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# Messalina's Moveable *Domus*: Landscape and Memory in *Annals* 11<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This article addresses the intersection between landscape, memory, and power in Messalina's movements through Rome, as recorded in Tacitus' *Annals*. Messalina's journeys demonstrate her appropriation of spatial memory and her transgressions of gender and status, as she attempts to relocate the imperial *domus* to the home of Gaius Silius. Reading the imperial *domus* as a kind of landscape opens new avenues for interpretation. Tacitus recognizes the relationship between the imperial mother and the Palatine *domus*, and connects Messalina to the space itself. He thereby prompts readers to consider the fragile nature of imperial power and dynastic succession as bound up in the imperial *cubiculum* and the body of the emperor's wife.

**Keywords:** Tacitus, *Annals*, Messalina, memory, landscape, Claudius, Gaius Silius, *domus*

Despite the senate's condemnation of her memory (*damnatio memoriae*), Messalina is one of the most memorable characters in Tacitus' *Annals*.<sup>2</sup> As the mother of Britannicus and Octavia, Messalina was celebrated for ensuring the continuity of the first imperial dynasty and received honors comparable to those of Livia.<sup>3</sup> However, literary sources prioritize her shameful actions, either condemning her as a libidinous adulteress or defending Messalina as a victim of Venus who was murdered by Claudius.<sup>4</sup> Scholars continue to debate whether Messalina's marriage to Silius in the autumn of 48 CE stemmed from

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<sup>2</sup> As noted by Varner 2001, 41, the phrase *damnatio memoriae* is not a Roman term, nor does it indicate an exact list of penalties. Cf. Flower 1998, 156. The *senatus consultum* mentioned by Tacitus (*Ann.* 11.38.3) is not extant, but material evidence shows that Messalina's images and name were removed from public visibility after her death (see discussion below).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. She was allowed to ride in a *carpentum* during Claudius' triumph of 44 CE (Suet. *Claud.* 17.3), given the privileges of the Vestals, and offered the title of Augusta on the birth of her son Britannicus (although Claudius refused her this honor) (Suet. *Claud.* 26.2; on which cf. Levick 1990, 55-7). Rose 1997, 41 compares the honors received by Messalina to those of Livia and Agrippina the Elder. Cf. Wood 1992, 219-34.

<sup>4</sup> The former argument is presented by Pliny the Elder, Juvenal, and Cassius Dio, whereas the latter appears in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis* and the *Octavia*. See Sen. *Apocol.* 11, 13; *Octavia* 10-17, 257-72, 536-7, 947-51; Juv. 6.115-32, 10.329-45; Suet. *Claud.* 26.2, 29, 36, 37.2, 39.1, *Nero* 6.4, *Vitellius* 2.5; Pliny *NH* 10.172, 29.8; Cassius Dio 60.8.4-5, 14, 15.5-16.3, 17.5-18, 22.2-5, 27-28.5, 29.4-6a, 30.6b-31.5.

her unrestrained sexual desires or political aspirations that she shared with Silius.<sup>5</sup> This article turns from character to theme and addresses the intersection between landscape, memory, and imperial power in Messalina's movements through Rome.<sup>6</sup> From the time of Augustus, imperial family members rewrote the landscapes of Rome, refurbishing ancient monuments and building new ones; rather than build, Tacitus' Messalina moves, redefining Rome as an imperial possession over which she has control. Throughout *Annals* 11, Tacitus traces Messalina's shifting relationship with imperial and non-imperial spaces, mapping the vicissitudes of her influence onto specific sites and pathways from the Palatine palace to the home of Silius, the gardens of Lucullus to the road from Ostia. Reading the imperial palace (*domus*) as a type of landscape opens new interpretive possibilities. By following Messalina through Rome, Tacitus connects landscape and memory to dynasty: just as the location of the *domus* itself is neither inherent nor fixed, so too is the hereditary dynasty fragile and liable to breakage. Tacitus prompts readers to consider the tenuous nature of imperial power and dynastic succession as bound up in the imperial bedchamber (*cubiculum*) and the body of the emperor's wife.

Within *Annals* 11, significant spaces provide a framework for Messalina's narrative and follow the trajectory of Messalina's power. Messalina's movements into and out of the imperial *cubiculum* during the trial of Asiaticus and her acquisition of the gardens of Lucullus introduce the centrality of space and motion to Tacitus' account.<sup>7</sup> Messalina's relationship with Gaius Silius and her repeated processions to his *domus* show how Tacitus synthesizes space, imperial power, and memory, as Messalina attempts to relocate the imperial *domus*. In her movements, Tacitus' Messalina perverts the symbolism of the imperial *cubiculum* and the ritual of marriage, imagines the imperial *domus* as a moveable entity over which she has control, and disassociates the emperor's political power from a specific architectural locale. The *domus* becomes emblematic of Tacitus' exploration of ambiguity and polyvalency in the meaning of sites of memory; the idea of the *domus* is further complicated by its overlapping nuances as both identifiable structure and moveable household. Messalina's authority is overturned when Claudius returns to the city. Tacitus traces Messalina's fall through her conveyance through space: rather than a *carpentum*

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<sup>5</sup> Joshel 1995 has discussed Messalina's actions as a part of a discourse of desire and, consequently, the discourse of empire. Questa 1995 questions whether Messalina was an innocent victim. Wyke 2002, 321-90 reviews literary and film responses to Messalina as a libidinous character. On the reasons for her marriage to Gaius Silius see Scramuzza 1940, 90-4; Fagan 2002; Griffin 1984, 29; Levick 1990, 64-7; Barrett 1996, 91-4; Cenerini 2010; Major 1994. Osgood 2011, 206-11 discusses how Tacitus does not explain Messalina and Silius' plans for the principate, allowing for multiple interpretations of her death and posthumous memory.

<sup>6</sup> See Hutchinson 2020, 118-52 on the language of motion in Tacitus.

<sup>7</sup> Von Stackelberg 2009 argues for the gardens as a space of performance and transgression and argues that garden spaces link Messalina's seemingly uncoordinated movements, from the marriage to Silius (*Ann.* 11.27), to the celebration of the mock vintage (*Ann.* 11.31.2-3), to Messalina's journey on the Ostian road in a cart used for carrying garden refuse (*Ann.* 11.32.3). Pagán 2006, 65-92 relates Messalina's garden as a place of inclusion and exclusion to Tacitus' process of inclusion and exclusion of material within his history, arguing that the episode, "reveals the historian's anxiety over his ability to render a credible past" (72).

(carriage), she crosses the city on foot and then rides “in a cart used for the removal of garden refuse,” (*vehiculo, quo purgamenta hortorum e<x>cipiuntur, Ann. 11.32.3*).<sup>8</sup> Claudius’ freedmen prevent an encounter, recognizing the metonymic relationship between Messalina and the imperial *domus*. Messalina dies in the gardens she claimed for her *domus*, and her body disappears from view. After her death, the emperor’s household is overturned (*caede Messalinae convulsa principis domus, Ann. 12.1.1*). Claudius takes a new wife, and the imperial *domus* shifts focus to Agrippina the Younger and her aspirations for her son Nero. The conclusions address Messalina’s memory in the remainder of the *Annals* and the implications for Tacitus’ historiographical project.

### Memory, Space, and Historiography

In the past few decades, memory studies have provided new avenues for interpretation of classical literature and culture.<sup>9</sup> Several types of memory, as defined by Jan Assmann, are relevant: “collective memory” serves as a composite term that combines “communicative memory,” identified with individual or living memories usually communicated verbally and limited to a period within three or four *saecula* (generations) of a given event (roughly 80 to 100 years), and “cultural memory,” which is temporally distant from the everyday and communicated primarily through texts and material culture.<sup>10</sup> Cultural memory begins where communicative memory ends: it is more controlled and public in nature than communicative memory, and is transmitted by those with some degree of authority. Matthew Roller defines this form of memory as “the crystallization of communicative memory into objective cultural forms like narratives, texts, tombs or other built structures, rituals, honorific names, and the like.”<sup>11</sup> Memory is thus intimately connected to sites significant to cultural history. Pierre Nora described symbolic locations identified as *lieux de mémoire*, such as the Arc d’Triomphe, as anchors for memory, specific sites around which collective memories formed within a community.<sup>12</sup> These sites of memory include physical monuments like cemeteries or museums, rituals and other commemorative practices such as anniversaries, as well as notions like lineage. The meaning of a place may change after its memory is invested with a new celebration, and thus Nora viewed history as “perpetually suspicious” of memory.<sup>13</sup> In Rome, such sites include cultural reference

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<sup>8</sup> All text of Tacitus’ *Annals* is that of Heubner 1994. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>9</sup> See Galinsky 2016b for a background to memory studies and Roman perspectives and Galinsky’s 2014 and 2016a edited volumes for these studies put into practice. Cf. Cubitt 2007 and Le Goff 1993. See further Gowing 2005 on memory and power; Farrell 1997 on the phenomenology of memory; Walter 2004 on the transmission of historical memory in Republican Rome; Jaeger 1997 on *memoria* and *monumentum* in Livy; Timpe 1996 on memory and tradition; Small 1995 on writing and memory in Livy and Plutarch; Flower 2003, 39 on the development of historiography within Rome’s culture of memory, with attention to the figure of Marcellus; Shannon-Henderson 2019 on cultic memory in Tacitus’ *Annals*.

<sup>10</sup> Assmann 1995. The term “collective memory” derives from Halbwachs 1992. Wiseman 2014 prefers the term “popular memory” in his discussion of Rome.

<sup>11</sup> Roller 2018, 229 continues that he labels these cultural forms as “monuments.”

<sup>12</sup> See Nora 1989.

<sup>13</sup> Nora 1989, 9.

points like the hut of Romulus.<sup>14</sup> Historiography involves the formation or reconstruction and handing down of cultural memory. However, this does not mean that memory is static. As Edward Said argues, collective memory “is not an inert and passive thing, but a field of activity in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified, and endowed with political meaning.”<sup>15</sup>

Tacitus betrays a deep concern for memory in his *Annals*, particularly in the comparison between the Republican past and his imperial present.<sup>16</sup> Tacitus traces the manipulation of memory during the early principate and establishes that memory is intrinsically connected to the genre of historiography.<sup>17</sup> He suggests that historiography is the material instantiation of memory, and that its purpose is to transmit the lives and deeds of those worthy of remembering in order to provide *exempla* (role models) for the future.<sup>18</sup> However, memory may be used, misused, or exploited in the desire for domination, or in the shaping of a particular narrative. Alain Gowing has shown how memory provides a motivating factor in the *Annals*, and emperors are concerned “with manipulating memory towards particular ends.”<sup>19</sup> This preoccupation is relevant for the recognition of the power of the imperial *domus* and the continuation of the first dynasty. As one who was voted a *damnatio memoriae*, Messalina provides a test case for the manipulation, control, and authority involved in the transmission of memory.<sup>20</sup>

The past few decades have also witnessed a “spatial turn” in various disciplines, bringing focus to the human experience and distinguishing between space, place, and landscape, while recognizing overlaps between them. As is discussed by Yi-Fu Tuan, space and place require each other for definition: once endowed with value, space becomes place.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, when an environment acquires value and is integrated into a human’s understanding of the world, it becomes a landscape.<sup>22</sup> Landscape is a cultural construction, a product of human action and intervention, a “space that is mediated through human subjectivity.”<sup>23</sup> William Mitchell introduces landscape as a dynamic “medium of exchange” that participates

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<sup>14</sup> As discussed by Walter 2004, 179-83.

