



HISTORY VS. HOLLYWOOD

Livia: Wicked empress of Rome?



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Index

Introduction.....	4
Hollywood vs. History	4
Women in film.....	6
Method.....	7
Livia	8
Biography.....	8
Ancient literary sources	10
Ovid.....	11
Tacitus.....	11
Suetonius.....	13
Cassius Dio.....	14
Character Analysis.....	16
Case Study: The Caesars: Augustus (1968)	19
Livia on Screen.....	19
Character analysis.	20
Comparison to the ancient literary sources.	21
Case study: I, Claudius (1976).....	22
Livia on screen.....	23
Character Analysis.....	24
Comparison to the ancient literary sources.	26
Case Study: Rome (2005-2007)	27
Livia on screen.....	28
Character Analysis.....	29
Comparison to the ancient literary sources.	30
Comparison case studies	31
Conclusion	32
Bibliography.....	33

Primary sources.....33

Literature33

Websites34

Appendix I36

Questions for analysis.....36

Introduction

Real history is complicated; plot lines skitter in every direction and seldom terminate in clear points.... Reel history unfolds according to the dramatic conventions with which audiences are familiar. Reel history is comprehensible and accessible. —Mark C. Carnes.

Hollywood vs. History

On 7 December 2016 the Dutch newspaper NRC published an article questioning the truth of 'based on a true story' films.¹ In it they refer to the website Information is Beautiful, which look at films scene-by-scene to test how close the films are to the truth. While some films get close, like *Selma* (2014), *The Imitation Game* (2014) only scored 17.6%.² When we look at these scores, it does not come as a surprise that some historians are indeed critical of the historic film. Historians claim filmmakers take exorbitant liberties with the truth, so that the final product represented nothing of the 'true' history. However, for filmmakers, history sells. This is reflected in the increase of "based on true" story films and series in recent years. Mark C. Carnes, professor of history at Barnard University and with an interest in historic films, claims that people have always been interested in their history and want to form a connection with that history. Film is just one of the preferred ways.³

However, historians are focused on the historiography, and staying as close to the truth as possible. Filmmakers focus on entertainment and making money. This makes it hard to understand the classical film according to Pomeroy.⁴ Yet, some historians seem to have come to terms with these historic films. They have stopped faulting films for being inaccurate with the facts and are looking for ways to use films in educating people about history. While the films can give the bigger audience the wrong historical image, they do make it easier to form a connection.⁵ After all: "*What has made a greater impression on the mass consciousness, myriad scholarly studies of the Normandy invasion or Steven Spielberg's Saving Private Ryan?*" Paul B. Weinstein, professor of history, agrees with the scholars that for some, the historic film is their education in history.⁶

This portal to the past is something Pierre Nora discussed in his work. He emphasized the difference between history and memory in his work. These places he called lieux de mémoire. They contribute to the collective memory culture of societies.⁷ This collective memory culture can be connected to the works of Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson. During the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth

¹ van der Veen, C. (2016).

² Information is Beautiful. Available at: <https://www.informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/based-on-a-true-true-story/> [Accessed 15 Jun. 2019].

³ Carnes (2004) p. 45-49.

⁴ Pomeroy (2017) p. 1-14.

⁵ Pomeroy (2017) p. 1-14.

⁶ Weinstein (2001) pp. 27-48.

⁷ Nora (1989) pp. 7-24.

century the emphasis was on shared history and traditions.⁸ It does not come as a surprise that there was also a growing interest in the Ancient World during this century. They wanted to learn lessons from the Roman Empire itself.⁹

Another author who connects photographs and films to memory culture is Marita Sturken. She showed that historical memory can be made or destroyed by film. They can show a distorted image of the historical reality and this might lead to a 'faulty' collective memory of society.¹⁰ Pomeroy says it is important and complex to understand the classical film because currently scholars and filmmakers do not see eye to eye. While the scholars seek to find the true version of history, films are made to entertain and make money, so their goal is not to reach the same level of authenticity. Pomeroy also claims that interest in the depiction of ancient history in film is relatively recent. Courses about reception studies or film are starting to arise because of the didactic value of films.¹¹

One of the first scholars to point out that historians need to look further than historiography is Hayden White, professor of history specialised in the tradition of literary criticism. He introduced the term 'historiophoty' in 1988. Historiophoty is the opposite of historiography and focuses more on the visual discourse.¹²

Robert A. Rosenstone, historian at the California Institute of Technology, acknowledges the differences between the non-fiction historical works and the Hollywood films, but also sees the films as a gateway for people to form a connection to the past. He finds mere words to be inadequate to form a good image of the past.¹³ Leen Engelen, film-media historian at the LUCA School of Arts, goes even further and says that film can do a lot more than just connect us to the past. Historical film can also impact us in a personal emotional level. Film gives us an idea of what it was like to live through such a period.¹⁴ Marnie Hughes-Warrington, professor of history, also agrees that scholars might judge films too harshly. In academic works, mistakes are made as well. So, a comparison between non-fiction works and film will always lead to discrepancies.¹⁵

As mentioned above, filmmakers are focused mostly on entertainment and to make money, but they must keep their audience in mind. The audience will come to a movie with a certain image in their mind of the historical period the film is set in. Even though this could be influenced by previous historical films. Thus, the filmmaker must try and balance the narrative with enough detail in clothes, set, and other elements. To achieve this, they need historians. These historians need to be willing to give advice

⁸ Anderson, B. (2006) and Hobsbawm (2012).

⁹ Griffiths (2006) p. 9-14.

¹⁰ Sturken (1997) p. 64-79.

¹¹ Pomeroy (2017).

¹² White (1988).

¹³ Rosenstone (2006) p. 1-10.

¹⁴ Engelen (2007) p. 555-563.

¹⁵ Hughes-Warrington (2009) p. 1-12.

to the makers of historical films, without expecting only authenticity.¹⁶ Most historical films, have selected carefully what they want to show of history, unfavourable events, or events that seem too controversial will be left out.¹⁷

Women in film

“Why Hollywood is frozen in the 1950s: White men are still king of the silver screen with lead roles going to just 26% of women and 11% of minorities”¹⁸

As mentioned above, historical filmmakers are known to leave out events or sometimes even people, when they think it will ruin their narrative. Therefore, the Academy Awards in 2016 were boycotted by famous actors, actresses and directors because they claimed that the Oscars were ‘too white’, other complaints have been made as well about the lack of women’s roles, as actresses and directors, in Hollywood. If we look at the above quotes, a parallel can be drawn to ancient times; most of the classical literature was by and for men. While most works only discussed men, some of the Roman authors included female characters. Like the early women’s study courses, they talked about the more famous, or even ‘great’ women, and paid less attention to the ‘common’ women. The life of most of these women were private, if they had a public appearance it was usually at the request of a (male) family member. However, we cannot ignore the famous women as they are shown to be an example of how to be a woman to ‘common’ women.

During the mid to late twentieth century Women’s studies were introduced to universities. Since the many feminist movements in the 1960s and 1970s the number of courses grew. Because of this development there have been more scientific papers and books about women in (ancient) history.¹⁹

If we consider gender in relation to works of fiction and film, Joseph Campbell shows in his Hero’s Journey that there is a big difference between men and women. Films usually follow the pattern of the Hero’s Journey, for men this means that they, as the hero, will go on an adventure and fight for the good cause. However, when the Hero’s Journey is applied to women, the journey takes on a spiral form. Their journey is mostly focused on the family life, having children and making sure they all remain healthy and happy.²⁰ As mentioned before, this can also be seen in the lives of Roman women, their lives were focused on the private and not the public life. However, this only relates to the ‘common’ women. Women in the elite class are expected to commit themselves to the public life and good causes.²¹

One of these controversial women is Livia. In Robert Graves’ novel *I, Claudius*, she is portrayed as a strong and scheming woman. Her history is more elaborate than she comes across in the book and series

¹⁶ Rosen (2009) p. 193.

¹⁷ Pierson (2009) p. 212-214.

¹⁸ Lyons (2019).

¹⁹ Scott (1986) p. 1053-1075.

²⁰ Campbell (1949).

