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Kristin Michelle Hébert

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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LOOKING THE PART:
EXAMINING THE TRANSCENDENCE OF GENDER
IN THE PORTRAITS OF AGRIPPINA THE YOUNGER

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The School of Art

by
Kristin Michelle Hébert
B.A., Tulane University, 2011
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DEDICATION

To Judith Ginsburg and her close circle of friends, for giving me hope when there was none to be found, and to my family for their unceasing encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

The propagandist art of the Roman Empire typically used images of the imperial women as a type of political icon. These women were often displayed in reliefs or portrait groups as symbols of morality, fecundity, femininity, and the continuation of the dynasty. While scholars have discussed this issue in great detail, they have often overlooked the fact that the portrait images of these very same women often contradict the feminine virtues that they are meant to convey. For instance, the portraits of Agrippina the Younger are divided into typologies based on, among other things, the incorporation of physiognomic features of contemporary emperors (Caligula, Claudius, and Nero) that lend an element of androgyny to her depictions.

This physiognomic assimilation was not simply the unconscious input of sculptors accustomed to carving the emperor's features, since it occurs in some of the highest quality versions of Agrippina's portrait types. Agrippina's portraits integrated these masculine features to reinforce her various positions in relation to the emperor while demonstrating the unity and cohesiveness of the imperial dynasty as a whole. Furthermore, this gender transcendence was employed to advance Agrippina's political aspirations through the formation of alliances with popular imperial factions. In addition, Agrippina's depictions exploit the virtues of masculinity and the memory of her beloved father, Germanicus. By analyzing the portraits of Agrippina the Younger, this paper aims to explore the dichotomy presented by this transcendence of gender in order to expand our current understanding of gender roles and women's functions within the dynastic ideology.

INTRODUCTION

Julia Agrippina, commonly known as Agrippina the Younger, was one of the most prominent women of the Julio-Claudian house. As a result of her overwhelmingly negative portrayal by ancient historians, Agrippina is remembered as a power-hungry and treacherous woman. She is best known for committing incest with her deranged brother Caligula, marrying and then murdering her uncle Claudius, and being killed by her rebellious son Nero. Agrippina's imagery, however, contrasts greatly with this negative portrayal.

Roman imperial women such as Agrippina were often displayed in portrait groups as symbols of morality, femininity, and fecundity. Their representation in the material evidence tells us that women of the imperial family had a role to play in the public sphere. Namely, their public representation aimed to strengthen the dynastic power and authority of their families, to personify the virtues that the emperors sought to promote, and to represent the continuation of a dynasty.¹

While scholars have discussed the modes of depiction of imperial women in great detail, they have overlooked the fact that the portrait images of these very same women often contradict the feminine virtues that they are meant to convey. That is, some depictions of the imperial women exhibit distinctly masculine associations. For example, the sculpted portraits of Agrippina are divided into typologies based on, among other things, the incorporation of physiognomic features of the contemporary emperors, which

¹ Constantina Katsari, "Public Images of Imperial Women in the Roman Empire: the Julio-Claudian Period," *The Roman Economy* (2007).

lend an element of androgyny to her depictions, thereby emphasizing the “masculinity” that she embodied.²

Agrippina integrated these masculine features into her portraits in order to reinforce her various positions in relation to the emperor, while demonstrating the unity and cohesiveness of the imperial dynasty as a whole. Furthermore, this transcendence of gender was employed not only to serve the three emperors with whom she was associated, but also to advance her own political aspirations through the formation of alliances with popular political factions. Agrippina was the daughter of the general Germanicus, one of the most admired public figures of his age. She had no scruples about exploiting that connection, even though Germanicus died before he could have had any direct influence over her. As a result, it is logical to conclude that Agrippina’s masculinizing depictions aim to promote this connection.

While there is no such term as “empress” in Latin, and there was no formal title for a female head of state, it is a term that is often associated with Agrippina in order to emphasize her extensive influence. Agrippina reflects a political paradox of the early Roman Empire as a woman who exercised great power and influence over a society that offered no formally recognized role to women. As a result, her story represents a critical stage in the evolution of Rome’s imperial system in terms of attempts to give a formal definition to the political role of a woman within the imperial household. While she may not have changed the Roman system, she did push the limits of what Romans were willing

² Historically, the study of portraiture has been influenced by physiognomy, or the reading of a portrait’s features as something indicative of character. In the most recent scholarship, the term “physiognomy” refers to a portrait’s form and facial features, without reference to the implied characteristics of those facial features. Therefore, when the term is used in this paper, it will simply refer to a portrait’s facial features, remaining unattached to any implications of character.

to tolerate. While she remained confined to her subordinate roles as daughter, sister, wife, and mother of Rome's most powerful men, her ability to exploit these various positions in order to exert her authority is what has made her so remarkable.

This paper neither seeks to exonerate or rehabilitate Agrippina, nor does it intend to provide a full catalogue and classification of her images. Rather, it intends to explore Agrippina's modes of depiction in both the literature and material evidence in order to determine how the tool of gender transcendence was used to reach her objective of recognized political authority. Before we can understand the power of Agrippina's images, we must first analyze the system that shaped and defined them. The first chapter of this paper will discuss the Augustan system for the public representation of the imperial women, as well as its backlash and results. The second chapter will discuss her representation in numismatics, sculpted portraits, sculpted reliefs, and private images while demonstrating the "masculine traits" that have been mentioned by previous scholars. The third and final chapter will aim to reconcile Agrippina's depictions in both literature and material evidence while attempting to explain the masculine assimilation seen in her portraiture. As a whole, this work aims to demonstrate that Agrippina's imagery offers valuable information about the roles and functions of women in the imperial dynastic ideology and how their imagery was used for political purposes.

CHAPTER 1: THE PUBLIC REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE EARLY EMPIRE

“How great will be the misfortune of that city, in which women will assume the public duties of men.”

-Marcus Tullius Cicero, 51 BCE³

This quote by the statesman Cicero reflects the exclusion of Roman women from all formal involvement and leadership in the political sphere of the Late Republic. At the same time, this statement reflects a rise in anxiety among upper class men caused by Roman society's fear of the political involvement of women. This unease continued to develop and build during the Late Republic, only to become magnified by Augustus's new regime and the public prominence of women within the imperial family. Living a century after Cicero, the younger Agrippina, who held a prominent public position within the Roman state, would have still been viewed as a threat by Roman traditionalists. As a result, the public representation of Agrippina (and women like her) was molded by this male apprehension.

Numerous scholars have discussed the cherished role of women as mothers and daughters within Roman society, but only now are they beginning to address the unease surrounding the growing influence of Roman elite women.⁴ Women began to develop an

³ Lactantius, *Epitomes* 33 [38] 1-5, ascribed to *De Re Publica* 4.5, quoted in Judith P. Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 8.

⁴ Some of the notable works addressing Roman women in society are: Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); Kristina Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus: Inventing Private Life*, Oxford Studies in Classical Literature and Gender Theory (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Sarah B. Pomeroy, "The Roman Matron of the Late Republic and Early Empire," in *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975); Beryl and Weaver Rawson, P. R. C., *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space*, Oup/Hrc (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family*. Works addressing the increased anxiety caused by women in the public sphere are: Richard A. Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1992); Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977); Susan S. Fischler, "Social Stereotypes and Historical Analysis: The Case of the Imperial Women at Rome," in *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night*, ed. S. Fischler L. Archer, and M. Wyke (London: Basingstoke and London, 1994); Emily

active, public life in the Republican period, despite the animosity that we see from sources such as Cicero. The archetype of the influential Republican woman was Cornelia Africana (190–100 BCE), the mother of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, tribunes who aimed to pass a number of reforms against the patrician class in response to economic distress in Rome. Cornelia was the model of a virtuous Roman woman who publically played an active part in the political affairs of her two sons, who in turn used her virtue to their advantage in their political rhetoric.⁵ During the Late Republic, as civil wars increased and Roman territories grew, Roman elite men spent more time away from their families, leaving women to look after family affairs, and making the female presence in the public sphere even more prominent.

The proscriptions of 82 and 43 BCE, by Sulla and the Second Triumvirate, respectively, sentenced any politically threatening men to exile or death. The proscriptions presented a situation in which women who needed to protect their families were forced to take public actions to defend their husbands, fathers, and sons.⁶ This furthered male apprehension by taking women out of the private sphere and placing them openly into the public arena. The greatest example of this can be seen in the so-called *Laudatio Turiae*, a funerary inscription written by a husband for his wife, Turia. In the inscription, the husband writes that when he was in flight following the proscription of 43, she sent him her jewelry and gold coins, defended his property against break-in, and requested his recall from exile by personally appealing to the triumvir Marcus Lepidus, who had her dragged

Ann Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta : Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna*, Routledge classical monographs (London ; New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁵ Plutarch addresses Cornelia's involvement in the fairs of the Gracchi in Plut. *Gai. Gracc.* and Plut. *Tib. Gracc.*

⁶ Susan S. Fischler, "The Public Position of the Women of the Imperial Household in the Julio-Claudian Period" (Dissertation, Somerville College, 1991), 18-20.

off as a slave after she prostrated herself at his feet.⁷ The hostility that Turia experienced while supporting her husband in such a taboo public fashion underscores the great contradiction between Roman society's expectations of upper class women and their public activities.

Augustus's regime furthered the tension and anxiety already present within Roman society. With the establishment of the Augustan Republican image, the *princeps* aimed to find an acceptable Roman precedent for socially and politically superior women. There were a number of reasons why Augustus needed to find a way of rationalizing the role of the imperial women within this new form of government. One was to utilize the wealth that the women of his family possessed in order to further his public works. Following his customary pattern of wrapping innovation in the cloak of traditionalism, Augustus needed to cultivate an image of the women of his family in a way that seemed traditional while allowing them to use their wealth in the development of the principate. Further, a public female presence was required to establish a clear progression of heirs to the newly founded Augustan monarchy. Finally, by promoting the virtue of the women of the imperial family, Augustus was able to provide a foil to headstrong and threatening women such as Antony's wife Fulvia and the Ptolemaic princess Cleopatra VII, both of whom had been demonized during his previous civil wars.⁸ In this way, the threat of the imperial women's

⁷ CIL VI 1527.

⁸ Fulvia was infamous for her involvement in the political careers of all three of her husbands, Publius Clodius Pulcher, Gaius Scribonius Curio, as well as Mark Antony. According to Cassius Dio 47.8.2, she was heavily involved in the proscriptions under Octavian and may have been directly involved in the proscription of Cicero. Dio 48.4.1-6 mentions that when Octavian and Antony left Rome to pursue Caesar's assassins, Fulvia was left behind to control the politics of Rome. She later publically endorsed Antony in opposition to Octavian, which resulted in the Perusine War of 41 BCE and ultimately her own death. Cleopatra also aligned with Antony in opposition to Octavian, resulting in the battle of Actium in 31 BCE, which led to the death of both her and Antony. Octavian demonized both women for opposing him. See Diana E. E. Kleiner, *Cleopatra and Rome* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

power could be controlled and channeled into areas that were seen as beneficial to the state. It seems that Augustus aimed to create a class of *feminae* that were to serve as *exempla* for the women of the aristocracy as well as for the female population at large.⁹ As a result, the conspicuous public role that the women of the imperial family developed as well as their wealth and their proximity to the emperor gave them more access to political power than some Roman men, likely causing them to be viewed as threatening to the male control of the state.

There was reality to the threat that these women were perceived to possess. There is no doubt that the women of the imperial family had political power. The lack of a vote does not always equal lack of political power, and the women of the imperial household were skilled in manipulating this fact. The power to serve as intercessor to the emperor was among their many authorities, and it was a powerful skill. One noteworthy example is the time that Agrippa II appealed to Agrippina the Younger for her support in ensuring that a dispute between the Jews and Samaritans received a fair hearing from the emperor Claudius.¹⁰ The close proximity of these women to the emperor and their ability to influence his decisions was seen as a threat to the established order of the state, which constitutionally excluded women from taking part in state administration. Such instances of women being involved in decisions of the state in the most elite public roles must have come to be seen as a sign of civil chaos.¹¹

⁹ Francesca Santoro L'Hoir, *The Rhetoric of Gender Terms : 'Man', 'Woman', and the Portrayal of Character in Latin Prose* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1992), 123.

¹⁰ Tac. *Dial.* 28,6; Fischler, "The Public Position of the Women of the Imperial Household in the Julio-Claudian Period," 63-64.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

The number of imperial women exiled under the Julio-Claudians reinforces the idea that their position was close enough to the center of power to be a threat, either by their direct actions or their marriage eligibility. In one instance, Messalina, the third wife of Claudius and the mother of Claudius's only son Britannicus, had strong enough ties and influence that she and others believed that she was capable of creating an emperor out of C. Silius, a nobleman and member of the senate whom Messalina married while her husband was away on business.¹² Upon hearing of her marriage, Suetonius tells us that Claudius became terrified, asking again and again, "Am I still emperor?"¹³ Claudius's reaction indicates that Messalina's actions were minatory enough to destroy the monarchy. The power that the imperial women held was the cause of great tension because it so graphically revealed the contrast between the Republican past in which women could never hold a position within the state and the Republican façade that Augustus created. Such a situation was bound to cause tension within government and society because it placed women in an overtly powerful role within the state due to the influence they held over the emperor.

The Peak of Feminine Authority

The power of these women came to a peak with Agrippina the Younger, who refused to remain relegated to the background of imperial politics. Agrippina, with her marriage to Claudius, aimed to become a *socia imperii*, or a partner in power.¹⁴ Tacitus records that Agrippina at one point commanded that the Praetorian Guard, a force of bodyguards that had been reserved for the emperor, swear their obedience to her, to the disgrace of the

¹² Tac. 11.26-11.31.

¹³ Suet. *Div. Claud.* 35.

¹⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 12.37.5, 12.42.3; Dio 60.33.7-12; Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, 183.

senate and the people. The devotion of the praetorians to the empress enabled her to have influence over the major military power in the city, which in turn could have put her in a position that equaled the position of her husband.¹⁵

With the death of Claudius and the accession of Agrippina's son Nero, Agrippina gained even more power. Nero was only seventeen when Claudius died. His inexperience and power provided the perfect opportunity for Agrippina to display both her dynastic importance and her political influence both through her son and in her own right. Suetonius claims that Nero allowed Agrippina to run public and private affairs.¹⁶ It is entirely possible that the *quinquennium Neronis*, or the five "good" years of Nero, may have been the last five years of Agrippina's life.¹⁷ This newfound privilege allowed Agrippina to successfully transgress the boundaries of gender imposed on her by receiving embassies and attending meetings of the senate (although she could only listen from behind a curtain).¹⁸

The Bias of Threat

With the presence of the imperial women, achieving a position of power was no longer the exclusive domain of men. The arrival of the imperial women onto the public scene, combined with the fact that it was easy for them to obtain the attention of the emperor, turned these women into a threat for the male elite.¹⁹ As household affairs

¹⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 14.11.1.

¹⁶ Suet. *Nero* 9.1 reads: *matri summam omnium rerum priuatarum publicarumque permisit*.

¹⁷ The first five years of Nero's reign are referred to as the *quinquennium Neronis* and were known for Nero's magnanimous administration. This time period was held in high regard by future emperors, such as Trajan, who referred to them as most prosperous time of the imperial era. See Susan Wood, *Imperial Women : a Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava Supplementum (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999), 269, 303.

¹⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 13.5.2-3.

¹⁹ Lien Lucienne Foubert, "Women Going Public : Ideals and Conflicts in the Representation of Julio-Claudian Women" (Dissertation, Radboud University Nijmegen, 2010), 82.

became imperial business, women had an even greater access to power than many men who were able to hold constitutional office.