<sup>15</sup> Said [1994] 2002, 251.

<sup>16</sup> See for example Gowing 2005, 28-32.

<sup>17</sup> Tacitus’ account of the trial and death of the historian Cremutius Cordus provides an example (*Ann.* 4.34-5); on which see Gowing 2005, 26-7, Sailor 2008, 250-313, Libatique 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Agric.* 1, *Hist.* 1.1.1-4, and *Ann.* 1.1.1-3 for Tacitus’ presentation of the utility of his works.

<sup>19</sup> Gowing 2016, 50.

<sup>20</sup> Flower 1998 traces the erasures of political rivals and others viewed as negative *exempla*, including imperial women; Varner 2004 catalogues the material evidence for *damnationes*. Flower 1998, 155 argues that memory sanctions were meant to erase the condemned individual without harming the entire *gens*; see further Flower 1998, 179.

<sup>21</sup> Tuan 1977, 6. Cf. Tuan 1977, 136, “Space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning.” By comparison, De Certeau 1984, 97 differentiates between place, which considers static relationships, and space, which is dynamic and creative, defined by movement and human experience. Purves 2014, 96n.7 identifies space as “abstract, global, framing, theoretical,” and place as “value-laden, experienced, lived-in, embodied.”

<sup>22</sup> McNerney and Sluiter 2016, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Felton and Gilhuly 2018, 2. Cf. Cosgrove 1984, 13 on landscape denoting, “the external world mediated through subjective human experience in a way that neither region nor area immediately suggest. Landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world. Landscape is a way of seeing the world.” See further Alcock 2002, 30, “Landscape, a capacious and currently much utilized concept, contains a multitude of meanings, all of which revolve around human experience, perception and modification of the world.”

in the revolution and formation of a complex network of political, social, and cultural identities.<sup>24</sup> As an idea, landscape operates like language: relationships are established between a given topographic entity, such as a tree or road, and an agreed upon meaning or significance.<sup>25</sup> Landscapes include physical environments, spaces demarcated by walls or boundaries, cities and open spaces within them, estates, gardens, monuments, pathways, and much more.<sup>26</sup> Diana Spencer has connected Nora's concept of sites of memory to the idea of landscape.<sup>27</sup> Within Rome, the Campus Martius, Pompey's theater and its environs, and the area surrounding the Mausoleum of Augustus provide examples.<sup>28</sup> As Spencer notes, each of these landscapes tells a story, memorializing political and social change.<sup>29</sup>

In classical studies, scholars have investigated the relationship between space (*locus*), landscape, and emotion,<sup>30</sup> landscape and the discourse of civil war,<sup>31</sup> landscape as an expression of Roman culture and as a means of constructing identity,<sup>32</sup> and the impact of imperial domination on landscape.<sup>33</sup> Jeremy McInerney and Ineke Sluiter emphasize that landscapes are polyvalent and can mean different things to different people at different times.<sup>34</sup> Individuals may alter a landscape, adding new layers of meaning: for example, through his program of restoration, Augustus rebuilt the city of Rome while also impressing an imperial layer onto existing monuments and sites of memory.<sup>35</sup> Considering the Hercules-Cacus episode in Vergil and Ovid, Lissa Crofton-Sleigh concludes that the Romans were enabled to see landscapes as multivalent, valuable parts of their history and identity.<sup>36</sup>

As products of human action, landscapes are infused with memory and history. Memory and landscape foreground the human perspective temporally and spatially, providing related analytical tools. I argue that Tacitus pays particular attention to spatial relations and interactions between people and landscapes of power, defining spaces as dynamic identity-makers. Analyzing Tacitus' narrative of Messalina through the lens of memory and with particular attention to space and landscape allows for new insights into the ways in which the historian represents sites like the imperial *cubiculum* as invested

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<sup>24</sup> Mitchell [1994] 2002, 2. See Schama 1995 on the development of the term "landscape" and a way of looking at landscapes as a product of culture.

<sup>25</sup> Spencer 2010, 9.

<sup>26</sup> As noted by Alcock 2002, 30.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Spencer 2010, 13 argues, "We can read landscape as a 'site of memory' giving access to *priscae virtutes*, ancient and fundamental qualities of the ideal Roman."

<sup>28</sup> As noted by Spencer 2010, 4-5.

<sup>29</sup> Spencer 2010, 12

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Felton and Gilhuly 2018.

<sup>31</sup> O'Gorman 1995, 117 argues that the landscapes of Palestine and Germany in Tacitus' *Histories* are "marshaled as physical manifestations of the moral/political/poetical discourse(s) of civil war."

<sup>32</sup> Spencer 2010. Cf. Edwards 1996.

<sup>33</sup> Spencer 2005 explores three moments in Lucan and argues for Lucan's poem "as an exploration of the implications of imperial domination for perceptions and experiences of landscape" (48).

<sup>34</sup> See McInerney and Sluiter 2016, 7

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Crofton-Sleigh 2016, 383 fn. 3 on Augustus as a landscape agent involved in shaping and reshaping the city.

<sup>36</sup> Crofton-Sleigh 2016, 404. Crofton-Sleigh 2016 discusses treatments of the Hercules-Cacus episode in Augustan poetry that combine landscape, history, and memory in order to suit a contemporary Roman audience.

with social and political meanings that could evolve and change due to the actions of an individual and thereby impact the memory of the whole site. Tacitus aligns ambiguities in location and the idea of the imperial *domus* with the polyvalency of memory. While he recognizes that the imperial family influenced collective memory through their actions, Tacitus demonstrates that no one could assert absolute control over memory and the meaning of the sites with which they were associated.

In opening his *Annals* with the words *urbem Romam* (*Ann.* 1.1.1), Tacitus places city and empire at the forefront of readers' minds and announces an interest in the connection between the city and the power of the emperor. From the time of Augustus, the emperor came to represent the empire writ large. In Rome, Augustus advertised his power by transforming the urban landscape through renovations and new constructions. Statues, temples, and other *monumenta* (monuments) contributed to the cultural memory of individuals within the imperial household, and imperial family members continued to inscribe themselves upon the landscape of Rome through building projects. The imperial palace on the Palatine hill became both their home and the center of imperial power, and thus the symbolic center of the empire.<sup>37</sup> Tacitus acknowledges the symbolic power of the site and those who dwell within the Palatine *domus*. The stability of the *domus* as both the physical space of the Palatine palace and as a group of people is necessary for the assertion of the dominance of the imperial dynasty: it is the space where heirs were brought up to become imperial successors. However, this dual meaning is also at the heart of the ambiguity of the *domus*.

Tacitus' narrative of Messalina prioritizes her active presence in the *domus* and in Rome and the indelible impact she makes through her movements. The imperial *domus* is instilled with the memory and history of the ruling dynasty: in *Annals* 11, it is an active component of Tacitus' text. I argue that the imperial *domus* may be analyzed as a landscape that is shaped and exploited by its members, and whose meaning shifts as a result of human intervention. The imperial *domus* embodies ambiguities in unresolved power struggles within the household, especially under a weak-willed, oblivious emperor. Tacitus' Messalina manipulates and attempts to control this landscape due to her privileged position as the mother of Claudius' children. She challenges the Palatine *domus* as the citadel of the empire as well as the power of the emperor who dwells within. She expands the *domus* to include gardens as well as urban spaces that combine natural and artificial features, borders, pathways, and defined entrances and exits. Messalina acquires the gardens of Lucullus for the imperial *domus*, and Tacitus traces her movements through additional spaces identified

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<sup>37</sup> Augustus advertised this combination of family, state, and state religion when he became Pontifex Maximus; instead of living in the *domus publica*, he lived in his own Palatine home and made part of it public through the dedication of a shrine to Vesta (*Dio* 54.27.3; *Ov. Fast.* 4.949-54). See Severy 2003, 99-104. In his *Histories*, Tacitus records that Vitellius makes a pretense of abdicating power and then retraces his steps to the Palatine, the "citadel of the empire," (*imperii arcem*, *Tac. Hist.* 3.70). See Ash 2007 on Tacitus' use of topography in the episode (*Tac. Hist.* 3.67.2-3.86) and Vitellius' movements around the city as laden with meaning.

as a *domus*. In these curated spaces, Tacitus' Messalina exploits the possibilities of the imperial *domus* as a center of memory and empire, cultivating new meanings of this *domus* as an expression of her own authority. Tacitus traces the dismantling of Messalina's power over the *domus* as both physical space and group of people; the ambiguity of the *domus* underlies the complex nexus of memory, monumentality, and *damnatio* in Messalina's narrative. These themes are intrinsically connected to the physical space of the city and central to Tacitus' historiographical project.

### Messalina's *Cubiculum* and Gardens of Desire

Messalina's extant narrative is framed by her misuse of space, from the trial of Valerius Asiaticus within the imperial *cubiculum* to her failed suicide and ignoble death in the Gardens of Lucullus (*Horti Luculliani*) that she acquired as a result. In the opening of the extant *Annals* 11, Messalina gapes with desire for the *Horti Luculliani*, which are increasing in splendor under the care of Valerius Asiaticus (*Ann.* 11.1.1):

\*\*\*nam Valerium Asiaticum, bis consulem, fuisse quondam adulterum eius credidit; pariterque hortis inhians, quos ille a Lucullo coeptos insigni magnificentia extollebat, Suillium accusandis utrisque immittit.

For she [Messalina] believed that Valerius Asiaticus, twice consul, was once her [Poppaea's] adulterer; and equally gaping open-mouthed for the gardens, begun by Lucullus, that he was increasing in remarkable magnificence, she sent for Suillius in order to accuse both.

