

## An Assessment of the Political Power of the Severan Women

Primary sources by Cassius Dio and Herodian imply that the Severan women, the wives and mothers of the Severan emperors, played a significant role in governing the Empire during a period characterized by unstable emperors. However, this research seeks to demonstrate that the Severan women, Julia Domna, Julia Maesa, Julia Soaemias, and Julia Mamaea, did not in fact hold unprecedented amounts of political power. This paper will argue that, although the women appear to be prevalent in the events related in the primary sources, they did not truly wield political power. The first main point which supports this thesis is based on a comparison of the Severan women to the women of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Such a comparison demonstrates that the Severan women were used as propaganda tools, just as was the case with the Julio-Claudians. Additionally, there is no evidence that the acts of the Severan women directly involved them in the political system so that they were in a position to openly influence policy. As it was with the women of the first dynasty of Rome, they were still acting behind the scenes, a tradition established as part of the imperial system by the Julio-Claudians. The second main point which this paper will emphasize in supporting this thesis involves an examination of the Severan women's role within the family. A close assessment of the women's actions reveals that they were not overstepping the bounds of the traditional role of the Roman mother, once again exercising power behind the scenes through influencing their sons. While the women were granted more power after the passing of their husbands, it was accepted that widows would often become more autonomous after the death of their spouse. The comparison of the Severans to the Julio-Claudian women, in conjunction with the examination of the extent to which the Severans can be considered to have fulfilled their traditional role within the Roman family, can be used to demonstrate that the Severan women did not wield unprecedented amounts of political power.

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