁴ Judith P. Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 11.

determine. Beyond the problem of stereotyping women, writers were freer to represent women as they wished because there was no fear of retaliation from the male relatives – they had died long ago.²⁵

For studies of the imperial family, three writers are at the forefront: Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio, each with a different style of writing. Tacitus and Dio wrote in a narrative framework,²⁶ and in an annalistic format. Suetonius wrote biographies not histories; the difference in genre provided some variation in the storytelling, but the opinions of the authors were the most dramatic divergence.

Tacitus

Cornelius Tacitus, born the son of an imperial tax collector, was a senator. This role had the greatest impact on his writing. He places the senate at the center of his *Annales*, so that senate business and proceedings are given a disproportionate amount of space. Moreover, Tacitus' senatorial position would lead him to take a negative view of increased monarchical power because it would signify a decrease in senatorial power.²⁷

Tacitus drew from many sources of various types, from autobiographies to public monuments, to create a work all his own.²⁸ He tried to verify his sources, either by assessing an author's reputation or relying on survivors' recollections.²⁹ For Claudius' reign, he also had archives available, including his autobiography.³⁰ Wilkes, however, believes that Tacitus fashioned groups of books after certain authors, so that while the

²⁵ Wood, 5.

²⁶ Ronald Mellor, ed., *The Historians of Ancient Rome* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 393-4.

²⁷ Wallace-Hadrill, 99.

²⁸ Barbara Levick, *Claudius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 193.

²⁹ Syme, *Tacitus*, 294-5.

³⁰ Ibid.

total work may be a blend of influences, the predecessors' impact on particular sections is overwhelming.³¹ Cluvius Rufus, who may have been the primary source for *Annales* 11-16, was respected by Tacitus and also garnered the respect of Pliny the Younger³² because he was able to serve four emperors.³³ Tacitus used both Rufus and Pliny³⁴ for information on the reigns of Claudius and Nero.³⁵ He also used the *Memoirs* of Agrippina the Younger. She is the only author to record that her mother was interested in a remarriage, noting that she begged Tiberius for another husband and was refused.³⁶

The combination of Tacitus' experiences and his sources creates a unique bias. His senatorial background made him suspicious of imperial power in general,³⁷ but his commitment to the concept of liberty made him realize that a consolidation of power was the best chance for Rome to realize peace at the end of the civil wars.³⁸ Although Tacitus wrote extensively about senatorial proceedings and matters of state, he was more interested in crimes, money and inheritance.³⁹ "Imperfections" in books can be attributed to this tendency towards "climax and catastrophe,"⁴⁰ which usually included the imperial

³¹ Wilkes, 180. He goes on to assign the predecessors to certain works: *Annales* 1-6 is attributed to Aufidius Bassus, *Annales* 11-16 to Cluvius Rufus, and the *Historiae* to Pliny the Elder.

³² Barrett, *Agrippina*, 200.

³³ Nero, Galba, Otho and Vitellius

³⁴ Syme (*Tacitus*, 292) says that Tacitus draws not only his information but also his opinions from Pliny: a hostile depiction of Nero and Agrippina and an indulgent treatment of Claudius.

³⁵ Wilkes, 200.

³⁶ Syme, *Tacitus*, 277-8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 541.

³⁸ Wallace-Hadrill, 110.

³⁹ Syme, *Tacitus*, 543.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 377. For example, Syme identifies one problem as Tacitus' interest in only a few central figures during Nero's reign. As a result, "policy suffers, events remain unelucidated or are forced into an unconvincing sequence of cause and result . . . Many of the facts, the opinions, and the governmental decisions lay out of reach, not recorded in any document, and not verifiable. Reconstruction was hazardous. A man might well turn to the known and public figures of the Palace, in their undisguised behaviour or credible ambitions," *ibid.*, 376-7.

women. Tacitus saw the women as stereotypes, mostly as ambitious women who were wicked and irrational in an effort to control the men in power.⁴¹

Suetonius

Born in 70 C.E. in North Africa, Suetonius Tranquillus came from a distinguished family with long-standing imperial connections.⁴² Suetonius maintained the family dynasty, working as a civil servant in the imperial archives. Under Trajan, Suetonius advanced to the position of chief librarian.⁴³ This position, though ranked below a senator, was powerful because it allowed access to the emperor and, on occasion, some influence over him.⁴⁴

Although Suetonius probably had access to privileged documents,⁴⁵ he did not necessarily use them; he does not, for example, cite the letters of any emperor except Augustus.⁴⁶ He used some of the same sources as Tacitus and Dio if we are to judge from his accounts of certain events.⁴⁷ Pliny the Younger was Suetonius' patron and also exerted some influence, but Suetonius avoided Pliny's senatorial slant. Thus, Suetonius' work expresses the advantages of autocracy and is free from the senator's longing for the Republic.⁴⁸

⁴¹ Linda W. Rutland, "Women as Makers of Kings in Tacitus' *Annals*," *Classical World* 72 (1978): 17.

⁴² Wallace-Hadrill (3) counts three generations of relationships to emperors within Suetonius' family.

⁴³ Mellor, 365.

⁴⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, 101.

⁴⁵ Until 122 C.E., when he was dismissed from his position by Hadrian.

⁴⁶ Wallace-Hadrill, 95. This fact does not make him unusual; Wallace-Hadrill claims that other authors quote only letters of Augustus.

⁴⁷ Barrett, *Agrippina*, 204-5. For example, the events surrounding Agrippina's death; see Cass. Dio 61.12-4, Suet. *Nero* 34, Tac. *Ann.* 14.1-9.

⁴⁸ Wallace-Hadrill, 99.

Suetonius was a biographer not a historian; for that reason, his sources – or rather his use of them – are different from Tacitus'. As a biographer, in his *De Vita Caesarum*, he included such categories as awful acts and personal characteristics, with anecdotes to illustrate points not found elsewhere.⁴⁹ For this reason, Suetonius did not judge his sources by the high standard employed by Tacitus, and as a result, his sources' reliability varies widely. Rather than apply historical criticism, he "selected those [stories] that suited his purpose, arranged them in a more or less logical order, connected them with loose general statements, and so constructed a biography."⁵⁰

Suetonius' bias stems from his expectations of the emperors; he had a "passion for order and distinction of rank".⁵¹ His hope was that the emperor would be a friend and protector of the people, while maintaining respect for the different orders.⁵² For example, Suetonius did not write a very flattering portrayal of Julius Caesar because he distributed honors as he pleased rather than in accordance with traditional hierarchy;⁵³ as a result (in Suetonius' opinion), Caesar did not honor the state.

Nec minoris inpotentiae voces propalam edebat . . . nihil esse rem publicam, appellationem modo sine corpore ac specie.

No less arrogant were his public utterances . . . that the state was nothing, a mere name without body or form. (Suet. *Iul.* 77)

On the other hand, the biography of Augustus is a kind treatment, revealing Suetonius' admiration of the emperor for his ability to balance his own power with the state's.⁵⁴

Templa, quamvis sciret etiam proconsulibus decerni solere, in nulla tamen provincia nisi communi suo Romaeque nomine recepit.

⁴⁹ Mellor, 365.

⁵⁰ Frank Burr Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1931), 7.

⁵¹ Wallace-Hadrill, 117-8.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 117.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Although well aware that it was usual to vote temples even to proconsuls, he would not accept one even in a province save jointly in his own name and that of Rome. (Suet. *Aug.* 52)

Wallace-Hadrill says that the unconcealed appreciation is not inappropriate or out of sync in light of Augustus' attempts to include the senate and other orders in appropriate decisions.⁵⁵ In addition, Suetonius tends to present just one view of the emperor, so that if Augustus is beloved by some people, he is described as beloved by all.⁵⁶ Marsh, on the other hand, asserts that Suetonius' bias stems from a careless approach to his sources: the accuracy of his information cannot be trusted, with some valid sources and some worthless ones.⁵⁷ One possibility is that Suetonius based information on facts in sources that we no longer have, although that is an optimistic view. More likely is the assertion that Suetonius was uninterested in facts or circumstances so that no context is provided, making the emperors' decisions seem disjointed.⁵⁸

Cassius Dio

Cassius Dio is a major source for the Julio-Claudians and dates to the early third century C.E. Although a native of Bithynia, his family was well-known in Rome, where his father was a senator. Dio followed in his father's footsteps, holding several political offices.⁵⁹ He began to write his large-scale history of Rome during the reign of Septimius Severus; in it, he covers the time between Aeneas' landing in Italy and 229 C.E. He

⁵⁵ Ibid., 111-2.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 115. Wallace-Hadrill contradicts himself, however, by saying that Suetonius wrote in a "neutral, non-committal" style so as not to influence the reader; see *ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁷ Marsh, 7.

⁵⁸ Thomas Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 12. At times, Suetonius even lists information; see the biographies of Tiberius, Claudius and Nero.

⁵⁹ *Dio's Roman History*, translated by Earnest Cary, Loeb Classical Library, ed. E. H. Warmington (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), x-xii. According to Cary (ix), what information we have about Dio comes from the casual statements in his histories.

spent ten years researching his topic and another twelve years writing.⁶⁰ He tries to follow the annalistic format of Tacitus, but he is not as successful: he details his accounts so closely that he exceeds the yearly limits.⁶¹ Also, Dio does not infuse his work with specifics. The absence of names, places and dates results in a more thematic work, rather than a history.⁶²

Tracing Dio's sources is difficult, and he offers no specific help. "I have read pretty nearly everything . . . that has been written by anybody" (Cass. Dio 1.2). His work was written after those of Suetonius and Tacitus, but he does not seem to draw on them,⁶³ with the exception of Tacitus' description of Tiberius' reign.⁶⁴ He parallels several authors,⁶⁵ but the only section which seems to have a principle source is that which records events after the second Punic War, which closely parallels Livy.⁶⁶ He seems also to have consulted imperial biographies and public records.⁶⁷ Millar claims that the difficulty in tracing Dio's sources stems from the difference in the politics of the Republic and the Principate.⁶⁸ In the Republic, the senate handled all matters with discussion and on public record; in the Principate, however, "all important political business was done in private by the Emperor and his advisers, and what was made public was disbelieved, even if it happened to be true."⁶⁹ Therefore, while it was easy to verify information from the Republic, imperial politics were known only to those who

⁶⁰ Fergus Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 30. Millar says that Dio researched from 197-207 C.E. and composed from 207-219 C.E.

⁶¹ For an extended discussion of Dio's "abandoned annalistic format" when describing the reign of Hadrian, for example, see *ibid.*, 66-72.

⁶² Cary, xvi.

⁶³ Marsh, 7.

⁶⁴ Cary, xvii.

⁶⁵ Cary (xvii-xviii) cites, for example, Livy, Pliny the Elder, Polybius, and Sallust.

⁶⁶ Cary, xvii.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, xviii.

⁶⁸ Millar, 37.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

participated. Because Dio does not reconcile the differences of his sources, he risks contradicting himself.⁷⁰

Dio's bias is considered "typically Roman": he is a senator who supports the monarchy.⁷¹ As such, he resents those who oppose the government. To present his viewpoint, he often embeds his political views in the mouths of his characters; for example, Maecenas' speech to Augustus debates the possibility of returning power to the senate.⁷² By disguising it as someone's speech, Dio avoids the appearance of lecturing his audience. Finally, what may appear to be Dio's bias is actually his unwillingness to apply criticism to his sources.⁷³ For example, in his descriptions of Agrippina's stories he includes gossip but he never identifies what parts of the stories may be absurd,⁷⁴ thereby compromising the entire portrayal. In his introduction to his work, Dio seems to reflect happiness with the outcome, relative to the works of other authors.

I trust, moreover, that if I have used a fine style, so far as the subject matter permitted, no one will on this account question the truthfulness of the narrative, as has happened in the case of some writers. (Cass. Dio 1.2)

*The Roman Family*⁷⁵

The Roman life course included, in addition to biological thresholds, social ones such as adoption, marriage, divorce, remarriage and widowhood. Politics were structured a bit like the Roman family with a prominent male figurehead in the foreground and

⁷⁰ Cary, xviii.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² For the entire speech, see Cass. Dio 52.14-40. For an extended discussion of the speeches of Agrippa and Maecenas, see Millar, 102-18.

⁷³ Similar to Suetonius, see above, pp. 10-2.

⁷⁴ Barrett, *Agrippina*, 203.

⁷⁵ I do not intend to explore fully the complexities of the Roman family here. For more detail, see Keith Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992). Hereafter cited as *Family*.

much less prominent – perhaps even invisible – females in the background. In the government, as in the family, women primarily had access to political power only through their male kin.⁷⁶ Because adoption and marriage were common avenues for men to gain political advancement, women entered the calculus, not as recipients of advancement themselves, but as tools for advancement.⁷⁷ For women, marriage was the sphere in which they wielded the most potential for influence. For a Roman woman, marriage marked the first, and greatest, change in social status that she would experience. Her family's social and political positions were important factors in acquiring a spouse. If a father married off his daughter at a young age to a suitable husband, not only would he potentially live to see grandchildren from the union to whom he could pass along the family legacy, but he could potentially cement important political alliances for himself.⁷⁸

This study of Republican marriage ironically begins with the story of the first Roman divorce: at the end of the third century B.C.E., Spurius Carvilius Ruga divorced his wife because she was barren.⁷⁹ This story of Carvilius identifies the reason for the match: to produce children. According to Gellius (*NA* 4.3.2), the censors in Rome were concerned that marriages be “productive.”

⁷⁶ That Roman political structure mirrored that of the family is a point that has been made forcefully by many scholars; see for example Susan Elliott Wood's comment that “a society that modeled its political system on the organization of the family, and made the family structurally central to its system of government, also provided women with a means to exercise their political wills by sharing a degree of power with the men of their family,” Wood, 9.

⁷⁷ According to Barrett, “the only other quasi-political role for an upper-class Roman woman was to strengthen family alliances through marriage. Daughters, even wives, would find themselves used as political tools,” Barrett, *Agrippina*, 45.

⁷⁸ This is a point that is discussed by many scholars. See, for example, Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence's assessment that women “as they progressed through life, were valued first for the connections of their families, particularly their fathers and elder brothers, but also for their potential and then proven fertility . . . early marriage for daughters was desirable both for political alliances and for certainty of succession,” Harlow and Laurence, 93-4.

⁷⁹ Aulus Gellius *Noctes Atticae* 17.21.44; Plutarch *Moralia* 267c; Tertullian *Apologeticus* 6; Valerius Maximus 2.1.4.

Atque is Carvilius traditur uxorem quam dimisit egregie dilexisse carissimamque morum eius gratia habuisse, set iurisiurandi religionem animo atque amori praevertisse quod iurare a censoribus coactus erat, uxorem se liberum quaerendum gratia habiturum.

It is reported that this Carvilius dearly loved the wife whom he divorced, and held her in strong affection because of her character, but that above his devotion and his love he set his regard for the oath which the censors had compelled him to take, that he would marry a wife for the purpose of begetting children.

Although he fulfilled his oath to the censors, Carvilius was detested by the Roman people for his action.⁸⁰ This study begins at the end of the third century B.C.E., when the state's intervention⁸¹ unofficially declared the woman's role as wife as inferior to her role as mother.

By the first century B.C.E., divorce was considered common.⁸² The process was simple, requiring only a letter from one spouse to another. The repercussions of divorce, however, were more serious for a woman than for a man: the woman lost both her dowry, if the fault was with her, and the right to raise her children.⁸³ Moreover, divorced Romans were expected to remarry, which meant that complex relationships, such as step-parents and step-children, developed.⁸⁴ Often there were multiple remarriages, and these would result in even more convoluted family trees.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Antiquitates Romanae* 2.25.7.

⁸¹ "The emphasis within marriage on the production of children did not just come from the families of the couple, but was also implemented by the state. At the five yearly census, the husband had to state clearly on oath that his marriage was for the procreation of children," Harlow and Laurence, 85-6.

⁸² The prevalence of multiple marriages, especially among the political elite, in Republican Rome highlights that divorce was a common end to marriage. See, for example, comments in Rawson (*Marriage*, 85) that most Romans anticipated at least two marriages. Harlow and Laurence (87) disagree with this assessment and identify the informality of the process of divorce as the reason for the misunderstanding of modern authors.

⁸³ These two penalties are measurable; for the psychological cost to a woman, see Rawson, *Family*, 32.

⁸⁴ Worse than the expectation of remarriage were divorces forced on women in order to create an opportunity for other, already decided, spouses. Sulla forced his stepdaughter Aemilia (not even his own blood relation) to divorce her husband in order to marry Pompey. Sulla desired alliance with Pompey, and

Social complexity was also increased by the fact that, due to the incongruence in the ages of a bride and groom,⁸⁶ the bride usually outlived her spouse by many years. If the bride was young when her husband died, she was expected to remarry up to the age of thirty.⁸⁷ Once women were past thirty, they were more likely to be allowed to remain a widow, which in some instances gave her an elevated status.⁸⁸

Given the high rates of early childhood death and divorce during the time of the Republic,⁸⁹ one might assume that, for the Roman, personal relationships were overshadowed by political ones. Though that clearly is not the case,⁹⁰ it does seem that the bond between siblings and between parents and children was stronger than that between husbands and wives.⁹¹ The development of a close mother-son bond is not surprising when the time spent together is measured. Hallett reminds us that mothers and sons would have more time together in the home because of the delayed age of marriage

he needed Aemilia to strengthen the bond between them. Not even Aemilia's pregnancy by her former husband hindered the process, but she died in childbirth soon after the marriage to Pompey (Plut. *Sulla* 33).