Messalina seeks to punish Asiaticus and his lover Poppaea and to obtain the gardens for the imperial *domus*. The participle *inhians* expresses the level of her obsession with the garden space.<sup>38</sup> Asiaticus is tried *intra cubiculum* with Messalina present, while access is denied to members of the senate (*neque data senatus copia: intra cubiculum auditur, Messalina coram, Ann.* 11.2.1).<sup>39</sup> The imperial bedroom appears as a courtroom in which Claudius serves as judge and Asiaticus may be condemned. Both Claudius and Messalina are moved by his defense, and Messalina exits to ensure her desired outcome: "Claudius was greatly moved and [Asiaticus] even stirred the tears of Messalina. Exiting the bedroom to wash them away, she warned Vitellius not to allow the accused to slip away. She herself rushed toward the destruction of Poppaea" (*commoto maiorem in modum Claudio, Messalinae*

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Joshel 1995, 57, who notes that elsewhere in the *Annals*, Agrippina the Elder desires *dominatio*, according to Sejanus, and her daughter Agrippina desires the luxurious *horti* of Statilius Taurus (*Ann.* 4.12.3; *Ann.* 12.59.1).

<sup>39</sup> Tacitus is only author to say he was tried in the *cubiculum*. Cf. Cassius Dio 61.29.4-6, 6a. On this location see Tagliafico 1996, de Vivo 2009.

*quoque lacrimas excivit. quibus abluendis cubiculo egrediens monet Vitellium, ne elabrum sineret; ipsa ad perniciem Poppaeae festinat, Ann. 11.2.1-2).* As a result of Messalina's actions, Asiaticus is condemned to death and Poppaea threatened with execution until she commits voluntary suicide.

Scholars have noted the significant location of the trial as the imperial *cubiculum*, a relatively private space to which Messalina has access and the senate does not. As an intimate space, the *cubiculum* invites a different kind of reading than other courtrooms. Andrew Riggsby discusses the limited access to this space, which depended upon gender and status and is connected to the exercise of power.<sup>40</sup> Laura Nissinen considers the activities that took place inside the *cubicula* at different times of day, while Anna Anguissola demonstrates the utility of alcove *cubicula* in Pompeiian homes as reception rooms advertising the luxury, prestige, and style of the residents.<sup>41</sup> In Arturo de Vivo's estimation, the trial of Asiaticus is highly pathetic and emblemizes Tacitus' condemnation of Claudius' passivity and Messalina's depravity, as the site where she also committed adultery with the actor Mnester (*Ann. 11.28.1*).<sup>42</sup> Claudius is unaware that the traces of Mnester remain in the space; Messalina's profaning of the *cubiculum* with an actor marked a shift in the power balance of the space, and Claudius has lost mastery over the *cubiculum*. Messalina works through her agents to ensure the destruction of Asiaticus and Poppaea; her movements into and out of the *cubiculum* are vital to her success.

Through the trial of Asiaticus, Messalina asserts her authority over the *cubiculum*. Tacitus illustrates that the *cubiculum* is not a neutral space, but rather one encoded with moral and political meanings that can shift according to activity, time of day, and occupancy. The imperial *cubiculum* cannot be defined as public or private, domestic or political, and the question of accessibility remains active. Tacitus emphasizes who has access and who is in control, beyond whether it was legal to hold a trial in that space.<sup>43</sup> While Claudius and Messalina are both spectators of Asiaticus' defense and emotionally moved (*commoto... excivit*), Messalina claims influence over the space through sightlines and movement. Asiaticus presents his defense before Messalina's eyes (*coram*), and she exits the room to regain control, ordering Vitellius to follow through on her plan. Her orders, given while exiting in order to cleanse herself of her emotional display (*quibus abluendis*), suggest the importance of dynamic space and movement in the episode. Messalina exhibits her mastery over the *cubiculum* through having access, observing and experiencing the trial

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<sup>40</sup> Riggsby 1997, 54.

<sup>41</sup> Nissinen 2009; Anguissola 2010. In contrast to Riggsby 1997 and Anguissola 2010, who consider the *cubiculum* as relatively private, Nissinen 2009, 92 concludes, "*cubiculum* gave a *possibility* for peace and privacy, though, in practice, moving inside a house and accessing one's bedroom was probably quite easy" (original italics).

<sup>42</sup> De Vivo 2009, 19-23

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Quintilian, "Place also frequently affects the quality, for the same action is not lawful or becoming in all circumstances" (*ad qualitatem quoque frequenter pertinent locus, neque enim idem ubique aut licet aut decorum est, Inst. 5.10.40*).

within, and by her well timed exit. After leaving, she rushes (*festinat*) to the destruction of Poppaea. Swift, decisive action complements quick motion as Messalina transitions from the physical space of the *cubiculum* to the metaphorical space of destruction (*ad perniciem*). Claudius remains unaware of Messalina's orders: indeed, he asks Poppaea's husband where she is at their next dinner party (*Ann.* 11.2.2). Rather than a site of the emperor's power, the *cubiculum* becomes an emblem of Claudius' ignorance and Messalina's influence.<sup>44</sup>

After Asiaticus' condemnation, the *Horti Luculliani* become an imperial possession. Beard has noted that conceptually, *horti* conflate public and private, *urbs* and *rus* (city and country), political and domestic space, and it is not always clear who belongs there.<sup>45</sup> Katharine von Stackelberg adds, "The Roman garden was neither wholly public nor private; instead, it mediated between the domestic interior and venues of public life, functioning as a space of transition."<sup>46</sup> These ambiguities allow Messalina to redefine the *horti* according to her own agenda. On this reading, they are similar to the imperial *cubiculum*. Messalina transforms the gardens into a symbol of her authority, and situates herself within a tradition of emperors and their wives who utilize Republican *horti* as extensions of the imperial *domus*.<sup>47</sup> Gardens are effeminizing spaces, and the *Horti Luculliani* are no exception.<sup>48</sup> When they become an imperial possession, the gardens' lengthy Republican aristocratic history gives way to Messalina and her desires.<sup>49</sup> Messalina considers the gardens as a space with potential for new possibilities in use and in meaning. The gardens witness her actions within their walls and become a symbol of imperial power and her authority as wife of Claudius and mother of his heirs. Her journeys through the city invite a wider audience.

## Moving the *Domus*

Messalina's movements through Rome advertise her authority as she pushes the boundaries of her public identity as the wife of the emperor.<sup>50</sup> Timothy O'Sullivan has argued that walking and other means of moving through the city provided an index of one's personal

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Purves 2014 for a reading of bedrooms and other interior spaces in Herodotus' *Histories* as viewed and experienced

<sup>45</sup> Beard 1998, 23-24.

<sup>46</sup> Von Stackelberg 2009, 611.

<sup>47</sup> On the connection between *horti* and imperial power see Boatwright 1998 and Beard 1998. Cf. Spencer 2010, 62-134 on villa estates (*horti*) as sites where power and culture were negotiated, and page 62 on these landscapes as the "nexus of luxury, display, power, production, and cultivation." On Messalina see von Stackelberg 2009, 602, "The *Horti Luculliani* concretize her political influence on the social topography of Rome and signal her inversion of gender norms."

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Boatwright 1998, 71ff. on Latin historiography (Tacitus especially) as disproportionately presenting imperial women and "womanly" men as owners and users of *horti*. Vespasian preferred to conduct business in the *Horti Sallustiani* (Cass. Dio 66.10.4-5); by contrast, Trajan did not use *horti* as places of business (Pliny *Pan.* 63; cf. Beard 1998, 30).

<sup>49</sup> On the history of these gardens see von Stackelberg 2009, 597-601.

<sup>50</sup> Von Stackelberg 2009, 607 observes, "The whole episode is saturated with movement between various locations in and around Rome."

and social identity: walking was a “performance of identity” advertising gender and status, delineating emperor from subject, masculine from effeminate and feminine movers, and so on, and one’s entourage contributed to this performance.<sup>51</sup> A woman’s gait was aligned with other aspects of her identity and connected to societal expectations of gender roles: as O’Sullivan demonstrates, “gait becomes a focal point for the judgment of female bodily comportment, and indeed for the judgment of women themselves.”<sup>52</sup> Paired with gestures and clothing, a woman’s gait should be graceful and not ostentatious, advertising her sexual modesty (*pudicitia*) rather than sexual availability (*licentia*). Tacitus’ Messalina displays her social superiority, status, and power through her movements, as well as her *licentia*, without the pomp of a state-sponsored procession. While other imperial wives such as Livia participated in state-sanctioned *pompae* and religious processions, Messalina uses her public appearances to reject the meaning of these state-sponsored displays.<sup>53</sup> In Tacitus’ narrative, Messalina’s movements through space are just as important as her destinations, and she and her entourage invite an audience for the spectacle. As she traverses the city, she attacks the Roman institution of marriage, inverts gender expectations by actively pursuing the beautiful object of her desire, and transfers an imperial dowry to his *domus* prior to their marriage. She then goes through the motions of the marriage ritual and completion of official marriage documents as the culmination of an elaborate performance. By redefining paths through the city as expressions of immorality, Messalina ensures that her actions enter into collective memory, rendering the senatorial decree of *oblivio* rendering the senate’s decree consigning her to oblivion (*oblivio*) impossible to enact. Her display begins during a public spectacle and ends in a final moment with her mother.

Tacitus introduces Messalina’s obsession with Silius in his account of the Troy Games that featured both Britannicus and Nero: the populace favored Nero as the last descendant of Germanicus and felt compassion for his mother Agrippina because of Messalina’s brutality. Messalina took no action against Agrippina because she was preoccupied, “with a new love that bordered upon madness” (*novo et furori proximo amore*, *Ann.* 11.12.3). The object of her desire, Gaius Silius, was already married, and Messalina herself had been married to Claudius for a decade and shared two children with him. Messalina did not allow these relationships to alter her plans (*Ann.* 11.12.2-3):

nam in C. Silium, iuventutis Romanae pulcherrimum, ita exarserat, ut Iuniam Silanam, nobilem feminam, matrimonio eius exturbaret vacuoque adultero poteretur. neque Silius flagitii aut periculi nescius erat; sed certo, si abnueret,

<sup>51</sup> O’Sullivan 2011, 7.

<sup>52</sup> See O’Sullivan 2011, 22-28 on walking like a woman; quote is from page 25.

<sup>53</sup> See Brännstedt 2015 for an analysis of Livia’s public movements within Rome, including participation in the funeral train of Drusus and triumph of Tiberius, religious processions, and daily movements while being conveyed in a *carpentum* as reflective of her increasing political position.

exitio et nonnulla fallendi spe, simul magnis praemiis, op<p>eriri futura et praesentibus frui pro solacio habebat. [3] illa non furtim, sed multo comitatu ventitare domum, egressibus adhaerescere, largiri opes honores; postremo, velut translata iam fortuna, servi liberti paratus principis apud adulterum visebantur.

For she was so inflamed for Gaius Silius, the loveliest of Roman youth, that she compelled him to divorce the noblewoman Junia Silana and took possession of a free adulterer. Silius was not unaware of depravity or danger; but with death certain if he refused and with some hope of escaping notice, and at the same time with the rewards being great, he took solace in awaiting the future and enjoying the present. She, not secretly but with a great retinue, frequented his *domus*, attached herself to his outings, lavished wealth and honors; finally, just as though fortune had already been transferred, slaves, freedmen, ancestral objects of the emperor were seen at the home of the adulterer.

