ANTONIA AND SEJANUS*

The fall of Sejanus in A.D. 31 aroused considerable controversy in the ancient sources and has also continued to do so in modern research. Indeed, questions of Sejanus' intentions and of the identification of his allies and enemies still remain of great interest. No small part of this speculation concerns Antonia Minor, who is considered by an increasing number of scholars to have provided Tibertius with the critical information which led directly to the fall of Sejanus. In one recent article on the family connections of Sejanus, it has been suggested that Antonia Minor, as a relative of Sejanus and a figure of no little influence, could have played a significant role not only in his fall but also in his rise to power. The relationship between the two, the subject of much conjecture but little analysis, deserves to be considered in detail.

The following discussion will consist of three parts: I) the alleged relationship between Antonia and Sejanus before 31, II) the tradition that stresses Antonia's importance in the fall of Sejanus, and III) based on the conclusions of the first two sections, a reconstruction of the process by which Antonia became associated with the events of 31.

It will here be argued that Antonia did not, in all probability, provide Tibertius with the critical information about the intentions of Sejanus. Her importance in the tradition is an invention of the Claudian and Flavian Periods.

I. Antonia and Sejanus before 31

There seems to be a four-fold connection between Antonia and Sejanus in the years before A.D. 31. First, Tacitus notes that Junius Baelus, the author wishes to express his thanks to the members of the Seminar für Alte Geschichte der Universität Freiburg before whom an early draft of this paper was read. Further drafts were improved by S. M. Levick of Oxford, Martinus Chamber of Los Angeles and Walter Schmitthenner of Freiburg.


* See Sumner's Stehmann, 137 (discussed on page 14) and PIR A 1737.

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2. Sumner, 146.

3. See Sumner's Stehmann, 137 (discussed on page 14) and PIR A 1737.

4. Sumner, 141.

5. On Livilla's relationship to Sejanus, see Meine, 491.

6. For the evidence, see PIR A 305 and especially C. 26.2, where it is stated that Aelia was divorced ex ipso officio. The possibility to interpret these offici as referring to a connection with Sejanus should, I feel, be resisted if Sejanus was the case it is difficult to understand why Antonia does not say so directly.

way actively involved in the dynamic and political problems of the early
principate.8

II. Antonia and the fall of Sejanus

A. The Sources

An epigram of the poet Honestus of Corinth has been interpreted by
Cichorius as the earliest reference to Antonia's role in the fall of Sejanus.9
This epigram, preserved as an inscription, is similar to thirteen other in-
scribed epigrams of Honestus celebrating the Heliconian Muse of Theseiae.
It reads:

'Ἡ δωδέκα σφυγμόν δοξής αὐτοῦ Σέβαστη
Καίσαρε, τίραμεν δυνα κλίμακα φάτ \nἘνρέετο διὰ άμμος ἐλώοντος πεντάγέρω
σύγχρονος, ὡς γὰρ νόσος κόλποι τοῖς διόν-
Οὐχίστοις'

which may be translated:

Augusta, being proud of two godlike Caesars
with their sceptres, shines forth a twin light of peace;
Fit company for the wise Heliconian Muse, a choir mate
of wise counsellor, whose sagacity saved the whole world
Honestus10

Cichorius has argued that the Augusta here is Antonia Minor, the two
Caesars are Galus Caligula and Tiberius Gemellus. The saving of the world
refers to Antonia’s exposure of the plot of Sejanus. The validity of this
interpretation will be discussed below. Suffice it here to say that the identi-
fication is highly improbable.

