Grant: “She grew up in an appalling atmosphere of malevolence, suspicion and criminal violence”

Congruent with the assertion that her family background gave birth to the goals that would continue to mark her life: gaining imperial prestige and elevating her son to princeps.

- In 28 AD, Agrippina the Younger marries Ahenobarbus
- In 29 AD, Agrippina the Elder’s popularity with the army makes her a threat
- Sejanus (friend and confidant of Tiberius) threatened plotted against Drusus, Nero and Agrippina’s allies
- Treason trials eradicated several wealthy senators
- Agrippina the Elder, Nero (exiled to Pontian islands) and Drusus (imprisoned in Rome)
- Agrippina the Elder

Griffin: “She must have been the most important influence on her daughter and namesake.”

**Ambitions:**

- Agrippina lived with great-grandmother, Livia:
  - Became aware of political intrigue and disputes
  - Learnt need for political caution and diplomacy
  - Learnt need for influential friends and support of military (patronage)
  - Understood need for sex, wealth and power
  - Gave sense of importance: understood own lineage → gave her courage to plan continuance of family line
- Influenced by Agrippina the Elder:
  - Promoted sons to be in line for emperorship
  - Cultivated military → appeared to want power (influence of Germanicus)
  - Tacitus: concerned with masculine matters (military)

**Marriages:**

- **First Marriage – Cnaeus/Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus**
  - In 28 AD at the age of 13, Agrippina married Domitius at the order of Tiberius
  - He was not chosen at random from nobility, as pointed out by Tacitus in *Annals*
  - Domitius’ Was Antonia the elder’s son who was also Antonia the Younger’s sister. Antonia the Younger was married to Drusus Claudius Nero who was the brother of Tiberius and so on. He was the great nephew of Augustus.
  - This marriage is taken apart from her sisters who were married to mere nobles. It was designed to benefit the family and not her.
  - Domitius himself held the office of consul in 32 AD, and was unusually allowed to hold the office for an entire year
  - Suetonius: “… was a wholly despicable character … once driving through a village on the Appian Way, he whipped up his horses and deliberately ran over and killed a boy; and when a knight criticised him rather freely in the Forum, he gouged out one of his eyes there and then.”
  - Agrippina’s marriage seemed to have no impact on the political battles which were taking place at the time. In fact, it could be argued that the marriage to Domitius – be he a fine fellow or a brute – provided Agrippina with a major advantage provided her protection against this background of attacks on the family of Germanicus, the family of Domitius would be able to offer the young Agrippina some security.
  - In this marriage, it gave her a son, Nero who became a dynastic weapon since he was the direct descendant of Augustus, Livia and Germanicus.
  - According to Suetonius, while responding to friends congratulating him on his son’s birth, Gnaeus said “I don’t think anything produced by me and Agrippina could possibly be good for the state or the people”.
  - Nero was born 9 months after Tiberius died, which cannot be a coincidence. She waited for the opportune moment rather than act on impulse.
  - On March 16, AD 37, Caligula (Drusus) became the Roman Emperor following which he bestowed several honours on his three sisters - Agrippina, Julia Drusilla and Julia Livilla. These included the rights of the Vestal Virgins and issuing coins portraying his images along with his sisters.
  - Following Drusilla’s death on June 10, AD 38, who was quite close to Caligula, her husband, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, along with Agrippina and Livilla made an unsuccessful attempt to murder Caligula in AD 39 in pursuit of making Lepidus the new Emperor. The plot became famous as the ‘Plot of the Three Daggers’.
  - Caligula had Lepidus executed while Agrippina and Livilla were exiled to the Pontine Islands.
Gnaeus died in January AD 41 due to edema at Pyrgi. Although he left 1/3 of his estate to his son Nero through a will, the latter’s inheritance was taken away by Caligula who sent Nero to live with his paternal aunt Domitia Lepida the younger, mother of Claudius’ third wife, Valeria Messalina. Nero’s inheritance was later restored after Claudius became Roman Emperor.

Caligula was murdered on January 24, AD 41 by his own Praetorian Guard on the Palatine in a conspiracy involving senators, officers of the Praetorian Guard and courtiers. His wife, Milonia Caesonia, and daughter, Julia Drusilla, were also murdered just hours after his assassination.