²¹ Pomeroy (1991) p. Xi-xii.

following the novel. By some she is seen as the first lady of the Roman Empire. Augustus, by presenting her as the perfect example of a Roman woman and mother, gave her a status unlike any other woman. A position she held during the reign of her son Tiberius.²²

Method

To look at all the historical films and, if they represent the truth or not, is beyond the scope of this thesis. Because of this, this thesis will look at the Livia. How is Livia portrayed on screen throughout the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century and how, if at all, is this influenced by ancient literary sources? To answer this question this thesis makes use of case studies. First there is a literature review of four ancient literary sources. These texts were written by the following authors: Ovid, Suetonius, Cassius Dio and Tacitus. These authors were already famous in their time for their poems and histories of the Roman world. The criteria for the series are as follows:

- The series must show Livia at some point in her life;
- The series must take place in the (early) Roman Empire.

These criteria have been examined through the Internet Movie Database. Based on the findings, the following series were left: *The Caesars* (1968), *I, Claudius* (1973) and *Rome* (2005-2007). To answer the main question a template used. This template is based on the method of *Essential Cinema: An Introduction to Film Analysis* by Jon Lewis.

The second chapter deals with the ancient authors mentioned above and a character analysis based on these sources. It will answer the question: How is Livia portrayed in ancient literary sources? The third chapter will focus on the first case study: *The Caesars* (1968), a British television series by Granada Television. She played a role in two of the series' episodes. The fourth chapter treats the second case study: *I, Claudius* (1973), the BBC Television adaptation of the novel of the same name by Robert Graves. The final case study will concentrate on *Rome* (2005-2007), a British-American-Italian series which first aired on HBO and the BBC. Finally, the results of the analysis will be compared to answer to the main question.

While the scope of this thesis does not allow to study a larger group of women, both in the ancient literary sources as well as the films and series. In the future it is possible to apply the template found in the Appendix to other famous Roman women in films and series.

²² Barrett (2002) p. ix – xiii.

Livia

Before the case studies it is important to get an image of the historical Livia. Livia was surrounded by controversy. Some of the ancient literary sources describe her as a pious woman and the preeminent example of the Roman *matrona*. On the other hand, Livia is described as an evil woman, not unlike the evil stepmothers we have seen in fairy tales. This chapter will first give a short biography of her life before moving to the ancient literary sources. It will also answer the question: How is Livia portrayed in ancient literary sources?

Biography

Livia was born in 58 B.C. and married her first husband Tiberius Claudius Nero somewhere around 43 B.C. shortly after the assassination of Julius Caesar. The death of Caesar caused a struggle for power in the Roman Republic. Livia's first husband backed one of the two most powerful figures: Marc Antony. During this period Livia was expecting her first child, Tiberius, who was born in 42 B.C. Tiberius Claudius Nero tried to get into a more powerful position, but ultimately failed to do so. His family had to flee from Naples when Octavian's forces breached the city. During his exile they travelled from place to place and only in 40 B.C. were they able to return to Rome after Octavian and Antony reached a treaty.²³

It is unsure when or how Octavian and Livia met, but when Octavian's daughter Julia was born, he immediately divorced his wife Scribonia. Livia was pregnant with her second child, Drusus, during this time. She and Tiberius Nero divorced as well, though some ancient literary sources claim she was forced to do so. When Tiberius Nero died in 33/2 B.C. Octavian was named *tutor* to both children. While Octavian was criticised for his marriage to Livia, Antony being one of the instigators of this criticism, Livia seemed to come out unscathed.²⁴ This might be because, as Seneca put it, Livia was extremely careful about her reputation. While this is a new image for women, as they seem to be responsible for their own reputation, instead of being protected by their male family members, Livia managed to balance this. She was beyond reproach, but not unapproachable.²⁵

In 27 B.C. Octavian was granted the title of Augustus and the Roman republic evolved into the Roman Empire. Issues arose in the succession of Augustus because he and Livia did not have children together. This would later play a role in the rumours about Livia. In 11 B.C. Livia's son Tiberius was forced to divorce his wife in favour of marrying Augustus' daughter Julia. Some of the ancient authors claimed that this was all according to Livia's plan, but there is no evidence to suggest this was the case. Already in 13 B.C. the Senate wanted to consecrate the *Ara Pacis* but waited till Livia's fiftieth birthday to do

²³ Barrett (2002) p. 28-44.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Kunst (2008) p. 152-157.

so. A great, but indirect honour which seems to have kept to Livia's more reserved personality when it came to public appearances.²⁶

After Octavia died in 11 B.C., Livia took on a more public role, but managed to balance this with the expectations the people had of a Roman wife. After the death of Drusus in 9 B.C. this public role was expanded. Even the Senate expressed sympathy for her loss and ordered statues as well as granting her *ius trium liberorum*, normally only granted to women who had given birth to more than three children.²⁷

While deaths of highborn males in the imperial family would usually lead to rumours involving Livia, the death of her son Drusus implicated Augustus instead. The death seems to have caused Livia to be overcome with grief, but in public managed to uphold a respectful image. It was at this time that the poem *Consolatio ad Liviam* was composed.²⁸

Meanwhile, Tiberius' victories gave her reason to give banquets and she dedicated shrines and monuments in her husband's name. She promoted welfare, and harmonious households and marriages. However, the decision of Tiberius to leave Rome for an unspecified period caused issues yet again in the imperial succession. Livia was caught in the middle, both wanting the best for her son, but also having to support her husband. In 2 B.C. Julia's fall from the good graces of her father and her banishment, and subsequent divorce from Tiberius caused more rumours about Livia's influence. To the public it was also evident that Livia, with her composed behaviour in public, was the exact opposite of Julia. When Julia was banished Livia was the only female left in the imperial family. While there were rumours, that Livia brought about the downfall of Julia, inscriptions show that she might have tried to help Julia.²⁹

When Tiberius wanted to return to Rome, after his self-imposed exile, it is said Livia supported her son, but Augustus only reached a compromise and gave Tiberius a position in the East. While Augustus might have been influenced by his wife, he was still the one who made the decisions. During this period, it was also clear that Augustus wanted his nephews, Gaius and Lucius Caesar to succeed him. However, both died in 2 and 4 A.D. respectively. Livia was implicated to have caused the deaths of both. It is very unlikely she had anything to do with their deaths.³⁰ This event left Augustus with very few suitable heirs to succeed him, and it is rumoured that Livia persuaded Augustus to choose Tiberius. In 4 A.D. Augustus officially adopted Tiberius and Postumus. Tiberius adopted his nephew Germanicus in the same matter. However, Postumus was later exiled, and this would undo his adoption. It is likely that, had Augustus and Postumus reconciled, he would have been an option as heir again.³¹

²⁶ Barrett (2002) p. 28-44.

²⁷ Barrett (2002) p. 42-48.

²⁸ Ovid *Consolatio ad Liviam*.

²⁹ Barrett (2002) p. 48-72.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Ibidem.

In 14 A.D. Augustus died, and rumours started again. Livia was rumoured to be the cause of his death. The ancient sources are very divided about this turn of events, some merely mention the rumours but do not give any indication they think it holds true. There are also rumours she kept word of Augustus' death until it suited her to make his death public, while others claim Tiberius was with his adopted father before his death.³²

After the death of Augustus, Livia's situation greatly changed. Her son Tiberius was the new ruler, but it is hard to define their relationship. However, Tiberius did not want any woman interfering in his rule. The transfer of power from Augustus to Tiberius went smoothly, partly because of the will Augustus left behind. Livia and Tiberius were his only heirs. He also adopted Livia into the Julian family and she received the title of Augusta. It is said Livia stayed behind after the funeral to mourn Augustus.³³

For a while there seemed to be no issues between Livia and Tiberius, but the first sign of trouble involved Germanicus. His wife Agrippina took control of the troops to solve a problem with the Germans. Tiberius detested women taking the role of a man, and Germanicus' weak performance. While Livia seemed supportive and full of love for Germanicus and his children. In several instances Tiberius asked Livia for help, and her solutions always helped the state, even if her personal interests collided. Again, rumours started when Germanicus died, and foul play was suspected. This was only made worse by the fact that both Livia and Tiberius avoided showing grief in public.³⁴

In the 20s the family showed more signs of trouble, and in 22 A.D. Livia fell ill. At this point Tiberius rushed back home to be with his mother, but the rumours that things were strained between them could not be stopped. A year after her illness she was granted the honours of joining the Vestals in the theatre. In the end it seemed that Tiberius could no longer handle the inharmonious household and left to his villa on Capri. Sources like Cassius Dio, Suetonius, and Tacitus claim Tiberius left because he could no longer deal with his controlling mother.³⁵ However, there is little proof for this theory. Livia stayed behind in Rome with Agrippina and Caligula. Her position at court and her reputation more than likely protected them until her death in 29 A.D.³⁶

Ancient literary sources

Livia was in a difficult position as the first empress of Rome. She had no predecessors she could look to, and as a member of the royal family had to set an example of how a woman in her position should act. To find out more about her character it is required to look at the ancient literary sources. The directors of the series that will be discussed in the case study based their works on four famous sources: Ovid, Cassius Dio, Suetonius and Tacitus. The following part will focus on their portrayal of Livia.