Apart from this most doubtful reference, Flavius Josephus, writing at
the end of the first century, is the first and only writer to assign directly to
Antonia the major role in the discovery of Sejanus’ alleged “conspiracy”
against Tiberius. In Book xviii of the After Josephus relates how his hero,
M. Julius Agrrippa I, had been imprisoned by Tiberius and how the former
appealed to Antonia, an old friend of his mother, to use her influence in
order to secure his release. Josephus here explains why Antonia was in-
fluential:

Now Antonia was highly esteemed by Tiberius both because, as the wife
of his brother Drusus, she was related to him, and because she was a

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8 Tacitus’ treatment of Antonia is generally positive, see for example Ann. III, 3 and Mars. 304.
9 C. Cichorius, Römische Studien, Leipzig and Berlin, 1922, 362. Honestus most likely lived under
Augustus and Tiberius, see below page 51.
Cambridge, 1968, 276. The translation is basically that of this writer.
thoroughly.
Theopae were engraved with Boeotian letters which have not generally been well studied. One may conclude only that the inscriptions in question were cut before A.D. 200.\textsuperscript{14} The alternative method of dating Honestus, and a difficult one given the imprecise language used, has been to identify the Augusta and Caesares of the above cited epigram. Up to the present time, four imperial ladies have been suggested: Julia Augusta f. (with Galus and Lucius as the Caesares), Livia (with Augustus and Tiberius or with Tiberius and the Elder Drusus), Antonia (with Galus Caligula and Tib. Gemellus) and Julia Domna (with Geta and Caracalla).\textsuperscript{15}

As can be seen from the variety of suggestions this epigram does not lend itself to easy interpretation. There are, however, sufficient arguments against Cichorius’ identification of the Augusta as Antonia. First, though Antonia was given the title Augusta following the accession of Galus in March 37, she rejected the use of it during her lifetime (She died 1 May 57\textsuperscript{9}) and it was not commonly used before the reign of Claudius (Suet. Claud. 15.3; Cf. 11.2). Second, it is hard to imagine that any poet would have thought to place Tiberius Gemellus on the same level as Caligula at any time after March 37. And, in fact, there is no official propaganda commenting on the equal status of the two either before or after that date.

Moreover, there are two other more satisfactory candidates for the title, Julia Augusta f. and Livia. Louis Robert has summed up persuasively the arguments for assigning the title to Julia.\textsuperscript{17} Indeed, the identification of Julia and her sons C. and L. Caesar fits the inscription very well except for one problem: Julia never bore that title. It is true, however, that at least one other inscription refers to her unofficially as: ‘[Ἰωάννης] ηισεοντος’.\textsuperscript{18}

Nevertheless, suspicion remains as Livia, an official Augusta, fits the description even better.

It is true that the previous identifications connecting Livia with Augustus and Tiberius\textsuperscript{19} or with Tiberius and Drusus the Elder\textsuperscript{20} are less satisfactory than the identification of Julia with Galus and Lucius. To the first pair it may be objected that it is highly improbable that Livia, as Augusta only after A.D. 14 (Tac., Ann. 1, 8), would be mentioned as such on the first line and the defied Augustus, paralleled with Tiberius, only as Caesar on line two. The second identification suffers from a similar complication: Drusus was long dead when Livia received the title.\textsuperscript{21}

The most satisfactory identification, and one not previously suggested, is Livia as the Augusta and her grandsons Germanicus and Drusus Julius Tib. f. as the Caesares. First, Livia was Augustus during the years that they were Caesares (A.D. 14–19). Second, they both held imperium in these years (Tac., Ann. 1, 14 and 24), if, indeed, that is the meaning of οὐσίας. They both had been voted ovations for diplomatic successes (Tac., Ann. 11, 64) which is perhaps the meaning of οὐσίας. They were often paired (Tac., Ann. II, 45; IV, 4) and frequently served as honorary duxes\textsuperscript{22} and formed as well a consistent pair on the inscriptions and coins of the period.\textsuperscript{23}

Finally, there seems to have existed another coin of Livia with Germanicus and Drusus in Spain.\textsuperscript{24} Livia’s saving the world, then, may well refer to her role in Augustus’ final settlement of the succession problem in A.D. 4, at which time the Julian and Claudian families were united.\textsuperscript{25}

In general, and recognizing that certainty on this question is impossible, it is highly unlikely that the Augusta in this epigram is Antonia Minor. Probably it is Livia, but Julia cannot be ruled out. One should in any case reject Cichorius’ interpretation that Honestus was celebrating Antonia’s role in the fall of Sejanus.\textsuperscript{26}

The chapters from Josephus, though more specific, are no more satisfactory, for, as will be shown, both Josephus’ sources and his own inclinations would have led him to exaggerate Antonia’s role.

