Livia Drusilla:
Deciphering Between Traditional Views of Rome's First Lady

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On a warm August night in the year AD 14, Augustus Caesar sat down to dinner at the home where his father had lived and died, and did not live to see the next day. At the age of seventy-five, Augustus had held the position of Emperor of the Roman Empire for fifty-two years, and had been married to Livia Drusilla for as many years. Though Livia was Augustus's third wife, she was without a doubt the woman who held the most influence in his life, and one of the few women whose name endures in ancient history. Unfortunately, that endurance does not come without skepticism and scandal. Livia was accused of poisoning Augustus for fear that reconciliation with his last remaining heir would stand in the way of her own son's succession to the throne. This accusation is only one of several against Livia surrounding the untimely deaths of each of Augustus's chosen heirs in the years leading up to his own death at Nola.[1] Though it is debatable whether there is any truth to these accusations, it is pertinent to study them simply for the fact that they appear in ancient sources.

Many ancient and modern historians argue that rather than embodying the image of Augustan modesty and womanhood, Livia represents conspiracy and corruption. However in a world where women were expected to be submissive and understated, a woman who wielded an unparalleled amount of influence over a people as prominent as the Romans was bound to encounter some kind of opposition. But what kind of opposition did she face? Was Livia ruthlessly slandered by men who could not make sense of her power? Or by women who were jealous of it? Several historians have studied Livia's life, and included her in studies of ancient Rome. However, the very small amount of modern literature that has been published on the subject hardly focuses on where the slander, if it was slander, originated and why. That is why this paper will seek

[1] Gaius Suetonius Tranquilus. *The Twelve Caesars*. (New York: Penguin Classics, 1957), 104 .

to prove that Livia Drusilla was a financially and socially independent woman who gained power and influence through her husband's authority, and this power was resented by those who felt a woman should not possess them, which caused her character to be distorted by their representations of her in history.

The primary sources for this topic are the histories written by Cornelius Tacitus, Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, and Cassius Dio. Some other ancient sources include Velleius Paterculus and Valerius Maximus, but they do not offer nearly the volume of work as the previous authors. Though the first three authors did not live during Livia's lifetime, they were actively involved in Roman politics through the senate and even in offices as high as *consul* in the years after her death.[2] During their careers, these historians had access to primary source documents that no longer exist. This may be due to deliberate destruction or simply long-term deterioration. What is most interesting about these sources is that they present the evidence both for Livia's good character and against it. In doing this, two versions of Livia emerge.

The two ancient authors who provide these contradictory images are Cornelius Tacitus and Cassius Dio. Tacitus presents Livia in an almost exotic way, starting off his description of her with accusations that she was a "multiple murderess" and "fearsome intriguer."[3] He goes on to describe here in terms of a catastrophe- a selfish, overbearing mother and wife whose influence was resented by the Roman people rather than welcomed.[4] However, he sings Livia's praises in a discussion of her personality traits later on, speaking of her graciousness and traditional compliance and moral strictness. He presents the stories of her supposed murder plots as rumors and never gives them any

[2] C*onsuls* in ancient Rome were the two highest elected military and municipal officials.
[3] Cornelius Tacitus. *Annals of Imperial Rome*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 18.
[4] Ibid., 38.

kind of concrete validity. However very fact that these accusations appear in ancient sources like Tacitus is cause enough to study them- Tacitus gives the accusations validity simply by including them in his history. Just as in modern literature, an author does not simply throw ideas into his or her work for no reason. Had Tacitus and Dio not believed (or wanted their readers to believe) that the accusations could have some factual base, they would not have placed them in their histories.

Suetonius tends to speak more about Livia's personality and events that took place after the death of Augustus, leaving out the rumors of murder by the Empress. Suetonius's analysis of Livia is useful in understanding her relationships, but beyond that does not offer much insight into the accusations against her regarding the deaths of Augustus and his potential successors. Suetonius is more partial to the positive image of Livia in his account, which is helpful in analyzing those types of personality traits construed as positive.

