

UC Riverside

UCR Honors Capstones 2017-2018

Title

Livia and Agrippina: Roman Empresses in the Roman Historical Imagination

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7tw683qk>

Author

Jenne, Erin

Publication Date

2018-04-01

By

A capstone project submitted for
Graduation with University Honors

University Honors
University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

Dr.
Department of

Dr. Richard Cardullo, Howard H Hays Chair and Faculty Director, University Honors
Interim Vice Provost, Undergraduate Education

Abstract

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii

Livia and Agrippina:

Julio-Claudian Empresses in the Roman Historical Imagination

Under the Julio-Claudian emperors, gender roles of women were both challenged and confirmed by women in positions of power, especially by women married to emperors. Two women in particular, Livia, the wife of Augustus and the most of his successor Tiberius, and Agrippina, the wife of Emperor Claudius and mother of the soon to be Emperor Nero, stand out due to their influence over their emperor husbands and emperor sons, as well as for their influence and acts of patronage in Roman society. However, the memories of these two women, reflected especially in the narratives of their deaths, reflect the still traditional bias of Roman society. As I will show in this paper, in the three main historical sources for these women, Livia is written about in a reverential fashion in her early years. Only in later years does she fall prey to the image of power-hungry stepmother, due in large part to the biases of the male authors. In contrast, there are few, if any positive perceptions of Agrippina in her lifetime and later. The dominant reason for Livia's initially good treatment, and her later poor treatment, as well as Agrippina's overall poor treatment in the sources is, as my research shows, due to male perceptions of their failure to live up to be a good traditional Roman wife or mother.

Before comparing Livia and Agrippina, it is necessary to evaluate the sources from which the information about them is derived. The three main historians are Suetonius, Tacitus, and Dio Cassius. While there are of course other primary written sources about the early Roman principate, these three are key to modern historians. Suetonius, who lived from 70-130CE, was "an equestrian man of letters and senior imperial official..."¹ Suetonius's biographies are useful because he approaches the lives of the emperors in a thematic way. However, his work is limited

¹ Ted Champlin, *Nero*, pg 37.

in scope as he shapes events to make it more entertaining. Tacitus, who lived from 56-120 CE, “was a senior senator, consul in 97, proconsul of the province of Asia, in 112/113, and one of Rome’s great historians.”² There are many of Tacitus’s works left, some fully intact and others not. His *Annals* begin with the death of Augustus and continue to far beyond Agrippina’s death. While the *Annals* are filled with a wealth of information, Tacitus is often heavily biased against imperial power, especially imperial women with power, due to his senatorial status and traditional perspective on gender roles. Dio Cassius, who lived from 164 through at least 229 CE, was “another very senior senator, consul c. 204 and for a second time in 229...proconsul of Africa, and governor of the military provinces of Dalmatia and Upper Pannonia.”³ His *Roman History* is also filled with more detail than Suetonius, but his is also the most narrative as he tries to build a story from historical events thus impacting the veracity of his account. It’s likely that Dio drew upon both Suetonius and Tacitus, among other sources available to him, when writing his *Roman History*.

The dates of these authors are critical in attempting to separate fact from fiction in their accounts as well as discerning their biases for and against certain topics. While Suetonius and Tacitus are closer to the events that they wrote about and likely had access to imperial records, while Dio wrote almost a century later. Additionally, Suetonius and Tacitus were born right after Nero was killed and right before, respectively. Thus, they tend to be more heavily biased against Nero and events during his reign, including Agrippina. Despite writing much later, Dio is still useful because he “preserves much material not found in either [Tacitus and Suetonius].”⁴ Also of note is that all three historians were upper class men with significant amounts of senatorial

² *Ibid.*, pg. 37.

³ *Ibid.*, pg. 37.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 38.

and political power; therefore, while their accounts will be used to examine the perceptions surrounding Livia and Agrippina, their representation of events and accusations towards these women need to be contextualized. Tacitus in particular is heavily biased against the imperial system and finds the idea that women could hold unofficial political power through their relationship with the emperors abhorrent, and he treats women with power as such. Suetonius and Dio Cassius are more even handed, and Dio even defends the need for an imperial government to effectively rule Rome.⁵ Finally, these sources prove very useful in that they inform the modern reader of the legacies of people with power, in this case Livia and Agrippina. Because they are all writing after the fact, these writers are shaped by the reputations of these women.