Messalina forces Silius to evict Junia Silana from her marriage and her *domus* and accept her in Junia's place.<sup>54</sup> Tacitus uses conventional language of desire, equating her ardor to feminine madness (*furor*) and noting that she "burned" for Silius (*exarserat*). In contrast to her feminine lack of control, Messalina is the masculine, active pursuer of a superlatively beautiful, youthful body (*pulcherrimum*) and takes possession of Silius (*poteretur*).<sup>55</sup> Silius has limited agency over his divorce and subsequent relationship, but he hopes that the affair might escape the notice of the public (*nonnulla fallendi spe*). Instead, the affair is more public and problematic than any of Messalina's other sexual transgressions, for Silius is a member of the elite and thus a potential political threat to the emperor. Since she advertises the relationship outside of the imperial *domus*, the public knowledge of her activities is more difficult to contain. Their relationship is visibly confirmed by Messalina's visits to Silius' *domus* and her accompaniment of him on his excursions.

Messalina's journeys to Silius' *domus* are a repeated, public performance involving multiple participants and spectators. Tacitus begins his account of the affair by juxtaposing Messalina's distracted state with the spectacle of the Troy Games. Messalina performs an alternate spectacle, although one still intended to be seen by the public. Her retinue frequents the path to Silius' home and she attends him on other outings, crisscrossing the cityscape and involving herself in Silius' business. Tacitus notes that she accompanied him on his excursions (*egressibus adhaerescere*), suggesting that she went to his private *domus* as well as public places of business and politics, laying claim to spheres of power beyond her authority even as the wife of the emperor. Her actions create an alternate mode of commemoration that runs parallel to official spectacles and state-sponsored monuments.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Juv. 10.329-45; cf. Nappa 2010 on Silius as a victim of Messalina's lust

<sup>55</sup> Panoussi 2019b, 212-9 explores Messalina as an example of the trope of an older woman pursuing a younger man, although she notes on page 212 that Messalina and Silius were about the same age.

Monuments provide a visible means of constructing memory and exist within landscapes; Messalina inserts herself into public spaces full of monuments to Rome's past, asserting her relevance to their continued meaning.

Although Tacitus does not mention her mode of transport, Messalina was unlikely to have walked these paths. Elite women would have been carried in litters and Messalina was honored with the use of a *carpentum*. This two-wheeled carriage carried the Vestal Virgins and other religious figures during public festivals. Messalina received this privilege at the same time she was allowed to sit with the Vestals in the theater.<sup>56</sup> Livia was the only imperial woman to use the *carpentum* before her, and Agrippina the Younger claimed its use after she became Claudius' next wife.<sup>57</sup> The *carpentum* thus advertised the imperial women's status. It also played a significant role in two episodes of Rome's history prior to the principate. Tullia drove a *carpentum* over her father Servius' dead body (Liv. 1.48.5-7), and the lex Oppia prohibited women from its use. Jared Hudson juxtaposes these moments to establish the role of the *carpentum* in the construction of Roman gender,<sup>58</sup> and shows that the *carpentum*, a state-sponsored vehicle, was "specifically built for looking at, like the triumphal chariot," but one which also facilitated women's "reckless misbehavior."<sup>59</sup> Hudson concludes that the *carpentum* "stands in for, or helps to structure, the significant passage from the roles of daughter to wife," and "contributes towards patterning Roman conceptions of domestic and public space, and women's movement between them."<sup>60</sup> If she took advantage of her right to this vehicle, Messalina misused the *carpentum* to advertise adultery rather than religiosity, publicizing her transgressions though her privileged conveyance. Her use of the *carpentum* abused both of Hudson's conclusions: Messalina rode in the vehicle from the home of one husband to another, rather than the home of her father to that of her husband, and took an entourage and dowry with her, publicizing her domestic concerns and redefining the path to Silius' *domus* as both domestic and political space. Messalina transferred slaves, freedmen, and objects signifying imperial power to the *domus* of Silius, suggesting a symbolic transfer of power itself. The emperor's *paratus* presumably included objects inherited from the imperial ancestors, such as ancestral busts, enemy spoils, and other emblems of success and honor.<sup>61</sup> The presence of imperial

<sup>56</sup> Cass. Dio 60.22.2. Suetonius notes that she was allowed to ride in the *carpentum* during Claudius' triumph of 44 CE (Suet. *Claud.* 17.3).

<sup>57</sup> For Livia's use of the *carpentum* see Cass. Dio 60.22.2; Suet. *Cal.* 15.1, *Claud.* 11.2; for Agrippina the Younger see *Ann.* 12.42.2. Suetonius notes that an image of the deceased Agrippina the Elder was also carried in a *carpentum* in a procession Gaius gave in her honor (Suet. *Cal.* 15.1).

<sup>58</sup> Hudson 2016, 218 argues, "women in *carpenta* are either too dominant and threatening: too unlike women; or too soft and luxurious: too much themselves. Or else, often, they are somehow both of these things at once."

<sup>59</sup> Hudson 2016, 218.

<sup>60</sup> Hudson 2016, 233.

<sup>61</sup> Furneaux 1896 vol. 2, 18 gives, "the household treasures." For the possible inclusion of spoils in *paratus*, compare Suetonius, "Then in addition a vast number of homes of venerable generals burned, still adorned with enemy spoils" (*tunc praeter immensum numerum insularum domus priscorum ducum arserunt hostilibus adhuc spoliis adornatae, Nero* 38.2).

slaves and freedmen indicates a transfer of ownership and loyalty: these freedmen follow Messalina rather than the emperor. Messalina attempts to invest Silius' home with emblems of imperial power and the symbolism of the Palatine *domus*, the seat of that power. The movement of objects also represents her attempt to become a member of Silius' *domus*, providing a symbolic dowry without Claudius' consent or even knowledge that he has given away his wife.

In her journeys, Messalina brings together the concept of spectacle as a visual experience intended to be witnessed and thereby enter into collective memory, as well as landscape as the visible world filtered through human perception. Messalina asserts herself in public, arguably claiming a role for herself in memory politics and the future of the imperial household. Landscape is defined as a way of seeing the world.<sup>62</sup> Tacitus' Messalina sees the world differently. She imagines the imperial *domus* as a moveable space and disassociates the emperor's political power from this specific domestic locale. She parodies a traditional marriage procession and claims the ability to move the center of imperial power as part of her dowry. Messalina's transfer of her *domus*, accompanied by her provision of her own dowry, provides a prelude to her marriage to Silius. Silius decides that marriage would be preferable to their present situation, and promises to adopt Britannicus and that Messalina's power will remain unaltered (*Ann.* 11.26.2).<sup>63</sup> His promise implies a political coup, but Messalina's agreement, according to Tacitus, is not political, rather, "she desired the name of marriage on account of the magnitude of the infamy" (*nomen tamen matrimonii concupivit ob magnitudinem infamiae*, *Ann.* 11.26.3). *Nomen*, placed in first position, suggests that the title of marriage is the matter of greatest concern. Messalina seeks to subvert the traditional institution of marriage and redefine her matrimony as an *infamia*. Rather than the noble goal of the virtuous, marriage becomes the ignoble goal of morally corrupt adulterers. The perversion of ritual meaning stands in contrast to Claudius' actions: Messalina waits until Claudius has departed to perform a sacrifice at Ostia before staging a full marriage ceremony (*cuncta nuptiarum sollemnia celebrat*, *Ann.* 11.26.3).

Although Tacitus admits surprise that a marriage would take place between a consul-elect and the emperor's wife, he recounts the ceremony proceedings in full (*Ann.* 11.27):

Haud sum ignarus fabulosum visum iri tantum ullis mortalium securitatis fuisse in civitate omnium gnara et nihil reticente, nedum consulem designatum cum uxore principis praedicta die, adhibitis qui obsignarent, velut suscipiendorum liberorum causa convenisse, atque illam audisse auspicum verba, subisse <vota>, sacrificasse apud deos; discubitum inter convivas, oscula complexus, noctem denique actam licentia coniugali. sed nihil compositum miraculi causa, verum audita scriptaque senioribus trado.

<sup>62</sup> Cosgrove 1984, 13.

<sup>63</sup> On the legal problems of this adoption proposal see Levick 1990, 67.

I am not unaware that it will seem fabulous that any mortal had so much carelessness in a city aware of everything and keeping silent about nothing, much more so that a consul designate joined with the wife of the *princeps* on a day specified beforehand, with witnesses present to sign, as if for the sake of producing children, and that she listened to the words of the marriage officials,<sup>64</sup> took up vows, sacrificed to the gods; that they banqueted among guests, there were kisses and embraces, and finally the night spent in conjugal license. But nothing has been composed for the sake of wonder; I record the reports and writings of the elders.

The marriage ritual is framed by Tacitus' authorial commentary. He admits that his narrative seems fabricated, but insists that multiple sources, oral and written, support his account.<sup>65</sup> The marriage ritual is relatively banal, and could describe almost any wedding.<sup>66</sup> The various stages of the ritual are observed, and witnesses are present to sign an official document, giving material proof of the marriage. In his parallel account, Suetonius reports that Claudius signed a contract for the dowry on the grounds that the marriage was fake; once he realized that a true marriage had taken place, he ordered Messalina put to death (Suet. *Claud.* 26.2-3). In Tacitus' narrative, at the end of the celebration the couple engages in socially acceptable conjugal *licentia*, a detail that marks the difference between their wedded state and previously adulterous *licentia*. Tacitus provides a straightforward description of a ritual whose value is being overturned by its adulterous participants and complicit observers. The ritual becomes an index of the depths of Messalina's depraved desires and loses meaning: rather than a cultural institution undertaken for the production of legitimate children, marriage is equated with the height of infamy.

Vassiliki Panoussi has argued that women's rituals provided a space where women could become empowered by "laying claim to structures of authority or power usually associated with the male domain."<sup>67</sup> As "an important vehicle for the construction of Roman gender and national identity," a wedding should benefit both society and the state at large.<sup>68</sup> Messalina's marriage distorts the relationship between the imperial family and others, eliding the distinction between the Julio-Claudians as a hereditary dynasty and those who may contest their power. As the mother of potential imperial heirs, Messalina had a vital role within the imperial *domus*. In her marriage to Silius and removal of a dowry from her husband Claudius' house, Messalina challenges the idea of marriage as

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<sup>64</sup> In addition to 'augur,' an *auspex* is a person who witnesses the marriage contract and ensures that marriage ceremonies are performed correctly (L&S s.v. *auspex* 2).

<sup>65</sup> Fagan 2002 questions the historical accuracy of the marriage and considers whether it is intended as a moralizing tale.