There is not much secondary literature to be found on Livia. The first biography of her in English was published in 2002, written by Anthony A. Barrett. However, the first biography of Livia was written in 1864 by Joseph von Aschbach, in the German language. That is a huge void of time in which no substantial work was published on this woman. Various journal articles have been published in the last several decades on Livia, including some by Marleen B. Flory, as well as Diana E.E. Kleiner. They studied specific aspects of Roman life that included Livia, but accusations of murder and scandal are largely dismissed by these authors for their lack of supporting evidence. While addressed in these works, the accusations against Livia are never given the attention that they merit for the simple fact that they were included in the work of ancient historians. More so,

modern authors spend their time analyzing Livia's role in Roman society, her relationships, and her public appearance.

One excellent secondary source is Richard Bauman's *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*. Bauman realizes the tremendous significance of Livia in ancient Roman politics and dedicates several sections of his book to analyzing her part in them. He details Livia's relationship with her son the Emperor, as well as with her other relatives such as Agrippina. These relationships are important to study because they give insight into the type of matriarch Livia was for her family and the way she conducted family affairs. Bauman gives a detailed analysis of Livia's role in ancient Rome, which is extremely helpful for the purposes of determining important developments in her character and her influence on Roman life.

The next choice for secondary sources is Anthony Barrett's biography, *Livia: First Lady of Imperial Rome*. To understand what makes a person who they are it is important to know their past (this is why we study history, is it not?), which Barrett quite sufficiently describes. However he also offers in-depth analysis of her life as Empress and of the descriptions of her by the primary sources previously mentioned. Barrett goes into serious detail about various Livian themes such as Livia's private life and how she went from wife of the Emperor to mother of the Emperor. Barrett believes in the good character of Livia and casts off all previous criticism of it calling it "ink largely wasted."[5] So while this source is a quintessential guide to analyzing Livia's character, it does not fairly present the circumstances of her life.

A third pertinent secondary source is Mary Mudd's *I, Livia: The Counterfeit Criminal*. Mudd argues against the traditional view of Livia as a scheming murderess,

[5] Anthony Barrett, *Livia: First Lady of Imperial Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), xi.

offering a chronological analysis of her life, then culminating in a defense of Livia's good character. Her main argument is that there practically no evidence to support any of the accusations against Livia and that they are largely the inventions of jealous men who could not make sense of her power as Empress and influence over the Roman people. While Mudd's appraisal is thorough and founded in facts, her views on the Roman world come across as somewhat biased toward Livia through her attempts to support Livia's good character. From the very beginning, Mudd makes it clear that she does not believe the traditional view of Livia as a criminal. That aside, she still presents the recorded events that incriminate Livia, analyzing them in such a way that both tells the story and presents the factual evidence for or against the validity of those incriminations.

Livia Drusilla was a devoted mother, wife, and citizen of Rome. She was a strong Roman woman who saw the importance of family and state life. Throughout the course of her 86 years, Livia enjoyed fortune, influence, motherhood, and an adoring husband. She was passionate about the beautification of Rome and the image of the Roman family. She built and restored many monuments in the empire, and was able to see the completion of many in her lifetime. As the first empress of Rome, Livia set standards for success that would never again be matched. Her enthusiasm for her country and willingness to inspire change was unprecedented in her time and legendary after her death. Livia was influenced largely by the ideas of her second husband, Octavian (who later became Augustus). Their marriage in 38 B.C. marked the fusion of two strong political minds. Together, they held power over one of the most prosperous periods in ancient Roman history. But what exactly did Livia have to do with this? What was her role in the well-being of Rome?