A standard tactic against political opponents was to charge that opponent with treason. This weapon could not easily be used against a woman because, by society's standards, a woman could not be charged with aspiring to supreme power, given her ineligibility to attain any kind of power.²⁰ This is why charges of immorality against women were so common.²¹ In addition, access to power was contrary to the social construct of the Roman matron, and with the increased power that women of the imperial family saw during the Augustan age, the dichotomy between social construct and reality became difficult to reconcile for later historians.²² As a result, the bias against imperial women such as Agrippina within the literary sources makes it impossible for us as scholars to assess exactly how these women operated in the political sphere. This bias is the result of an era of increased anxiety that Roman society experienced during the rise of the empire.

Many modern scholars, falling into the traps set by the ancient sources, have been misled into believing Tacitus's description of Agrippina the Younger, and their works often refer to the empress as disdainful, treacherous, and bloodthirsty.²³ Recent works by

²⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 6.10.1

²¹ Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, 12.

²² Glenys Davies, "Portrait Statues as Models for Gender Roles in Roman Society," *Role Models in the Roman World: Identity and Assimilation* (2008): 127; Fischler, "Social Stereotypes and Historical Analysis: The Case of the Imperial Women at Rome."

²³ Barrett discusses how many of the modern sources refer to Agrippina as 'treacherous', 'corrupt and vigorous' and 'loathsome.' These sources also portray her as a power hungry monster that exercised a demonic influence over her husband and son. This is similar to the way Tacitus writes about Agrippina. While Tacitus's introduction to Agrippina is presumably missing (it was probably in his book on Caligula), he writes that she was 'threatening', 'intolerable', 'immoral', 'disreputable', 'violent', and a 'relentless enemy.' See Anthony Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), xii-xvi.

Anthony Barrett and Susan Wood prove to be an exception.²⁴ Both authors aim to rehabilitate the image of the empress by exposing the bias against her in the sources.

The vilification of intelligent and powerful women has occurred throughout western history and follows a recognizable format. Susan Wood reminds us that the elements of this stereotype are usually unbridled ambition, bloodthirstiness, and sexual flagrancy.²⁵ The attackers typically accuse these women of unfeminine frigidity, promiscuity, and adultery in service of their ambitions. It is important to note that the authors of the primary sources (in our case, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio) are writing in hindsight, looking back to the disastrous principate of Nero. The vilification of Agrippina may have been the result of an inclination to blame Nero's shortcomings on his mother. Agrippina attempted more openly than any woman before her to encroach on what were traditional male privileges. She could be viewed as the first woman in history to demand recognition of official power, as opposed to mere influence. This behavior was likely to arouse feelings of fear and hostility in some men.²⁶ Therefore, the sources tell us more about how women such as Agrippina were perceived as a major threat to the Roman political order than about who they were and what they did.

It is apparent from Agrippina's harsh treatment in the literary sources that her control over state affairs, however integral, caused a great deal of anxiety among Roman society. It is no secret that patriarchal Roman society did not like the involvement of women in politics. Within the city of Rome and without, there was a dichotomy between the social restrictions that controlled the lives of women and the image of political

²⁴ Wood, *Imperial Women : a Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, 249-319; Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire*.

²⁵ Wood, *Imperial Women : a Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*: 261-62.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 259.

authority that the imperial women possessed.²⁷ The dichotomy between the role of women within the structure of Roman society and the position of the imperial women outside of that defined role makes the imperial women worthy of study.

Tacitus in particular takes a dim view on women's participation in public affairs.²⁸ To Tacitus, Agrippina seems to have represented the fall of traditional virtues of the Roman matron, since a major theme in the *Annales* is the corruption of the old standards of conduct.²⁹ To him, the feminine ideal was far from the feminine reality. Tacitus sums up his anxiety when he writes, speaking of Agrippina's control over the state: "It was a stringent, and, so to say, masculine despotism; there was sternness and generally arrogance in public, no sort of immodesty at home, unless it conduced to power."³⁰ This statement (and other ancient sources referencing Agrippina) clearly suggests that she has stepped out of line. Tacitus casts Agrippina as a *dux femina*, or a woman who transgressed the proper gender roles and challenged male authority by crossing the barriers of gender in order to become a leader in her own right.³¹ Because women like Agrippina had the emperors under their thumbs, Tacitus remarks that the *princeps* as well as the entire nation had become a slave to the *femina*.³²

Tacitus uses terms such as *dominatio* and *regnum* to characterize Agrippina's ambitions, but does not use such words in conjunction with the other imperial women that

²⁷ Fischler, "The Public Position of the Women of the Imperial Household in the Julio-Claudian Period," 2-3.

²⁸ L'Hoir, *The Rhetoric of Gender Terms: 'Man', 'Woman', and the Portrayal of Character in Latin Prose*: 122.

²⁹ Leonard E. Hardy, "Imperial Women in Tacitus' *Annales*" (Dissertation, Indiana University, 1976), 165.

³⁰ Tac. Ann. 12.7.6-7: *adductum et quasi virile servitium: palam severitas ac saepius superbia; nihil domi impudicus, nisi domination expedient.*. Trans. Complete Works of Tacitus. Tacitus. Alfred John Church. William Jackson Brodribb. Sara Bryant. edited for Perseus. New York: Random House, Inc. Random House, Inc. reprinted 1942. From <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:latinLit:phi1351.phi005.perseus-eng1:12.7>

³¹ Francesca Santoro L'Hoir, "Tacitus and Women's Usurpation of Power," *The Classical World* 88, no. 1 (1994).

³² Francesca Santoro L'Hoir, *The Rhetoric of Gender Terms: 'Man', 'Woman', and the Portrayal of Character in Latin Prose*, 123.

he discusses.³³ Because these terms are unique to her, they underline how differently she was perceived for her ambitious nature. This tone is reminiscent of a passage in Suetonius, in which the author mentions that the emperor Caligula called his great-grandmother Livia “*Ulixem stolatum*,” or “Ulysses wearing a *stola*.”³⁴ The phrase references both masculine and feminine qualities and implies that Livia combined the intellect of men with the traditional values of women.³⁵ As a woman, Livia was expected to remain in the private sphere. But, as a member of the imperial family and one of Augustus’s most trusted advisors, she was visible in the public sphere. Agrippina’s role as *dux femina* in Tacitus no doubt aims to represent a reversal of “appropriate” gender roles, just as Suetonius’s *Ulixem stolatum* does.

The Female Public Persona

For a more complete picture of the life of Agrippina, one needs to examine non-literary sources. Public image is more significant than private behavior, which is why we must consult the material evidence. Depictions of women during the Republic were rare. In fact, the only example of a female portrait in pre-Augustan Rome that we know of was a seated statue of the previously mentioned Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, of which only the base remains extant (Figure 1). By the time of Augustus, Pliny the Elder tells us that her exemplary motherhood was the justification for the statue, but in reality, it was her

³³ Hardy, “Imperial Women in Tacitus’ *Annales*,” 156.

³⁴ Suet. *Cal.* 23. The Latin phrase is illustrative of the ambiguous position of Livia in Roman society and the way that others perceived her position. The phrase is an apparent contradiction. It references Odysseus, who appeared in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as a clever and courageous figure and was seen by the Romans as an example of *virtus*. But, the adjective *stolatus* gives the term a feminine distinction by referencing the long sleeveless dress worn by the Roman matron, which served as a symbol of Roman female behavior.

³⁵ Foubert, “Women Going Public : Ideals and Conflicts in the Representation of Julio-Claudian Women,” 1.

connection to the political, public realm through her sons that justified a publically commemorated portrait.³⁶



Figure 1. Base of the seated statue of Cornelia Africana, 2nd century BCE, Rome, Museo Capitolino, <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/sarahbcornell/2922098170/>>

Because women could not vote or hold office, the large number of portrait statues of women that appears during the Augustan regime is perhaps unexpected. Glenys Davies observes that, “[women’s] position was socially and legally subordinate to that of men, yet they appear on almost equal footing when it comes to commemoration in marble and the

³⁶ Plin. *HN* 34.30-31. Interestingly, three existing female statues, one in the Rodin Museum in Paris (co. 471), one from the Capitoline Museum in Rome (inv. 634), and the other in the National Museum in Naples (inv. 6029) have at one time been identified as Agrippina the Younger. None of them, however, have been securely identified according to their portrait features by modern scholarship. Still, it is interesting that these statues are associated with the younger Agrippina, as it underlines the similarity between Agrippina and Cornelia, both of whom were influential in the careers of their sons.

visibility of their images.”³⁷ This is because the women of the Augustan age were commemorated to promote Augustus’s archaic ideals of womanhood, just as Livia had become Augustus’s idealized icon of Roman motherhood as exemplified by his moral and marriage legislations.³⁸ The themes of motherhood and womanly virtue continued to be common themes in the depiction of women throughout the Late Republic and Early Empire. In fact, it is possible that many depictions of the imperial women displayed them holding their children (or just their sons), just as Messalina is presented holding her son Britannicus in a statue currently in the Louvre (Figure 2).³⁹ Most portraits of women at this time displayed the Roman *matronae* in the pose of *pudicitia* or “modesty.” This was a common stock body type that displayed the woman veiled, wearing the *stola*, a female utergarment that was a symbol of a patrician woman’s marital status, and *palla*, a simple shawl that would have been worn over the *stola*. The type displays a woman with her hand either grasping her veil near her face, or grasping her *palla* tightly around her body (Figure 3).⁴⁰ The pose would have embodied the concept of sexual fidelity enhanced by fertility, and was thus an attractive option for the imperial women, whose fertility was celebrated because it provided an heir that would continue the monarchy.

However, Agrippina’s statues did not exist to model the same virtues. While some of Agrippina’s portraits celebrated her exemplary motherhood, a woman with such control over the state would not have been depicted in the passive pose of *pudicitia*. The

³⁷ Davies, "Portrait Statues as Models for Gender Roles in Roman Society," 207.

³⁸ Kleiner, *Cleopatra and Rome*: 43.

³⁹ Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. MA 1224. It should be noted that this double portrait statue of Messalina and Britannicus was inspired by the famous fourth century sculptural group of Eirene and Ploutos (Peace and Wealth), created by the sculptor Kephisodotos. The head of the child Britannicus is a modern addition. See <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/messalina>.

⁴⁰ For more information about the *pudicitia* body type and its Greek origins, refer to Sheila Dillon, *The Female Portrait Statue in the Greek World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 88-98.

representation of Agrippina's power was at the forefront of her agenda. This is displayed in a basanite statue on the Centrale Montemartini, which clearly depicts Agrippina in the guise of a goddess (Figure 4).⁴¹ The statue was found during an excavation of the Temple of Claudius on the Caelian hill, and depicts Agrippina as the priestess of her husband's cult. It shows her with her head held high, wearing the diadem of an *Augusta* and the veil of a *matrona*. Instead of clutching her garments and wrapping them around her body in a display of modesty, Agrippina's body is on full display through the thin, seemingly wet drapery of her *stola* and *palla*. Her exaggerated walking stance, outstretched arm, bulky frame, broad shoulders, and wide chest are reminiscent of the Piraeus Athena, and are a clear reference to divine authority (Figure 5). Here is an obvious contradiction between the modest *pudicitia* pose of the Roman *matronae* that Augustus advocated and the powerful, goddess-like stance used in the representation of Agrippina. This contradiction mirrors the opposition that we see in references to Agrippina in the literary sources, which use terms that imply an aggressive pursuit of power such as *dominatio* and *regnum*. The statue could perhaps demonstrate that Agrippina's image was modeled from Cleopatra's imagery (as the queen was often depicted as Isis), as opposed to following the trend set by her ancestresses, which exemplified and propagated the ideas of traditional Roman female virtue that directly contradicted the public position of Cleopatra.

⁴¹ Rome, Centrale Montemartini, inv. MC 1882. The head of the statue is a plaster cast of an original from Copenhagen (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, cat. 634). The headless body was uncovered in the nineteenth century, in fragments, used for fill in a wall. When pieced together, it was identified as the body of a goddess and placed in the Capitoline Museum. Recent restorers were able to match the Copenhagen head to the body's cavity, causing the statue to be identified as Agrippina the Younger. Museum exhibit label for: Statue of Agrippina, (Rome, Centrale Montemartini).



Figure 2. Messalina holding Britannicus, 45 CE, marble, Paris, Musée du Louvre,
< <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/messalina> >



Figure 3. Statue of a woman in the pose of *pudicitia*, 2nd century CE, marble, Istanbul Archaeological Museum, < http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:4547_-_Istanbul_-_Museo_archeol._-Donna_-_Copia_rom_da_orig_sec_IV_a.C._-da_Thasos_-_Foto_G._Dall%27Orto_28-5-2006.jpg>



Figure 4. Statue of Agrippina the Younger, 54-59 CE, basanite, Rome, Centrale Montemartini, photo by author.



Figure 5. Piraeus Athena, 4th century BCE, bronze, Athens, Archaeological Museum of Piraeus, < http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:7347_-_Piraeus_Arch._Museum,_Athens_-_Athena_-_Photo_by_Giovanni_Dall'Orto,_Nov_14_2009.jpg >

We cannot ignore the ideological and political aspects of the public images of women such as Agrippina. The interpretation of the visual world through material evidence aids in our construction of gender in the ancient world. A person's representation becomes an idealized form of that individual. This in turn allows that individual to categorize him or herself in a way in which he or she wants society to view them. The study of gender transcendence within the portraiture of influential imperial women like Agrippina aims to shed light on the power relationship between elite men and women. The integration of masculine attributes into a woman's features aimed to rectify the doubt surrounding a woman's ability to govern. A woman, by taking on the attributes of a man, instantly became more virtuous and could more easily embody the noble aspects of the head of state.

CHAPTER 2: AGRIPPINA'S DEPICTIONS

The Roman world was truly crowded with portraits, from imposing life-sized marble statuary in the forum, to the coins carried in one's pocket, and even the gems that were exchanged among the aristocracy. For this reason, the subject of Roman portraiture has been one of intense study and debate. Portraits are, of course, intended to represent their subject realistically. Roman portraits are often highly persuasive in terms of their realness. They certainly look like real people. But do these portraits accurately portray their subject with verisimilitude?

Peter Stewart mentions that there are a number of reasons why portraits are not *just* likenesses. The first reason given is that a bare record of outwards appearance does not always make an instantly recognizable portrait; for instance, sometimes a caricature may be more representative of a person than a passport photo. In addition, for makers of portraits, likeness and realism are not always the most important objectives since artists may wish to flatter their subjects by making them more appealing in a variety of ways – thinner, more attractive, etc. This is true with the veristic style of the Republic, in which a portrait's over-exaggerated realism was meant to communicate age, sternness, and experience along with other Republican values. In this way, we can see that Roman portraiture involved the cultivation of an image that carried implicit ideological values. As a result, in trying to understand Roman portraiture, art historians often encounter two differing motives: the impulse to depict individuals as they actually appear, and the need to place them within a broader social and historical framework.⁴²

⁴² Peter Stewart, *Roman Art*, Greece & Rome New surveys in the classics (Oxford England ; New York: Published for the Classical Association by Oxford University Press, 2004), 5-10.

We should also realize our limits within the study of portraiture. The identification and dating of different portrait types is an academic industry that involves a meticulous attention to detail, which in turn allows us to understand the process by which these types were developed, altered, copied, and diffused. But, through this painstaking study, we can confirm that standard portrait types do indeed exist, and are not a figment of the art historian's imagination. This confirmation allows us to draw the conclusion that officially sanctioned images appear to have been manufactured at Rome before they were distributed and copied elsewhere. These widely distributed portrait types must have maintained a degree of individuality so that their images would have been recognizable to the largely illiterate populace, and would have served as the embodiment of that figure, as most of the populace would not have seen a ruler in the flesh.⁴³

The function of these Roman portraits can at times be unclear. Who erected them, when, and why? While it is tempting to see portraits of the emperor and his family as propaganda that was distributed from Rome, this may be an inaccurate impression. During the first two centuries CE, it was not customary for the emperor to produce his own portraits. According to Stewart, the general populace erected imperial portraits in both public and private places within the empire.⁴⁴ Guilds, associations, wealthy families and individuals, and even whole communities often did this. Their purpose was to express loyalty and gratitude, while hinting at the prosperity and importance of the patron. In fact, private portraits were also commissioned by someone other than the subject, usually by clients or relatives thankful for their generosity. It is true that the subject could often be

⁴³ Ibid., 13-14.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

involved in the process, as it seems that he or she would have “refunded” the expenses of the dedicators, effectively paying for the monument him or herself.⁴⁵

As previously discussed, the male authors of the primary sources may have wished to portray the imperial women in a more negative light than their action warranted. As Diana Kleiner points out, it is precisely for this reason that we should also let the material evidence narrate the story of Agrippina’s political relationships.⁴⁶ Likewise, Judith Ginsburg brings up a number of good points that one should keep in mind when studying material evidence for a greater understanding of Agrippina the Younger: whether the quality of the visual material is a direct result of the attitudes of the ruler, whether there was an imperial department of propaganda, and whether Agrippina played a role in developing her own image.⁴⁷ In addition, we must consider the environment and audience for which the chosen works were meant to be displayed.