**Second Marriage - Gaius Sallustius Crispus Passienus**

- The Praetorians declared Claudius, uncle of Caligula as the next Roman Emperor on the very day of the latter’s assassination. Following his accession to the throne, Claudius recalled Agrippina and Livilla from exile.
- Claudius asked wealthy, intelligent and powerful Gaius Sallustius Crispus Passienus to divorce his wife, Domitia Lepida the Elder, Nero’s first paternal aunt, and marry Agrippina. Following the marriage, Gaius became Nero’s step-father.
- Gaius, who held the consulship twice, was possibly treacherously killed by Agrippina around AD 47. His fortune worth two hundred million sestertii went to Nero.

**Third Marriage – Claudius**

- Agrippina’s second paternal cousin and third wife of Claudius, Empress Valeria Messalina, was a powerful and influential woman infamous for her ruthlessness, predatory and promiscuity. She was often called a ‘nymphomaniac’. She also attempted to murder Nero, as she regarded him a threat to her son, Britannicus’ position.
- Following Messalina’s mock marriage with Roman senator Gaius Silius and knowledge of their plot to assassinate Claudius, the latter ordered their execution in AD 48. Meanwhile, Agrippina became mistress of eminent Greek freedman and secretary, Marcus Antonius Pallas.
- Contemplating marriage for the fourth time, Claudius chose Agrippina, his niece, among the three candidates put forward by his advisors including Caligula’s third wife, Lollia Paulina. The marriage took place on New Year’s Day, AD 49, but it was widely disapproved as marriage between uncle and niece in a Roman society was regarded incestuous and unethical.
- With this marriage, Agrippina became an Empress and emerged as the most powerful lady of the Roman Empire. In no time she charged Paulina with sorcery and had her property confiscated without a hearing. Paulina was sent into exile in Italy on orders of Agrippina and compelled to commit suicide.
- Not only Paulina, Agrippina had many others executed who were regarded as a potential threat to her and Nero’s position. Some of such victims of Agrippina included the praetor Lucius Junius Silanus Torquatus; Britannicus’ tutor, Sosibius; and Valeria’s mother, Domitia Lepida the Younger.
- She was bestowed with the Roman imperial honorific title Augusta in AD 50. Thus, she became the Roman lady after Livia Drusilla and Antonia Minor to receive such a title. The Roman colony, Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensis, was also founded by Claudius that year marking the first and only Roman colony in the name of a Roman lady. The place, now called Cologne, forms the largest city of the most populous state of Germany, North Rhine-Westphalia.
- Eventually, she was successful in convincing Claudius to make Nero his successor depriving Britannicus’ succession to the throne. In AD 50, Claudius adopted Nero, then known as Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus. The latter became heir and recognised successor of Claudius after such adoption and came to be known as Nero Claudius Caesar Drusus Germanicus.
- Agrippina and Claudius betrothed Nero to Claudius’ daughter, Claudia Octavia, and the marriage took place on June 9, AD 53.
- With time Claudius started lamenting his marriage with Agrippina as also his adoption of Nero and started considering and preparing Britannicus for the throne. This possibly made the conjugal life of Agrippina and Claudius more combative in the last few months of his life and gave Agrippina a motive to remove him.
- According to sources, Agrippina poisoned Claudius to death on October 13, AD 54 serving him a plate of poisoned mushrooms.
- Valuable work as it almost completely covers Julio-Claudian period and is only surviving source for many events that occurred
- Conservative especially in relation to politics and women
- Saw Augustus as ideal; ruler and descendants as having departed from the ideal
- Only half of his account of this dynasty survives
- Had access to her memoirs
- Invented speeches and conversations he thought appropriate to the situation being described
- Like Tacitus he wrote with the same moral purpose
- Established the motivation that led to historical figures to act as they did
- Depicts Agrippina as a determined woman who would go to any lengths, even personal suffering, to achieve her ambition