⁸⁵ Sulla's stepdaughter, Aemilia (see above, fnnt 84), was the second of Pompey's five wives. He divorced two women, and two women died in childbirth. Since his third wife, Mucia, had borne his children, Pompey's fourth and fifth wives served as stepmothers to his sons and daughter. Cornelia, his fifth wife, could have brought children with her from her previous marriage to Publius Crassus. This sort of confused household arrangements only becomes more pronounced in the imperial setting.

⁸⁶ For details on the ages of a bride and groom relative to each other and their family members, see Harlow and Laurence, 151-64.

⁸⁷ Women under the age of thirty were considered fertile and thus, needed to marry.

⁸⁸ If not elevated status (as an *univira*), at least widows were able to control their own finances.

⁸⁹ Early childhood mortality at Rome is estimated to have been as high as 30%; see Harlow and Laurence, 10. While Susan Treggiari does not offer statistics on divorce, she does say that divorce was a free option with no automatic social stigma. On the other hand, she says the divorce-rate seems "much less rapid and the habit of divorce less widespread than has commonly been thought" *Roman Marriage*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 482. Hereafter cited as *Marriage*.

⁹⁰ See, among others, Haley, who argues persuasively that love, affection and even passion were present in the Roman family. Shelley P. Haley, "The Five Wives of Pompey the Great," in *Women in Antiquity*, eds. Ian McAuslan and Peter Walcot (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 103.

⁹¹ "In a social world in which the death of loved ones was a frequent experience, as was divorce, we should not rule out the possibility of love and affection. However, the bond between siblings, children and their parents was stronger than the tie of marriage. Demographically, the longest lasting relationship in the life course was between siblings, followed by that of child and mother and finally that of child and father," Harlow and Laurence, 103. Hallett (218) agrees and draws a further conclusion that, as a result of the closer emotional bond between mothers and children, the role of a wife was "less culturally valued" than the role of a mother.

for their sons relative to their daughters.⁹² In addition, their sons also outlived their husbands, so Roman matrons tended to guard their sons' careers more carefully. In other words, the women who exercised some power in the Roman world were more likely to be mothers than wives.

⁹² Hallett, 252-3.

CHAPTER 1

REPUBLICAN WOMEN

As a result, in part, of the political upheaval during the late years of the Republic, marriages changed in frequency and character. Political alliances were tenuous, and, since marriages had often secured those alliances, divorce and remarriage became more common.⁹³ Moreover, a Republican woman was more likely to be attached to her children than to her husband because as a wife her position was more tenuous: she could be obtained and replaced easily. Legally, her position as a wife was not secure; but a blood relationship, with her brother or children, could never be denied.⁹⁴ Another change during the late Republic was the option for a woman to stay in the *manus* (“protection”) of her *paterfamilias* instead of her husband. Upon the death of the *paterfamilias*, the woman would have freedom and control of her property which could increase her emotional distance from her husband.⁹⁵ Finally, the age difference between husband and wife during the late Republic increased the probability that most women would outlive their first husbands,⁹⁶ especially during the civil wars. In the senatorial elite, this age difference typically linked the groom more closely with the bride’s father.⁹⁷ Just as her husband was entering public life, her father would be retiring. It is for this reason that the

⁹³ H. H. Scullard specifically cites the number of marriages for Sulla, Pompey and Caesar in *From the Gracchi to Nero*, 5th ed. (London: Methuen, 1982), 177.

⁹⁴ Hallett, 236-7.

⁹⁵ Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 43.

⁹⁶ Harlow and Laurence, 10-1.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

status of the bride's father was so important; he could escort her husband into and through a public career.

This chapter will examine three women from the Republic: Terentia, first wife of Cicero, Julia, fourth wife of Pompey, and Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi. They are presented in order of the stages of the life course (marriage, remarriage, motherhood) to illustrate how their images as wives and, more importantly, as mothers, affected the lives of the men around them, some of whom were prominent players in Republican history. These women were upheld as the ideal by later authors; ironically, they were criticized for falling short of expectations by the same sources. We begin with these late Republican women because, as Bauman says, it is a time of particular importance for the study of women.

[This period] can properly be described as the Age of the Political Matron. Where previous ages had thrown up a few women whose status and abilities had enabled them to influence public affairs, the last century of the Republic saw an emergence of the influential woman almost as an institution In the public sector she foreshadowed the great imperial women, and in some respects outdid them, for the liberal climate of the time allowed her, like her male counterpart, to address a wider range of goals than would be possible later on.⁹⁸

The late Republic is also a good starting place because the tales of “idealized womanhood or the calamity of perverted womanhood”⁹⁹ from this period became in later years the didactic stories told to successive generations of young girls in imperial families. As *exempla*, these Republican women were held up as models governing the behavior of imperial girls and, thus, paving the way for Julio-Claudian empresses.

⁹⁸ Richard A. Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1992), 60.

⁹⁹ Barrett, *Agrippina*, 8.

Terentia and Cicero: A Realistic First Marriage

Cicero's marriage to Terentia highlights the struggles in a Republican marriage.

There is little discussion of this marriage – in ancient and modern sources – until its later years when divorce was imminent. Rawson reconstructs a brief biography of Terentia.¹⁰⁰

She had a half-sister (or conceivably cousin) who was a Vestal Virgin and who from her name was probably of patrician descent; and there had been Terentii of some distinction in Rome since the third century, one branch even rising to the consulship and thus technically noble. Terentia herself was undoubtedly rich; she is said to have had a great dowry, and her property is a recurrent theme in the letters. If she was an heiress, that would help to explain why we do not hear of male relations.

One of the “early stories” in the ancient sources occurs almost twenty years into their marriage. Cicero, although on good terms with Clodius,¹⁰¹ gave evidence against him at trial, an event which Plutarch (*Cicero* 29) attributes to a jealous fit of Terentia.

It was thought that Cicero did not give his testimony for the truth's sake, but by way of defence against the charges of his own wife Terentia. For there was enmity between her and Clodius on account of his sister Clodia, whom Terentia thought to be desirous of marrying Cicero and . . . [it] made Terentia suspicious. So, being a woman of harsh nature, and having sway over Cicero, she incited him to join in the attack upon Clodius and give testimony against him.

Terentia's “ascendancy” is likely due to her large dowry¹⁰² which provided not only a comfortable living for her husband but influence over him as well.

In the course of this thirty-four year marriage,¹⁰³ Cicero was sent into exile, leaving behind Terentia, to whom fell the burden of maintaining the family's well-being

¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Rawson, *Cicero: A Portrait* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1983), 25. Hereafter cited as *Cicero*.

¹⁰¹ At this time at least, prior to the Catilinarian conspiracy.

¹⁰² Although Rawson (*Cicero*, 50) does not give any primary evidence of the dowry, she does list among Terentia's holdings woodlands, grazing pastures, and house property in Rome. See also Barrett, *Agrippina*, 9.

¹⁰³ 80-46 B.C.E.

and finances.¹⁰⁴ Attention has been given to this time in their marriage, primarily because Cicero's letters to Terentia have survived. Cicero praised her in many of his early letters for her ability to manage the family's affairs in his absence.

Et litteris multorum et sermone omnium perfertur ad me, incredibilem tuam virtutem et fortitudinem esse teque nec animi, neque corporis laboribus defatigari. Me miserum! Te, ista virtute, fide, probitate, humanitate, in tantas aerumnas propter me incidisse!

I am kept informed by the letters of many and the conversation of everybody that your courage and fortitude, Terentia, are beyond belief, and that you are not exhausted by your troubles either of mind or body. Woe is me! To think that you of all people, virtuous, faithful, upright, and generous as you are, should have fallen into such a morass of misery all on my account! (*Epistulae ad familiares*, 14.1.)

This letter, dated November 25, 58 B.C.E., begins a series of correspondence to his wife which conveys Cicero's admiration for her. In it, his compassion for the state of his wife's health and happiness are explicitly expressed. He even sounds lovesick for her in some letters.¹⁰⁵ His "sickness" worries Terentia, so much so that she offers to come to him in exile: *Quod scribis, te, si velim, ad me venturam* ("As to your suggestion that, if I wish it, you will join me here"). He declines by saying "my wish is that you should stay where you are. If you all succeed in your aims, it is for me to come to you."¹⁰⁶

The idealistic tone of Cicero's characterization of Terentia (*uxori meae optimae*, *Fam.* 14.3) had become, by 47 B.C.E., a more realistic one. Cicero had grown to distrust her, and his earlier letters of long flattery were now replaced by succinct business

¹⁰⁴ As was necessary for the family's survival, Terentia handled all financial and familial affairs in Cicero's absence. This reversal of roles for the husband and wife proved a great stress on their marriage later when Cicero returned. For evidence of her duties in his absence, see, for example, *Cic. Fam.* 14.5; in it, Cicero praises Terentia for describing thoroughly her activities on behalf of the family and asks her to send someone to take care of his interest in an auction.

¹⁰⁵ *mea Terentia, fidissima atque optima uxor* ("Terentia mine, the most faithful and best of wives"), *Fam.* 14.4.

¹⁰⁶ *te istic esse volo. Si perficitis, quod agitis, me ad vos venire oportet*, *Cic. Fam.* 14.3.

letters.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps the state of his daughter's marriage was to blame for the change in tone. Terentia had arranged the marriage of their only daughter, Tullia, to Dolabella.¹⁰⁸ The match was considered a good one, but in the chaos of Republican political clashes, Cicero questioned the safety of his family. His son-in-law's political leanings, Cicero feared, might endanger his family. In a letter to Terentia, he expressed his wish that Tullia divorce Dolabella.

Quod scripsi ad te proximis litteris de nuntio remittendo, quae sit istius vis hoc tempore, et quae concitatio multitudinis, ignoro. Si metuendus iratus est, quies tamen ab illo fortasse nascetur. Totum iudicabis, quale sit; et quod in miserrimis rebus minime miserum putabis, id facies.

I wrote to you in my last about sending a note of divorce; well, I don't quite know what force he [Dolabella] has behind him at the moment, and what means of rousing the populace. Even if he is to be feared in his anger, he will after all perhaps take the initiative in a peaceful settlement. You will, I am sure, take a comprehensive view of the whole matter, and you will do what you think to be least distressing in these most distressing circumstances. (*Fam.* 14.13)

Despite his concern for her safety in Rome ten years prior, Cicero no longer sheds tears over Terentia's plight. In this letter, Cicero seems to express trust in her ability to handle the situation, but a hint of his changing feelings towards her appears in a letter to Atticus, written only five days earlier (July 5, 47 B.C.E.). In it, he expresses concern that Terentia might be writing a new will which did not make careful provisions for their children. He clearly no longer trusts that Terentia is acting in the best interest of the whole family.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Cic. *Fam.* 14.22-4, which date from August 11 to September 1, 47 B.C.E.

¹⁰⁸ As opposed to the tradition of the father finding a suitable husband for his daughter (Harlow and Laurence, 58). This example serves as one of many obligations which Terentia had to fulfill in Cicero's absence.

¹⁰⁹ Petrocelli believes that Republican wives of exiled men "actually denounced their legitimate husbands to get rid of them and most likely, come into control of their fortunes," in Corrado Petrocelli, "Cornelia the Matron," in *Roman Women*, Augusto Fraschetti, ed., translated by Linda Lappin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 101. Perhaps Cicero was aware of this practice and suspected Terentia of plotting to do the same, but he does not express those sentiments directly in his letters to his wife.

Quod ad te iam pridem de testamento scripsi, apud epistulas velim ut possim adversas. Ego huius miserrimae facultate confectus conflictor, nihil umquam simile atum puto.

I wrote to you some time back about the will. I wish ***. This poor child's long-suffering affects me quite beyond bearing. I believe her [Terentia's] like on earth has never been seen. (*Epistulae ad Atticum*, 11.25)

Here, Cicero calls into question Terentia's loyalty to him and his family, and he later asks Atticus to speak to her on his behalf.¹¹⁰

Plutarch's commentary on the decline of Cicero's marriage appears to be based on what Cicero himself said. According to Plutarch, Cicero

divorced his wife Terentia because he had been neglected by her during the war, so that he set out in lack of the necessary means for his journey, and even when he came back again to Italy did not find her considerate of him. For she did not come to him herself . . . (*Cic.* 41)

Plutarch chastises Terentia for failing to go to Brundisium, yet Cicero had told her himself, during his exile, not to join him.¹¹¹ In June 47 B.C.E., only months prior to the divorce, he wrote:

Si vales, bene est; valeo. Da operam, ut convalescas. Quod opus erit, ut res tempusque postulat, provideas atque administres, et ad me de omnibus rebusquam saepissime litteras mittas. Vale.

if you are well, all is right; I am well. Make every effort to recover your health. Provide for and take charge of any necessary business, as time and circumstances demand, and send me letters about everything as often as possible. Goodbye. (*Fam.* 14.21)

There is no invitation in this letter, nor does he allude to any previous invitation; nevertheless, according to Plutarch, Terentia's failure to appear at Brundisium was one reason cited by Cicero for the divorce. His last extant letter to Terentia, on October 1, 47

¹¹⁰ *Haec etiam, si videbitur, cum Terentia loquere opportune, non queo omnia scribere* ("This too, if you think fit, please discuss with Terentia at a suitable moment. I cannot write all that is in my mind.") *Cic. Att.* 11.25.

¹¹¹ *Cic. Fam.* 14.3; see above, p. 22.

B.C.E., gives instructions to prepare the Tusculan estate for the arrival of guests.¹¹²

Cicero seems to have no desire to see her or to come to Rome, despite his long absence.

Their marriage did not survive his return to Rome. Considering their ability to survive during the shifting politics of the times, theirs was a seemingly successful relationship; however, the long separation, the reversal of roles,¹¹³ and Cicero's growing mistrust proved too burdensome, and the marriage was dissolved.

Julia and Pompey: An Ideal Remarriage

The ideal marriage of the late Republic¹¹⁴ was a love-match between a husband and wife who herself was idealized. The original motive for the match may have been political, but love and affection could result nonetheless. Treggiari argues that in the first century B.C.E., when our sources are more copious, we begin to see ideal portrayals of the family. She bases her judgment on the "heightened expectations of emotional rewards in marriage".¹¹⁵ One such couple is Pompey the Great and Julia, daughter of Caesar and granddaughter of Cinna; quite obviously the match was political,¹¹⁶ but their devotion to one another is attested in the ancient sources:

¹¹² *In Tusculanum nos venturos putamus aut Nonis aut postridie. Ibi ut sint omnia parata. Plures enim fortasse nobiscum erunt, et, ut arbitror, diutius ibi commorabimur. Labrum si in balineo non est, ut sit. Item cetera, quae sunt ad victum et ad valetudinem necessaria. Vale.* ("I think that I shall set to Tusculum either on the Nones or on the following day. Kindly see that everything there is ready. I may have a number of people with me, and shall probably make a fairly long stay there. If there is no tub in the bathroom, get one put in; likewise whatever else is necessary for health and subsistence. Goodbye.") Cic. *Fam.* 14.20.

¹¹³ See above, note 104.

¹¹⁴ In contrast to the ideal wife of early Rome who was portrayed much like Lucretia who "though it was late at night, was busily engaged upon her wool, while her maidens toiled about her in the lamplight as she sat in the hall of her house" (*Sed nocte sero deditam lanae inter lucubrantes ancillas in medo aedium sedentem inveniunt*, Livy 1.57.9).

¹¹⁵ Treggiari, *Marriage*, 120.

¹¹⁶ So political that Cicero expressed great concern and suspicion that Pompey was "working for absolute power" (Cic. *Att.* 2.17). In fact, several political marriages resulted from this alliance: Julia and Pompey married; Pompey offered his daughter Pompeia to appease Caepio, Julia's original betrothed; and

He himself spent his time with his wife among the pleasure-places of Italy, going from one to another,¹¹⁷ either because he loved her or because she loved him so that he could not bear to leave her; for this reason too is given. (Plut. *Pompey* 53)

This portrayal of a love-match may seem somewhat contrived, but it is an effective counterpoint to Plutarch's depiction of Pompey's earlier marriages which, according to Plutarch, seemed barely tolerable.¹¹⁸ Because Plutarch's description of Julia makes no mention of her potential or proven fertility, their marital happiness here seems to be based solely on compatibility. Because Pompey had been married before, the age difference was greater than usual; Julia was only twenty-four years old when she became Pompey's fourth wife.¹¹⁹ His enthusiasm for the relationship no doubt stemmed, in part, from her youth: the forty-seven year old Pompey would be able to mould his wife according to his wishes, and she had her childbearing years ahead of her.

For his part, Pompey was praised for his fidelity, not only by abstaining from extramarital affairs but also by refusing to divorce Julia on the suggestion of his political advisors.¹²⁰ Julia is depicted as equally worthy of her husband, exciting him with a lively interest in non-political affairs. Such a distraction was well received by Pompey.¹²¹ Meanwhile, Julia piqued the interests of other men; for example, C. Memmius attempted

Caesar married Calpurnia, daughter of Piso, prompting Cato to comment disgustingly that it was a "government prostituted by marriage alliances" (Plut. *Caesar* 14.4).

¹¹⁷ Terentia most likely would have traveled with Cicero, had his departure been for state business or leisurely travel. Her stay in Rome can more likely be attributed to Cicero's exile. While he was away, Cicero would have been cut off from any official news of Rome, and so, needed his wife to provide that link for him. Pompey was traveling for pleasure; besides, as a young bride, Julia could never be expected to handle his affairs as Terentia did. Nonetheless, by providing companionship for her husband, she demonstrates a certain level of devotion.

¹¹⁸ Pompey divorced Antistia dishonorably to marry an already pregnant Aemilia who then died in childbirth. The divorce of Antistia "befitted the needs of Sulla rather than the nature and habits of Pompey" (Plut. *Pomp.* 9). The divorce of Mucia cannot be attested to a specific cause, only that she "had played the wanton" while he was away at war (Plut. *Pomp.* 42).

