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Tacito

MESSALINA

PARTE III



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Annales XI, 35

1 *Mirum inter haec silentium Claudii, Vitellius ignaro propior: omnia liberto oboediebant. Pateferi domum adulteri atque illuc deduci imperatorem iubet. 2 Ac primum in vestibulo effigiem patris Siliii consulto senatus abolitam demonstrat, tum quidquid avitum Neronibus et Drusis in pretium probri cessisse. 3 Incensumque et ad minas erumpentem castris infert, parata contione militum; apud quos praemonente Narcisso pauca verba fecit: nam etsi iustum dolorem pudor impediabat. 4 Continuus dehinc cohortium clamor nomina reorum et poenas flagitantium; admotusque Silius tribunali non defensionem, non moras temptavit, precatus ut mors adceleraretur. 5 Eadem constantia et inlustres equites Romanos cupidos matura necis fuit. 6 Et Titium Proculum, custodem a Silio Messalinae datum et indicium offerentem, Vettium Valentem confessum et Pompeium Urbicum ac Saufeium Trogum ex consociis tradi ad supplicium iubet. 7 Decrius quoque Calpurnianus vigillum praefectus, Sulpicius Rufus ludii procurator, Iuncus Vergilianus senator eadem poena adfecti.*

1 Sconcertante in mezzo a ciò il silenzio di Claudio, mentre Vitellio pareva più simile a uno che ignora; ogni cosa ubbidiva al liberto. Ordina di aprire la casa dell'adultero e di condurvi l'imperatore. **2** E per prima cosa gli indica nel vestibolo l'immagine del padre di Silio, cancellata per decreto del senato, poi che tutto quanto era stato ereditato dai Neroni e dai Drusi era passato di proprietà come prezzo della vergogna. **3** Mentre era pieno d'ira e stava prorompendo in minacce lo conduce all'accampamento, dopo che era stata predisposta l'assemblea dei soldati; e davanti a loro, dopo una premessa di Narcisso, pronunciò poche parole; infatti la vergogna era d'impaccio al dolore, per quanto giusto. **4** Incessanti dopo di ciò le grida delle coorti che chiedevano i nomi dei colpevoli e la loro punizione; e Silio, portato in tribunale, non tentò una difesa né una dilazione, avendo chiesto di affrettare la morte. **5** La medesima fermezza rese desiderosi di una morte sollecita anche illustri cavalieri romani. **6** E ordina che siano condotti a morte, tra i complici, Tizio Proculo, assegnato da Silio come custode di Messalina e che cercava di offrire delle rivelazioni, Vezio Valente, reo confessore, Pompeo Urbico e Saufeio Trogo. **7** Anche Decrio Calpurniano, prefetto dei vigili, Sulpicio Rufo, sovrintendente delle scuole di gladiatori, e il senatore Iunco Virgiliano furono colpiti dalla stessa pena.

1. Mirum: immerso nella lettura dei *codicilli* passatigli da Narcisso (cfr. *supra* 34,3), l'imperatore non esce da un impietrito silenzio, cui si uniforma, accortamente, Vitellio - **ignaro propior:** come dimenticare il panellaro de *Il giorno della civetta* ('la faccia di un uomo sorpreso nel sonno più innocente'): 'Perché - domandò il panellaro, meravigliato e curioso - hanno sparato?'. Almeno sembra aver interrotto la sua litania (cfr. *supra* 34,1) - **liberto:** Narcisso, detentore dello *ius militum*. Si può immaginare il disappunto di Tacito in questa constatazione - **pateferi... deduci:** regolare la forma passiva in assenza di chi riceve l'ordine - **illuc:** avverbio di moto a luogo.
2. primum: il suo correlativo è *tum* - **patris Siliii:** fedele alla memoria di Germanico, nel 24 era stato falsamente accusato da uomini di Seiano e si era ucciso; la moglie, Sosia Galla, era stata esiliata (cfr. *Ann.* 4,18-19) - **effigiem... abolitam:** nota il Furneaux: 'the mention of his trial and death records no decree respecting his statues; and the prohibition of any possession of the statue of a condemned ancestor in a house is somewhat beyond the usual practice; though their use was forbidden at funerals'. Solitamente la *damnatio memoriae* riguardava i luoghi pubblici e non gli atrii delle residenze private, ma Narcisso è fermamente intenzionato a servirsi di tutto ciò che può servire ad accrescere la collera di Claudio - **avitum:** 'this correction for *Med. habitum* is supported by the occurrence of a similar error in 13. 34. 3. On the heirlooms of the imperial house, given by Messalina to Silius, see note on c. 12, 5' (Furneaux) - **Neronibus et Drusis:** il primo termine si riferisce alla *gens Claudia*, il secondo alla *gens Livia*, di cui sono pronomi tradizionali. Si ricordi che Livia Drusilla, prima di sposare Augusto, era stata moglie di Tiberio Claudio Nerone - **in pretium probri:** costruito allitterante; oltre che a 12,5 anche a 30,3 c'è stato un riferimento ai doni elargiti da Messalina all'amante-sposo. Commenta Furneaux: 'had gone to swell the reward of infamy': cp. *in pretium belli cessurae* (*Hist.* 1,11,4), and similar expressions in *Hist.* 1,70,4; 5,9,2'.

3. Incensum... erumpentem: partecipi predicativi, in sequenza temporale corretta. Di questo aspetto del suo carattere era consapevole lo stesso Claudio che, al dire di Svetonio (*Claud.* 38) *irae atque iracundiae conscius sibi, utramque excusavit edicto* - **castris:** dativo di moto a luogo - **contione militum:** dotato di *ius militum*, Narcisso ha potuto predisporre lo schieramento dei soldati della guardia pretoriana per ascoltare le disposizioni dell'imperatore - **praemonente Narcisso:** riporta il Furneaux: 'aoristic present; cp. 12,48,1, also *respondens* (*Hist.* 2,4,3), *revertentem* (*Agr.* 9,1). The parallel expression in 12,69,1 (*monente praefecto*) suggests that here, as there, the monition is addressed to the soldiers, over whom Narcissus for a time assumes the position of praefect (c. 33,2). The context shows that Claudius was glad to be spared some of the recital' - **verba fecit:** finalmente Claudio esce dal *mirum silentium* e ostenta un minimo di autorità - **nam... pudor:** esplicativo del prec. *pauca*.

4. Continuus: efficacemente contrapposto a *pauca*, ribadisce la fedeltà dei reparti, che reclamano con insistenza (*flagitantium*) l'immediata punizione dei colpevoli - **Silius:** se ne deve supporre l'avvenuto arresto, facilitato dalla sua presenza nel foro (cfr. *supra* 32,2). 'Uno storico antico non si cura di dirci come e dove ciò avvenne perché è irrilevante rispetto al significato e alla conclusione degli eventi: quel che conta per Tacito è dirci che l'abbozzo di congiura, se vi fu, non approdò a nulla e che Silio seppe morire con dignità di vero romano' (Questa) - **tribunali:** 'such an erection was part of the *principia* in a camp' (Furneaux); 'qui *tribunal* deve intenderti proprio nel senso del luogo in cui il comandante supremo esercita, nei *castra*, la giurisdizione penale' (Questa) - **non:** ripetuto in anafora, enfatizza i due sostantivi (*defensionem... moras*), che potrebbero considerarsi anche un'endiadi ('la dilazione data dalla sua difesa').

5. cupidus maturae necis: 'il passo è di difficile restituzione nella tradizione manoscritta: ho seguito il Koestermann nel dare il testo dei Leidense debitamente adattato; il senso generale non pare tuttavia dubitabile: altri personaggi non mancarono di un estremo sprazzo di dignità' (Questa). Il Furneaux legge invece *cupido* e spiega: 'it seems best to follow Nipperdey in bracketing the reading of Med. as a gloss. Halm follows Haase in reading *cupidi maturae necis fuerunt*; the older editors read *cupidos ... fecit*, after G. Nipperdey takes *eadem constantia* (sc. *fueri*) as abl. of quality, and supposes that the knights are those whose names follow, and that *et* before *Titium* is used to specify (as in 2,50,1; 3,38,1). There is weight in the objection that Titius Proculus could not have been said to have shown the same *constantia* as Silius'.

6. Titium Proculum: nominato solo qui; 'Silio ne aveva fatto una sorta di ... cicisbeo dell'imperatrice, ma non si può escludere (le parole di Tacito sono indubbiamente ironiche) che anch'egli fosse da annoverarsi tra i suoi amanti' (Questa). Spiega Furneaux: 'it was not uncommon for the husband to take this means for ensuring the fidelity of his wife, or for her to do the like by him. The assignment of such a guardian in this case was part of the irony of the marriage'. Verrebbe allora da concordare con Giovenale (6,347-8) *sed quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* - **indicium offerentem:** tutt'altro carattere rispetto a Silio e agli altri *equites*; *le style c'est l'homme...*; 'instances are given under Tiberius (*Ann.* 6,3,5; 7,5) of those who saved their own lives by informino against others' (Furneaux) - **Vettium Valentem:** è la 'vedetta' sull'albero che scorge la 'tempesta da Ostia' (cfr. *supra* 31,6 e note relative) - **Saufeium Trogum:** 'Nipperdey thinks this may be the person whose name is written in Sen. *Lud.* 13,4 as M. Helvius Trogus. The others here mentioned are unknown except from c. 30,3' (Furneaux) - **ex consciis:** 'dunque non amanti di Messalina, ma complici dei suoi disordini e, più, del tentativo politico di Silio' (Questa) - **iubet:** sugg. Claudio.

7. Decrius Calpurnianus: era probabilmente subentrato nella carica a Cornelius Laco nel 44 (cfr. Cass. Dio 60,23,3) - **vigilum praefectus:** 'this was an important equestrian office' (Furneaux). La *praefectura vigilum* era stata istituita da Augusto nel 6 d.C. per la sorveglianza e la sicurezza della città; i *vigiles* avevano un'organizzazione paramilitare, erano inquadrati in sette coorti suddivise a loro volta in sette centurie. Ad ogni coorte competevano due delle 14 regioni in cui Roma era stata suddivisa da Augusto; in una di esse veniva posta la *statio*, cioè la caserma, nell'altra un distaccamento o una postazione di guardia detta *excubitorium* - **ludi procurator:** i gladiatori erano organizzati in *ludi* (scuole) dirette da un *lanista* - una parola di origine etrusca - che aveva potere di vita e di morte sui suoi uomini. A Roma i *ludi* imperiali (che potevano mantenere sino a 2000 uomini) erano le sole scuole autorizzate: vi erano il *Ludus Matutinus*, dove si allenavano i cacciatori di animali, il *Ludus Gallicus*, il *Ludus Dacicus* ed il *Ludus Magnus*. I *ludi* - che erano qualcosa a metà tra caserme e prigioni - presentavano in tutto l'impero la stessa disposizione: i gladiatori erano alloggiati in piccole celle tutt'intorno al cortile ove si allenavano; le scuole, che erano sparse in tutte le province dell'impero, potevano accogliere ciascuna da 100 a 1000 gladiatori; tutte erano sottoposte all'autorità di un *procurator*, un funzionario che controllava un'intera area, vasta come la Gallia o l'Asia - **eadem poena:** ablativo di causa efficiente - **Iuncus Vergilianus:** 'apparently the same person who is mentioned among the list of victims by Seneca (*Lud.* 13,4) under the name of *Junius praetorius*. As *Iuncus* is known as a Roman name from the Pisan cenotaph (*C. I.L.* II,1421), we cannot decide in which author the name is correctly given. *Senator* is here added to distinguish him from the knights. The list in Seneca omits the names of Titius Proculus, Pompeius Urbicus, Decrius, and Sulpicius Rufus, and adds those of Cotta and Fabius' (Furneaux) - **adfecti:** sott. *sunt*.