The sources of Josephus’ A/J, especially for Roman history, have long

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\textsuperscript{14} Pert, 6125. Robert is of the opinion, however, that there are analogies between this inscription and another one from Theopae dated to between 17 and 12 B.C.

\textsuperscript{15} See Robert for a bibliography and discussion. The suggestion of Julia Domna may be immediately ruled out due to the similarity of this epigram to the early first century Carole of Philip, Grow and Page, Vol. II, 301.

\textsuperscript{16} And not in May, 58, as believed by Cichorius, 563. It is in error, giving Antonia a year instead of six weeks of life under Galus, which, in this writer’s opinion, substantially reduces the effectiveness of Cichorius’ argument. On the date of her death, see the Fasti Ost. for the year 37 in Ehrenberg and Jones, Documents Illustrating the Reign of Augustus and Tiberius, Oxford, 1963 (= EJ).

\textsuperscript{17} Robert, Id.

\textsuperscript{18} IGRR III, 945, an inscription from the temple of Venus at Paphos.

\textsuperscript{19} F. Jemot, Fouilles de Thrace, BCH 26 (1902) 300.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., in Spain. See A. Vives y Escuder, Le Monde Hispanique IV, Madrid, 1936, for many references.

\textsuperscript{21} For the inscriptions, IGRR III, 680, and iv, 1549: EJ 92, 94a and b; for the coins, Vives, op. cit. and Catalogue of Greek Coins in the British Museum, for Phrygia, 246; Lydia, 251; Caria, 167 and Central Greece, 65.

\textsuperscript{22} A. Garcia y Bellido, Los Banquetes de Livia, Drusus Minor y Germanicos y Hilarones Siodon, Mélanges Pignon, Paris, 1966, 481.

\textsuperscript{23} On this subject, see B.M. Lavick, Drusus Caesar and the Adoptation of A.D. 4, Latomus 25 (1966) 227.

\textsuperscript{24} Unfortunately, and despite the criticisms of Pert and Robert, Cichorius’ authority has remained unchallenged in English speaking research, see, for example, Seager, 216 and G.W. Bowersock, Augustus and the Greek Rites, Oxford, 1965, 141 n. 2.
been the subject of speculation. Josephus, as is unfortunately his habit, does not give any indication of his sources. Mommsen has argued on the basis of one anecdote (AJ xix, 91.2) that Clavius Rufus was the source of all portions of the AJ and BJ dealing with Roman history. This theory has, until recently, won general acceptance. Feldman, however, has presented a good case for supplemental oral sources dealing especially with the problems of AJ xix. Among the probable sources is the Jewish king Agrippa I (PRA I 131), whose son, Agrippa II (PRA I 132), as a friend and patron of Josephus, provided him with a considerable body of historical material (Vita 366).

That the section here under discussion could well stem from the family tradition of the Agrippae is substantiated by the fact that Book xviii of the AJ centers around the figure of Agrippa I and his romanticized adventures at the court of Tiberius and Gaius. Throughout Book xviii Antonia, as the friend of Agrippa's mother Berenice (AJ xviii, 145, 156, 165), is presented as Agrippa's saving angel (id. and 179f., 183f., 203f., 236f.). These statements lead Feldman to conclude that Josephus gave special notice to Antonia and her family as part of a "... general exaltation of Agrippa, (and) his friend Antonia ..." And, indeed, the story of Antonia and Sejanus appears only within the context of Agrippa's adventures.