¹¹⁹ Haley, 107.

¹²⁰ Q. Terentius Culleo thought that Pompey needed to separate himself from Caesar and saw the divorce of Julia as a necessary step (Plut. *Pomp.* 49).

¹²¹ Haley, 108.

to distract Julia with letters sent via a freedman.¹²² Julia disclosed the event to Pompey who dismissed the freedman; Memmius suffered in reputation.

Having proven herself a good wife,¹²³ Julia attempted a new role, as a mother. Her first attempt ended in a miscarriage, but the circumstances demonstrate, once again, her commitment to her husband. As told by Plutarch (*Pomp.* 53), there was a public fight which splattered Pompey's clothes with blood. He changed his clothes, sending the soiled garments back to the house; when Julia saw these, she fainted. She was "only brought back to life again with great difficulty. As it was, the shock to her feelings caused a miscarriage."¹²⁴ Even at this tragic moment, Julia's "ideal" devotion to Pompey is portrayed, by tying her health to his; if he was injured, then she was injured also. Sadly, Julia was not able to cross this threshold into motherhood; she died bearing Pompey a child, who died only a few days later (Plut. *Pomp.* 53).

The *exemplum* of Julia meant to inspire young girls to fit "the pattern of the good, young wife: the clever, pretty, but modest girl who is devoted to her father-figure husband . . . [who] combined family life with intellectual interests".¹²⁵ Regardless of the political nature of the marriage, Julia was a loved and loving wife, but she fell short of fulfilling the ultimate goal of becoming a mother.

¹²² Suet. *De Grammaticis* 14.1. See Haley, 109 n. 15, for a discussion that resolves any confusion about the *uxor* named in Suetonius' story.

¹²³ If we use previous descriptions of Pompey's love for her as a standard of measurement, then it is safe to assume that Julia was a good wife to him.

¹²⁴ See also Val. Max. 4.6.4.

¹²⁵ Haley, 111.

Cornelia: A Widow and Mother

Most Republican wives crossed the threshold into widowhood with little ceremony or comment; but the inception of Cornelia's widowhood was recorded because of the uniqueness of the event. Plutarch (*Tiberius Gracchus* 1) says that Tiberius Gracchus, Cornelia's husband, caught two snakes on his bed. According to the augurs, Tiberius had to kill either the male or female snake, signifying his own or his wife's death.

Tiberius, accordingly, who loved his wife, and thought that since she was still young and he was older it was more fitting that he should die, killed the male serpent, but let the female go. A short time afterwards, as the story goes, he died, leaving Cornelia with twelve children by him.

Thus, Cornelia is first mentioned in the sources as the recipient of her husband's sacrifice. She is, in effect, defined by her husband's piety and his recognition of her virtue.¹²⁶ By 150 B.C.E., Cornelia was a widow and, thereafter, could only be mentioned in light of her children. Although her role as a widow, especially an *univira*, gave Cornelia tremendous status, her role as a mother was primary, and her *exempla* mostly revolve around her activities as a mother.

As the mother of twelve, Cornelia took her place in a famous triad of exemplary Republican mothers that also included Aurelia, mother of Caesar, and Atia, mother of Augustus.¹²⁷ Harlow declares that "it is almost axiomatic in Roman history that children who achieved highly had at least one good parent, and that good parents produced good

¹²⁶ Plutarch goes on to say that "Tiberius was thought to have made no bad decision when he elected to die instead of such a woman" (*Ti. Gracch.* 1).

¹²⁷ Tac. *Dialogus de oratoribus* 28.6.

children.”¹²⁸ Tacitus, in his *Dialogus de oratoribus* (28.4-6), identifies the ideal childhood, and, in doing so, extols the parenting skills of their mothers.

Nam pridie suus cuique filius, ex castra parente natus, non in cellula emptae nutricis, sed gremio ac sinu matris educabatur, cuius praecipua laus erat tueri domum et inservire liberis Ac non studia modo curasque, sed remissiones etiam lususque puerorum sanctitate quadam ac verecundia temperabat.

In the good old days, every man’s son, born in wedlock, was brought up not in the chamber of some hireling nurse, but in his mother’s lap, and at her knee. And that mother could have no higher praise than that she managed the house and gave herself to her children Religiously and with the utmost delicacy she regulated not only the serious tasks of her youthful charges, but their recreations also and their games.

Thus, these Republican women become the role models for Julio-Claudian mothers. As mothers of the most powerful men of their time, they provided the best models for later mothers of imperial princes. Of these mothers, we have the most information about Cornelia.

Cornelia saw three of her twelve children live to adulthood, a daughter and two sons, Tiberius and Gaius. Those two sons provided the reason why Cornelia was mentioned by later writers. Although she was regarded very highly for her matronly ideals and intellect, she only exists in the literature because of her relationships with the men in her family.¹²⁹ Cornelia took seriously her duties for her children, adding to her burden the tasks that would normally be handled by a father, such as providing for their

¹²⁸ Harlow, 84.

¹²⁹ As clarified by Petrocelli, “Cornelia was idealized by posterity as the perfect matron, the embodiment of those values that traditionally characterized the family, the underlying structural unit of a Roman society. Yet in order to describe Cornelia’s life, we must resort to conjecture and refer continuously to the men in her life, digging through their biographies, full of references to their careers, in search of a few scanty bits of information about her,” Petrocelli, 35-6.

education.¹³⁰ Moreover, since Cornelia was responsible for choosing her sons' tutors, Tiberius and Gaius developed a political outlook similar to their mother's.¹³¹

Cornelia took pride in her children, remarking that they were "her jewels" (*haec ornamenta sunt mea*); this story led Valerius Maximus to conclude that "children are a matron's best jewellery" (*maxima ornamenta esse matronis liberos*, 4.4). Cornelia's comments also impressed other ancient authors. Having read her letters,¹³² Cicero praises her speech as a positive influence on her sons.¹³³ As Cornelia's children became adults, she was responsible for finding suitable spouses for them. Her greatest match was for her daughter who wed Scipio Aemilianus. The match was so exceptional that Cornelia complained to her sons, saying "the Roman still called her the mother-in-law of Scipio, but not yet the mother of the Gracchi."¹³⁴ That Cornelia's opinions influenced her sons is demonstrated by the fact that an offhand comment such as this provided the motivation for her sons to achieve greater success.¹³⁵ Cornelia's interest in her sons' careers was not unusual; Roman matrons tended to guard their sons' careers carefully because they were judged by their sons' decisions. That also led Cornelia to provide them with the best education and advice.

¹³⁰ Even though fathers typically handled educational tasks, including the teaching of the *mos maiorum*, Petrocelli (52) argues that women transmitted the cultural heritage of fathers to their children. He argues that this task was instrumental in the "development of great men."

¹³¹ "Young Tiberius' political ideas had been inspired by his teachers Blossius and Diophanes, whom [Cornelia] had personally chosen as his tutors," *ibid.*, 56-7. See also Cic. *Brutus* 27.104.

¹³² Cicero (*Brut.* 58.211) attests to the publication of Cornelia's letters and, along with Quintilian (*Institutio oratoria* 1.1.6), extols the eloquence of her style. For a lengthy discussion of Cornelia's letters, including quotations from the so-called "Cornelia fragments", see Emily A. Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London: Routledge, 1999), 193-7.

¹³³ *Filios non tam in gremio educatos quam in sermone matris*, Cic. *Brut.* 27.104; for praise of her rearing of her sons, see also Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 1.5.

¹³⁴ Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 8.5.

¹³⁵ Based on their subsequent careers and success. This use of a mother's guilt to motivate her sons becomes more exaggerated in the Imperial family, where the standards of success were considerably higher. For example, on the occasion where Nero gave his mother, Agrippina the Younger, a beautiful jeweled robe, her remark was that it was only a fraction of what was owed to her; see Tac. *Ann.* 13.13.

Cornelia avoided active involvement in her elder son's political activities, but after his murder, she took care to provide advice to her younger son, Gaius.¹³⁶ That advice, however, was not always well-received; to be tangled in Gaius' politics meant that any suspicion of his activities would cast a shadow on her as well. For example, although he usually treated Cornelia with respect,¹³⁷ Plutarch recorded that Gaius' "mother also took active part in his seditious measures, by secretly hiring from foreign parts and sending to Rome men who were ostensibly reapers" (*Caius Gracchus*, 13.2). Anthony Barrett¹³⁸ claims that, at one point, Cornelia was even suspected of killing her famous son-in-law Scipio because he jeopardized her sons' legislation.

The anecdotes about Cornelia depict her as an ideal matron.¹³⁹ Even in her own time, she served as a model. Petrocelli¹⁴⁰ says that "sources tell us that her sons sometimes evoked her image in order to manipulate the public conscience." Cornelia lived out her life as an *univira*, despite offers of marriage,¹⁴¹ and was devoted to her children's success. Plutarch ends his account of Gaius' life with praise for her, citing a noble spirit and admirable ability to speak of her sons' achievement and tragic ends with

¹³⁶ "In the tragic career of her youngest she comes to the fore. Letters of advice were said to have passed from her to him and then were circulated later in antiquity. Cicero [*Brut.* 58.211] thought they could be studied with profit," in T. W. Hillard, "*Materna Auctoritas*: The Political Influence of Roman *Matronae*" *Classicum* 9 (1983): 11. Hereafter cited as "*Matronae*."

¹³⁷ Plutarch (*Ti. Gracch.* 1.5) credited the success of the Gracchi to Cornelia's nurturing over the nature of her children: "these sons Cornelia reared with such scrupulous care that, although confessedly no other Romans were so well endowed by nature, they were thought to owe their virtues more to education than to nature."

¹³⁸ Barrett, *Agrippina*, 8-9. He does not, however, provide any primary source as a reference for his statement.

¹³⁹ "It is here that the idealization of Cornelia comes in; her high birth, the great number of her children and her long and dignified widowhood made her an object of reverence: as a model of motherhood and of traditional Roman virtues she became an example of Roman moral superiority," Hemelrijk, 94.

¹⁴⁰ Petrocelli, 56-7. For example, Tiberius used to parade his mother and children in front of the people to "join their entreaties to his" (Cass. Dio 24.83.8).

¹⁴¹ "She refused [Ptolemy], and remained a widow" (Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 1.4).

pride and without grief.¹⁴² Plutarch, by beginning and ending his lives of the Gracchi with praise for their mother, sealed Cornelia's fate as one of the most influential mothers of the Republic.

¹⁴² "Cornelia is reported to have borne all her misfortunes in a noble and magnanimous spirit, and to have said of the sacred places where her sons had been slain that they were tombs worthy of the dead which occupied them She was indeed . . . most admirable when she spoke of her sons without grief or tears, and narrated their achievements and their fate to all enquirers as if she were speaking of men of the early days of Rome" (Plut. *C. Gracch.* 19).

CHAPTER 2

LIVIA

Livia Drusilla¹⁴³ was born on 30 January 58 B.C.E. to Alfidia and M. Livius Drusus Claudius.¹⁴⁴ The Claudian family was considered one of Rome's most influential families, with such famous ancestors as Appius Claudius and Publius Clodius Pulcher. Livia advanced the family name through her marriages, first to Ti. Claudius Nero¹⁴⁵ whom she wed in the turbulent era of civil wars and then to Octavian. Because her first husband sided against Octavian in the Perusian War, he was forced to flee Rome when Octavian emerged victorious.¹⁴⁶ When he went into exile, Livia, as a supportive wife, voluntarily joined her husband, with their son Tiberius who had been born in 42 B.C.E.¹⁴⁷ Octavian eventually pardoned those men who were in exile, including Ti. Claudius, presumably because he wanted to restore order and peace to Rome after nearly a hundred years of civil war. Not until her husband was recalled and pardoned in 38 B.C.E. did Livia return to Rome. Not long afterwards, Livia was given in marriage to Octavian with her first husband acting as her father.¹⁴⁸ This blend of political and romantic intrigue in

¹⁴³ "By the imperial period Roman men allowed themselves considerable flexibility in their nomenclature. The naming of Roman women was even more varied. It seems that Livia was originally named by the feminine form of her *gens* (her father's *gens* by adoption, that is) and a feminine diminutive form of her father's *cognomen*, hence Livia Drusilla (CIL 6.13179)," Barrett, *Livia*, 307.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴⁵ Barrett (*Livia*, 10) mentions that, based on the lineage of the Claudian name, Livia and her first husband were first cousins.

¹⁴⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 5.1. In this paper, Livia's second husband will be referred to as Octavian in any description dating prior to 27 B.C.E. and as Augustus thereafter. In addition, Tiberius Claudius Nero, Livia's first husband, will be referred to as Ti. Claudius. Their son will be referred to simply as Tiberius.

¹⁴⁷ Suet. *Ti.* 4.

¹⁴⁸ Vell. Pat. 2.75.3.

Livia's relationships with men was not unusual for Roman women of the Republican and Imperial periods.¹⁴⁹ To explore the intricacies of these intrigues, this chapter will focus on how Livia was portrayed in ancient literature, how she developed the image of the Roman Empress, and why her role as a mother of a future emperor was significant.

Livia's Marriage to Octavian

The circumstances of Livia's betrothal and marriage to Octavian are vague.¹⁵⁰

We know that both Livia and Octavian were already married when they first met.

Suetonius says

Cum hac quoque divortium fecit, "pertaesus," ut scribit, "morum perversitatem eius," ac statim Liviam Drusillam matrimonio Tiberi Neronis et quidem praegnantem abduxit

[Octavian] divorced [Scribonia] also, "unable to put up with her shrewish disposition," as he himself writes, and at once took Livia Drusilla from her husband Tiberius Nero, although she was with child at the time
(*Aug.* 62)

Their introduction is undocumented, but Barrett considers the possible irony that Scribonia introduced Livia, her niece by adoption to Octavian.¹⁵¹ Although Dio (48.34.3) does not mention their first interaction, he gives a point of reference by describing a party in 39 B.C.E. where Octavian's clean-shaven chin was a testimony to his growing love for Livia. Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.10) says that, because of her pregnancy, Octavian was forced to obtain official permission to marry Livia; Tacitus also claims that Octavian abducted Ti.

¹⁴⁹ Petrocelli, 16.

¹⁵⁰ "Octavian had decided on a new wife. The precise series of events by which this came about is difficult to disentangle. There is the usual problem of dealing with sources that may be incomplete, careless, or hostile. But we have the additional difficulty that these sources might have drawn much of their information on the marriage from material that was essentially fuel in a propaganda war, and thus already distorted at birth," Barrett *Livia*, 20-21. None of the ancient sources gives specifics on the time and circumstance of their first introduction.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

Claudius' wife.¹⁵² What we do not know is why Ti. Claudius was a willing participant in the union (Cass. Dio 48.44.3). One opinion is that "Tiberius [Claudius], for the sake of the interests of the aristocracy, was willing to give up Livia, in order that the old Roman nobility might reacquire through the prestige and cleverness of a woman what it had not been able to maintain by force of arms."¹⁵³

Another unknown is Livia's feelings for Octavian at this point. Was she angry that her family had been forced into exile by this man, or was she grateful to him for allowing her family to return? Was she pregnant from an affair with Octavian, or did she, from the very beginning of her relationship with Octavian, have designs on power for her son Tiberius? The only comment on Livia's feeling is from Tacitus (*Ann.* 5.1) who opined that "her regrets were doubtful" (*incertum an invitam*). He also claims that Octavian wanted to marry Livia because he was obsessed with her beauty (*cupidine formae*, *Ann.* 5.1). I would add that he was impressed with her proven fertility: Livia had already produced one son and was pregnant with another child. Although Octavian's first wife Scribonia had borne a daughter, her two years with Octavian had not resulted in any male children.¹⁵⁴ Octavian needed heirs to whom to pass his legacy, and Livia would be

¹⁵² Barrett (*Livia*, 23) believes that Tacitus misunderstood Octavian's discussions with the pontiffs about Livia's pregnancy. Instead, Barrett believes the topic of discussion related not to Livia's ability to marry, but to the paternity of the child. Barrett has used later Roman legislation on the periods of time appropriate for Roman women before taking certain actions to deduce his theory. He cites Claudius' permission from the Senate (instead of priests) for his marriage to Agrippina as another example of Tacitus' confusion.

¹⁵³ Ruth Hoffsten, "Roman Women of Rank of the Early Empire as Portrayed by Dio, Paterculus, Suetonius, and Tacitus," Ph.D. diss. (University of Pennsylvania, 1939), 54. Barrett (*Livia*, 22) says that Livia's ancestry would have benefitted Octavian by relating him to the old distinguished families. For a description of her noble lineage, see Vell. Pat. 2.75.3.

¹⁵⁴ Regardless of his future political stature, Octavian would be expected to continue the Julian family's legacy, as conferred upon him in Julius Caesar's will. A son born to Octavian would provide continuity in the family line. I believe that Octavian was initially taken with Livia's ability to produce sons; however, by the time that their marriage proved childless, I believe that they had realized theirs was a love-match. Also, Octavian would have realized his ability to use his sons-in-law and stepsons as heirs to the family legacy; while not ideal, it would allow him to maintain his marriage to Livia.

likely to have more children. Many scholars have discussed the issues of Octavian's aims in marrying Livia; this chapter instead explores the role of Livia as a mother.

Livia and the Ancient Sources

Non regno tamen neque dictatura, sed principis nomine constitutam rem publicam . . .

Yet he organized the state, not by instituting a monarchy or a dictatorship, but by creating the title of First Citizen.

