More Than Mortal: Divine Depictions of Livia in Early Imperial Portraiture and Literature

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More Than Mortal:
Divine Depictions of Livia in Early Imperial Portraiture and Literature

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Classical Studies from
The College of William & Mary

by

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Abbreviations

\textit{AE} \quad \textit{L’Année Epigraphique}

\textit{OCD} \quad \text{Oxford Classical Dictionary}

\textit{OLD} \quad \text{Oxford Latin Dictionary}
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Introduction

As the first Roman empress, Livia Drusilla (58 BCE – 29 CE) filled a role without precedent. She witnessed the fall of the Roman republic, the growth of her husband Augustus’s singular political influence, and the birth of the Roman empire, all within the first century BCE. By the end of her life, she was matron of the imperial household and the most powerful woman in Rome, and her worldly prominence culminated in her deification in 42 CE (Bartman: 1999: 128). This deification, though a unique honor, seemed natural and even overdue after Augustus’ apotheosis at the end of his life in 14 CE, and it emphasized the Julio-Claudian dynasty’s preeminenence. Even before 42 CE, archaeological and literary evidence suggests that the empire already recognized Livia as divine in certain ways, and over the course of her lifetime, she rose higher and higher above the status of mortal until she finally become a goddess. In this thesis, I reconstruct Romans’ perception of Livia’s image by focusing on early imperial statues, inscriptions, and literature, and I conclude that the people of the Roman empire viewed Livia as divine far before her official deification.

In order to understand how and why Livia’s public image gradually became overtly divine, one must understand the political contexts of her lifetime. Livia was born in 59 or 58 BCE to a noble republican household of the powerful Claudii and Livii families, and she married her first husband, Tiberius Claudius Nero, while still a girl (Bartman 1999: 57). She bore two

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1 For consistency, I will refer to Augustus as such throughout my discussion, though he did not formally adopt this name until 27 BCE, when the senate bestowed him with that honorific title. Previously, he was known as Octavian.

2 The powerful family of Augustus and Livia, as connected by blood ties, adoptions, and various marriages. The five Julio-Claudian dynasty included emperors Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero (Bartman 1999: xviii).
sons by Tiberius Nero, Tiberius and Drusus, though she divorced him and married Augustus in 38 BCE even before Drusus was born.

Before Livia married Augustus, he was a political enemy of her family’s, especially during the tumultuous period of the 40s and 30s BCE. This conflict reaches back to the death of Julius Caesar, a general and politician who challenged the political structure of the republic and amassed great influence. His growing power caused concern among the ruling elites and resulted in his assassination in 44 BCE, a conspiracy spearheaded by Roman senators Brutus and Cassius (D’Ambra 2007: 14). When Caesar’s will named Augustus, his young grand-nephew, as his heir, Augustus capitalized on his adoptive father’s popularity in the army. He promoted the idea that Caesar became a god after his death, and he started labeling himself the *divus filius*, or “son of the deified.” This name implied the idea of a dynasty and an inherited right to rule. Augustus ensured that he was the only relative to benefit from Caesar’s legacy, and he engineered the assassination of the other potential heir, Caesarion, who was the son born to Caesar and Cleopatra. Augustus also eliminated his political enemies during this time, starting with the defeat of Brutus and Cassius’ forces at the Battle of Philippi in 42 BCE (Barrett 2002: 14). Livia’s father, Marcus Livius Drusus Claudianus, committed suicide after fighting against Augustus’s forces at Philippi, and her husband, too, made an enemy of Augustus by backing Fulvia and Lucius Antony, kin of Marc Antony, in the Perusine War (Fraschetti 1994: 100). Tiberius Nero escaped proscription in Rome and fled east, and Livia and her infant son Tiberius followed him in 40 BCE (D’Ambra 2007: 149). Marc Antony and Augustus reconciled briefly thereafter, when he gave his sister Octavia to Antony in marriage, so Livia’s family returned to Rome (Barrett 2002: 18).
Back in Rome, Livia caught Augustus’s interest, and this former political foe of hers orchestrated their respective divorces so they could marry each other in 38 BCE (D’Ambra 2007: 148-9). This union affiliated Augustus with Livia’s prominent ancestry and thus gave him greater political clout among the nobility of Rome, whose support he sought during the civil wars (Bartman 1999: 57). These conflicts ended with Augustus’s defeat of Marc Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE, and after that decisive event, Augustus emerged as the princeps, the sole leader of a new Rome. By 27 BCE, the senate had voted honors for the newly dubbed Augustus, who ushered in the imperial era of Rome. He instituted several social and moral reforms, and his social legislation especially focused on the family unit, marriage, and the return to old republican values like pietas. As his wife and empress, Livia fell into the role of upholding by example these new values, so she presented an image of matronly duty, virtue, and modesty (Barrett 2002: 33, 124).

With Augustus’ emphasis on the family – especially a dynastic, ruling one – women became more visible and consequential, and Livia, first among her female “equals,” naturally had to be the most visible and most consequential. She represented a conduit for the continuation of imperial power, and ultimately she supplied Augustus his heir, though indirectly. She and Augustus had no children, and his previous marriages left him with only a daughter, Julia (Barrett 2002: 20). This lack of a clear male heir created an issue of succession that plagued Augustus’ reign for years to come, and it necessitated the establishment of dynasty and succession through the women of the Julio-Claudian line. The relatively few Julio-Claudian men typically claimed their membership in the domus Augusta through their mothers or spouses, and Livia herself was a blood relation to more members than Augustus was. Thus, later emperors like Claudius emphasized their relationship to Livia in order to strengthen their legitimacy and
right to rule (Corbier 1995: 185). She was the sole connection between Augustus and Tiberius, who took over as imperator when Augustus died in 14 CE, so the nascent Julio-Claudian dynasty owed its existence to her. Even the senate recognized Livia’s importance in the imperial line, and they proposed adding “son of Julia [Livia]” to Tiberius’ official title as new emperor, though he rejected the idea.³

After Augustus died, Romans acknowledged his apotheosis and worshiped him as a god, as happened with Julius Caesar. This honor put Livia in a unique position, because she had been married to someone now recognized as a god, and because Augustus posthumously adopted her as Julia Augusta, so she was also the daughter of that god (D’Ambra 2007: 154). She served as a priestess, too, in the imperial cult. This cult was established for the worship of the imperial family, especially those who were formally deified, though different religious practices around the empire often allowed living members of the family to be worshiped as part of the cult. Especially in the eastern provinces, cities and people set up statues, temples, or other honors on behalf of imperial family members like Livia.⁴ Hesitation about outright claims of divinity still existed, and though literary and epigraphic evidence suggests that the ruler truly became a god in the subjects’ minds, the rulers were discouraged from setting up cults themselves, especially to living members of the imperial family. When considering the cult of the emperor, scholars must be careful not to make generalizations, because this facet of Roman religion appears to involve many different local practices across the vast empire (Galinsky 2011: 3).

As a vehicle for the dissemination of imperial ideology, the imperial cult emphasized the unity between different members of the family, who would often be worshiped in statue groups in the same context. For example, groups of Augustus, Tiberius, and Livia were common,

³ Corbier 1995: 186. See chapter two of my argument for more discussion on this title and its divine implications.
⁴ For more on the imperial cult in the East, specifically Asia Minor, see Price 1984.
showing how Livia was recognized as the link between the first two emperors of Rome. Her blood continued to flow through the Julio-Claudian line more directly than Augustus’ did, because she was great-grandmother of emperor Caligula (37 – 41 CE) and grandmother of emperor Claudius (41 – 54 CE) (Barrett 2002: 2). Her public appearance was thus closely tied to the reputation of the Julio-Claudian emperors, and as a result, the depictions in her statues reveal a consciousness about what roles were required of her at different times. Even as republican or classicizing aspects of her image change throughout its loosely chronological development, there is a sense that, overtime, Livia is more elevated and set apart, established as not first among equals, but first above others.  

My argument is divided into two chapters, the first focusing on Livia’s physical portraits, and the second addressing the early imperial literature in which she appears. Both approaches, one artistic, the other literary, reveal how the Roman populace viewed the first empress. When placed alongside each other, these analytical frameworks speak to Livia’s reception as a divinity across the empire. The primary sources I use are the surviving portraits and inscriptions of Livia, as well as the works of Ovid, Velleius Paterculus, Tacitus, and a small sampling of other ancient writers. I follow OCD abbreviations when citing ancient sources, and I place my argument within the existing scholarly context. Though scholars have catalogued Livia’s portraits and analyzed her depictions in literature, none have paired art and literature to demonstrate her early divinity, so my research pushes to understand a new aspect of imperial ideology by examining the woman so crucial to its conception.

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5 This idea is an extension of Augustus’ stylization of himself as princeps, or first among equals.
Chapter One: Divine Implications in Livia’s Portraiture

I. Portrait Types

In order to reconstruct Livia’s divine portrayal, I turn first to her portraiture, which includes her physical depictions from statues, gems, coins, and monuments. The majority of this chapter will focus on divine implications in statues and epigraphic evidence, though relevant gemstones and reliefs will also be mentioned. Scholars sort Livia’s representations based upon formal portrait types, which develop in a loosely chronological order and about which there is scholarly debate. The production and use of these types falls within the system of imperial portraiture established under Augustus’ reign, so it is useful to understand the treatment of imperial-era portraits by Romans and modern scholars alike.

Portraits were a ubiquitous feature of Roman life, and depictions of living people, past figures, and divinities decorated spaces both public and private. The tradition of commemorative portraits was not a new one when Augustus took power, and imperial art grew out of influences from Greek, Italic, Etruscan, and Roman republican art (Kleiner 1992: 60). Imperial art, however, did reflect some changes from the most recent art of the Roman republic, most notably in the physiognomy of the subject. People of the Roman republic (509-27 BCE) were usually represented with features that reflected their age, such as wrinkled brows, sunken cheeks, receding hairlines, etc., because age connoted experience and competence (Kleiner 1992: 61). Augustus’ earliest portraits rejected this trend and established the style of idealized, perpetual youth that would dominate imperial images for centuries. Though Augustus was a young man when first depicted in portraits, he was seventy-six at the time of his death, so the use of youthful portraits throughout his lifetime demonstrated an adherence not to reality but to a political
message. Youth suggested vitality, budding potential, and even divinity, as Greek gods, especially Apollo, were the most common subjects of such strong, young, and beautiful portraits (Kleiner 1992: 62).

The depictions of other imperial family members, including Livia, matched this idealized style, and the similar features within the domus Augusta reflect another political message conveyed through portraiture: dynasty. Young Julio-Claudian men and potential heirs, such as Marcellus, Gaius Caesar, Lucius Caesar, Drusus I, and Tiberius, often resembled Augustus in their hair styles, strengthening a kinship that was based upon adoption and not actual blood ties. Livia’s portraits did not resemble Augustus, but other Julio-Claudian women, and even Tiberius, did emulate her facial features (Bartman 1999: 24-5). These imperial family members, led by Augustus, were setting themselves apart from the republican politicians of the past and elevating themselves to a new status with the change of their portraiture.

The political message that Augustus, later emperors, and imperial family members sought to promote through portraiture could only succeed given two conditions. The first is that the image must have been identifiable as a particular person, and the second is that the image must have been controlled and standardized in some way. The first condition would have been easily met in antiquity, when some sort of text typically appeared alongside an image (Fejfer 2015: 234). Most statues had an inscription on their statue base, which gave the figure’s name and possibly other biographical information. This written description would have immediately identified the subject, but even without reading—or perhaps being able to read—the inscription, Romans could have visually recognized the subject, if they were someone famous enough to be depicted repeatedly. Though imperial family members often resembled each other, and though they often influenced or reflected the portrait preferences of private individuals in a given period,
they usually retained enough distinctive features to be individually recognizable (Fittschen 2015: 65).

Modern scholars use this system of recognizing portrait subjects based upon their individual features to make most identifications, because few inscriptions remain to unequivocally establish identity. This process usually begins with numismatic evidence, because coins typically display a subject’s portrait and name, and scholars can match that identified portrait to similar statue portraits, which can then be classified under one name (Fittschen 2015: 53). This one designation for similar portraits represents the portrait type, which is a standard image after which examples model their appearance. Individuals could have more than one type; for instance, recent scholarship divides Livia’s portraits into four or five main types, which I will examine in more detail later in this chapter (Bartman 1999: 145). Though the reason for multiple types is not always evident, Klaus Fittschen argues that some changes in types appear to correspond to important changes in the subject’s life. Due to sparse epigraphic remains and inexact dates for statues, it is almost impossible to prove such chronologically based shifts, but most scholars admit that it is highly plausible that a new victory, anniversary, bestowed title, death, etc. in the life of an imperial family member might have prompted a new type. Even once a new type was introduced, though, old types were not suddenly invalid, so multiple types could appear at once and further obfuscate later scholars’ attempts at simple chronological classifications (Fittschen 2015: 59).

