

## *Virile Servitium*: The Representation of Agrippina on Roman Imperial Coinage

Agrippina the Younger was not the first empress to appear on Roman Imperial coinage. However, her innovative and powerful representations illustrate the great authority exercised by this ambitious woman. Conversely, her fall from power following Nero's ascension is clearly delineated in the numismatic record. I argue that the eventual relocation of Agrippina's image from obverse to reverse, followed immediately by her complete disappearance from Imperial coinage, is significant. Agrippina was first represented in coinage with her sisters during the reign of her brother, Caligula, in 37 CE. This was the first instance of living women being identified on Imperial coinage by name (Rose 1997). After her marriage to Claudius in 39 CE, coins were minted depicting the emperor and empress together on the coin's obverse. There are no previous coin issues showing both members of the Imperial couple on the same side of a coin. Of particular significance is that this honor was not given to Claudius' three previous wives, highlighting Agrippina's influence. After her husband's death, Agrippina yet again broke from tradition with one of the earliest coins minted during Nero's reign in 55 CE (Barrett 1996). Agrippina and her son appear together on the obverse which uniquely illustrates the strong bond between the emperor and his mother. The placement of their legends is even more striking; while Nero's legend appears on the reverse with his name written in the dative case, Agrippina's is on the obverse and in the nominative (Rose 1997).

Following this issue, Agrippina appeared on only one more coin, now with her image on the reverse, not the obverse. The significance of this shift is debated. Some scholars maintain that the consignment of Agrippina's legend to the reverse, after having been so recently portrayed on the obverse, is directly related to her political decline (Mattingly 1972). Alternatively, others argue that this last coin still exhibited "exceptional public honours, with a

barely discernible diminution from a slightly earlier honour” (Barrett 1996, 167). Although this modification might not be considered noteworthy under usual circumstances, in this context I believe it demonstrates Agrippina’s decline in power and the fall from her son’s favor. In order to strengthen this argument, I first examine the roles of the emperor and the Senate as authorities involved with minting Imperial coinage to evaluate what part Agrippina may have had in this process. Next, I look closely at circumstances surrounding her waning influence: the period of the time between the last two coin issues discussed above and the shift in Agrippina’s relationship with the commander of the Praetorian Guard and Nero’s own tutor, Seneca. Finally, I compare the accounts of the ancient writers, primarily Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio, to establish a timeline of significant events and examine the complexities of Agrippina’s reception in the ancient world.

#### Works Cited

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