<sup>66</sup> On the marriage ceremony see Treggiari 1991 and Hersch 2010; on the procession to the groom's house see Hersch 2010, 135-226. Panoussi 2019a, 17-21 provides a concise summary of the elements of a wedding.

<sup>67</sup> Panoussi 2019a, 9

<sup>68</sup> Panoussi 2019a, 12.

a contractual bond between spouses, and re-envisioning her duty to the dynasty.<sup>69</sup> In her dislocation of the *domus*, Tacitus' Messalina demonstrates problems in considering the state as an extension of the imperial *domus*.<sup>70</sup> The location of Messalina's marriage ceremony is left unsaid, complicating our perception of the event. Tacitus fails to identify the location of the ceremony, and we are left to wonder whether there was a procession from the imperial *domus* to that of Silius to complete the incredible ritual. The lack of a specific location adds a nebulous quality to the event, justifying Tacitus' disbelief. Ambiguity operates on the level of both landscape and ritual, challenging the entrance of the event into historical memory. The proof relies on text rather than location. Tacitus records a traditional marriage ceremony without assigning the ritual to a physical space. However, witnesses sign the document proving the ritual occurred, consigning the marriage into history.

Through her marriage ritual and frequent journeys from the imperial *domus* to the home of Silius, the emperor's wife claimed the authority to transfer both the imperial *domus* and the power of that household. Tacitus' Messalina thus suggests that the following claim is perverse: namely, that Rome is wherever the emperor is. Rather, she claims that her maternal body is a signifier of Rome's future: as the mother of potential imperial heirs, she had a vital role within the imperial *domus*. Sandra Joshel identifies her simple logic: "the man who holds the woman holds the power."<sup>71</sup> Messalina's claim is confirmed by the reaction of the personified imperial household to her marriage: the *domus* is horrified (*domus principis inhorruerat*, *Ann.* 11.28.1). The horror is concentrated in those with power (*penes potentia*, *Ann.* 11.28.1). In Tacitus' verb choice (*inhorruerat*), there is a certain slippage between the members of the household and the *domus* as an architectural structure that has been physically shaken. The *OLD* presents the primary meaning of *domus* as the building itself, but the *TLL* identifies the physical building versus the members of the household as the core binary of *domus*.<sup>72</sup> By presenting the *domus* as subject of an emotive, evocative verb, Tacitus explores the overlapping nuances of the *domus* as both structure and group of people. He establishes that the members of the imperial household define its power, status, and public image. The *domus* fulfills the role of a human agent in guiding the reader's emotional reaction to events happening within its environs; as a landscape for Messalina's transgressions and the household's responses, the *domus* becomes a site that is at war with itself. In her analysis of Tacitus' Batavian revolt, Leen van Broeck argues that Tacitus endows the Rhineland landscape with its own agency that works against the Romans.<sup>73</sup> In *Annals* 11, Tacitus grants the imperial *domus* a similar agency that creates a sense of urgency and dread among its members, particularly

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<sup>69</sup> See Panoussi 2019b, 215.

<sup>70</sup> On the state as an extension of the imperial *domus* see for example Severy 2003, 213-51, Milnor 2006, 47-93.

<sup>71</sup> Joshel 1995, 73.

<sup>72</sup> *OLD* ad *domus* 1 (the household is consigned to meaning number 6); *TLL domus* I *proprie et corporaliter* and II *cogitatur de dominis, habitatoribus*.

<sup>73</sup> Van Broeck 2018.

Claudius' freedmen. Messalina thrives in places that she defines as part of her *domus*, while Claudius remains ignorant of activities that take place there. By transforming the *domus* into a witness of its own destruction, Tacitus also offers a subtle critique of the concept of a hereditary dynasty on the whole. In his *Histories*, Tacitus contrasts the Julio-Claudian *domus* with that of Galba: in his adoption speech to Piso, Galba notes that Augustus sought a successor within his *domus*, while he looked for one in the state (*sed Augustus in domo successorem quaesivit, ego in re publica*, Tac. *Hist.* 1.15). Tacitus' Galba elides the difference between the Julio-Claudian *domus* as a physical location and as a household by juxtaposing the *domus* with the *res publica*; unlike Augustus, he does not consider the state as an extension of that *domus* and does not limit his search for a successor to those living within its walls.

In calling attention to the ambiguities present in *domus* in the marriage of Messalina, Tacitus heightens the drama at a critical juncture of his narrative. Throughout *Annals* 11, Messalina has advertised her possession of the imperial *domus* by moving into, out of, within, towards, and away from the space itself. Her marriage ceremony introduces another nuance of the *domus*. In her unbelievable ritual, the Palatine *domus* emerges as its own character and another potential victim of Messalina. The emperor's wife makes the *domus* shudder in horror by attempting to move its very foundations, the locus of imperial power and the focal point of the empire.<sup>74</sup> Tacitus exposes the vulnerability of the imperial *domus* and the Julio-Claudian dynasty, questioning the permanence of the Palatine *domus* as the center of imperial memory and Roman identity. He demonstrates that Roman landscapes are not static, and that a single woman had the ability to destroy the sense of inevitability in the perpetuity of the hereditary dynasty.

After Messalina's marriage to Silius, the *domus* becomes an active stage on which the freedmen and Messalina vie for power, and the emperor ironically has the least amount of control. Claudius has been ignorant of his wife's actions, but once the political situation is compromised his freedmen consider it necessary to inform the emperor of his tenuous position. While traveling back to Rome from Ostia, the freedman Narcissus acquaints Claudius with the situation and advises the emperor not to reclaim his *domus* or the objects that Messalina has transferred to Silius' home (*Ann.* 11.30.2):

...nec nunc adulteria obiecturum ait, ne domum servitia et ceteros fortunae paratus reposceret: frueretur immo his, <s>ed redderet uxorem rumperetque tabulas nuptiales. 'an disidium' inquit 'tuum nosti? nam matrimonium Siliii vidit populus et senatus et miles; ac ni propere agis, tenet urbem maritus.'

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Ash 2007 on personified buildings in *Histories* 3. Ash 2007, 237 argues, "Tacitus deploys devices such as personification of architectural structures selectively but at strategic moments, using Rome and her buildings creatively as both victims and voyeurs within the text, and artfully switching between their identities as prosaic structures of bricks and mortar on the one hand and emotive beacons of Roman identity on the other."

[Narcissus] said that he was not going to bring a charge of adultery, and [Claudius] should not demand back the *domus*, slaves, and the other ornaments of fortune: rather [Silius] should enjoy those, but return the wife and make the marriage documents void. [Narcissus] said, “Do you recognize your divorce? For the people and senate and soldiers saw Silius’ marriage; and unless you act quickly, the husband holds the city.”

In the freedman’s perspective, the imperial possessions do not represent the power of the emperor, but the marriage to Messalina does. The *domus* is not located in objects or stone, but in the person of the emperor’s wife. Although Tacitus has represented Messalina as apolitical in her *furor* for Silius, Tacitus’ Narcissus frames Messalina’s marriage as a political maneuver whereby she and her children became members of a different physical *domus*, but retained their status. Narcissus refers to Silius not by name but by position: Messalina’s husband (*maritus*) is the one who has power in Rome. Claudius is so panicked by the report that he questions his own position, wondering whether he still held *imperium* and whether Silius was still his subject (*ut identidem interrogaret, an ipse imperii potens, an Silius privatus esset. Ann. 11.31.1*). Claudius’ confusion reflects an overall anxiety of his reign that began with his initial claims to power. Josiah Osgood has emphasized the necessity for Claudius to lay claim to the Palatine complex immediately on the death of Caligula: his occupation of Augustus’ *domus* assisted in symbolically and visually justifying his accession.<sup>75</sup> Messalina challenges the symbolic power of the Palatine complex as well as the *cubiculum*. As is mentioned later in book eleven, the actor Mnester profaned the space (*histrion cubiculum principis insultaverit, Ann. 11.28.1*).<sup>76</sup> Messalina’s use of the bedroom for adultery with an actor cheapens its sanctity as a space controlled by Julio-Claudian men.<sup>77</sup> Mnester’s transgression violates the imperial *domus* and the moral integrity of the dynasty housed there.<sup>78</sup> Messalina is responsible for political and sexual transgression in the imperial *cubiculum*, for challenging the authority of the emperor in his own home, and for questioning the symbolism of the imperial *domus* as the center of the Empire.

### The Return of Claudius

When Claudius learns of the marriage, Messalina and Silius are celebrating a mock vintage in an unspecified outdoor location, also identified as a *domus* (*Ann. 11.31.2*):

at Messalina non alias solutor luxu, adulto autumnno simulacrum vindemiae perdomum celebrabat. urgeri prela, fluere lacus; et feminae pellibus accinctae adsultabant ut sacrificantes vel insanientes Bacchae; ipsa crine fluxo thyrsum

<sup>75</sup> Osgood 2011, 38.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. The persecution of the couple that allowed Mnester and Poppaea to meet at their house (*Ann. 11.4.1*)

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Joshel 1995, 72, “She turns the household into the street, conflating the imperial household and the imperial city.”

<sup>78</sup> For Mnester’s self defense see Tac. *Ann. 11.36.1-2*.

quatiens, iuxtaque Silius hedera vincetus, gerere cothurnos, iacere caput, strepente circum procaci choro.

However, Messalina, never more loose in dissipation, with autumn ripe was celebrating a mock vintage through the *domus*. Wine presses were stomped, vats flowed; and women dressed in animal skins were leaping about like those making a sacrifice or raving Bacchantes; she herself shook a thyrsus, hair loose, and beside her Silius, crowned in ivy; they wore the boots of tragedy, tossing their heads surrounded by the noisy accompaniment of a shameless chorus.

It is unclear whether this is a garden belonging to the imperial household or to Silius.<sup>79</sup> The ambiguity is Tacitus' point: Messalina is in transition between homes and husbands, and the issue of political control is unresolved.<sup>80</sup> The narrative discloses a crisis in epistemology in which it becomes difficult to know the meaning of ritual and the location of imperial power. The indeterminate space provides the nexus of not knowing: Messalina performs a wedding in an undisclosed location and stages a mock vintage in a *domus* that we cannot be sure we can locate. The *domus* juxtaposes evidence of human cultivation, such as the wine press, with wildness in the uncontrolled Bacchic movements of its habitants: the landscape is positioned between untilled nature and the carefully constructed urban environment, reflecting Messalina's own position as she begins to lose control over her followers as well as the cityscapes and pathways she traversed with Silius. The Bacchic celebration is not static, but moves through the space (*per domum*), as Messalina claims the *domus* as her own and imprints her memory on the landscape through frenzied motion. Panoussi argues that Tacitus depicts her Bacchic frenzy as "negating or destroying the household."<sup>81</sup> Uncontrolled, irreverent motion is thematic throughout the episode, from the vats of wine to Messalina's shaking thyrsus and flowing hair, to the raving Bacchant chorus; Silius is the only one slightly constrained, his head bound by ivy (*vincetus*).<sup>82</sup> The performance is enhanced by a visual reminiscent of tragedy: through describing their costume, including the iconic buskins of tragedy, Tacitus suggests an interplay with Euripides' *Bacchae* and the rituals depicted therein. As the culminating display of Messalina's wantonness, Tacitus aligns his narrative with the concerns surrounding the Bacchanalian affair of 186 BCE, as narrated in Livy's history (Livy 39.8-19). The Bacchanalian conspiracy targeted those who

<sup>79</sup> Koestermann vol. 3, 96 ad 11.31.2 follows Furneaux ad loc., arguing that this is the house of Silius; von Stackelberg 2009, 608 points out that this *domus* could also be the imperial palace.