Annales XI, 36

1 Solus Mnester cunctationem attulit, dilaniata veste clamitans aspiceret verberum notas, reminisceretur vocis, qua se obnoxium iussis Messa-

1 Solo Mnestere provocò un'esitazione poiché, stracciatasi la veste, andava gridando che guardasse i segni delle percosse, si ricordasse delle pa-

linae dedisset: 2 aliis largitione aut spei magnitudine, sibi ex necessitate culpam; nec cuiquam ante pereundum fuisse si Silius rerum poteretur. 3 Commotum his et primum ad misericordiam Caesarem perpulere liberti ne tot illustribus viris interfectis histrioni consuleretur: sponte an coactus tam magna peccavisset, nihil referre. 4 Ne Trauli quidem Montani equitis Romani defensio recepta est. Is modesta iuventa, sed corpore insigni, accitus ultro noctemque intra unam a Messalina proturbatus erat, paribus lasciviis ad cupidinem et fastidia. 5 Suillio Caesonino et Plautio Laterano mors remittitur, huic ob patrum egregium meritum: Caesoninus vitiiis protectus est, tamquam in illo foedissimo coetu passus muliebria.

role con cui l'aveva reso schiavo dei capricci di Messalina; 2 gli altri avevano colpa per la corruzione o le grandi speranze, egli a seguito di una costrizione; e se Silio si fosse impadronito del potere, nessuno sarebbe dovuto morire prima. 3 I liberti obbligarono l'imperatore, commosso da queste parole e incline alla compassione, a non risparmiare un attore, dopo che erano stati uccisi tanti uomini illustri; non importava nulla se aveva commesso colpe così gravi spontaneamente o perché costretto. 4 Neppure la difesa di Traulo Montano, cavaliere romano, fu accolta. Egli, di costumata gioventù, ma con un bellissimo corpo, fatto venire da Messalina, per sua volontà, per una sola notte, ne era stato scacciato, perché uguale era la sua insolenza di fronte alla passione e all'avversione. 5 Si risparmiò la morte a Suillio Caesonino e a Plautio Laterano; a questi per gli straordinari meriti dello zio paterno, mentre Caesonino fu protetto dai suoi vizi, come chi in quella turpissima compagnia si era prostituito come una donna.

1. **Mnester:** per il personaggio cfr. *supra* 28,1 e note relative - **cunctationem:** in contrasto con la procedura sommaria applicata agli altri - **dilaniata veste:** ablativo assoluto, con valore temporale. E' l'ultima *performance* del pantomimo - **clamitans:** un appropriato frequentativo - **aspiceret:** come il seg. *reminisceretur* è congiuntivo dell'*oratio obliqua* - **verberum notas:** 'the stripes received for resisting Messalina's will' (Furneaux). L'imperatrice non aveva certo gradito gli incontri amorosi del pantomimo con Poppea (cfr. *Ann.* 11,4,1) - **reminisceretur vocis:** 'Dio states (60,22,5) that Messalina, after having in vain tempted him by rewards and threats, procured a general injunction from Claudius, that he was to obey her in all things' (Furneaux) - **obnoxium:** 'is used in the sense of 'under dominion of' (Furneaux).
2. **aliis:** come *sibi*, è un dativo di possesso - **largitione... magnitudine:** ablativi di causa, in *variatio* con *ex necessitate* - **culpam:** sott. *fuisse* - **pereundum... poteretur:** periodo ipotetico di terzo tipo con apodosi dipendente all'infinito. Si noti la forma arcaica *poteretur*.
3. **perpulere:** forma raccorciata di perfetto - **liberti:** si osservi il passaggio al plurale; non più il solo Narcisso, ma anche gli altri si sono affrettati a manifestare la loro 'fattiva' solidarietà all'imperatore. Svetonio (*Claud.* 28) dà un elenco di questi figure, assoggettatosi ai quali, *non principem se, sed ministrum egit:* Poside, un eunuco, onorato per la campagna britannica, Antonio Felice, fratello di Pallante, che governò la Giudea e riuscì a sposare tre regine, Arpocrate, che ebbe il privilegio di farsi portare in lettiga per Roma e di dare pubblici spettacoli, e poi la triade Polibio - Narcisso - Pallante. Altri nomi sono dati da Seneca (*Lud.* 13,5) - **ne... consuleretur:** qui il verbo è usato come sinonimo di *parceret* - **tot... interfectis:** ablativo assoluto, con valore causale - **histrioni:** 'la rovina di illustri personaggi, dalle autorevoli parentele, non consente, per crudeltà di giustizia distributiva, che si risparmi l'*histrion*' (Questa) - **sponte an coactus:** consueto esempio di *variatio* - **nihil referre:** infinito dell'*oratio obliqua*. Si noti l'uso del poetico *refert* in luogo di *interest*.
4. **Trauli... Montani:** un Sesto Traulo compare nel passo di Seneca sopra citato - **modesta iuventa:** ablativo di qualità, in *pendant* con *corpore insigni* - **ultro:** l'iniziativa era quindi partita da Messalina, che se ne era incapricciata, per poi disfarsene subito (*noctemque intra unam*) - **paribus lasciviis:** ablativo assoluto, con valore causale; 'her disgust being no less capricious than her desire' (Furneaux).
5. **Suillio Caesonino:** cfr. *supra* 2,2; era uno dei due figli di Publio Suillio, su cui si era riversato lo sdegno sarcastico (e giustificato) di Valerio Asiatico. 'His cognomen appears to be taken from Caesonia, the wife of Gaius, who was his father's halfsister' (Furneaux) - **Plautio Laterano:** annota in merito il Furneaux: 'He was expelled from the senate (*Ann.* 13, 11, 2), and was subsequently involved in the conspiracy of Piso and put to death (*Ann.* 15,49,2; 60,1). The uncle here alluded to is A. Plautius Silvanus, the commander of the great invasion of Britain (see *Ann.* 13. 32, 3; *Agr.* 14,1) - **vitiis protectus est:** 'frase a sorpresa, che Tacito scrive con evidente disgusto per bollare la miseria del personaggio (figlio dello spregevole delatore Suillio)' (Questa) - **passus muliebria:** l'espressione è un calco sallustiano (*Cat.* 13,3); il verbo è termine tecnico per indicare il ruolo passivo nel rapporto, proprio delle donne, che Seneca (*Ep.* 95,21) definisce *pati natae*, mentre Petronio (*Sat.* 9,6 e 25,3) allude alla *muliebris patientia*. La pubertà della donna veniva infatti indicata con il termine *viripotens*, che indica 'colei quae virum pati potest', come spiega il giurista Antistio Labeone (*Dig.* 36,2,30).

Annales XI, 37

1 *Interim Messalina Lucullianis in hortis prolatare vitam, componere preces, non nulla spe et aliquando ira: tantum inter extrema superbiae gerebat. Ac ni caedem eius Narcissus properavisset, verterat perniciem in accusatorem.* **2** *Nam Claudius domum regressus et tempestivis epulis delentus, ubi vino incaluit, iri iubet nuntiarique miserae (hoc enim verbo usum ferunt) dicendam ad causam postera die adesset.* **3** *Quod ubi auditum et languescere ira, redire amor ac, si cunctarentur, propinqua nox et uxorii cubiculi memoria timebantur, prorumpit Narcissus denuntiatque centurionibus et tribuno, qui aderat, exequi caedem: ita imperatorem iubere.* **4** *Custos et exactor e libertis Evodus datur; isque raptim in hortos praegressus repperit fusam humi, adsidebat matre Lepida, quae florenti filiae haud concors supremis eius necessitatibus ad miserationem evicta erat suadebatque ne percussorem opperiretur: transisse vitam neque aliud quam morti decus quaerendum.* **5** *Sed animo per libidines corrupto nihil honestum inerat; lacrimaeque et questus inriti ducebantur, cum impetu venientium pulsae fores adstititque tribunus per silentium, at libertus increpans multis et servilibus probris.*

1 Nel frattempo Messalina, nei giardini di Lucullo, cercava di prolungare la sua vita, dettava suppliche, con qualche speranza e talvolta con rabbia; tanta arroganza manifestava pur nel momento supremo. E se Narcisso non avesse affrettato la sua uccisione, la rovina si sarebbe volta contro l'accusatore. **2** Infatti Claudio, ritornato a palazzo e rabbonito da un banchetto prolungato, quando si riscaldò per il vino, dà ordine di andare e di riferire alla sventurata (dicono infatti che usò questo termine) di presentarsi il giorno dopo per discolparsi. **3** Ma quando fu udito questo, e la collera andava sbollendo, ritornava l'amore e, se esitavano, si temeva la notte imminente e il ricordo del letto della moglie, Narcisso rompe gli indugi e ordina ai centurioni e al tribuno, che era presente, di procedere all'uccisione: così ordinava l'imperatore. **4** Come custode ed esecutore viene assegnato uno dei liberti, Evodo; ed egli, recatosi in fretta nei giardini, la trovò sdraiata a terra, mentre le sedeva accanto la madre Lepida, che, in disaccordo con la figlia quand'era all'apice della fortuna, si era lasciata indurre a compassione nel suo momento supremo e cercava di convincerla a non aspettare il carnefice; la vita era finita e non bisognava cercare altra dignità se non nella morte. **5** Ma in un animo corrotto dalle disso-lutezze non c'era nulla di decoroso; si prolungavano lacrime e inutili lamenti, quando le porte vennero spalancate dalla spinta di chi arrivava e il tribuno rimase fermo in silenzio, mentre invece il liberto la insultava con molte e triviali ingiurie.

1. Interim: mentre si eseguivano, con procedura sommaria, le condanne a morte dell'amante e dei suoi sostenitori, descritte nei capp. 35-36 - **Lucullianis in hortis:** l'espressione è il *Leitmotiv* del libro XI. Per Messalina tutto finisce proprio là dove l'anno prima, per sua istigazione, si era conclusa la vita del loro proprietario, Valerio Asiatico (cfr. *supra* capp. 1-3 e note relative). Aggiunge Furneaux: 'she had gone back there after her interview with Claudius (c. 34,3)' - **prolatare:** come il seg. *componere* è un infinito storico-narrativo; la loro presenza, accanto alla *variatio*, rende bene la palpitazione e gli opposti sentimenti che si agitano nei vari protagonisti in quei momenti decisivi - **componere preces:** 'draws up a petition (= *litteras supplices*). Similar concise expressions are *componere res* (*Ann.* 1,1,5), *res gestas* (*Ann.* 4,34,3)' (Furneaux). La stesura di suppliche, per un carattere come il suo, non doveva essere certo congeniale a Messalina, e questo spiegherebbe l'alternarsi di due sentimenti opposti quali la speranza e la collera - **nonnulla... ira:** ablativi di modo; si noti la *variatio* data da *aliquando* - **tantum:** regge il gen. partitivo *superbiae*. La lettura è controversa e il Furneaux spiega così: 'most recent edd. rightly follow Bezenb. in thus correcting the Med. *tantum... superbia egebat*; such wrong division of words and loss of a syllable being common errors in this and other MSS. The older edd. read *tanta... superbia agebat* (after G)' - **properavisset... verterat:** esempio di periodo ipotetico 'misto'. L'irrealtà anticipa il successo delle contromisure poste in essere da Narcisso. Si osservi l'uso transitivo di *properavisset* e quello intransitivo di *verterat* (cfr. *supra* 31,6) - **perniciem:** la morte aleggia, violenta, su entrambi i protagonisti come sottolineano i due sostantivi *caedes* e *perniciem*.

2. domum: l'imperatore era stato quindi riportato al Palatino dopo la breve allocuzione alla sua guardia, schierata nei *castra praetoria* (cfr. *supra* 35,3) - **tempestivis epulis:** ablativo strumentale. L'attributo allude sia all'ora anticipata della cena che al suo prolungamento per l'abbondanza delle libagioni. Commenta, al solito, il Furneaux: 'early', 'before the proper hour': so in *Hist.* 2,68,2, and in several passages of Cic. and other authors. In early times to dine *de die* (before sunset) had been a mark of luxury (see Catull. 47,5; Hor. *Carm.* 1,1,20); but at this time the *hora nona* had become the customary time (Mart. 4,8,6)' - **vino incaluit:** ci informa Svetonio (*Claud.* 33) che l'imperatore fu sempre *cibi vinique quocumque tempore et loco appetentissimus... nec umquam triclinio discessit nisi distentus ac*

madens - **nuntiari**: il verbo è così spiegato da Furneaux: ‘that she should be ordered by message’ - **miseræ**: ‘Tacito, quando è necessario riporta alcuni detti testualmente: qui è chiaro che il valore delle parole di Claudio è tutto nel termine (*miseræ*) che egli usa per riferirsi alla consorte’ (Questa). Si ricordi il manzoniano ‘la sventurata rispose’... - **dicendam ad causam**: proposizione finale; si noti l’anastrofe della preposizione - **postera die**: ablativo di tempo determinato; il femminile serve a indicare una data precisa, perentoria.