Although there is a great amount of debate surrounding the identifications of Roman portraits, there is no doubt a degree of uniformity that exists between various portrait types, suggesting the existence of an approved prototype, or an official portrait from which all others could be copied. There is no good evidence that demonstrates how this process worked. It is usually assumed that bronze, wax, or plaster miniatures of these official portraits were distributed to the provinces so that they could be reproduced locally. It has even been suggested, for instance, that the small bronze head of Agrippina found at Alba Fucens might have been an example of a type piece that was distributed to the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 24-25.

⁴⁶ Diana E. E. Kleiner, "Family Ties: Mothers and Sons in Elite and Non-Elite Roman Art," in *I, Claudia II: Women in Roman Art and Society*, ed. Diana E. E. Kleiner and Susan B. Matheson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 44-45.

⁴⁷ Judith Ginsburg, *Representing Agrippina: Constructions of Female Power in the Early Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 55.

provinces to be copied (Figure 6).⁴⁸ This process would result in a multitude of replicas across the empire that were based on a common type, although with idiosyncrasies introduced by their respective craftsmen. Several different portrait types were created for important members of the royal family, especially when they enjoyed long lives. Regardless of how these imperial statues were distributed, there is no question that they were numerous and ubiquitous.

A thorough study of portraiture must also consider the response of the Roman viewer to these portraits. Images, and especially portraits, must have evoked different feelings from the Romans than they do in us today. As Peter Stewart notes, the significance of a portrait “resides not just in its form, as an isolated object, but in the way ancient viewers encountered it and reacted to it.”⁴⁹ Portraits were not just a depiction of a person or a reminder of his or her presence, but were also an object of veneration for subjects devoted to both men and gods.



Figure 6. Small bust of Agrippina from the *tablinum* of Pisoni's villa at Herculaneum, ca. 54 CE, bronze, Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, photo by author.

⁴⁸ Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire*, 215.

⁴⁹ Stewart, *Roman Art*, 27.

Agrippina's Appearance

The literature gives us little information as to Agrippina's appearance. Only one specific feature is recorded by Pliny the Elder, who tells us that she had a double set of canine teeth on the right side of her upper jaw. This probably had the effect of making her face asymmetrical, a feature that might be reflected in her portraiture to some extent.⁵⁰ Other authors speak generally about her appearance. Tacitus, when comparing her to two of her contemporaries, Junia Silana and Domitia Lepida, mentions that the women were well matched in their *forma* or beauty.⁵¹ Dio calls her *kalē* (beautiful), and Suetonius says that Nero remarked how lovely her body was upon seeing her naked after her death.⁵² Anthony Barrett points out that, in any case, she could not have been sexually repellent, as these authors credit her with a long list of lovers.⁵³

The Consequences of *Damnatio*

Even though the extant material evidence is relatively ample, we are limited in examining the materials representing Agrippina due to the *de iure damnatio memoriae* that was carried out after her death. Literally meaning "condemnation of memory," a *damnatio memoriae* was essentially meant to erase someone from history. The senate, the emperor, or the army could condemn individuals who were seen to be a threat to the state.⁵⁴ Condemnations were often expressed in mutilated, transformed, or, recut portraits, effaced

⁵⁰ Pliny, *NH*, 7.71.

⁵¹ Tac. *Ann.* 12.64.4, 13.19.2, 14.9.1.

⁵² Dio 60.31.6, 61.14.2; Suet *Nero* 34.4.

⁵³ Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire*, 41. For a list of Agrippina's lovers, see Barrett's list of "Significant Events and Figures," xvii-xxi.

⁵⁴ Eric R. Varner, "Portraits, Plots, and Politics: 'Damnatio Memoriae' and the Images of Imperial Women," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 46(2001), 41.

inscriptions, altered historical reliefs, and damaged coins.⁵⁵ However, the results of a *damnatio* were unintentionally twofold. While some objects were destroyed, others were warehoused or thrown into the Tiber, which protected them from the elements and left them well preserved for study.

Agrippina's *damnatio* occurred in approximately 59 CE, after Nero had her murdered and justified his actions by claiming to the senate that she had conspired to murder him via one of her messengers.⁵⁶ It should be noted that Agrippina was not the only imperial woman to suffer such a fate. Previously, *damnationes* had been suffered in 32 CE by Sejanus's mistress Livilla and in 48 CE by Messalina.⁵⁷ As a result, the political importance of women has been obscured by their frequent *damnationes*. In fact, the number of women suffering from *damnationes* during the Roman Empire far outnumbers the number of women who were deified, 24 to 17 respectively.⁵⁸ This fact reflects the idea that women were often seen as political threats, capable of usurping those in power. By destroying evidence linked to notably powerful women, their legacy would be effectively erased, and the growth in number of their supporters would be squashed. In terms of *damnatio*, Tacitus tells us that *supplicationes* were to be celebrated commemorating the failure of Agrippina's conspiracy and that her birthday was made a *dies nefastus* (an inauspicious day).⁵⁹ The *Octavia*, a Flavian-era tragedy that is focused on Nero's divorce

⁵⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁶ Tac. Ann. 14.11.

⁵⁷ Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire*, 192.

⁵⁸ Varner, "Portraits, Plots, and Politics: 'Damnatio Memoriae' and the Images of Imperial Women," 43.

⁵⁹ Tac. Ann. 14.12.

from his first wife, briefly mentions the destruction of Agrippina's images and inscriptions.⁶⁰ Dio writes that her statues were destroyed in Rome in 59 CE.⁶¹

The quality of the evidence that has survived the *damnatio* makes it seem as though many of Agrippina's images within Rome were warehoused or damaged. A prominent image of Agrippina displayed in Rome, the previously discussed basanite statue depicting Agrippina as the chief priestess of the Divine Claudius from the Claudianum on the Caelian (Figure 4 above), seems to have been destroyed after her condemnation, as the statue body today is composed from forty-one fragments, hinting that it may have been intentionally attacked.⁶² Two small bronze portraits of Agrippina, one from Pompeii and one from Herculaneum, are likely to have been removed from public display and warehoused after 59 CE.⁶³ It is also possible that the destruction of Agrippina's images was short-lived due to her popularity among the masses, as evidenced by the large number of her portraits that survive intact. In fact, her image seems to have been rehabilitated shortly after her condemnation, as Nero held games in her honor.⁶⁴ It is therefore possible that the *damnatio* against her was not entirely successful and that Nero and the senate quickly recanted their decree.

⁶⁰ In *Octavia* 610-611, Agrippina's ghost laments that her son ordered the destruction of her statues and inscriptions: *simulacra, titulos destruit mortis metu totum per orbem*. In the past, recent scholarship has attributed the *Octavia* to Seneca, a contemporary of Agrippina and Nero. Now, however, common consensus presumes that it was written in the Flavian era during the first century. T. Barnes, "The Date of the *Octavia*," *MH* 39(1982).

⁶¹ Dio 62.16.2a.

⁶² Varner, "Portraits, Plots, and Politics: 'Damnatio Memoriae' and the Images of Imperial Women," 69.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Dio. 62.16.4.

Numismatic Images

When discussing portrait typologies and their defining characteristics, we must first begin by evaluating the existing numismatic evidence, as portraits are often identified according to one's representation on coins and their accompanying legends. Agrippina's first appearance on Roman coinage occurred on a *sestertius* issued in 37 CE, under the reign of her brother Caligula, whose profile is placed on the obverse (Figure 7).⁶⁵ The *sestertius* is the most valuable of the imperial coins for the study of portraiture, since its large surface offers the best scope for detail. However, this issue displays Agrippina and her two sisters in full length on the reverse, leaving little space for accurate facial detail or any individualism at all. The women hold different attributes, which associate Agrippina with *Securitas*, Drusilla with *Concordia*, and Julia Livilla with *Fortuna*.⁶⁶ Barrett explains this occurrence, writing that this coin (as well as the fact that Caligula had the Praetorian Guard include his sisters in the oath to the emperor) represents a key stage in the elevation of women in the imperial house to the point that they shared in the majesty of the principate.⁶⁷



Figure 7. *Sestertius* of Caligula (obverse) and his three sisters (reverse),
< <http://www.ancientcoins.ca/RIC/index.htm> >

⁶⁵ RIC² 33.

⁶⁶ Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire*, 53.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Suetonius mentions that Caligula's sisters were included in oaths and consular proposals in Suet. *Cal.* 15.3.

When Agrippina later became the wife of her uncle Claudius, she was the first to be represented with both an identifying inscription and an easily recognizable portrait profile, in contrast to her depictions under Caligula. A second *sestertius* featuring Agrippina was minted under Claudius (50-54 CE) (Figure 8).⁶⁸ The draped bust of the princess, who faces the right and wears her hair in a braid, is encircled by a legend reading “AGRIPPINA AVGVSTAE GERMANICI F CAESARIS” (Agrippina Augusta, daughter of Germanicus, wife of Caesar Augustus). In this issue, the empress’s features are youthful and rounded, following the classically idealistic model set by Augustus. This is the same profile that we see on a *denarius* and *aureus* minted between 50-54 CE (Figure 9). The obverse features a draped bust of Agrippina, again facing right, wearing the wheat crown of Ceres. The hair is fastened at the neck in a long braid, with two locks of hair falling onto the neck. A legend simply reads “AGRIPPINAE AVGVSTAE.”⁶⁹



Figure 8. *Sestertius* of Claudius featuring Agrippina the Younger (obverse),
<<http://www.ancientcoins.ca/RIC/index.htm>>

⁶⁸ RIC² 103.

⁶⁹ RIC² 75.



Figure 9. Denarius with Agrippina the Younger (obverse) and Nero (reverse),
<<http://www.ancientcoins.ca/RIC/index.htm>>

These features are worth comparing to those on other Claudian-era coins, which may have been minted only slightly later. A series of coins (both *aurei* and *denarii*) that feature the laureate head of Claudius on the obverse and feature Agrippina on the reverse show the slow creep of masculine features into her physiognomy (Figure 10-11).⁷⁰ This time, her carefully detailed likeness displays typical features of the Claudian family such as a square jaw, small chin, and a distinctive overbite.⁷¹ In contrast to Agrippina's earlier depictions, the empress now seems to display a profile that is more similar to her husband's. In a short time, Agrippina's profile had evolved from youthful, soft, and feminine to strong, sharp, and mannish.

⁷⁰ RIC² 80-81. Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire*, 225-26. A side-by-side analysis of the three profiles, however, shows that even though they may have the same legend, Agrippina is displayed with dramatically different features (but the same attributes).

⁷¹ Wood, *Imperial Women: a Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, 298. Agrippina's signature overbite, mentioned by Pliny the Elder, has likely been emphasized in Agrippina's portraiture on both numismatics and in sculpture due to the nature of the omen-conscious Roman people, who believed that a supernumerary canine tooth on the upper right jaw signified good fortune.



Figure 10. Aureus of Claudius (obverse) with Agrippina the Younger (reverse),
[<http://www.ancientcoins.ca/RIC/index.htm>](http://www.ancientcoins.ca/RIC/index.htm)



Figure 11. Denarius of Claudius (obverse) and Agrippina the Younger (reverse),
[<http://www.ancientcoins.ca/RIC/index.htm>](http://www.ancientcoins.ca/RIC/index.htm)

An undated cistophoric *tetradrachm* features the jugate heads of a laureate Claudius and a seemingly bareheaded Agrippina with the legend reading “TI CLAVD CAES AVG AGRIPP AVGVSTA” (Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus and Agrippina Augusta) (Figure 12).⁷² With this issue, it seems that Agrippina’s facial features have lost the traces of

⁷² RIC² 119.

femininity. Here, her heavier masculine features stand in stark contrast to her more feminine representations in her first numismatic depictions. It is this type of masculine depiction that has led modern scholars such as Barrett to remark on Agrippina's "rather jowly [appearance], with a large nose."⁷³ Barrett goes on to remark that, although authors like Tacitus have related stories of how Agrippina's physical beauty ensnared a defenseless Claudius, the numismatic evidence suggests that his claim is unwarranted.⁷⁴ Similar claims have been made about Cleopatra VII based on her depictions on coins. The issue of beauty in depictions of both Agrippina and Cleopatra will be readdressed in Chapter 3. Regardless of her depiction, the jugate images of the emperor and the empress display them as more equal than when Agrippina was relegated to the reverse.



Figure 12. Tetradrachm of Claudius and Agrippina the Younger (obverse),
<http://www.ancientcoins.ca/RIC/index.htm>

The coins issued after Agrippina's marriage to Claudius accord with the primary sources by confirming that Agrippina had an extraordinary degree of influence over the *princeps* while she enjoyed an unprecedented amount of recognition. Before Agrippina's

⁷³ Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire*, 225.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

marriage to Claudius, coins of the Roman mint celebrated the emperor's military and political accomplishments. After the two were married, these coins were replaced with issues showing significant emphasis on not only Agrippina, but also her parents and her son, Nero.⁷⁵ This may have been an attempt to legitimize Claudius's principate through his new union with the great granddaughter of Augustus, from whom Claudius was not directly descended. Instead of displaying this new union with the family of Augustus by emphasizing Agrippina's Julian features (soft and rounded), these new issues show Agrippina's typically Claudian features (sharp and strong, as described above). Was this simply a more accurate depiction of the empress? It is possible instead to believe that this new depiction was a conscious effort put forth to emphasize the features that linked her to not only her uncle-turned-husband Claudius, but also to her father, the beloved general Germanicus.

Agrippina saw an even greater amount of recognition on coins from the first few years of Nero's principate, in which she may have served as regent.⁷⁶ The first issue of 54 CE were *aurei* and *denarii* that feature a somewhat awkward obverse in which both Agrippina and Nero, portrayed on the same scale, face each other with their noses practically touching (Figure 13).⁷⁷ The inscription on the obverse reads "AGRIPP AVG DIVI CLAVD NERONIS CAES MATER," while the reverse reads "NERONI CLAVD DIVI F CAES AVG GERM IMP TR P." The layout seems designed in a way that showed both mother and son as equals, as opposed to a jugate image, in which the image placed in front of the other was

⁷⁵ Wood, *Imperial Women : a Study in Public Images*, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68, 256-293.

⁷⁶ Diana E. E. and Matheson Kleiner, Susan B., *I, Claudia II: Women in Roman Art and Society*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 11.

⁷⁷ RIC² 1-2.

clearly of greater importance.⁷⁸ Wood remarks that it is reminiscent of a staring contest between children, and reads as though both figures refuse to be subordinate to the other.⁷⁹ The lack of precedent in Rome for such a depiction left the result clumsy and awkward. What is perhaps the most surprising aspect of this issue is that Agrippina's name is inscribed on the obverse in the nominative (a case that would normally be expected for a ruler) while Nero's name is in the dative on the on the reverse. As a result, the coin reads "Agrippina Augusta, wife of the Divine Claudius, mother of Nero Caesar for Nero Claudius Caesar Germanicus son of Divine Claudius holder of tribunician power." This inscription hints at the fact that Agrippina may have even been in a superior role by indicating that *she* had this coin issued *for* her son. At the same time, one could argue that Nero's name is in the dative simply because the coin was ratified or issued by the senate for the emperor, as indicated by the "EXSC" inscribed in the center of an oak wreath on the reverse of the coin. Either way, this portrayal of mother and son of equal status shows the extent of Agrippina's enhanced power after the death of Claudius.