The role of women in the empire was that of mother and wife, which made any female involvement in politics completely un-heard-of. There was no place for women in the senate, or in any other office of government, because it was simply the man's duty to maintain the government, while the woman attended to the children and affairs of the home. Although Livia never held a formal office in the senate or any other part of the Roman government due to the status of women in Rome, she was able to gain influence through the wealth, image, and *auctoritas* provided to her by Augustus.[6]

Because Augustus's goal was to maintain an image of reviving traditional Roman values, it is understandable that he would want his wife to exemplify the traditional Roman woman. Thus, the "Domus Augusta" was born. This expression, meaning "The house of Augustus," is meant to describe the example set by Augustus and his family. The image of the house of Augustus is described as striving toward "modesty and simplicity, to stress that in spite of his [Augustus's] extraordinary constitutional position, he and his family lived as ordinary Romans."[7]

Livia understood that in order to become an influential figure in the male-dominated Roman world, she had to conform to the traditional values of the Roman woman, while at the same time epitomizing the ideals of the knowledgeable Roman man. She was well known for her charitable contributions and building projects in the city of Rome, as well as in other parts of the Empire. It can also be noted that association with Livia frequently helped people gain position in Rome, or escape punishment. As a "first lady," she exhibited many of the same traits that, for example, the first lady of the United States is expected to display. These traits might include a general concern for all things

[6] *Auctoritas* is a Latin word meaning "authority" which, in ancient Rome, would have referred to the social status of an individual and the amount of influence he or she would have held as the result of that status.
[7] Ibid., 118-119

that effect their people, the desire to help anyone who needs assistance, ambassador-like qualities, motherly qualities, and all around philanthropy. Liva, for example, funded building projects out of her own estate, providing jobs and adding to the scenic beauty of Rome. She had an extensive social network in which she was highly regarded, and even named as an heir in some wills.[8] Her enthusiasm for her country and willingness to inspire change was unprecedented in her time and legendary after her death. All of these things added to the "nice" image of Livia; the image of the Mother of Rome, a woman deserving of the title "Augusta."[9]

Roman women of high financial standing were expected to engage in charitable acts, and Livia was the wealthiest woman in all of Rome. Therefore it makes perfect sense that she would be remembered in history for her many contributions and charitable acts. She frequently provided dowries for young girls whose families had none, and gave financial support to orphaned children, as well as children whose parents could not afford to raise them.[10]

Temple of Concord, http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3065/3062406386_686918bce4.jpg

Livia also commissioned building projects, and received the honor several times of having structures built and dedicated to her name. One pertinent example of this is the

[8] Barrett, 175.
[9] Augusta is the feminine form of "Augustus," meaning "augur," or "dignified."
[10] Barrett., 188.

Temple of Concord, or Concordia. This temple was already in existence during the reign of Tiberius, but Tiberius pledged to restore it around 7 B.C., and Livia dedicated a shrine to Concordia in the portico of that temple, which was located on the West end of the Forum. Another example of Livia's influence in architecture is the Porticus Liviae. Although the ruins of this portico do not survive, the building of it is mentioned in *Fasti* by the poet, Ovid.[11] Augustus also built and dedicated colonnades to his wife, and there is a temple still standing in Rome called the Temple of Augustus and Livia. Following Augustus's death the temple was built with the help of Tiberius. Dio notes in his description of the many monuments dedicated to Augustus after his death that Livia had taken place in the process of these dedications, which gave her the image of total power. Livia even began the tradition of a festival at their home each year in his honor that was still carried out in the time Dio was writing about it. [12] This would have been somewhere around the year 202 A.D., roughly one hundred, seventy three years after Livia's death.

The Temple of Augustus and Livia
http://en.structurae.de/files/photos/2018/vienne/temple_auguste_livie_1.jpg

[11] Ovid, *The Fasti, Tristia, Pontic Epistles, Ibis, and Halieuticon of Ovid*. (London: H.G. Bohn, 1851), 238.

[12] Dio, 258.

Evidence that Livia was beloved by the Roman people is abundant in primary source literature of ancient Rome. One of the primary ways her popularity is shown is through the volume of appeals she received from Roman citizens that were in need of her aid. It must have been widely known throughout the Republic that one way to improve one's circumstances was through an appeal to Livia, because there are so many instances of this throughout the historical record. One example is that of Haterius. After having made an offensive comment to Tiberius in the year AD14 about whether or not he would accept the throne following Augustus's death, Haterius went to apologize and ended up groveling at Tiberius's feet. In doing so, he brought Tiberius to the ground and was nearly beat to death by the guards. Feeling the threat of his impending doom, Haterius appealed to Livia (The Augusta as Suetonius refers to her) and was saved by her mercy from Tiberius's rage.[13] This is only one example of Livia's tremendous compassion for her fellow Romans.