3. Quod: ‘nesso’ del relativo, riassume le precedenti disposizioni - **ubi... timebantur**: ‘the construction of the temporal clauses is varied from perfect to historical infin. and again to imperf.’ (Furneaux); ‘dopo *auditum (est)* la proposizione temporale procede con due infiniti narrativi (assai rari in questo tipo di frase) e un imperfetto’ (Questa) - **si cunctarentur**: Narcisso e gli altri liberti (cfr. *supra* 36,3) - **uxorii... memoria**: cfr. *supra* 34,1 *memoriam coniugii*. Sapendo che l’imperatore era *libidinis in feminas profusissimae* (Suet. *Claud.* 33), Narcisso e i suoi traggono subito le loro conclusioni e adottano i provvedimenti del caso perché altrimenti, sempre manzonianamente, ‘ne va... ne va la vita!’ - **prorumpit**: ‘alla sensuale neghittosità di Claudio, si contrappone l’energia scattante, ancora una volta, di Narcisso, che si avvale sempre dello *ius militum* conferitogli per quel giorno’ (Questa). Per il liberto si tratta veramente del suo *longest day* - **denuntiat**: ‘commands’: so used with infin. only here and in Apuleius; but a similar inf. is used with *nuntio*, in this sense, in *Ann.* 16,11,1. The officers would be those of the cohort on duty at the Palatium’ (Furneaux) - **tribuno**: sarà poi l’esecutore materiale della condanna - **ita... iubere**: ‘il caso è talmente grave che Narcisso deve usare, mentendo, del nome di Claudio, chiamato qui opportunamente *imperator*, cioè rappresentato quale detentore della suprema autorità militare’ (Questa). Alla concisione tacitiana bastano pochi tratti per delineare l’esito incerto della partita che si sta giocando: l’attrazione fisica per quella donna diabolica, ancora forte nell’animo di Claudio (che sembrerebbe incline ad accettare le suppliche della ‘misera’) e la lucida determinazione (condensata nella finale espropriazione della decisione imperiale: *ita imperatorem iubere*) dell’altrettanto diabolico Narcisso, rapido nel far precipitare gli eventi.

4. custos... exactor: ‘Narcisso, liberto, si fida soprattutto dei suoi simili, non di soldati che per senso d’onore militare e rispetto delle gerarchie avrebbero anche potuto esitare di fronte a un ordine così grave e non venuto dalle labbra stesse del principe’ (Questa); ‘sc. *supplicii*. He was to prevent her escape and see the sentence executed’ (Furneaux) - **e libertis**: sc. *Caesaris*. Un liberto della *domus* imperiale - **Euodus**: ‘Euodus is thought to be the same as the freedman of Tiberius of that name mentioned by Josephus (*Ant.* 18,6,8). The form of the name in inscriptions is *Euhodus*’ (Furneaux). Di probabile origine greca o orientale, è una sorta di *nomen-omen*, quasi dovesse indicare a Messalina l’unica ‘buona via’ rimastale... - **raptim**: così da prevenire il drappello di soldati al seguito del tribuno incaricato della sentenza - **praegressus**: in altre edizioni ricorre *progressus*. ‘The whole passage would show that he obtained admittance privately, and took note of the state of affairs (which is described by the imperfects), but did not come forward openly till the whole body burst in. Prof. Holbrooke takes the word to mean only that he marched in front, and that they all entered together’ (Furneaux) - **fusam**: ‘Messalina è evidentemente allo stremo delle forze fisiche e psichiche’ (Questa) - **humi**: locativo - **adsidente... Lepida**: ablativo assoluto, con valore temporale. ‘Domizia Lepida non era quella che si dice una dama di specchiati costumi (in *Ann.* 12,64,5 Tacito dice che essa e Agrippina minore *impudica infamis violenta haud minus vitiis aemulabantur quam si qua ex fortuna prospera acceperant*), ma il suo apparire accanto alla figlia giunta all’ora estrema è un quadro di solennità tutta romana’ (Questa). Era figlia di Antonia maggiore e di Lucio Domizio Enobarbo; suo fratello era Cneo Domizio Enobarbo, marito di Agrippina minore e padre di Nerone, così che quest’ultimo e Messalina erano primi cugini - **haud concors**: esempio di litote; il secondo marito di Domizia Lepida, Appio Silano, era stato messo a morte per volontà di Messalina (cfr. *supra* 29,1 e inoltre Cass. Dio 60,14,3 e Suet. *Claud.* 37), proprio con la complicità di Narcisso, in sintonia allora con l’imperatrice - **supremis... necessitatibus**: ablativo di causa efficiente in presenza di un passivo (*evicta erat*), ma potrebbe configurarsi anche come ablativo di tempo determinato, senza sostanziale differenza - **percussorem**: l’*exactor* di cui sopra - **transisse... quaerendum**: sott. *esse*; infiniti dell’*oratio obliqua*. Si osservi il carattere cogente delle parole della madre alla figlia in quell’uso delle perifrastica passiva. Ma l’imperatrice dall’*animo per libidines corrupto* non può, petrarchescamente, concepire che ‘un bel morir tutta la vita onora’ (*Canz.* 207,65). - **aliud... decus**: nel raccontare il suicidio di Tullio Marcellino dirà Seneca (*Ep.* 77,6) *non est res magna vivere: magnum est honeste mori, prudenter, fortiter*. Saggezza di filosofo maturo, impensabile in una donna come Messalina, poco più che ventenne, e adusa a ben altre riflessioni ed attese dalla vita.

5. animo: ablativo retto da *inerat*, variante questa di *sum* e il dativo di possesso - **per libidines**: si osservi con l’uso dell’accusativo con *per* lasci intendere una sorta di squallido percorso attraverso un progressivo degrado, che non ha conosciuto limiti di sorta - **lacrimaeque et questus**: il polisindeto accentua questo *unicum* visivo ed auditivo, dove ormai la *spes* e l’*ira* (cfr. *supra* § 1) sono scomparsi, ma *irriti* ne vanifica immediatamente il prolungarsi - **ducebantur**: ‘were being prolonged’, used strictly with *questus* (cp. *ducere... voces* Verg. *Aen.* 4,463) and by zeugma with *lacrimae*’ (Furneaux) - **cum**: temporale, con il valore di *cum inversum*. Singhiozzi e lamenti sono bruscamente sovrastati dal frastuono di porte e battenti spalancati a forza e poi, nel silenzio improvviso, la figura cupa del tribuno, nunzio e artefice di morte - **at... probris**: ‘al silenzio del soldato, maestoso e tragico, Tacito contrappone con brusco effetto la sguaiata volgarità del liberto, che non si trattiene dallo scagliare contro Messalina, anche in quel momento ‘molte ingiurie e da quello schiavo che era’ (così il senso di *servilibus*)’ (Questa).

Annales XI, 38

1 *Tunc primum fortunam suam introspevit ferrumque accepit, quod frustra iugulo aut pectori per trepidationem admovens ictu tribuni transigitur. 2* *Corpus matri concessum. Nuntiatumque Claudio epulanti perisse Messalinam, non distincto sua an aliena manu. Nec ille quaesivit, poposcitque poculum et solita convivio celebravit. 3* *Ne secutis quidem diebus odii gaudii, irae tristitiae, ullius denique humani adfectus signa dedit, non cum laetantis accusatores aspiceret, non cum filios maerentis. 4* *Iuvitque oblivionem eius senatus censendo nomen et effigies privatis ac publicis locis demovendas. 5* *Decreta Narcisso quaestoria insignia, levissimum fastidii eius, cum super Pallantem et Callistum ageret, † honesta quidem, sed ex quis deterrima orerentur, [tristitiis multis].*

1 Compresse allora per la prima volta il suo destino e prese un'arma, ma, mentre se l'accostava inutilmente, per paura, alla gola o al petto viene trafitta da un colpo del tribuno. **2** Il corpo fu concesso alla madre. E fu comunicato a Claudio, che era a banchetto, che Messalina era morta, senza precisare se per mano propria o altrui. Ed egli non lo domandò, chiese una coppa ed attese alle cose consuete in un banchetto. **3** E neppure nei giorni che seguirono diede segno di odio o di gioia, di collera o di tristezza, insomma di un qualche sentimento umano, non quando vedeva gli accusatori che si rallegravano, non con i figli che ne erano addolorati. **4** E il senato ne aiutò la dimenticanza decretando che il nome e le immagini venissero rimosse dagli edifici pubblici e privati. **5** Furono conferite a Narcisso le insegne di questore, cosa assolutamente insignificante per la sua arroganza, poiché si sentiva al di sopra di Pallante e Callisto, ... † fatti certamente onorevoli, ma da cui sarebbero nate cose decisamente tremende... [con molti mali ???].

1. Tunc: d fronte al silenzio del tribuno e alla serqua di ingiurie del liberto, Messalina prende infine piena coscienza della sua condizione, con la precisazione, non certo casuale, data dall'avverbio (*primum*) - **fortunam suam:** quanto mai evidente come qui il valore di *vox media* del termine - **introspevit:** finalmente uno sprazzo di lucidità razionale, dopo lo sconcolato alternarsi di speranza e rabbia (cfr. *supra* 37,1) e l'abbandonarsi sterile a lacrime e lamenti (37,5) - **ferrum:** metonimia; il metallo della lama per l'arma, con ogni probabilità un pugnale, datole forse dalla madre - **quod:** 'nesso' del relativo, con valore avversativo - **accepit:** 'took into her hand' (Furneaux) - **frustra:** esitazione e conseguente inutilità del gesto - **iugulo... pectori:** dativi di moto. Carotide o cuore, per morire rapidamente. Così alla fine dovrà darsi la morte Nerone (cfr. Suet. *Nero* 49: *ferrum iugulo adegit*) - **per trepidationem:** chiarisce il prec. *frustra* - **ictu... transigitur:** esecuzione rapida, nel silenzio irreali del carnefice, che non ha proferito verbo.

2. Corpus... concessum: 'tre parole che sono un epitafio' (Questa); sott. *est*, come dopo il seg. *nuntiatum* - **Claudio epulanti:** il convito è continuato, ma a scusante di Claudio resta il fatto che aveva disposto la convocazione della moglie per il giorno dopo, senza prevedere la contromossa di Narcisso. Inspiegabile rimane invece il suo comportamento successivo alla notizia della morte - **non distincto:** esempio di ablativo assoluto costituito dal solo participio; regge l'interrogativa disgiuntiva seg. (*sua... manu*, sott. *perisset*, ricavabile dal prec.) - **quaesivit:** sott. *quomodo perisset*; si osservi il polisindeto *nec... -que... et* a rimarcare un'indifferenza che suscita sconcerto, e sembra dare conferma alle parole di sua madre Antonia che, quando voleva tacciare qualcuno di stupidità, *stultiorem aiebat filio suo Claudio* (Suet. *Claud.* 3) - **poculum:** sull'intemperanza conviviale di Claudio cfr. *supra* 37,2 - **solita... celebravit:** 'i.e. did what one normally does at a banquet (*solita* is neuter accusative plural and means 'things customary' (Garrett).