Figure 13. Aureus of Nero and Agrippina (obverse),
<http://www.ancientcoins.ca/RIC/index.htm>

⁷⁸ Wood, *Imperial Women : a Study in Public Images*, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68, 293.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

This issue in particular shows the association of the emperor's power with his mother's and vice versa. Is it possible that the gender transcendence in other aspects of Agrippina's portraiture aimed to display precisely the same message? This display is the powerful hint that Agrippina saw herself, or that others saw her, as a regent or co-emperor with her son, who was barely eighteen years old. The position of a co-emperor was one that had absolutely no precedent in Roman law or tradition. This coin in particular correlates well with the ancient literature. Tacitus gives us an anecdote from the first year of Nero's reign, when Agrippina attempted to mount the imperial dais to take a seat beside Nero as he received delegates from Armenia. This was an unprecedented breach of protocol and was quickly avoided when Nero jumped out of his seat and stepped down to greet her.⁸⁰

Not since the triumvirate had a man and woman appeared in a similar arrangement. Then, Mark Antony honored his then wife Octavia in a similar format on a coin issued from one of his Eastern mints. Here, however, the coin had a great amount of precedence. The East had a long history of displaying queens on their coins, making Antony's issue completely acceptable to its viewers.⁸¹ The coin showing Agrippina and Nero would have been considered strange and prodigious to a Roman audience, who could have interpreted the issue as an announcement of a partnership between mother and son. It seems possible that, while Nero must have still approved the coin, Agrippina or her backing party were responsible for the idea of the coin's issue. It is also likely that the creator of the motif took inspiration from the coins of the East, as Antony had done earlier.

⁸⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 13.2.

⁸¹ Under the triumvirate, Antony was given control of Egypt and the East, and his coins were minted specifically for those regions and not for the city of Rome itself. Prior to Antony's issue, Cleopatra VII had issued multiple coins featuring her likeness. Due to this precedent, Antony's coin featuring Octavia was not perceived as unusual or monumental by its audience. Ginsburg, *Representing Agrippina : Constructions of Female Power in the Early Roman Empire*, 58.

This unprecedented honor did not last for long. Only a year later, in 55, *aurei* and *denarii* were issued showing the jugate portraits of Agrippina and Nero (Figure 14).⁸² This time, the emperor is in the foreground while his mother is silhouetted in the background. In contrast to the earlier issue, Nero's name is on the obverse while Agrippina's is on the reverse. Later in the following year, Agrippina appears on no new issues, setting the stage for the decline of her influence over Nero, which culminated with her assassination in 59 CE.



Figure 14. *Aureus* of Nero and Agrippina (obverse),
<<http://www.ancientcoins.ca/RIC/index.htm>>

Sculpted Portraits

While Agrippina's appearance in coinage was revolutionary in itself, an evaluation of her influence and public perception would not be complete without a survey of her portrait statuary, which is able to capture more specific detail. The sheer volume of Agrippina's

⁸² RIC² 6-7.

surviving portraits attests to the visibility she obtained during her lifetime. Even after her *de facto damnatio*, forty-five portrait busts have been identified as Agrippina in addition to two reliefs from Aphrodisias and eleven depictions on cameos.⁸³ Unfortunately, no statue base bearing Agrippina's name has been securely linked to an extant statue, making it impossible to create a secure corpus of Agrippina's portraits. In addition, attributions vary from scholar to scholar, but something of a consensus had emerged on the key types.⁸⁴ Agrippina's portraits can be split into five types (or groups). In addition to being set apart by their coiffure, the typologies are further derived by their physiognomic resemblance to Caligula, Claudius, or Nero. They are listed here chronologically.

The Adolphseck 22 type (also called the Providence-Schloss Fasanerie type) dates to the time of Caligula, from 31-41 CE.⁸⁵ The two samples that best typify the group are from the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence and Schloss Fasanerie bei Fulda in Eichenzell, Germany (Figures 15-17).⁸⁶ The type is identified by hair that is parted at the center and waved on the head in concentric arcs, with the addition of stylized forehead curls that are piled in front of the ear. The treatment of the hair shows an emphasis on pattern and texture rather than a natural depiction. The length of the hair is

⁸³ Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire*, 215-29.

⁸⁴ Susan Wood, Anthony Barrett, and Katrina Dickson discuss Agrippina's portrait types in detail, and this paper aims to reconcile their classifications without providing a full catalogue of Agrippina's depictions. See *ibid*; Wood, *Imperial Women : a Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, 203-315; Katrina Dickson, "Agrippina Minor: *Optima Mater* or *Semper Atrox*" (Dissertation, Emory University, 2002). For initial identification and classifications of the portraits and their respective types, see Klaus Fittschen, Paul Zanker, and Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, "Katalog der römischen Porträts in den Capitolinischen Museen und den anderen kommunalen Sammlungen der Stadt Rom," *Beiträge zur Erschliessung hellenistischer und kaiserzeitlicher Skulptur und Architektur* (1983); Karin Polaschek, "Studien zu einem Frauenkopf im Landesmuseum Trier und zur weiblichen Haartacht der iulisch-claudischen Zeit," *TrZs* 35(1972); Walter Trillmich, "Julia Agrippina als Schwester des Caligula und Mutter des Nero," *Hefte des Archäologischen Seminars der Universität Bern* 9(1983); ———, "Ein Bildnis der Agrippina Minor von Milreu/Portugal," *MDAI* 15(1974).

⁸⁵ ———, "Julia Agrippina als Schwester des Caligula und Mutter des Nero."; Polaschek, "Studien zu einem Frauenkopf im Landesmuseum Trier und zur weiblichen Haartacht der iulisch-claudischen Zeit."

⁸⁶ Providence, Rhode Island School of Design, Museum, acc. No. 56.097; Schloss Fasanerie, Fulda, Adolphseck 22.

looped outwards behind her ears and woven into a braid at the back of her neck. Agrippina is depicted with a small chin, a triangular jawline (a typically Julian feature), and delicate lips that feature her signature overbite. A resemblance to Caligula is noticeable, especially when compared to a bust of Caligula from the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts and the head of Caligula from the Getty in Malibu (Figures 18-19).⁸⁷ Like Agrippina, Caligula is also shown with small, similarly shaped lips and a triangular jawline. This resemblance, and the hairstyle that seems atypical to other depictions of Agrippina the Younger, have led some to assign these portraits to Drusilla (sister of Caligula and Agrippina), as evidenced by a statue that is still labeled “Agrippina” in the Museo Gregoriano Profano in the Vatican but that has since been correctly identified as Drusilla. Some still prefer to assign the type to Messalina.⁸⁸ A large number of replicas (approximately eight) of the Adolphseck 22 type survive, displaying a variety of styles and variations, which suggest production over a period of many years. Only Agrippina the Younger would have warranted the re-copying of a portrait type years after its creation, during a surge of popularity that coincided with her marriage to Claudius.⁸⁹ The production of this portrait type was probably discontinued after 39 CE, when Agrippina and her sister Julia Livilla were banished by Caligula to the island of Pontina after being accused of treason and conspiracy with Aemilius Lepidus.⁹⁰ In fact, neither woman was included in any of the dynastic group monuments of this period.⁹¹ It was Claudius, when made emperor, who recalled the two sisters back to Rome.

⁸⁷ Worcester, Worcester Art Museum, inv.1914.23; Malibu, The Getty Villa, inv. 72.AA.155.

⁸⁸ Dietrich Boschung, "Die Bildnistypen der iulisch-claudischen Kaiserfamilie: ein kritischer Forschungsbericht," *JRA* 6(1993): 71-73; Tomasz Mikocki, *Sub specie deae : les impératrices et princesses romaines assimilées à des déesses : étude iconologique* (Roma: G. Bretschneider, 1995), 45, 185, no. 240, pl. 12.

⁸⁹ Trillmich, "Julia Agrippina als Schwester des Caligula und Mutter des Nero," 295.

⁹⁰ Suet. *Caligula*. 24.3; Dio 59.22.6-9.

⁹¹ Charles Brian Rose, *Dynastic Commemoration and Imperial Portraiture in the Julio-Claudian Period* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 37.



Figure 15. Agrippina the Younger, Adolphseck 22 type, 37-38 CE, white marble set on a bust of colored marble to which it does not belong, Providence, Museum of Rhode Island School of Design, <<http://www.risdmuseum.org/explore/objects/11.shtml>>



Figure 16. Alternate view of Figure 15,
<<http://www.risdmuseum.org/explore/objects/11.shtml>>

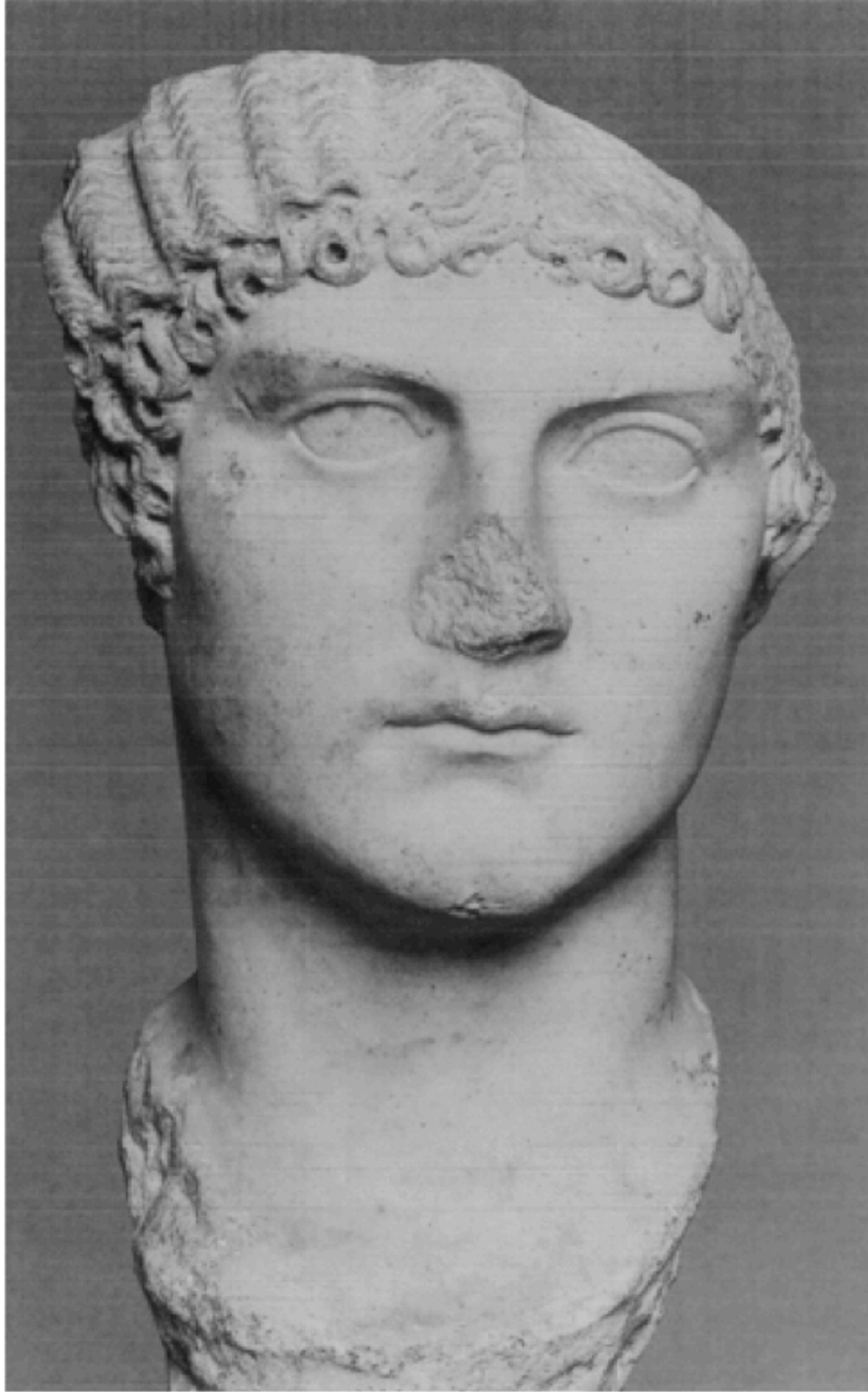


Figure 17. Agrippina the Younger, Adolphseck 22 type, 37-38 CE, marble, Eichenzell, Schloss Fasanerie bei Fulda, (Susan Wood, *Imperial Women : A Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, Boston: Brill, 1999, fig. 109.)



**Figure 18. Caligula, 37-41 CE, marble, Worcester, Worcester Art Museum,
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/roger_ulrich/3289719185/>**



**Figure 19. Caligula, 37-41 CE, marble, Malibu, The Getty Villa,
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/roger_ulrich/3289719185/>**

The Parma/Naples type dates stylistically to the time of Caligula, and a similarity to the emperor has been noted here as well.⁹² It is because of this similarity that some believe this type is actually Claudian in date, and served as a solution for re-carving portraits of Claudius's former wife, Messalina.⁹³ They were likely created at the beginning of Claudius

⁹² Polaschek, "Studien zu einem Frauenkopf im Landesmuseum Trier und zur weiblichen Haartacht der iulisch-claudischen Zeit," 141-210; Cesare Saletti, *Il ciclo statuario della Basilica di Velleia* (Milano: Ceschina, 1968), 120, n.52, pl. 3-4.

and Agrippina's marriage and modeled from her older, Caligulan-era portraits (the Adolphseck 22 type), and thus resemble Caligula. Only two replicas survive: one from the Museo Nazionale in Naples, and the other from the Museo Nazionale di Antichità in Parma (Figures 20-21).⁹⁴ In these portraits, Agrippina's hair consists of scallop-shaped waves that are flattened to the scalp.



Figure 20. Agrippina the Younger, Parma/Naples type, 49 CE, marble, Naples, Museo Nazionale inv. 6242, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/roger_ulrich/6316177102/>

⁹³ Susan Wood, *Imperial Women: A Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, 296.

⁹⁴ Naples, Museo Nazionale, inv. 6242; Parma, Museo Nazionale di Antichità, inv. 830.



Figure 21. Agrippina the Younger, Parma/Naples type, 49 CE, marble, Parma, Museo Nazionale di Antichità, inv. 830, (Susan Wood, *Imperial Women : A Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, Boston: Brill, 1999, fig.119.)

One of Agrippina's most prominent portrait types, the Milan/Florence type, is Claudian in date (49 CE – 54 CE), and is best typified by portraits from the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence and the Civico Museo Archaeologico in Milan (Figures 22-23).⁹⁵ The group is distinguished mainly by the smooth band of waves that originate at the part of her hair, followed by three or four parallel bands of small curls that lie against the forehead. This hairstyle gives her the resemblance to her mother, Agrippina the Elder, a feature that is probably intentional (this will be discussed further in Chapter 3). This new hairstyle was far more elaborate, and more difficult to create (with the help of a few maids), than Agrippina's previous style, which required only a curling iron to curl the hair and create spiral curls around the face. Because of the added rows of curls, Agrippina either wore short bangs that were curled into rows, or an artificial headpiece that would have been worn across the crown. Again, a large mass of curls partially covers the ears, as they had in her Caligulan-era portrait. In this type, Agrippina wears locks on her shoulders, usually two on each side, either as loosely waved strands, or as tightly curled corkscrew curls that remain planted onto the neck.