Tacitus' description (*Ann.* 1.9) of Octavian as an innovator also sheds light on the portrayal of Livia in the ancient sources. Just as Octavian defined a new form of government, so too did Livia redefine the behaviors and attitudes of women, especially women in the Imperial family. Livia became the consummate Empress, a role which she envisioned as a continuation of Republican ideals in which motherhood played a major role. In fact, Barrett believes that Livia's maintenance of the traditional role of women at the beginning of Octavian's rise to power allowed her to be more accepted by the Republicans.¹⁵⁵ Livia's eventual role as imperial wife and mother made her a target for criticism just as Octavian's political power – rivaled only by the kings of Rome – attracted censure.¹⁵⁶ Regardless of her attempt to uphold tradition, the portrayal of Livia in the sources varied from one extreme to the other: Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.9-11) tended to vilify her, while Paterculus (2.75.3) praised her.

¹⁵⁵ "From what we can glean about Livia's personality from the scant evidence available, the picture that emerges is not a remarkable one In reality, the very ordinariness of Livia as a private individual was one of her strongest assets. Romans had watched with alarm during the final years of the Republic as women with powerful personalities asserted themselves on the political scenes. Livia's dull normalcy was reassuring, and perfect for the times," Barrett, *Livia*, 114.

¹⁵⁶ Bartman, XXII.

The ancient sources often attacked her through her son. Further, they projected his misdeeds onto Livia and accused her of manipulating Augustus to advance Tiberius' political standing (*nam senem Augustum devinxerat adeo*, Tac. *Ann.* 1.3). Tacitus used such phrases as *novercalibus odiis* (*Ann.* 1.5), *dolus Liviae*, and *obscuris matris artibus* (*Ann.* 1.3) to express his contempt for Livia's participation in politics. In the first ten chapters of the *Annals*, he linked her to several crimes, so that the negative portrayal of Livia was clear at the outset.¹⁵⁷

Since mothers often were judged by the careers of their sons,¹⁵⁸ ancient historians were able to use Tiberius "against" Livia in this way. For example, Tacitus (*Ann.* 5.3) described the reign of Tiberius as "a sheer and grinding despotism" (*praerupta iam et urguens dominatio*); surely his distaste for the Emperor would have influenced his description of the woman who raised him.¹⁵⁹ In order to paint a certain image, positive or negative, of Livia, the author added and omitted information which would have made the picture more balanced. Because Tiberius was not Augustus' first choice as heir,¹⁶⁰ several sources (although they often disagreed on what exactly she did) accused Livia of having a part in the deaths of Augustus' first choices. Ancient accounts of the death of Agrippa Postumus form an illuminating case study of this phenomenon. Agrippa Postumus died immediately upon Tiberius' accession, and the biases of the particular

¹⁵⁷ Rutland, 20. Even Syme (*Tacitus*, 307) that Tacitus adds a sinister slant to his portrayal of Livia by taking "much more license" than other authors.

¹⁵⁸ See above, pp. 30-1.

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, M.P. Charlesworth, "Livia and Tanaquil," *The Classical Review* 41 (1927): 55-57. He claims that Tacitus' own experience under Domitian colored his view of all Caesars, and thus tainted his image of the mother of the Tiberius.

¹⁶⁰ "Between 35 and 9 B.C. [Livia's] history is obscure because her position and the position of her two children in the plans of Augustus for the succession were minor since Marcellus and Agrippa were the putative heirs," in Marleen B. Flory, "Livia and the History of Public Honorific Statues for Women in Rome," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 123 (1993): 298, hereafter cited as "Statues."

authors are evident in their descriptions of his death. Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.6), who was the harshest critic of Livia, claimed that she and Tiberius “hurriedly procured the murder of the youth whom they suspected and detested” (*suspecti et invisi iuvenis caedem festinavisse*). On the other hand, Suetonius questioned to what degree she was responsible and left open the possibility that Augustus had given the order.

Quos codicillos dubium fuit, Augustusne moriens reliquisset, quo materiam tumultus post se subduceret; an nomine Augusti Livia et ea conscio Tiberio an ignaro, dictasset.

It is not known whether Augustus left this letter [ordering Agrippa’s death] when he died, to remove a future source of discord, or whether Livia wrote it herself in the name of her husband; and in the latter case, whether it was with or without the connivance of Tiberius. (*Ti.* 22)

Dio (57.3.5-6) said that Tiberius, although he was responsible for the murder, allowed men to invent their own versions, from which rumors of Livia’s involvement grew.

Concerning the death of Germanicus, another of Augustus’ protégées, Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.7) held Tiberius and Livia equally to blame, though other authors (Cass. Dio 57.18.6, 9-10; Suet. *Caligula* 1, *Ti.* 52; Vell. Pat. 2.130) did not include Livia as part of the plot against him.

The description of Livia’s misdeeds continues with the circumstances of Augustus’ death. The public announcements of his death and Tiberius’ succession brought suspicion on Livia because they occurred only after Tiberius had returned to Rome. Sources cited the timing and method of death, implying that Livia directed Augustus’ death. Even if she played no part in Augustus’ death, she tried to create a picture of easy succession for her son’s benefit. Although Suetonius (*Ti.* 21, *Aug.* 98) and Paterculus (2.123.1-2) assign Livia no role, saying that Tiberius was recalled by Augustus and received instructions before his death, Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.5) says that Livia

delayed the announcement of Augustus' death, although he acknowledges that he does not know if Tiberius saw Augustus before he died. Dio (56.31.1) implies that Livia acted in a sinister manner because she did not announce Augustus' death until Tiberius had returned.

Purcell believes that Livia would not have been attacked so harshly by the sources if Augustus had not placed her in the spotlight as the *princeps femina*, a title assigned to her in ancient literature.¹⁶¹ If Augustus had kept Livia at home and away from the public eye, then, Purcell argues, the rumors would have been limited to speculation about the imperial couple's sexual relationship, and she would not have been criticized for participating in politics.¹⁶²

The comments were not, however, entirely critical, and it is probable that our sources are equally biased about Livia even when they praised her. Velleius Paterculus praised her openly and commented that she had a favorable impact on others.¹⁶³ Seneca said that she was concerned for her good reputation.¹⁶⁴ Valerius Maximus praised her modesty in marriage.¹⁶⁵ Although Dio and Suetonius did not praise her openly, when they mentioned crimes involving the family, they did not assume Livia's guilt.¹⁶⁶ In

¹⁶¹ Nicholas Purcell, "Livia and the Womanhood of Rome," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 32, new series (1986): 95. See also *Consolatio ad Liviam* 356; Ovid *Ex Ponto* 3.1.125. For other titles and honors bestowed on Livia, see below, note 179.

¹⁶² Purcell, 95.

¹⁶³ *Mater, eminentissima et per omnia deis quam hominibus similior femina, cuius potentiam nemo sensit nisi aut levatione periculi aut accessione dignitatis* ("his mother, a woman pre-eminent among women, and who in all things resembled the gods more than mankind, whose power no one felt except for the alleviation of trouble or promotion of rank"), Vell. Pat. 2.130.5.

¹⁶⁴ Seneca relates Livia's appeal to Augustus on account of Lucius Cinna. *Severitate nihil adhuc profecisti . . . Nunc tempta, quomodo tibi cedat clementia* ("So far you have accomplished nothing by severity . . . Try now how mercy will work"), Seneca *De Clementia* 1.9.6.

¹⁶⁵ *Tu Palatii columen Augustos penates sanctissimumque Iuliae genialem torum adsidua statione celebras* ("you [Chastity] never leave your post on the pinnacle of the Palatine, the august habitation, and the most holy marriage bed of Julia"), Val. Max. 6.1 preface.

¹⁶⁶ Rutland, 21. See Cass. Dio 57.3.6 and Suet. *Ti.* 22 for their depictions of Agrippa Postumus' death; for discussion of his death, see above, pp. 37-8.

summary, the tradition was hostile to Livia when it described public or traditionally male realms. Indeed, Livia's success in the political arena bred the contempt of some authors, in particular Tacitus.¹⁶⁷ What is interesting is the fact that ancient authors who criticize her political role are not equally critical when describing her in her traditionally feminine roles, chiefly in her role as a mother.¹⁶⁸

Livia and the Republican Ideal

Cornelia as the ideal Republican widow and mother was an inspiration to Livia. Both Livia and Augustus sought to portray this ideal by re-erecting Cornelia's statue¹⁶⁹ in the Porticus Octaviae,¹⁷⁰ possibly in a cluster of statues of mothers.¹⁷¹ Plutarch asserts that Cornelia was honored in respect to her father and sons, but he concedes that the inscription on her statue mentioned only her sons:

the people were pleased at this and gave their consent, honouring Cornelia no less on account of her sons than because of her father; indeed, in after times they erected a bronze statue of her, bearing the inscription: "Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi." (*C. Gracch.* 4.3)

¹⁶⁷ Measured primarily by her "success" in convincing Augustus to transfer power to Tiberius, but also noted by the number of honors and titles bestowed on her; see Cass. Dio 57.12.4-5, 58.2.3; Suet. *Claud.* 11; Tac. *Ann.* 1.14.

¹⁶⁸ Perhaps as males, the authors were less offended by Livia's actions that could be categorized as "female." Perhaps they meant their criticism to curb future female interest, as an example of the possible consequences of their involvement in political affairs.

¹⁶⁹ Pliny the Elder (*Naturalis historia* 34.14) describes the statue of Cornelia and includes its original location in the colonnade of Metellus. The base of this statue now stands in the Capitoline Museum in Rome.

¹⁷⁰ When Octavian built over the colonnade of Metellus, he re-erected Cornelia's statue in the Porticus Octaviae. It is likely that Octavian's interest in assembling statues of outstanding females in the Porticus Octaviae paralleled his interest in erecting the *summi viri* statues in his own Forum; by his actions, he was subsuming himself and his wife into the ranks of outstanding Roman men and women.

¹⁷¹ Flory, "Statues," 292. I think that the cluster of statues contained females who had offered some service to the state, rather than statues of mothers. Flory herself gives that as the reason for statues of women; see "Statues," 288.

As her sons' political faction, the *populares*, began to gain strength, the statue of Cornelia visually affirmed her support of her sons' goals with its inscription linking her to them.¹⁷² As Flory says, the statue of Cornelia "did not start a trend but specifically responded to political tensions and propaganda of the period."¹⁷³ What is interesting for this thesis is the fact that Cornelia's support of her sons did not open her up to accusations of trying to create a power vacuum in order to advance her sons.¹⁷⁴ Because of the changing political structure under Augustus, however, this was exactly the charge that was leveled at Livia in some of the sources. Any perceived promotion of her son was used by the historians as a reason for criticizing Livia, even though she was not the first woman to act or exert influence in the political arena. Indeed, she was basing her involvement in public life on firm Republican foundations.¹⁷⁵

In the beginning, Livia became involved with activities deemed acceptable for women.¹⁷⁶ According to Dio (58.2.3), for example, she provided dowries for daughters of patricians to marry and offered money to families to help raise their children. Both of these acts generated goodwill. Paterculus (2.130.5) also commented on her help to senators. He said that she interceded on their behalf when she could alleviate their trouble and advance their rank, which elevated her to god-like status. Dio (57.16.2) and

¹⁷² Ibid., 291.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 292.

¹⁷⁴ For favorable press about Cornelia, see above, pp. 28-32.

¹⁷⁵ "Already during the Republican period highborn women had been occupying positions of consequence at Rome. The well-known names of Aemilia, wife of the great Scipio, Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, and Sempronia her granddaughter, Julia, daughter of Caesar and wife of Pompey, Portia, Brutus' wife, and Servilia, his mother, amply attest the fact that women played a significant part in determining the policies of the Commonwealth," Hoffsten, 1. While these women may not have played a significant role, I do believe that their relationships with important men gave them positions of influence.

¹⁷⁶ As a result, according to the ancient writers (see below), Livia's involvement in activities which benefited people outside her family was cast in a positive light, even if the duties had political ramifications.

Suetonius (*Ti.* 50) both credit her with assisting the victims of fires in the city. Even Tacitus, her harshest critic, praised her:

Sanctitate domus priscum ad morem, comis ultra quam antiquis feminis probatum

in domestic virtue she was of the old school, though her affability went further than was approved by women of the elder world. (*Ann.* 5.1)

Clearly then, much of her image as a public servant was based on the image of the ideal Republican woman.

Livia focused originally on her image as a wife; her role as a mother would be placed center stage later when Augustus “appointed” a successor. This focus on marriage led Livia outside the home as champion of Concordia who personified the ideal relationship between husband and wife.¹⁷⁷ Ovid (*Fasti* 6.637-48) described a shrine to Concordia which Livia alone sponsored and dedicated (*ipsa praestit . . . dedicat Livia*) and said that Livia chose to honor Concordia as a testament to her harmonious life with Augustus. This shrine was dedicated during the Matralia, a festival to honor Mater Matuta, an old Italic goddess worshipped by married women in honor of their nieces and nephews (Ov. *Fast.* 6.559-62).¹⁷⁸ Clearly her decision to dedicate this shrine to Concordia at this time indicated her support of family and served to promote the image of Livia as a devoted wife.

¹⁷⁷ “Livia did not develop a new aspect of Concordia; rather, she focused renewed attention on an old ideal,” in Marleen B. Flory, “*Sic exempla parantur*: Livia’s Shrine to *Concordia* and the *Porticus Liviae*,” *Historia* 33 (1984): 317, hereafter cited as “Shrine.”

¹⁷⁸ Ovid gives the date of the dedication as June 11th, but the year is unspecified. Barrett (*Livia*, 51) suggests the year 14 C.E.

Livia received honors throughout her lifetime.¹⁷⁹ Some recognition was not unusual for aristocratic women who were generous in their benefaction to the people.¹⁸⁰ Livia's honors were more abundant, however, because of her association with Augustus. The more visible and honored his wife, the more positive his public image became. As the political situation changed from a Republic to a Principate, Livia's image and name were more often used in isolation. In 35 B.C.E., Livia was represented on a statue with Octavian's sister, Octavia (Cass. Dio 49.38.1);¹⁸¹ by 7 B.C.E. Livia was listed alone on a monument.¹⁸² These monuments were usually associated with traditional female roles. As Augustus gained more power, Livia came to represent a new ideal. No longer was she simply the wife of the *princeps*, associating herself with cults related to family relationships, such as the one for Concordia, rather she became the role model for all women in the Empire.¹⁸³ Because Augustus' laws¹⁸⁴ put his own marriage and family on public view,¹⁸⁵ he chose to represent his wife as the ideal. Furthermore, her sexuality and fertility could have a tremendous impact on his political agenda.¹⁸⁶ Livia and Augustus

¹⁷⁹ For honors related to the Vestal Virgins, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.13-17; for the dedicatory arch, see Cass. Dio 58.2.3, 6; for "Mother of her Country", see Cass. Dio 57.12.4-5, Tac. *Ann.* 1.14; for the Senate's proposal to rename October for her, see Suet. *Ti.* 26; for her deification, see Seneca *Apocol.* 9.

¹⁸⁰ For Cornelia's statue, see Plut. *C. Gracch.* 4.3; for Cloelia's statue, see Livy 2.13.6-11; for Claudia Quinta's statue, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.64, Val. Max. 1.8.11.

¹⁸¹ Purcell (85) remarks that Livia and Octavia received two other honors at that time, freedom from *tutela* and tribunician sacrosanctity.

¹⁸² See above, description of shrine to Concordia.

¹⁸³ Cass. Dio (58.2.4-5) explained one of her virtues, chastity, in a story which concerned her reaction upon seeing nude men. These men were threatened with harm for their offense, but Livia commented that "to chaste women such men are no whit different from statues" and thus, saved their lives.

¹⁸⁴ "By the *lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* and the *lex Iulia de adulteries coercendis*, both in place by 17 B.C., Augustus attempted to regularize the marital relationship, to make marriage once more a social obligation by instituting penalties against the unmarried, and to stimulate the birthrate by creating a series of rewards for families with the required number of children. Thus the *princeps* hoped to re-establish the sanctity and dignity of marriage and family life and the honor and prestige traditionally accorded to the mothers of families," Flory, "Shrine," 322.

¹⁸⁵ His own daughter broke his laws on adultery, and Augustus had to exile his only child for her vices (Suet. *Aug.* 65).

¹⁸⁶ "Female virtues thus have for [the emperors] a more specifically political use . . . for the sexuality of these women is being consciously used by their male kin – and sometimes by themselves – to

took Republican ideals and from them created an imperial mold. Thus Livia served her husband by providing an example for Roman women as the government evolved from a Republic to a Principate.

Livia as a Wife

In her second marriage, as in her first, Livia was “political cement”; like her first husband, Octavian used her family connections to solidify his political alliances.¹⁸⁷ Likewise, her standing in society was much more apparent once she married Octavian who was, at the time, one of the triumvirs;¹⁸⁸ with that standing came certain expectations, primarily associated with raising a family because Octavian “earnestly desired issue” (*maxime cuperet*, Suet. *Aug.* 63). Soon after the marriage, Livia gave birth to a second son, Drusus, but her third child, conceived with Augustus, was stillborn. The couple remained married for 52 years until Octavian’s death in 14 C.E., but she was unable to conceive again. Augustus’ love for her is well-attested (e.g., *dilexitque et probavit unice ac perseveranter*, Suet. *Aug.* 62), but Livia’s feelings for him are not mentioned. Instead we have descriptions of her actions which give us some sense of her

represent something else. So the icon covers over the woman inside it,” in Amy Richlin, “Julia’s Jokes, Galla Placidia, and the Roman Use of Women as Political Icons,” in *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views*, eds. Barbara Garlick, Suzanne Dixon, and Pauline Allen, 65-91 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 66-67.