³² Barrett (2002) p. 73-103.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ Ibidem.

Ovid

Ovid lived from 43 B.C. – 17/8 A.D. Ovid is one of the great poets in the Augustan period. He is best known for his *Metamorphoses* and *Ars Amatoria*. His poetry was imitated during the Renaissance and there is debate about the dating of the poem *Consolatio ad Liviam*. Because he was exiled to Tomi in 8 A.D. It was in his best interest to flatter the leading powers in the hopes of returning to the Empire.

Deaths of highborn males in the imperial family would usually lead to rumours involving Livia, the death of her son Drusus implicated Augustus instead. It was at this time that the poem *Consolatio ad Liviam* was composed. In this poem it is said that Livia was anticipating a triumph because of Drusus' many military victories but had to prepare a funeral instead. The death of her son seems to have caused Livia to be overcome with grief, but she managed to uphold a respectful image in public.

What now avails thy character, thy whole life chastely lived, thy having so pleased so mighty a lord? And what with chastity to have crowned such a sum of dignities that it is the last among thy praises? What avails it to have kept thy mind upright against thy age, and to have lifted thy head clear of its vices? To have harmed none, yet to have had the power to harm, and that none feared thy might? That thy power strayed not to the Campus or the Forum, and that thou didst order thy house within the bounds permitted thee? – Ovid, Consolatio ad Liviam, 41-58.

Ovid describes some of her virtues, but even those virtues could not protect her son Drusus from dying. He also describes her immense grief, one of the few times she would show emotion in public. In his other work, *ex Ponto*, he claims Livia is the *femina princeps* and wishes his own wife would be more like her.³⁷ He says that Livia alone can claim to be equal to Augustus.³⁸ In his *Fasti* he is certain that Livia will be deified.³⁹

Tacitus

The second author that will be discussed is also one of the most famous and painted a picture of the infamous Livia. Tacitus was born ca. 55 A.D. He was a consul and historian. Tacitus preferred the Republic and is damning in his portrayal of some of the emperors of the Roman Empire. Tacitus, like Suetonius after him, belonged to the Equestrian order. He was extremely critical towards women who showed too much ambition and tried to influence political events. These events should be decided by the Senate and the people as it had been during the Roman Republic. While he did see issues with the Republic and its corruption, he did want more power returned to the senate.⁴⁰ While he started describing

³⁷ Ovid, *Consolatio ad Liviam*, 3.1.114-18.

³⁸ Ovid, 2.8.29.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 1.5.36.

⁴⁰ Barrett (2002) p. 239 and Mellor (1996) p. 6-9, 89.

most emperors in a positive way, they slowly became worse. He saw a decline in morals and values and blamed the emperors, or their ambitious wives for this.⁴¹

From the first notion of Livia in the work of Tacitus is damning. Tacitus stereotyped her as the evil stepmother:

*When Agrippa gave up the ghost, untimely fate, or the treachery of their
stepmother Livia, cut off both Lucius and Caius^o Caesar, Lucius on his road to the
Spanish armies, Caius^o — wounded and sick — on his return from Armenia.
Tacitus, Annals, 1.3.1.*

Then he moves to Tiberius, and claims he was arrogant and he blames Livia for this: “his mother with her feminine caprice”.⁴² While he does not mention Livia’s involvement in the death of Augustus, he accuses her of the death of Postumus, yet again because she was his stepmother.⁴³ Furthermore “Livia, - as a mother, a curse to the realm; as a stepmother a curse to the house of the Caesars”.⁴⁴ Tacitus clearly blames her for Tiberius, and the deaths of possible other heirs of Augustus. The considerable problem between Tiberius and Livia which Tacitus mentions is the case of Piso and Plancina. Livia managed to get Plancina a pardon and Piso committed suicide.⁴⁵ This controversy seems to have pushed Livia further away from Tiberius, but until her death he still had “deference to his mother was ingrained”, which seems to have kept him from his later escapades. This is seen in Tacitus:

*In any case, there followed from now onward a sheer and grinding despotism: for,
with Augusta still alive, there had remained a refuge; since deference to his
mother was ingrained in Tiberius, nor did Sejanus venture to claim precedence
over the authority of a parent. But now, as though freed from the curb, they broke
out unrestrained, and a letter denouncing Agrippina and Nero was forwarded to
Rome; the popular impression being that it was delivered much earlier and
suppressed by the old empress, since it was publicly read not long after her death.-
Tacitus, Annals, 5.3.1.*

The only time Tacitus is kind to Livia is after her death. He describes her as a great beauty that caught Augustus’ eye the moment they met. “In domestic virtue she was of the old school, though her affability went further than was approved by women of the elder world. An imperious mother, she was an accommodating wife, and an excellent match for the subtleties of her husband and the insincerity of her son”.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Mellor (1996) p. 23-27, 60-61.

⁴² Tacitus, *The Annals*, 1.5.1.

⁴³ Tacitus 1.6.1.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 1.10.1.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, 1.43.1, 1.77.1.

⁴⁶ Ibidem 5.1.6.

Suetonius

Suetonius was born ca. 69 A.D. and was a Roman historian. He is most known for his *De Vita Caesarum*. He was close to the imperial court in the time of Hadrian but was later dismissed. Suetonius describes the lives of the emperors thematically. The result is that certain events are not always placed in time and context, because it was assumed the reader was already familiar with these. When he does describe women, he does so only when they added something to the life of the emperor, usually meaning their influence. Suetonius based his *De Vita Caesarum* on letters and other authors like Tacitus, which will also be discussed later in this chapter. Because of his position at court it is also assumed he had access to the archives, but when he was sent away in 122 A.D., he lost this access. His main way of describing events is to write down all different versions. After examining all of these he will follow with his own conclusion of the event. The characteristics of the emperors are written down in the same way, with their positive and negative character traits deciding his opinion of them. He was part of the equestrian order and seems to have been more favourable to the emperors who treated them and the senate kindly.⁴⁷

In *The Life of Augustus* Suetonius describes Augustus as a strong leader who learned from the mistakes Caesar made. For example, when watching the games in the Circus he paid attention: ‘either to avoid the censure to which he realized that his father Caesar had been generally exposed, because he spent his time in reading or answering letters and petitions’. He also characterizes both his daughter as his granddaughter, both named Julia, as guilty of every form of vice.⁴⁸ However, he also speaks of Augustus depravity when discussing the accusations Antony made against Augustus.⁴⁹ Livia is not abundantly present in this part of his work, and she is only mentioned again in relation to the death of Augustus. According to Suetonius Tiberius was still on his way and Augustus died in the arms of Livia:

Then he sent them all off, and while he was asking some newcomers from the city about the daughter of Drusus, who was ill, he suddenly passed away as he was kissing Livia, uttering these last words: "Live mindful of our wedlock, Livia, and farewell," thus blessed with an easy death and such a one as he had always longed for. – Suetonius, Augustus, 99.1.

Postumus died soon after Augustus and it is rumoured that either Tiberius or Livia gave the order to have him killed. However, it is now difficult to give a clear view of the situation.⁵⁰

However, in *The Life of Tiberius* Livia is described more often. Tiberius is painted as a strict man with a hatred of his family. Mostly in the case of Drusus, who wanted to return the Empire to a Republic and especially in the case of his wife Julia. Furthermore, he was extremely upset by the position Livia tried

⁴⁷ Baldwin (1983) p. 167-168.

⁴⁸ Suetonius, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, Augustus, 65.1.

⁴⁹ Suetonius, 69.1.