If then Agrippa I is the probable source of these chapters, how reliable is he as a witness? As he was in Palestine from A.D. 23 until about 36, he could not have passed on an eye witness account of what had happened. His version of the story was formed, most probably, from what he learned from his Roman acquaintances after his return to Rome.

Some confirmation for this suggestion may be found in the prominence of Pallas (PRA A 855) in the story. First, the fact that Pallas, then an unknown slave of Antonia, is mentioned at all, points to a source dating to the reign of Claudius. Second, Pallas' brother Antonius Felix (PRA A 825) was later the procurator of Judea and married Drusilla (PRA D 195), the daughter of Agrippa I and the sister of Agrippa II. Though it is doubtful...

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59 See Feldman, 320, n. 3, for the references. An exception noted by Feldman in H. Block, Die Qeileus der Flavius Josephus, Leipzig, 1879, 154, where he argues that everything about Agrippa I comes from his son Agrippa II.

60 Feldman, 332. Timpe is of less value for this question as his analysis is restricted to the particular problems of AJ xix. He does, however, admit the existence of a Jewish source, 501f.

61 L. H. Feldman, Josephus IX (Loeb) 139, n. 'O'.

The presence of Caenis points to the clear connection between Vespasian and Antonia. Vespasian’s mistress in his youth and again later as he was emperor was this Caenis, the trusted secretary of Antonia (Suet. Vesp. 3; Dio 66.14). He was sponsored in his career by L. Vitellius (Tac. Hist. iii, 66), the powerful minister and friend of Claudius, who claimed a long friendship with Antonia (Tac. Ann. xii, 3). Another supporter of Vespasian was Narsissus (Suet. Vesp. 4), the freedman of Claudius, who may have begun his career in the joint household of Claudius and Antonia. Given this strong Flavian background, it may be worthwhile to investigate Dio’s sources for this story. An analysis of the lost contemporary histories of the reign of Tiberius is hopeless. The works of Servilius Nonianus, Ausilius Basus and the autobiographies of Tiberius and Agrippina the Younger remain shadowy documents. Nevertheless, it is hard to see how any one of them would have devoted much space to the tale of the prodigious memory of the still unknown and young freedwoman of Antonia. Seneca the Elder might be a more likely source; his history seems to have come down to about 37 and his own excellent memory may have given him an interest in similar capacities in others. Nevertheless, the definitive Flavian context in which this story is told seems to speak against the proposition that Dio found the story in a Julio-Claudian source. If a Flavian source for this tale seems more likely, its identification is no more certain. Pliny the Elder shows a great interest in such tales but his history does not seem to have covered either the reign of Tiberius or very much of Vespasian’s. Licinius Mucianus composed a book on natural wonders in which the mnemonic achievements of Caenis would not have been out of place. Nevertheless, too little is known about this work to venture any suggestions. Plutarch, on the other hand, would seem a more likely source. He had traveled extensively in Italy during the Flavian Era and was no doubt familiar with the gossip concerning the emperors and their immediate families. Such a story might well have been recorded in one of his lost essays. Tacitus is also a possible source. It would not be unusual for him to have given a summary of Caenis’ career on mentioning her death in a lost portion of the Historiae. The details of the necrology, however, and especially Caenis’ reply to Antonia, are not compatible with the usual Tacitean solemnity and brevity on such occasions. In the end certainty is impossible and further speculation meaningless. We may conclude that such a story would never have been recorded if Caenis had not later become such an important figure at Vespasian’s court. Most likely this tale of one of the few truly colorful characters of the Flavian Era developed in that Era, being recorded perhaps by Plutarch. In general, then, there is no reliable evidence that Antonia played a significant role in the fall of Sejanus.