¹⁸⁷ “Marriage to Livia created no obvious alliance with a single powerful individual. Rather, she cemented [Octavian’s] links to two of Rome’s noblest families, the Claudii and the Livii, at precisely the time when Octavian was courting the support of the old senatorial aristocracy . . . At a critical time politically for B.C.E. Octavian, Livia’s prestigious bloodlines helped garner crucial support among the aristocratic faction for her husband, an outsider to their closed social sphere. Even as late as 33 Octavian would seem to be capitalizing on his wife’s familial connections, for the couple sponsored funeral games not only for Livia’s just deceased ex-husband but also for her father, who had died nearly a decade earlier,” Bartman, 57-8. For information on Livia’s noble heritage, see Tac. *Ann.* 5.1; Vell. Pat. 2.75, 79.

¹⁸⁸ “Livia thus had a decade or so of married life before she found herself married to a princeps, in a process that offered time to her to become acclimatized and to establish a style and timing appropriate to her situation. It must have helped that in their personal relations she and her husband seem to have been a devoted couple . . .” Barrett, *Livia*, 120.

devotion to Augustus. Livia was involved in the cults of Concordia and Juno Pronuba,¹⁸⁹ both of whom were guardians of happy marriages. Such an association with cults for married women might not be proof of Livia's romantic affection for Octavian, but her actions certainly demonstrated her devotion to their life together.¹⁹⁰ The fact that the day of their marriage was celebrated in Rome¹⁹¹ and that Livia's name was used in the marriage contract¹⁹² identifies the couple as "happily married".

Not only did Livia support Augustus publicly, but she served him privately as well. For example, Seneca said that Augustus was happy to have found a supporter in Livia (*gavisus, sibi quod advocatum invenerat, Clem. 1.9.7*). Livia gained Augustus' confidence, and through the years, he turned to her for advice on various matters. Plutarch (*Galba* 3.1) said that she had influence over him in a matter concerning her relative Galba, so that, at her insistence, the emperor made him a consul. Suetonius related two stories of Livia's influence over Augustus. In the first she interceded on behalf of a Gaul, and, according to Suetonius,

Liviae pro quodam tributario Gallo roganti civitatem negavit, immunitatem optulit

When Livia asked [for citizenship] for a Gaul from a tributary province, he

¹⁸⁹ "The association of later empresses and Livia herself both during her lifetime and after her death with Juno suggests a role as Juno Pronuba and honors the wife of the emperor as the guardian of married life. . . Livia was associated with traditional deities of female life such as Juno and Vesta and, by degrees during her lifetime, assimilated to the status of a Vestal Virgin. Her identification with Juno fitted her role as consort to Augustus-Jupiter," Flory, "Shrine," 320. See *Con. ad Liv.* 380; *Ov. Fast.* 1.650.

¹⁹⁰ Barrett (*Livia*, 19) suggests that she may initially have been attracted by his power. While I do not intend to attempt to identify Livia's feelings towards Octavian specifically, I do believe that she was (no matter her feelings for her husband) intent on building a life with him and on providing a model for Roman women to follow.

¹⁹¹ "The day of her marriage to Augustus was an even more important date in the calendars than her birthday, and was the day chosen by Claudius as the appropriate moment for her deification," Purcell, 92. For a description of the celebration, see *Fasti Verulani*, Jan. 17th (*feriae ex s.c. quod eo die Augusta nupsit divo Augusto*), cited in Attilio Degrassi, ed., *Inscriptiones Italiae* XIII no. 2 (Rome: La Libreria dello Stato, 1963), 161.

¹⁹² Barrett (*Livia*, 22-3) says that papyri from Egypt confirm that this custom continued for more than a century after her death.

refused, offering instead freedom from tribute . . . (Aug. 40)

We know that Augustus had refused such a request before when Tiberius made it,¹⁹³ but he offered a concession to Livia when she asked, a fact which might have indicated a greater respect for her than for her son. In the second story, Suetonius described how Augustus wrote out his conversations before meeting with individuals, saying that Augustus feared speaking without this crutch; according to Suetonius, he did this for “his conversations with individuals and the more important of those with his own wife Livia” (*sermones quoque cum singulis atque etiam cum Livia sua graviores*, Aug. 84). This remark illuminates the relationship between husband and wife and elevates Livia to a status equal to, or even above, that of his other advisors.¹⁹⁴ From this evidence we cannot determine, however, the extent to which she influenced him or if he simply held her opinion in high regard. Barrett believes, however, that Augustus was smart enough to value Livia’s insight on matters beyond those traditionally assigned to one’s wife.¹⁹⁵ Although Livia did have opportunity to give input,¹⁹⁶ she knew that rather than claim power of influence over her husband, if she seemed not to notice her power or not to want it, she could have all the more control.

When someone asked her how and by what course of action she had obtained such a commanding influence over Augustus, she answered that it was by being scrupulously chaste herself, doing gladly whatever pleased him, not meddling with any of his affairs . . . (Cass. Dio 58.2.5)

¹⁹³ Suet. (Aug. 40) describes the reason for Augustus’ willingness to grant Livia’s request as unusual because he was reluctant to create new Roman citizens. While he did not grant Livia’s full request, he rejected Tiberius’ request on behalf of a Greek.

¹⁹⁴ The comparative degree of *graviores* indicates that it was Suetonius’ belief, at least, that Livia’s *sermones* were more important to Augustus.

¹⁹⁵ “[Livia] was in many respects Augustus’ mental equal, if not his superior, and it is hardly surprising that he sought her advice and counsel in affairs of state . . .” Barrett, *Agrippina*, 15.

¹⁹⁶ Seneca (*Clem.* 1.9.6) related a story of the subtle influence Livia had over her husband. She asked, “Will you take a woman’s advice?” (“*Admittis*,” *inquit*, “*muliebre consilium?*”) According to Suetonius (Aug. 84), she was often consulted by Augustus.

Livia understood that subtlety would allow Augustus to maintain his pride and Livia to keep her position as his confidant.¹⁹⁷

The issue of Augustus' successor was her most commonly assumed sphere of influence, at least in the view of our extant sources. Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.3) commented on Livia's interference in Tiberius' life. He gives the following example to demonstrate how Livia's treatment of her son changed once he was adopted by Augustus.

Omnisque per exercitus ostentatur, non obscuris, ut antea, matris artibus, sed palam hortatu.

He was paraded through all the armies, not as before by the secret diplomacy of his mother, but openly at her injunction.

In this story, Tacitus implies that, early on, Livia was working quietly on her son's behalf, but that her actions were more transparent once Tiberius was the only surviving heir of his generation. At that point, she acted openly (*palam*). According to Suetonius (*Ti.* 21), Augustus, who was "overcome by his wife's entreaties, did not reject his adoption" (*sed expugnatum precibus uxoris adoptionem non abnuisse*).¹⁹⁸

Livia had already achieved the status of wife and mother through her first marriage. During her marriage to Augustus, Livia embodied the perfect example of these roles. Only at Augustus' death was Livia able to expand her role by taking advantage of the opportunity widowhood provided: financial independence, honors, and control of her son. She still demonstrated her devotion to her dead husband by dedicating funeral

¹⁹⁷ According to Hillard, "One of the arts of influence has always been not to claim it," in T. W. Hillard, "On the Stage, Behind the Curtain: Images of Politically Active Women in the Late Roman Republic," in *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views*, eds. Barbara Garlick, Suzanne Dixon, and Pauline Allen, 37-64 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 42, hereafter cited as "Stage."

¹⁹⁸ While Suetonius did identify Livia's influence, he also said that Augustus could have acted selfishly (in his adoption of Tiberius), thinking that Tiberius would be such a bad ruler that the Romans would long for the days of Augustus' rule; see Suet. *Ti.* 21.

games to honor him. They were so lavish that even Tacitus described them as magnificent (*magnificentiam*, *Ann.* 12.69). She also watched over his ashes. For his part, Augustus rewarded his wife in his will.

Cuius testamentum inlatum per virgines Vestae Tiberium et Liviam heredes habuit. Livia in familiam Iuliam nomenque Augustum adsumebatur . . .

The will, brought in by the Vestal Virgins, specified Tiberius and Livia as heirs, [and] Livia to be adopted into the Julian family and the Augustan name. (Tac. *Ann.* 1.8)

At Augustus' death, despite his old age, Livia was nonetheless accused by some of conspiring to kill him (*scelus uxoris*, Tac. *Ann.* 1.5).¹⁹⁹ The charge was that she benefited from her son's rising star, and thus she must have planned Augustus' death. At his death, Livia oversaw the transition of power to her son, and while some sources praised her for her conduct, others faulted her for the death itself.²⁰⁰ Whereas there might have been debate, prior to Augustus' death, as to which role was more important for Livia, wife or mother, once Augustus died, there was only one role left for her, that of mother. For the rest of her life, Livia acted solely as a mother looking out for her son. Even at the very moment of Augustus' death, she acted in Tiberius' best interests, delaying the announcement until he could return to Rome (Tac. *Ann.* 1.5). By doing so, Livia enabled Tiberius to appear capable of controlling the state, even in times of sorrow, a trait which, she hoped, would encourage the public to embrace her son as its leader.

¹⁹⁹ "Poison was naturally blamed for sudden unexplained death, and members of the household, especially wives, were the obvious suspects. It would tend particularly to be ascribed to women whose position made divorce impossible, such as Livia or Agrippina the Younger," Treggiari, *Marriage*, 431.

²⁰⁰ See above, pp. 38-9.

Livia as a Mother

Just as Livia focused originally on being the wife of Augustus and advancing his political career, so too did she exert the same energy in fulfilling her role as mother. As was natural at that time, Livia's sons, Tiberius and Drusus, lived with their father after the divorce.²⁰¹ Only at Ti. Claudius' death in 33 B.C.E. did the boys come to live with their mother. At that point, Livia would have realized that their fate depended on the actions and decisions of Augustus.²⁰² Mothers in aristocratic families usually had a special interest in their son's political careers, not surprising given the close association of their reputations.²⁰³ Motherhood added status. When that role was thwarted by the early death of the child, the mother suffered beyond the grief associated with the loss of a child.²⁰⁴

Once Livia's children came to live with her and Augustus in their home, she strove to depict herself as the motherly ideal. The "motherly ideal" was, in turn, an important facet of the "wifely ideal".²⁰⁵ The image of wifely Livia did not serve to advance Augustan propaganda as well as did the image of motherly Livia. As Richlin argues, for women in political families, there was a "strong identification between the woman's body and the health of the state."²⁰⁶ A mother who produced male heirs secured the place of the family and, by extension, that of the state itself. In no family was

²⁰¹ Rawson, *Family*, 35.

²⁰² Barrett (*Livia*, 27) says that Ti. Claudius, at his death (about six years after the wedding of Livia and Octavian), named Octavian as the guardian (*tutor*) of his boys.

²⁰³ T. W. Hillard, "*Matronae*," 12. I believe that by supervising their sons' actions, these mothers were not trying to control them but instead trying to influence their own reputations, since they were so closely linked. In my opinion, Republican mothers were practical, given that they endured so many years of civil war. Their interest in their sons' success was one way to try to ensure their safety (for a time). For the interest of aristocratic mothers in their sons' careers, see above, pp. 29-31.

²⁰⁴ For repercussions within the imperial family, cf. story of Octavia below, pp. 51-2.

²⁰⁵ See above, pp. 15-6.

²⁰⁶ Richlin, 84.

this more true than in the emergent Imperial family. Thus Augustus and Livia began to depict Livia as the ideal mother, just as they had earlier associated her with goddesses of marriage. Once her sons by Ti. Claudius took up residence in Augustus' house, she was mentioned in association with goddesses of fertility and maternity. The most significant monument was the *Ara Pacis Augustae* dedicated on 30 January 9 B.C.E., Livia's birthday (*Ov. Fast.* 1.709-722).²⁰⁷ The altar had processional friezes on its two long sides, of senators on one side and of Augustus' family on the other. The inclusion of the family was a clear indication of dynastic intentions, depicting the men of the family in a line.²⁰⁸ The family frieze included some possible heirs to Augustus and to parallel the strong male presence on the altar, several females and children are also included. These images of fertility and maternity echo the image of *Italia* and her abundance that appears on one of the short sides of the altar enclosure.²⁰⁹ This representation of Livia was her first public honor since 35 B.C.E. Her status had changed in the last six years, with the

²⁰⁷ I do not intend to explore the myriad problems in identifying figures on the *Ara Pacis*, as described by Charles Brian Rose, *Dynastic Commemoration and Imperial Portraiture in the Julio-Claudian Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 103-4 and Bartman (88); however, I do subscribe to the view that Livia was included as the only veiled figure other than Augustus, as identified by Barrett (*Livia*, 126), Bartman (90), Beth Severy, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 136 and Wood (99-102). Given the propagandistic nature of the altar and that the date of the dedication was her birthday, Livia's depiction on the altar is assured.

²⁰⁸ As Severy (62) comments, this use of his family on the public altar was in strong contrast to the absence of his family in 17 B.C.E. during the *Ludi Saeculares*, despite its purpose to revive Roman morality and family. She credits the change to the alteration in dynamics within his household and his consolidation of power between 17 and 9 B.C.E. Barrett argues that they are included because the *Ara Pacis* depicted "the *supplicatio*, the celebration that followed Augustus' safe return [from Gaul and Spain], an event in which women and children were able to participate," Barrett, *Livia*, 126.

²⁰⁹ "The implied comparison [of Livia to *Italia* on the *Ara Pacis*] of course elevated Livia's status considerably: in physical appearance as well as moral virtue, Livia on the altar fulfilled a contemporary's assessment [Vell. Pat. 2.130] of her as 'more like the gods than mortals.' That the personification with whom she was associated had a strong maternal character would not have been lost on the viewers; in the processional frieze, Livia's placement directly in front of Tiberius, with Drusus as the subsequent male, emphasized her motherhood," Bartman, 90. Severy also says that just as the *Ara Pacis* "articulates a paternal role for Augustus over the community of Rome, Livia is presented in the same terms as his female counterpart, the *mater* of the state," Severy, 136.

advancement of her sons' honors and offices. With the dedication of the *Ara Pacis* on her birthday, Livia's role in family politics was highlighted.²¹⁰

Livia's character as the ideal mother was also exemplified by her dignified manner when her younger son, Drusus, died. In his *De Consolatione ad Marciam* Seneca offered consolation to Marcia by naming Octavia and Livia as examples of grieving mothers to be either rejected or emulated. He said that Octavia failed to maintain her dignity at the death of her son Marcellus, while Livia was dignified even in her grief, making her the ideal mother. Concerning Octavia, at Marcellus' death, he said

Nullum finem per omne vitae suae tempus flendi gemendique fecit nec ullas admisit voces salutare aliquid adferentis; ne avocari quidem se passa est, intenta in unam rem et toto animo adfixa.

through all the rest of her life Octavia set no bounds to her tears and moans, and closed her eyes to all words that offered wholesome advice; with her whole mind fixed and centred upon one single thing, she did not allow herself even to relax. (2.4)

After Drusus' death, he said that

Ut primum tamen intulit tumulo, simul et illum et dolorem suum posuit, nec plus doluit quam aut honestum erat Caesare aut aequom Tiberio salvo.

as soon as [Livia] had placed him in the tomb, along with her son she laid away her sorrow, and grieved no more than was respectful to Caesar or fair to Tiberius, seeing that they were alive. (3.2)

Another point of comparison was the manner in which these women allowed others to express grief in front of them. Octavia would allow "not one mention of [Marcellus'] name in her hearing" (*aves suas adversus omne solacium clusit*, 2.4), while Livia

Non desiit denique Drusi sui celebrare nomen . . . libentissime de illo loqui, de illo audire: cum memoria illius vixit . . .

²¹⁰ "Between 35 and 9 B.C. her history is obscure because her position and the position of her two children in the plans of Augustus for the succession were minor since Marcellus and Agrippa were the putative heirs," Flory, "Statues," 298.

never ceased from proclaiming the name of her dear Drusus . . . and it was her greatest pleasure to talk about him and to listen to the talk of others – she lived with his memory. (3.2)

Because of the dignity with which she conducted herself in the face of the tragedy of Drusus' death, Livia was also offered the *ius liberorum* (Cass. Dio 55.2.5-6).²¹¹ This honorary distinction granted her certain privileges²¹² and recognized her as the mother of three children. The implication was that Tiberius and Drusus offered more to the state than three average sons.²¹³

Another tribute to Livia on the occasion of Drusus' death was the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, a poem which offered praise and comfort to members of Drusus' family, primarily to Livia.²¹⁴ The author addresses Livia from the outset of the poem and warns her of the topic (*iam legis in Drusum miserabile, Livia, carmen, Con. Ad Liv. 3*). So evidence exists from Seneca, Dio, and the *Consolatio* that the mother was the woman assumed to need the most comfort upon a death. Perhaps this evidence was an indication of the close relationship of a mother and son or of the identity of a woman so tied with her son that she loses a part of herself at his death.

A final honor, and the one with the greatest lasting implications for the Imperial mothers, was granted to Livia at Augustus' death. He willed her the cognomen *Augusta* (Tac. *Ann.* 1.8), so that she now became Livia Drusilla Julia Augusta. Suetonius (*Aug.* 7)

²¹¹ It is interesting to note that while Livia as his mother received several honors at Drusus' death, Antonia as his widow received little attention. She was the mother of his children, but her role as his wife was not recognized; see Bartman, 81.

²¹² The *ius liberorum* was an incentive for aristocratic families to have children. Certain financial and civic privileges were associated with it, such as, for men, freedom from jury duty (Suet. *Claud.* 15) and, for women, more freedom in controlling their affairs and finances without a guardian (Plut. *Numa Pompilius* 10.3). Occasionally, as in the case of Livia, the *ius liberorum* was granted as an honorary status.