Throughout the reign of Augustus, perceptions of Livia remain positive in the historical accounts of Suetonius and Dio Cassius, while Tacitus maintains negative step-mother perceptions throughout his account. Once her son Tiberius takes over after Augustus' death, perceptions towards Livia shift in a negative direction. This change over time in how Livia is treated in the records is due to her perceived influence over each of the emperors individually. With Augustus, Livia was careful to publicly be a role model for other Roman women and, while she was highly influential, work within gender norms to acquire that power. She was always seen as his advisor rather than an equal to the emperor, which the sources claim she was during the reign of Tiberius. A major example of Livia's advisory role to Augustus is found in Dio Cassius; in book 55, section 14 Livia gives an extended monologue of advice to Augustus about a situation involving treasonous men.⁶ Not only is this speech very long, it covers several pages and over six

⁵ Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, trans. Earnest Cary (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1917) 54.6.1-2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.14.2.

chapters in Dio, but at the end Dio writes that “Augustus heeded these suggestions of Livia and released all the accused with some words of admonition...It was rather Livia herself who was chiefly responsible for saving the life of Cornelius, that was to be charged with plotting the death of Augustus.”⁷ While her monologue to Augustus is likely made up by Dio to further his narrative, its presence at all indicates that Dio perceived Livia to hold this advisory role and wrote her in his *Roman History* in a way that would fulfill that perception. Dio perceives Livia as truly Augustus’ advisor and as someone who made a positive impact on his policies during his reign. However, Livia does nothing more than advise Augustus in this example, had she tried to make the decision for Augustus Livia would likely have been portrayed more negatively. As Severy notes, Livia “advised her husband, handled petitions and appeals to him, and managed her own set of important clients and friends. Through these traditional duties but in an imperial context, she developed a powerful and recognized influence in public affairs.”⁸ Perceptions of Livia at this time also benefit positively from the positive image of Augustus in the narrative. Augustus was the first true emperor of Rome, and through striving to return Rome to the pre-civil war morals, was held in high esteem by Romans. He was also deified after death and adopted Livia into the Julian family⁹, thus expanding her influence even in death and throughout Tiberius’ reign.

Beyond serving as an advisor to Augustus and garnering power in this way, Livia also publicly associated herself with traditional gender norms such as motherhood and family, including sewing Augustus’ clothes, dedicating a temple to Concordia, and through acts of

⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.22.1.

⁸ Beth Severy, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 152.

⁹ Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.8.

public patronage.¹⁰ Her dedication of the temple of Concordia was not only a symbolic act that solidified her public status of belonging to the imperial family, but also was an act of patronage. She sponsored the project with her own money; Roman citizens expected the wealthy aristocracy to use their own money to give back to the community; her act of patronage here definitely contributed to positive emotions regarding her place in the imperial family. Beth Severy succinctly analyzes the significance of not only Livia sponsoring a public works project but also the religious and political significance of Livia choosing to dedicate a temple to Concordia. She writes:

“Augustan discourse thus argued that proper and productive family relations created a harmonious civic body – precisely the mix of familial and state Concordia Livia sponsored in her shrine in 7 BCE. ... her relationship with such a political and yet familial concept helped Livia create a public role for herself.... By dedicating that shrine on Roman Mother’s Day in a portico that she built with her son, she portrayed herself as the model Roman wife and mother – making herself a public figure while maintaining emphasis on traditional women’s roles in the terms of contemporary rhetoric.”¹¹

In this passage, Severy also touches on how Livia manipulated the concept of motherhood in order to maintain a positive public image; having a public role could be explained in a positive way if it was connected to the traditional role of women as mothers. While Concordia was usually invoked to heal the state from civil wars and political discord, Livia “celebrated her harmonious marriage to Augustus, creating an ideological relationship between the concord of her family, and that of the community.”¹² Other important acts of patronage attributed to Livia include hosting dinner banquets for aristocratic women that paralleled the triumphs of the emperor; giving money to women to raise their children; and paying the dowries of women who

¹⁰ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves (London: Penguin Books, 2003) *Augustus* 73.3. Severy, *Augustus and the Family*, 131-132. Dio 55.2.4 and 22.8.2.

¹¹ Severy, *Augustus and the Family*, 134.

