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(Un)veiling Politics: Women's Political Writings during the Julio-Claudian Age

“He [Claudius] was not allowed to give a frank or true account of the earlier times, since he was often taken to task both by his mother and his grandmother” (Svet. Cla. 41). The interference of women in a male-dominated literary genre like historiography (at that time eminently conceived as political and military history) could seemingly be read as an hyperbole of the biographer with the purpose of outlining an inept emperor, not even capable of control over his female relatives. In fact, the attention paid by the imperial women to historical writing is far from being unlikely. They should have been highly conscious of their importance to public life and dynastic dynamics. Their fundamental role was recognized since the beginning of the Principate, when the Augustae were mentioned in the Tabula Siarensis (19 B.C.) and in the Senatusconsultum de Cn. Pisone patre (20 B.C.) as basic pillars of the brand new constituted domus Augusta. Within the imperial family were quickly set up factions opposing each other and referring to one or another female member of the kin group (e.g. the two Iuliae, Augustus' daughter and granddaughter respectively, just to mention a famous case). Writing became a way to enter the political life also for women: if their approach to historiography was just an indirect one, other autograph, only outwardly private, gained a marked political character and were used as important sources by the forthcoming historians. The most famous work are the memoirs of Agrippina the Younger, referred to with the pregnant title of *commentarii* / *ὑπομνήματα*, whose main purpose was apologetic. Moreover, letters were sent by Livia and Antonia the Younger with the aim of political pressure or complaint. Since the ancient sources make only a glancing reference to

their fight in the name of a common political tendency, my research concerns the role of the missing texts written by the Augustae of the Julio-Claudian age in reference to the construction of the Principate.