The portraits must have been controlled somehow in order to standardize their image and its political meaning, otherwise scholars would not be able to establish these types that link physical portraits to real subjects. The concept of types is not just a modern classification system, and epigraphic evidence demonstrates that Romans also had a conception of types
(Fittschen 2015: 54). Since no surviving evidence indicates a physical model for a type, scholars have suggested different reasons for the relative homogeneity among an individual’s portraits. Some scholars posit that portrait types were distributed throughout the empire as wax, clay, or plaster models to be copied by local workshops, or perhaps that full copies were made from models in Rome, and those finished products were distributed more widely (Fittschen, 2015: 53).

There is no evidence to conclusively support either theory, so one must think less about the mechanics of the process and more about the implications. If types were copied to make models of important figures, then it is natural to wonder who directed the production of these types. Some scholars infer that, simply because the types were important in promoting an imperial image and ideology, the emperor or his advisors must have made the final decision about its appearance (Fittschen 2015: 56). Other scholars suggest that the development of portrait types involved more back-and-forth between the patron and the artist, with the goal to create an image that conveyed a message about the subject and also reflected the imperial ideologies of the time (Bartman 1999: 18). The imperial court exerted at least some influence, though scholars may never know to what extent, because these types were the authoritative sources for what an imperial figure looked like. The control over types represents a control over ideology, wherein controlling the former allows the promotion of a specific message about the portrait subject.

Tight iconographic control appears to have been less established in the provinces, or the regions beyond Rome and Italy. In general, specific portrait examples may have deviated slightly from the established iconography of a type, but the facial features and especially the hair

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6 This notion of what subjects looked like is, of course, slightly misleading, because there is no reason to assume that a portrait depiction, no matter how consistent, ever actually represented the true physiognomic likeness of a person (Kleiner 1992: 62).
must have retained enough traits of the type in order to be identifiable. Portraits made in the
provinces typically diverged most from their types, and Fittschen cautions that one must not
misinterpret such divergence as inexact copying and a sign of lesser skill. Extremely precise
portrait copies have also been found in the provinces, so the provincial copyists seem to have
been familiar with official types. Perhaps, then, provincial variations represent a choice by the
artist to make a copy more local, such as by using local workshop traditions regarding the level
of detailing in the hair, the degree of polish on surfaces, even the type of material used. Aside
from personal choice, which could have been exercised by the artist or the person commissioning
a given statue, cost could have been another reason that copies differed from their types. A more
precise copy, especially one with lots of minute details, would have required more time and
attention and would thus have been more expensive (Fittschen 2015: 64).

Divergences from a type, whether motivated by choice or cost, mostly occur in facial
features and hair style. Other changes, such as the addition of attributes like wreaths or crowns
or the variation of body styles, do not fall within the established parameters of a type. Thus, the
imperial court decided upon the face and hair of an official image, but choices regarding dress,
pose, scale, attributes, etc. were presumably left up to the commissioner of the statue (Fittschen
2015: 56). All of these aspects of an image can suggest divinity, so both the Roman people and
the imperial court controlled some divine implications in Livia’s image. To support this
conclusion, I examine how different features liken her to a goddess and trace their development
across her portrait types.

In order to understand Livia’s ancient types, one must look at the modern scholarship
produced about Livia and her portraits. Livia has been the subject of much recent work, and
within this wide range of academic material, two meticulous catalogues of her portraiture exist.
Rolf Winkes’ (1995) and Elizabeth Bartman’s (1999) books both provide useful classifications and analyses of Livia’s portrait types, though their conclusions often differ. All scholars recognize that Livia has two general categories of portrait types based upon her hairstyle, which is either worn in the nodus style, where a knob of hair loops above her forehead and runs back into a braid-wrapped bun (see Fig. 1 and 2), or in the center-part style, where thick locks wave back from the middle of her head and sweep into a bun (see Fig. 6). When classifying Livia’s portraits, Bartman accepts two nodus types, the Marbury Hall and Fayum types, and two center-part types, the Kiel/Salus and Diva Augusta types. Exact dates do not exist for most of Livia’s portraits, but scholars generally accept that the nodus types dominated her portraiture from 38 BCE to 14 CE, and the center-part types emerged after 14 CE (Bartman 1999: 10). The important break at 14 CE most likely corresponds to Augustus’ death, when Livia’s role in Roman society shifted and, as a result, her image became more overtly divine. Even within the earlier nodus group, though, certain features elevated Livia above mortality.

Some scholars theorize that the Marbury Hall type is the older of the nodus group because it is more realistic and stylistically complex, but the Fayum type, which is more idealistic and simpler to copy, quickly came to dominate Livia’s public depictions (Bartman 1999: 21, 24). Both types display Livia’s characteristic features of a strong nose, little mouth, curvaceous lips, small yet defined chin, and large, flat eyes. Both types were also distinctly Roman, showing Livia as a respectable matron with no jewels, an impassive expression, and the very common nodus hairstyle (Bartman 1999: 36). The differences in detailing between the Marbury Hall and Fayum types can be seen in Figures 1 and 2 below, with the main difference

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7 Winkes’ book is as useful a source as Bartman’s, but because it is written in German, I rely more upon Bartman’s catalogue.
8 These type names derive from the location of their best portrait examples or the supposed occasion for their portraits’ use in antiquity.
being that the Marbury Hall type generally has a smaller, more pointed nodus that clearly folds back over itself.

Figure 1: Marbury Hall Type, Museo Nazionale Romano: Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, photos by Lillian Waddill

Figure 2: Fayum Type, British Museum, photos by Lillian Waddill
Unlike Bartman, Winkes (1995) divides Livia’s portraits into five main types, four of which bear nodus-style hair and one of which wears the center-part style. He organizes the text of his book around these types, the Marbury Hall, Albani-Bonn, Zopftyp, Fayum, and Mittelscheitelfrisur or “middle crown hairstyle” types. The majority of these sections explain the visual differences between the types Winkes’ gives, and a catalogue of Livia’s known portraits organized alphabetically by their present locations follows. Dating the portraits is difficult given a lack of conclusive evidence, but Winkes generally views the Marbury Hall type as early Augustan, followed by the Albani-Bonn type, then the Zopftyp. He proposes that the Fayum type originated next around 4 CE, when Tiberius was appointed Augustus’ successor and Livia would want a new, easily disseminated portrait that stressed her motherhood. The center-part type grew to be most prevalent following Livia’s death, allowing her to present herself first as a wife and mother, then as a priestess, and finally as a goddess (Winkes 1995).

Diana Kleiner’s book *Roman Sculpture* (1992) shows how older scholarship helped inform Winkes’ classifications. She recognizes all the same nodus-style types that he later does in his book, though her chronology is different. She places the Albani-Bonn type as earliest, having been created around 35 BCE, and the next as a style with shoulder locks, which is called the Copenhagen 616 type and corresponds to Winkes’ Zopftyp. She proposes that the Fayum type arose around 14 CE and that the Marbury Hall type came last, and she does not designate a separate portrait type for center-part statues. In her assessment, that hairstyle represents a shift to match Tiberian fashion preferences, but not a new type (Kleiner 1992: 76-7).

The scholars who research and debate Livia’s types have commented either very little or not at all on the divine implications of her portraiture, so my argument focuses around this neglected topic. In my argument, I follow Bartman’s scholarship because she justifies her
categorizations and analyzes the different types in significant detail. I accept the idea that at least two nodus-style types existed, followed by two distinctive center-part types. The division of the latter hairstyle into two portrait types seems appropriate based on visual shifts and the timeline of events, deaths, and bestowed honors in Livia’s life. Thus, my argument will refer to the Marbury Hall, Fayum, Kiel/Salus, and Diva Augusta types. The Marbury Hall and Fayum types can still be treated collectively as a nodus group when considering divine portrayal, because such generalization highlights broader shifts in attributes and features overtime. These changes point to the gradually bolder claims of Livia’s divinity.

**II. Nodus-Type Portraits**

Livia’s nodus-type portraits represent her depictions before Augustus’ death, and they make subtler references to divinity than the center-part types. This subtlety fits the political context, when Augustus was the adopted son of deified Caesar and was worshiped as a god in the East but, while alive, could not claim direct divinity in Rome. Still, Livia was the first Roman woman to be systematically honored with statues during her lifetime, and this simple fact elevated her above the status of normal women (Bartman 1999: xxi). Like Augustus, her idealized, perpetually youthful image—especially as seen in the Fayum type—linked her to statues of Greek deities, and this assimilation was furthered when she wore Greek dress. Livia often wore the Roman stola in her lifetime portraits, as that strengthened her embodiment of Roman matronhood, but she was occasionally depicted in a Greek peplos, as in a statue from Lepcis Magna in Asia Minor, or a chiton and himation, as seen in statues from Paestum in Italy.

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9 Though not all scholars accept the four types I use, this disagreement ultimately has little affect on my argument about Livia’s divinity, which relies more upon the long-term attributes and shifts in her portraiture than on the specifics of a type.
and the Iberian Peninsula (Bartman 1999: 42). Of this Greek dress, Bartman notes that seeing Livia wear the clothing associated with goddesses and their personifications would prompt viewers to treat Livia as such (Bartman 1999: 42). The so-called Ceres Borghese statue is a particularly good example of a nodus type implying Livia’s divinity. Her features idealized, she wears a chiton and himation, bears a floral wreath atop her head, and holds sheaves of wheat in one hand and a cornucopia in the other (Bartman 1999: 45).

![Figure 3: Ceres Borghese statue, Louvre Museum, photo by Lillian Waddill](image)

These attributes assimilate Livia with Ceres, the goddess of the harvest and fertility whose symbols include wheat and cornucopias. Along with Ceres, Livia was most frequently
likened to Juno and Vesta, all of whom are goddesses who represent traditional, matronly roles of agriculture, marriage, and the hearth respectively. These associations placed Livia in an intermediate realm between mortal women and divinities, even if they did not always openly make her a goddess (Bartman 1999: 93).

Livia could not claim to be a goddess in Rome’s conservative climate, but the East had an accepted tradition of treating living people as divine. Explicit references to Livia’s divinity complement the message promoted by the visual details, and some people worshiped her in the imperial cult even before Augustus’ death, while she was still depicted in her nodus portrait types. Such open worship occurred in the East in cities like Attouda, Cyzicus, Palaepaphus on Cyprus, and more, as well as on coins, like one from Teos (21-19 BCE) that calls her ΘΕΑ ΛΙΒΙΑ, Goddess Livia (Bartman 1999: 96, 101). Around the 20s BCE in Athens and Mytilene, Livia became part of the cult of the Greek goddess Hestia (Bartman 1999: 94). All of these examples show how people viewed Livia as a goddess while she and Augustus were both alive, though her clear divinity was never established in Rome until 42 CE. Once Augustus died, though, her nodus portraits declined and she was more often depicted in one of two center-part styles, each of which made bolder assertions of her divinity. Thus, this transition of portrait types is evidence of the process of deification occurring.

III. Center-Part Portraits

The earlier center-part style predates Livia’s formal deification, so it still confines divine presentation to private contexts or humanizes the image with particular attributes. This type shows how Livia’s image retains her mortality only in the statues of the public Roman space, whereas the gemstones and coins of the more private or provincial space contain explicitly divine
portrayals. Bartman classifies this style as the Kiel/Salus type, which encompasses what other scholars sometimes view as different styles, namely the Kiel and Salus styles. However, the variation of center-part statues during this phase of Livia’s iconography warrants a grouping of mostly similar images into this one main type. While most of these Kiel/Salus images fall after the start of Tiberius’ rule and before Livia’s death (14-29 CE), some center-part depictions of Livia occur even during Augustus’ reign. One major example is her portrait on the Ara Pacis, Augustus’ altar dedicated to the goddess Peace in 9 BCE. On this monument, which was notably dedicated on Livia’s birthday, scholars generally identify her as the woman in front of Augustus (Fig. 4). She wears a veil and a laurel wreath, both of which signify her powerful new role as priestess and adopted member of the laudable Julio-Claudian family. The lack of a nodus as well as the twisted locks that fall down onto her neck make Livia appear more like a Greek goddess, and it is this vague similitude that creates a visual correlation between Livia and the goddess’ personifications found elsewhere on the altar. The so-called Italia or Pax figure on the altar

Figure 4 (left). Livia on the Ara Pacis, Rome, from Bartman 1999: 89
Figure 5 (right). Italia/Pax on the Ara Pacis, Rome, from Bartman 1999: 91
closely matches Livia’s image, with its center-parted waves of hair and idealized facial features (Fig. 5). Both Livia and the goddess share their portrait space with a child or two, emphasizing their motherhood. Thus, a viewer would easily equate Livia and the goddess Italia and see the former as elevated above mortality (Bartman 1999: 86-90).