¹² *Ibid.*, 203.

did not have any.¹³ In this way, Livia shared her imperial influence with other aristocratic women and “used economic resources to create relationships of dependency with other members of the aristocracy.”¹⁴ While there are many examples of Livia’s patronage during the reign of Augustus, there are few, if any, instances recorded of Agrippina sponsoring any kind of public works project. She did create a colony for veterans, but this is the only example of her giving back to Roman society in the accounts.¹⁵ Her lack of attested patronage may be the result of the deliberate omission of any of her projects; if so, that in itself suggests the antipathy with which she was held by Roman historians and the overall negative perceptions of her.

After Augustus died, Livia’s power did not diminish at all, in fact it increased, and this is viewed negatively by the sources in the way that they talk about her after the ascension of Tiberius. While before under Augustus, Livia’s influence was seen as advisory in nature, under Tiberius some saw her as his equal in power and Suetonius even claims that “Livia vexed him [Tiberius] by wanting to be co-ruler of the Empire...”¹⁶ In this same passage, Tiberius is attempting to wrest power away from Livia by refusing to meet with her often, vetoed proposals that would give her the title of ‘Parent of the country’, and “warned Livia to remember that she was a woman and must not interfere in affairs of state.”¹⁷ Here, Tiberius is reminding Livia of her duties as a woman to try and restrict her from continuing to acquire power. Dio also claims that Tiberius hated sharing power with his mother and hated that she had “secured the rule for him contrary to the will of Augustus”.¹⁸ Tiberius’ efforts to check Livia’s power can be attributed to a threatened feeling or even a feeling of resentment, another interpretation is

¹³ Dio, *Roman History*, 58.2.2-3. Severy, *Augustus and the Family*, 142.

¹⁴ Severy, *Augustus and the Family*, 142.

¹⁵ Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.27.

¹⁶ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 50.4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.7.

¹⁸ Dio, *Roman History*, 57.3.3.

Tiberius' conservatism that is found throughout the narrative. He is someone that usually seeks to reinforce traditional concepts and ideals, thus he would seek to remove any power he deemed excessive from Livia and prevent any further power acquisitions during his reign. A good example of Tiberius' conservative nature is depicted by Suetonius, who writes "Tiberius imposed the severest discipline on his men: reviving obsolete methods of punishment..." and Suetonius goes on to describe how Tiberius worked to reinforce traditional ideologies through his imperial power.¹⁹

While this shift from more positive perceptions to more negative is harder to see in Tacitus because he portrays Livia negatively from the get-go, he spends a lot of time on portraying her as a stereotype of the evil step-mother. In chapter 3 of Annal 1, the very beginning of his historical account, Tacitus writes that Lucius and Gaius were "prematurely cut from destiny, or by their step-mother Livia's treachery..." and that Livia "had gained such a hold on the aged Augustus..."²⁰ He immediately perceives her as having too much power and using it to further the political career of her son over the legitimate descendants of Augustus. Despite his overall negative portrayal of Livia, Tacitus does call her Augusta after she is renamed, perhaps as a small sign of respect or because of her strong legacy, which is something he refuses to do for Agrippina later in the Annals. Finally, Dio depicts Livia as increasingly power hungry after the death of Augustus and writes that she might even have contributed to his death. He writes that she "smeared with poison some figs that were still on trees from which Augustus was wont to gather the fruit with his own hands; then she ate those that had not been smeared, offering the poisoned ones to him."²¹ He goes onto to note that "I have added the name of Livia because she,

¹⁹ Suetonius, 19.2, 34.1, 35.1, 36.1.

²⁰ Tacitus, *The Complete Works of Tacitus: The Annals*, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (New York: Random House, 1942) 1.3.

²¹ Dio, *Roman History*, 56.30.1.

too, took a share in the proceedings, as if she possessed full powers”²² in reference to the decrees passed by the senate in memory of Augustus. Essentially, Dio claims that these decrees were technically passed by the senate, but in reality, it was Tiberius and Livia who ordered them. Dio’s comment “as if she possessed full powers” expresses disdain for her continued participation in policy making, which was not present before Augustus died; this new element of negativity towards Livia is likely because Roman women were not expected to affect legislative decisions or interfere too much with the political process. As is seen from the above quotations, when Livia grew beyond a perceived advisory role to a woman with power over policy and legislation, perceptions of her become more negative than previously.