- Modern interpretations and images
  - Modern accounts follow the key events presented in the ancient sources vary in their interpretations slightly as to her character, motives and role.
  - None are as scathing as Tacitus or as positive as Ferrero
  - Most see her as the product of a family background marked by political intrigue and violence which made her determined to protect her own interests
  - Generally presented as an intelligent, ambitious woman who was determined to exercise power through the men in her family and in her own right
  - Modern historians we can use that have interpretations of Agrippina in their work include:
    - Barrett
    - Ferrero
    - Bauman
    - Wood
    - Judge
    - Levick
    - Griffin

- Ferrero:
  - "The women of Caesars" (1911)
  - Only totally positive interpretation of her
  - Condemns the crude and superficial falsification of Tacitus' accounts
  - Believes:
    - Marriage to Claudius as an act of self-sacrifice to advance her family, especially Nero
    - She was an intelligent and respectable woman who brought prestige and stability to Claudius' reign after Messalina's scandalous behaviour
    - She curtailed the power of imperial freedmen
    - She re-organised the state's finances
    - She prosecuted officials who wasted public money
    - Stability during early years of Nero's reign due to her authoritative and admin skills ("the zenith of her power")
    - When Nero tried to get rid of her she "like a true roman matron of the old type" used the family as an instrument of political power in turning to Britannicus
    - Nero's relationship with Acte marked decline of her influence
    - Relationship with Poppaea heralded the end for her
    - Notes how event Tacitus struggles to criticise her in the time she was married to Claudius
    - Sees no motive for her to kill Claudius
    - Enjoyed prestige in Rome and around colonies
    - Given highest honour (Augusta)
    - Surrounded by semi-religious adoration
    - If she had killed him, it would have been much better planned
    - Claims she "died like a soldier on duty... bravely defending the social and political traditions of the roman aristocracy"

- Susan Wood
Dio: "...she gained complete control over Claudius..."

Dio: "...she obtained from the senate the right to use the carpentum at festivals..."

Dio: "Agrippina also banished Calpurnia... because Claudius had admired and commended her beauty"

Tacitus: "From this moment the country was transformed. Complete obedience was accorded to a woman..."

Tacitus: "...Austere and often arrogant"

Tacitus: "Her private life was chaste – unless power was to be gained"

Tacitus: "Her passion to acquire money was unbounded"

Tacitus: "... (She) advertised her power to the provincials..."

Tacitus: "...she had a settlement of ex-soldiers established..."

Tacitus: "...offered to Agrippina...the same homage and gratitude as they had given the emperor."

Tacitus: "That a woman should sit before Roman standards was an unprecedented novelty. She was asserting her partnership in the empire..."

Tacitus: "... (Burrus was) fully aware whose initiative was behind the appointment..."

Tacitus: "...to this day (she) remains unique as the daughter of a great commander and the sister, wife and mother of emperors"

Dio: "Agrippina was training her son for the throne..."

Dio: "...she even destroyed some of the foremost women out of jealousy; thus she slew Lolliia Paulina because she had been the wife of Gaius and had cherished some hope of becoming Claudius' wife"

Dio: "...Nero entered the senate and promised a horse race in the case the emperor should recover. For Agrippina was leaving no stone unturned in order to make Nero popular with the masses and to cause him to be regarded as the only successor to the imperial power"

Tacitus: "Agrippina had long decided on murder"

Josephus: "...he had been poisoned by his wife Agrippina..."

Josephus: "Agrippina, fearing that Britannicus on coming to manhood might fall heir to his mother's office..."

Suetonius: "... (Claudius) lost his power of speech, suffered frightful pain all night long and died shortly before dawn..."

Suetonius: "...he fell into a coma but vomited up the entire contents of his overloaded stomach and was then poisoned a second time..."

According to Tacitus, "Agrippina had long decided on murder" for Claudius. She asked Locusta, "an expert in such matters" as poison to help her. The poison was "administered by the eunuch Halotus who habitually served the emperor and tasted his food". "The poison was sprinkled on a particularly succulent mushroom" but "because Claudius was torpid" it had a laxative effect on him. "Agrippina was horrified" but called in the imperial doctor Xenophon who was already loyal to her to finish the job. "While pretending to help Claudius to vomit, he (Xenophon) put a feather dipped in a quick poison down his throat".

Tacitus: When Nero picked a lovely gown out and sent it to his mother as a gift she "declared that her son was doling out to her what a mere fraction of what he owed her – all else but this one thing was kept from her"