The Copenhagen/Ancona type is by far the most influential and widespread of the five types, and was probably contemporaneous with the Milan/Florence type.⁹⁶ Good

⁹⁵ Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, inv. 1914.115; Milan, Civico Museo Archaeologico, inv. A1132. Frederik Poulsen, *Porträtstudien in norditalienischen Provinzmuseen*, Kongelige Danske videnskabernes selskab; Historisk-filosofiske meddelelser (København: A.F. Høst, 1928), pl. 48; Susan Wood, "Memoriae Agrippinae: Agrippina the Elder in Julio-Claudian Art and Propaganda," *American Journal of Archaeology* 92, no. 3 (1988): fig. 8-9; Fittschen, Zanker, and Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, "Katalog der römischen Porträts in den Capitolinischen Museen und den anderen kommunalen Sammlungen der Stadt Rom," pls. 3a-b; Trillmich, "Ein Bildnis der Agrippina Minor von Milreu/Portugal," pl. 35-7, 46.

⁹⁶ Trillmich, "Ein Bildnis der Agrippina Minor von Milreu/Portugal," 189, n.25, pl. 42, 43a, 39; Wood, "Memoriae Agrippinae: Agrippina the Elder in Julio-Claudian Art and Propaganda," fig. 1, 12; Fittschen, Zanker, and Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, "Katalog der römischen Porträts in den Capitolinischen Museen und den anderen kommunalen Sammlungen der Stadt Rom," pls. 3c-d, 4a-d, 5a-d.



Figure 22. Agrippina the Younger, Milan/Florence type, 49-54 CE, marble, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, inv. 1914.115, (Artstor).



Figure 23. Agrippina the Younger, Milan/Florence type, 49-54 CE, marble, Milan, Civico Museo Archaeologico, inv. A1132, <[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:9736_-_Museo_archeologico_di_Milano_-_Agrippina_Minore_\(49-50_d.C.\)_-_Foto_Giovanni_Dall%27Orto,_13-mar-2012.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:9736_-_Museo_archeologico_di_Milano_-_Agrippina_Minore_(49-50_d.C.)_-_Foto_Giovanni_Dall%27Orto,_13-mar-2012.jpg)>

examples of the type are the portraits from the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, the Ashmolean Museum of Oxford, and the Museo Chiaramonti of the Vatican (Figures 24-26).⁹⁷ The hairstyle is similar to the Milan/Florence type, but with no small curls against the forehead (although the many rows of curls at the hairline do remain), and fewer curls cover the ears (which are now fully visible). Typically, the curls are drilled. The type sometimes includes a diadem, making it possible that this type was based on the earlier Milan/Florence type, but was re-commissioned with the added diadem to celebrate the newly named *Augusta*. Just as the Milan/Florence type shows, the lips are tightly set, and the upper lip protrudes slightly over the lower, again exhibiting Agrippina's overbite. The cheekbones jut out, the chin is broad, the eyes are large, and the nose is prominent with a rounded tip. Scholars have noted a somewhat masculine cast to the face of both types, and they often suggest assimilation to Claudius (Figure 27).⁹⁸ It is more plausible that this portrait type aims to reference Agrippina's father, Germanicus, above her husband. This topic will be addressed further in Chapter 3.

The fifth and final type, called the Stuttgart type, is Neronian in date (54-59 CE).⁹⁹ The best examples are from the Württembergisches Landesmuseum in Stuttgart and the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen (the head of the previously discussed basanite portrait in the Centrale Montemartini) (Figures 28-30).¹⁰⁰ This group features softer, fleshier features that aim to show a slight increase in age. Many of this type show a crescent diadem,

⁹⁷ Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, inv. 636; Oxford, Ashmolean Museum (no number); Rome, Vatican, Museo Chiaramonti inv. 2084 (refashioned into a depiction of *Hygieia*).

⁹⁸ Varner, "Portraits, Plots, and Politics: 'Damnatio Memoriae' and the Images of Imperial Women," 191; Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire*, 216.

⁹⁹ Fittschen, Zanker, and Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, "Katalog der römischen Porträts in den Capitolinischen Museen und den anderen kommunalen Sammlungen der Stadt Rom," pls. 3a-b.

¹⁰⁰ Stuttgart, Württembergisches Landesmuseum, arch, 68/2; Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, cat. 634.

and the hair is typically displayed in rows of curls that start immediately at the center parting. The fleshier facial features stress her relation to Nero, as seen in the similar jawline (now more square) that the type shares with portraits such as Nero from the Museo Capitolino, or the Museo Nazionale in Cagliari (Figures 31-32).¹⁰¹ It is likely that Agrippina did not sit for a new portrait at this point. Wood suggests that this type was invented by modifying the Milan/Florence and Copenhagen/Ancona groups.¹⁰² This would have been done to visually reinforce Nero's license to rule by linking him back to his mother, and ultimately, Augustus.



Figure 24. Agrippina the Younger, Copenhagen/Ancona type, 49-54 CE, marble, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, cat. 636, <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/frenchieb/7637867332/in/pool-599840@N20%7Cfrenchieb>>

¹⁰¹ Rome, Museo Capitolino, MC427 (formerly Terme inv. 616); Cagliari, Museo Nazionale, (no number).

¹⁰² Wood, *Imperial Women : a Study in Public Images*, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68, 299.



Figure 25. Agrippina the Younger, Copenhagen/Ancona type, 49-54 CE, marble, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, <<http://www.ashmolean-grandtour.org/westmorland-08-Agrippina.asp>>



Figure 26. Agrippina the Younger, Copenhagen/Ancona type, 49-54 CE, marble, Vatican, Museo Chiaramonti, inv. 2084, photo by author.



Figure 27. Claudius, 42-54 CE, marble, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Claudius_Ny_Carlsberg02.jpg>



Figure 28. Agrippina the Younger, Stuttgart type, 54-59 CE, marble, Stuttgart, Württembergisches Landesmuseum, arch. 68/2, <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Agrippina_minor_Stuttgart.jpg>



Figure 29. Agrippina the Younger, Stuttgart type, 54-59 CE, marble, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, cat. 634, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/roger_ulrich/5188663336/>



Figure 30. Profile of Figure 29,
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/roger_ulrich/5188663502/in/photostream/>



Figure 31. Nero, 54-59 CE, marble, Rome, Museo Capitolino, inv. MC427 (formerly Terme inv. 616), <<http://www.rome101.com/portraiture/Nero/>>



Figure 32. Nero, 54-59 CE, marble, Cagliari, Museo Nazionale,
<<http://www.flickr.com/photos/carolemage/6517439465/in/set-72157628433702221/>>

Other Public Images

The only extant public relief images of Agrippina are from the Sebasteion, or imperial sanctuary, of Aphrodisias. The ancient city was dedicated to Aphrodite and the imperial family (Venus being the mother of Aeneas, the founder of the Julian line). The sanctuary complex comprises a gateway at the west, which opens up onto two porticoes

along the north and south leading to a temple at the east end. The porticoes were at one time three stories high, with 180 relief panels flanked by columns in the two upper stories. The panels, 80 of which survive, were varied in their subject matter from mythology, allegory, and the imperial family.¹⁰³ The two reliefs featuring Agrippina are securely linked to this source. Both panels depict Agrippina according to her Copenhagen/Ancona type.¹⁰⁴

One panel relief from the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias depicts a young man in military dress and a slightly older and larger woman crowning a man with an oak wreath (Figures 33-34). Because the panel had been lying face down and being used as a stepping stone, the figures are well preserved and easily recognizable as the Emperor Nero and his mother Agrippina.¹⁰⁵ The relief clearly represents Agrippina promoting her son as emperor, regardless of the constitutional validity of this in Rome. She crowns her son with the *corona civica*, or oak wreath, substantially altering her position in relation to the emperor. Nero would have originally held a spear in his right hand and an orb in his left. Agrippina wears a diadem and holds a cornucopia in her arms. These attributes associate her with *Fortuna Augusta*, or the “kingmaker.” The fact that the female figure is clearly recognizable as Agrippina is astounding, as the bestower of the crown was generally a personification of virtues, institutions, or geographical regions. This is the first instance in which one member of the imperial family crowns another and it successfully demonstrates the power that Agrippina was perceived to have.¹⁰⁶ The message displayed in the relief parallels an

¹⁰³ Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire*, 215-16.

¹⁰⁴ R.R.R. Smith, "The Imperial Reliefs from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias," *JRS* 77(1987): no. 3, pl. 8 and no. 11, pl. 24.

¹⁰⁵ Fischler, "The Public Position of the Women of the Imperial Household in the Julio-Claudian Period," 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

anecdote recorded by Cassius Dio, who writes that Agrippina, in a fit of rage, told Nero “It was I who made you emperor.”¹⁰⁷



Figure 33. Panel from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias with figures of Nero and Agrippina the Younger (Copenhagen/Ancona type), 49-54 CE, marble relief, Aphrodisias Museum, <<http://bleon1.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/caesar-nero-and-agrippina.jpg>>

¹⁰⁷ Dio. 61.7.3: *ἐγώ σε αὐτοκράτορα ἀπέδειξα*. Loeb Classical Translation.



Figure 34. Detail of Figure 33,
<<http://www.flickr.com/photos/amthomson/3970388718/>>

The relief makes very clear the power that Agrippina possessed when compared to the depiction of Nero, who is placed in the submissive position of being the recipient of his rank from his mother (although he is depicted as larger). The relief displays what the Aphrodisians perceived as the exalted and powerful position of a Roman woman. In a society where it was forbidden for women to hold positions of power, the relief is a striking attempt to accommodate the uncomfortable image of a woman with imperial authority.¹⁰⁸

Another panel of the Sebasteion shows Agrippina grasping Claudius's hand while another (headless) figure crowns him. Agrippina holds a sheaf of wheat, a symbol of her fertility (Figures 35-36). In this scene, Claudius and Agrippina are joined in a *dextrarum iunctio* (a marriage union marked by the clasping of right hands), the first imperial couple to be so represented.¹⁰⁹ This act, using the right hand that was sacred to the god *Fides*, was seen not only as a gesture of fidelity and loyalty, but also as the solidifying event of an agreement or contract. Further, Claudius is displayed in heroic nudity and is therefore represented as a god, or as god-like. In this case, the *dextrarum iunctio* serves as a reminder of the sacred marriage between Agrippina and the divine Claudius. It is important, too, that Agrippina and Claudius are displayed on the same scale, that is to say, that Claudius is not shown in a position of hierarchy, even though Agrippina is relegated to the background. This is in comparison to Livia's depiction on the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, in which she is depicted on a slightly smaller scale than Augustus, Agrippa, and her son Tiberius, even though all are in the foreground (Figure 37). In this regard, Agrippina's depiction on the relief of the Sebasteion portrays her as Claudius's partner, depicting the two as near-equals.

¹⁰⁸ Fischler, "The Public Position of the Women of the Imperial Household in the Julio-Claudian Period," 1.

¹⁰⁹ Rose, *Dynastic Commemoration and Imperial Portraiture in the Julio-Claudian Period*, 44.



Figure 35. Panel from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias with figures of Agrippina the Younger (Copenhagen/Ancona type), Claudius, and a togate personification, 49-54 CE, marble relief, Aphrodisias Museum, <<http://www.flickrriver.com/photos/damiavos/5085807506/>>



Figure 36. Detail of Figure 35,
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/peterpeers/3448545408/in/photostream/>

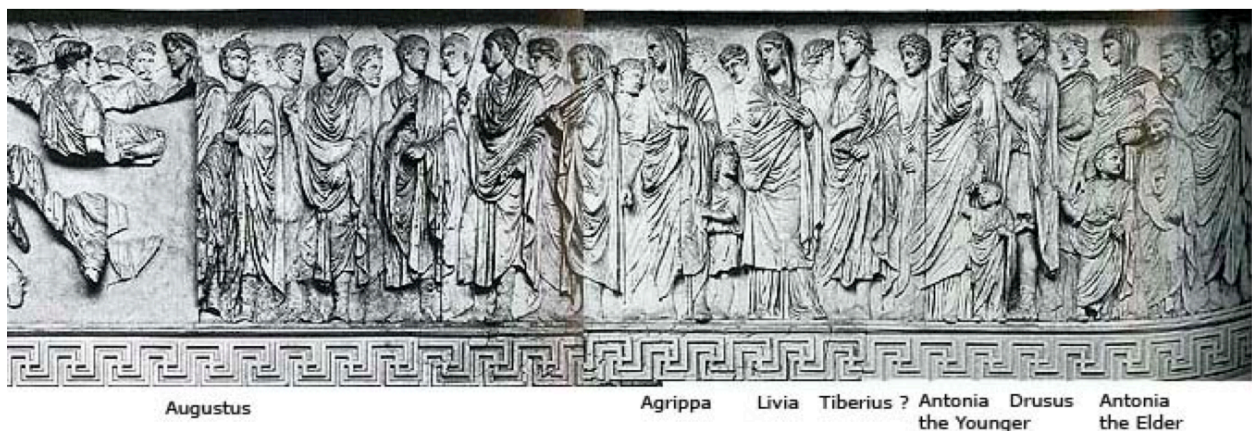


Figure 37. Imperial procession from the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, 13 BCE, marble, *Ara Pacis Museum*, Rome,
http://employees.oneonta.edu/farberas/arth/arth200/politics/roman_imp_sculpt.html

Private Images

While coins, life-sized portrait statues, and monumental reliefs were for public display, smaller objects like cameos and carved gems would have presumably been made for private ownership. Owners of these artifacts would have not only included members of the royal families (who could have quite possibly put them on public display), but also individuals who wished to privately express their individual allegiances.¹¹⁰ Tacitus describes the use of such privately owned portraiture during a time when Tiberius first denounced Agrippina the Elder and her oldest son in a letter to the senate. While the proceedings were being held, supporters of the elder Agrippina gathered outside of the Curia carrying effigies of the mother and son.¹¹¹ While Tacitus does not explain what the effigies were, it is possible that they consisted of portable objects such as small painted panels, sculpted bronzes, gems, cameos, and even statuettes. In this way, “private” images had “public” exposure and uses.

In order to further explore the relationship between Agrippina and Claudius, there is perhaps no better item to examine than the *Gemma Claudia* (Figure 38).¹¹² The gem is thought to have been a wedding present to the emperor and his niece, giving it an approximate date of 49 CE.¹¹³ The gem would have been a privately circulated image, and would probably never have been displayed to the public. The large engraved onyx cameo features the jugate portraits of Agrippina the Younger (in the background) and the emperor Claudius (in the foreground) on the left, facing the jugate portraits of Agrippina’s

¹¹⁰ Wood, "Memoriae Agrippinae: Agrippina the Elder in Julio-Claudian Art and Propaganda," 418.

¹¹¹ Tac. *Ann.* 5.4.

¹¹² Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum 19 (inv. no. IX a63).

¹¹³ S. Fuchs, "Deutung, Sinn und Zeitstellung des Wiener Cameo mit den Fruchthornbüsten," *MDAI (R)* 51(1936): 232-37.

parents Agrippina the Elder and Germanicus on the right, with both sets of portrait busts emerging from a double *cornu copiae*. The color variation of the gem requires comment. The background is dark, while the two women are carved in a layer of white, and the men are carved in a layer of sepia. This emphasizes the depth of the placement of the four figures. The two *cornua copiae*, also in sepia, rest on what appears to be a mound of armor, and together the two objects are an expression of the peace and prosperity achieved by both brothers through their military exploits. Both men wear the *corona civica*, a distinctive symbol of political authority. Between the two sets of busts is an eagle, representing the concept of Roman rule. The women in the background exemplify the promise of dynastic continuity and show the link between the Julian and Claudian families that Agrippina the Younger herself embodied.