²¹³ Flory, "Statues," 298. The honor counted her stillborn baby among her "three children".

²¹⁴ I believe that the *Consolatio ad Liviam* was meant to be a truly comforting poem to Livia and was not a rhetorical work. If the author wanted recognition for his work, he would most likely have identified himself within it. Purcell (78) says that it is a Roman *eques*, but both the date and author of the poem are disputed by Henk Schoonhoven, ed., *The pseudo-Ovidian Ad Liviam de morte Drusi (Consolatio ad Liviam, Epicedium Drusi)* (Groningen, The Netherlands: E. Forsten, 1992).

and Ovid (*Fast.* 1.609-14) both used the word *Augustus* to link the emperor with “sanctity, growth or increase”.²¹⁵ The title was obviously a link to her husband, but as a feminine form *Augusta* (especially when applied to other women) referred instead to her ability to “augment” the family, thus elevating her status.²¹⁶ This title became formulaic for the Imperial women of the Julio-Claudian period so that it was used for the mother of an emperor, once that man had taken over power.²¹⁷ Other honors for Livia were suggested during her lifetime, but the cognomen *Augusta* held the greatest significance.

Livia and the Julio-Claudian Dynasty

Ex Scribonia Iuliam, ex Livia nihil liberorum tulit, cum maxime cuperet. Infans, qui conceptus erat, immaturus est editus.

By Scribonia he had a daughter Julia, by Livia no children at all, although he earnestly desired issue. One baby was conceived, but was prematurely born. (Suet. *Aug.* 63)

Suetonius captures the problem of Augustan succession with this one sentence.

While official propaganda promoted Livia’s maternal nature, she failed to produce an heir for Augustus, suffering instead several miscarriages.²¹⁸ Without a male child to succeed him, Augustus turned to the males who surrounded him. He had many options – nephews, sons-in-law, grandsons, and friends. Livia and the other mothers of potential

²¹⁵ Marleen B. Flory, “The Meaning of *Augusta* in the Julio-Claudian Period,” *American Journal of Ancient History* 13, no.2 (1988): 118, hereafter cited as “*Augusta*.”

²¹⁶ “The past participle of the related verb *augeo* describes the birth of children, linking it to elevated social standing . . . [Livia is described] as born to high rank and further dignified by the birth of her two sons . . . *Auctus* indicates the growth of a family by the birth of a child and an increase of good fortune and social stature,” *ibid.* The proof of this elevated status lies within the laws which rewarded fertility, e.g., *ius trium liberorum*.

²¹⁷ “The bestowal of the *cognomen Augusta* on Livia, which created an honorific name for a female member of Augustus’ family, was an innovative moment for women in the Imperial household. There existed no precedent in Roman society for the transferral of a man’s honorific *cognomen* to a woman; her new name brought Livia elevated social rank, *dignitas*, and honor,” *ibid.*, 113.

²¹⁸ Bartman, 58.

heirs were “competing” to have their sons as the successor of Augustus. Octavia lost first when Marcellus, the most promising heir as a nephew and son-in-law, died young.²¹⁹

Seneca (*Pro Marcia* 2.3) gives a strong description of how Augustus had come to depend on Marcellus, thus suggesting a future successor.

[Augustus] incumbere coeperat in quem onus imperii reclinare, adolescentem . . . quantumcumque imponere illi avunculus et, ut ita dicam, inaedificare voluisset, laturum; bene legerat nulli cessura ponderi fundamenta.

Upon whom Augustus . . . had begun to lean, upon whom he had begun to rest the burden of empire – a young man . . . ready to bear whatever his uncle might wish to place or, so to speak, to build upon him: well had he chosen a foundation that would not sink beneath any weight.

After Marcellus had died, Julia was not able to see her sons (by her second husband Agrippa), Gaius and Lucius, secure power because of a similar fate (Tac. Ann. 1.3). Because Drusus, Livia’s other child, had died young, the only male children left were Tiberius, Livia’s son by Ti. Claudius, and Germanicus,²²⁰ Augustus’ great-nephew. Because she had produced no blood heirs, Livia worked to secure the adoption of Tiberius and thus fulfill her role as a good wife. Perhaps Livia’s original intent was to win security for her family, remembering the exile of her first husband, but as time passed and Augustus’ heirs died, Livia might have understood the possibility of a legitimate place for Tiberius. In any event, with the exception of Tiberius, none of the

²¹⁹ While no official title had been granted to Marcellus, Augustus’ intentions were understood within the family. Octavia’s reaction indicates that she believed Marcellus was going to inherit from Augustus (*oderat omnes matres et in Liviam maxime furebat, quia videbatur ad illius filium transisse sibi promissa felicitas*, Sen. *Pro Marc.* 2.4).

²²⁰ Germanicus, the elder son of Drusus and Antonia and the nephew of Tiberius, was the younger of the two men and was adopted along with Tiberius. That adoption secured the transfer of power within the Julio-Claudian family. Germanicus did not become *princeps*, however, because he died early in the reign of Tiberius.

possible heirs were her biological children, but she was considered the mother of the successors.²²¹

Augustus' hardships in finding an heir did not alleviate the need to establish a dynasty to maintain stability in the state. "The fact that there were no children of his marriage with Livia was his first misfortune and has, indeed, been seen as the origin of the whole tragedy of the family history of the Julio-Claudians."²²² The study of Roman marriage is often the study of divorce and remarriage. Augustus had already divorced one wife, in part, for the failure to produce a son, so why did he not divorce Livia? I think that his decision to stay in that marriage is ultimately the reason why the sources are so extreme in their description of his love for her (Suet. *Aug.* 62; Tac. *Ann.* 5.1). He must have loved her. Only an abiding love for Livia could explain his refusal to divorce her. With no close male relative available to Augustus, the women were the key to whatever relationship Augustus would have with his heir. This situation led to bickering and competition among the women.²²³ Each one wanted her son, husband, or grandson to be next in line for the Principate.

How was the man chosen who would rule the Roman world? During the period covered by the *Annals*, adoption – though without binding force in law – was the means by which the Princeps directed the succession. Furthermore, Tacitus depicts that process – honorable enough in itself, though not the most desirable method – as a game controlled by the females of the imperial family.²²⁴

These women could not fight openly, so they used their influence to gain men as their allies and agents who would win support in areas where women were not allowed, for

²²¹ Flory, "Augusta," 115-6.

²²² J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Roman Women: Their History and Habits* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962), 69.

²²³ For example, for the relationship between Livia and Agrippina, see Tac. *Ann.* 1.33; for the relationship between Livia and Octavia, see Sen. *Pro Marc.* 2.4.

²²⁴ Rutland, 15.

example, in the courts.²²⁵ Marriage was a typical avenue for alliances, and Augustus used the marriage of Julia to Tiberius to strengthen his tie to Tiberius.²²⁶ The new arrangement was not a happy affair, but political gains were made: Tiberius was adopted as Augustus' son. Augustus, in his will,

Heredes instituit primos: Tiberium ex parte dimidia et sextante, Liviam ex parte tertia, quos et ferre nomen suum iussit; secundos: Drusum Tiberi filium ex triente, ex partibus reliquis Germanicum liberosque eius tres sexus virilis . . .

appointed as his chief heirs Tiberius, to receive two-thirds of the estate, and Livia, one-third; these he also bade assume his name. His heirs in the second degree were Drusus, son of Tiberius, for one-third, and for the rest Germanicus and his three male children. (Suet. *Aug.* 101)

Thus, Livia and Tiberius were crucial in establishing the Julio-Claudian dynasty and were the first pieces in the network of succession created by Augustus.

Augustus's use of the title *princeps*, instead of *rex* or other dynastic titles that would implicate the rest of his family, also suggests that he was anxious to avoid criticism. Rather than serving as proof that he did not intend to create a dynasty, I would argue that the title *princeps* demonstrates the shrewd political decision to heed the example of Julius Caesar who took the title "dictator for life." In an effort to maintain the newly created peace in Rome, Augustus was wise not to push the boundaries of Romans' comfort with inflated titles in his early years of power.

The rest of the Julio-Claudian emperors derived from Tiberius, and so was the mother of the dynasty; by bringing the Claudian family with her into their marriage, Livia brought heirs for Augustus. Because she had personal relationships, and thus influence, with all the emperors except Nero, one might argue that she was just as important as

²²⁵ Barbara Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 153.

²²⁶ Treggiari, *Marriage*, 116.

Augustus.²²⁷ Livia's impact was long felt by the members of the Imperial family and Empire. She introduced a renewed devotion to family life and served as mother to her family and to her country. Although Livia would not have been able to predict the change in the political structure represented by the creation of the Principate, and therefore she could not have known that Augustus would have needed dynastic heirs, she did know that Augustus was a powerful man. As such, Augustus would be able to provide for the safety, security, and possibly success of her children.

Another point worth mentioning is that the extent to which Livia exerted influence over the emperors changed. While she used as much influence with Augustus as needed to win power for her son, once Tiberius was emperor, she was more at ease with involving herself in state affairs than she had been with her husband.²²⁸ I believe that the ancient depictions are misread; they mistake Livia's preservation of her own reputation for hunger for power. Tiberius' conflicts with his mother were exaggerated by the sources so that she could be faulted for Tiberius' poor administration.²²⁹ Livia's legacy was Tiberius, and the legacy of his reign would reflect on her.²³⁰ One of the final honors recommended for Livia was not "Wife of Augustus" but "Mother of her Country"²³¹ (Tac. *Ann.* 1.14; Cass. Dio 57.12.4). Livia wanted to have some command over her own legacy, so I do not believe that she desired the Principate for herself but

²²⁷ Wood, 75.

²²⁸ For official communication which addressed them both, see Cass. Dio 57.12.2; for accusations of Livia wanting more control than Tiberius and declaring that she had made him ruler, see Cass. Dio 57.12.3.

²²⁹ "The notion of a mother-son conflict should not be pushed too far. To some extent the sources would have been instinctively inclined to exaggerate the differences between Tiberius and his mother, because they could not pick on a powerful wife – a Messalina or Agrippina the Younger – to denigrate as the sinister power behind the throne," Barrett, *Livia*, 147.

²³⁰ See above, p. 49.

²³¹ The title "Mother of her Country" not only recognized her as the consummate mother but also paralleled her husband's title "Father of his Country".

tried to provide direction for her son.²³² While Tiberius complained about Livia's influence (Suet. *Ti.* 50), the fact remained that "because Tiberius had no wife, no sisters, and no daughters, his mother Livia remained the ranking female of the imperial court for the remaining fifteen years of her life."²³³

²³² This factor is a major difference between Livia and Agrippina the Younger; see below, Chapter Three and Conclusion.

²³³ Bartman, 102.

CHAPTER 3

AGRIPPINA THE YOUNGER

Agrippina the Younger²³⁴ was born in 15 C.E. to Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder. Germanicus had been adopted by Tiberius in accordance with Augustus' wishes and was therefore next in line for the throne (Suet. *Calig.* 1); moreover, Agrippina the Elder was Augustus' granddaughter. On both her maternal and paternal side, therefore, Agrippina was the child of a powerful couple. She was a child of about four years when her father died, and his death would have affected her deeply; however, the grief exhibited by the Roman people and her mother was not publicly shared by Tiberius and Livia (Suet. *Calig.* 5-6; Tac. *Ann.* 2.72, 3.2). There were rumors that the emperor and his mother were pleased by Germanicus' death, and some people went so far as to speculate that they had, in fact, plotted his death (Suet. *Calig.* 2). In contrast to Tiberius and Livia, Agrippina the Elder grieved deeply for her dead husband (Tac. *Ann.* 2.75). The suffering and humiliation her mother endured may have affected Agrippina's understanding of dynastic politics and shaped her relationships with men because she continually sought to attach herself to powerful men. As a descendant of both Livia and Augustus and as the daughter of the beloved Germanicus, Agrippina was a good candidate for marriage, and Tiberius, as head of the family, was able to make a good match for her with Gnaeus Domitius:

²³⁴ She will hereafter be called Agrippina, and her mother will be referred to as Agrippina the Elder.

Tiberius neptem Agrippinam Germanico ortam cum coram Cn. Domitio tradidisset, in urbe celebrari nuptias iussit. In Domitio super vetustatem generis propinquum Caesaribus sanguinem delegerat; nam is aviam Octaviam et per eam Augustum avunculum praeferbat.

Tiberius, after personally conferring on Gnaeus Domitius²³⁵ the hand of his grandchild Agrippina, ordered the marriage to be celebrated in Rome. In Domitius, to say nothing of the antiquity of his family, he had chosen a blood-connection of the Caesars: for he could boast Octavia as his grandmother, and, through Octavia, Augustus as his great-uncle. (Tac. *Ann.* 4.75)

Not much has come down to us about the marriage²³⁶ except that they had a child together, the future emperor Nero.

Her brother Caligula also exerted a tremendous influence on Agrippina.

Suetonius (*Nero* 6) records that she tried to win his favor early by asking him to name her child, thinking her brother would be flattered and name the child after himself. She was, however, upset when Caligula said that the child should be named after Claudius who was then the family joke.²³⁷ As disappointed as she may have been by Caligula's callous response, Agrippina still desired her brother's favor. Indeed, the longer Caligula ruled, the more his sisters eventually benefitted.

To his sisters he assigned these privileges of the Vestal Virgins, also that of witnessing the games in the Circus with him from the imperial seats, and the right to have uttered in their behalf, also, not only the prayers annually offered by the

²³⁵ Agrippina's husband will be referred to as Domitius in this paper, and their child will be referred to as Nero, despite the fact that he was given that name upon his adoption by his stepfather and great-uncle, Claudius. For information on the name change, see Richard Holland, *Nero: The Man Behind the Myth* (Gloucestershire, England: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2000), 50-1.

²³⁶ Suetonius said of Domitius that he was "a man hateful in every walk of life" (*Ner.* 5), which might explain the story of the father's description of his son Nero. "[A] remark of his father Domitius was also regarded as an omen; for while receiving the congratulations of his friends, he said that 'nothing that was not abominable and a public bane could be born of Agrippina and himself'" (Suet. *Ner.* 6).

²³⁷ Ironically, she marries the "joke" (for evidence of his physical infirmities and awkward traits, see Suet. *Claud.* 30) later when it suits her purpose to be the wife of the emperor. I subscribe to Robert Graves' portrayal of Claudius in the *I, Claudius* series – that Claudius was brilliant and only acted a fool to keep out of the family politics as long as possible (for evidence of his sudden improvement in health upon taking the throne, see Suet. *Claud.* 31). The only way to avoid prompting the paranoia and suspicions of his family was to pretend to be an idiot. His plan worked, for he survived all the other men in his family (with the exception of Nero) and sat as emperor without any conspiracy on his own behalf.

magistrates and priests for his welfare and that of the State, but also the oaths of allegiance that were sworn to his rule. (Cass. Dio 59.3.4)

Because Caligula had no son of his own, his heir (like Augustus') would have to be the son of a female related to him; Agrippina would have known that Nero was a contender for the throne.²³⁸

Finally, Agrippina's life was dramatically changed by her multiple marriages. With the first husband she gained a son; with the second, money; with the third, an empire. The timing of the death of her second husband, Passienus,²³⁹ was suspicious; he died at the moment when the emperor Claudius was looking for a new wife, and the ancient authors suggest that Agrippina set her mind to the task of acquiring him (Suet. *Claud.* 26; Tac. *Ann.* 12.1-7). Agrippina became the empress²⁴⁰ and thereby gained the positions to which she, according to Dio (60.32.1-2, 33.12), had aspired all along: wife and mother of emperors. This chapter examines how the dynastic rule of the Julio-Claudians, coupled with lessons she learned in her early roles as daughter and sister, gave Agrippina more political power than any other imperial woman and brought about her tragic ending.

Agrippina and the Ancient Sources

We have more information about Agrippina than about most of the imperial women. There are two main reasons for this: first, she wrote her own *Memoirs* (Tac. *Ann.* 4.53) and thus left a record of her life for later ancient authors;²⁴¹ and second, because she was related to every Julio-Claudian emperor, she entered the biographies and

²³⁸ Barrett, *Agrippina*, 64-5.

²³⁹ Gaius Sallustius Crispus Passienus, known hereafter as Passienus.

²⁴⁰ Suet. *Claud.* 26; Tac. *Ann.* 12.7

²⁴¹ Pliny, *HN* 7, preface.

histories of later authors more often than any other Roman woman. Her *Memoirs*, which is not extant, is the only Roman woman's autobiography of which we have any mention.²⁴² Three of her male relatives, Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius, had written in the same genre,²⁴³ suggesting that she specifically chose to write an autobiography in order to insert herself into this company of powerful Julio-Claudian emperors. As a member of such a prestigious family, a certain amount of fame and glory would have been her due, but she took the unprecedented step of writing a book about her life as if to say hers was on a par with that of her great-grandfather, grandfather, and husband, emperors all three.

For all the venom unleashed by certain authors on Livia, Agrippina has been treated far worse by the surviving ancient sources. Did ancient writers turn some of the passages from her *Memoirs* against her? Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.22) called her a woman "fierce in her hatreds" (*atrox odii*) who exacted revenge on anyone who stood in the way of her goals. Nonetheless, when one looks below the negative portrayal, it appears that their depictions of Agrippina conforms to an archetype of an imperial woman who used charm and beauty to influence the powerful men in her life.²⁴⁴ In the eyes of her ancient biographers, Agrippina fits this stereotype. Although we do not have specific descriptions of her features, she was apparently attractive and had lovers.²⁴⁵ Dio called

²⁴² Hemelrijk, 187.