<sup>80</sup> Panoussi 2019b, 215 argues, "The royal *domus* is determined by Messalina's status as imperial wife, who is free to exchange one husband for another."

<sup>81</sup> Panoussi 2019b, 215. Panoussi 2019b, 212-19 examines the episode as a demonstration of the distortion of marriage through allusions to Vergil's Dido and Amata, as well as Euripides' *Bacchae*.

<sup>82</sup> See Hutchinson 2020, 147-50 on movement verbs in the episode; Hutchinson differentiates between the unified movement of the Bacchic dance and the diverse movements of the various parties after they learn of Claudius' approach.

practiced rituals that implied sexual licentiousness; Livy links the foreign religion explicitly to the authority of the state and demonstrates that it posed a challenge to state-controlled *religio*.<sup>83</sup> Messalina's Bacchic performance represents a metaphor for her insurrection on sexual, moral, and political levels. The imperial household shakes at the overt threat to its symbolism as the center of political power, just as Euripides' palace of Pentheus, but it does not fall.<sup>84</sup> Rather, the Bacchic revel breaks into chaos when Claudius' approach is announced and the celebrants scatter. Messalina departs for the gardens, Silius for the Forum, and their followers into places public and private.

Claudius learns of his precarious situation while outside of Rome and far from the imperial *domus*. Messalina, knowing from past experience that she is able to manipulate Claudius if he sees her, attempts to meet him on the road from Ostia. She also orders Britannicus and Octavia to be led to his embrace, and begs the chief Vestal, Vibidia, to intercede on her behalf (*Ann.* 11.32.2). Sight and touch are intended to soothe Claudius' anger, remind him of his love for his children, and result in forgiveness. Abandoned by all but three companions, she crosses the city by foot and then rides in a garbage cart (*Ann.* 11.32.3):

atque interim tribus omnino comitantibus – id repente solitudinis erat – spatium urbis pedibus emensa, vehiculo, quo purgamenta hortorum e<x>cipiuntur, Ostiensem viam intrat, nulla cuiusquam misericordia, quia flagitiorum deformitas praevalebat.

Meanwhile, with only three companions – such was her sudden solitude – she traversed the length of the city on foot, and entered onto the road to Ostia in a cart for the removal of garden refuse, no pity from anyone, since the baseness of her adulteries had the most influence.

In order to meet Claudius on the road from Ostia, Messalina traveled the length of the city, displaying her loss of fortune by her mode of transport and limited entourage.<sup>85</sup> She then would have exited the Servian Wall through the busy Porta Trigemina between the

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<sup>83</sup> See Takács 2000.

<sup>84</sup> See Henrichs 1978, 159 n.118 on Vettius Valens climbing a tree to observe the revel (*Ann.* 11.31.3) as an echo of Euripides' Pentheus at *Bacchae* 1061. Cf. La Penna 1975 on Valens and the Bacchantes in light of Tacitus' reference to Euripides.

<sup>85</sup> Hutchinson 2020, 149 assumes the Bacchic revel took place in the gardens of Lucullus, located in the north near the start of the Aqua Virgo, and that Messalina traversed the city by foot prior to riding in the garbage cart once she reached the start of the Via Ostiensis in the south; he notes, "The cart for garden waste is naturally taken to come from the Gardens of Lucullus, which she owns; if so, it was evidently too embarrassing a mode of transport for the city, and has been brought separately." O'Sullivan 2011, 65 argues, "Tacitus draws attention to the connection between official escorts and the imperial family as an indication of the new modes of power that result from the transition to monarchy. The rise and fall of Messalina's political ambitions, for example, are tracked through the size of her escort."

Aventine hill and the Tiber, near the Forum Boarium.<sup>86</sup> Plautus notes the crowd of beggars found just outside the gate (Plaut. *Capt.* 90). If this crowd persisted into the principate, Messalina's fallen fortunes are increasingly pathetic: rather than a wedding procession through the city center in a *carpentum* accompanied by supporters or a Bacchic revel in an outdoor *domus*, Messalina is conveyed out of town in a garbage cart past a group of beggars. Her isolation becomes complete as she passes through this final exit and out of the city she has claimed as her *domus*: her companions accompany her on foot to the city gate, after which point she passes through the gate and transfers to the garbage cart, alone. The significance of Messalina's journey outside of the gates of Rome and the sacred boundary (*pomerium*) depends upon her movements and mode of transport.

The road from Ostia, the site of Claudius' potential final confrontation with Messalina, becomes significant for its own indeterminate status: outside of the gates of Rome, Messalina must vie with the freedman Narcissus for authority and the attention of the emperor. When Messalina exited her *cubiculum* to ensure her desired outcome at the trial of Asiaticus, she exerted authority and claimed ownership of that space. By contrast, when Messalina exits the boundary of Rome, she enters a space over which she has no authority. Within the city, Messalina controlled the sightlines, vectors, and paths of engagement, managing the entrances and exits that invited audiences to observe her activities; on the Ostian road, she lacks control over Claudius' experience of topography. Outside of the *domus*, she is deprived of power over the freedmen and her husband, the members of the *domus*. The road contains no positive memories of Messalina, unlike the *cubiculum*. Her solitude contributes to this sense of abandonment and misfortune. She fails to master the road from Ostia, and her travels in the garbage cart become an index of her loss of authority. Gregory Hutchinson notes the "hasty indignity" of the vehicle, especially as compared to the honorary *carpentum*.<sup>87</sup> As with much of her narrative, Messalina rushes to accomplish her will, advertising her immorality by her inability to move with the composure and modesty of an elite matron (*matrona*). Once she leaves the *pomerium*, Messalina also moves from a civic space into a military space. She attempts to address her husband in a space where power is negotiated and treaties formed prior to entering the gates of Rome. She is denied a meeting with the nominal head of the opposing party, and is forced to wage a "quasi-military campaign" against Narcissus instead.<sup>88</sup> Ellen O'Gorman has discussed the *topos* of a landscape impeding battle in narratives of war.<sup>89</sup> In *Annals* 11, rather than host a meeting with Claudius, the Ostian road becomes an agent in Messalina's demise: the freedmen avoid a true confrontation by capitalizing on the concept of a road as

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<sup>86</sup> On the Via Ostiensis see Platner and Ashby 1929, 565-566; on the Porta Trigemina see Platner and Ashby 1929, 418.

<sup>87</sup> Hutchinson 2020, 151.

<sup>88</sup> On this phrase see von Stackelberg 2009, 607.

<sup>89</sup> O'Gorman 1995, 127.

a space designed to accelerate and facilitate movement between places. Neither party stops, and Messalina is denied the attention of the one she seeks: the emperor.

The freedmen are aware of the ability of the senses to activate memory recall. Claudius' positive memories of Messalina are explicitly connected to his memories of their children: the emperor wavers between condemning Messalina's shamefulness (*flagitia uxoris*), and recalling his marriage and young children (*aliquando ad memoriam coniugii et infantiam liberorum revolveretur*, *Ann.* 11.34.1). The parallel phrases, *memoriam coniugii* and *infantiam liberorum*, create a symmetry between Claudius' memory of the past and his concerns for the future. As Claudius wavers, his freedmen control his contact with Messalina. When Messalina comes into view, the freedmen distract the emperor by showing him records of her adulterous activities (*codicilli*), overwhelm her voice with their own, and prevent Claudius from seeing his children (*Ann.* 11.34.2-3). Claudius, an emperor-historian dependent upon textual evidence, finally accepts his wife's transgressions once provided with this written proof. By controlling his sightlines, the freedmen prevent a confrontation. However, they remain aware of the danger if Claudius should meet his wife in their shared *domus* and conjugal *cubiculum*. They recognize that Claudius' attitude towards Messalina depends upon material evidence such as the marriage documents, proof of her motherhood in their shared children, and the specific site of the *cubiculum*. Tacitus' Claudius exemplifies the particular crisis between memory and history noted by Nora, who argued, "Memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events."<sup>90</sup> Claudius' positive memories of Messalina are tied to the *cubiculum*, but the emperor's opinion of his wife is challenged by documentary evidence of an event – her marriage to another. By moving the *domus*, Messalina unwittingly dismantled the locus of Claudius' *amor*. Her misreading of the emperor's perspective continues after their missed encounter on the Via Ostiensis.

After failing to attract Claudius' gaze, Messalina journeys to the *Horti Luculliani*, while Narcissus orders Claudius to be taken to Silius' home, where he shows him Republic and imperial possessions weighted with ancestral memory (*Ann.* 11.35.1):

patefieri domum adulteri atque illuc deduci imperatorem iubet. ac primum in vestibulo effigiem patris Sili consulto senatus abolitam demonstrat, tum quicquid avitum Neronibus et Drusis in pretium probri cessisse.

[Narcissus] ordered that the home of the adulterer be thrown open and that the emperor be led there. And first, in the vestibule he pointed out a statue of Silius' father, banned by decree of the senate, and then that she had handed over the ancestral possessions of the Neronians and Druses, the price of disgrace.

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<sup>90</sup> Nora 1989, 22.

The presence of objects significant to several *gentes* is striking: Silius' father is honored with a likeness, despite the *senatus consultum* ordering the removal of his images.<sup>91</sup> The existence of his *effigies* is a political maneuver in itself, and a testament to the uneasy transition from Republic to principate. By contrast, the possessions of the Neronēs and Drusi are present as a substitute dowry, the "price of disgrace" for Messalina's shamelessness and Silius' complicity (*in pretium probri*).<sup>92</sup> *Quicquid* fails to specify the precise nature of the inherited objects: their significance lies in the fact that they belong to Claudius' family line, not to Messalina's Julian *gens*. The objects suggest a transfer of Claudius' imperial ancestry and inherited power to the home of Silius. They confront the emperor with Silius' political aspirations and create confusion: Silius' home simultaneously harbors memories of the *princeps* and of a condemned political traitor. Is this the home of a renowned Republican family, or the center of the empire and imperial power?<sup>93</sup> Claudius' reaction to seeing his ancestral objects in Silius' home confirms the primacy of visual evidence for the emperor: the display so incenses Claudius that they immediately journey to the barracks, where Silius offers no defense and prays for a swift death (*Ann.* 11.35.2).