Another potentially pre-Tiberian example of Livia’s center-part style comes from a sardonyx cameo (Fig. 6) now in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. This portrait depicts Livia in profile with waved locks, a laurel wreath, a veil, and long shoulder locks (Bartman 1999: 92). Like the Ara Pacis relief, this example, too, shows how Livia’s image could affect divinity in artistic modes beyond sculpture in the round, and notably before Tiberius’ reign. The Ara Pacis relief portrait of Livia is still like a free-standing statue in that it belongs to a public context, which means that it occupied a public space and was easily viewed by many. The gemstone, however, represents a category of portraits in miniature which would almost certainly have been carved for private circumstances and intended for few eyes. Because these gems were

Figure 6. Livia on a sardonyx gemstone, St. Petersburg from Bartman 1999: 92
not widely disseminated, they tend to unabashedly depict Livia’s divinity which was, as yet, unacknowledged in public spheres of the city of Rome.

The majority of Livia’s center-part portraits do come after Augustus’ death in 14 CE, when she was adopted as Julia Augusta and became priestess to the imperial cult. An increase in Livia’s commemorative images at this time signaled a change in her status, though she does not appear to have received a new type. Bartman proposes that the Kiel/Salus type may have emerged from existing center-part portrait styles, and the Fayum type did not cease to be used. Because Livia was the adopted daughter of deified Augustus, her portrait could change to project a greater sense of divinity in public spheres as well as private. Two portrait heads from this time, for example, depict Livia as a priestess wearing an *infula*, which Bartman defines as “a woolen headpiece knotted into a series of beadlike clumps” (Bartman, 1999: 45). The *infula* signifies a religious subject or context, so in Livia’s case, it reinforces her identity as priestess to the

![Figure 7 (left). Livia as a priestess, Hermitage Museum, from Bartman 1999: 105](image1)

![Figure 8 (right). Livia as a priestess, Römisch-Germanisches Museum, from Bartman 1999: 106](image2)
imperial cult. Of these two portraits, one (Fig. 7) layers a wreath of wheat sheaves atop the *infusa*, which, combined with the center-part style, suggests divinity. In contrast, the portrait’s serious, faintly lined expression presents a dour subject past her youth, thus clearly mortal. The second portrait (Fig. 8) shows Livia wearing a veil, *infusa*, and floral crown of poppies, wheat, and laurel over her middle part. This Kiel type reinforces priesthood through the veil and *infusa*, but the floral crown pushes the subject into the visual sphere of gods and goddesses.

Portraits from the private realm similarly focus on Livia the priestess, though they also link her more closely to specific goddesses. A sardonyx cameo (Fig. 9) shows Livia holding an image of Augustus as a god with a radiate crown, and she herself represents different goddesses through such attributes as her crown (Tyche/Fortuna), bouquet of wheat and poppies (Ceres), exposed shoulder (Venus), and seated position upon a throne (Cybele). However, she is
grounded by her dress, as the stola she wears highlights her Roman matronhood, and the veil signifies a religious role (Bartman 1999: 102-103, 193). Another gem with a Tiberian date is the Grand Camée (Fig. 10), in which Livia and Tiberius are the central figures seated upon thrones. Livia’s floral crown and bouquet of wheat and poppies symbolize Ceres or Italia, but her reclined posture suggests passivity and age, which emphasizes her humanity despite the divine attributes she bears (Bartman 1999: 112). Such portraits found on gems can be difficult to typify, because their subject is often shown in profile or is too small for great detail. However, given their Tiberian date and their center-part hairstyle, one can treat them as Kiel/Salus portraits.

Coins are another portrait medium to consider, as they represent a small yet public portrait that would have easily traveled throughout the empire. In fact, one coin (Fig. 11) with the inscription *Salus Augusta* provides such a good Kiel/Salus type portrait that it served as the namesake for the type. This coin shows a highly detailed miniature portrait of Livia, whose center-part hair style pulls back from her face in neat waves that narrow and twist into a bun. The bun at the nape of the neck closely resembles that of the Fayum portrait type, which suggests
that the Kiel/Salus type evolved from and simplified the Fayum type. The Kiel style especially reflects this transition, as it bulges at the front of the centered hairline, which mimics the volume of the nodus. The tendrils along Livia’s neck mimic goddesses’ hair styles, and the description of Livia as “Salus Augusta” is strongly divinizing. The Romans linked the goddess Salus to wellbeing, both personal and statewide, and the title Augusta echoes deified Augustus’ own. Both descriptors successfully elevate Livia beyond a normal woman’s role (Bartman 1999: 114-116).

Kiel/Salus portraits from the years between Livia’s death and her deification closely resemble other Tiberian-era portraits, so they can be analyzed similarly. One portrait (Fig. 12) from a building dedicated to Ceres Augusta in Lepcis Magna dates to roughly a decade after Livia’s death. Given the religious context of the statue and Livia’s floral crown, she here resembles Ceres. Additionally, the mural crown she wears evokes the goddess Tyche/Fortuna. By iconographically alluding to these goddesses, Livia represented herself as a nurturing figure (Bartman 1999: 107). This role extends into the idea of motherhood, which Livia also stressed through her associations with Tiberius. Statues of her often appeared alongside statues of him, and one such statue group from Paestum presents its subjects in divine modes. The thrones, over-life-size scale, and scepter in Tiberius’ hand all represent features usually applied only to gods and goddesses, thereby reinforcing the statues’ divine implications. A metal diadem, too, appears to have crowned Livia’s statue (Fig. 13), but most scholars treat it as a later Claudian addition. Whether an original piece of the statue or not, the diadem and other attributes convey a message confirmed by epigraphic remains from the East, which continued to describe Livia as θέα, goddess (Bartman 1999: 109-12, 157).
Livia remained technically mortal under Caligula’s rule (37-41 CE), just as she had during the times of Augustus and Tiberius, but her implied divinity persisted. Livia’s image arguably lost some importance during this period because her dynastic function as a link between Augustus and the next ruler no longer proved necessary. Caligula descended directly from Augustus through his mother’s mother, Julia, the first imperator’s only child, so he did not need to link himself by way of his father, Germanicus, to his great-grandmother Livia. Caligula emphasized his Julian heritage over his Claudian, so the foremost imperial women during his reign were his sisters and mother. In fact, his sister Drusilla was the first Roman woman to be officially deified upon her death in 38 CE. Bartman argues that Caligula and his sisters had more explicitly divine portraits than Augustus or Livia ever had, and that Livia proved a model but not a “precise precedent” for the portraits of Caligula’s sisters (Bartman 1999: 122). In what follows
I argue that Livia was in fact a direct precedent for deified Drusilla and her imagery, because she set the example of how any powerful woman in the imperial family should look and provided the first step toward overtly divine representations of Julio-Claudian women.

Despite Livia’s decreasing relevance, at least three of her statues date to this Caligulan period and prove her divine affectations. The first comes from the Greek city of Aphrodisias in Asia Minor, where only the statue base has survived. Despite the absence of the portrait image, this example is still useful as the inscription on the statue base reveals Livia’s treatment at that time. The statue’s dedicatory inscription reads “To Julia Augusta, daughter of Augustus, the [new] Hera.”¹⁰ The title and description emphasize Livia’s identity as the daughter of the god Augustus. Additionally, she is called ῾Ηραν, thus assimilating her to the goddess Hera and portraying her as more divine than mortal. Such evidence supports the argument of Livia’s early divinity, and as with earlier evidence, it unsurprisingly comes from the eastern part of the empire, which had a tradition of honoring mortals with open claims of divinity through titles like θεά. The second statue from the time of Caligula comes from Gortyn, Crete, and resembles Livia’s Kiel/Salus type. The image itself is unexceptional, but the context is important, because it appeared as part of a portrait group with Caligula, Tiberius, and Gaius Caesar (Augustus’ grandson and Caligula’s uncle). Based on this grouping, one can deduce that Livia remained socially significant enough at this time to be paired with these powerful men (Bartman 1999: 122-3).

The final statue produced during Caligula’s reign comes from Velleia, Italy (Fig. 14). This Livia also belonged to a Julio-Claudian portrait group, which included Caligula’s sisters, Drusilla and Agrippina II, and his mother, Agrippina I. Of the women in this group, Livia’s

over-life-sized statue is the tallest, and she and deified Drusilla alone wear the Greek chiton and mantle instead of the Roman tunic and palla. The Greek clothing visually equates the two women with depictions of Greek goddesses, thus elevating their status. This distinction suits Drusilla’s official divinity at that time, but Livia had not yet been awarded this honor. Because her imagery matches Drusilla’s, Livia seems to have functioned as much like a goddess as Drusilla did in everything but title. Her statue also affects divinity through the diadem that crowns her head, which represents an original attribute and not a later addition. Though Livia wore diadems in earlier private portraits found on gems or coins, the presence of that attribute on a free-standing, public statue is significant. It shows that an overtly divine symbol appeared in a public portrait of Livia before her official deification. Because a diadem could technically only adorn a goddess, the one on Livia’s pre-deification statue suggests that this Italian town
already viewed her as divine (Bartman 1999: 123-6). Arguably, then, the acceptance of Livia’s divinity crept ever-closer to Rome in the years following her death.

Livia’s final portrait type, the Diva Augusta (Fig. 15) type, emerged after she achieved official divinity in 42 CE under Claudius’ reign. By honoring his grandmother as a goddess, Claudius elevated himself and legitimized his rule, demonstrating political savvy rather than piety. This official deification allowed the honors already given Livia outside of Rome and in private spheres to spread into public, central spaces, and the proliferation of her Diva Augusta type reflects her widely accepted divinity. Although the use of other types sharply declined after 42 CE, Livia’s image still retained many of the earlier traits. This last type mimics the Kiel/Salus center-part hairstyle, but the coiffure has more clearly segmented, parallel waves that pull back into a bun simpler than the braid-wrapped knot of the earlier three portrait types.

Livia’s features are at their most idealized, classicized form in the Diva Augusta type, giving her an Olympian appearance. The diadem becomes a recurring attribute in Livia’s divinized image, and from this point on, she exclusively wears Greek dress (Bartman 1999: 41, 127-8).

All of these aspects of the Diva Augusta type, however, have some precedent in Livia’s pre-deification portraits, and outlining these similarities reveals the extent to which Livia’s image already claimed a divine status before 42 CE. Thus, I move beyond Bartman’s position that Livia’s deification caused a visible shift in public attitude toward her, and instead I argue that the Diva Augusta type simply allowed Livia’s image within the public spaces of the city of Rome to align with the divine message long conveyed outside of the capitol’s public space.

Whereas more examples of western inscriptions using the title Diva Augusta appear in cities like Herculaneum, Terracina, Collegno, Vienne, and Haluntium, the language of eastern inscriptions
remains the same, since the terms θεά and Σεβαστή had been used for decades. Bartman emphasizes the frequent use of diadems in Livia’s deified portraits as a major iconographic shift, but I have already mentioned examples of pre-42 CE statues in which Livia wears a diadem, like the Velleian statue (Fig. 14). Because the diadem is attested in statues that definitively precede 42 CE, one should hesitate to use that symbol as a clear indicator of an otherwise undatable statue’s Claudian date, as Bartman frequently does (Bartman 1999: 127-31).

Along with the diadem, Bartman points to over-life-size scale and a seated pose, which evokes the image of enthroned gods and goddesses, as features that prove the divinity of Diva Augusta portraits. These features, however, also appear in pre-Claudian portraits of Livia, like the over-life-sized Ceres Borghese, a Fayum type, and the seated Kiel/Salus type from Paestum. One Marbury-Hall type portrait from Ephesus, identified as Augustan or Tiberian in date, shows a seated Livia wearing Greek dress. Greek dress is, as previously mentioned, a main feature of the Diva Augusta type, and Bartman connects this style of clothing to divine presentation. The statue from Ephesus as well as many other pre-deification examples show how common this divinizing portrait feature was. Bartman highlights other features as typical of Diva Augusta portraits but which also appear throughout Livia’s other types, features such as the idealization of facial features and the addition of shoulder locks to a regular Livian hair style. Ideal features appear to varying degrees during every era of Livia’s portraiture, so they cannot be limited to one type, and shoulder locks exist in such early portrait examples as the Livia on the Ara Pacis (Bartman 1999: 130-4).