3. Ne... quidem: sottolinea il perdurare di una ἀπάθεια che finisce con lo sconcertare un po' tutti; sarebbe interessante sapere di un qualche intervento in merito di Gaio Stertino Senofonte, medico personale dell'imperatore Claudio, ma che poi, inserendosi nelle trame di palazzo che avrebbero determinato l'ascesa al potere del giovane Nerone, avrebbe somministrato a Claudio un potente veleno facendolo passare per un farmaco emetico - **secutis... diebus:** ablativo di tempo determinato. Compiuto il delitto, nessuna traccia di esso sembra sfiorare il *princeps* che, dopo aver accolto la notizia dell'uccisione della moglie, continua, almeno in apparenza, a mostrarsi del tutto indifferente a qualsiasi sentimento di rimorso o di rimpianto - **odii... tristitiae:** si osservi l'efficacia dell'asindeto, a scolpire un'insensibilità sfingea nel comportamento dell'imperatore, la cui totale assenza di reazione disorienta chi, nell'avvicinarlo, appare in preda a sentimenti controversi - **non cum:** ripetuto in anfora - **laetantis... maerentis:** si noti la disposizione chiasmica dei termini - **accusatores:** Narcisso, con Calpurnia e Cleopatra *in primis*, e poi la sequela degli opportunisti *last minute* - **filios:** Ottavia e Britannico, i *communes liberi* (cfr. *supra* 34,4); si osservi l'anomalo uso del maschile a indicare figli di sesso diverso.

4. censendo: gerundio ablativo con valore strumentale - **nomen... demovendas:** viene quindi decisa una *damnatio memoriae* totale, cosa che non sembrava essere stata decretata nei confronti del padre di Gaio Sillio (cfr. *supra* 35,2).

annota al riguardo il Furneaux: 'for an instance of the erasure of Messalina's name see *C.I.L.* VI, I,918; for inscriptions in which it is retained see *C.I.L.* 6. 5537'.

5. Decreta: sott. *sunt* - **quaestoria insignia:** la *quaestura* costituiva il primo grado del *cursus honorum*. Tra i tratti distintivi lo scettro d'avorio e il diritto alla *sella curulis*. Ricorda il Furneaux che 'the extension of such senatorial distinctions even to freedmen (cp. *Ann.* 12,53,2 [con le insegne pretorie conferite a Pallante, *N.d.T.*]), who not only were not senators, but (until the time of Caracalla) were incapable of becoming such, appears to originate with Claudius. That the freedmen of Claudius were allowed to be present with him in the senate is seen from Dio 60,16,3.' - **levissimum fastidii eius:** passo di lettura controversa, come del resto tutto il finale del capitolo. Infatti commenta il Furneaux: 'this is the reading of Med., 'this honour was the least ground of his arrogance'. Halm follows Ernesti's alteration *fastidio*, 'a most significant reward to his disdain, when he bore himself even above Pallas and Callistus'. Most of the older edd. read *fastigii* (after several inferior MSS.). Cp. the language of Juvenal (14,329: *divitiae Narcissi, Indulsit Caesar cui Claudius omnia, cuius Paruit imperiis, uxorem occidere iussus*. To one who stood so high, an empty honour placing him on a level with the lowest rank of senators would seem very little' - **cum... ageret:** 'perché si sentiva e si comportava come (uomo) al di sopra di Pallante e Callisto' in quanto, evidentemente, rivendicava a sé i meriti di aver sventato la congiura e salvato il trono di Claudio' (Questa) - † **honesta quidem:** il passo è corrotto e la *crux* è stata emendata variamente. Il Furneaux osserva: 'most edd. treat these words as more or less corrupt. It is very probable that Tacitus concluded the Book with some general remark, similar perhaps to that in *Ann.* 1,81,4; but the words here stand in no relation to the immediate context, *honesta* being only capable of a general reference to the deserved punishment of Messalina and her accomplices (and hardly an appropriate term even for this), and *deterriba* to the following marriage destined to rise out of it. Also the harsh abl. abs. (for which some inferior MSS. and old edd. read *flagitiis multis* or *flagitiis inultis*) is a weak conclusion, hardly strengthened, though simplified in point of construction, by reading (with Jacob) *tristitiis simul multis*. The words bracketed, as above, by Halm, are omitted by Nipperdey; and the whole sentence is bracketed by Kitt. and Dr. as the note of a reader, introduced into the text by a copyist. Others treat the words as fragmentary, and either suppose a new sentence to have begun with *tristitiis multis* (as Baiter), or mark a lacuna before and after *honesta quidem* (as Pfitzner)'.

Per mera curiosità si riporta il commento in merito al passo, tratto da un'edizione *in usum Delphini* (C. Cornelii Taciti, *Opera omnia ex edizione Oberliniana cum notis et interpretatione in usum Delphini*, vol. VII, Londini 1821, p. 3985): *una opera dicam me non ossequi sensum horum verborum, quam eaesse mutila et corrupta. Tacitus impositurus huic libro finem, iudicium fert de tota Messalinae tragedia: nemo (inquit) adulterae caedem accuset; quia suo sibi merito poenis fuit adfecta: verum illinc fons tot malorum, quae secuta sunt: nam Messalina viva numquam locus incesto neptis matrimonio, non veneficio Britannici, non tot sceleribus, quibus Nero infestavit orbem terrarum.*

Messalina! Chi era costei?

In addition to preserved legislation, we cull most of our knowledge about imperial Rome from various literary sources. These literary sources are representative of the male elite of Rome, by and for whom they were written. Both legislation and literature can be indicative of social norms for any group of people, however they signify the norms held by the ruling class. From this perspective it is possible to glean societal expectations and desired roles (although these, of course, differ from how roles were performed on a practical level). The moral overtones of imperial literature give an idea of the official elite view of prostitution.

Literature of imperial Rome had a tendency to create a metaphor between a sound empire and the ideal Roman woman; Messalina, the wife of the emperor Claudius, served this purpose well as she violated that ideal and was thus used to exemplify in multiple works political and moral problems in the empire. In the symbolic sense, a prostitute, Messalina or otherwise, is antithetical to this desired empire: she is entirely accessible and subject to indiscriminate penetration.

Tacitus and Juvenal both use fictionalized versions of the story of Messalina in their literature to construct a representation of the moral degradation of the empire. Both authors create their own versions of Messalina: Juvenal depicting her as an empress-turned-prostitute, while Tacitus simply draws a picture of her as a harmful, misguided woman. Juvenal, in his *Satires*, repeatedly takes on the morality of women, and he uses the example of Messalina metonymically, having it stand within his rhetoric for problems in the empire. Of course it is impossible to take his accounts literally and factually, but it is possible to use his writings to determine social issues of public importance during first to second century Rome. From the viewpoint of an elite male he discusses the impulsive and sexually charged nature of women while making an example of Messalina as the epitome of what is harmful for the empire.

Tacitus, on the other hand, depicts Messalina as a conniving, manipulative, bacchantic woman who plots secretly to divorce the somewhat incompetent emperor, Claudius.

Tacitus' description of Messalina's calculating exploits typifies her as counter to the ideals of the empire. Comparing this description of an adulteress to Juvenal's description of Messalina running off to a

brothel brings to the forefront the difficulties encountered when working with ancient sources. Both of these writers had their own agendas, whether political or moral, when creating a literary image of the figure of Messalina. A common theme between the two constructions is the clear implication of the negative effects of Messalina's behavior upon the security and sanctity of the empire. She has voluntarily placed herself in the same position as a slave, yet in doing so she maintains traces of autonomy which the enslaved are denied. I believe that these compound infractions upon social rules are what make Messalina's behavior so unacceptable to Roman mores that she becomes a literary symbol for many things rejected by the ruling class.[...] The case of the literary Messalina is interesting in that she shows her ability to act in her own interests by joining a brothel, which contradicts the overarching themes of this paper. As an example of a woman acting independent of an authoritative male and defying her socially-defined role, the character of Messalina is ripe with fodder for the moral treatises of elite men. Aside from her choice of a brothel as her forum for prostitution, Messalina is a precise example of a woman prostituting herself in avoidance of living under the authority of a male (husband or otherwise). This subversion puts her in the status of *infamia*, and is therefore immoral.

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Can One Believe the Ancient Sources That Describe Messalina? (Tacitus's account of Messalina)

If readers were to believe everything the ancient sources wrote about the Empress Valeria Messalina, they might conclude that she was a conniving, sex-crazed megalomaniac who worked as a prostitute in her spare time. The historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus, the satirist Decimus Junius Juvenalis (Juvenal), and the biographer Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus were Roman citizens who wrote slightly before and during the middle second century CE and are just some of the ancient authors who describe Messalina in unflattering ways. However, to what degree are these sources accurate representations of Messalina? It may be difficult to gain a coherent sense of Messalina's true character and behavior from the ancient sources, but it is possible to identify who she most likely was not and what she probably did not do. After all, each depiction of Messalina reflects certain personal biases and motives, such as Tacitus's dislike of Messalina's husband or Suetonius's tendency to gossip. In addition, the natures of history, satire, and biography can affect accuracy, as can the sources that each author used. For example, ancient historical writing's primary purpose was to provide lessons in morality, while biography tended to focus on anecdotal evidence, and satirical works employed exaggeration in order to be effective. Therefore, as a result of personal and literary biases, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Juvenal most likely provide exaggerated, fabricated, or intentionally one-sided portrayals of Messalina, which subsequently reduce the accuracy of their depictions.

One of the primary sources that discusses Messalina in the most depth is *The Annals*, by Tacitus. However, Tacitus's account of Messalina is questionable in several ways. First, Tacitus seems to have distinct motives for writing about Messalina that call into question the accuracy of his depiction. As historian Ronald H. Martin notes, Tacitus wrote within a senatorial tradition "that was hostile to Claudius from the outset" because Claudius reduced the power of the Senate.¹ Therefore, Tacitus was biased against Claudius for political reasons and as D. W. T. C. Vessey asserts, through "his account of the reign of Claudius runs the idea that the *princeps* himself was a man unworthy of his office."² Tacitus most likely uses Messalina to accomplish this goal, for he depicts her as constantly making her husband appear dim-witted and hesitant. By negatively characterizing Claudius through Messalina, Tacitus probably appealed to his elite audience, which certainly understood the power struggle between senators and emperors.³ However, by using Messalina in this way, Tacitus most likely exaggerates certain aspects of her character in order to emphasize Claudius's own shortcomings.

Tacitus asserts that Messalina betrayed her husband and indulged her own passions by obsessively lavishing expensive gifts on her lover. Tacitus writes that Messalina gave him so many kinds of wealth and honors that it seemed like "the transference of fortune were already complete," for "the slaves, freedmen, and the trappings of the princeps were to be seen at the adulterer's house."⁴ As a result, Messalina appears

extravagant and obsessive. Tacitus then claims that Claudius “was ignorant of his own marriage” and was oblivious to the entire affair.⁵

It is likely that Tacitus embellishes the extent of Messalina’s gift-giving in order to more forcefully emphasize Claudius’s oblivion and ignorance. After all, this particular situation probably did not happen in the way Tacitus describes it, for it seems unlikely that Claudius would have not noticed his entire fortune being transferred to another man. Therefore, Tacitus wanted to emphasize just how clueless Claudius was, which maintains the senatorial tradition of hostility. As a result, it is probable that he exaggerates Messalina’s licentiousness and her obsessive character in order to achieve this goal, which makes his description of her less reliable.

However, Tacitus’s personal bias is not the only factor that affects his account, for the nature of the historical genre does as well. As J. S. Reid points out, one of the primary functions of history during antiquity was to “aid in the formation of individual moral character.”⁶ In fact, according to Reid, this function “underlies all the historical writing of Tacitus.”⁷ In order to provide a moral commentary, Tacitus attributes the potentially inaccurate motive of uncontrollable lust to Messalina’s adultery. To the ancient Romans, morality was closely related to the *mos maiorum*, the traditional customs and values of the ancestors; one of these customs was to avoid overindulging in lust and bodily excesses.⁸ Because of its political and social implications, Romans thought that uncontrollable lust in general was immoral, but its implications for women were especially troubling. After all, the results of such overindulgence in lust could lead to adultery, the mixing of social classes, and noncompliance with the law, all of which had negative consequences for society.⁹ Tacitus likely applies the characteristic of excessive lust to Messalina in order to explicitly draw the connection between uncontrollable lust and one of its negative consequences, adultery. As a result, Tacitus’s characterization of her may not be entirely accurate.