Livia was a supportive, dedicated wife on the surface, but she enjoyed a great amount of influence behind closed doors. She had the unique ability to be a part of legislation without actually being involved in making the legislation. By promoting the ideals that Augustus desired for the empire, Livia had a major role in accomplishing them. There is one instance in which Livia is given special authority, and this came in 35 B.C. when Octavian granted both Octavia and Livia powers almost identical to that of a Tribune.[14] This is the first recorded official power given to a woman who was not one of the Vestal Virgins.[15] Livia was also awarded the right by Tiberius to sit with the Vestal

[13] Tacitus, 41.
[14] Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, vol. v, book XLIX (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1961)
[15] The Vestal Virgins were the priestesses of Vesta, the goddess of hearth and home. The virgins were sacrosanct, exempt from the *patria potestas* which excluded women from making wills, owning property,

Virgins when she attended the theatre.[16] But this was only the beginning of a lifetime of special honors that Livia received.

Following the death of Augustus, Livia gained several new privileges and honors. For quite some time during the reign of Tiberius, government documents sent to the Emperor also bore the name of Livia. The Senate even attempted to give the title "Son of Julia" to Tiberius who was offended by the offer and thus rejected it.[17] They also made Livia the priestess of the Cult of Augustus and allowed her to inherit the one-third of Augustus's estate that he had bequeathed to her (roughly one million sesterces), although there was a law in place at the time that should have prohibited Livia from inheriting this large amount.[18] Livia had such an influence on the members of the Senate that they exempted her from this law, the *lex Voconia*. Finally, Augustus insisted in his will that Livia be adopted into the Julian family. In order to do this, Livia was adopted as Augustus's daughter and given the name "Julia Augusta." Because Augustus had adopted Tiberius as his son before his death, Livia was now not only Tiberius's mother but also his sister.[19]

Livia did not need the financial support that would come as a perk to being adopted into the Julian family. She already had ownership of her own family estate at Primaporta, which she probably inherited from her father upon his death.[20] Beyond that,

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and voting, and entrusted with the security of important wills and testaments. They were held in extremely high regard in Roman life, even able to pardon prisoners by touching them.

[16] Tacitus, 165. This may have just been an attempt to convince more young women to become Vestals, but it nonetheless shows the privilege that Livia enjoyed.

[17] Ibid., 41.

[18] Ibid., 36.

[19] Richard Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1992), 131.

[20] Barrett, 29.

upon her own death, she was worth at least sixty-eight million sesterces.[21] There are so many unanswered questions about why Livia did the things she did, and that is a good place to begin the transition into how Livia was portrayed in a negative light.

For all the great things listed about Livia in primary sources, there is something equally nasty to make the reader doubt whether Livia was truly the majestic, pure Augustan lady she is sometimes thought to be. It is frequently mentioned in Tacitus's *Annals of Imperial Rome* that "according to rumor" certain events took place. It is clear that Tacitus was prone to recording these rumors in his work, but whether they were true or not is largely unknown. There is never a place in any of the primary sources where one of these rumors is claimed to be absolutely true. More so, phrases such as "it is likely" or "it has been speculated" are used to lead into stories about Livia in which she has reportedly committed some crime or done some wrong. However, they are included in the primary source documents, so they must be examined and analyzed in order to understand the type of conversation that took place surrounding Livia during her lifetime and afterward.

One blow to Livia's character comes from Suetonius, describing an anonymous poem that charges Augustus with deviant sexual activities, namely homosexuality and womanizing. Suetonius asserts that Augustus became increasingly fond of young girls in his old age and that among others, Livia procured young virgins for him to "deflower."[22] This act deemed *lenocinium*, or pandering, which Richard Bauman dismisses as a

[21] Ibid., 174. According to the key to terms in Tacitus's *Annals*, it is too difficult to translate the value of a sesterce into modern monetary terms. However, it does put the number listed here in perspective by showing the contrast in the average rate of pay for Roman soldiers, which was 900 sesterces a year.
[22] Suetonius, 87.