Claudius' need for visual proof parallels Tacitus' need as historian for documentary evidence. He admits that Messalina's marriage will seem unbelievable to his audience, but insists that he has oral and written accounts (*verum audita scriptaque senioribus trado*, *Ann.* 11.27.1). Tacitus' Narcissus refers to the marriage contract (*tabulae nuptiales*) and the presence of witnesses in order to convince Claudius of his divorce (*Ann.* 11.30.2). While on the road from Ostia, Narcissus distracts Claudius with a written history of Messalina's infidelities (*codicillos libidinum*, *Ann.* 11.34.2). Narcissus attempts to replace Claudius' memories of Messalina and their shared bedroom with a parallel history of Messalina's crimes. The written evidence offers a counterpoint to Claudius' experiences in his imperial *domus*, and the emperor-historian seeks the comfort of this familiar locale to consider his next move.

Narcissus' efforts to control Claudius' memory are threatened by the imperial *domus* as the locus of Messalina's authority. When Claudius returns to the imperial *domus*, he gives the order to call the wretched woman (*miserā*) to present herself the next day (*Ann.* 11.37.2):

nam Claudius...iri iubet nuntiarique miserae (hoc enim verbo usum ferunt)dicendam

<sup>91</sup> See Roller 2018, 237 on the connection between the elite *domus* and social power in which certain features such as *imagines* symbolized the "continuity of the owner's lineage and sociopolitical power that his family had exercised over time." The elite *domus* "articulated its owner's relationship to his family and ancestors, peers and supporters, dependents and slaves, in ways that underpinned his claims to social power and prestige," (Roller 2018, 237).

<sup>92</sup> Joshel 1995, 60 notes that these objects are "family signs" that "have been degraded by becoming the price of scandal."

<sup>93</sup> Joshel 1995, 70 observes, "A wife's desire creates a crisis in the very geography of imperial power. Who is citizen and who emperor? Which house is the imperial *domus*?"

ad causam postera die adesset. quod ubi auditum et languescere ira, redire amor ac, si cunctarentur, propinqua nox et uxorii cubiculi memoria timebantur.

For Claudius...ordered that someone go and announce to the wretched woman (for they report the use of this word) that she be present to state her case on the following day. Which, when it was heard, anger growing faint, love returning and, if they delayed, the approaching night and memory of the uxorial bedchamber were feared.

The term *misera*, Tacitus notes, is present in his sources. Claudius' desire to see and hear his wife indicates that Claudius' *amor* for Messalina has not disappeared completely. This *amor* is associated with Claudius' memories of the uxorial bedchamber (*uxorii cubiculi memoria*). Emotion, memory, and location are intertwined in this specific locus, and the freedmen recognize that Messalina's authority may return if she reenters the imperial *domus*. Fearing that Claudius' *amor* will replace his anger, Narcissus orders her death instead.

Messalina's end confirms that specific *loci* activate Claudius' memory, while Messalina understands space differently. The emperor's wife attempts to control the meaning of significant spaces through movement, from her utilization of the *cubiculum* to her journey to meet Claudius on the road from Ostia. However, by traversing the city on foot and then in a garbage cart, rather than in a litter or *carpentum*, Messalina advertises her loss of control. When the freedman Euodus finds her in the gardens, her body is sprawled on the ground, her mother Lepida by her side (*fusam humi*, *Ann.* 11.37.3). Tacitus' liquid metaphor imagines Messalina's body poured out on the ground, becoming a part of the space itself. The participle forms a fitting conclusion to Messalina's relationship with Silius, which was initiated when Messalina "flowed out into untried lusts," (*ad incognitas libidines profluebat*, *Ann.* 11.26.1). On the advice of her mother she attempts to commit suicide, but is ineffectual in moving the blade against her neck and must be dispatched by a tribune's sword (*tunc primum fortunam suam introspevit ferrumque accepit, quod frustra iugulo aut pectori per trepidationem admovens ictu tribuni transigitur*, *Ann.* 11.38.1). Messalina, a master of movement rather than introspection (*introspevit*), fails in her final movement and thereby confirms her irredeemable immorality (*sed animo per libidines corrupto nihil honestum inerat*, *Ann.* 11.37.4). The *Horti Luculliani* provide the stage for Messalina's death, and there is a certain poetic justice in the fact that Messalina dies in the gardens that she killed to possess.<sup>94</sup> The body is given to her mother, and Messalina disappears from view (*corpus matri concessum*, *Ann.* 11.38.1).<sup>95</sup>

Messalina's absence from the imperial *domus* dictates Claudius' reaction. Claudius

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Beard 1998, 27.

<sup>95</sup> See Mastellone 2004, 544 on the sacrificial aspect in Messalina's mode of death as comparable to that of Polyxena; Mastellone argues that Messalina is both at fault and a victim at the same time, and that her failed suicide is not heroic.

is informed of her death during dinner, and makes no response: rather, he continues with his party and shows no emotion in the following days, not even when he observes his grieving children (*Ann.* 11.38.2-3). Tacitus adds, “The senate helped his forgetting by decreeing that her name and image must be removed from private and public places,” (*iuvitque oblivionem eius senatus censendo nomen et effigies privatis ac publicis locis demovendas. Ann.* 11.38.3). Commemorative devices including monuments and statues gave a materiality to memory, guiding and provoking memory in the viewer.<sup>96</sup> They presented a vision of the past that was preserved as well as manipulated by those in power. Maurice Halbwachs placed emphasis on the physical setting of memory, arguing that memory is localized in both objects and places.<sup>97</sup> As Susan Alcock notes, monuments “live within a wider matrix of human activity; they are set within a landscape.”<sup>98</sup> Landscapes, monuments, and memories are not fixed in meaning and lie vulnerable to attack: memory sanctions illustrate the opportunity for both disturbance and stability.<sup>99</sup>

The senate’s decree of *oblivio* demanded a revision of visual evidence and was intended to erase the public memory of the condemned. Roman memory sanctions included the removal, replacement, transformation, or destruction of honorific statuary and inscriptions.<sup>100</sup> The removal of images of an imperial family member could allow the *domus Augusta* to maintain its dynastic integrity.<sup>101</sup> Corollary to the “cancellation” of one emperor or his wife was the advent of his or her successor: sculptures were re-cut or replaced to indicate the transfer of power from one man to the next.<sup>102</sup> Messalina is the first imperial woman for whom there is sculptural evidence that has arguably been re-carved.<sup>103</sup> Portrait sculptures of Messalina do not appear on any extant monuments, but evidence of her original presence remains.<sup>104</sup> Her image has been removed and/or replaced with Agrippina the Younger on several dynastic monuments.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>96</sup> See Alcock 2002, 19, 28.

<sup>97</sup> Halbwachs 1992, 200.

<sup>98</sup> Alcock 2002, 30.

<sup>99</sup> See Alcock 2002, 30.

<sup>100</sup> Varner 2001, 41 gives a concise overview of the different types of actions included in a decree of *damnatio*.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Varner 2004, 2, “Cancellation of a bad emperor’s identity and accomplishments from the collective consciousness was one of the fundamental ideological aims of *damnatio* in the imperial period.”

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Varner 2004, 4.

<sup>103</sup> Varner 2004, 4, 95-7; Wood 1992, 226.

<sup>104</sup> Rose 1997, 41 notes three extant public inscriptions at Lindos, Lepcis Magna, and Arneae that originally had Messalina’s name. There is also papyrus evidence for a sculpture of Messalina among the Alexandria dynastic statue group (Rose 1997, 185-8 Cat. 128).

<sup>105</sup> See Varner 2004, 95-7 for an overview of Messalina’s replaced and re-carved images (including those at Velleia, Caere, and Baiae). Messalina may have appeared on the Ravenna relief (Kleiner 2000, 50; Rose 1997, 100-102 Cat. 30). In Olympia, there is a sculpture of Claudius at the Metroon, and Rose suggests that there may have been a sculpture of Messalina that was transformed into the portrait of Agrippina the Younger after her death (Rose 1997, 147-8 Cat. 80). A statue group discovered at Baiae, which includes Claudius, Octavia, and Britannicus, probably featured Messalina as well (Wood 1999, 285). The dynastic group from the Julio-Claudian basilica at Velleia includes a statue of Agrippina the Younger, which some scholars have argued has replaced an earlier portrait of Messalina (Varner 2004, Cat. 3.4, Fig. 100a-c; Wood 1992, 473 n.64; Rose 1997, 121-3 Cat. 50, Pl.132-3).

## Messalina's Memory

Messalina's *damnatio memoriae* has particular relevance for Claudius, an emperor overtly invested in honoring his ancestors in order to legitimize his place as emperor and his hopes for his descendants: his willingness to forget Messalina shows an attempt to control the collective memory of the transgressive empress without harming the dynastic potential of her children. Tacitus revives Messalina after the *senatus consultum* ordering the removal of her name and images from public view. Although Tacitus implies that the senatorial decree was intended to aid Claudius' forgetfulness specifically, it has wider implications for Messalina's public memory. The *senatus consultum* implies that Messalina's name and image were meant to disappear from view, from public and private discourse, and from collective memory. Claudius demonstrates a willingness to cast his wife into oblivion and thereby provides a model for all Romans for the erasure of Messalina's memory. Tacitus' record of Messalina's memory sanctions illustrates the interconnected nature of physical and textual monumentality, the process of *damnatio memoriae*, memory, and landscape as space filtered through the human perspective.

Claudius' reaction and the senate's vote provide a combined attempt at memory control. However, Messalina's memory impacted the remainder of Claudius' reign and the future of the principate. Whereas the emperor acts as if he has actually forgotten his wife, her death causes a shift in the imperial *domus*. With the death of Messalina, the imperial household is rent apart (*caede Messalinae convulsa principis domus*, *Ann.* 12.1.1). This phrase opens *Annals* 12 and continues Tacitus' account of 48 CE. *Convulsa* suggests a violent upheaval in which the *domus* has been wrested from its position. The participle implies movement, from shaking or tottering to complete destruction.<sup>106</sup> While her marriage to Silius caused the imperial *domus* to tremble (*domus principis inhorruerat*, *Ann.* 11.28.1), her death causes its dismantling. When Agrippina the Younger replaces Messalina as Claudius' wife, the *domus* is overthrown. Messalina's marriage to Silius endangered Claudius' position as emperor but supposedly maintained Britannicus' position as the imperial heir, but Messalina's death caused the disruption of the Claudian line in preference for the Julian *gens*, represented by Agrippina and her son Nero.