These various features that exist throughout Livia’s portrait types prove that the Diva Augusta type did not create a new style, but it simply merged and more frequently used existing

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11 This honorific title, which in Latin becomes “Augusta,” is the feminine equivalent of Σεβαστός, the Greek name for Augustus.
aspects of Livia’s portraiture that connect her to divinity. The attributes, physical features, pose, dress, etc. of her statues can all serve to visually equate her with various goddesses. These traits exist in examples across artistic media, like statues, gemstones, monuments, and coins, which proves the ubiquity of her divine portrayals in art. While the nodus types of Livia’s portraits aimed to portray her as a typical Roman matron, they began to exhibit the divinizing traits that were increasingly reflected in the center-part types. Thus, her formal deification changed little about her portraits, because they already presented her as divine. Most of these portraits, the statues in particular, would have occupied public spaces, so her displayed divinity would have reminded citizens frequenting those places of the imperial family’s elevated position above their own mere mortality.
Chapter Two: Elevated Portrayals of Livia by Early Imperial Authors

My previous chapter on Livia’s increasingly divine representation in her physical portraits relies upon evidence unconducive to nuance, as the statues, gemstones, monuments, and other artworks often lacked full context. History obscures such details as artist, commissioner, date of creation, location, and audience, all of which could inform the interpretation of art and knowledge of its reception. One can still draw valid conclusions from what information exists, but the nature of the evidence constrains layered arguments. Written material, in contrast, proves a much more fruitful source. Scholars have dissected the works of ancient Latin writers for centuries, and their myriad analyses stem from the flexibility of the written word, where one line can yield a host of interpretations. In this chapter, I place myself within this history of literary scholars and consider how Roman authors treated Livia. By analyzing a primary contemporary source, Ovid, and later authors like Tacitus, I argue that their references to and discussions of Livia prove her political prowess, and explore the new ideological space that the imperial family occupies. This ideology emphasizes dynastic continuity and assumed divinity, though the Roman sources suggest that Livia’s divinity was expected but not accepted outright, and that questions surrounding the new political order pervaded the nascent imperial age.

In terms of methodology, in the previous chapter I relied heavily upon an art-historical analysis of the physical evidence of Livia’s portraits. In this section of my study, I consider early imperial authors, employing both a literary and a historical approach. I aim to tease out the

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12 My discussion in this section is by no means exhaustive, and in a longer research project, one could consider many more Roman authors. For further scholarship on some of these, see the following: Wardle 2000 discusses the treatment of the Domus Augusta by Valerius Maximus, a Tiberian author who wrote a collection of historical anecdotes with a moral focus. Wardle argues that Valerius Maximus treats the domus as divina, and that he valuably represents the perspective of a Roman citizen not from the literary or social elite.
authors’ opinions through close reading of their texts, instead of simply searching for universal interpretations of their works. My argument centers around not the main point of their narratives, but on their treatment of Livia and how it was shaped by the social and political circumstances of their lives. For example, I argue that Ovid and Velleius Paterculus wrote more cautiously about the *Domus Augusta*, as they lived during the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius while Livia was still very much a prominent public figure. Their censure is shrouded in irony and praise that highlights hypocrisy within the imperial household, especially regarding moral conduct and piety. Later authors, in contrast, lived after the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, and temporal distance emboldened them to more openly criticize the first rulers of Rome. While such historical contextualization frames the basis of my argument, the details rely upon literary analysis, as Ovid’s poetry and the historians’ writings are literary works whose first loyalty is to rhetorical convention, and only secondarily to objective truth. I examine those sections in their works that discuss Livia, which comprise a relatively small percentage of any individual work. Intratextual comparison of those references provides a full picture of an author’s approach to the empress. In some cases, I find it more useful to analyze one section in depth instead of detailing every time Livia’s name appears in a work. I build upon existing and occasionally contradictory scholarship that considers early imperial authors’ depictions of Livia, as these scholars demonstrate useful approaches for analyzing this literature. They stop short of discussing Livia’s divine status as implied by the Roman texts, which remains the focus of my argument.

I. Ovid and Livia in Literature
Ovid best represents ambiguous acceptance of imperial ideology. One of Rome’s most famous poets, Ovid occupies an especially crucial role in any literary analysis of Livia, as he lived and wrote during the rise, establishment, and dynastic transferal of Augustus’ power. The political circumstances of his lifetime impacted what he wrote, so his treatment of Livia can reveal her evolving status. His writings suggest that her importance fundamentally shifted, both to Ovid and to Roman society in general, over the course of the first decade CE. The timing of this shift corresponds to Tiberius’ adoption as Augustus’ heir in 4 CE and Ovid’s banishment in 8 CE from Rome to provincial Tomis, a city on the Black Sea. Thus, a subdivision of Ovid’s work into pre- and post-exilic writings helps clarify why and in what ways Livia’s literary depiction changed, and illuminates changes in her status.

The *Fasti*, an incomplete yet extensive poetic account of important days in the Roman calendar, provides rich material for analyzing Ovid’s view of the empress. Ovid began this work around 2 CE and continued to write and edit it through the rest of the decade (Newlands 2000: 173). Though scholars debate the exact dates, many accept that Ovid worked on the *Fasti* before his exile and revised it extensively after. As such, the *Fasti* can be treated as illustrative of the main point of my argument that Livia’s depiction in Ovid’s works shifted after his banishment. In order to fully understand the *Fasti*, one must first acknowledge its unique position within the ancient literary tradition. In form, it is an elegiac poem, a style characterized by long sequences of couplets with one hexametric and one pentametric line. In Roman elegy, the themes

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13 The reason for Ovid’s banishment, which he attributes to “carmen et error” (Tr. 2.207), has been much debated. The exact reason is unimportant to my argument, although it is significant that a *carmen*, or poem, of his along with some unnamed *error* caused Augustus enough personal offense for him to order Ovid’s exile. Some scholars even believe that Ovid fabricated the banishment and never actually lived in Tomis, though I dismiss that idea for reasons outlined in Claassen 1987: 40-1.

14 Geraldine Herbert-Brown acknowledges some scholarly disagreement over the dating of the *Fasti*, but I accept her assertion that Ovid’s banishment interrupted his work without halting it altogether. She mainly cites Ovid’s *Tristia* (2.549-50) as indicating his disrupted composition of the *Fasti* (Herbert-Brown 1994: ix).
traditionally center around love, and the focus turns inward on the narrator’s self.⁴⁵ Ovid uses elegiac meter in many of his works, including the *Heroides, Ars Amatoria, Remedia Amoris*, and his exile poetry, but none of these fit neatly into the category of Roman love elegy (Gold 2012: 2). The *Fasti* is especially unusual because its subject matter—the Roman calendar and, through it, Roman history and religion, astronomy, and Augustan monuments—differs so greatly from the elegiac norm. Instead of resembling Roman love elegy, the *Fasti* as an “aetiological narrative” more closely reflects canonical Greek elegy.⁴⁶ This Greek and Roman duality exists alongside a poetic elegy-epic duality, which Alessandro Barchiesi explains. He sees the *Fasti* as hovering between the two styles by including elements of didactic epic and aetiological elegy, while also peripherally incorporating those of heroic epic and love elegy (Barchiesi 1997: 53). These dualities do little to clarify the intention of the poem, but prove an important point about the *Fasti*. This text cannot be received as a simple panegyric of Augustan Rome, as early critics have argued. The interwoven layers of form and content demonstrate Ovid’s transformative talent, which he used to fit a non-literary subject, the Roman calendar, into the mold of a well-established literary style, elegy, to produce an unconventional poem with an endlessly interpretable ideological message.

Ovid himself appears aware of his novel treatment of elegy, as he writes in the proem to *Fasti* Book Two:

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⁴⁵ Gold 2012: 1. For more on elegy in general, especially its Roman tradition, see the rest of Gold’s book. Her introduction of this collection of essays explores the uncategorizable nature of elegy as a genre, which allows Ovid to use that form to create a playful love poem (*Ars Amatoria*) as well as a debatably more serious exploration of the Roman calendar (*Fasti*).

⁴⁶ Joseph Farrell discusses how the *Fasti* particularly resemble Callimachus’ *Aetia*, an ancient Greek elegiac poem, though he sees Ovid as attempting to fit the Roman model of love elegy by “eroticizing” the content. Farrell 2012: 21-2.
“Myself I found you ['my elegiacs’] pliant ministers of love, when in the morn of youth I toyed with verse. Myself now sing of sacred rites and of the seasons marked in the calendar: who could think that this could come of that?” (Fast. 2.5-8).¹⁷

Ovid signals his departure from the traditional elegiac theme of love, especially as was found in his previous erotic elegiac works, and presents the Fasti’s matured content as a sign of his growth as a poet no longer in “the morn of youth.” Such maturation could indicate Ovid’s conformity to Augustan moral legislation, which the Ars Amatoria disrespected through their focus on carnal love, and his desire to appease the conservative imperator. However, Ovid still recognizes that the Fasti emerges from the earlier works, “this” from “that.” As such, the themes of the Fasti cannot be completely separated from those of the Amores, Heroïdes, Ars Amatoria, and Remedia Amoris, which serve as “models of reading” this transformed elegy (Miller 1991: 6). Ovid may claim a loftier, more serious subject matter, but his reference to his other elegies suggests that this new poem simply contains more themes, rather than more mature ones. This multiplicity of themes allows varied critical analysis, and two scholars, Geraldine Herbert-Brown and Carole Newlands, present productively contrasting viewpoints on the Fasti, especially Livia’s treatment in the work.

Herbert-Brown (1994) explains in detail the four references to Livia in the Fasti, which occur specifically on May 1st and June 11th, written before Ovid’s exile, and on January 11th and January 16th, written after his exile. On the most basic level of interpretation, the two pre-exilic dates evoke an image of Livia that serves a purpose similar to her nodus-style portraits, for they emphasize her virtue as a traditional Roman wife and mother. The post-exilic dates seem to function more like the Diva Augusta portrait type, for they present Livia as divine and stress her

¹⁷ I use James G. Frazer’s translation.
dynastic associations (Herbert-Brown 1994: 130). However, a second layer of interpretation exists in which Ovid’s disjointed poem seeks to prompt skepticism in the reader and encourages them to question the ideological authority of Augustus’ regime. Given this argument, advanced by Newlands (2000), Livia becomes a subject represented in an ambiguous way that highlights her feminine potential to cause instability. The power of interpretation falls to the reader, who, as proven by critical disagreement concerning Ovid’s political message in the *Fasti*, can read the text in two opposite directions: either as celebrating and legitimizing Augustan ideology, or as provoking public mistrust of imperial power (Newlands 2000: 175). Both interpretations, strengthened by a positive portrayal of Livia that honors her or by a negative one that suggests her shortcomings, show how she held a significant position in public discourse, including literary discourse. In this realm, Ovid’s and other authors’ treatment of her amounted to a political stance on the *Domus Augusta* and the imperial era. Her ideological importance as well as explicit comparisons between Livia and female deities suggest the extent of her divine reception during and just after Augustus’ reign.

To illustrate this idea, I will closely consider June 11th, one of the *Fasti*’s two pre-exilic dates to mention Livia. Ovid’s long episode on this date clearly exemplifies both Herbert-Brown’s and Newlands’ readings. The passage explores three goddesses representative of women, family life, and feminine virtue, namely Mater Matuta, Fortuna, and Concordia. The common date associated with these three goddesses encourages comparison, and because Livia chose June 11th to dedicate a shrine to Concordia, it seems she intended to create an association between herself and Mater Matuta and Fortuna. Herbert-Brown views this association in a positive light, as it ties Livia to venerable Roman goddesses who symbolize her role in the *Domus Augusta* as wife and mother to the imperial line (Herbert-Brown 1994: 146).
The entire June 11th section fittingly begins with Ovid telling mothers to honor Mater Matuta, the goddess associated with the Matralia festival. He writes, “Go, good mothers (the Matralia is your festival)” (Fast. 6.475). With this beginning, the section and its final mention of Livia’s shrine to Concordia effectively uphold Livia as one such “good mother,” and it associates the goddess of concord, Concordia, with goddesses of motherhood and marriage, Mater Matuta and Fortuna. This correlation suggests that marriage in the Domus Augusta includes traditionally virtuous women who harmoniously support their husbands (Herbert-Brown 1994: 150). May 1st had already indicated Livia’s support of her husband’s policies, since she imitated Augustus’ restoration of ancient temples by restoring the temple of Bona Dea (Fast. 5.157-8). June 11th then solidifies this supportive image of Livia, especially when Ovid writes, “To you, too, Concordia, Livia dedicated a magnificent shrine, you whom she herself manifested towards her dear husband.” In those lines, Livia is shown to honor both Concordia and Augustus by presenting an image of marital concord to him.