"canard," simply a way to de-legitimize the royal family.[23] However, the fact that it is mentioned in Suetonius merits some attention. If, in fact, Livia did procure young virgins for her husband's enjoyment, there are two ways of understanding it. First of all, she clearly would only have compromised her own values if it was a direct request from her husband. In this respect, she was only acting out her role as model wife to Augustus.[24] However, a second way of understanding this event arises from a statement made by Suetonius earlier in *The Twelve Caesars*. In a section regarding Augustus's marriage history, he refers to Livia was the only woman Augustus ever truly loved.[25] This is a good place to mention Augustus's affair with another man's wife. This was not just any man's wife, but the wife of one of Augustus's close political advisors, Maecenas. [26]This is evidence of Augustus's infidelity, which even Mark Antony accuses him of.[27] How could a man so devoted to his wife that he stayed with her until his death be so unfaithful to her? And why would she stay with him if she knew about it? She had more than enough money and social clout to make it on her own.

It seems entirely possible that this love was more of a façade than anything else. It even makes sense in modern politics- a handsome, rich, successful politician marries a beautiful, intelligent, ambitious woman in order to maintain a certain image. In Augustus's case he needed a smart, conservative woman who would uphold the traditional Roman values and household, and his haste in marrying Livia almost proves

[23] Bauman, 125.
[24] Anthony Barrett describes the woman's role as "by tradition devoted to her husband, whom she would not think to cross, and she spent her time and energies on the efficient running of her household, a paragon of impeccable virtue, a perfect marriage partner." *Livia: First Lady of Imperial Rome*. 115.
[25] Suetonius, 81.
[26] Dio, 172.
[27] Suetonius, 85-6.

his immediate necessity for such an image.[28] Anthony Barrett even states in his biography that Livia was "…The only woman fit to be the wife of Augustus, and but for her the emperor would have remained unmarried."[29] And the poet, Ovid, describes her as the *femina princeps,* which roughly translates into "the ideal wife of the emperor."[30] So, in the case of the *lenocinium* charge, it seems as though it was Livia's duty to carry out whatever request her husband made and, if the accusation has any factual base, she willingly compromised her image as a modest housewife by seeking out these young women. This action reveals the hypocrisy in the imperial family, particularly Livia, and their divergence from the values they expected other Romans to uphold. It also compromises the traditional view of Livia as *Mater Patraie,* or mother of her country- the woman Augustus handpicked to be the very model of traditional purity.

Livia's character was under constant fire from the time she became part of the imperial family to the time of her death, and one way of showing this is through the abundant murder accusations that were brought against her. The murder accusations are mostly found in Cassius Dio's account, *The Roman History*.

The first comes in 23 B.C. with the death of Augustus's nephew, Marcellus. Dio alleges that people blamed Livia for this death because Marcellus had been favored for succession of Livia's son, Tiberius. However, Dio also adds that it was during this year that there was a high death rate due to fires, storms, and flooding amongst other things.[31]

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[28] Ibid., in the same section, Mark Antony also accuses Augustus of "indecent haste" in marrying Livia, being that she was still pregnant with her son, Drusus, at the time of their wedding. Augustus had divorced his wife, Scribonia, who was also pregnant, and ordered the dissolution of Livia's marriage to Tiberius Claudius Nero.
[29] Barrett, 193.
[30] Ovid, *Tristia ; Ex Ponto.* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1988), I. 6. 25.
[31] Dio, 154.

Next in line after Marcellus was Marcus Agrippa, Augustus's right-hand-man. The account in Dio is that Agrippa became ill at Campania and died of that illness. There is no indication, however, than Livia had a connection to this. It may have been beneficial to her son's succession, but there is no mention in any of the primary sources that she may have been linked to the death somehow.