Tacitus claims that even though she was already married to Claudius, Messalina decided to marry her lover, Silius, because she had “become sated with the simplicity of her adultery” and therefore needed something more to satisfy her uncontrollable lust.¹⁰ As the result of this lust, she committed adultery with Silius, which disrupted the bonds of her family, caused her to disobey her husband, and made it difficult to determine the paternity of any of her future potential children, all of which could contribute to instability in traditional society. It is possible that Messalina married another man while she was still married to Claudius and thus committed adultery.¹¹ However, readers should be cautious to accept that she did so simply as the result of excessive lust. In fact, the historian Barbara Levick argues that in contrast to how Tacitus presents her, Messalina was in fact not “an adolescent nymphomaniac” and instead, used sex as a means of compromising and controlling politicians.¹² Therefore, if Messalina’s marriage actually existed, it may have been for political reasons instead of mere lust. Indeed, Tacitus might inaccurately characterize Messalina as excessively lustful just so that he could provide an example of a problem to which this lust could lead and therefore give a moral lesson to his readers. As such, his portrayal of Messalina may not be completely accurate.

It is also necessary to consider Tacitus’s sources about Messalina in order to evaluate how he depicts her. For example, with respect to Messalina’s marriage to Silius, Tacitus writes, “I am transmitting what was heard and written by my elders.”¹³ Because he does not specifically mention any particular “elders,” it is difficult to determine from where Tacitus received his information, which makes it less credible, as does the fact that he relies on what he “heard,” which was most likely gossip and oral traditions. This does not necessarily mean that the marriage did not take place, but it certainly casts doubt upon how it happened or at least the veracity of the lustful motive that Tacitus uses to explain its occurrence. Also, in Book IV, Tacitus reveals that he had consulted the memoirs of Agrippina the Younger, who “recalled for posterity her own life and the fates of her family.”¹⁴ If Agrippina wrote about Messalina in her memoirs, it probably would have been in a negative light, since Agrippina replaced Messalina as Claudius’s wife, and their sons were in competition to be Claudius’s heir.¹⁵ Therefore, if Tacitus relied on Agrippina’s memoirs as a source of information, it might have colored his own interpretation of Messalina. Thus, Tacitus’s sources contribute to his potential inaccuracy and render his depiction less reliable.

1 Ronald H. Martin, *Tacitus* (London: Batsford Academic and Educational Ltd., 1981), 144. Martin clarifies the reason for such hostility by explaining how the Praetorian Guard secured Claudius’s emperorship at the expense of the Senate. In addition, Mary Boatwright explains how Claudius tended to rely on freedmen instead of the senators or the equites, which further diminished the senators’ power. Mary T. Boatwright, *The Romans: From village to empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 330.

2 D.W.T.C. Vessey, “Thoughts on Tacitus’ Portrayal of Claudius,” *The American Journal of Philology* 92.3 (July 1971), 385.

- 3 Mario Erasmo, *Roman tragedy: theatre to theatricality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 119.
 4 Publius Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals*, 11.12.3.
 5 *Ibid.*, 11.13.1.
 6 J.S. Reid, "Tacitus as a Historian," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 11 (1921), 192.
 7 *Ibid.*
 8 Laura McClure, *Sexuality and gender in the classical world* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 172.
 9 Rebecca Langlands, *Sexual morality in ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006),
 10 Tacitus, *The Annals*, 11.26.1.
 11 Mary T. Boatwright asserts that Messalina conducted a "mock marriage" with Silius instead of a legal one. Boatwright, *The Romans*, 330.
 12 Barbara Levick, *Claudius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 56.
 13 Tacitus, *The Annals*, 11.27.1.
 14 Tacitus, *The Annals*, 4.53.2.
 15 Boatwright, *The Romans*, 330.

(riduz. e adattam. da Hosack, Kristen A. (2011) 'Can One Believe the Ancient Sources That Describe Messalina?,' *Constructing the Past*: Vol. 12, Iss. 1, Article 7. <http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/constructing/vol12/iss1/7>)

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Case Study: Messalina

Unlike Livia, Claudius' wife Messalina did not have a collection of good works and semi-legitimate authority to counterbalance the criticism lodged against her. She was never made *Augusta*, and she received limited imperial privileges.¹⁰⁸ Dio (60.12.5) says that the senate offered to make her *Augusta*, but Claudius refused. Messalina was, however, allowed the occasional privilege of the *carpentum*, and she had a seat of honour at state events (Suet. *Claud.* 17.3; Cass. Dio 60.22.2). There seemed to consistently be a contest over representation of imperial wives. Claudius gained power through the same regime that allowed women access to great power, much as Tiberius did. The senate, wishing to please the emperor, acted in the now-standard fashion: it attempted to aggrandize female imperial family members alongside the male. Claudius (much as Tiberius) faced with the tension resultant of women's new roles (which were created or reinforced by his dynasty), attempted to limit the authority of the imperial women with the hope of diffusing the tensions resultant of their increasing power. Such an attempt was impossible when the emperor continued to grant special privileges while at the same time he curtailed others. The historians, critical of the hypocrisy of the regime, fed on such contradictions and emphasized the excesses of imperial women to expose the hypocrisy of the monarchy. A number of ancient authors describe the downfall of Messalina,¹⁰⁹ and all frame her transgressions on the model established earlier in this chapter. In these accounts, the empress was guilty of asserting herself in the male political sphere and inciting rebellion, motivated by her uncontrollable lusts. Not only was she framed as a whore, but she was also characterized as savage, violent, mad and capricious, the very epitome of imperial excess.¹¹⁰

Tacitus' account of Messalina is the fullest in the ancient sources, and he frames his drama in a particular way, one that will appeal to the elite Roman reader and engage his outrage at the motifs of the excesses of women in power, as well as the arrogance of slaves and freedmen. The details of Messalina's fall and the criticism lodged against her are basically unchanging across the literature, but the sources upon which these accounts were based were never completely accurate in the first place. Unlike events involving private citizens, which can be verified through the *acta senatus*, affairs involving the imperial family were private, and the speeches and details could only be conjectured in the literature.¹¹¹ The similarity of sources, however, suggests that a tradition arose soon after Messalina's demise, and it is from this tradition that our evidence derives. Whether the disparagement in our accounts was a product of reliable sources or hostile slander, the castigation of Messalina reveals contemporary fears of the power of imperial women.

Messalina was accused of exercising improper power - Tacitus calls it *potentia* (*Ann.* 11.26.4). She was responsible for a number of murders, imperial executions and suspicious inquiries, all of which arose out of her alleged petulant capriciousness.¹¹² Tacitus uses *potentia* (part of his subversively negative vocabulary) specifically to highlight the contrast between the empress' power and legitimate authority (*auctoritas, imperium*). In his account, when Messalina is stripped of her influence, she is an utterly miserable character. She is bereft of her companions, forced to walk on foot, then transported in a refuse cart. She is shouted

down by the emperor's slaves and in the end receives no trial or chance to defend herself. Narcissus, Claudius' imperial freedman advisor, sends counterfeit orders to the Praetorian guard, who dispatch Messalina ignobly in the gardens of Lucullus. This pathetic image highlights a critique implicit in Tacitus - illegitimate authority wielded by women is transient and will always crumble in the face of real *auctoritas*.¹¹³

The empress' improper power extended to her influence over doddering, incompetent Claudius. Tacitus was very critical of that emperor and used Messalina and the powerful freedmen to represent Claudius' passivity and lack of agency.¹¹⁴ Dio (60.14.1) says that Claudius was a 'slave to his wife and freedmen'. Since the emperor embodied the state, in essence the state was brought into the domestic sphere. A wife and freedmen, whose locus of authority should be limited to the confines of the *domus*, now controlled the *res publica*. The perception of Messalina's excessive influence angered the male elite for the violation of proper gender roles, but also as it related to the outrages of a monarchy, equated with tyranny. In such circumstances justice could not prevail and the entire populace was enslaved to the arbitrary whims of a family ruling without legitimate authority to do so.¹¹⁵

As the tradition had it, Messalina used her influence over the emperor to bring about the trials of several elite Roman citizens. She encouraged the senator Suillius to accuse Valerius Asiaticus of conspiracy in 47 B.C. The trial took place in the privacy of the imperial household (highlighting yet another abuse of the judicial system by the 'bad emperors') and the accusation was that the senator had been involved in the death of Caligula. Asiaticus defended himself admirably and persuasively, but Messalina exhorted Vitellius, another member of her circle, to press the accusation. Asiaticus was forced to commit suicide. In the same affair, two equestrians and another noblewoman Poppaea Sabina (mother of Nero's infamous wife of the same name) were executed or compelled to suicide.¹¹⁶ The real reason behind the trial, as asserted by Tacitus, was convoluted and evidence of Messalina's mad excess. Asiaticus had allegedly been the lover of Poppaea Sabina, who had offended Messalina by having an affair with *her* lover, the actor Mnester. Messalina was also moved by a desire for Asiaticus' property, the very gardens in which she, ironically, ends her life. The outrageous injustices perpetrated by Messalina (or at least attributed to her) were motivated by her personal lusts and jealousies, to the detriment of many persons of legitimate power in the Roman state. For the Romans, this was the definition of tyranny. Messalina encouraged Claudius to act in a manner typical of tyrants; he failed to give fair trials and he allowed Messalina's *crudelitas* free reign to eliminate her enemies.

It was the sexual intrigue associated with Messalina, however, that incurred the harshest attacks in the literature. The empress was depicted as a nymphomaniac, unable to sate her savage lusts. Her alleged lovers included actors, the prefect of the German bodyguard (Cass. Dio 60.28.2), Claudius' freedman advisor Polybius (Cass. Dio 60.31.2), Traulus Montanus (Tac. *Ann.* 11.36.4), Suillius Caesoninus (Tac. *Ann.* 11.36.5), Gaius Silius (Tac. *Ann.* 11.12.2), and innumerable others she serviced in the brothels (Juv. *Sat.* 6.115-32; Pliny *N.H.* 10.172; Cass. Dio 61.31.1). By the time her lover Silius proposed reckless marriage to her, Messalina had become tired of her degenerate activities and desired yet worse ones - she longed for *infamia* (Tac. *Ann.* 11.26.1-6).¹¹⁷ The presentation of her adulteries highlights areas of Roman elite male anxiety. The adulteries were a violation of the boundaries of the *domus* - not only did Messalina open up her body to penetration, she opened up her home. Family heirlooms were found in Silius' home during the investigation after the couple was found out (Tac. *Ann.* 11.35.2). But while Messalina violated the *domus* with her adultery, she did so with an aim to protect it; she sought to advance her children over her husband. There was speculation that her union with Silius was intended to insure that her son Britannicus would eventually ascend to the throne,¹¹⁸ which she (correctly) feared would not happen should Claudius desire another wife. As with Livia, Messalina's intentions for her children came at the expense of her husband who had given her the power to act in the first place.

He gave over his public power, the *res publica*, to the feminine *domus*, into Messalina's hands.¹¹⁹ Given the loyalties of women, this could only translate into disaster and injustice for the people, as the *paterfamilias* was also the *pater patriae*; conflicts and private affairs could and *did* spill over into the public sphere.

Messalina was attributed with none of the redeeming characteristics of Livia, and her character was fully exploited in the elite male criticism against her. She transgressed male spheres, used her influence to secure the deaths of many elite Roman citizens and instill terror in others through the revived practice of delation, and engaged in sexual intrigue. Her characterization employed the various tropes and motifs for disparagement to highlight the excesses and abuses of the Julio-Claudian regime, while also reinforcing the tyranny inherent in a monarchy, the abuses suffered by the citizenry when the public realm was subordinated to the whims of the household.

¹⁰⁸ Flary, "The Meaning of *Augusta*," 125.

¹⁰⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 11.12,26-38; Cass. Dio 60 (61).31.1-5; Suet. *Claud.* 26.2,29.3,36,39.1; Juv. *Sat.* 6.115-32,10.329-45; Aur. *Vict. Caes.* 4.12-13; Jos. *A.I.* 20,149; Sen. *Octavia* 257-69, *Apocol.* 11,13.

¹¹⁰ Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire", 249, note 2.