⁵⁰ Barrett (2002) p. 73-103.

to usurp in his court and declined meetings with her and did not allow the senate to give her several honours.⁵¹ Suetonius describes this as following:

Vexed at his mother Livia, alleging that she claimed an equal share in the rule, he shunned frequent meetings with her and long and confidential conversations, to avoid the appearance of being guided by her advice; though in point of fact he was wont every now and then to need and to follow it. He was greatly offended too by a decree of the senate, providing that "son of Livia," as well as "son of Augustus" should be written in his honorary inscriptions. For this reason, he would not suffer her to be named "Parent of her Country," nor to receive any conspicuous public honour. More than that, he often warned her not to meddle with affairs of importance and unbecoming a woman, especially after he learned that at a fire near the temple of Vesta she had been present in person, and urged the people and soldiers to greater efforts, as had been her way while her husband was alive. – Suetonius, Tiberius, 50.2-3.

After her death the Senate wanted to bestow honours upon her but according to Suetonius, Tiberius refused them and regarded Livia's will:

When she died, and after a delay of several days, during which he held out hope of his coming, had at last been buried because the condition of the corpse made it necessary, he forbade her deification, alleging that he was acting according to her own instructions. He further disregarded the provisions of her will, and within a short time caused the downfall of all her friends and intimates... – Suetonius, Tiberius, 51.2.

Cassius Dio

Cassius Dio was born ca. 155 A.D. in Asia Minor and wrote eighty books, but he is most famous for his history of Rome in Greek. He became a senator in Rome in 180 A.D. In the Roman History, book 45 it is made clear that he is reserved about mentioning details about sex and feels ashamed for the people of Rome because they picked Antony as consul. While Cassius Dio had a positive attitude towards the Roman Empire, he is not content with all the dynasties. While he lived centuries after Livia, he studied Suetonius and Tacitus and it gives an impression if their ideas were still valid after all that time.⁵²

After Octavia died, Livia took on a more public role, but managed to balance this with the expectations the people had of a Roman wife.⁵³ One of the mythical stories about Livia is described by Cassius Dio (48.52.3-4):

⁵¹ Suetonius 50.1.

⁵² F. Millar (1963) p. 78.

⁵³ Barrett (2002) p. 3-28.

Again, the incident that happened to Livia, although it caused her pleasure, inspired the rest with dread; a white bird carrying a sprig of laurel with the berries on it was thrown by an eagle into her lap. As this seemed to be a sign of no small moment, she cared for the bird and planted the laurel, which took root and grew, so that it long supplied those who celebrated triumphs in after time; and Livia was destined to hold in her lap even Caesar's power and to dominate him in everything.

It is said that the emperors took their laurel crowns from the laurel Livia planted and Dio mentions that when the laurel died, so did the Julian-Claudian dynasty. In this Livia could be a role model for *Concordia*, both in public and private life. This also supported the position of her husband Octavian.⁵⁴

He describes Augustus as a strong leader and Antony as ‘a slave to the passion and the witchery of Cleopatra’.⁵⁵ When he mentions Livia, although he does not avoid the accusations and rumours, he does seem milder in his judgment. He claims Livia was accused of murdering Marcellus, but a great many people died of illness in that year and the next.⁵⁶ In 54.16.1-7 Cassius Dio talks about the morals Augustus tried to instil in the people of Rome, and Augustus claimed he ‘admonished and commanded his wife’. He also mentions the death of Drusus and that the senate dedicated statues to her and gave her rights as if she had given birth to three children.⁵⁷

In 55.14.1-22.2 Cassius Dio describes a conflicted Augustus, who had to deal with people plotting against him, receiving advice from Livia. Before she gives advice, she even mentions that she hopes Augustus will not censure her, because she as a woman is daring to suggest how he solve his problem. She advocated clemency for most of the wrongdoers, instead of harsher punishments.

In 56.3 his ideal view of a women is given, and Livia seems to match this description: “Is there anything better than a wife who is chaste, domestic, a good house-keeper, a rearer of children; one to gladden you in health, to tend you in sickness; to be your partner in good fortune, to console you in misfortune; to restrain the mad passion of youth and to temper the unseasonable harshness of old age?”.

He is dismissive of Livia being the cause of Augustus’ death, but mentions she kept his death silent until Tiberius could arrive, although some other sources claim Tiberius was there as well at the time of Augustus’ death.⁵⁸ Cassius Dio also mentions that some suspect Augustus appointed Tiberius to be his successor so ‘that his own glory might be enhanced thereby’.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Barrett (2002) p. 125.

⁵⁵ Cassius Dio, *Roman Histories*, 49.34.1.

⁵⁶ Cassius Dio, 53.33.4.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 55.2.4-7.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 56.31.1

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 56.45.1

It is also during this time that Livia seems to have let the power get to her head, because ‘she undertook to manage everything as if she were sole ruler’ and ‘she always declared it was she who had made Tiberius emperor; consequently she was not satisfied to rule on equal terms with him, but wished to take precedence over him’.⁶⁰

Finally in 58.2.5 it is suggested that the influence Livia had in the time of Augustus came from ‘being scrupulously chaste herself, doing gladly whatever pleased him, not meddling with any of his affairs, and, in particular, by pretending neither to hear or nor to notice the favourites of his passion’.

Character Analysis

Most of what is known about Livia is from her public life as the wife of Augustus and mother of Tiberius. She always behaved as was expected of a woman in her position and showed little to no emotion in public. By doing so, it is hard to claim the rumours to be true or false. It seemed like she was beyond reproach. Women of the imperial family who acted like was expected of a Roman woman seem to have been respected and honoured by both the Senate and the people. Suetonius and Cassius Dio show that while she may have acted as yielding towards her husband, she did in fact have influence. Cassius Dio shows this in the rather large conversation between Livia and Augustus considering the case of Cinna (55.14-22.2).⁶¹

Augustus used Livia’s image as the example of *matrona* for his own ends and like Livia kept private and public separate. After his death, he left her in a new and hard to define position which ultimately led to strife between her and Tiberius.⁶²

Both Cassius Dio and Tacitus describe her as an attractive woman. Ovid compares her to goddesses but seeing her age at the time he was being overly complimentary. It was known that she had dressers, and other staff meant to make sure she was looking her best. In addition, she was an educated woman and literate in both Latin and Greek. Seeing she was born into an affluent family; she probably had a tutor as a child. She was also very interested in health, mental as well as physical. Considering her age, her diet and natural remedies seemed to have worked for her. This interest in natural remedies might have led to the rumours about Livia using poison to take out her personal enemies or the ones who were a threat to the state. This is strengthened by the fact that poison is usually considered to be the weapon of choice for (ambitious) women. Especially seeing Livia used her remedies on the members of her household.⁶³

As the above shows, during quiet times Livia was the example of the perfect Roman woman. However, during crisis, or the death of a member of the imperial family, it is easy to blame the woman who seems

⁶⁰ Ibidem, 57.12.1.

⁶¹ Barrett (2002) p. 145.

⁶² Barrett (2002) p. 145.

⁶³ Barrett (2002) p. 103-115.

so perfect and hardly shows her emotions in public. It is hard to say if the rumours had any truth in them or not, most of the sources were written after her time and the authors had no direct contact with the family. While Ovid is overly positive, he is not a trustworthy source, if the poem is written by him at all. While Suetonius and Cassius Dio only seem to note down their evidence without judging her, Tacitus seems to condemn everything about Livia. It is the example of Tacitus that Robert Graves decided to follow in his work *I, Claudius*.

Tacitus mostly mentioned Livia as evil in connection to her stepchildren.⁶⁴ This stereotype was already of great renown in the ancient Roman literature. With mythical counterparts to be found in Juno and Phaedra. Because it was common in Rome to divorce and remarry when it was convenient it seems this strengthened this stereotype because of the strain it caused between the stepmother and her stepchildren. There were two archetypes for the wicked stepmother in ancient Rome. Phaedra was the example for the sexual wicked stepmother. Theseus remarried and Phaedra fell in love with her stepson but was rejected and caused a rift between her husband and his son. Especially amongst the elite in Rome, the women married when they were younger than their husbands, this could mean that they would be closer in age to the stepson than their own husband which could lead to these problems. However, it does not seem likely that Tacitus saw Livia as this archetype. She fits the patrimonial wicked stepmother, who is compared to Juno. Juno was slighted because her husband had many illegitimate children, and therefore she resented her stepchildren. It might be Livia felt slighted because Augustus married Julia to Marcus Agrippa, while her son Tiberius would have been a logical choice in her eyes. So, she took it upon herself to make sure there was no other heir to compete with Tiberius.⁶⁵

In the ancient literary sources Livia is not discussed abundantly in the start of the Roman Empire. Augustus takes the lead and he seems to follow the hero's journey as described by Campbell. Livia is sometimes seen to give him advice in cases when Augustus seems to find no correct solution to his problem. In addition to the personification of the ideal wife and example *matrona*, she seems to take on the supportive role as an ally to the hero Augustus. Her beauty is described by all authors, and all seem to agree that her beauty and strong character is what drove Augustus to marry her. However, when the topic turns to the heirs of Augustus, Livia plays a larger role. Here she is no longer his ally, but slowly becomes the antagonist. Everything that seems to be a good quality of Augustus, she twists, which makes Augustus seem an even better person. Both do not want a return to the Roman Republic or the civil war that preceded the reign of Augustus, but their methods and choices differ. Tacitus is especially damning of Livia. He blames her for the deaths of Augustus' heirs, not knowing what they would have been like as emperor, but it seems he would have preferred a return to the Republic instead of having Rome under the control of fickle emperors. Some authors claim Augustus chose Tiberius on purpose, so he would look all the better as an emperor.