While textual evidence backs this interpretation, a reinterpretation of that evidence points toward a more complicated reading driven by the inconsistent portrayals of female deities mentioned on June 11th. Newlands demonstrates that the poet’s narrator discusses Mater Matuta, Fortuna, and Concordia in ways that suggest their failure to uphold the very virtues they

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18 Tara S. Welch complicates this account of Bona Dea by considering the site’s treatment within the tradition of Roman love elegy. Love elegists commonly wrote about this site as a place of love, so Ovid “uncomfortably juxtaposes the Dea’s elegiac possibilities with Livia’s moralism.” Ovid undermines her moralism by focusing his account on Remus, gender antipathy, and an original founder of the temple who, according to other historical sources, was executed for sexual misbehavior (Welch 2012: 107).

19 “Te quoque magnifica, Concordia, dedicat aede / Livia, quam caro praestitit ipsa viro” (Fast. 6.637-8). Herbert-Brown (1994: 146) renders the Latin slightly differently than other translators do, because she takes the ambiguous “quam” to indicate Concordia rather than the shrine. Frazer’s translation from the Loeb Fasti, in contrast, does translate “quam” to mean shrine, writing, “To thee, too, Concordia, Livia dedicated a magnificent shrine, which she presented to her dear husband.” Herbert-Brown’s translation provides an even stronger case for Livia representing marital concord. In it, Livia is shown to be Concord “manifested” toward Augustus, instead of just a pious wife presenting a shrine to her husband. Herbert-Brown’s translation allows a reading in which Ovid more overtly equates Livia to a goddess, and though the Latin is ambiguous, I argue that such semi-assimilation is intentional given Ovid’s political message and his later explicit treatment of Livia as divine.
represent. The date’s explanation begins with the oldest goddess, Mater Matuta, whom Romans equate with the mythical figure Ino. Ino appears in the *Fasti* twice, first in Book Three as a murderous stepmother and later in Book Six on June 11th as a deified symbol of motherhood. The two depictions are entirely at odds. The narrator, when presenting Ino’s story, sidesteps any clarification of her distinct identities, though the account in Book Six makes no attempt to erase the previously recounted myth from Book Three in which she seems wicked. When placed in their mythological context, discrete references to Ino’s treachery and inauspicious motherhood make her transformation into Mater Matuta, a symbol of good mothers, seem absurd. Ovid even warns mothers against Ino as a patron goddess when he writes, “let not an affectionate mother pray to her [Ino] on behalf of her own offspring: she herself proved to be no lucky parent” (*Fast. 6.559-60*).

In addition, Ino’s deification is susceptible to criticism, because the apotheosis arose not from some significant event but from a prophecy and a name change (Newlands 2000: 189). The prophetic mortal Carmentis said, “Thou shalt be a divinity of the sea: thy son, too, shall have his home in ocean. Take ye both different names in your own waters” (*Fast. 6.543-4*). Ino and her son then experience a succinct deification, expressed within a line: “they changed their names: he is a god and she a goddess” (*Fast. 6.550*). This point has heavy implications in Ovid’s contemporary world, where, depending on when he wrote this particular section, Livia may just have received a new name that more closely associated her with Augustus’ near-divine status. The attention on Ino’s son also suggests parallels with Livia, whose son, Tiberius, became

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20 The myth of Ino presents her as a wicked stepmother who threatens the stability of the kingdom and attempts to murder her stepchildren to secure her own children’s succession to the throne. See Newlands 2000: 186.

21 Carmentis was mother of Evander, a notable forefather of Rome.

22 In 4 CE, Augustus officially adopted Tiberius as his heir, and at the same time, Livia received the new name “Julia Augusta,” which placed her in the gens of then-divine Julius Caesar and gave her a title, “Augusta,” with heavy connotations of divinity.
Augustus’ heir apparent at the time of Livia’s name change. The abrupt conferral of divine powers on Ino and her son may encourage the reader to be skeptical of the unique powers of Livia and Tiberius. Similarly, Ovid’s stories of Ino might be intentionally contradictory in order to call into question the morals of powerful women and mothers, especially those with enough power to control how their story is being told (Newlands 2000: 190). Throughout this telling, Ino becomes associated with violent and irrational women, both herself (Fast. 3) and the bacchants who attack her as she comes to Rome (Fast. 6.513-15). Any correlation between Livia and this goddess, then, presents her more as a bad mother than a good one (Newlands 2000: 192).

These details suggest Ovid’s subversive treatment of Livia, but if examined from a different angle, they could instead be seen as flattering her and complementing Augustan ideology. Hugh Parker (1999) interprets in a positive light Ino’s delayed deification after her suicide attempt, her hostile encounter with the bacchants, and even her violent past, because these details, he argues, establish Ino as a Roman deity. Other ancient sources that discuss Ino, including Ovid’s own Metamorphoses, end her tragic tale with her jump off a cliff and immediate deification.23 Ovid’s version in the Fasti differs notably, because Ino survives the fall and arrives, still mortal, at the Tiber River where pre-Roman Evander rules the Arcadians (Fast. 6.501-6). Parker explains this deviation as Ovid’s attempt to Romanize Ino by allowing her apotheosis to occur in Italy instead of Thebes. Beyond location, the literary parallels between this story and Aeneas’ arrival in Italy, which led to the foundation of Rome, Romanize Ino even further. For example, both Ino and Aeneas arrive at the mouth of the Tiber, both encounter crazed women who act like or are maenads, both enjoy Evander’s hospitality, and both suffer at

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23 Ovid tells the story of Ino and her son’s transformations into the sea deities Leucothoë and Palaemon in Book Four of the Metamorphoses (Met. 4.542).
Juno’s hands (Parker 1999: 336-47). Parker sees Ovid’s Ino as “a female doublet of Vergil’s Aeneas,” giving her mythic status and an important place in Rome’s memory (Parker 1999: 340).

In this light, Livia’s indirect comparison to Ino would be flattering, because it would imply her own prominence in Roman history. By restructuring the myth, Ovid effectively Romanized Ino, which would separate her from the wicked Ino seen in Book Three of the Fasti. At a time when Augustus was redefining in more traditional terms what it meant to be Roman, Ovid’s account of Ino appears to complement Augustan ideology. However, the comparisons between Aeneas and Ino are arguably too tenuous to claim that Ovid intentionally compared the two to the extent that Parker proposes. Every similarity could be explained by the initial argument that Ovid is Romanizing Ino, and Aeneas is one vehicle for such Romanization. This interpretation does not diminish Newlands’, but instead, it supports her critique. Ino becomes a decidedly Roman goddess who, despite her new local identity, still represents a bad mother. Because the Fasti links Ino and Livia, this conclusion questions the legitimacy of the imperial line by casting doubt on its women, which threatens dynastic stability in Rome.

In addition, Romanizing Ino as Mater Matuta reveals the selectively traditional aspects of Augustan ideology. Augustus claimed to be returning to old Roman morals, but the long-established Matralia festival demonstrates that he had a new approach to marriage. Traditionally, only univirae, or once-married women, could participate in the Matralia festival, but Augustus’ social legislation discouraged widowhood and pressured women to remarry. Even Livia herself had been married twice, so she technically would not have been eligible to participate in the Matralia. Ovid’s description of Mater Matuta omits this detail about univirae, which Herbert-Brown suggests reflects his sensitivity toward Augustan marriage laws and the rewed women of

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24 Livia was not only married twice, but she divorced her first husband, Tiberius Claudius Nero, and married Augustus while still pregnant with Nero’s second son.
the *Domus Augusta* (Herbert-Brown 1994: 148). However, any Roman citizen would have known the Matralia custom and noted Ovid’s omission of the detail about *univirae*, so introducing Livia to this section of the *Fasti* would simply highlight her failure to match this traditional ideal (Johnson 1997: 410). Virtuous only by rewritten standards, Livia shows how Augustan ideology was crafted to serve those in power. This special treatment calls to mind another time when Livia was not held to the same moral standard as other women. Following the death of her son Drusus, she was honored with special privileges that were intended to reward women who had given birth to three or more children (Purcell 1986: 78). Because she had been married multiple times and bore only two children—both of whom belonged to that first union—Livia did not match either the traditional or the Augustan model of an ideal wife.

Upon close examination, the treatment of Fortuna on June 11th casts an equally unflattering light on women, the goddess, and Livia by extension. Her story presents issues regarding dynastic succession and female wickedness, as illustrated by the story of Servius Tullius, an early king of Rome, and his daughter Tullia. In this section, the narrator gives three possible accounts as to why a veil obscures the statue of Servius Tullius in Fortuna’s temple. The first account compromises the modesty and virginity of Fortuna, who is meant to represent these ideals. According to Ovid’s story, “she burned with a deep, an overmastering passion for the king [Servius], and… she was wont to enter his house by a small window” (*Fast*. 6.575-7). These desires and trysts brought the goddess shame, and they certainly transgressed Augustan standards of conduct. Fortuna herself receives less attention in the second and third accounts, which instead address Servius’ murder and highlight female violence and filial impiety. His daughter Tullia goads her husband into murdering Servius, saying “crime is a thing for kings” (*Fast*. 6.595). Herbert-Brown treats the wickedness of Tullia as a welcome contrast to Livia’s
goodness, because it allows the reader to see the destructive power of an immoral royal woman and appreciate Livia’s virtues even more (Herbert-Brown 1994: 150). Newlands, though, sees not a contrast but a correlation, which suggests Livia’s own destructive potential and the dangers of succession within the uncertain imperial dynasty. She argues that Ovid “invites the reader to make an emphatic link between monarchical forms of government and the criminal abuse of power.” This concern would be extremely topical in Augustan Rome, where one man seized power after decades of civil war and political conscriptions. This interpretation is more convincing, as it moves beyond a straightforward idea of celebratory propaganda and demonstrates veiled political critiques, which would be more typical of a poet of Ovid’s caliber and daring. It seems impossible that he intended only to flatter, given that a day devoted to the celebration of female cults unnecessarily dwells on immoral, criminal women (Newlands 2000: 195-96).

Ovid’s account of June 11th progresses chronologically from a pre-Roman story of Mater Matuta to an early kingship story of Fortuna, and it culminates in an Augustan setting with Livia establishing a shrine for Concordia. This shrine represents the marital concord of Livia and Augustus, which serves as a secure foundation for the Domus Augusta and the imperial dynasty (Herbert-Brown 1994: 150). However, one can complicate this reading by juxtaposing Ovid’s account of the shrine in the Fasti with his account of the Porticus of Livia in the Ars Amatoria. The porticus, which Augustus built in honor of his wife, housed the shrine to Concordia, so the literary treatment of the two structures can be conflated. Ovid first writes of the Porticus of Livia in his erotic poem Ars Amatoria as an ideal spot to find love, which corrupts the image of matronly Livia’s site and associates it with non-Augustan amorous pursuits (Ars 1.71-2). As discussed above, Ovid and the elegiac style of the Fasti signal to the reader that it emerges from
the tradition to which the poet’s earlier elegies, including the *Ars*, belong. Perhaps, then, Ovid corrects his original depiction of the porticus by writing about it as a home to Concordia’s shrine. Previously a symbol of would-be lovers and promiscuity, the Augustan monument becomes a symbol of monogamy and “domestic harmony at the highest level” (Newlands 2002: 226-27). While such a thematic correction, if treated in isolation, aligns with Augustan ideals, the fact remains that it recalls the *Ars* and reminds the reader of the porticus’ other uses. Even the direct address of the passage discussing the shrine to Concordia, which begins “disce tamen, veniens aetas [learn this, thou age to come],” evokes the didactic elegy of the *Ars* (*Fast.* 6.639).