Tacitus directly compares Messalina and Agrippina in introducing Agrippina's control over the imperial *domus* and the state.<sup>107</sup> Rome served both women, but while Messalina's was a rule through caprice, Agrippina demanded a strict and almost manly servitude (*Ann.* 12.7.3):

<sup>106</sup> L&S s.v. *convello* I.B.

<sup>107</sup> On Agrippina as a more corrupt version of Messalina for her dismantling of Roman ideas of motherhood, see Panoussi 2019b, 220-2.

versa ex eo civitas et cuncta feminae oboediebant, non per lasciviam, ut Messalina, rebus Romanis inludenti. adductum et quasi virile servitium: palam severitas ac saepius superbia; nihil domi impudicum, nisi dominationi expediret. cupido auri immensa obtentum habebat, quasi subsidium regno pararetur.

From that moment it was a changed state, and all things obeyed a woman who played with the affairs of Rome not through licentiousness, as Messalina. It was a tight-drawn, almost masculine servitude: in public, there was austerity and not infrequently arrogance; at home, no trace of unchastity, unless it contributed to power. Her boundless desire for gold was maintained, as if she were preparing resources for rule.

*Versa* continues Tacitus' metaphors of movement and turning: while *convulsa* suggested that the *domus* was overthrown, *versa* identifies Agrippina as the woman that accomplished its reorientation. *Domus* and state are aligned in this reorientation and new state of servitude. Messalina's authority was sexual in nature and her desires aimed at a love object, but Agrippina's power is defined as domination and both her adulteries and desire for gold serve that aim. And while Messalina acted in public, traversing the city and moving imperial objects to a new *domus*, Agrippina demonstrates that the *domus* does not need to be physically moved in order for the power balance to shift and for the emperor's wife to take command. The memory of Messalina thus informs the introduction of Agrippina into the *domus* and assists in the definition of its reorientation, despite the fact that the emperor remains the same. Both Agrippina and Messalina toyed with the Roman state, but with different goals. Each woman is shameless, but whereas Messalina's actions ended with a new marriage, Agrippina's adulteries are a means of gaining greater political control.<sup>108</sup> Hindsight allows Tacitus to assess Agrippina as a more domineering, masculine ruler than Messalina: by placing his conclusions at the beginning of *Annals* 12 and continuing the sense of a dislocated *domus* in the evaluation of Narcissus, he invites his reader to interpret Agrippina's movements and the symbolism of the Palatine *domus* in light of Messalina.

Agrippina's reorientation of the imperial *domus* manifests when she uses the memory of Messalina in order to persecute those who were loyal to the former wife of Claudius or her children. One of Agrippina's first acts as empress is to ensure the betrothal of Nero to Octavia, and the freedmen support her intentions out of fear that Britannicus may attempt to avenge his mother's death (*Ann.* 12.9.2). Agrippina then controls the personnel in the imperial *domus*. In 51 CE she removes Lusius Geta and Rufrius Crispinus from their positions in the Praetorian Guard, "whom she believed mindful of Messalina and completely devoted to her children" (*quos Messalinae memores et liberis eius devinctos*

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<sup>108</sup> Cf. Ginsburg 2006, 127-8.

*credebat*, *Ann.* 12.42.1). During his reign, Nero makes a display of clemency and restores Plautius Lateranus, one of the men exiled for adultery with Messalina (*Ann.* 13.11.1), and Publius Suillius attempts to defend himself against various crimes by attesting that he was acting on Messalina's orders (*Ann.* 13.43.4). Nero, citing evidence from Claudius' personal *commentarii*, identifies Messalina as the controlling force behind his crimes. Messalina is not mentioned by name, but rather by the epithets *saeviens* and *impudica*.<sup>109</sup> Suillius served as Messalina's chosen "minister of atrocities," and his trial reminds the reader of Messalina's authoritative role in Claudius' court. This is the final reference to Messalina in the *Annals*. Tacitus' identification of Messalina as savage and unchaste summarizes the two main qualities she is impugned for after her death. He implies that Messalina continued to have a presence in imperial memory and the imperial family's perspective on the authority of women and its public expression. Far from forgotten, Messalina's memory gains relevance as profitable comparative material and is reinterpreted by her successors.

Messalina's death and the overthrow of the imperial *domus* come full circle at the end of *Annals* 12. Although he supported Agrippina's accession, the freedman Narcissus eventually turns against her and opposes her destruction of Domitia Lepida in 54 CE, although he knows it spells his own ruin. He recalls the convulsion (*convulsa*) of the *domus* and admits, "the whole *domus* is overthrown by the plots of the stepmother, a greater scandal than if I had remained silent concerning the shamelessness of the prior wife. However shamelessness is still present now, with Pallas as adulterer, and no one should doubt that she holds honor, shame, the body, everything more paltry than rule," (*at novercae insidiis domum omnem convelli, maiore flagitio, quam si impudicitiam prioris coniugis reticuisset. quamquam ne impudicitiam quidem nunc abesse Pallante adultero, ne quis ambigat decus pudorem corpus, cuncta regno viliora habere. Ann.* 12.65.2). Narcissus finally recognizes the monumental impact of his destruction of Messalina and promotion of Agrippina, echoing the dislocation of the *domus* after Messalina's death (*convulsa principis domus, Ann.* 12.1.1) and its wholesale destruction due to the machinations of Agrippina (*domum omnem convelli*). Narcissus' observations continue the metaphor of displacement and movement of the Palatine *domus*.

After the death of Claudius, the *domus* shifts again: even before the great fire and the building of the Domus Aurea, Tacitus records that Nero, "arranged entertainments in public places and used the whole city as if it were his home," (*Ipsae...publicis locis struere convivia totaque urbe quasi domo uti, Ann.* 15.37.1). The emperor imprinted his own memory on Rome through transforming it into one big imperial possession, a *domus* that was not wholly inside or outside, public or private, urban or rural.<sup>110</sup> The Domus Aurea

<sup>109</sup> "Then by alleging the orders of Messalina, the defense wavered: for why was no other man chosen to offer his voice to that shameless, savage woman?" (*tum iussa Messalinae praetendi et labare defensio: cur enim neminem alium delectum, qui saevienti impudicae vocem praeberet? Ann.* 13.43.4).

<sup>110</sup> Spencer 2005, 57 notes, "By rearticulating Rome as domestic imperial space, Nero made explicit a process of slippage between public and private that had commenced in the last years of the Republic."

opened interior, private spaces to view and invited observers into a relationship with the imperial *domus* hitherto off-limits. Nero's expansion of the *domus* to include the entire city forms a fitting conclusion to Messalina's use and misuse of imperial spaces and the cityscape of Rome. Messalina allowed the whole city to peer into her *cubiculum*, making her desires visible to any who wished to see. She advertised her control by moving through the city with an entourage, until she lost control and was forced to traverse the city on foot and exit the urban setting in a garbage cart alone. Messalina's loss of fortunes can be charted in her paths across the city and modes of transport, as well as in her observing audiences. Tacitus uses Messalina to explore the connection between memory and space in historiography, while also bringing to light her relevance for his critique of hereditary dynasty. Messalina cannot be excised from the Julio-Claudian dynasty or from the *Annals*; rather, her movements during life and her lasting influence after death imprinted the dynasty - and Tacitus' record of it - with her indelible memory. In *Annals* 11, Messalina challenges the concept of a *domus* as a clearly defined or confining space, using the *domus* to advertise the ways in which she challenged moral, political, and domestic boundaries and expectations for imperial mothers. Her transgressions occur in the interior of the *cubiculum*, the transitional space of the garden, the pathway to Silius' home, and through the city and the gate to the Ostian road. Tacitus utilizes the word *domus* expansively in her narrative, suggesting that Messalina redefines spaces as domestic landscapes over which she has control. Nero's transformation of the *domus* completes the message of Tacitus' Messalina: there is no stable position for the imperial *domus*, and no way to completely control the memory of its members.

## Conclusion

In his *Annals*, Tacitus meditates on the fixity of the imperial *domus* and the vulnerability of the dynasty housed there. Messalina presents an exemplary candidate for this exploration in her public movements through the city, her attempt to relocate the imperial *domus*, and her posthumous *damnatio memoriae* that resulted in the removal of her images from public view. Imperial women who were condemned on moral grounds present powerful examples of the emperor's successes and failures in memory control.<sup>111</sup> Messalina's performances ensure that her manipulation of space will be recorded and remembered, despite the *senatus consultum* against her memory. From the intimate space of the *cubiculum* to the semi-private gardens, the path to Silius' home to the road to Ostia, Tacitus' Messalina invites readers to consider how space is utilized and experienced rather than merely viewed, challenging readers to reflect on space as an expression of power. By moving through Rome and sites significant to the imperial *domus*, Messalina contributes to the meaning of each space, questioning the boundaries between public and private, domestic

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<sup>111</sup> E.g. Augustus' daughter Julia died quietly after a prolonged exile, and Tiberius hoped that her death would go unnoticed (*Ann.* 1.53.2); Livilla's memory and material honors were publicly disgraced (*Ann.* 6.2.1).

and political, and extending the symbolism of the imperial *domus* and the *cubiculum* over which she held authority as imperial mother. In *Annals* 11, Tacitus demonstrates how space becomes landscape – the visible world filtered through the human perspective, which gains significance through human interaction and use. Ambiguity is central to Tacitus’ references to the *domus*, from the *cubiculum* to the locations of Messalina’s wedding and Bacchic revelry. Ambiguity also connects the themes of landscape and memory to the imperial *domus*, which serves as both landscape and site of memory in Tacitus’ text.

Tacitus’ narrative of Messalina reflects the author’s rejection of memory sanctions and other forms of memory control, and demonstrates the inability of either Messalina or the senate to control her posthumous memory. While Claudius seems willing to forget his wife, others remember her and continue to be influenced by her memory after her murder. The senate removed Messalina’s visible appearance as a dynastic mother from cultural memory; however, the landscape remains instilled with the memory of Messalina and the former appearance of her statues and monuments. Individual memories, as well as Messalina’s lasting reputation, remain open to further interpretation and reflection. Through memorializing Messalina in his text, Tacitus shows that an individual cannot control his or her posthumous memory, nor can the senate control the memory of a public figure. Tacitus prompts readers to contemplate the dynamic nature of memory, particularly in the evaluation and reevaluation of the Julio-Claudian dynasty by different audiences at different times. Messalina’s memory changes over time, and Tacitus records the impressions of those who do not follow the precepts of the senate or the example of Claudius. Tacitus celebrates the flexibility of historiography to represent different nuances in Messalina’s memory that are not easy to represent through honorific images. He suggests that Messalina’s death, not her remarriage to Silius, caused the collapse of her *domus*. Agrippina the Younger replaced Messalina in the imperial household and on dynastic monuments, and unwittingly caused the Julio-Claudian *domus* to fall.

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