III. A Reconstruction

On the basis of the conclusions reached above, it might be worthwhile to consider how the tradition concerning Antonia and Sejanus developed. The official version of Sejanus’ fall is given by Suetonius in his Vita Tiberii. There Suetonius, quoting from Tiberius’ autobiography, states that Tiberius claimed to have destroyed Sejanus “...quod comparisset iureus adversus liberis Germanici filiis sui” (63). This version is supported by Tacitus who mentions that Sextius Paccianus was the “...delectus ab iis seius olim apo Gala Cae acei parvenus” (Ann. VI.3). Whether Tiberius mentioned Antonia as the source (or one of the sources) which informed him of Sejanus’ plans cannot be determined. But, on the basis of Suetonius’ statement, it would seem unlikely that Tiberius mentioned anyone in particular. In line with this official version it is probable that the Acta Senatus made some mention of Antonia in connection with Sejanus’ fall. Following the condemnation and death of Sejanus the Senate would probably have officially thanked Tiberius and Antonia for saving Galus and his siblings. A similar thanksgiving had been voted eleven years before when, following Cn. Piso’s condemnation, Tiberius, Livius, Antonia, Agrippina, Drusus Tib. f. and Claudius were thanked “...ab vindicatis Germanici” (Tac. Ann. III.18). In 31, Livis and Drusus were dead and Agrippina was in prison. Claudius, who had been consistently denied public honors by Tiberius (Suet. Cl. 5) and who had only been added to the Resolution of 20 as an afterthought,

44 The traditional list of Plutarch’s writings, "the catalogue of Lamprias" is given in full by Ziegler, RE xi, 607. About one-third of the titles are lost, including a "Life of Tiberius," catalogue number 27.
45 A good example of the Tacitean necrology is that for Livius, Ann. V, 1.
may not even have been included in this one. It is a reasonable assumption that official thanks would have been voted to Antonia, the guardian of Gaius and his sisters in 31 (Suet. Gaius 10), whether or not she had played any role in the exposure of the “plot.”

The accession of Gaius brought Antonia into prominence. She was given all the honors voted previously to Livia including the title of Augusta (Suet. Gaius 15.2). It should be noted that, though Suetonius gives no particular reason for these honors, people might have begun to associate her with the saving of Gaius. Most likely, however, Antonia was honored as part of the general celebration of Gaius’ family.45

Interest in Antonia no doubt increased under Claudius, who, to the honors voted for his mother, issued also a series of coins.46 The story would, of course, have varied: a reference to Antonia saving Gaius would not have been acceptable in the days following his assassination. At this point the tradition divided. Agrippa I returned to Judaea with one variation closely linked to his own adventures and flattering to Claudius, to his mother Antonia, and to his powerful freedman Pallas. This version became part of the family tradition of the Agrippae and eventually passed into the AJ of Josephus. The other variation of the tradition is more difficult to trace but it certainly solidified in the Flavian era, no doubt promoted by Antonia’s former secretary and Vespasian’s mistress, Caenis. This tradition, stressing Caenis instead of Pallas, passed eventually into Dio’s history.

Conclusions

There is no evidence to support the theory that Antonia and Sejanus were in any way allied before the events of 31.

The sources which stress Antonia’s importance in the fall of Sejanus are most probably based on inventions of the Claudian and Flavian periods.

In reference to the more general question of Sejanus’ conspiracy it has here been suggested that Josephus’ allegation that Sejanus was plotting against Tiberius reflects the semi-official history of the Claudian principate, which, in the aftermath of Gaius’ assassination, de-emphasized the threat to Gaius in 31. This tradition, developing at the time that it did, preferred to see Sejanus’ conspiracy directed against Tiberius rather than against the dead tyrant Gaius.

Freiburg i. Br.                        John Nicols

45 The phenomenon is most plainly seen on Gaius’ bronze coinage, see BMCRE I, 151f.
46 BMCRE I Claudius, Nrs. 109 (aureus) and 166 (dupondius).