Years later, in 4 A.D., Augustus lost his two grandsons, Gaius and Lucius. Both were primed for succession, and both showed much promise. Gaius was injured in battle, and Lucius fell ill around the same time and both died. The suspicion fell on Livia for these deaths because, of course, Lucius and Gaius were ostentatiously promoted as Augustus's heirs which hindered Tiberius's opportunities, and because at the time of their deaths, Tiberius was just returning from his stay in Rhodes.[32] This must have looked suspicious to the Roman people.

The final and most dramatic accusations against Livia accompanied her own husband's death. Agrippa Postumus, the youngest son of Augustus's good friend, Marcus Agrippa, was next in line for the throne after Lucius and Gaius. However, Postumus displayed disturbing behavior that was not in sync with the image of Augustan modesty and humility. Tacitus suggests that it was through the manipulation of Livia that Augustus was convinced to banish his only surviving grandson even though he had not been formally charged with any crime.[33] After years of banishment, Augustus finally decided to go visit his grandson in Planasia. His health was deteriorating and he was getting old- it is possible that he simply wanted to make amends with his last surviving blood-related heir. At any rate, Tacitus describes a "tearful display of affection" between

[32] Dio, 202.
[33] Tacitus, 33

the two, and this fact had been reported to Livia by the wife of Paullus Fabius Maximus, who was the only person to accompany Augustus on his trip.[34] Only Agrippa and Tiberius remained to succeed the throne- it is possible that Livia panicked and feared that Agrippa would return to claim that right. Maybe she feared that her husband had grown soft in his old age and still desired his bloodline to be carried through the ages of the empire. Regardless, within a few days both Augustus and Agrippa were dead, and this is where Dio's account begins to get tricky.

Dio states early in his descriptions of Augustus and Livia that Livia believed her own livelihood depended on that of her husband's. Why, then, would he go on to suggest that she very possibly murdered her husband? If she depended on him this does not make sense. But it does make sense that since she probably wanted to keep her power and influence after her husband's death that she would want somebody who she could force to allow such a thing. That could only be one person, her son Tiberius. If Augustus reconciled with Agrippa Postumus, there was a possibility that Agrippa would take the throne rather than Tiberius. If that was the case, all the power Livia had built up over the years might be gone as soon as her husband was gone. In this way it is easy to see how, even if it's not true, people might have perceived foul play in Augustus's death. The story, according to Dio, is that Livia smeared poison on figs from a fig tree that Augustus was partial to eating from, and guided him to the poisoned ones while she chose those which had none. Regardless of whether this was the truth or not, somewhere around the time Augustus died, an order was sent out from a member of the imperial family to kill Agrippa Postumus. There is much debate about who ordered this- Augustus before he

[34] Ibid., 34.

died? Tiberius to secure his place? Livia to secure Tiberius's place? The both of them in a conspiracy? The possibilities are too many to ignore.

There are multiple incidents throughout Tacitus's account in which it appears that association with Livia almost equaled immunity. While some analysts may regard such a thing as remarkable, it also shows Livia's elitism. It is clear through Tacitus's descriptions that Livia manipulated her way through politics. One example of this is her support of Plancina after her murder of Germanicus. Obviously murder is a serious offense, and Plancina, although a member of the imperial family was subject to the same laws as all other Romans. However, through Livia's appeals on her behalf, Plancina was eventually pardoned.[35] Another example is that of Urgulania. Lucius Calpurnius Piso summoned Urgulania to court and Urgulania refused to comply. In this case, Tiberius's appeal to the praetor in support of his mother's friend saved her from prosecution for this insubordination.[36] This same principle also applies to the aforementioned altercation between Tiberius and Haterius in which Livia intervened on Haterius's behalf.[37]

It is also worth noting that each of these events took place after the death of Augustus. Tacitus also strongly suggests that Livia and Tiberius worked together to suppress Germanicus's mother, Antonia, from attending his funeral so that their own failure to attend would appear to be simply a way of respecting Antonia's own actions. Tacitus also presents the possibility that Antonia was horribly ill at the time, or completely overcome by grief in such a way that prevented her attendance, but he heavily insinuates that Livia and Tiberius had a hand in the situation.[38]

[35] Tacitus, 125.
[36] Ibid., 93.
[37] Ibid., 41.
[38] Ibid., 120.