According to Dio, Livia died at the ripe old age of eighty-six²³; her death, the funeral, and her legacy are important parts to understanding perceptions of her. In the accounts of her death, which seems to have been from natural causes, all three historians note Tiberius’ hatred towards his mother. While each account of her death is roughly similar, each has details that the other is lacking. Suetonius claims that Tiberius refuses to treat her body with respect and writes “After several days her corpse became so corrupt and noisome that he sent to have it buried”²⁴; this is not the treatment befitting a woman of Livia’s stature and the way Suetonius writes about her death reflects the strangeness of it. Additionally, Suetonius writes that Tiberius “vetoed her deification”²⁵, which would later be enacted by Claudius; her legacy here was prevented from growing into an imperial cult by Tiberius but was resurrected by a later emperor. In Dio Cassius account, he too touches on Tiberius’ lack of concern for holding a proper funeral for Livia; he writes “in fact, he made no arrangements at all in her honour except for the public funeral and

²² *Ibid.*, 56.47.1.

²³ Dio, *Roman History*, 58.2.1.

²⁴ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 51.7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.7.

images and some other matters of no importance” thus obscuring her immediate legacy among the Roman people.²⁶ He also notes that the Senate voted her an arch in her honor, which was “a distinction conferred upon no other woman”; here the Senate tried to honor her in a very special way, indicating her immediate impact and still generally favorable reputation among Romans, however the arch in her name was never built. Here, as before, Tiberius exerts his conservative control and personally makes sure that the first arch for a woman is not built; Dio writes that “The arch voted to her, however, was not built for the reason that Tiberius promised to construct it at his own expense; for, as he hesitated to annul that decree in so many words, he made it void in this way, by not allowing the work to be done at public expense nor yet attending to it himself.”²⁷ Tiberius’ attempts in each account to curb the impact of Livia’s death indicates that people at the time were enamored of her; he had to go to great lengths and use his power as emperor to ensure that she was not honored properly and indeed her legacy is so strong that Claudius resurrects it during his reign.

Both Suetonius and Dio Cassius are respectful of her in death, which is to be expected because their accounts of her are generally more favorable, but even Tacitus tones back his usual spite towards Livia in his re-enactment of her death. He writes that “In the purity of her home life she was of an ancient type but was more gracious than was thought fitting ladies of the former days. An imperious mother and an amiable wife, she was a match for the diplomacy of her husband and the dissimulation of her son.”²⁸ Here he praises her for being like the Roman women of old in how she kept house and commends her as a match for Augustus. Tacitus even goes so far as to argue that Livia was the only barrier holding Tiberius back from total despotism

²⁶ Dio, *Roman History*, 58.2.2.

²⁷ Dio, *Roman History*, 58.2.7.

²⁸ Tacitus, *Ann.* 5.1.

and with her death “they [Tiberius and Sejanus] threw off the reins and let loose their fury...”, thus indicating her positive and preventative influence on the pair.²⁹ Despite his criticism of her throughout his narrative, even Tacitus is respectful and commends her; her legacy thus lasted not only beyond Tiberius’ futile attempts to curb it, to be resurrected by Claudius, but even down through Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius’ time .

Throughout their narratives, Suetonius, Tacitus, and Dio Cassius perpetuate negative images of Agrippina as a lustful, selfish, self-serving, and power-hungry monster. The main reason for their utter disdain for Agrippina is due to her influence over her husband Claudius and her son Nero, both emperors. But she is able to do this because, in their view, Claudius and Nero were inept and weak emperors. Essentially, Agrippina oversteps the boundaries set by Roman society for a woman in her position and thus incurs highly negative perceptions in the narratives of Suetonius, Tacitus, and Dio Cassius. A common theme is that Claudius “fell so deeply under the influence of these freedmen and wives that he seemed to be their servant rather than their emperor”.³⁰ Claudius’ own personal weakness and lack of strong character caused those who were not supposed to hold great power, namely his freedmen and wives, to garner large amounts of power and effectively rule in his stead, or so the historical records portray it. In the end, whether or not Claudius was so weak and truly ruled by his freedmen and wives is not important but rather the perception that he was this way is important. Additionally, Agrippina is not Claudius’ first wife who is written as a power-hungry woman, but instead follows in the footsteps of his previous wife Messalina. Part of Agrippina’s negative perceptions is that she is following in the footsteps of Messalina, who was perceived as improper because of her inability

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.3.

³⁰ Suetonius, *Claudius* 29.1.

to obey Claudius and her sexual escapades, and is thus already at a disadvantage by filling a position which was already viewed as being too powerful over the weak-willed Claudius; Dio writes that “She [Agrippina] quickly became a second Messalina...”.³¹ By comparing her to Messalina, Dio perpetuates this stereotype of the improper, unfaithful and altogether too powerful wife in Agrippa.