⁶⁴ Barrett (2001) p. 171-175.

⁶⁵ Noy (1991) p. 345-361.

In the public life, even the classical authors agreed on the fact that Livia seems to be beyond reproach. She kept careful watch over her reputation, also to support Augustus, who made sure his family set the example for the rest of the Roman elite. They mention the rumours in relation to all the deaths in the elite family, but none of them have actual proof. This is sometimes attributed to her cunning, and the fact she has supposedly poisoned the men herself.

To Tiberius she seems to take on the role of mentor. It seems that all his life she made sure he would listen to her, but when he became emperor himself, he was quick to distance himself from her. He found that woman needed to know their place and leave the ruling of the Roman Empire to the men. It seems most of the authors, especially Tacitus agreed with his view and this might be why he is so damning of Livia. Livia is seen as an evil stepmother, and an evil matriarch. She is willing to do what must be done, for the good of all the people. At least, that is the way she herself sees this. Especially in relation to Tiberius she is very controlling and is quick to rebuke him when he does not immediately do as she asks.

Case Study: The Caesars: Augustus (1968)

This first case study describes *The Caesars: Augustus*. This episode has been chosen because it gives Livia the most screen time and this gives the opportunity to analyse her character. However, she does appear in several other episodes of this series as well, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis. This case study will answer the question: How is Livia portrayed on screen in the series *The Caesars* (1968)?

The series was made by Philip Mackie and it was produced by Granada Television. It covers the same time period as *I, Claudius*, which seems to have overshadowed this series. However, it shows more moderate characters in comparison.

The main actors are Roland Culver as Augustus, André Morell as Tiberius and Sonia Dresdel as Livia. Roland Culver started his acting career in his twenties and was known for his roles in countless movies and plays. André Morell was known for his roles in films produced by the Hammer Film Productions, which mostly produced horror films. Sonia Dresdel was a famous actress on stage.

The series has a rating of 8,2 on the Internet Movie Database. The series focuses on the end of Augustus' life to Claudius. The emphasis of the series is on the males in the Roman Empire. Out of 58 roles, 48 are male and only 10 are female.

Livia on Screen.

In the first part, Livia has summoned Tiberius and it does not please Livia he made her wait. She tells him of Augustus' plans to visit Postumus in secret. He even kept it secret from Livia, but according to Tiberius he wanted her to know. After all he would not have involved the husband of her handmaid if he meant to keep it from her. Livia asks what Tiberius will do if Augustus makes Postumus his official heir again, but Tiberius responds stoically. She claims there are two things between Tiberius and the throne: the first is Postumus, the second is his own character. According to Tiberius his own character will be the bigger obstacle. During a dinner with the imperial family, Augustus claims her family always turns out well, but Livia nods towards Claudius and denies this. When Augustus informs her, he will leave earlier, she keeps it hidden that she knows where he will go but asks Crispus, her handmaid's husband, where they will go. From her tone it is clear she already expects to be lied to. Augustus meets with Postumus and claims that unlike the high-born Livia and Tiberius, the Octavian are a new middle-class family and so they must be careful with the first hundred years. It is clear to Augustus that Postumus will be a bad leader, so it must be Tiberius who becomes his heir.

During part two, Augustus is ill and on his deathbed. Livia as empress has given the order that no one is allowed near or to leave unless she or Tiberius allows it. Livia is very distraught because she knows Augustus will die soon. Her voice breaks at times and it is clear she really feels love for Augustus. When Tiberius claims "who would not love a young prince marked out to be the ruler of Rome?" Livia calls him a monster and says he has never loved anyone. Tiberius rebukes her saying she has a long memory

for some things, but a short memory for others. Then her demeanour changes and she claims Tiberius must become the new emperor. Tiberius says Augustus' will shall decide the next emperor. However, Livia keeps urging him to make sure Postumus is killed so there can be no disarray. Tiberius just wants to wait. Augustus talks with Tiberius and informs him of his decision and says Livia "was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and that she had the strength of character he needed to support him through the war". Tiberius stoically replies that her family, being one of the oldest in Rome with great political influence must have drawn Augustus to her. In the end Augustus tells Livia he has always loved her and that she must not forget whose wife she has been. Then he asks his family if he played his part in life and they applaud him while he dies.

In the final part, after Augustus' death Livia is distraught but when she finds out Crispus has final orders from Augustus she must find out. When Tiberius decides against it, they argue again, and Livia claims Augustus became emperor because he eliminated all other possibilities. Furthermore, she claims Tiberius never should have been made emperor. Tiberius says that an ex-empress is held the utmost respect, venerated more highly than before if possible, but is not accorded any new powers. Livia seems taken aback at his rebuke of her. Tiberius later claims she got too used to commanding while being married to Augustus and her being in a position of power. When Crispus returned they are all involved Postumus died in what was supposed to be an accident. Livia seems both satisfied as well as shocked and grieving her husband anew, because she knows the order must have come from Augustus. Only then is Rome informed of Augustus' death.

Character analysis.

Livia always looks the part of an empress. She is veiled, wearing a crown, abundant amounts of jewellery, fancy clothes and elaborate hairstyle. Because the episodes are in black and white it is not possible to tell if she wears subdued or bright colours.

During the entire episode Livia is very proud and refuses to speak to commoners, nor be in the presence of people she deems lesser than her. This seems to clash with Tiberius, who seems to act like a soldier more than someone of the aristocracy. Between the lines, Livia concedes she is responsible for deaths in the family and more than willing to do the evil things that have to be done to make sure that Rome does not fall back into civil war. While it is heavily implied, we are never shown any of the deaths Livia is meant to have caused. This might be because of censoring rules at the time this series was produced.

Both Augustus and Livia are accused of never being truly in love with each other. Augustus needed her family's influence and power, while she got married to Augustus because it was clear he would become powerful. However, they were married for fifty years and Livia does seem truly distraught at the death of Augustus and not her loss of power.

Livia is clearly the shapeshifter in this episode. She seems to switch character from one moment to the next. When dealing with the death of Augustus she grieves, but the moment she senses something might make a mess of her careful planning she switches to someone who is cunning and without emotion.⁶⁶

However, the series does not give the impression that Livia is the antagonist or purely an evil archetypal character. While it mostly shows the relationship between Livia and Tiberius, Livia and Augustus seem to have agreed on a many great things. When she talks to Tiberius about how Augustus managed to gain power they seem to have been allies. Both wanted the best for the Roman Empire and that meant getting into a position of power. While their ideas on how to gain this goal might have varied, both have been getting their hands bloody if that was needed.⁶⁷

Comparison to the ancient literary sources.

The episode shows part of the dialogue as if straight from the ancient sources like Tacitus and Suetonius. One of the main examples is when Augustus asks if he has played his part in the comedy of life and his family applauds before he dies. Livia, like the ancient sources, is plotting against the heirs of Augustus to make sure Tiberius becomes his heir. Another striking example is that she implies herself in the murders of many of the family members when she says she will do what it takes. This is like the rumours in the ancient sources. but it is never directly shown or proven that it really was Livia.

Indeed, in the episode it is Augustus, not Tiberius nor Livia, who gave the orders to have Postumus killed. Livia seems ruthless and shocked by the tempering of her influence by Tiberius. This sudden shift in her position is also visible in the ancient sources.

⁶⁶ Vogler (2007) p. 59 - 63.

⁶⁷ Vogler (2007) p. 71-75.