Even if all these accusations are false, there is some worth in trying to understand what they mean and why they are made. Obviously to be in a position of such unparalleled power creates a multitude of opportunity for criticism and slander. Whether the accusations are true or not, it is nearly impossible to know. There is very little physical evidence remaining that could give insight into correspondence between the Roman people that may have led to such accusations. And really, even in the modern world it is usually impossible to find the source of a rumor, let alone discover the truth to it. One obvious reason for this is simply that the accusers don't want to get caught spreading the rumors, whether they be true or false. So they destroy the evidence of correspondence, or whatever else may incriminate them. Rumors flourished in ancient times- Romans did not have television or any similar forms of media. Spoken word entertained them, in the theatre, in the forum, in the home, on the city streets.

Ultimately, it is clear that Livia was a model wife and mother, and that she wanted the best for her family. It is also clear that while the untimely deaths of all Augustus's heirs were convenient to Livia's desire for her son to acquire the throne, it is impossible to prove that she caused them to take place. By the same token, it is also impossible to prove that she did not cause them to take place. However, the accounts of Suetonius, Dio, and Tacitus all support the idea that such machinations were purely rumor, and there is no valid evidence to support the notion that Livia may have orchestrated the assassinations of all her husband's possible successors. In fact, there is far more evidence to support Livia's good character as the primary mother figure in Rome after which all or at least most women modeled themselves. Her image on coins, the dowries for needy families, the wills that list her as a beneficiary, the public works

projects- all these things barely scratch the surface as to the kind of woman Livia was, but they prove her dedication to her country and all its inhabitants. The fact is that while the various rumors surrounding Livia's role as a multiple murderess may be fascinating (as is easily proven by the popularity of the BBC production, "I, Claudius"), they are largely unfounded.

It is unfortunate that there are no ancient histories written by women that might show a different point of view regarding Livia and the true influence she enjoyed- namely how the average lower class women of the Roman Empire viewed her. If such a thing survived, a more complete, more satisfying and unbiased account of Livia's life might be available. However there is no sense in wondering about what could have been, as historians we are left with only the facts and relics that remain and the tragedy in regard to Livia is that there is so little documentary and physical evidence left from which to draw conclusions about the kind of woman she truly was.

In re-assembling these pieces, it is clear that Livia was a well respected, very ambitious and knowledgeable wife, mother, and Empress, who enjoyed a great amount of financial and political privilege during her lifetime. She was charitable and kind, she was a voice for those who did not have a voice; she was a philanthropist and even a goddess.[39] However there is a dark side to Livia that will always intrigue people who read about her and write about her, and it is evident that the "rumors" recorded in the primary sources on her life cannot be ignored. The simple fact is that even in today's world it is difficult to differentiate between what is based in fact and what is fabrication when it comes to rumor and gossip, and life in ancient Rome was no different from that. Certainly in the modern era media is more technologically advanced, but the basic idea is

[39] Livia was a goddess of the Cult of Bona Dea.

still there. How does one find the essence of a person through all the fact and fiction that exists and conflicts? People will always be fascinated by public figures, just as they always have been, and Livia is an extraordinary case of public influence in which it is hard to know a concrete answer to the question of whether she meant well or ill. And there is no rule that says a person has to be one or the other. What can be determined with a relatively substantial degree of certainty is that Livia, just like everyone else, had both positive traits and negative traits, and what little commentary survives on her life focuses on that. In most primary sources, both traits are portrayed and it is up to the reader to determine what they believe. Livia is just another victim of history, knowledge of her life is restricted to what can be learned through images of her, and what was recorded from original sources that no longer exist for modern historians to analyze and compare with the primary literature that does exist. So the conclusion that can be reached regarding her character is that she was a powerful woman who inevitably gained enemies for her revolutionary position in ancient Rome, and that caused the recordings of her life and personality to be distorted in history.

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