Agrippina continues to overstep the boundaries of her station throughout Claudius’ reign and beyond. Tacitus writes about her conduct when Caractacus of Britain is brought back to Rome. When he is brought to face Claudius and Rome, Agrippina sits on a throne equal to Claudius’ and Tacitus writes that “It was indeed a novelty, quite alien to ancient manner, for a woman to sit in front of Roman standards. In fact, Agrippina boasted that she was herself a partner in the empire which her ancestors won.”³² Tacitus sees Agrippina as stepping out of line in her attempt to be an equal to Claudius. Her perceived intention to rule as an equal of the emperor continues through the reign of her son Nero, and can be seen in the following anecdote related by Dio:

“An embassy of Armenians had arrived and Agrippina wished to mount the tribunal from which Nero was talking with them. The two men, seeing her approach, persuaded the young man to descend and meet his mother before she could get there, as if to extend some special greeting to her. Then having brought this about, they did not re-ascend the tribunal, but made some excuse, so that the weakness in the empire should not become apparent to foreigners and thereafter they labored to prevent any public business from being again committed to her hands.”³³

This anecdote clearly relates that Dio perceived Agrippina’s desire to be an equal in power and negotiations with Nero as a weakness of Rome in that women are not supposed to be allowed to

³¹ Dio, *Roman History*, 60.18.1. Dio, *Roman History*, 61.33.2.

³² Tacitus, *Ann.* 12.37.

³³ Dio, *Roman History*, 61.3.3.

perform such political functions, and thus seeks to vilify her in the account. While Livia was allowed to shape foreign policy through her connections with other aristocratic women outside of Rome, Agrippina is not allowed this concession because she tries to intervene too directly.³⁴ Beyond her power aspirations, her influence and control over Nero and Nero's character, just like Claudius' before him, also worries the authors of these sources. Dio writes that "As for Nero, he was not fond of business in any case, and was glad to live in idleness; indeed, it was for this reason that he had previously yielded the upper hand to his mother..."³⁵ Here, Nero's utter laziness and lack of sense is what allowed Agrippina to gain such a power foothold in the first place, and both are thus perceived negatively.

Beyond her influence over Claudius and Nero, and her inability to spin her public power into something palatable for the Roman masses, Agrippina is also vilified in the narrative for her sexual impropriety. It begins with accusations from the reign of her brother Caligula that when he was emperor, he engaged in illicit sexual relations with her and his other sisters; there are multiple examples from Dio that establish the utter disgust with which the implied incest was viewed.³⁶ Next, her impropriety is revealed in the exile of Ofonius Tigellinus who "was banished on the charge of having had improper relations with Agrippina."³⁷ At this point, she is probably still married to her first husband, Domitius, and so this is likely an accusation of an extra-marital affair. Then before marrying Claudius, Agrippina "had a niece's privilege of kissing and caressing Claudius and exercised it with a noticeable effect on his passions..."³⁸ She manipulated her familial closeness with Claudius to seduce him, and while marriage between

³⁴ Severy, *Augustus and the Family*, 148.

³⁵ Dio, *Roman History*, 61.4.1.

³⁶ Dio, *Roman History*, 59.3.6, 59.22.6-8, 59.26.5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.23.9.

³⁸ Suetonius, *Claudius* 26.8.

distant family members was allowed, the law had to be amended for Agrippina to marry Claudius.³⁹ This gives an indication of how abnormal her relationship with him was, or at least perceptions of her relationships, and indicates why people perceived her as failing to be a good Roman woman. While married to Claudius, there are no mentions of her cheating on him, however accusations of sexual impropriety start up once again after he dies and Nero comes to power. First, Seneca “now found himself under accusation, one of the charges against him being that he was intimate with Agrippina.”⁴⁰ Second, Dio writes that Agrippina tried to seduce even Nero in order to stay in his good graces:

Agrippina, therefore, fearing that Nero would marry the woman (for her was no beginning to entertain a mad passion for her), ventured upon a most unholy course. As if it were not notoriety enough for her that she had used her blandishments and immodest looks and kisses to seduce her uncle Claudius, she undertook to enslave even Nero in similar fashion. Whether this actually occurred, now, or whether it was invented to fit their character, I am not sure; but I state as a fact what is admitted by all, that Nero had a mistress resembling Agrippina of whom he was especially fond...⁴¹

There is a lot to unpack here: Dio is touching again on Agrippina’s impropriety in seducing Claudius in order to marry him, which was considered legally incest until the passage of a new law immediately before their marriage but is also claiming that she re-employed these methods to flatter Nero, her son. The language that he uses leaves no room for how he feels about the subject by saying it was a “most unholy course.” While he does question the legitimacy of this story that he cannot verify, ultimately by talking about Nero’s mistress he casts enough doubt for the reader to infer that Agrippina is an immoral woman because she uses incestuous seduction methods to achieve her own self-serving goals. The absolute abnormality of such a relationship

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.8.