¹¹¹ Fagan, "Messalina's Folly," 568-70.

¹¹² Tac. *Ann.* 11.28.3.

¹¹³ Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire," 233. Though here too the moral is problematized, as Messalina's authority was stripped of her by imperial freedmen exercising counterfeit authority themselves.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 226-27.

¹¹⁵ Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant," 168.

¹¹⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 11.1-4.

¹¹⁷ Par a detailed reading of this passage, see Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire," 230-31.

¹¹⁸ See Pagan, "Messalina's Polly," 573, note 32.

¹¹⁹ Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire," 231-32. He did this out of love for her, but this love was presented by the historians as yet more evidence for Claudius' submissiveness to his wife's whims - he was emasculated by virtue of his very love for her.

(riduz. e adattam. da Witzke, Serena, 'Censure of Powerful Women: Roman Monarchy and Gender Anxiety' (2007). <http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/opensdissertations/5388>)

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Mesalina y la sexualidad

Teniendo presente este escenario político, la actitud y el comportamiento de esta emperatriz no difería en mucho de los comportamientos de otras princesas imperiales, como las dos Agripinas o incluso las dos Julia. Sin embargo, los autores antiguos citados, que se basarían en la misma fuente, califican a Mesalina con los adjetivos más duros y descalificadores, considerándola campeona del horror y dispuesta a transgredir lo más sagrado, además de procurar la muerte de lo/as que podían ser o eran realmente sus rivales de cara a la sucesión dinástica. La descripción de los hechos se construye en torno al sexo, la violencia y la crueldad. Los tres vicios "tiránicos" más importantes que le adjudican son la *libido*, la *avaritia* y la *saevitia*, pero los dos últimos, de tono más político, apoyan a la infamia máxima centrada en la *libido*.

Con todo, la descripción más extrema y siniestra es la de Juvenal que la convierte en "*meretrix Augusta*" (*Sat.* 6.115-132, esp.118), en un intento de confrontar lo más excelso de una mujer, que es ser *Augusta*, aunque en realidad no lo fuera, con lo más tético y sórdido en lo que puede convertirse: *prostituta*. La Mesalina de Juvenal prefería el lupanar al *pulvinar*, en un estado de excitación continua (*rigida volva*) que rozaba lo patológico e identificado por los médicos romanos y calificado como un mal o enfermedad repugnante²⁴. La escena de Juvenal la describe en el trabajo diario de una prostituta, con su nombre profesional de Lycisca, y que recibe en su cubículo a los amantes. Pero el cuerpo que se expone a los ojos de los hombres es el que dio a luz al *princeps* romano de noble nacimiento, Británico²⁵, en un claro intento de relacionar la maternidad real de Mesalina y su representación como prostituta.

También Plinio el Viejo (29.20) la califica de *regina* y *regalis* en una descripción en la que resalta su libido excesiva y su comportamiento como prostituta, y sabemos que estos términos pertenecen al lenguaje técnico que usaban los griegos para definir un régimen tiránico, cuyo ejecutor era calificado de *rex* y su régimen de *regnum*²⁶, expresando en el mismo término los desarreglos sexuales de la misma como elementos básicos de la *libido*, uno de los vicios propios de la tiranía del que ella quedaba contaminada. Incluso los científicos de finales del siglo XIX llegaron a considerarla como un tipo de mujer criminal, y ha pasado junto a otras mujeres a formar parte del imaginario de diversas sociedades, en las que tales personajes femeninos fueron materia literaria, artística, musical, teatral o cinematográfica²⁷.

Pero hay que aclarar que la sexualidad libre y ostentosa de Mesalina no era algo extraño a la cultura romana. Ovidio en su *Ars Amandi* exalta el amor libre, el placet sexual por sí mismo y sin fines procreativos. Sabemos que lo dedicó a las mujeres y que fue el pretexto para su exilio en Tomi en el 8 d.C. Por otra parte, las mujeres que aparecen en *El Satiricón* de Petronio también son disolutas y la *luxuria* es el vicio que las caracteriza²⁸. Posiblemente las libertinas princesas julio-claudias habrían tomado buena nota de la lectura de

estos poemas ovidianos, pero todas se encontraron de frente con la legislación augústea sobre la familia y el adulterio, que fijaba un modelo de mujer basado en Cornelia, y sufrieron los castigos correspondientes. Al mismo tiempo

y en contraposición con esta corriente de permisividad sexual, se iba extendiendo por todo el imperio el pensamiento estoico, convertido en ideología oficial, que invitaba a hombres y mujeres a llevar una vida basada en la moderación y la continencia.

Estos eran los valores en alza. Plutarco por su parte escribió los *Precepta coniugalis* a fines del s. I d.C., verdadero manual de buen comportamiento, dirigido a las mujeres de cara al matrimonio²⁹. En ellos se aprecia un interés del autor para que el marido eduque a la mujer y la considere como igual, pero sólo teóricamente pues en la práctica para los asuntos políticos y económicos debe estar sometida al marido y ser sumisa a él. A pesar de una mayor consideración hacia las mujeres se mantiene la relación de dependencia entre la *uxor* y el *maritus*. En el caso de las princesas julio-claudias esta relación desigual pero en equilibrio se rompió y realmente era muy difícil que Mesalina saliera indemne teniendo como fondo ese contexto cultural. Por otra parte, para comprender en toda su dimensión la imagen que las fuentes nos han legado de la figura de Mesalina, hay que resaltar que estos autores antiguos escribieron unas décadas después de los acontecimientos y posiblemente el retrato que hicieron de ella era una reconstrucción por medio de la que los romanos contemporáneos experimentaron su propio presente. Era un uso del pasado para justificar el presente, utilizando un discurso de imperio³⁰, que desde una perspectiva de la razón patriarcal se convertía en un arma atroz contra las mujeres, pero al mismo tiempo a los historiadores les servía para instalarse en un discurso teórico entre pasado/presente, y entre mal gobierno y buen gobierno. En esta dinámica de confrontación y comparación entre uno y otro se insertaba de manera significativa el modelo de princesa virtuosa e infame que transcurría en paralelo al del *bonus* y *pessimus princeps*³¹, teniendo sus puntos iniciales de referencias en la dinastía julio-claudia en torno al problema sucesorio ante la inexistencia de una normativa que regulase el acceso al poder monárquico.

Hemos analizado anteriormente que Mesalina utilizó su situación privilegiada en la casa real como heredera de la *gens* divina de Augusto y como esposa de emperador y madre de un heredero, para detentar un papel político activo en la completa situación sucesoria de Claudio. Es verdad, por lo que nos dicen las fuentes y en ello todas coinciden, que esta emperatriz con el apoyo de algunos *amici* y, sobretudo en una primera etapa, de algún liberto imperial, especialmente Narciso, logró anular, procesar y mandar a ejecutar a aquellos *nobiles* políticos, que ocupando magistraturas importantes y próximos por sus esposas o por ellos mismos a la *domus*, eran potenciales o reales rivales políticos no sólo para sus intereses y los de su hijo Británico, sino también en esos momentos para el propio emperador Claudio. Sin embargo, estos comportamientos aun con sus excesos fueron moneda común en toda la dinastía por parte de otras princesas, baste recordar a las dos Julias, las dos Agripina e incluso a Livia, en su expresión de modelo triunfante de emperatriz pero muy activa e intrigante. ¿Qué novedad se produce en la forma de actuar de Mesalina, según los autores antiguos? Evidentemente lo que incluso la aleja del modelo de princesas infames para incorporarse a una situación peor, es su sexualidad libre, su ninfomanía, según expresión poco afortunada de B. Levick³².

Su sexualidad libre, calificada como producto de una libido incontinente, de un mal que la enloquece, no sólo la induce a mantener continuos adulterios con hombres diversos e incluso a frecuentar los prostíbulos y a preferirlos a la cámara palaciega. En todas las descripciones de las fuentes hay algo más que trasciende a este comportamiento. La manera como es representada en su personaje de *meretrix* es comparable al de una “bárbara” por su atuendo y sus afeites. Es pues “el otro”, el enemigo externo, que hay que batir. Pero además la situación llega al límite cuando acepta el matrimonio y la adopción de Británico que le propone su amante Gayo Silio, de origen noble, joven cónsul electo y muy querido (Tac. *Ann.* 11.12.2: *iuventutis Romanae pulcherrimum*), pero opositor de Claudio.

Podemos interpretar que la propuesta matrimonial es aceptada por Mesalina ante su propio temor de que Silio pueda abandonarla y lleve a cabo sus proyectos sin contar con ella. El matrimonio, según expresa Tácito (*Ann.* 11.26) en palabras de Silio, podía representar una mayor seguridad para ella y para su hijo: *mansuram eandem Mesalina potentiam, addita securitate, si praevenirent Claudum*. En los mismos términos se pronuncian Suetonio (*Cl.* 26.2) y Dión Casio (61.29.4-6a; 61.31.3-5). Mientras Claudio marcha a Ostia para la realización de unos sacrificios, la pareja de amantes celebra la boda de manera solemne (Tac. *Ann.* 11.26.7: *cuncta nuptiarum sollemnia celebrat*). Las palabras de Tácito no ofrecen dudas sobre el carácter público de la boda, tras fijar un día y citar a todos los testigos, aunque no aclara en absoluto si se había producido anteriormente el divorcio, generando este problema un debate historiográfico contemporáneo de matiz jurídico³³. Ante esta osada acción “la *domus* imperial tiembla”, dice Tácito

(11.28.1: *domus principis inhorruerat*). Los libertos imperiales son los primeros en acusar esta convulsión que podía amenazar su *status* en la *domus*. La situación de desestabilización es aprovechada por Tácito para arremeter contra el gran poder que los libertos tenían en la *domus*, otorgado por Claudio, y la inconveniencia de que tuviesen tantas responsabilidades en la corte imperial, al no ser más que ex-esclavos (11.28-29).

Cuando Claudio se entera de los hechos, sólo se atreve a preguntar ¿soy todavía emperador?, en un gesto que delata su endeble y atemorizada personalidad de *princeps* enfermizo. Las palabras de Tácito siguen siendo elocuentes en un intento de atacar esa plúmbea manifestación del emperador (11.31.3: *satis constat eo pavore offusum Claudium ut identidem interrogaret, an ipse imperii potens, an Silius privatus esset*). Además son los libertos los que toman la iniciativa en todos los acontecimientos y obligan a Claudio a decretar sus muertes (año 48), poniendo de manifiesto la incapacidad del emperador para un pensamiento y una acción independiente³⁴.

Mesalina, al enterarse de lo que ya no era un rumor sino una realidad brutal, va a palacio y en un intento de convencer a su esposo, se dirige con sus hijos a la más antigua de las Vestales, Vibidia, para que personalmente interceda ante el emperador como *pontifex maximus*, y pida clemencia para ella, manifestándose así la relación que siempre había existido entre las emperatrices y las Vestales. De nada sirvió, el poder de los libertos se impuso y Narciso consiguió con palabras falsas tranquilizarla y posponer la cita para más adelante, y a continuación la obligó a retirarse a sus obligaciones religiosas (11.34). Mientras tanto, Mesalina atraviesa a pié la ciudad y en un carro se dirige al puerto de Ostia donde estaba Claudio al que le dice: “Te ruego, te lo ruego, escúchame, y si no quieres escucharme, escucha a la madre de Británico y de Octavia”, en un intento de hacerse valer como madre de herederos. Ante la inseguridad y dudas del emperador por atender las súplicas, Narciso promete que la emperatriz culpable tendrá toda libertad de defensa. Todo era una farsa de este liberto que se apresura a presentar al emperador las pruebas de la traición de Silio (una imagen de su padre que un *senatus consultum* había prohibido erigir por traición, además de muchos objetos de la casa real trasladados allí por orden de Mesalina), y con el apoyo de los pretorianos, que reclamaban el castigo de los culpables, éste fue llevado ante el tribunal al que sólo solicitó una muerte rápida (*Ann.*, 11.35). Mesalina no llegó a ser recibida por el emperador para poder defender su causa, una vez más el poder del liberto Narciso se impuso, según Tácito (*Ann.*, 11.37), evitando la entrevista y mandando a ejecutar la sentencia de forma inmediata. La emperatriz, sin posibilidad de defenderse y pedir clemencia al emperador, refugiada con su madre en los jardines de Lúculo, sabe que nada le queda del poder exhibido anteriormente. En la escena tacitea se visualiza de manera trágica la precariedad de su poder³⁵.