Case study: *I, Claudius* (1976)

This case study will focus on *I, Claudius* (1976). Out of the three case studies, *I, Claudius* is perhaps the most famous. The series in the previous case study has been overshadowed by the excellent portrayal of Livia and seems to have influenced the series in the next case study as well. It will answer the question: How is Livia portrayed on screen in *I, Claudius* (1976)?

Herbert Wise directed all 12 episodes of the series. He was in his fifties at the time the series was produced. He based the series on the two novels by Robert Graves: *I, Claudius* (1934) and *Claudius the God* (1935). The series was produced in 1976 and produced by the BBC. It is not the first attempt to make a serialisation out of the novels by Robert Graves, but unknown reasons they were never finished before. At first it was made to be shown on television in the United Kingdom and aired by the BBC, but it later also aired by PBS in the United States. The novels by Robert Graves are partly based on the work of Tacitus and Suetonius. However, the series has several anachronistic and factual errors. The most prominent errors are as follows: Marcus Agrippa is much older than Augustus in the series, while they were around the same age; Tiberius is seen to be married to Vipsania in the first episode, and Julia is married to Marcellus. This is historically incorrect because Tiberius married in 19 B.C. when Marcellus had already been dead for four years and Julia was married to Marcus Agrippa.

The series Herbert Wise had in mind was considered too graphic for television according to the BBC. Scenes that were controversial had to be edited several times before they were suitable for television. One scene involving Caligula was edited and subsequently deleted and is now lost. In addition, when the series aired on PBS it was done in 13 episodes, while the BBC combined the first two episodes into one. The latter is the version that is available on DVD nowadays. In the United Kingdom it is rated 15 and above (GB-15) and in the United States it is unrated, this usually happens when there are multiple versions available. The score is an 8,8 out of 10 on the Internet Movie Database, which is high for historical series, and it is one of the most impressive series from that time.

The series was nominated for several awards. They won a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Art Direction for a drama series, and a BAFTA for Best Actor and Best Actress. Sian Phillips, who plays the role of Livia in the series won an additional award for Best Performance by the Royal Television Society, UK.

Derek Jacobi plays the main role of Claudius in the series. He was a relatively unknown television actor at the point he was cast to play the title role. Before he played Claudius, he was a Shakespearean actor and had minor roles in *Hamlet* and *Othello*. Brian Blessed, who plays Augustus in the series was already a familiar face on television. He was known for PC Smith in *Z-Cars* (1962-1965) and Porthos in *The Three Musketeers* (1967). As mentioned above, Livia is played by Sian Phillips. Like Derek Jacobi she was known for her roles in the plays by the National Theatre Company. Out of 150 listed performers on the Internet Movie Database, 112 are male and 38 are female.

While Claudius is the main character, he narrates the history of his family, so the focus of most of the episodes is not on himself. The first episode takes place in the time of his grandfather Augustus and his hated grandmother Livia. The first episode deals with the deaths of Marcellus and Drusus.

Livia on screen.

The first episode starts with Claudius introducing himself and the fact he is writing his family's history. He talks about the time of Augustus and Livia. He mentions quickly "If Augustus ruled the world, Livia ruled Augustus" and also "My grandmother Livia, her mind always turning, always scheming". Livia is unimpressed by most of the activities at the court. When Marcus Agrippa leaves Rome, presumably because of Augustus' favouring of Marcellus, she gives Augustus advice, but he makes the final decision.

During a conversation between Livia and Tiberius, she claims she favoured Tiberius over Drusus because Drusus is too much like his father: he wants a return to the Republic. She also claims that she had been watching Augustus and Antony ruling together and knew it would not last. Therefore, she divorced and remarried Augustus. So, it seems she plans for the long run, which Claudius affirms: "she waited nine years, but she got her way, wicked woman."

When Marcellus grows too popular, she started thinking of ways to remove Marcellus. During the entire episode we see Livia focused a lot on letters and petitions, even right before the games organised by Marcellus. When he falls ill, she acts like a concerned mother and says she will nurse him herself: "I would never forgive myself if anything happened to you". Marcellus says she is too good, but Livia answers ominously: "goodness has nothing to do with it". His condition only worsens and when Tiberius returns and claims that Livia does not care about Marcellus she says: "I care very much if he lives or dies".

Marcellus dies and Julia enters the room hysterically before she gets slapped by Livia who claims that "that is no way for a Roman woman to behave". Livia leaves Tiberius to comfort Julia, in the hopes they will end up together, but later finds out Augustus has already promised Julia to Agrippa.

After the suspicious death of Marcellus rumours cause riots in Rome and Livia goes to deal with the "rabble". Tiberius accuses her of not acting like a normal woman, she claims "To act like a normal woman, you need normal men around you". When Augustus tells Livia about Agrippa and Julia, he seems unhappy, but it was a decision he was forced to make. When he accuses Livia opposing this marriage, she just acts like a concerned mother to Julia.

In the second part, there is a time skip to the point where Tiberius has been married to Julia for quite a few years. Drusus writes a letter to Tiberius and talks about a return to the Republic and considers it the time for Augustus to retire. Augustus considers this but Livia talks him out of it. Livia seems livid and when Drusus is wounded on the battlefield, she sends her own doctor to take care of him. It is implied

this doctor was incapable of saving him to begin with or has orders not to from Livia. Drusus dies and his wife Antonia and their three sons return to Rome.

Tiberius and Julia are most unhappy with their marriage and it is heavily implied that Julia has been unfaithful several times. During a fight between the two Tiberius strikes her and Augustus sends Tiberius away. Julia wants a divorce, but Augustus refuses and claims she will have to live her life as a Roman matron should. Because of Drusus' death, Augustus becomes the mentor of Gaius and Lucius, calling them their only hope, and Livia grips them very strongly when she says they will take very good care of the children, while Augustus looks at them and says they express the true spirit of the Roman family.

Character Analysis

Livia is one of the main characters of the series and is portrayed in nine of the twelve episodes. In the start of the series Livia is in her early thirties, approximately thirty-four, because the death of Marcellus is visible in the first episode. Livia is married to Augustus and has two grown sons from her previous marriage. It is shown that, unlike their children, the marriage between Livia and Augustus is out of love.

She is usually very quiet in scenes except when expected to speak. Only in scenes between herself and her son Tiberius and the scenes with Augustus she shows she has more influence. She is portrayed as an ally of Augustus who wants the best for the empire, but also a power-hungry woman. While the series never shows direct proof, it is heavily implied she is behind the two deaths in the first episode.

In the first part, or arc, of the series Livia is the antagonist. She plans to put her sons in higher positions in the empire, preferable Augustus' heir after his death. To do so she schemes and poisons quite a few people she thinks to be in her way. She is typically shown as the evil matriarch trope. She kills everyone she has to, to make her son emperor of Rome and to stop a return to the Republic or fall back into a civil war. She is also described as a very pretty woman. She is highly manipulative. By eliminating the competition, either by poisoning them herself or having them murdered, she brings her son Tiberius closer to becoming Augustus' successor. Unlike other antagonists, it is hard to catch her in the act, because she does plan far ahead and can be a very patient woman to get her way. It is also not her ambition to rule over Rome herself, but she wants a calm and peaceful Rome and thinks the only way to reach this goal is with Tiberius as the next emperor. She is also shown as a very caring woman towards her family members if they are not in her way and seems to genuinely care about Augustus.

She is portrayed as a traditional woman. In public she is composed and the perfect image of a Roman matron, but in private she has far more influence. The men talk far more about the matters of state, while Livia concerns herself more with the direct influences on the royal family. Other women in the series are shown to clash with her personality. Julia went from being a young woman happily married to Marcellus to a promiscuous woman unhappily married to Tiberius in the span of the first episode. Antonia is shown to be very naïve and after the death of Drusus very withdrawn. Most of the women

are younger or of the same age as their husbands, but when widowed are expected to remarry after a certain period, and divorce seems common.

Livia is shown to be very motherly. She dresses modestly, mostly covered, though the fabrics look expensive and her hair and make-up is always in order. Livia spends a lot of time on her appearance when she must appear in public. She has staff helping her look her best when needed. She acts in public as a mother of the Roman Empire should. The series shows Julia as the complete opposite with her behaviour in the second half of the episode. Augustus seems to want the best for the empire and is tired of running it and when Drusus says it might be time to retire in the second half of the episode, he does consider it. But he is also very occupied with finding a good heir to leave Rome to so the Empire will not end up in a civil war again.