⁴⁰ Dio, *Roman History*, 61.10.1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 62.11.2-4.

between mother and son is clearly abhorrent to both ancient Romans and modern peoples and serves to further Agrippina's failure as a good Roman woman and wife.

After outliving her husband Claudius, Agrippina was not destined to outlive Nero, her son and successor to the throne. Unlike Livia, who died of natural causes, Agrippina was murdered by agents of Nero; Suetonius attributes Nero's desire to get rid of her to "The over-watchful, over-critical eye that Agrippina kept on whatever Nero said or did" while Dio attributes it to the desires of Sabina and Seneca.⁴² Each of the three accounts presents her death in much the same way; after trying to poison her, and failing that, drown her on a collapsing boat, Nero finally resorts to just having thugs murder her.⁴³ Dio Cassius writes about her death in, perhaps, the most poetic way, saying "Thus was Agrippina, daughter of Germanicus, granddaughter of Agrippa, and descendant of Augustus, slain by the very son to whom she had given the sovereignty and for whose sake she had killed her uncle and others."⁴⁴ In comparison to Livia, Agrippina's legacy here is almost nothing; she is voted no arches, nor is she deified, nor is her will read out to be completed, nor does she receive a proper funeral or burial. Tacitus observes:

"Many years before Agrippina had anticipated this end for herself and had spurned the thought. For when she consulted the astrologers about Nero, they replied that he would be emperor and kill his mother. "Let him kill her," she said, "provided he is emperor."⁴⁵

Her only legacy, in her own word, is for Nero to have been emperor and nothing more. Beyond this, her legacy as an awful, power-hungry woman persisted through Suetonius and Tacitus'

⁴² Suetonius, *Nero* 34.1. Dio, *Roman History*, 62.12.1.

⁴³ Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.3-9. Suetonius, *Nero* 34. Dio, *Roman History*, 62.12-17.

⁴⁴ Dio, *Roman History*, 62.14.1.

⁴⁵ Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.9.

times and writings down to Dio Cassius a century later. Similar to how Tacitus curbed his negativity towards Livia when describing her death and funeral, he betrays a begrudging respect of her courage in facing escaping the first assassination plot and then her courage in facing death.⁴⁶ Despite Tacitus understated respect for Agrippina in death, she is clearly portrayed throughout the three narratives as the extreme for what Roman women should not be and perpetuated their perceptions of her as an evil, selfish woman.

These two women and their legacies in the historical records indicate the extremes of Roman sentiment and public opinion; Agrippina is constantly vilified and perceived negatively due to her influence over Claudius and Nero and her inability to fulfill the stereotype of a good Roman woman while Livia starts off as a role model for other Roman women through her conduct but is eventually forced into the evil step-mother trope in the narrative as her perceived influence and power increases. Livia's success when Augustus was emperor is largely due to the fact that she was perceived to function effectively within the traditional gender roles, when she stepped out of this role the sources began to treat her more negatively. The same is true of Agrippina; because of perceptions that she controlled Claudius and desired more power over Nero, she was denigrated in the records. Essentially, women who worked within gender norms to obtain influence and power were perceived as fulfilling their role as a good Roman woman while those who stepped outside of these boundaries were perceived in a much harsher light.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.3-9.

Bibliography

Barrett, Anthony. *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire*. New Haven and

London: Yale University Press, 1996.

Barrett, Anthony. *Livia: First Lady of Imperial Rome*. New Haven and London: Yale University

Press, 2002.

Champlin, Edward. *Nero*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005.

Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, Books 51-70. Translated by Earnest Cary. Cambridge,

Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1917.

Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*. Translated by Robert Graves. London: Penguin Books, 2003.

Severy, Beth. *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire*. New York: Routledge,

2003.

Tacitus, *The Complete Works of Tacitus*. Translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson

Brodribb. New York: Random House, 1942.