Murió no por sus propias manos, como su madre le increpaba en un intento de conseguir que su hija, ya que había llevado una vida infame, buscara una muerte honrosa, sino que fue el tribuno de guardia el que atravesó su pecho con la espada. Ni siquiera su marido preguntó cómo había muerto, ni siquiera se interesó por ella³⁶, el Senado decretó la *damnatio memoriae* y Narciso fue condecorado con las insignias de cuestor (*Tac. Ann.* 11.38). A pesar de esta *damnatio* se han encontrado monedas y bustos de Mesalina en provincias, como la famosa moneda de Cesarea en la que aparece la imagen de Mesalina en el anverso y en el reverso Antonia, la madre de Claudio, y sus hijos Británico y Claudia, en la línea tradicional de expresar la legitimidad de Claudio a través de la relación de su madre con Augusto (era su sobrina), pero también de la de Mesalina con el mismo y como madre de la nueva era que aseguraba la sucesión hereditaria.

²⁴ D. GOUREVITCH-M. TH., RAEPSAET-CHARLIER, *La donna nella Roma Antica*, Firenze-Milano 2001, p. 9.

²⁵ JUVENAL, *Sat.* 6. 122-124: *tunc nuda papillis/ prostitit auratis titulum mentita Lyciscae/ ostenditque tuum, generose Britannice, ventrem*. También Juvenal, *Sat.* 10.321-323 habla de lo peor que puede tener una mujer, aludiendo a que sus partes íntimas siempre están húmedas (*humidis inguinibus*), de forma que en esta situación nada puede negar a su amante.

²⁶ C. QUESTA, “Mesalina, meretriz augusta”, en *Vicende e figure femminili in Grecia e a Roma*, R. RAFAELLI (ed.), Convegno di Pesaro 28-30 aprile 1994, Ancona 1995, pp. 399-423, esp. 401; GUNHILVIDEN, *Women in Roman Literature: Attitudes of authors of Early Empire*, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Västermik 1993, pp. 32-37; 143 ss.

²⁷ MARIA WYKE, *The Roman Mistress*, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 321-390, hace un interesante análisis sobre la imagen diversa y compleja que esta emperatriz ha tenido en el cine, hasta ser analizada desde una perspectiva de género por el movimiento feminista a partir de los años setenta y ochenta.

²⁸ M. COCCIA, “*Multa in muliebrem levitatem coepit iactare...*”, en AA.VV, *Le figure femminili del Satyricon di Petronio*, 1989, pp. 121-140.

²⁹ M^a José HIDALGO, “Usos sexuales y amorosos de las mujeres en el mundo romano: ¿imagen o realidad?”, en J. ALVAR, C. BLÁNQUEZ, Carlos G. WAGNER (eds.), *Sexo, Muerte y Religión en el mundo clásico*, Ediciones Clásicas, Madrid 1991, pp. 99-111.

³⁰ M^a José HIDALGO, “Princesas imperiales virtuosas e infames en la tradición de la corte romana”, en P. DESIDERI-S. RODÁ-A.M. BIRASCHI, *Costruzione e uso del passato stoico nella cultura antica*, ed. Dell’Orso, Alessandria 2006, (en prensa); Sandra R. JOSHEL, “Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire: Tacitus’s Mesalina”, en Judith P. HALLET-Marily B. SKINNER (eds.), *Roman Sexualities*, Princenton Univ. Press, Princenton-New Jersey 1997, pp. 221-254.

³¹ M^a José HIDALGO, “Princesas virtuosas e infames”, (en prensa).

³² *Claudius*, 2000, pp. 55-5.

³³ B. LEVICK, *Claudius*, p. 67; C. QUESTA, *op.cit.*, p. 406; A. GUARINO, “In difesa di Mesalina”, *Labeo*, XX, 1974, pp. 12-26.

³⁴ R. JOSHEL, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

³⁵ R. JOSHEL, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

³⁶ Aquí se produce una diferencia entre la versión de Tácito (*An.11.38*), a la que aludo en el texto con la de Suetonio (*Cl. 39*), que una vez ejecutada Mesalina, recostado en el triclinio preguntó: “por qué no viene la señora”, poniendo de manifiesto su falta de memoria.

(riduz. e adattam. da M. J. Hidalgo de la Vega, *La imagen de ‘la mala’ emperatriz en el Alto Imperio: Mesalina, meretrix Augusta*, «Gerión» 2007, Vol. Extra, pp. 403-407)

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Flagitium ultimum

En 47 ou 48, une fois de plus, Messaline tombe amoureuse! Mais cette fois, *furori proximo amore* «d’un amour proche de la folie furieuse», écrit Tacite qui poursuit: *nam in C. Silius, iuventutis Romanae pulcherrimum, ita exarserat ut Iuniam Silanam, nobilem feminam, matrimonio eius exturbaret vacuoque adultero poteretur*. Ce Gaius Silius était le fils de C. Silius, consul en 13, adjoint et ami de Germanicus en Germanie. En 24, Séjan décide d’abattre le parti favorable à Agrippine et à ses fils, en particulier Silius et Titius Sabinus; Silius, devant l’extraordinaire mauvaise foi de l’accusation, se suicide; sa femme Sosia Galla est exilée. Le fils aîné (il porte le même prénom que son père) devait être alors âgé d’une dizaine d’années. Il poursuit une carrière sénatoriale sans éclat particulier qui aboutit à sa désignation pour le consulat. Quand est-il devenu l’amant de Messaline? Avant ou après sa désignation pour le consulat? Les *Annales* ne permettent pas d’en décider de façon certaine, Dion Cassius (61,31) affirme que καὶ τέλος ὑπάτων αὐτὸν ἀπέφηνε.

Elle lui offrit, (Id., *ibid.*), une résidence royale (οἰκίαν αὐτῷ βασιλικὴν ἐχαρίσατο). Quelle revanche sur le destin si notre Silius avait quelque envie de venger ses parents: amant de l’impératrice au vu et au su de tous, sa maison devenait le pendant officieux du palais. De là à s’imaginer officiellement empereur, il n’y avait qu’un pas, et au lieu d’échafauder une conspiration, une de plus, avec tous les risques que comporte ce genre d’entreprise, n’était-il pas plus sûr d’accéder au pouvoir suprême en se servant de Messaline?

Au point où Silius en était arrivé, il avait tout à gagner à pousser l’aventure jusqu’au bout: il devait épouser sa maîtresse et obtenir l’abdication ou la destitution de Claude. Il semble que Messaline n’ait pas envisagé les choses sous cet angle et qu’elle se soit laissé dépasser par l’ampleur du scandale. Sans doute était-elle, malgré son incroyable conduite, sincèrement attachée à Claude et Tacite nous montre Silius en train d’essayer de convaincre une Messaline très réticente (*quippe non eo ventum ut senectam principis opperirentur. Insontibus innoxia consilia, flagitiis manifestis subsidium ab audacia petendum. Adesse conscios paria metuentis. Se caelibem, orbem, nuptiis et adoptando Britannico paratum. Mansuram eandem Messalinae potentiam, addita securitate, si praevenirent Claudium, ut insidiis incautum, ita irae properum, Ann.11,26*).

Argumentation intéressante: leur mariage était donc prévu, mais après la mort de Claude. Intéressante aussi la place accordée à Britannicus dans ce discours: le clan des Julii représenté par Agrippine posait le jeune Domitius Ahenobarbus (le futur Néron) en rival du fils de Claude. Je ne sais pas si l’amour maternel occupait une place importante dans les sentiments de Messaline, mais tant que son fils pouvait être considéré comme l’héritier du trône impérial, son influence et sa sécurité étaient assurées.

Le point faible de l’argumentation de Silius, c’est que Messaline précisément se sentait parfaitement en sécurité et pensait, à juste titre, n’avoir pas grand-chose à craindre des colères de son mari: Claude

éprouvait pour elle *amorem flagrantissimum* l'amour le plus ardent, dit Suétone, et la suite des événements montre qu'elle savait comment retourner une situation en sa faveur.

Messaline écoute ce discours avec un certain détachement: *segniter eae voces acceptae*, continue Tacite. Et en effet, qu'avait-elle à gagner dans un complot? elle était déjà la femme de l'empereur, elle se laissait sans doute donner le titre d'*Augusta* sans l'avoir officiellement reçu, elle avait un fils qui devait succéder à son père, elle avait enfin tout pouvoir sur Claude. En aurait-elle autant sur un empereur auquel elle serait liée par un crime précédé de scandales? Ce que Silius lui promettait, elle l'avait déjà. Et vraisemblablement, elle commença par refuser *non amore in maritum*, dit Tacite, mais pour préserver sa position sociale.

Pourquoi dès lors va-t-elle céder ? *Ob magnitudinem infamiae*, dit Tacite, ce qui semble en effet bien possible: Messaline s'amuse à choquer l'aristocratie romaine, elle joue, et la suite des événements le montre. Nous sommes à l'automne 48, et Claude doit se rendre à Ostie pour la fête de Vulcain. Silius et Messaline en profitent pour célébrer leur mariage, tout à fait officiellement, selon les rites, nuit de noces comprise, avec un contrat de mariage où figure le nom de Claude.

On imagine facilement la frénésie qui s'empare de l'entourage de Claude. Un conseil restreint réunit les principaux ministres, en dehors de la présence de l'empereur. Ni Calliste, ni Narcisse, ni Pallas ne peuvent songer un instant à se rallier à Silius et Messaline: ils doivent leur ascension à Claude (au moins les deux derniers) et ils ont tout à perdre si un coup d'état se produit.

Cette fois, ils doivent se désolidariser de Messaline: même s'ils arrivaient à étouffer provisoirement le scandale, il ne peut que resurgir tôt ou tard et les emporter. Le même scénario risque d'ailleurs de se reproduire car les motivations réelles de l'impératrice sont sans doute plus complexes qu'il n'y paraît. son amour pour Silius (Tacite, *Ann.* 11,24) ne suffit pas à expliquer un tel mariage pas plus que *novissima voluptas*.

A moins qu'on ne donne à cette dernière expression un sens plus précis que ne le laisse entendre Tacite et que Dion Cassius (61,31) énonce explicitement: Messaline rêve de devenir polygame (ἐπεθύμησε καὶ ἄνδρας πολλοὺς ἔχειν. Καὶ σύμπασιν ἄν τοῖς χρωμένοις αὐτῇ κατὰ συμβόλαια, elle désirait avoir plusieurs maris, au sens propre du terme, et elle se serait mariée dans les règles légales avec tous ceux à qui elle aurait accordé ses faveurs, si elle n'avait pas été découverte et condamnée à sa première tentative).

Curieusement d'ailleurs, ni Tacite, ni Suétone ne soulignent le fait que, déjà légalement mariée à Claude, Messaline ne pouvait pas contracter de nouveau mariage ! Son affaire avec Silius tenait de la mascarade, à moins qu'elle n'y ait vu une occasion d'introduire la polygamie à Rome. Et peut-être même avec la complicité de Claude qui avait apposé sa signature au bas du contrat de mariage et qui était bien capable d'envisager ce genre de réforme.

Quoi qu'il en soit, les ministres de Claude ne peuvent que s'opposer à un tel projet. Narcisse agit par simple fidélité envers l'empereur; Calliste en bon politique souhaite, pardon pour l'anachronisme, ouvrir grand son parapluie; Pallas travaillait en secret pour Agrippine dont il était l'amant et a compris tout le parti qu'il pouvait tirer d'un pareil scandale.

La décision est prise, il reste à l'appliquer. En premier, il faut informer Claude des événements ou de leur tournure, ce qui ne va pas sans risque quand on connaît la primarité de son caractère et la violence de ses colères, ces colères imprévisibles, brèves, mais d'une extrême violence. Narcisse se charge de l'empereur, ce qui lui permet de garder la situation bien en main, mais avec une certaine prudence. Il réussit à convaincre, non sans peine, Calpurnia et Cleopatra, les deux prostituées qui se tiennent habituellement au service de Claude, de lui annoncer que sa femme vient d'épouser un consul désigné.