The presentation of Ovid’s poetry again contradicts its supposed meaning when the narrator focuses on what previously stood where Augustus built the porticus, a private palatial home that Augustus razed “because its luxury was deemed harmful” (*Fast.* 6.644). At first glance, this passage serves imperial ideology, as it praises Augustus for being an example of economic sacrifice and prioritization of the common good by making public what once was private land. However, because Ovid concludes the June 11th passage with a celebration of Augustus, he creates a climax that overshadows the themes of female authority explored in Mater Matuta, Fortuna, Concordia, and Livia (Newlands 2002: 229). Moreover, by mentioning the public house that Augustus destroyed, Ovid preserves what otherwise would have been erased from history. Such preservation suggests that Augustan reforms, either of monuments or of morals, cannot completely replace the past, thus implicitly criticizing Augustus’ attempts to rewrite what it meant to be Roman. Ovid shows that Augustus’ message, especially as promoted through Livia, does not dominate society and will never rule with absolute authority. The Porticus of Livia can simultaneously represent imperial morals, public licentiousness, and private opulence, though Ovid never fully commits to any one representation. He frees history from one
perspective by allowing all interpretations to coexist, just as he allows multiple understandings of the women of June 11th (Newlands 2002: 249).

While Livia appears in a flattering light as the final woman in a narrative associated with the goddesses Mater Matuta, Fortuna, and Concordia, each representing “the good mother, the modest virgin, [and] the female peacemaker,” the actual details of the text challenge that reading (Newlands 2000: 200). The myth of Ino, begun in Book Three of the Fasti, appears in Book Six as an incomplete and slanted view of a powerful woman who has a history of treachery and murder. She represents a wicked stepmother, a bad wife, and a danger to succession before somehow becoming a benevolent goddess. The passage on Fortuna discusses a conniving woman of the royal family, Tullia, who also disrupts succession and creates political discord. In many ways, Livia’s position in the Domus Augusta aligns with the roles of Ino and Tullia, and though Ovid may not have intended a direct comparison, he certainly would have been aware of the associations his passage created between Livia and unstable succession. Livia was a woman central to succession within the new imperial regime, as she was stepmother to Augustus’ favored heirs Gaius and Lucius Caesar and mother to Tiberius, Augustus’ eventual successor. She complicated the search for the next emperor because she could not produce an heir for Augustus, which represents a failure as a wife, especially the emperor’s wife, and which exposed the empire to uncertainty regarding its next ruler.

This theme of problematic succession appears in the section on Concordia, which surprisingly does not mention Tiberius’ inauguration of a temple to Concordia in the same year.

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25 For more on the complicated history of Augustan succession, see Werner Eck, The Age of Augustus (Malden: Blackwell, 2007). A modern reader may be tempted to draw comparisons between Ino as a murdering stepmother and Livia, whom Tacitus suggests poisoned Lucius and Gaius in order for Tiberius to rule (Ann. 1.3). Ovid, however, does not make any specific reference to such actions, so one cannot conclude that such rumors existed in his time.
that Livia dedicated a shrine to the goddess (Newlands 2002: 244). Such omission of Livia’s son may reflect a sensitivity to the uncertainty surrounding Augustus’ choice of heir at that time, or perhaps Tiberius’ absence from this passage is intentionally notable in order to highlight that very uncertainty and expose the dynasty’s instability. Of the entire account of June 11th, whose goddesses are associated with motherhood, Newlands writes, “the silence about Livia’s children and stepchildren in the very place where they should be mentioned surely draws attention to them” (Newlands 2000: 198). By not mentioning Livia’s son or Augustus’ other potential heirs, Ovid makes dynastic succession an unresolved issue of the passage, and the central subtextual issue. The June 11th entry in the Fasti serves to expose the lack of certainty about imperial Rome’s future, and it suggests, as Newlands puts it, that “there is nothing inevitable about the domestic stability of the imperial present or future” (Newlands 2002: 247). Livia plays a key role in Ovid’s political commentary, and regardless of how he depicts her, her utility as a means for critiquing the imperial family proves her importance in the increasingly powerful, not-yet divinized Augustan line.

This method of looking beyond the surface-level meaning of Ovid’s poetry exposes critique beneath apparent praise, as seen in the above discussion of the Fasti. All of Ovid’s poetry proves receptive to such analysis, so in order to elaborate upon the treatment of Livia in the Fasti, I will briefly consider the exilic poetry, specifically the Tristia and Epistulae Ex Ponto. While these works generally receive less critical attention than Ovid’s previous works, significant scholarship addresses their literary and historical value. These epistolary elegies lament the poet’s exile and offer even more exaggerated praise of the Domus Augusta than did the Fasti, and just as with that poem, scholars debate Ovid’s true message. Older scholarship

26 This thought comes from Herbert-Brown 1994: 153-6, while the following one represents Newlands’ position.
generally sees Ovid as flattering Augustus in order to gain permission to return to Rome, but newer literary examinations have discovered multiple layers of meaning and disguised or even blatant irony that make such a simple reading impossible.27

Within such analyses, though, Augustus and Ovid’s poetic purpose receive the most attention, and Livia recedes into the background as a complementary piece of Ovid’s treatment of Augustus. I seek to pull her treatment to the forefront in order to clarify her public and domestic significance. Two scholars, Jo-Marie Claassen (1987) and Patricia Johnson (1997), pave the way in such an approach, and their arguments concerning Ovid’s ironically hyperbolic praise of Livia have informed my conclusion. Livia plays a significant role in the exile poetry by representing one route of appeal through which Ovid might gain reentry to Rome, so he frequently seems to praise her and calls her a goddess more openly in these texts than any others. All of these references to the divinity of Livia and other members of the imperial family craft an exaggerated panegyric that, arguably more ironic than sincere, leads the reader to judge Augustan Rome. In the exile poetry, Ovid intends not to complement but to critique Livia, a female symbol of imperial power, though he does so—metaphorically and literally—from a safe distance.

In order to explore the hidden critique of Livia and Augustan Rome embedded in Ovid’s words, one must first consider the straightforward message of those words. The purported function of the Tristia and Ex Ponto is to facilitate Ovid’s return to Rome, as Ovid creates a narrative persona who laments his exile and pines for Rome. He does not hesitate to express his dissatisfaction with Tomis, “a hideous land” that pales in comparison to “the sweet soil of my

27 See Johnson 1997 for a brief overview of some of those scholarly perspectives. Evans (1983: 26) represents one scholar who sees Ovid’s exile poetry as extremely panegyric.
native land.” He writes how honorific hymns often please the gods and continues, “such precedents now form the basis of my prayer, O merciful Caesar [Augustus], that my poetic gift may assuage thy wrath” (Tr. 2.27-8). In this line, Ovid loosely suggests that Augustus is divine, and he acknowledges the conciliatory function of his poetry. He also frames himself as a gifted writer and victim of a god’s ire, which aids his sympathetic appeal. Augustus consistently appears as an angry deity, called “the angry god” and described as having a “harsh will” and “wrath.”

Even though Livia does not receive as many negative descriptors, her reputation still suffers when Ovid presents her as the perfect companion to such a vengeful god. This role as companion to Augustus forms one of Livia’s main roles in the exile poetry, and she is often called “consort” to “the deity of Augustus” (Pont. 3.1.164). When Ovid writes of Livia this way, saying “his [Augustus’] consort guards her divine couch” and invoking her name in a plea to Augustus with “by thy consort who alone has been found equal to thee,” he technically only calls Augustus divine. However, the reader can easily assume Livia’s near-divinity since she is so perfectly suited to Augustus. Additionally, she is often likened to goddesses, such as when she has “the countenance of Juno” or is described in the following lines: “[Livia], with the beauty of Venus, the character of Juno, has been found alone worthy to share the divine couch.” Throughout the poetry, she represents the Juno complement to Jupiter-Augustus, which suggests that as empress, she held a social position above everyday citizens and could acceptably be treated as more than mortal.

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28 Respectively Tr. 3.3.5 and 3.8.8, translated by A.L. Wheeler.
29 Respectively, from Tr. 1.2.12, 3.3.26, and 3.2.28. Claassen 1987: 34 records the frequency of such references.
30 I use the translation by A.L. Wheeler.
31 Respectively, Pont. 2.2.64 and 2.8.29.
32 Pont. 3.1.145 and 3.1.117-18.
33 For this idea and more on goddesses who were important to Julio-Claudian ideology, see Claassen 1987: 36-7.
Her divine comparisons do more than elevate her status, though, because from this high position her flaws are easily critiqued. She may have been presented as the perfectly suited, semi-divine wife to Augustus, but the irony within these presentations expose her inadequacies to the reader. The following passage demonstrates great irony that highlights her flaws:

“In union with thee Livia may fill out her years—she whom no husband but thou deserved, but for whose existence an unwedded life would befit thee and there were none other whom thou couldst espouse.”

The verb *compleat* or “fill out” here is particularly interesting, because it is associated with pregnancy (OLD s.v. 2). Thus, Ovid calls attention to the fact that Livia should have become pregnant during her years with Augustus, while instead their marriage failed to produce an heir. Similarly, the passage says that Livia and Augustus could only marry each other, which is ironic given that both previously had more fecund marriages (Johnson 1997: 418). Thus, this passage and the countless others that reference the perfection of the imperial marriage serve to remind the reader of that marriage’s shortcomings. One last irony is Ovid’s statement that Augustus might as well be *caelebs* (“unwedded,” or sometimes translated as “celibate”) without Livia, because Augustus had a well-known reputation for adulterous affairs (Johnson 1997: 418-19). This passage effectively shows how lines that seem to praise Livia and the imperial family actually expose its issues. While Ovid is never explicit in his critique, his poetry still serves that end because any Roman citizen abreast of contemporary gossip would have been keenly aware of the contradiction of upholding Livia and Augustus’ marriage as perfect.

This role as wife reflects Livia’s greater treatment in the exile poetry as one who occupies and presides over the female sphere. The works advance her as a feminine exemplum,

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34 “Livia sic tecum sociales compleat annos, quae, nisi te, nullo coniuge digna fuit, quae si non esset, caelebs te vita decret, nullaque, cui posses esse maritus, erat.” (Tr. 2.161-64)
which again places her in a position susceptible to critique. Ovid is the only author to describe Livia as *femina princeps*, which captures the sense that she is both foremost among women and wife of the *princeps* Augustus.\(^{35}\) While Ovid typically addresses the emperor when pleading for an end to his banishment, he directs his wife to appeal to Livia, which indicates that Livia is ruler to women as Augustus is ruler to men (*Pont*. 3.1.114). In that same section, Ovid writes about sinful or monstrous women of myth, such as Medea, Clytemnestra, Scylla, and Medusa, whom he says are nothing like Livia (*Pont*. 3.1.120-24). However, their side-by-side presentation naturally makes the reader wonder about their similarities, thereby effectively comparing Livia to those bad women (Johnson 1997: 416). Livia’s elevation to the status of *femina princeps* appears celebratory at first, but Ovid uses that position to compare her to other women with too much power.

The poems in the *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto* function as more than correspondences to Ovid’s companions back home. He himself states that they had a grander audience and purpose. He addresses his “little book” as a traveler at the outset of *Tristia*, writing “Go, my book, and in my name greet the loved places: I will tread them at least with what foot I may” (*Tr*. 1.1.15-6). The pun on the word “foot,” which suggests that the metrical feet of the poem can enter Rome while Ovid’s physical body cannot, demonstrates his clever use of language and his expectation that it will have a Roman audience.\(^{36}\) The poetry achieves continued fame for Ovid and allows him, or at least his reputation, to live on in Rome and throughout history. Given this interpretation of the work’s function, Ovid’s primary concern was not to return to Rome but to produce art, so there is

\(^{36}\) Potentially included in this audience was Augustus himself, as Ovid tells his book, “If you can be handed to him [Augustus] when he is at leisure, if you see everything kindly disposed… then approach him” (*Tr*. 1.1.93-6). For more discussion on the exile poetry’s audience, whether or not it included Augustus, and whether or not knowledge of his viewership can affect the interpretation of the tone, see Claassen 1987: 40.
no reason to interpret his treatment of the imperial family as propagandistic or obsequious. Even if one accepts the simpler conciliatory purpose of Ovid’s exile poetry, the idea that he only praised the *Domus Augusta* is no longer tenable. Irony pervades the texts and exposes Livia’s flaws, just as it did in the *Fasti*.