²⁴³ See above, p. 2, note 5.

²⁴⁴ Rutland (29) argues that Tacitus believed that all the imperial women were intrusive in politics and that matters to be handled by the state were instead decided by the intrigues of these women.

²⁴⁵ For a specific description of her unusual teeth, see Plin. *HN* 7.71. For Nero's comments upon viewing his mother's nude body, see Cass. Dio 61.14.3; Suet. *Ner.* 34; Tac. *Ann.* 14.9. Of course, her list of lovers may also be considered the effect of having such a high social position and potential political influence. Barrett says that the ancient sources may have depicted Agrippina as attractive because "as an alluring woman, who succeeded by using her sexual charms to ensnare defenseless victims like Claudius, a woman for whom sex was a means not so much to pleasure as to power . . . [her] achievements can probably be more fairly attributed to ability and perseverance . . ." Barrett, *Agrippina*, 41.

her “beautiful” (60.31.6), and Tacitus said that she was “eminent equally in blood, beauty and voluptuousness” to Julia Silana (*insignis genere forma lascivia*, *Ann.* 13.19) and in “looks, age, and fortune” to Domitia Lepida (*nec forma aetas opes multum distabant*, *Ann.* 12.64). In addition to her sexuality, ancient authors discussed Agrippina’s character. Tacitus used such phrases as *quod sine scelere perpetrari non poterat* (Tac. *Ann.* 12.3), *ira Agrippinae* (Tac. *Ann.* 12.2), and *inpotentiam muliebrem nimiasque spes eius arguens* (Tac. *Ann.* 12.57) to describe her emotional nature. He blamed her downfall on those very qualities.²⁴⁶

Tacitus also credited Agrippina with some masculine traits which enabled her to advance her position so effectively. While she might have on occasion used her sexuality, her calculated moves were unemotional and, thus, more like those of a man (*adductum et quasi virile servitium*, Tac. *Ann.* 12.27); also like a man, she used various agents to advance her political aims.²⁴⁷

Agrippina used her position as empress to convince Claudius to adopt Nero as his heir. To insure that Nero would actually sit as the emperor of Rome, she conspired to make Claudius insecure and paranoid.²⁴⁸ Finally, according to various sources,²⁴⁹ she killed Claudius to empty the throne for Nero. According to Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.67), the public believed that she herself killed him with poisoned mushrooms. He recorded, however, that this attempt actually failed and that Claudius died when a doctor came and

²⁴⁶ Rutland, 22.

²⁴⁷ For example, Agrippina convinced L. Vitellius to introduce legislation in the Senate to advance her marriage to her uncle (Tac. *Ann.* 12.5). She also persuaded L. Pollio to propose Nero’s betrothal to Claudius’ daughter, Octavia (Tac. *Ann.* 12.6). For an example of how this trait was “male”, see Plin. *HN* 16.242, where Passienus uses his marriage to Agrippina as a means to forward his political ambition.

²⁴⁸ Agrippina accomplished this on several occasions: for persuading Claudius that the praetorians had compromised his safety in the famine riots of 51 C.E., see Cass. Dio 60.33.10, Tac. *Ann.* 12.43; for taking advantage of the emperor’s terror at the opening of the waterway for the Fucine Lake, see Tac. *Ann.* 12.57.

²⁴⁹ Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 20.151; *Octavia* 614-7; Tac. *Ann.* 12.66.

stuck a poisoned feather down his throat. Suetonius (*Claud.* 44) agreed that Claudius died as a result of a second attempt to kill him, but he did not say who was responsible, Agrippina or the doctor. Once Claudius was dead, Agrippina further orchestrated events to curry public favor for Nero by releasing false stories from the palace about Claudius' hope for recovery and his belief that Nero would be a fine successor. She also hid Britannicus from the public so that they would not be reminded of his rights to his father's legacy. In addition she waited for a favorable time – judged by astrologers – to announce Nero as successor (Tac. *Ann.* 12.68).

Once Nero ascended the throne, Agrippina's troubles did not end, for she faced resistance from Nero's tutors and from the other women in his life. Many people with great influence surrounded him, and his mother's voice was heard less and less (Cass. Dio 61.4.5; Tac. *Ann.* 14.3). She occasionally tried to regain control over him, but she was deterred by many others, notably Seneca and Burrus²⁵⁰ (Cass. Dio 61.3.3-4; Tac. *Ann.* 13.12). Nero tired of his mother's interference, especially in his private affairs (Cass. Dio 61.6.7; Tac. *Ann.* 13.13), and he plotted to kill her. Though his plans failed several times, he did eventually succeed (Suet. *Ner.* 34).

Agrippina as a Wife

Although our sources link Agrippina with lovers,²⁵¹ this study focuses on her relationships with her husbands, Domitius, Passienus, and Claudius and what she gained

²⁵⁰ Seneca was the notable literary figure whom Agrippina recalled from exile in order to tutor Nero with the help of Burrus; both Seneca and Burrus were opposed to Agrippina's regime once Nero became emperor.

²⁵¹ See, for example, Cass. Dio 61.10.1 and Tac. *Ann.* 14.2.4 for her relationships with Seneca, Pallas and Lepidus.

from them.²⁵² With Domitius, her first husband, she had a child, Nero. When Domitius died, Agrippina contrived to steal Passienus, the husband of her former sister-in-law, Domitia.²⁵³ For Passienus' part, he believed that this new marriage would advance his political ambition.²⁵⁴ They married, and Agrippina inherited his wealth upon his death. Perhaps the generous inheritance encouraged the authors to suspect her actions and her motives in stealing him from her sister-in-law.²⁵⁵ Moreover, the timing of his death was beneficial to Agrippina, for the emperor Claudius was now looking for a new wife. Agrippina's dream of becoming an empress²⁵⁶ could come true.

In his search for a new wife, Claudius had several possibilities, each of whom was supported by someone within the emperor's inner circle of advisors.²⁵⁷ Claudius' freedman Pallas supported the union with Agrippina in private, while L. Vitellius publicly proposed the union (Tac. *Ann.* 12.5). Vitellius' help was necessary²⁵⁸ because the Senate had to agree to change an existing Roman law which forbade a niece and uncle to marry.²⁵⁹ Her efforts were rewarded; she and Claudius were married with the blessing and, in fact, the insistence of the Senate.²⁶⁰ Claudius was aware that Agrippina would

²⁵² *Vita Passieni*, attributed to Suetonius; Tac. *Ann.* 4.75.1.

²⁵³ Domitia was the sister of Agrippina's first husband.

²⁵⁴ Plin. *HN* 16.242.

²⁵⁵ Martial 10.2.10; Suet. *Ner.* 6.

²⁵⁶ Cass. Dio 60.32.1-2, 33.12.

²⁵⁷ Each possible woman already had a connection to the imperial family: Narcissus proposed Aelia Paetina, Claudius' ex-wife; Callistus proposed Lolliia Paulina, Caligula's widow; Pallas proposed Agrippina, Claudius' niece; see Tac. *Ann.* 12.1-2. Agrippina used Pallas to convince Claudius that she was the most desirable candidate for marriage, and she then took Pallas as a lover (Tac. *Ann.* 12.1-2). He is also credited with being her agent in the adoption of Nero as heir over Britannicus (Tac. *Ann.* 12.25).

²⁵⁸ "As a class, the senators harboured resentment towards Claudius but there would have been some who realized that their future lay with the principate. The most prominent of such men was Lucius Vitellius, the father of the future short-lived emperor of AD 69. He would prove a consistently loyal servant both of Claudius and of Agrippina," Barrett, *Agrippina*, 74-5.

²⁵⁹ Gaius (*Institutes* 1.157) says that it was possible in his day to marry a brother's daughter. He claims that this principle was only begun when Claudius married his niece, Agrippina; before that time, marriage laws did not permit this relationship and defined it as incest.

²⁶⁰ For the enthusiastic response of the senators, see Tac. *Ann.* 12.7.

reinforce his tie with the Julian side of the dynasty and that the alliance would make him more secure;²⁶¹ presumably he thought that, if he married Agrippina, he would no longer be vulnerable to criticism from certain families who begrudged the Julio-Claudians' power and who attacked him by pointing out that he was not descended from Augustus.²⁶² Though the marriage presented obvious advantages to Claudius, some ancient authors fall back on the old stereotypes²⁶³ and claimed that Agrippina seduced her uncle and tricked him into marriage (Suet. *Claud.* 26; Tac. *Ann.* 12.3). Modern authors are sometimes a bit kinder; Barrett, for example, argues that "the common interests of Claudius and Agrippina would result in a perfect partnership, since she shared his view of the union of the dynastic traditions of the two families as the source of strength and stability. She was to remain loyal to this ideal even after Claudius' death"²⁶⁴

Agrippina's beauty and sexuality were the focus of many ancient writers,²⁶⁵ but very little was written about any interest she might have had in bearing children. In fact, despite all the affairs she was rumored to have had, Agrippina produced only one child. In short, Agrippina was not depicted by the ancients as a vessel to produce children – a common ancient stereotype for women;²⁶⁶ rather she was depicted as a kind of siren, using her sexuality to lure, trick and influence men. The tradition reported that she used her feminine wiles to marry Claudius and, once married, to win the throne for Nero. In this depiction, she was not a stereotypical Roman matron. She was, instead, a political

²⁶¹ Barrett, *Agrippina*, 73.

²⁶² Tac. *Ann.* 12.1-2.

²⁶³ For the stereotyping of beautiful women and their manipulation of men, see pp. 62-3.

²⁶⁴ Barrett, *Agrippina*, 98.

²⁶⁵ See above, pp. 62-3.

²⁶⁶ Female sexuality hinged on the woman's role in a marriage. Harlow and Laurence claim that "the primary reason for marriage was the production of legitimate heirs: once this was achieved, the marriage would have been considered a success," Harlow and Laurence, 84; therefore, Agrippina appears deviant because she used her sexuality for satisfying certain lusts instead of producing children.

animal, influencing Claudius' decisions as the head of state (Cass. Dio 60.33.1). With her rise to power came enemies whom, once she was married to Claudius, she was in a position to punish;²⁶⁷ however, the primary item on her agenda seemed to be the adoption of Nero which she must have viewed as the first step to assuring that Nero would succeed Claudius. Her singlemindedness and her persuasiveness must have been exceptional to get Claudius to ignore his own son, Britannicus, who was only slightly younger than Nero.²⁶⁸ Most adoptions were to provide a male heir, so while the adoption of Nero was unusual, it was not illegal. However, given that Britannicus was in place to inherit his father's legacy, the adoption of Nero must have been one of the primary reasons why ancient authors were so suspicious and critical of Agrippina. Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.25) credited Pallas with putting through the deal and attributed his actions to his affair with Agrippina. He said

Adoptio in Domitium auctoritate Pallantis festinatur, qui obstrictus Agrippinae ut consiliator nuptiarum et mox stupro eius inligatus, stimulabat Claudium, consuleret rei publicae, Britannici pueritiam robore circumdaret . . . His evictus triennio maiorem natu Domitium filio anteponit, habita apud senatum oratione eundem in quem a liberto acceperat modum.

the adoption of Domitius was hurried forward by the influence of Pallas, who, pledged to Agrippina as the agent of her marriage, then bound to her by lawless love, kept goading Claudius to consult the welfare of the country and to supply the boyish years of Britannicus with a stable protection . . . The emperor yielded to the pressure, and gave Domitius, with his three years' seniority, precedence over his son, reproducing in his speech to the senate the arguments furnished by his freedman.

²⁶⁷ For actions against Lollia Paulina, see Tac. *Ann.* 12.22; against Narcissus, see Tac. *Ann.* 12.57; against Statilius Taurus, see Tac. *Ann.* 12.59; against Domitia Lepida, see Tac. *Ann.* 12.64.

²⁶⁸ "The existence of a legitimate son did not constitute an absolute legal obstacle: it did, however, give rise to considerable criticism, as witnessed notably in the reaction of Tacitus . . . The criticism was perfectly understandable: the adoption seemed pointless, indeed even suspicious, when the main obligation of the head of the family . . . was already assured. At the time of Claudius . . . the needless adoption of Nero seemed a doubly shocking precedent," Rawson, *Marriage*, 66. See also Cass. Dio 60.32.1-2; Suet. *Claud.* 34.

Given the propensity of Julio-Claudians to die young,²⁶⁹ the argument to “supply the boyish years of Britannicus with a stable protection” carried some weight, but Tacitus colored his account with his description of Agrippina’s sexual misconduct and political machinations. Thus a “monstrous mother” was born. Despite the legitimate claims of Britannicus and Octavia, Claudius’ blood children, Nero was adopted and named the heir apparent.

Agrippina had been granted honors previously by her brother, but with the adoption of Nero, she was given the title *Augusta* (Cass. Dio 60.33; Tac. *Ann.* 12.26). Like Livia, Agrippina was honored and identified as the mother of the heir to the throne. But, unlike Livia, she was not content to wait quietly for Nero to become emperor. Rather, she intruded one more time in the affairs of state – this time with disastrous consequences for her husband the emperor.

The death of Claudius by poisoned mushrooms is, perhaps, the most frequently told story about Agrippina in the ancient sources. It appears in Dio, Josephus, Juvenal, Suetonius and Tacitus.²⁷⁰ Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.64, 66-7) gives the most common account of Claudius’ death: Agrippina had asked Locusta, a woman previously charged with poisoning, for advice on how to kill Claudius. Agrippina wanted a potion which would act quickly but not so quickly as to attract suspicion.²⁷¹ As a backup plan, Agrippina enlisted the services of Claudius’ doctor, Xenophon, should the poison fail. The poisoned mushrooms did fail, so the doctor, under the guise of helping Claudius vomit, stuck a poisoned feather down his throat. Whether or not this account was accurate,

²⁶⁹ See above, p. 54.

²⁷⁰ Cass. Dio 60.34.2; Joseph. *AJ* 20.150-1; Juv. 5.147-8, 6.620-4; Suet. *Claud.* 44; Tac. *Ann.* 12.64, 66-7.

²⁷¹ Agrippina feared that Claudius, upon realizing that he had been poisoned, would decide to name Britannicus as his heir before he died (Tac. *Ann.* 12.66).

Rutland argues that the evidence against Agrippina was not necessarily greater than the evidence against Livia.²⁷² Agrippina's actions after Claudius' death, though comparable to Livia's, gave the impression that she was capable of murder to achieve her goal.

Following the strategy employed by Livia, Agrippina sent out false reports on Claudius' health and appeared to comfort Britannicus and Octavia. She wanted to ensure the loyalty of the troops and receive good omens for Nero's appointment (Tac. *Ann.* 12.68). Her control of information from the palace mimicked Livia's control of affairs until Tiberius could return to Rome. The difference was that Agrippina had been the cause of Claudius' death.

Funeris sollemne perinde ac divo Augusto celebratur, aemulante Agrippina proaviae Liviae magnificentiam.

[Claudius'] funeral solemnities were celebrated precisely as those of the deified Augustus, Agrippina emulating the magnificence of her great-grandmother Livia. (Tac. *Ann.* 12.69)

Agrippina knowingly recalled Livia's preparations of Augustus' funeral, if for no other reason than to remind the public of Nero's rightful place in the dynastic succession.²⁷³ Any link to Augustus would surely have strengthened the link between the first and current emperor. The transition from Augustus to Tiberius had been smooth and well received because of Livia's actions, and Agrippina hoped for the same for her son's succession. That motive accounted not only for her decision to delay the announcement until the time approved by the priests, but also her decision not to have Claudius' will read publicly (Tac. *Ann.* 12.69). Her concern was that the preference of his stepson over

²⁷² Rutland, 24. For evidence against Livia, see Tac. *Ann.* 1.5.

²⁷³ Not all of Agrippina's reasons were for her son's benefit. It is likely that Agrippina wanted to claim the divine status of Livia as well. Livia was deified by Claudius (Sen. *Apocol.* 9), and Agrippina surely desired to be placed among the gods.

his son displayed in the will would have been awkward and would possibly encourage public support of Britannicus as the wronged, but rightful, heir.

In her actions, Agrippina appeared to have been guided in large part by the model of Livia's actions and to have reached for Livia's same honors. There were, of course, some significant differences. Livia did not need to manipulate her husband to adopt Tiberius as his son for he had none of his own. Livia did not need to kill Augustus to put Tiberius on the throne for he died of old age. Agrippina would have remembered Augustus' old age and how he outlived his favored heirs; she probably feared the same might happen with Claudius. Livia had benefited from fate, but Agrippina chose to work quickly to further hers and Nero's dreams. Once Nero was adopted, the less need there was for Claudius and the more precarious Agrippina's role. Probably foremost in her mind was the threat of changing circumstances – a new marriage, Claudius' popularity, his adoption of Nero, Britannicus' taking of the *toga virilis*. Any of these factors had the potential to quash Nero's chances for succession. Indeed, once Nero was adopted, there was every need to remove Claudius hastily from the picture. The time was right for Nero to ascend to power, but she needed to hurry. Even if she believed that Nero would succeed Claudius without a problem, she would have wondered whether she could still influence her son. One could argue that the longer Claudius lived, the more vulnerable her power became.

Because her ultimate goal was fulfilled when Nero ascended the throne (Cass. Dio 60.32.1-2, 33.12), Agrippina's actions prioritized her role as a mother of the emperor, rather than as a wife of the emperor. While Agrippina played the role of the grieving

wife,²⁷⁴ she was not fully satisfied by serving in this role; she wanted to be known for her role as mother, and especially, as mother of the emperor. Indeed her own actions against Claudius actually eliminated her role as wife and clearly show that her maternal role was the more important. were remembered more by their roles as the former than the latter. As with Cornelia and Livia,²⁷⁵ history would associate Agrippina with her son; thus the higher the position Nero achieved, the better it was for Agrippina's historical legacy.