Livia is seen as a caregiver, but also a shadow and shapeshifter. She seems to personify the evil stepmother stereotype that we usually see in fairy tales. While Augustus seems to have a temper, she is usually the one to persuade him with 'reason' and he will change his mind, while she does have some influence the final decision does lie with Augustus so she is forced to use other methods to get her own way.

As mentioned above she seems to personify the shapeshifter archetype as written by Campbell and Vogler. Their nature and personality seem to constantly change depending on the situation, so it is difficult to decide if she really is a good wife and mother, or if she happily murders people for her own gain or for that of the good of the Empire. According to Carl Jung the shapeshifter shows the male elements in the female's unconscious and the other way around. He claims that: "Women sometimes spend their adult lives trying to reclaim the male energies within them which society has discouraged, such as power and assertiveness."⁶⁸ This is made clear in the episode by Tiberius when he asks her why she cannot act like a normal woman when she seems to go beyond the expected duties. The archetype also causes change in the hero or main character which could be Augustus in the first episode. During the episode Livia is scheming, but on the other hand it looks like she does all she can to support Augustus. This might cause the audience to doubt her priorities.

The second archetype is the shadow. Typically, they are portrayed as the antagonist or the villain. Even though they might have the same goal as the hero, for example Augustus and Livia wanting to prevent Rome falling back into a civil war, they probably do not agree with each other's methods. For a good story, to create a strong hero, the villain must be portrayed as a strong counterpart. Antagonists are usually not the villain from their point of view, this is emphasized by the ending where she holds her stepchildren closely and says she will take care of them, but what is shown is an image of her as the evil stepmother.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Vogler (2007) p. 60.

⁶⁹ Vogler (2007) p. 65-67.

Comparison to the ancient literary sources.

I, Claudius by Robert Graves was mostly based on Tacitus and Suetonius and the series follows their example. Livia is shown to be cunning and plotting when it comes to Augustus' heirs and Tiberius seems to be firmly under her control. Livia is enraged when she is informed of Augustus' decision to marry Julia to Marcus Agrippa instead of Tiberius. Her legitimate son is passed over in favour of someone she deems lesser. The episode's ending with Livia standing together with her stepchildren seems very much like Juno and the archetype of the patrimonial wicked stepmother Tacitus is so fond of.

Case Study: Rome (2005-2007)

The third and final case study is also the most recent portrayal of Livia on screen. Because she has little screen time in the episodes this case study will focus on three episodes. Without discussing all three it would be hard to do a character analysis. It will answer the question: How is Livia portrayed on screen in the series Rome (2005-2007)?

Rome was made by Bruno Heller, John Milius and William J. MacDonald. The latter is only known for his work on Rome, but Bruno Heller (1960) is a more well-known writer and producer and famous for his work on police drama's like *The Mentalist* (2008) and *Gotham* (2014). These works are focused on the gritty reality and not glorified. We see this again in Rome: the series does not only show the court, but also the slums in Rome. John Milius (1944) is a screenwriter and director known for his work on *Conan the Barbarian* and *Apocalypse Now* amongst others. In the commentary it is mentioned by several of the directors and writers that the office of Bruno Heller was full of ancient literary works, mostly those of Plutarch.

The makers of the series expected the series to run for more seasons, but because it was one of the most expensive series to date in that time HBO and BBC cancelled further seasons.⁷⁰ The costs went up as well when part of the set burned down.⁷¹ This is why they show a very condensed, and not always correct, version of history. Bruno Heller has mentioned he would like to see a movie, because he was not satisfied with the series' ending and even HBO has regrets of the cancellation.⁷²

The series has a rating of 8,8 on the Internet Movie Database, showing it is one of the more popular series made. Unlike the censored *I, Claudius*, which will be discussed in the next case study, and *The Caesars*, Rome was free to show scenes that would not have made it to television before. However, it is still rated 16 and above. Because it has not been censored there is realistic fighting and a lot of sex scenes, in which (full frontal) nudity is common for both men and women. The series has been nominated for multiple awards and won seven Primetime Emmy Awards in two years (2006-2007).

Several famous actors took on the roles of the famous Roman men in the series: Ciarán Hinds played Julius Caesar, Ray Stevenson played Titus Pullo and James Purefoy played Marc Antony. For the roles of Octavian and Livia less acclaimed actors were chosen. The screen time for both men and women is close to equal.

Rome is a series that ran from 2005-2007 and it was produced by HBO and BBC. The series is based on the lives of two fictional characters who are mentioned in Julius Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*. They meet and know the famous Romans like Caesar, Antony and Octavian. Their story is

⁷⁰ Becker (2018).

⁷¹ Reuters (2007).

⁷² Hibberd (2008).

influenced by the rich and famous Romans, but they also influence major events in the series. For example, Titus Pullo is the actual father of Cleopatra's son Caesarion. The first season deals with the rise and fall of Caesar. In the commentary for the first season it is mentioned that they used the real-life counterparts. The bakers and butchers in the series were played by actual bakers and butchers.

The director mentions in commentary in episode eight of season two that he wanted his swords and sandals 'fix', but he did not know a lot about the history of Rome. He said making this series was a nice opportunity to learn. They based the opening speech of Octavian on the 'America speech' in the Godfather, and they show scenes that directly counter what he is talking about. For example, Octavian talks about the virtuous women of Rome, while we see Atia, his mother, having intercourse with Marc Antony. They wanted to show the interplay and court intrigue during the quest for power. This is also the episode Octavian meets Livia for the first time and the director mentions that this is a Livia pre-I, Claudius, the early stages of the monster she will become.

Livia on screen.

Because the scenes with Livia in one episode were far too short to get an accurate character analysis, all three episodes will be discussed below.

In the first episode Augustus is introduced to Livia by Maecenas. Livia is called to be very presentable by Octavian and Maecenas says she is young, healthy, proven fertility, because she has one child, and from an impeccable family. Octavian knew he was from a relatively new middle-class family and needed someone like Livia with her powerful family background in his quest for power. In this scene Livia is very modest, bashful almost, and averts her eyes and looks to her mother for help. When Octavian's first question is if she would like to be married to him, she is shocked and taken aback and at a loss for words, but she seems very happy and says she would like it if her husband would not object.

A while later Octavian is informed about the scandalous behaviour of his mother and sister and he invites them to dinner. Before this dinner Octavian is anxious in Livia's presence and he asks her forgiveness. She takes his hand and tries to be calming. When he asks her if her husband ever beat her, or her father, she responds shocked and says she hopes she has never given them reason to do so. When he grips her hands tightly hurting her, he claims she is a virtuous woman, but that he might beat her at times because he gets sexual pleasure from it. At this point we see Livia steel herself and accept his character. According to the commentary during this episode the directors see this as one of her defining moments, she may come across as a young naïve woman, but she has an iron will. This goes for the next scene as well, when she is introduced to his family, she seems to take no heed of the conventional process, but already acts as if she is very familiar to them, calling them her sister and her mother. She notes the fury Octavian shows towards his sister and mother because of their depravity. He sends them to their villa to be locked up and forbidden contact with men. This is also the point he sends Antony to Egypt.

In the second episode Octavian is having issues with a grain shortage, while Antony refuses to deliver, because, as they suspect, he is bewitched by Cleopatra. When Octavian asks Octavia and Atia for a favour, to go to Antony and ask for help, he claims a soft voice of a loving wife might succeed where everything else has failed and looks lovingly to Livia. Octavia thinks he must be joking, Antony was sleeping with Atia after all, Octavian says he cannot remember his last joke. Livia practically makes a fool of herself before Octavian stops her from talking. Later, after Livia and Augustus have had rough sex, she is shown to be slapping and choking him during it, she discusses his plans with him. She quickly figures out that by sending Atia and Octavia, Octavian is putting Antony in a precarious position and a refusal will lead to public outrage, while if Antony accepts, Octavian gets his grain. Either way he wins, and Livia calls him a clever boy.

In the final episode we see Livia having dinner with the important women of her family and court and they discuss the battle at Actium. While Octavia seems to be more defensive of Antony, Livia listened to her husband's words and calls him a coward. Atia meanwhile, is wondering what happened to her sweet boy Octavian, but that she is most likely to blame for his recent behaviour.