However, an important shift between pre- and post-exilic work reveals a change in Livia’s public reception. Before his exile, Ovid indirectly compares Livia to certain goddesses in the *Fasti* by discussing them on similar dates, focusing more on those goddesses and Augustus than on the empress. She does not hold a prominent place in the narrative, and her main portrayal is as a woman who fails to produce an heir. Around the time of Ovid’s exile when Tiberius becomes Augustus’ heir, Livia’s role shifts from wife to spouse and mother of Rome’s emperors. She becomes more important in her own right, and she is linked to the divine realm through her association with the divinized Augustus. She represents a foremost woman who rules over other female citizens and serves as a model of morality to Roman women. Even if one reads Ovid as ironic and not intending to honor Livia as a goddess, his superficial portrayal of her as more than mortal increases in his post-exilic work, which suggests that popular perception shifted in that direction. Contemporary writers either explicitly reference or imply her divinity, and especially after Augustus’ apotheosis, Livia was effectively deified in literary portrayals.

**II. Roman Historians on Livia**

Unlike Ovid, who mentions Livia in his elegiac poetry, the later Roman authors who discuss the empress do so in a different genre, that of historiography. While some scholars would claim a great difference between those genres, others argue that the distinction matters relatively little, as Roman histories are less objective and more literary than the modern standard.
I side with the latter perspective in this scholarly debate, which argues that classical history writing is a branch of rhetoric that adheres to rhetorical conventions. Especially in the early imperial era after Augustus’ death, Roman historians emulated their celebrated literary predecessors, so writers like Thucydides and Cicero had an impact on the style of authors like Velleius Paterculus and Tacitus, whom I discuss in the following section. This impact brought long-held classical ideas concerning proper rhetoric into the realm of imperial histories. One such idea was *inventio*, often translated as “invention,” which the earlier rhetorical tradition emphasized as an important tool of a good speaker. This translation, though, does not capture the true essence of the term, as seen in the definition found in Cicero’s *De Inventione*. He clarifies, “*Inventio* is the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one’s cause plausible” (*De Inventione* 1.7.9). That quote implies that ancient rhetoric treated evidence that aligns with the speaker’s narrative as useful, regardless of its authenticity. Thus, Roman histories as subsets of rhetorical writing do not necessarily relay only objectively true events, and they may include stories, speeches, and other material invented by the author to prove a greater point. For example, Tacitus’ general narrative portrays Tiberius in a negative light, and he embellishes historical facts with rhetorical devices and *inventio* about Tiberius’ weaknesses as an emperor in order to strengthen his critique (Woodman 1988: 203). Such embellishment is

37 Cynthia Damon (2010: 439) outlines several arguments and counterarguments about the historical veracity of Roman historians. A.J. Woodman’s book (1988) is a comprehensive study about the influence of rhetoric on different classical historians, including the impact earlier writers like Thucydides and Cicero had on their successors Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus. M. Gwyn Morgan (1992-3: 36) critiqued Woodman’s position about classical history being more inventive and literary by questioning “why a writer of contemporary history [Tacitus] would either need or want to engage in *inventio*, especially on a topic for which there was no shortage of material” (from Damon 2010: 440). This argument misses Woodman’s point that *inventio* (see above) had rhetorical precedence and constituted an important part of a historian’s craft. By ancient standards, history was not only allowed to embrace more than objective truths, it was expected to do so.

38 For more on the stylistic influence of these authors on later Roman historians, see Woodman 1988.

39 I use H.M. Hubbell’s translation. This quote is echoed in other classical texts on rhetoric, such as the unattributed *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, so it clearly represents a fundamental ideology. A footnote on the relevant line from that text adds historical weight, saying that the idea of *inventio* in rhetoric occurs in Plato and Aristotle, and perhaps even earlier (*Rhet. Her.* 1.2.3).
allowed within the genre of history as a branch of rhetoric, and a modern reader must be aware of that conceptual difference in order to read Roman histories with a skeptical eye, looking for literary truths instead of unerringly accurate accounts of the past.

Since Roman historians’ attitudes toward the imperial family vary significantly, an exhaustive literary analysis of Livia’s character in these authors’ works is impossible. Still, by acknowledging the main different approaches, I will attempt to reconstruct a more accurate picture of Livia’s reputation in the early empire. Ovid, as discussed above, is better described as cautious than caustic, because even though his ironic praise of the empress seems to critique her faults and imperial hypocrisy, the poet never dares to denounce her or Augustan Rome outright. Scholars who interpret Ovid’s poetry as simply propagandistic or laudatory overlook its complexity, and such a one-dimensional interpretation similarly underestimates the writings of Velleius Paterculus.

Velleius (30 BCE – 37 CE) served under Tiberius’ command and held different public offices, and he wrote his *Compendium of Roman History* during Tiberius’ reign. As such, his perspective represents one of an upper-class Roman citizen with little literary experience and a demonstrated loyalty to the emperor. However, one must not discredit such a pro-imperial perspective, because it presumably reflects the views of a significant number of Romans. Velleius’ treatment of Livia, then, illuminates her reception among at least certain demographics in Rome. Some of his encomiastic tone should be attributed to his use of the panegyric style of history writing, which traditionally celebrates the subject in an overstated way, and he most

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40 Scholars tend to give more credence to critical authors like Tacitus than to unctuous ones like Velleius Paterculus, but I find all approaches informative. See further discussion of this idea in the conclusion.
41 On this topic, Frederick W. Shipley’s introduction of Velleius’ history explicitly says that his perspective represents that of “the group of administrative officers of the equestrian order who ardently supported [the new empire].” See Velleius Paterculus in the bibliography below.
likely exaggerates public opinion of the empress. Still, the core beliefs, when trimmed of excess praise, suggest the prominent public role Livia held. For example, Velleius writes after her death that “[Tiberius’] sorrow at this time was crowned by the loss of his mother, a woman pre-eminent among women, and who in all things resembled the gods more than mankind” (Vell. 2.130.5). When he wrote this line, Livia had not yet been deified, and Tiberius still ruled. This assertion of Livia’s near-divinity suggests that Velleius and others in Rome understood her role as first among women and expected her apotheosis following her death, when she would not only resemble a god but would fully become one. Whether this expectation arose from imperial adulation or simply from a practical acceptance of imperial politics does not matter, as either reason suggests a similar public understanding of Livia.

The line also implies that some filial bond still existed between Tiberius and Livia at the time of her death, a point which later authors contest. I argue that Velleius knew of the discord in the Domus Augusta and that the line quoted above allows a more complicated reading of the text in which the author subtly critiques Tiberius, just as Ovid did with Augustus. Because Velleius lived and wrote during Tiberius’ reign, one might expect his favorable depictions to have been politically motivated, and certainly his praise of Tiberius would fall into this category. However, later authors’ attestations of the worsening relationship between Livia and her son would suggest that a savvy contemporary author would not want to overemphasize Livia’s status. By indicating her divinity, Velleius actually breaks with Tiberius’ policies, as Tiberius himself denied divine honors that the senate would otherwise have granted Livia after her death. The

43 I use the translation by Frederick W. Shipley.
44 Augustus’ classification as princeps, or first among equals, and his deification set the precedent for Livia, and the high public position of her husband enabled her own.
45 Few scholars ascribe to Velleius’ writing any sort of complexity, so my argument is not grounded in other scholarship. A close reading of the primary source, though, does not resist my interpretation, and as such, it is a plausible position.
46 Tac. Ann. 5.2 and Suet. Tib. 51.2.
importance of her death is emphasized by its position in Velleius’ narrative, as it comes at the very end of his history. He praises Livia just before he concludes with a prayer to Jupiter, Mars, Vesta, and “all other divinities who have exalted this great empire of Rome,” and by doing so, he leaves room for the reader to imagine Livia within this list of deities (Vell. Pat. 2.131.1).

This literary celebration of Livia clashes with Tiberius’ political actions and challenges scholars’ treatment of Velleius as a simple imperial panegyrist, because he seems to be carefully critiquing Tiberius’ treatment of his mother, whose deification should have been natural and whose death should have brought the emperor great sorrow. Velleius writes that Tiberius did feel great sorrow after her death, but other evidence suggests that Tiberius resented his mother’s overbearing influence and did not even attend her funeral. Contemporary Romans would certainly have noticed his absence, so by mentioning Tiberius’ sorrow in his history when there was little evidence to suggest the emperor’s bereavement, Velleius either serves to gloss over an uncomfortable lack of filial piety in the imperial family, or he serves to highlight it by making an ironic comment that a reader would recognize as false, as Ovid has been shown to do. I argue that the latter interpretation is more likely, because it aligns with Velleius’ praise of Livia as a goddess when Tiberius tried to repress that portrayal. Accepting this conclusion, one sees how Velleius and presumably other Roman citizens thought Livia deserved divine honors and more respect than she received from Tiberius, whom many saw as indebted to Livia for his position as emperor.

The later authors who mention Livia, such as Suetonius, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio, enjoyed more freedom of expression in their discussions of Livia and the *Domus Augusta*,

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48 Suet. *Tib.* 21.2 and Tac. *Ann.* 4.57. In addition, it was widely known that Tiberius was only related to Augustus through Livia, so she enabled succession to pass to him.
because the Julio-Claudian line had ended by the time they were writing. They appear less concerned with flattery or disguised critique of any member of the imperial family. Seneca, like Velleius, was an open admirer of Livia; Pliny the Younger had nothing very critical to say; and Suetonius and Dio gave measured criticism (Barrett 2001: 171). The latter two provide the most interesting contrast to Tacitus, who wrote scathingly of Livia as a wicked stepmother. All three, however, show that Livia exercised great control over Rome, and I find it most useful to closely examine Tacitus’ critical account to reveal how much power later Romans thought she held.

Before turning away from Suetonius and Dio, it is worth considering one of their stories that does not appear in Tacitus’ *Annales*, as this story reveals Livia’s unique power and high status. According to this account, an eagle dropped a white hen holding a laurel twig in its beak into Livia’s lap. Seeing it as an omen, she brought the twig and the hen home and raised a grove of laurel trees and flock of chickens at her villa outside of Rome. The original laurel tree supposedly became the source for all laurel sprigs that the Julio-Claudian emperors customarily wore at triumphal processions, and from that tree each emperor planted a clipping that would mysteriously wilt just before his death. In Nero’s last year as emperor, the whole grove died, as did the chickens that Livia had reared from that original hen.

This symbolic tale suggests that Livia was an important progenitor of the Julio-Claudian family tree, whose members stopped ruling Rome after Nero’s death. One could even interpret the story as presenting Livia as the source of the male rulers’ power, since the laurel sprigs that celebrated their achievements and seemed linked to their lives originated as her omen. If she had not cultivated the plant, it would not exist; the logical extension is that if she had not supported

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49 Both Suetonius’ *The Twelve Caesars* and Tacitus’ *Annales* were published in the early second century CE, and Dio’s *Roman History* was published about 100 years later.

and raised the men of the Julio-Claudian line, they would never have ruled. Dio seems to draw a similar conclusion from the story, as he writes, “Livia was destined to hold in her lap even Caesar’s\textsuperscript{51} power and to dominate him in everything” (Cass. Dio 48.53.4). This reading of the omen suits the other portrayals of Livia in Suetonius’ and Dio’s works, where they show her to be a very strong, occasionally manipulative woman who exerted control over the emperor, whether her husband or son.

Tacitus takes this portrayal one step further, as his narrative creates a version of Livia who wields her power for personal benefit and antagonizes others in her life. This pejorative treatment, though, only reinforces the idea that Livia held significant influence in the early empire that propelled her above the status of women and distanced her from mortality. In addition, the dominant negativity toward Livia gives greater credibility to the few positive claims Tacitus makes, which do not serve to strengthen his main critical tone and thus appear in the text presumably to record true history. Such favorable depictions are rare, and on the whole, Tacitus presents Livia unfavorably through his descriptions of her as \textit{noverca} or “stepmother.” This word would have evoked mistrust in a Roman reader, for whom a stepmother was an established character type associated with poisoning and hostility toward her stepchildren.\textsuperscript{52} A reader must remember that historians like Tacitus exercised rhetorical \textit{inventio}, so his narrative might be crafting Livia’s character to fit the established role of stepmother, and not presenting a factual account.\textsuperscript{53} The lack of historical or corroborating literary evidence for her intrigues as a wicked

\textsuperscript{51} Here, “Caesar” could refer either to Augustus or Tiberius, and perhaps the ambiguity is purposeful. Suetonius’ account of the story places its events immediately after Augustus and Livia’s marriage in 38 BCE, so Augustus is the more likely identification if one is intended.

\textsuperscript{52} Barrett discusses Tacitus’ use of this word \textit{noverca} in more detail and gives context for its use. He cites Ovid, Horace, and Plautus as Roman authors who all denounced stepmothers (Barrett 2001: 172). The character type of wicked stepmothers goes back even further to the Greek literary tradition.