Figure 38. *Gemma Claudia*, 49 AD, sardonyx cameo, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. IX.A.63, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kunsthistorisches_Museum_Vienna_June_2006_033.png>

The depiction of mothers and daughters is notably rare in Roman art, as the mother was usually shown with her son to emphasize legitimacy through family ties. This analysis adds yet another facet to the notoriety of this gem.¹¹⁴ The women themselves, while pushed into the background, wear remarkable attributes. Agrippina the Elder is wearing a helmet encircled by the *corona triumphalis*— a common attribute of *Dea Roma*. Facing her, Agrippina the Younger wears the attributes of a place in the form of the turreted crown, a veil, and a garland of wheat. These attributes are thought to show the mother and daughter as personifications of both the political entity and the physical city of Rome, respectively. As a whole, the *Gemma Claudia* was a statement of the imperial security and continuity, as well as the legitimacy that Claudius gained through his marriage with Agrippina, who was his link to the Augustan line. The innovative quality of the *Gemma Claudia* lies in the fact that attributes and familial associations are used to create parallels between the dead and the living in order to further legitimize the position of the latter.¹¹⁵ Eric Varner has mentioned the resemblance between the shockingly similar profiles of Claudius and Agrippina on the *Gemma Claudia*.¹¹⁶ The similarity between the profiles of Agrippina the Elder and her husband Germanicus should be noted as well, and will be revisited in Chapter 3.

Agrippina's depictions on others gems seem to be less certain. Two gems from the British Museum in London have been identified as Agrippina the Younger, but have also

¹¹⁴ Kleiner, *I, Claudia II: Women in Roman Art and Society*, 8-9.

¹¹⁵ Wood, "Memoriae Agrippinae: Agrippina the Elder in Julio-Claudian Art and Propaganda," 423.

¹¹⁶ Eric R. Varner, "Transcending Gender: Assimilation, Identity, and Roman Imperial Portraits," in *Role Models in the Roman World: Identity and Assimilation*, ed. Sinclair Bell and Inge Lyse Hansen, *The Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 192.

been given identifications as Agrippina the Elder, Drusilla, or Livilla (Figures 39-40).¹¹⁷ The woman depicted in each of these carvings wears a *corona triumphalis*, or laurel crown, an attribute closely associated with the god Apollo that was awarded to those celebrating a martial victory. This was clearly a male attribute, and would have been unarming for a Roman viewer to see on the head of a female. At the same time, the masculine attribute would have legitimized the authority of the woman who wore it, just as a false beard would have accentuated the pharaonic power of a female Egyptian pharaoh, such as Hatshepsut (Figure 41). Livia had previously worn the crown in cameos from Florence and St. Petersburg, and Livia's close association with the triumph and the laurel branches is linked to the laurel grove at her villa in Prima porta, from which came the laurel that the male members of her family had worn in their own triumphal processions through Rome (Figure 42).¹¹⁸ If the gems do in fact depict Agrippina, they would have proclaimed her position as the legitimate heir and only surviving child of the triumphal general Germanicus.

Agrippina's imagery as a whole reflects her ambitions of authority. Her many depictions, combined with their many inherent associations, served as a tool of self-promotion for a woman with political aspirations. The material evidence proves that Agrippina's image was often manipulated and adjusted in order to show her various criteria. Because of this, the idea that Agrippina was a willing participant in her own self-serving propaganda is convincing.

¹¹⁷ London, British Royal Museum, Gems 3604 and 3593. See *ibid.*, 191; Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire*: 218-19.

¹¹⁸ Varner, "Transcending Gender: Assimilation, Identity, and Roman Imperial Portraits," 191. Those in St. Petersburg are from Hermitage, inv. Ž154, Ž267, and Ž268. The existence of Livia's laurel grove comes to us from Suet. *Galb.* 1.



Figure 39. Agrippina the Younger (?), sardonyx cameo, London, British Museum, Gems 3604,
<http://www.britishmuseum.org/system_pages/beta_collection_introduction/beta_collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=466257&partId=1&searchText=gem%203604>



Figure 40. Agrippina the Younger (?), sardonyx cameo, London, British Museum, Gems 3593, http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_image.aspx?image=k37319.jpg&retpage=17996



Figure 41. Hatshepsut, New York, The Metropolitan Museum,
<<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/31.3.166>>



Figure 42. Livia wearing the *corona triumphalis*, cameo, Florence, Museo Archaeologico, inv. 14528 (Antonio Giuliano, and Maria Elisa Micheli. *I cammei della Collezione medicea nel Museo archeologico di Firenze*. Roma: De Luca, 1989, p. 229, n. 153.)

CHAPTER 3: AGRIPPINA AND THE TRANSCENDENCE OF GENDER

Agrippina's resemblance to the men in her life could, of course, be attributed to the fact that she was closely related to all of them. It's only logical that they would share physiognomic characteristics. And everyone's appearance changes as they age, so it is again only logical for Agrippina's five portrait types to vary, if indeed they are associated with different dates. But this is looking at it too simplistically. Students of Roman art have, for a long time, understood that visual likeness is only one of many elements that a portrait encompasses. Things like spiritual likeness, the representation of ideals, or fictive assimilations may account for just as much as visual resemblance. Qualities such as these give portraits a deeper and more polysemic significance. There is no doubt that Roman portraits regularly sacrificed their verisimilitude for a more idealized depiction of character or status-enhancing associations.¹¹⁹ Further, portrait identities of gender were not as diachronically defined as societal roles, and portrait identities were not conceived around binary opposition of gender.¹²⁰

Many scholars note that this "masculine" resemblance is the result of unconscious carving on the part of the portrait copyists or die-cutters.¹²¹ However, it is more likely a calculated maneuver developed by both the patron and the official portrait artists. These imperial portrait models were highly elaborate, and would have displayed advanced levels of skill. Copyists were not always able to reproduce all of the subtle nuances and details. Therefore, the copied pieces vary in degrees according to the copyist's ability and ingenuity,

¹¹⁹ Natalie Boymel Kampen, "Gender Theory in Roman Art", in *I, Claudia: Women in Ancient Rome*. Eds. Diana Kleiner and Susan B. Matheson (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1996), 14-25.

¹²⁰ Varner, "Transcending Gender: Assimilation, Identity, and Roman Imperial Portraits," 57, n. 30.

¹²¹ R. R. R. Smith, G. Lahusen, K. Fittschen, P. Zanker, and R. H. W. Stichel, "Roman Portraits: Honours, Empresses, and Late Emperors," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 75(1985): 215; Wood, *Imperial Women : a Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D.* 68, 15.

while the finished product still remains recognizable.¹²² When analyzing these portraits, it is imperative to remember that, while the basic facial structure of the model is present in all portrait types, minor details were often altered as new types were introduced.¹²³ Variances are unavoidable when multiple artists and workshops copy numerous pieces. Still, it is unlikely that the masculine attributes that appear in Agrippina's portraiture are a result of the copying process, as each individual typology, and not each individual portrait, resembles a specific male. This assimilation cannot be accidental, as it appears in the highest quality portraits of each type, indicating that the transference of traits began in the modeling stage, and not in the copying stage.¹²⁴

The Precedent for Gender Transcendence

So where does this masculine physiognomic assimilation come from? Was there precedence for this type of gender transcendence before Agrippina's portraits were created? To answer this question, we should begin by analyzing the Hellenistic influences on the portraiture of the imperial women. This influence should not be underestimated, as there were no women that we know of who were presented in public contexts before the time of the triumvirate (besides Cornelia), while depictions of Hellenistic queens in the Eastern provinces were widespread.¹²⁵ This phenomenon of gender transcendence has precedence in Hellenistic and Ptolemaic examples, especially when it comes to depictions of Cleopatra I, II, and III that display distinctively masculine features (Figures 43-44).¹²⁶

¹²² R. R. R. Smith, G. Lahusen, K. Fittschen, P. Zanker, and R. H. W. Stichel, "Roman Portraits: Honours, Empresses, and Late Emperors," *Journal of Roman Studies* 75 (1985), 213.

¹²³ Constantina Katarsi, "Public images of Roman imperial women during the Julio-Claudian period: A review article," *Women Studies' Review*, 8 (2001), 1-12.

¹²⁴ Smith, "Roman Portraits: Honours, Empresses, and Late Emperors," 214.

¹²⁵ Wood, *Imperial Women : a Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, 28-29.

¹²⁶ Ginsburg, *Representing Agrippina : Constructions of Female Power in the Early Roman Empire*, 61.

The heavy, masculine features of an agate cameo in Florence were identified in the Renaissance as Ptolemy Apion, the last king of Cyrene, but instead should be associated with Cleopatra II or III, proving that our modern gender expectations have impacted our ability to accurately identify such pieces.¹²⁷



Figure 43. Coin of Cleopatra I (obverse), 201-180 BCE,
<<http://www.edgarlowen.com/greek-coins-egypt.shtml>>



Figure 44. Coin of Cleopatra II (obverse), 220-152 BCE,
<<http://www.edgarlowen.com/greek-coins-egypt.shtml>>

¹²⁷ Varner, "Transcending Gender: Assimilation, Identity, and Roman Imperial Portraits," 185.

Eric Varner has discussed gender blending between Roman emperors and goddesses, proving that assimilation could be fluid and transgendered.¹²⁸ Male rulers and goddesses were conjoined beginning with Augustus in a *denarius* of 19 BCE, which depicts the goddess Diana with Augustus's masculine physiognomy (Figure 45).¹²⁹ This is not an oddity, as the Paris gems, extremely fine pieces of art, depict Domitian in the guise of Minerva (Figure 46). An arguably extreme case of transcendence occurs in a head from Rome now in Budapest, which displays the combination of masculine facial features and female coiffure, problematizing the identification of the portrait, which has been variously identified as Livia, a private Julio-Claudian woman, or Domitian refashioned into an ideal likeness (Figure 47).¹³⁰ If Roman patrons could assimilate themselves with the divine through the use of attributes, costumes, and body types, then it is entirely possible that portraits could also incorporate hybridizing elements of the sexes. Varner notes that, "ultimately, the mixture of human and divine, male and female, in assimilative imperial portraits intentionally blurs traditional taxonomic categories and unequivocally asserts the transcendence of imperial authority over prescribed gender roles."¹³¹ In essence, Varner suggests that Agrippina's masculine assimilation is no different than theomorphic assimilation with gods and goddesses.

The method of visual allusion and assimilation, in which an image can simultaneously resemble more than one person, idea, or thing, was a tool that portrait artists commonly employed to characterize their subjects. During the Empire, portraits of the imperial women served a number of different functions. Their portraits were generally

¹²⁸ Ibid., 185-86.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 185-86, fig. 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 186, fig. 2; 87-88 fig. 3.

¹³¹ Ibid., 185.



Figure 45. *Denarius* of Augustus (obverse) and Diana Augusta (reverse), Rome, 13 BCE, (Eric R. Varner, "Portraits, Plots, and Politics: 'Damnatio Memoriae' and the Images of Imperial Women." *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 46 (2001): P. 186, fig. 1.



Figure 46. Domitian/Minerva, ca. 81-96, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Médailles 26, (Eric R. Varner, "Portraits, Plots, and Politics: 'Damnatio Memoriae' and the Images of Imperial Women." *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 46 (2001): P. 186, fig. 2.



Figure 47. Domitian/Minerva, ca. 81-96 CE, Budapest, Museum, inv. 347016, (Eric R. Varner, "Portraits, Plots, and Politics: 'Damnatio Memoriae' and the Images of Imperial Women." *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 46 (2001): P. 188, fig. 3.

either “prospective” or “retrospective” in that they not only represented the continuation of a dynasty, but that they also provided a link back to other distinguished members of the Julio-Claudian family.¹³² Agrippina’s portraits, because of her connection to Augustus and the fact that she provided an heir in Nero, served as both.

Agrippina’s Prospective Imagery

In the case of relatives, family traits and resemblances could be accentuated to call attention to bloodlines.¹³³ As a result, Agrippina’s gender transcendence would not only be legitimizing the reigns of both her husband and her son, but would also be gaining a political advantage by recalling the memory of her parents, who were both held in high esteem during their lives. But this evocation of masculine attributes walks a fine line between introducing formal elements of a male’s physiognomic type into the female portraits in a way that is clearly recognizable and suggestive, but that is still not masculinizing.¹³⁴

When comparing contemporary images of Agrippina and Nero (for example, Figures 28 and 32 above), Agrippina’s portrait appears “Neronian” not in date, but in physiognomic features, and translates to the viewer as something like “Agrippina, mother of Nero,” as opposed to “Agrippina, dynastic princess.” It is also likely that these portrait types were made together, to reference one another. Many imperial portraits were viewed in the context of dynastic groups, and so it is possible that specific features were emphasized to highlight the resemblance between certain individuals in the same group. In the case of Agrippina’s Stuttgart type (Figures 28-30 above), for example, it seems that her previous

¹³² Ginsburg, *Representing Agrippina : Constructions of Female Power in the Early Roman Empire*, 61.

¹³³ Wood, *Imperial Women : a Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, 14.

¹³⁴ Smith, “Roman Portraits: Honours, Empresses, and Late Emperors,” 214.

portrait types may have simply been adapted and altered to include assimilation to Nero, in order to emphasize Nero's Julian heritage, thereby linking him to Augustus and securing his claim to imperial power.¹³⁵

The Emphasis of Legal Ties

Patrons and their portraitists could employ this technique of gender transcendence to emphasize legal relation as well as familial relation by creating a false resemblance between people who were not related by subtly manipulating their features. This practice seems to have been common in Hellenistic art and later in the art of the Empire. It is most notable in the coins of Marc Antony that feature his Roman wife Octavia, and his later wife Cleopatra VII (Figures 48-49). Varner argues that the assimilation of Antony's features in Cleopatra's depictions have been taken "at face value" and scholars have had difficulty reconciling the noted literary accounts of the queen's beauty with her more masculine depictions.¹³⁶ It is then possible that the same has happened with the interpretation of Agrippina's portraits. This would explain Barrett's statement that claims of Agrippina's physical beauty were unwarranted.

With this assimilation, Cleopatra is not subjugating herself to Antony, but rather employing his masculine identity to fashion herself as a worthy opponent to Octavian and the future Roman Empire in the west. Varner notes that the more masculine, Antonian

¹³⁵ Wood, *Imperial Women : a Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, 299. Wood mentions that the princess probably did not sit for a new portrait in 54 C.E. for the creation of the Stuttgart portrait type, and that the type was likely a modification of the existing Ancona and Milan types, from which it only deviates slightly.

¹³⁶ Eric Varner, "Transcending Gender: Assimilation, Identity and Roman Imperial Portraits," in *Role Models: Identity and Assimilation in the Roman World*, eds. S. Bell and I Hansen (Supplement to the Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome 7, Ann Arbor 2008), 190.



Figure 48. *Aureus* of Antony (obverse) and Octavia (reverse),
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/antiquitiesproject/4807353334/>



Figure 49. *Denarius* of Antony (obverse) and Cleopatra (reverse),
<http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/antony.html>

appearance of Cleopatra may have been designed to appeal to Antony's Roman soldiers, because soldiers were often targeted in the design of numismatic imagery.¹³⁷ It is likely that this was also an intention of Agrippina, who had connections with the Praetorian Guard, which consisted of soldiers chosen from the various ranks of the Roman army and who were notorious for their political role during the Early Empire. In fact, conspirators from the Guard were responsible for the assassination of Caligula in 41 CE. Following the assassination, a guardsman found Claudius hiding trembling behind a set of curtains and promptly proclaimed him the new emperor.¹³⁸

While subjective, the frequent evocation of the emperor's image in the portraits of his wife has been acknowledged by many scholars.¹³⁹ An often-cited example is the Fayum type of Livia's portraits, which gives her a new face shape that seems to derive from the typically Julian triangular face, assimilating her to her husband Augustus (Figures 50-51). This is in contrast to her previous Marbury Hall type, which depicts a woman with a long, oval face (Figure 52).¹⁴⁰ At the same time, this assimilation creates a fictitious resemblance between Augustus and his adoptive son Tiberius, with whom he had absolutely no blood relation. These resemblances would have reminded the viewer of a family tie that was legal and not made by blood. With this, there is a precedent for the masculine cast to the face that appears in Agrippina's Copenhagen/Ancona type (Figures 24-26 above), which may aim to represent the political union between Agrippina and her husband Claudius (Figure

¹³⁷ Foubert, "Women Going Public : Ideals and Conflicts in the Representation of Julio-Claudian Women," 18-27.