On the other side of the Roman Empire in Egypt, Cleopatra tricks Antony into killing himself, pretending she has taken her life already. When she cannot seduce Octavian and figures out, he plans to use her as a trophy she kills herself with an asp, but not before telling Octavian he has a rotten soul. Octavian brings back Selene and Helios, Antony's and Cleopatra's children for Octavia to raise. When Atia tells Octavian, he is practically a king now, he says he is merely the first citizen. He felt insulted, because during his time it was an insult to be called a king. A month later we see women talking and getting prepared for Octavian's triumph. Livia calls to them to get ready because they need to take their places and notices Atia not attending. Octavia argues with her saying she can easily convince Livia to put in a good word for Atia and Octavian will listen to her. Livia claims Octavian is touchy about public events and everything must go perfect. When the women get ready to walk to their seats, in order of precedence, Atia arrives and cuts in front of Livia, saying she does not care about the precedence and that she knows women like Livia. After she says she takes no offence she does seem to be taken aback by Atia's rudeness and looks to her mother for solace.

Character Analysis.

Livia is not the only strong women on screen in these final three episodes. She must share the spotlight with Cleopatra and Atia. Cleopatra is the typical villain of the empire and is constantly called a witch. Atia seems to be depraved and manipulative, but also a villain archetype towards Livia. Historically Atia had been long dead, but the directors liked her as a strong female character and so they let her live in the show. In addition, Tacitus has described Atia as a devoted mother and ideal Roman matron. Livia comes across as a young and naïve woman, sometimes even aloof, but the series also shows her as a smart woman capable of adapting to her new situation.

In the first episode Livia is shown to be more veiled than most other women present for Octavian's speech and she also wears a less elaborate hairstyle. During private meetings like the dinner with the Octavian family, Livia is not veiled like she was in public. During the triumph of Augustus, Livia is wearing a dress that covers her more, and she is also seen to be wearing a laurel wreath in her elaborate hairstyle, which functions as a crown. Additionally, she is also veiled.

In the final three episodes Antony is the antagonist, egged on by Cleopatra, who takes on the role of the shadow. Atia seems to take on the role of the threshold guardian, who are known to be obstacles and seem to test the hero and his or her allies. Livia must deal with Atia and figure out a way to keep her reputation intact while also moving forward.⁷³ Meanwhile, Livia seems to take on the role of an ally. It is evident that Augustus needs a strong woman to support him to change the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire. While multiple characters talk about his demeanour, Cleopatra said he had a rotten soul, Livia makes him more of a rounded character. Augustus has his flaws, but Livia brings balance. She gives him advice, talks about his plans with him and thus giving him a mental sparring partner, while also making sure everything goes smoothly for his triumph.⁷⁴

Comparison to the ancient literary sources.

Comparing Livia on screen in Rome to Livia in the ancient sources it is clear there are similarities. As wife of Augustus, she behaved as was expected of a woman in her position and showed little emotion. When she talks with Augustus before the dinner, she makes it clear she has always been beyond reproach and never gave her father or husband any reason to be cross with her. While she plays a simple woman in public, when alone with her husband she shows herself to be a match in wits. This seems to follow the ideas of Cassius Dio, instead of the more damning Tacitus and Suetonius. The latter do not mention Livia a great deal in the start of the reign of Augustus.

⁷³ Vogler (2007) p. 49-52.

⁷⁴ Vogler (2007) p. 71-75.

Comparison case studies

In *Rome* (2006-2007) we see a young Livia, unsure of her position and sometimes acting the fool in public, always listening to what Augustus tells her to do. She arranges everything to look like the perfect wife and mother to make sure the population will not turn against Augustus. Nonetheless, we already get a glimpse of her actual strength and intellect when she shares the bed with Augustus and dominates him and figures out his plans.

In *I, Claudius* (1973), she has been empress for a while and Livia is cunning and manipulative. When she is talking with Augustus, she listens but tries to push her ideas. When this ends up enraging Augustus, she is quick to cover for herself with her perfect reputation and Augustus accepts her answers. We never see her poisoning Marcellus directly, but it is clear she is behind his worsening condition. In addition, she orders Tiberius around and he follows her every direction even if he does not agree with it.

In *the Caesars* (1968), she shows her cunning and overbearing control of Tiberius, but also her love for Augustus. This series, while showing the same cunning and ruthless personality of Livia we have seen in *I, Claudius*, is moderated. However, all character flaws and rumours are moderated, so it is not just in Livia's favour.

All three series have their roots in the ancient literature, some even based their scripts on the conversations of these sources. It is therefore no surprise that there are similarities between her portrayal in the ancient sources and on screen. In both media, Livia portrays the shapeshifter. She starts out as an ally of Augustus but does not always agree with his methods to secure the best future of the Roman Empire and later in her life slowly but surely shifts into his enemy and that of his heirs.

Conclusion

At the start of the thesis two ongoing discussions were described. The first being the rivalry between historiography and historiophoty. The second the lack of strong female leads in literature as well as on screen.

From the outset, historians were dismayed by the portrayal of historical figures and events on screen. They were far from the true historiography and gave the audience a wrong image. Because of the popularity of series and films this could lead to a society that has a skewed 'memory' of history. This was something historians try to battle with their works, but the visual images on screen tend to have more effect on the larger audience.

A famous example is *Gladiator*, after years without the so-called sword and sandals films, this film not only revived the genre, but also generated boost in books by historians discussing the film. This has since spread to other films and series. It seems that historians are coming to term with filmmakers and the way they portray historical events and characters. They also seem more willing to work with filmmakers and this had led to the creation of more rounded characters and authentic events in these films and series.

This can also be linked to women specifically. Since the 1970's there have been more female historians, and they tend to focus on the historical women. This has led to an increase of information about famous women like Livia. Since the 1970's historians have written more about Livia and there are many biographies describing her life. The director of *Rome* (2005-2007) has admitted he studied the material that was at hand. When we look at the older series like *The Caesars* (1968) or *I, Claudius* (1973), where Livia is a one-sided antagonist archetypal character, we see her in a completely different light in *Rome* (2005-2007). Her character in the latter is that of an ally to Octavian, and while the producers mention this is just her pre-I, Claudius state, it does show a more well-rounded character arc than before.

The older series based their works on the ancient sources. Tacitus describes her as an evil stepmother and blames most of Augustus' misfortune on Livia. Suetonius is already milder in his assessment of her character and balances the good and the bad, which he is known to do. Cassius Dio only mentions her rumours but no longer seems to believe in them. So, it is not surprising her character in the older series is less balanced and follows the female hero's journey as described by Joseph Campbell.

After the case studies it can be concluded that Livia is a strong female character in ancient sources as well as on screen. Her portrayal on screen is a likeness to her portrayal in the ancient sources. It seems filmmakers have found a middle ground between entertainment and the 'truth'. Thus, it seems historians can put their worries to rest when it comes to the portrayal of these ancient compelling females on the screen.

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Appendix I

Questions for analysis.

1. Who is the director of the work?
 - a. Are they male or female?
 - b. Did they have access to information?
2. When was it made?
3. Why was it made?
4. For which audience was it made?
5. Is the source representative?
6. What is the rating of the film?
7. Are there different versions of the film?
8. Was it a box office success or flop?
9. Did the film win any prizes?
10. Which actors are taking on the main roles of the work?
 - a. Are they male or female?
 - b. What is their age?
 - c. Have they starred in other films before?
 - d. Is this a familiar role? (typecasting)
11. What is the total amount of characters (with text)?
12. How many characters are male and how many are female?
13. Who is the main character of the work?
 - a. What is their age?
 - b. How many lines does the character speak?
14. What is the role of the character?
 - c. Are they in a relationship or single? Are they parents (single, married, divorced)?
 - d. Is there a protagonist/antagonist?
 - i. Are they male or female?

- ii. Is this influenced by age?
15. Is the character portrayed as traditional or modern?
- e. Is there a difference between male and female characters?
 - f. Is this influenced by age?
16. Is the character sexualised?
- g. Is there a difference between male and female characters?
 - h. Is this influenced by age?
 - i. Is the character wearing form fitting clothing/showing skin and is this visible or implied?
 - i. Is there a difference between male and female characters?
 - ii. Does this happen in a sexual or nonsexual situation?
17. Does the character spend time on their appearance?
- j. Is there a difference between male and female characters?
18. Does the character have ambition and if so, is their ambition focused on power or love or other reasons?
- k. Is there a difference between male and female characters?
19. What is the age of the characters?
- l. Is there a difference between male and female characters?
 - m. Does this influence their portrayal and role in the work?
20. Does the work meet the requirements of the Bechdel test?
21. Are there stereotypes? (example: Damsel in distress?) Does the story follow the hero's journey (Campbell)?