\textsuperscript{53} For greater explication of this idea, see chapter four in Woodman 1988. Woodman identifies one specific example where additional evidence proves Tacitus’ use of \textit{inventio} and assumes that it applies to other accounts of his that cannot be as easily corroborated or challenged (Woodman 1988: 203).
stepmother supports this interpretation. Still, Tacitus was a popular author in his time, so any character traits he attributes to Livia and others would have been well-known and worth studying to reveal public perception of the imperial family.

Whether exaggeration or pure fiction, Tacitus’ Livia as stepmother plotted against several members of the Domus Augusta who stood in the way of Tiberius’ succession, which Tacitus claims she secured. He writes, “Lucius and Gaius Caesar were taken off by premature natural deaths, or else by the machinations of their stepmother, Livia” (Ann. 1.3). Similarly, he says Tiberius and Livia killed Agrippa Postumus, Augustus’ grandson, because of fear and “a stepmother’s hatred.”

Even toward Agrippina the Elder, Augustus’ granddaughter who married Livia’s grandson Germanicus, she felt “a stepmother’s resentment” (Ann. 1.33). Barrett points out the inaccuracies in such descriptions, because Livia was not truly stepmother to any of these people, but I argue that her role as matriarch of the Domus Augusta justifies Tacitus’ leniency in technical familial terms (Barrett 2001: 173). Regardless of the suitability of the word noverca, Tacitus shows Livia as a murderous, politically motivated stepmother who cleared the path for her son’s succession. He even mentions a rumor that Livia played a sinister role in Augustus’ declining health, though this story feels more like gossip than credible foul play (Ann. 1.5). Before Augustus’ death, she had apparently convinced him, “overcome by his wife’s entreaties,” to adopt Tiberius as his heir, and she held this debt over Tiberius’ head throughout his reign (Ann. 4.57).

Livia of the Annales seems to think that she deserved as much power as Tiberius held, but “he refused to have her sharing his rule” (Ann. 4.57). The senate agreed that Livia was

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54 I use the translation by J.C. Yardley.
55 Tac. Ann. 1.6. Suetonius (Tib. 22) and Dio (55.10.10 and 57.3.6) hint at Livia’s involvement in these deaths as well, but they implicate Livia less conclusively than Tacitus does, and they make no mention of her motivations as noverca.
equally or more significant than Tiberius, and Tacitus writes of their actions following Augustus’
death: “Much senatorial adulation was focused on Augusta, too, some proposing that she be
styled ‘Parent’ and others ‘Mother,’ of the nation, and several that the words ‘Son of Julia’ be
added to the emperor’s name” (Ann. 1.14). In these lines, which use pieces of Livia’s later title
Julia Augusta, Tacitus shows how the senatorial class saw Tiberius’ relation to her as one worth
adorning. They clearly respected her position in Rome, which represented the female
equivalent of Augustus’ role as father of the nation (pater patriae). Additionally, the title “son
of Julia” (Iuliae filius) echoes the title divi filius that Augustus used to highlight his relation to
the deified Julius Caesar. This similarity shows how Livia’s standing in public opinion leaned
farther and farther toward the divine following Augustus’ death and apotheosis.56

While Tacitus does not deny her power, he opposes a venerable assessment and writes
that she was “detrimental to the state as a mother, [and] detrimental to the house of the Caesars
as a stepmother” (Ann. 1.10). This critique circles back to the idea of Livia as a stepmother, and
the line effectively conflates the Domus Augusta and the Roman state, which suggests that Livia
as conniving noverca within her household would be just as disruptive as mater patriae within
the wider imperial political sphere (Barrett 2001: 173). At the same time, it also suggests that
Livia held ultimate power over both men and women in both her household and the political
sphere. She tightly controlled imperial succession from her husband to her son, and after
Augustus’ death, she prevented word from getting out until Tiberius returned to Rome (Ann.
1.5). She enabled the concurrent announcement of Augustus’ passing and Tiberius’ new rule,
which demonstrates her domination over those two men, as well as the senate and people of

56 Suetonius claims that the senate proposed to give Tiberius the honorific title “Son of Livia” as well as “Son of
Augustus,” which shows how both branches of his parentage were important and strengthens the idea that Livia was
essentially as esteemed as Augustus, who was at that point deified (Tib. 50.3).
Rome, who exercised political choice previously but lost it in the time of the empire, seemingly to a woman’s hands (Strunk 2014: 143).

The true measure of the senate’s opinion of Livia came after her death, when they voted her significant honors, including divinity. Tiberius, however, denied his estranged mother these honors, and claimed that she herself did not want to be recognized as a goddess.\textsuperscript{57} While her apotheosis did not occur at this time, the literary record clearly demonstrates that the senate intended to award her such honors, and the authors discussing such events seem unphased by the senate’s steps toward deifying Livia. Velleius Paterculus’ first-century description of Livia as a woman who “resembled the gods more than mankind” supports the idea that contemporary Romans expected Livia to be deified, and thus saw her in a sort of pre-divine form while alive (Vell. 2.130.5). Her popular veneration during her lifetime can also be assumed from certain sections of Tacitus, such as when he writes that Roman \textit{equites}\textsuperscript{58} vowed an offering to the goddess Equestrian Fortune after Livia recovered from an illness (\textit{Ann.} 3.71). This offering proves that she held enough social influence to warrant the equestrian class’ support and celebration of her life.

Tacitus himself celebrates Livia’s life at the beginning of Book Five of the \textit{Annales}, where he opens with her death. His earlier critical tone diminishes, no longer presents her as a stepmother, but instead highlights her noble lineage and preservation of “the old morality” (\textit{Ann.} 5.1). He still expresses some disapproval when he mixes criticism with begrudging praise in the following line: “She was an overbearing mother but a compliant wife, who was a good match for her husband’s craftiness and her son’s hypocrisy” (\textit{Ann.} 5.1). Here, Tacitus acknowledges the

\textsuperscript{57} Tac. \textit{Ann.} 5.2 and Suet. \textit{Tib.} 51.2.
\textsuperscript{58} The \textit{equites} or equestrian class, to which upper-class men like Velleius Paterculus belonged, ranked just below the senatorial class.
suitability of Livia’s most significant positions as wife to Augustus and mother of Tiberius. In addition, he indirectly admits that she helped preserve order by showing how politics in Rome devolved after her death, when “it was an out-and-out oppressive tyranny.” He writes, “When Augusta was alive there was still some refuge because of Tiberius’ long-standing deference to his mother, and Sejanus would not presume to supersede a parent’s authority” (Ann. 5.3). Livia’s death disrupted the order of the imperial family, and by extension, it disrupted the entire order of imperial rule. This relationship indicates her significance as mother of the household (mater familia) as well as mother of the country (mater patriae), for when she lived, even the sitting emperor Tiberius deferred to her.

The corrupting influence of power on Tiberius appears in Book Five, which fits into the larger narrative of the Annales about the flaws of the imperial system. This book is almost entirely lost, so the details of Tiberius’ fall into despotism are not preserved. Still, the first few sections of Book Five suffice to indicate Tiberius’ decline, which is stylistically initiated by Livia’s death. Tacitus’ choice to recount her death at the beginning of Book Five instead of the end of Book Four suggests that he wanted the reader to connect her death to the immoral acts that follow, as if she represented the last barrier to moral decline in the empire. This role does not contradict her portrayal as noverca, but it indicates that Tacitus saw her as serving some important role in the transition from Augustus’ more stable reign to Tiberius’ corrupt rule. In presenting her death as leading to Tiberius’ decline, he arguably viewed Livia as part of the previous generation when imperial rule was less problematic.

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59 Sejanus was a political figure who exerted influence over Tiberius and reached the peak of his power, which he lost soon thereafter, in 31 CE.
60 From Anthony A. Barrett’s introduction to Tacitus’ Annales (2008: xx-xxi).
All of the authors discussed in this chapter treat Livia as a powerful woman central to imperial ideology and elevate her above mortality by explicitly or implicitly comparing her to deities. Ovid’s portrayal shifts to emphasize her distinction among and above mortals after his banishment, which corresponds both to political changes in Rome and his new status as supplicant. Velleius Paterculus praises her near-divinity at Tiberius’ expense, thus suggesting the author’s disapproval of the emperor but approbation of his mother. The later historians generally advance a negative image of Livia. Tacitus condemns her as imperial *noverca* before adjusting his tone to acknowledge her importance in preserving morality within the *Domus Augusta*. The historical information gleaned from the texts – such as the senate’s proposed honors to Livia after her death – further reinforces the idea of her significance. Regardless of specific authors’ personal views, their accounts demonstrate that Livia occupied a pre-divine space in public opinion, because they all hint at her divinity, which is rather surprising given the subtly anti-imperial slant of most of their works. Because such hints occur frequently and ubiquitously throughout early imperial literature, one can conclude that the Roman public viewed Livia as a near-goddess whose deification was so inevitable that she existed above mortality while living.
Conclusion

The great variety of Livia’s artistic and literary depictions examined in this study show how her role within Roman society evolved and greatly grew in import over the course of her life. Her statue types reflect shifts in her political position and move from the more matronly, traditional portrayal of the nodus type to the explicitly divine visual language of the Diva Augusta type. The various attributes and physiognomic details of her portraits link them to images of goddesses, as do the statue inscriptions that describe her as θεά and diva. Within the realm of literature, her depictions resist straightforward interpretation but still generally indicate her high status. Early imperial authors describe her in elevating ways that indicate the distinct possibility that the Roman public already viewed her as goddess-like during her lifetime.

This project has engaged with the material of artists and authors in an attempt to reconstruct a robust view of Roman popular opinion on Livia, which I have argued includes a divine element. Whether seen as fully divine or simply pre-divine before 42 CE, Livia was certainly treated as more than mortal. In accordance with other aspects of Augustan ideology that emphasized the princeps’ divine ancestry and status, she stood above other women as femina princeps and mater patriae, and set the precedent for how the Roman empress looked and acted.

This study is a first step in exploring Livia’s complex portrayal in art and literature, but there is certainly room for more work on the topic. The chapter on portraiture could particularly benefit from further research and advanced scholarly work, as extensive training in classical art history would enable a more detailed approach to the material. Additionally, since a good deal of the existing scholarship on classical art, especially on Roman imperial portraits and Livia’s statuary, is written in German or other non-English languages, my inability to easily consult such
sources precluded me from doing as wide a literature review as I would have liked. For example, I had to rely heavily upon Elizabeth Bartman’s *Portraits of Livia*, though Rolf Winkes’ German catalogue of the portraits of Livia, Octavia, and Julia holds equal authority on the topic. I could not easily translate this work, which limited the scope of my research. This research represents a small step toward a comprehensive understanding of the divine implications in Livia’s portraiture, and because I focus mainly on statue portraits, one could pursue in more depth the divinizing aspects of gems, monuments, and coins. Similarly, statue inscriptions represent another resource that would benefit from analysis by a trained epigrapher, who could point out innovations or significant patterns in the epigraphical references to Livia.

The second chapter sweeps through a huge corpus of early imperial literature, which could yield more answers and evidence to support this idea of Livia’s early divinity. Further scholarship could pursue, for example, the shifts between contemporary and later imperial depictions of Livia in more depth to reveal shifts in public opinion toward the imperial family and its first empress. Apart from the authors examined here, an examination of later texts could further contribute to the argument about Livia’s reception by the Roman public, such as the unattributed *Consolatio ad Liviam* written after the death of her son Drusus. Even my longest section on Ovid’s *Fasti* could be explored in much more depth, as one could consider all the references to Livia and their placement within the poem. Authors like Seneca, Pliny, Suetonius, Cassius Dio, and Valerius Maximus could be profitably studied as well.

Aside from expansion on the chapters I wrote, continued scholarship on Livia’s divine representations could move beyond her life to consider later empresses and imperial women who receive and adapt her model, revealing her artistic and ideological legacy. Such research would elucidate the function and appearance of female divinity in the imperial family, a topic which is
eclipsed by much more research on the divinity of the emperor himself. Comparing divinized women to divinized men could provide an interesting glimpse into the extension of gender roles beyond the mortal realm, and it would enter a feminist conversation regarding the historical reception of women. A much larger proportion of existing scholarship focuses on ancient men than women, and researching figures like Livia reinfuses a female voice into the male-dominated narrative of the past. Livia represents a woman who upheld traditional gender roles while still exerting significant influence over the powerful men in her life, and she, like Augustus or Julius Caesar or Cleopatra, deserves to capture public imagination in modern times as much as she earned public veneration in the ancient past as a woman most powerful, a model of matronhood increasingly unconstrained by the notion of mortality.
Bibliography