Agrippina as a Mother

Because power was so constrained in the Roman world and not truly accessible to women, Agrippina could play out her quest for political power only through her son. The only female role greater than wife of an emperor was mother of an emperor. From the moment of Nero's birth, Agrippina began plotting on his behalf.²⁷⁶ Agrippina set out from his first day to prepare Nero to rule Rome; along the way she did many things to secure that position for him, even though she knew the risks. Ancient authors play up this idea that it was the destiny of Nero to rule, thanks to the machinations of his mother. Dio (61.2.1-2) reported

A certain astrologer . . . prophesied . . . that he should rule and that he should murder his mother. Agrippina, on hearing this, became for the moment so bereft of sense as to actually cry out: "Let him kill me, only let him rule!"

²⁷⁴ While she copied many of Livia's actions upon Augustus' death, Agrippina acted in this way to bring recognition to the power of her new position. One similarity between the women was that the cults of their deified husbands fell to them to keep safe (Tac. *Ann.* 13.2; Vell. Pat. 75.3). Whereas Livia might have thought that that recognition would cast a positive light on Tiberius, as the adopted son of a god, Agrippina was not so magnanimous.

²⁷⁵ Cf. the portrayals of Cornelia and Livia in Chapters One and Two, respectively.

²⁷⁶ For the story of Nero's naming, see Suet. *Ner.* 6.

In Dio's account²⁷⁷ the presence of the astrologer emphasized Nero's destiny; Agrippina's comment emphasized her single-minded commitment to seeing her son wear the purple, even at the risk to her own life. To fulfill the prophecy, Agrippina showed tremendous determination, but her devotion would spin out of control.

One could argue that Agrippina's wanton sexual behavior was on behalf of her son and her desire to see him become emperor.²⁷⁸ When Domitius died, Agrippina began an affair with Aemilius Lepidus *spe dominationis* (Cass. Dio 59.22.6; Tac. *Ann.* 14.2.4). Her marriage to Passienus left her with a substantial financial legacy²⁷⁹ which she passed on to Nero (Tac. *Ann.* 13.13). Agrippina threw in her lot with her son, always claiming her power by her rights as his mother.

Her decision to define herself primarily as a mother and not as a wife is interesting in large part because she had many options and could define herself in relation to the emperors in many different ways. She chose not to assert her rights through her lineage as the great-granddaughter of Augustus, grandchild of Tiberius, daughter of Germanicus, sister of Caligula, or wife of Claudius.²⁸⁰ Rather she defined herself primarily as the mother of an emperor. Most instrumental in her quest for power for Nero was her marriage to Claudius, the family beauty wed to the family joke. At worst, she could try to engineer a joint succession for Britannicus and Nero;²⁸¹ at best, sole rule for Nero. The three year age difference (Tac. *Ann.* 12.25) was in Nero's favor as long as

²⁷⁷ This story also appears in Tac. *Ann.* 14.9.

²⁷⁸ While her sexual behavior may be a figment of Roman authors' imagination, the telling of such tales across multiple authors with various sources lends some credence to the stories.

²⁷⁹ Mart. 10.2.10; Suet. *Ner.* 6.

²⁸⁰ Wood, 8. The advantage of identifying herself in the other roles was to attach herself to men with established power; Nero's power was still a gamble, and one that she was willing to risk.

²⁸¹ Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.25) describes how Pallas, as Agrippina's lover and agent, approached Claudius with reasons for adopting Nero. One argument presented was the need for Britannicus to have a protector. Presumably, Agrippina would have told Pallas the arguments to present to Claudius.

they were both just boys. Once Britannicus became a man, by assuming the *toga virilis*, the need for a “stable protection” (Tac. *Ann.* 12.25) would diminish with time. “In Claudius’ eyes [Nero] would provide assurance of an untroubled succession. There were historical precedents for an arrangement whereby two potential successors were groomed, not necessarily with the intention of joint-rule but rather to provide a fail-safe in the event of the death of either one.”²⁸² Agrippina could not wait as Livia had, especially since the romantic attachment that existed between Augustus and Livia is not attested in the extant sources for the union between Claudius and Agrippina. But in Agrippina’s favor was the fact that Nero, unlike Livia’s son,²⁸³ was perceived to be a good candidate for the throne. If he were to gain power soon, the people would probably accept him.²⁸⁴

Though Britannicus was Claudius’ only legitimate son, he was not the only threat to Agrippina’s plan. Claudius’ daughter, Octavia, also posed a problem because she was betrothed to L. Junius Silanus (Tac. *Ann.* 12.3-4), and Agrippina could not afford to allow new blood – in the form of a child of theirs – to complicate the lines of succession. Not only would Octavia’s husband have been an obstacle, but their children would be in direct line for power. To forestall that, Agrippina worked to secure Nero’s hold on power by arranging Octavia’s betrothal and marriage to Nero. In this manner, she followed the precedent set by Augustus and Livia when they arranged the match of their children, Julia and Tiberius. Agrippina secured the betrothal in 49 C.E., and in 50 C.E., Nero was

²⁸² Barrett, *Agrippina*, 98.

²⁸³ Augustus was overcome by Livia’s pleas, so he did not reject Tiberius’ adoption or he “was even led by selfish considerations, that with such a successor he himself might one day be more regretted” (Suet. *Ti.* 21). On the other hand, Suetonius gives credit later to Tiberius as a ruler who “showed himself kindly and devoted to the public weal” (*commodiorem tamen saepius et ad utilitates publicas prouorem*, *Ti.* 33).

²⁸⁴ Barrett, *Agrippina*, 98.

adopted by Claudius (Tac. *Ann.* 12.25). The following year “the manly toga was prematurely conferred on Nero, so that he should appear qualified for a political career” (*consulibus virilis toga Neroni maturata, quo capessendae rei publicae habilis videretur*, Tac. *Ann.* 12.41.1). Nero was given other privileges. At the age of twenty, he assumed a consulship and received the title *princeps iuventutis* (Tac. *Ann.* 12.41.2) which not only marked his role as heir apparent, but also signaled the growing divide between Britannicus and him.²⁸⁵

As a form of job training, Agrippina helped Nero in his public relations prior to taking power. For example, she encouraged him to hold races for Claudius’ recovery, so an effort to be perceived as a good and compassionate leader (Cass. Dio 60.33.9-10). She also persuaded Claudius, as a show of faith in Nero’s ability, to issue a statement which claimed that Nero was prepared to run the government in the event of Claudius’ death (Cass. Dio 30.33.10). As a way of legitimizing Nero’s claim to the throne, she emphasized Nero’s descent from the beloved Germanicus and Augustus. As Barrett says, “for all her interest in the details of administration, Agrippina would not have forgotten that her key short-term task was to groom Nero to take over when Claudius died. It was particularly important that people grow familiar with the idea of him as the appropriate successor.”²⁸⁶

Once Nero became emperor, Agrippina continued to influence him. She and Nero were said to have a close relationship (Tac. *Ann.* 13.6), a fair statement in light of his young age; however, the sources also charge her with making sexual advances to her son (Cass. Dio 61.11.3; Suet. *Ner.* 28; Tac. *Ann.* 14.2). The charges of incest were written

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 116. In addition, I believe that the ancients credited Nero’s honors to Agrippina’s tricks of seduction because the benefit for Claudius of choosing Nero over his own son was not clear.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 134.

before and after Nero's reign. Prior to Nero's rule, the charge was used as evidence of her depravity that began as incest with her brother (Suet. *Calig.* 24) and continued with her marriage to her uncle (*Oct.* 141-2). After Nero's accession the charge was used as evidence of her desperation to control her son, once he had obtained the greatest power (Suet. *Ner.* 28).

In the early years of Nero's reign, Agrippina's political authority grew. Tacitus (*Ann.* 13.5) described how she had firsthand knowledge of the Senate's proceedings, and Dio (61.3.2) said that she gave audiences to ambassadors and sent letters to nations, governors, and kings. In this way Agrippina was able to vindicate "her belief that she had a special role to play in Rome's destiny."²⁸⁷ In the end, Agrippina became the target of her son's anger. He resented her attempts to manipulate him; although he was older and was advised by his tutors, she still tried to control him (Suet. *Ner.* 34; Tac. *Ann.* 13.13). At one point, to threaten Nero, Agrippina claimed that she would befriend Britannicus and place him on the throne, since he had a legitimate claim (Tac. *Ann.* 13.14). Britannicus was soon killed, and Agrippina withdrew from state affairs.²⁸⁸ Also at issue was Nero's desire to divorce Octavia with whom he had become bored and take Acte as his wife; Agrippina was opposed and thus lost more power.²⁸⁹ Later, he enjoyed Poppaea's company, and his mother feared that he would marry her.²⁹⁰ His resentment at her interference led him to plot to kill her, fulfilling the prophesy given at his birth

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 90.

²⁸⁸ For the story of Britannicus' death, see *Oct.* 170-1; Tac. *Ann.* 13.16. For Agrippina's horror at his death and frightened of her own impending doom, see Tac. *Ann.* 13.18-9.

²⁸⁹ For Nero's desire to have Acte as a wife, see Cass. Dio 61.7.1-3; Suet. *Ner.* 28; Tac. *Ann.* 13.11-3. For Agrippina's opposition, see Cass. Dio 61.7.1-2; Tac. *Ann.* 13.12.

²⁹⁰ Agrippina realized that she was losing control over Nero to his lovers. Poppaea was the savviest of the group: she knew that Nero would never divorce Octavia as long as Agrippina lived. Agrippina, aware of Poppaea's power, rightly feared a total loss of control (Cass. Dio 61.11.2-3; *Oct.* 125-9; Tac. *Ann.* 14.1).

(Cass. Dio 61.2.1-2). The only murder more often described than Claudius' murder by Agrippina is Agrippina's murder by her son.²⁹¹ The tradition said that his friend Anicetus, head of the fleet at Misenum, rigged the ship in which Nero offered to carry his mother back to Rome so that the ship was lost at sea. Accounts vary but most agree that Agrippina swam to shore and made her way back to her villa, pretending not to suspect her son. He sent guards to kill her, and when they arrived, she directed them to stab her in the womb, since giving birth to Nero was her crime (Tac. *Ann.* 14.1-9). Even on her deathbed, Agrippina defined herself as a mother and tried to justify her actions as a result of that role.

Agrippina and the Lessons Learned

Agrippina intended to follow in her great-grandmother's footsteps, serving as the empress in her role as a wife and as the *Augusta* in her role as a mother. Agrippina had an innate sense of politics and combined it with a pragmatic understanding of her family. The Julio-Claudian dynasty provided power for its heirs, and Agrippina drew strength from that legacy. She was born at the height of her mother's influence, and her father was adored by most Romans. From him Agrippina learned what qualities were admired in a leader. Upon his death, she saw how her mother's angry reaction towards the emperor worsened the situation. Agrippina the Elder had placed her fortune with her husband instead of her children and thus had failed to succeed. When Germanicus died, the futures of Agrippina, her mother, and her siblings were uncertain. She had seen how Tiberius resented her father's popularity (Tac. *Ann.* 1.33), so Agrippina kept her son out of the spotlight and focused on his education instead (Suet. *Ner.* 52).

²⁹¹ Cass. Dio 61.12-4; Joseph. *AJ* 20.153; *Oct.* 164-9; Suet. *Ner.* 34; Tac. *Ann.* 14.6-8.

As a sister Agrippina saw the advantage of power. Once her brother assumed power, Caligula included his sisters in royal honors (Cass. Dio 59.3.4). Although her name might have been mentioned in an oath, Agrippina took these symbolic acts literally. She would use whatever power she could draw from the honorary titles, and her insistence provoked her brother's anger. This lesson was the hardest to learn: that imperial relationships were volatile. The brother who had granted his sisters unprecedented status now banished them and confiscated their property. This may have been the result of his paranoia (Cass. Dio 59.22.8), but the effects of his actions were real. Like Livia, Agrippina experienced exile because of the emperor's whim; exile taught both women about the power of the throne. Both Agrippina and Livia realized that to survive, they had to gain and maintain the favor of the emperor. In Agrippina's case, she also had enough early experiences with the family dynamics to steer her towards appropriate manipulation. While Agrippina had the uncanny ability to understand the inner workings of politics (Tac. *Ann.* 12.7), she was blind to reason once her son became emperor. Contrary to her hopes, Nero did not reward his mother for her efforts on his behalf (*Oct.* 93-96). Agrippina had worked for so long to achieve this status, but her downfall was not knowing how to play the actual role of the *Augusta*. She learned this last lesson too late: sons would not tolerate a dominant mother for long. Agrippina's lessons taught her that the emperor must be pleased and that her relationships with other men – father, husband, lover, stepson or son – might threaten the emperor's pleasure with her.

CONCLUSION

Roman women had many roles during their lifetime. As daughters, sisters, wives, daughters-in-law, stepmothers and widows, these women had alliances with several families and were defined by their relationships with the men of these families. Depending on who was the most famous of those men, Roman women were written into history by that role. For example, using the early story of Lucretia, these women acting as *exempla* taught generations of Roman girls. Lucretia understood this concept when she said

*ego me etsi peccato absolve, supplicio non libero; nec ulla deinde inpudica
Lucretiae exemplo vivet.*

for my own part, though I acquit myself of the sin, I do not absolve myself from punishment; nor in time to come shall ever unchaste woman live through the example of Lucretia. (Livy, 1.58.10)

While not all women were as noble as Lucretia, they still left legacies for their descendants to follow or to abhor.

This thesis has used specific case studies to outline certain stereotypes of Republican women. Terentia, the first wife of Cicero, was the example of a woman faced with the consequences of her husband's exile because of political turmoil. Her determination and consistency were necessary for her family's survival, and she bore the task without complaint (Cic. *Ad Fam.* 14.1). The political struggles upset the family balance, and on Cicero's return, the couple divorced. Julia, fourth wife of Pompey the Great, was a political bride. As the daughter of Caesar and granddaughter of Cinna, Julia

cemented a bond between Caesar and Pompey in their creation of their *amicitia*, or the First Triumvirate.²⁹² The new bride was smitten with her much older, powerful husband. He was almost twice her age, but the ancient sources describe a well-matched couple (Plut. *Pomp.* 53). Julia tried to fulfill the ultimate goal of motherhood, but she failed: she miscarried their first child, and she died giving birth to a second child who only lived a few days. Her devotion to her husband became her legacy. Finally, Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, was the ultimate *exemplum* of a mother: nurturing, demanding, and proud. She was praised by the sources as one woman in the trio of outstanding mothers (Tac. *Dial.* 28.4-6). Cornelia's family had several famous men, and when she felt that her sons were not fulfilling their potential, Cornelia reminded them that, at that time, she was known as the mother-in-law of Scipio Aemilianus. Cornelia linked her legacy to her sons', and her reputation as a mother flourished even in her lifetime.²⁹³

As the first Roman Empress, Livia had to develop her role based on Republican models. Her consideration of Cornelia as a strong role model was not unreasonable, for they had much in common. Both were devoted wives and mothers of two sons. While Cornelia had three children live to adulthood, Livia was given the rights of mothers of three children (Cass. Dio 55.2.5-6), in honor of her third child who died at birth. Livia would have valued the success of Cornelia's children in the political arena and the honors accorded her as their mother. The public display of Cornelia's statue (Plut. *C. Gracch.* 4.3) dedicated to her role as a mother could have influenced Livia's approach to parenting. And, just as shadows were cast on Cornelia when her sons went astray, so did Livia feel the critics' heat when her son did not live up to expectations as an emperor.

²⁹² See above, note 116.

²⁹³ Petrocelli, 56-7.

Though Livia used the blueprint of Cornelia's ideals, she was raising children in a different era.²⁹⁴ The nature of imperial politics increased the stakes for Livia's work on her sons' behalf. By the end of the Julio-Claudian reign, this "mutation" of Cornelia's role reached its ultimate exaggeration in Agrippina's manipulation of and scheming for her son, Nero.

Agrippina serves as the best *exemplum* of an ambitious woman. As a blood relative to every Julio-Claudian emperor, Agrippina felt a tremendous sense of entitlement. She knew, from the previous *exempla* of Cornelia and Livia that her legacy would rise or fall with her son, and Agrippina used her "masculine traits" to advance her political aims (Tac. *Ann.* 12.27). As Hoffsten says, "from the gates of the palace to the man on the street the pulse of her power was felt."²⁹⁵ She promoted her importance by daring to publish her own *Memoirs*, an autobiography in the manner of Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius. Her exploitation of men culminated in her marriage to her uncle Claudius. Once considered the family joke (Suet. *Claud.* 30), Claudius became emperor and, through marriage and murder, Agrippina placed Nero on the throne. For a brief time, she reveled in the spotlight as the *Augusta* and even the guard knew her as "the best of mothers" (Suet. *Ner.* 9). Ironically the son, on whose behalf she had sacrificed, returned the favor by sending assassins to silence her. Even when facing her death, however, Agrippina defined herself as a mother, pointing to her womb as the source of her crime (Tac. *Ann.* 14.9). By her actions, Agrippina demonstrated that the Julio-

²⁹⁴ As Bauman states, "The late Republic saw the flowering of the role that Cornelia had mapped out for political women. But the flowering included a slight mutation. The idealism of Cornelia was replaced in some cases by hard-headed pragmatism . . ." Bauman, 215. As the Republic ended and the Principate began, this truth became more pronounced.

²⁹⁵ Hoffsten, 35.

Claudian empresses defined themselves – and were defined by others – in their roles as mothers of future emperors more than as wives of current emperors.

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