Tacite dit que Narcisse ne se rendit pas en personne aux Jardins de Lucullus, mais y envoya un affranchi du nom d'Evodus (Εὐόδος: «qui offre une route facile») pour surveiller et contrôler les prétoriens: ainsi finit Messaline. Ajoutons que le sénat soulagé ou flagorneur décréta la *damnatio memoriae* de l'impératrice déchu: *nomen et effigies privatis ac publicis locis demovendas* (Tacite, *Annales*, 11,38).

(riduz. e adattam da Alain Canu, *Noctes Gallicanae. Abrégé d'histoire romaine. Messaline*, http://www.noctes-gallicanae.fr/Rome/a_messaline.htm#meretrix)

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Damnatio memoriae

Like Livilla, Valeria Messalina, the third wife of Claudius was officially condemned by the Senate for her role in a conspiracy against the reigning emperor.

Well-connected within the Julio-Claudian family, Messalina was a great-granddaughter of Octavia through both her father, Marcus Valerius Messalla Barbatulus and her mother, Domitia Lepida. Messalina married the future emperor Claudius in A.D. 38 or 39, and produced two children, Tiberius Claudius Caesar Britannicus and Claudia Octavia.¹⁰⁶

In A.D. 48 Messalina was involved in an intrigue with the consul designate, Gaius Silius, culminating in the celebration of a marriage ceremony between the two.¹⁰⁷

This “marriage” was likely designed to lend legitimacy to Silius, who hoped to replace Claudius as emperor, and also to restrain the growing power of Claudius’s freedmen and his niece, Agrippina Minor.¹⁰⁸

Informed of the ceremony while in Ostia, Claudius immediately returned to Rome and Silius, Messalina, as well as eight of their associates were executed.¹⁰⁹

Tacitus specifically records that Messalina’s portraits (as Livilla’s had been before her) were included in the senatorial sanctions: *nomen et effigies privatis ac publicis locis demovendas*¹¹⁰

Tacitus’s statement is supported by extant inscriptions in which Messalina’s name is erased including a funerary inscription belonging to one of her freedmen¹¹¹ and from the Forum of Augustus in Rome, as well as honorific inscriptions from Lepcis Magna, Lindos, and Arneae which have been damaged or reused in other contexts.¹¹²

The erased inscription from Lepcis also attests to the removal of Messalina’s portrait from the Claudian group of portraits at the Temple of Roma and Augustus, just as Livilla’s image had been removed and her name erased from the earlier Tiberian dedication.¹¹³

Messalina’s *damnatio* was even extended to coins as attested by issues from Tralles that have her name intentionally chiseled off.¹¹⁴

C.B. Rose has also plausibly suggested that Messalina may have originally appeared in the Ravenna relief (and the statue group it may reflect) and if so, her image would have been removed, replaced, or recut.¹¹⁵

As a direct result of her *damnatio memoriae* and the virulence of the feeling against her, Messalina is the first empress for whom there is extant physical evidence for the deliberate mutilation of her images.

Two portraits of Messalina, in the Galleria Chiaramonti of the Vatican (cat.3.2; fig.99),¹¹⁶ and Dresden (cat. 3.1)¹¹⁷ were vandalized with hammers or chisels. Both portraits represent Messalina with complex divine attributes. The Chiaramonti head combines a crested helmet, reminiscent of that of the Athena Parthenos and decorated with the Augustan symbols of the griffin of Apollo and the winged horse of Mars, with a turreted crown associated with, Cybele, Tyche, and Roma.¹¹⁸

Restorations to the nose and lips of the portrait conceal intentional mutilations and the headdress itself has suffered extensive damage. The corrosion of the portrait’s surfaces indicate that it may have been thrown into a body of water following its defacement. Substantial blows to the Dresden portrait have split the image into four sections. It combines a turreted crown with a laurel or olive wreath. The overt divine iconography of the Chiaramonti and Dresden representations may have provoked the violent depredations which each image has suffered, as tangible signs of the empress’s denigration.¹¹⁹

The removal of Messalina’s images is confirmed by a full-length portrait in the Louvre whose generally excellent state of preservation indicate that it was warehoused following the empress’s downfall.¹²⁰

The statue depicts Messalina cradling a male infant in her left arm. Although the head of the infant is a modern restoration, it originally must have represented Messalina’s son Britannicus. The pose of both mother and child are intended to evoke the Eirene and Plutos of Kephisoditos, while the tunica and palla which the empress wears, and her gesture of raising to right hand to the veil covering her head are clearly intended to evoke her role as traditional Roman matrona. As a powerful piece of Claudian dynastic propaganda, the Louvre portrait would have been entirely unsuitable for display after Messalina’s condemnation.¹²¹

A papyrus in London preserves a letter written by Claudius granting permission for a group of portraits to be erected in Alexandria, including representations of Claudius, Messalina, Antonia Minor, Britannicus, Octavia Claudia, and Claudia Antonia.¹²²

Like the Louvre statue, Messalina's image was undoubtedly removed from the Alexandrian group dedication. Messalina's portrait has also been removed from a full length statue in the Julio-Claudian Basilica at Velleia, and replaced with a likeness of Claudius's fourth wife, Agrippina Minor (cat.3.4; fig. 100a-c).¹²³

After her damnatio, Messalina's head was severed from the statue and the body prepared for the insertion of the new likeness of Agrippina. The pendant statue of Claudius from the Velleian cycle was transformed in an identical manner from a pre-existing likeness of Caligula (cat. 1.27; fig. 34a-b). As with the Caligula/Claudius, the fact that the portrait features were replaced, rather than recut, strongly suggests that they were intentionally mutilated. Messalina's image may also have been removed and replaced with a statue of Bacchus in the Julio-Claudian statuary group from Baiae.¹²⁴

A portrait statue now in Naples of Agrippina Minor, refashioned from a likeness of Messalina, is the first surviving female image to have been physically transformed as the result of a damnation (cat. 4.3; fig. 101a-d).¹²⁵

The statue is carved from a single block of marble and the facial features and coiffure have been substantially altered. As a result, the head is disproportionately small. The statue itself represented the empress as the goddess Ceres, which like the Louvre image, was designed to celebrate her role as producer of heirs guaranteeing the stability of the empire. Not only is the Naples statue the first recarved imperial female portrait, it is apparently the only likeness of a condemned empress reconfigured in the first, second and third centuries. Two sculpted portraits of Lucilla (cat. 6.11 and cat. 6.12) would also be recut, but not until the Constantinian period and a relief portrait of Galeria Valeria (cat.9.8) appears to have been refashioned earlier in the fourth century. The Naples statue's unique status stands in marked contrast to the numerous private female likenesses which were altered or updated during these centuries.¹²⁶

The specificity of imperial female coiffures as badges of identity, as well as their often very elaborate and delicate configurations which precluded extensive sculptural alterations must have contributed to the nearly total absence of recarved representations of fallen empresses. The random holes scattered throughout Agrippina's coiffure which are remnants of Messalina's earlier arrangement attest to the enormous technical problems which faced sculptors who attempted to reconfigure the images of imperial women. Apparently, sculptors determined that such challenges were nearly insurmountable and as a result, replacement, removal, or intentional disfigurement become more standard responses to the sculpted likeness of condemned women.

¹⁰⁶ Suet. *Claud.* 27,1; 39,2; Tac. *Ann.* 11,26, 32, 34, 38; Cass. Dio 40,12,5.

¹⁰⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 11,25-38; Suet. *Claud.* 26,2; Juv. *Sat.* 10,329-45; Dio 60,31,35; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 4,11

¹⁰⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 11,28, 30 suggests that Silius was aiming for the principate, while Dio indicates that Messalina wished to place Silius on the throne, 60(61),31,5. On the plot, see also, M. Griffin (1984) 27-29; B. Levick (1990) 64-7; S. Wood (1992) 233-4; S. Wood (1999) 255.

¹⁰⁹ Suet. *Claud.* 26,2;39,1; Tac. *Ann.* 11,28-38; Dio 60(61),31,5. The others executed were: Titius Proculus, Vettius Valens, Pompeius Urbicus, Saufeius Trogus, Decrius Calpurnianus, Sulpicius Rufus, Iuncus Vergilianus, and the actor Mnester. Mnester was widely reported to have been Messalina's paramour and Dio suggests that Messalina had recalled coins of Caligula converted into bronze images of Mnester 60.22.3. If such images were in fact produced, they would have been subject to sanctions after the actor's execution.

¹¹⁰ *Ann.* 11,38,3. The Senate's specification of public and private locations signals the sweeping nature of the sanctions against Messalina's representations.

¹¹¹ CIL 6,4474.

¹¹² Forum of Augustus Inscription: CIL 6.6918 = ILS 210 (Palazzo dei Conservatori, Museo Nuovo inv. 6944) and H. Flower in E.R. Varner, ed. (2000) 61, fig. 3; for the reused inscriptions see Afrt 8 (1941) 34 (Lepcis Magna); IGR 4.1146 = IG 12.1.806 (Lindos); TAM 2.3.760 (Anreae, Lycia); C.B.Rose (1997) 41, and n. 43; S. Wood (1999), 274-5.

¹¹³ J. Reynolds and J.B. Ward-Perkins (1952) no. 340; C.B.Rose (1997) 184, no. 126

¹¹⁴ RPC 2654; BMC Lydia 345, no. 124. See also, C.B.Rose (1997) 41, and n. 43.

¹¹⁵ Rose (1997) 102.

¹¹⁶ Galleria Chiaramonti 39.9, inv. 1814.

¹¹⁷ Albertinum, Skulpturensammlung, cat. 358.

¹¹⁸ S. Wood (1992) 225, and n. 18.

¹¹⁹ Three portraits, in Dresden (Albertinum, Skulpturensammlung, 352), Munich (Glyptothek, inv. 316), Schloss Fasenerie (cat. no. 23) have been identified as a second type for Messalina, but these likenesses should be assigned to Drusilla. S. Wood (1995) 471-82, figs. 18-19, 24-26

¹²⁰ MA 1224, h. 1.95 m.; K. de Kersauson (1986) 200-1, no. 94, with earlier literature; S. Wood (1992) 219-34, figs. 1-4; D. Boschung (1993b) 71, no. 166; T. Mikocki (1995) 45, 187, no. 245; S. Wood (1999) 276-80, pls. 123-5; E.R. Varner (2001a) 65, fig. 7. Because the portrait has been restored from several large pieces, S. Wood has suggested that the statue may have been deliberately attacked, thus accounting for its fragmentary nature. However, the face has not been mutilated and it is likely that the damage which caused the statue to be broken is incidental, rather than a deliberate act resulting from *damnatio*.

¹²¹ S. Wood has also suggested that the portrait may owe its good state of preservation to protection by a private owner, presumably a partisan of Messalina or her son (1992) 334.

¹²² C.B. Rose (1997) 185-8, no. 128.

¹²³ Parma, Museo Nazionale d'Antichità, inv 146 (1870), inv. 830 (1952)

¹²⁴ S. Wood (1999) 285. Messalina is also absent from the group dedication from Russelae which includes her daughter Claudia Octavia, and presumably her son, Britannicus. If these statues are part of an earlier Claudian phase it is likely that Messalina was also represented and her image removed after her condemnation.

¹²⁵ Museo Nazionale Archeologico. inv. 6242.; P. Liveriani identifies a statue from Caere (Musei Vaticani, Museo Gregoriano Profano, inv. 9952) as a representation Agrippina Minor recycled from Messalina ([1990-91] 66). S. Wood, however, has situated the likeness within Drusilla's typology and suggested that the sculptural modifications resulted from her deification (1995) 471-75.

¹²⁶ On reworked private female portraits, see S. Matheson in E.R. Varner, ed. (2000) 70-81

(riduz. e adattam. da E.R. Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation. Damnatio memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture*, Leiden 2004, pp. 95-97)