¹³⁸ Suet. *Div. Claud.* 10. For more information on the Praetorian Guard, see N. B. Rankov, Hook, Richard, *The Praetorian Guard* (London: Osprey, 1994).

¹³⁹ Wood, *Imperial Women : a Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, 15; Varner, "Transcending Gender: Assimilation, Identity, and Roman Imperial Portraits," 189; Smith, "Roman Portraits: Honours, Empresses, and Late Emperors," 214-15.

¹⁴⁰ Wood, *Imperial Women : a Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, 15.

27). This idea has been the most common and readily accepted explanation for the slightly masculine facial features.

Agrippina's Retrospective Imagery

For an imperial woman with a prestigious bloodline such as Agrippina, strengthening the authority of her family was of the utmost importance when it came to continuing the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Susan Wood believes that at the height of Agrippina



**Figure 50. Livia, Fayum type, 4-14 CE, marble, from Arsinoe, Egypt, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, cat. 615,
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/roger_ulrich/5401662363/?q=livia>**

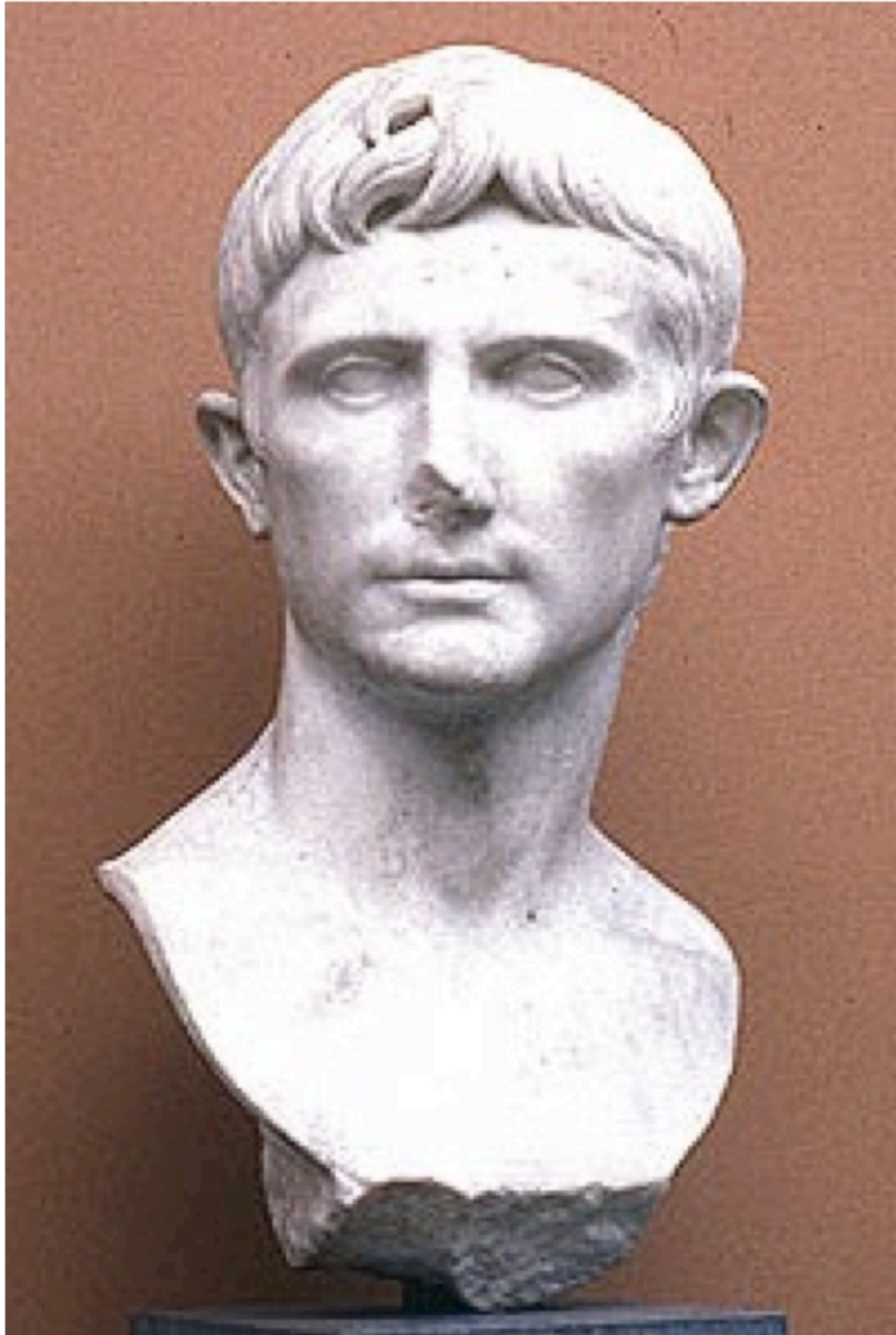


Figure 51. Augustus, Fayum type, 4-14 CE, marble, from Arsinoe, Egypt, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, <<https://resources.oncourse.iu.edu/access/content/user/leach/www/c102/assignment.html>>



Figure 52. Livia, Marbury type, 35 BCE - 14 CE, marble, Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 572,
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Livia_Drusilla_Massimo_Inv572.jpg>

the Younger's power, a new monumental portrait type was created for her mother, Agrippina the Elder.¹⁴¹ In fact, due to a *damnatio* on her images under Tiberius, Agrippina the Elder's posthumous images, created by her children, outnumber the portraits that remain from her lifetime.¹⁴² This new type was altered from Agrippina the Elder's previous type in order to stress the physical resemblance between the mother-daughter pair. These new commissions, as seen in a bust from Olympia and another from the Vatican, show the Elder with a more complicated and fashionable hairstyle than she wears in her previous portraits (one that is notably similar to the hairstyle the Younger wears in her Ancona type) as well as the addition of a diadem (Figures 53-56). Previously, the Elder's image had been evoked on a *sestertius* issued by Caligula in 37-41 CE because she was both his most direct connection to Augustus and because he aimed to gain the support of her political faction (Figure 57).¹⁴³ The same reasoning must have been behind the *Gemma Claudia* (Figure 37 above), which emphasizes the parallels between the dead and living couples as a way of legitimizing the power and position of the latter. In this way, Agrippina the Younger used her mother's imagery to aid in the realization of her political ambitions.¹⁴⁴

Tacitus tells us that Agrippina the Elder headed her own political party, the *Partes Agrippinae*, whose purpose was to secure imperial authority for one of her sons.¹⁴⁵ It would not be implausible to claim that the soldiers of Germanicus's old legions were among the

¹⁴¹ Wood, "Memoriae Agrippinae: Agrippina the Elder in Julio-Claudian Art and Propaganda."

¹⁴² Varner, "Portraits, Plots, and Politics: 'Damnatio Memoriae' and the Images of Imperial Women," 62. Tiberius had previously exiled the elder Agrippina to an island in the Tyrrhenian Sea, where she starved herself to death.

¹⁴³ Wood, "Memoriae Agrippinae: Agrippina the Elder in Julio-Claudian Art and Propaganda," 410.

¹⁴⁴ The Getty Agrippina is identified as the younger, and not the elder, due to an incision in the head for the insertion of a diadem, which could have only been worn by an Augusta or female divinity.

¹⁴⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 4.14.4.



Figure 53. Agrippina the Elder, 54-59 CE, marble, from Olympia, Olympia Museum, (Susan Wood, *Imperial Women : A Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, Boston: Brill, 1999, fig. 103)



Figure 54. Profile view of Figure 47, (Susan Wood, *Imperial Women : A Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, Boston: Brill, 1999, fig. 104)

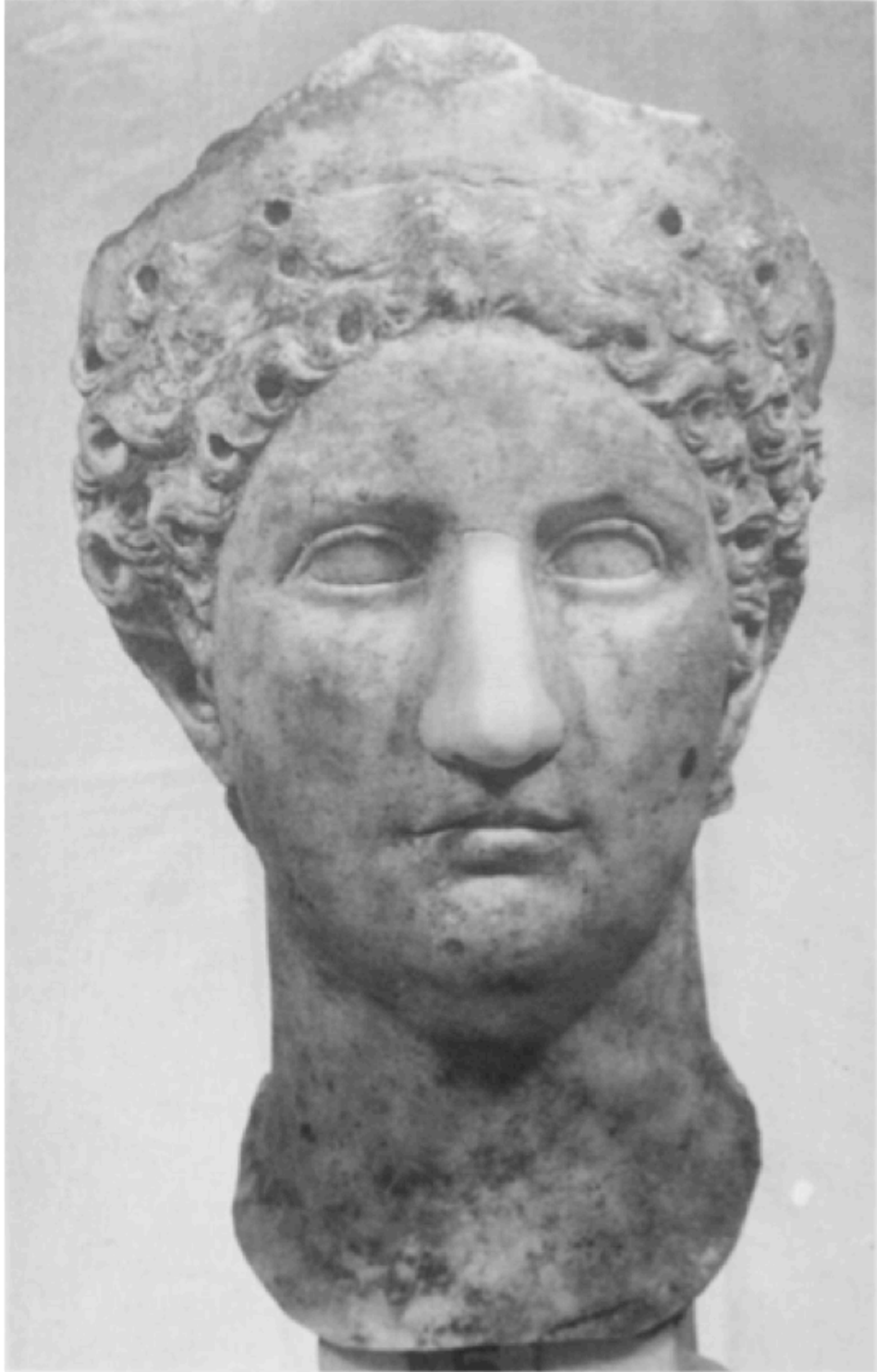


Figure 55. Agrippina the Elder, 49-54 CE, marble, Vatican, Museo Chiaramonti, inv. 1480, (Susan Wood, *Imperial Women : A Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, Boston: Brill, 1999, fig. 101.)



Figure 56. Profile view of Figure 49, (Susan Wood, *Imperial Women : A Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, Boston: Brill, 1999, fig. 102.)



Figure 57. *Sestertius* of Caligula with Agrippina the Elder (obverse),
<<http://www.ancientcoins.ca/RIC/index.htm>>

members of the party. Richard A. Bauman argues that the elder Agrippina's political faction set a new standard for women in public life, as the term *Partes Agrippinae* is the most explicitly political label attached to any woman from this time, and it foreshadows the comments that Tacitus will go on to make about the younger Agrippina.¹⁴⁶ Like her mother, Agrippina the Younger began building her own political party once she became threatened by her son's power.¹⁴⁷ Just as Tacitus associated the younger Agrippina with a tightly drawn masculine tyranny upon Rome, the elder Agrippina was connected with masculine traits. Speaking of her death, Tacitus mentions that she had overcome her feminine vices by her masculine ambitions.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, 145.

¹⁴⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 13.18.3-5. Unhappy with Nero's recent actions, Agrippina became a supporter of Claudius's son Britannicus, whom Nero promptly had poisoned.

¹⁴⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 6.25.2.

Agrippina the Younger's retrospective campaign continued beyond the visual arts as well. She composed and published her own written history of the Julio-Claudian family that circulated well enough to be used as source material for both Tacitus and Pliny the Elder.¹⁴⁹ As they are no longer extant, we only have second-hand knowledge of these memoirs through the sources that cite them. The memoirs apparently described not only Agrippina's life, but also the lives of her family members. It was likely written with a reading public in mind. Tacitus calls her autobiography *commentarii*, a genre that was often written by upper-class males who aimed to advertise their political campaigns and military journeys to boost their own *dignitas* and that of their descendants.¹⁵⁰ The Roman biography seems to have the distinct purpose of celebrating male virtue, and we know of no prose (with the exception of letter writing) that was written by upper-class women. Male memoirs were typically written for a male reading public of aspiring politicians. These works were no doubt propagandistic and self-serving. Agrippina presumably understood the political importance of manipulating public opinion by providing a carefully controlled perception of the past.

Agrippina's *commentarii* would have no doubt highlighted the accomplishments of her noble father, Germanicus, in order to connect the ambitious daughter with her highly accomplished father. Germanicus was the adopted son of Tiberius, and would have been next in line for the succession. He had obtained many honors throughout his command of Germania and Asia before he was poisoned. If Wood's theory is correct in that Agrippina the Younger did re-commission portraits of her mother in order to associate herself with

¹⁴⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 4.53 and 13.14; Pliny *NH* 7.46.

¹⁵⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 4.53.3; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta : Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna*, 185-88.

her memory, then it is certainly possible that Agrippina's imagery aims to provide a retrospective link back to her father. Through the tool of gender transcendence, it is likely that Agrippina's Copenhagen/Ancona portrait type shows notable physiognomic similarities to portraits of Germanicus, as opposed to Claudius. The physical resemblance between father and daughter can be easily recognized through their portrait images. When viewed in profile, portraits of Agrippina the Younger and her father Germanicus show remarkably similar facial structures (Figures 58-61). Both display a short forehead, similar bends in the nose, a slight overbite, thin lips, and a small but prominent chin. The literary evidence strengthens this resemblance between father and daughter: Tacitus repeatedly mentions that Agrippina depended on her position as the daughter of Germanicus to uphold her political influence.¹⁵¹

Those in favor of the theory of assimilation with Claudius in Agrippina's Copenhagen/Ancona type often point to their jugate profiles on the *Gemma Claudia* (Figure 62). Varner notes that that "the stressed resemblance between Agrippina and Claudius is striking, and perhaps even shocking."¹⁵² While this is true, a recent analysis of the gem has proposed that the profile of Claudius was at one time recut from a depiction of Caligula.¹⁵³ If this analysis is correct, then it is logical to assume that the female portrait behind Caligula was not originally Agrippina, but their sister Drusilla, Caligula's most beloved sister, whom he had deified upon her premature death. Upon the recutting of Caligula's profile, the portrait of Drusilla was left untouched, possibly because early portraits of her

¹⁵¹ Tac. *Ann.* 12.1.2, 12.3.2, 13.14.3, 14.4.

¹⁵² Varner, "Transcending Gender: Assimilation, Identity, and Roman Imperial Portraits," 192.

¹⁵³ Gerhard Schmidt, "Die Gemma Claudia inmitten der caliguläischen und claudischen Kameenkunst." Accessed March 28, 2013. <http://www.gemmarius-sculptor.de/info6.htm#skuenzel>



Figure 58. Agrippina the Younger, Copenhagen/Ancona type, 49-54 CE, marble, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, cat. 636, <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/menesje/2182729571/in/set-72157603864746117>>



Figure 59. Germanicus, ca. 18 CE, bronze, Rome, Museo Nazionale (Terme), photo by author.



Figure 60. Profile view of Figure 25,
<<http://www.flickr.com/photos/menesje/4692462169/>>



Figure 61. Profile of Figure 56,
<<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bstorage/5379102544/>>

and Agrippina were similar. This would explain why Agrippina's Adolphseck 22 type is sometimes identified as Drusilla (see Figures 15-17). As a result, the altered gem could still be seen as an object that broadcasts the similarities between Claudius and Agrippina the Younger and Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder even though it may not be an accurate portrait depiction of the Younger. When viewed in this new light, it is perhaps easier to see a similarity between Germanicus and his daughter. For instance, when the profile of Germanicus on the *Gemma Claudia* is compared to the profile of a sculpted portrait of Agrippina the Younger from Copenhagen, the similarities are astounding (Figures 63-64).

Claudius no doubt needed to exploit his union with Agrippina and her connection to Augustus to legitimize and solidify his reign, but Agrippina and her son Nero, due to their superior lineage, did not need Claudius to gain any kind of political recognition. Tacitus records the popularity of Agrippina and her son even before her marriage to Claudius by relating an incident during the secular games of 47 CE, when Nero received a greater acclamation from the audience than Claudius's son Britannicus.¹⁵⁴ When Claudius came to power, it was crucial he marry again, after the (assisted) death of his third wife Messalina. One of his freedmen, Pallas, suggested that he marry Agrippina, stressing her descent from Germanicus and emphasizing that she would bring the grandson of Germanicus (namely, Nero) with her. Pallas urged Claudius to ally himself with the noble line by uniting the two branches of the Claudian family, and stated his fear that Agrippina would bring the grandeur of the Caesars to some other house.¹⁵⁵ An alliance with Agrippina strengthened Claudius's position by aligning himself with a daughter of a previously royally significant individual, since Germanicus had been Augustus's and Tiberius's appointed successor and

¹⁵⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 11.11-11.12.

¹⁵⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 12.2.3.



Figure 62. *Gemma Claudia*, detail of Claudius and Agrippina,
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gemma_Claudia_KHM.jpg>



Figure 63. *Gemma Claudia*, detail of Germanicus,
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gemma_Claudia_KHM.jpg>



Figure 64. Profile view of Figure 24, (Susan Wood, *Imperial Women : A Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, Boston: Brill, 1999, fig.137.)

was deeply loved by the general populace. When the marriage had been finalized, Claudius further strengthened this alliance by wedding his daughter Octavia to Nero in order to link her more intimately with the house of Augustus.

Over time, it became increasingly evident that it was more significant to be Agrippina's son than it was to be Claudius's. If the Julio-Claudian dynasty was a *de facto* hereditary monarchy, then Claudius's son Britannicus should have been next in line to become emperor. However, it is very clear that Nero was made a designated successor shortly after the marriage of Agrippina and Claudius. In an inscription from Rome dating to 51 CE, Nero is described as *princeps iuventutis*, and his descent is recorded on his mother's side (through her father, Germanicus) as opposed to his newly adopted father's.¹⁵⁶ This is due to the fact that Agrippina was a part of the Julian *gens*, whereas Claudius and his descendants were not. Even before Claudius's death, Nero's matrilineal descent through his grandfather, Germanicus, was celebrated over his adopted father's, marking him as the first princeps who does not limit himself to his patrilineal descent.¹⁵⁷

It is clear that Agrippina had more to gain by associating herself with her parents than she did by associating herself with her husband. By connecting herself with her mother, Agrippina was able to expose and promote her Julian heritage while also promoting herself to her mother's political party. By assimilating her portraits with Germanicus, Agrippina was able to recall the public's memory of a beloved political figure. At the same time, Agrippina's assimilation to Germanicus may have aimed to take advantage of a common Roman social norm. Resembling one's father was a fashionable trait in the Roman world, and Pliny the Younger's letters reflect this. In one letter, Pliny

¹⁵⁶ Anthony Barrett, "Claudius' British Victory Arch in Rome," *Britannia* 22(1991): 6-7.

¹⁵⁷ Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus : Inventing Private Life*, 292-93.

praises the daughter of a friend, Minicia, as a true copy of her father, not only in outer appearance, but also in manners and character.¹⁵⁸ This makes it clear that women had much to gain by associating themselves with their fathers. Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, was referred to as the daughter of the great Scipio Africanus both during life and after death, as reflected by the inscription on the base of her seated public statue, which identifies her as *Cornelia Africani F. / Gracchorum* (Figure 1 above).¹⁵⁹ Emily Ann Hemelrijk discusses how the Roman habit of complimenting a woman for resembling her father in mind or character was based on the appreciation of male intellectual qualities in women.¹⁶⁰

The Virtue of Masculinity

Virtues in the Roman world were, and to an extent still are, tied to gender. In the ancient world, women were often thought to be irrational and lacking judgment, whereas the male mind was associated with reason and discernment.¹⁶¹ Women praised for their ‘male’ rationality and their ‘manly’ courage were seen, in a sense, as honorary men. A woman, by taking on the attributes of a male, instantly became more honorable.¹⁶² And often, the ability for a woman to inherit and transmit these ‘male’ qualities was regarded as a credit to her male relatives, and especially, to her father.¹⁶³ Roman society’s view on women remained more or less standard from the Roman Republic until Late Antiquity.

¹⁵⁸ Plin. Ep. 5.16.9.

¹⁵⁹ ILS 68; Pliny, *NH*, 34.31 describes the statue as (to) *Corneliae Gracchorum matri, quae fuit Africani prioris filia* (Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, who was the daughter of elder Africanus). Translation via Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family*, 66. For a discussion of the statue base, see Augusto Fraschetti, *Roman Women*, trans. Linda Lappin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 62-64. Curiously, the inscription seems to be lacking the word “mater.”

¹⁶⁰ Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna*, 91.

¹⁶¹ Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 91.

¹⁶² Kampen, “Gender Theory,” 14-25.

¹⁶³ Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 91.

That is, it was thought that women were the weak, impulsive, easily swayed and discouraged, and subject to passions and follies.¹⁶⁴

While the masculine aspects of Agrippina's depiction may have been meant to associate herself with various members of her family, it is also possible that they were meant to *disassociate* herself from the former wife of Claudius, Messalina. Peter Stewart notes that for political or aesthetic reasons, the portrait artist may wish to draw upon *or react against* imagery from the past, rather than simply depicting his subject.¹⁶⁵ Roman imperial images could break with traditions, expectations, and innovation. They could also react against predecessors. For example, portraits of Claudius depart from the recently developed tradition of classicizing youthfulness by representing the emperor with an older, more worn face (Figure 27 above). Nero, whose early portraits resemble other members of his family, eventually develops an image that breaks with the idealizing tradition by displaying a fat face and an elaborately arranged hairstyle (Figure 65).¹⁶⁶

Messalina, the third wife of Claudius, was condemned by the senate for her role in a conspiracy against her husband, the reigning emperor. Seven years after Claudius's accession, in 47 CE, Messalina committed bigamy by marrying the consul designate, Gaius Silius, even though she was already married to Claudius. This was done with the intention of establishing Silius as emperor in place of Claudius and perhaps to even thwart the growing power of Agrippina.¹⁶⁷ Tacitus enjoys contrasting the two women by depicting the motivation for power between Messalina and Agrippina differently. Tacitus implies that

¹⁶⁴ For various references to the weakness of women in the ancient sources, see Varner, "Portraits, Plots, and Politics: 'Damnatio Memoriae' and the Images of Imperial Women," 67.

¹⁶⁵ Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family*, 56, n. 29.

¹⁶⁶ Stewart, *Roman Art*, 19-20.

¹⁶⁷ Hardy, "Imperial Women in Tacitus' Annales," 166.



**Figure 65. Nero, 54-69 BCE, marble, Rome, Museo Nazionale (Palazzo Massimo),
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/piedmont_fossil/2717436648/in/pool-348069@N25>**

Messalina had been impelled by lust or whim, whereas Agrippina acted unchastely not for physical pleasure, but for the sake of power.¹⁶⁸ Further, Tacitus associates Messalina with numerous “feminine” traits, such as excess, extravagance, vice, audacity, and a lack of judgment when compared to her paramour, Silius.¹⁶⁹ The invocation of “consuming passions” was often used by Roman moralists and was a criticism primarily associated with women and femininity.¹⁷⁰ In contrast, Agrippina’s chastity for the sake of authority was considered by Tacitus to be a masculine attribute.

The influx of portraits of Agrippina and her family after her marriage to Claudius could be seen as a move to erase the collective memory of the emperor’s prior disastrous marriage to Messalina. It is possible that by incorporating a masculine persona into her portraits, Agrippina aimed to distance herself from such feminine attributes that were linked to the memory of Messalina. Tacitus tells us that Messalina’s portraits were included in the senatorial sanctions of against the empress.¹⁷¹ As a result of the *damnatio*, Messalina’s portrait head was removed from a full-length statue in the Julio-Claudian Basilica at Velleia and replaced with the head of Agrippina the Younger (Figure 21 above).¹⁷² The head is an obvious reworking, as it is too small for the body, the folds of the veil do not match up with the drapery of the body, and the tenon does not sit firmly in its cavity. Another of Messalina’s representations, this time from Naples, was altered to represent Agrippina (Figure 20 above).¹⁷³ The coiffure of the portrait has been recut, but the deeply drilled channels of Messalina’s ringlets are still visible, as are the ringlets around

¹⁶⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 12.7; Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus : Inventing Private Life*, 72.

¹⁶⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 11.12, 11.26.

¹⁷⁰ Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus : Inventing Private Life*, 72.

¹⁷¹ Tac. *Ann.* 11.38.3: *nomen et effigies privatis ac publicis locis demovendas*.

¹⁷² Parma, Museo Nazionale di Antichità, inv. 830.

¹⁷³ Naples, Museo Nazionale, inv. 6242.

the face. This piece is, in fact, the only surviving female Julio-Claudian image that has been recut as a result of *damnatio memoriae*.¹⁷⁴ These two statues comprise Agrippina's previously mentioned Parma/Naples portrait type. As Varner notes, "The reuse of the Naples and Parma statues attests to the political prominence of both Messalina and Agrippina during the principate of Claudius and suggests that their political rivalry found a visual expression in a response almost exclusively limited to male images."¹⁷⁵

Agrippina, who clearly had political aspirations, would have wanted to distance herself from Messalina's negative and overwhelming femininity. Virtues and vices were not the only things tied to gender. In fact, women's minds were thought to differ from those of men. Women were thought to be irrational and lacking judgment, whereas rationality and good judgment were thought to be a quality of the male mind, specifically the mind of a well-educated man of the upper classes. Women who did show good rationality and judgment were regarded as having surpassed the expectations of their sex and were often praised for their "male mind." This is the same for women who were praised for their "manly" courage or self-control, such as both Agrippina the Elder and the Younger.¹⁷⁶

Masculinity was an inherent visual prerequisite for Roman ruler imagery, and this is furthermore why Agrippina may have chosen to present herself with masculine attributes. Negative associations of femininity in the political realm were seen in the way the ancient authors discuss Rome's historically unfavorable leaders and "bad emperors." Negative aspects of femininity, including softness and passivity, were used to discredit Antony

¹⁷⁴ Varner, "Portraits, Plots, and Politics: 'Damnatio Memoriae' and the Images of Imperial Women," 65-67.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta : Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna*, 91.

during his alliance with Cleopatra.¹⁷⁷ Caligula was criticized for his feminine behavior in Suetonius and Aurelius Victor, who mention that the emperor was fond of wearing women's clothing, usually dressing in the guise of Juno, Diana, and Venus.¹⁷⁸ Josephus also describes Caligula's tendency to wear women's attire and wigs.¹⁷⁹ Like Caligula, Nero was associated with femininity. Suetonius records Nero's fondness for playing tragic female roles on stage.¹⁸⁰ Tacitus tells us that, Nero, dressed as a bride, was wedded to Pythagoras (one of his freedman) with all the solemn rights of legitimate marriage, underscoring the emperor's shocking female inclinations, while in the same breath referencing his feminine excess in regard to the setup of the wedding.¹⁸¹ Tacitus, tactfully, connects this incident with the greatest disaster of his reign, the fire of 64 CE, implying that Nero's violation of established gender roles resulted in Rome's devastation.¹⁸² Later, emperors such as Domitian, Commodus, and Elagabalus were criticized for their receptive (and therefore feminine) homosexual behavior as well as prostitution, feminine interest in exotic clothing, and excessive attention to hair care (something that no doubt is reflected in Nero's later portraits – see Figure 65 above).¹⁸³ Regardless of whether these claims are valid, the message behind them emphasizes the fact that femininity was not a valued trait among Roman rulers, and the reason why Agrippina would chose to distance herself from feminine associations.

In terms of modern feminist ideals, the idea of androgyny is seen as an escape from the prison of gender roles and the socially enforced preconceptions of ways in which

¹⁷⁷ Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus : Inventing Private Life*, 293.

¹⁷⁸ Suet. *Calig.* 52; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 3: *cum ipse nunc fluxo cultu Venerioque*.

¹⁷⁹ Jos. *AJ.* 19.30.

¹⁸⁰ Suet. *Nero.* 21.3.

¹⁸¹ Tac. *Ann.* 15.37: *in modum solemnium coniugiorum denupsisset*.

¹⁸² Tac. *Ann.* 15.38.

¹⁸³ Varner, "Transcending Gender: Assimilation, Identity, and Roman Imperial Portraits," 200.

women and men ought to differ.¹⁸⁴ If Agrippina did indeed have control over her portraits, then it is possible that gender transcendence was used as a vehicle to break through the social confines of gender and the associated characteristics, just as modern androgyny does. This, in turn, would allow her to gain authority within the dynasty. The masculine attributes that are incorporated into her portraits act to the viewer as visual cues that reinforce her lineage while associating her with male virtue and strength and therefore distancing her from feminine qualities that were unsuitable to a Roman ruler.

¹⁸⁴ Mary Anne Warren, "Is Androgyny the Answer to Sexual Stereotyping?," in *"Femininity," "Masculinity," and "Androgyny": A Modern Philosophical Discussion*, ed. Mary Vetterling-Braggin (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), 170.

CONCLUSION

It is now clear that Agrippina's masculine resemblance is by no means the result of careless carving. Instead, the transcendence of gender that we see in the portraits of Agrippina the Younger was used as a vehicle to break through the social confines of gender and its associated characteristics, allowing her to receive recognition within the empire. This tool of gender transcendence was used not only to legitimize the continuation of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, but also to further Agrippina's own aspirations by associating herself with her father, Germanicus. In turn, this assimilation allowed her to play on his popularity and appear favorable to his political faction. Agrippina, who no doubt aimed to be recognized in the public sphere as a leader in her own right, used the tool of gender transcendence to invoke the memory of her father. At the same time, transcending gender allowed her to affiliate herself with the virtues of masculinity while distancing herself from the vices of femininity. Because masculine imagery was a prerequisite for Roman rulership, Agrippina's masculine depictions were able to reconcile her political ambitions with the anxiety that she would have faced from the male elite. Therefore, this masculine assimilation does not reflect Agrippina subjugating herself to or defining herself through her male counterparts. Rather, Agrippina's portraits show a woman striving to break free of the limitations of her gender by embodying virtuous male qualities in an effort to gain prominence in a world that regarded politically assertive women as a threat.

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VITA

Kristin Michelle Hébert was raised in New Iberia, Louisiana. She attended Tulane University of New Orleans, where she acquired a Bachelor in Anthropology, Classical Studies, and History of Art. Kristin currently manages the collection of the Political History Museum at Louisiana's Old State Capitol. She hopes to return to New Orleans upon receiving her Master's degree to pursue her career in museums.