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Livia Drusilla

This paper examines the phenomenon of Livia Drusilla and her attainment of a position unprecedented in the Roman State. Her elevation is set against the conditions which prevailed in the Roman Republic and which militated against women attaining celebrated prominence. The paper focuses upon the violence to tradition that was perpetrated in the revolutionary era of the Roman civil wars, followed by a post-revolutionary settlement that exalted traditional custom. With regard to the latter, it is commonplace to observe that the traditional role of the family was strongly promoted. Paradoxically, the moral program instituted by the new regime resulted in an unconventionally high profile for the women of the leading family; it served dynastic purposes along the way. Women of the Roman elite had conventionally (within a family framework) used their accepted influence in the realm of private affairs and were, as the wives, mothers or daughters of those men temporarily in office, able to exercise this influence in the public arena. The fusion of the First Family with Rome's government allowed Livia to exercise such authority for an unprecedented length of time. Finally, the paper highlights the sheer longevity of Livia and the impact that this had upon her role in the transformation of the nature of Roman government.

Livia Drusilla was a phenomenon that prompts varied explanation. She is, I believe, the first Roman woman of historical prominence for whom a birthday is known. (We know this date because it became a matter of public celebration.) Born on January 30th, 59 or 58 BC,¹ she had attained, by her death in AD 29, a status that no one could have imagined at the time of her birth and which marked a significant development in the public perception of Roman womanhood. The barriers that occluded such a forecast were systemic, both institutional and cultural. She had been born into a Republic that excluded women from public office (other than certain religious posts – the extraordinary position of the Vestal Virgins springs to mind here and is relevant below) and deprecated too public a role for women. The barriers were born of interlocking aspects of Roman society; laws were often regarded as safeguarding custom, and custom authorized laws. But that was not the full picture: the Romans also saw that time wrought change and that certain laws, as with custom, would fall into desuetude (to the laments of some and the insouciance of others). While the Roman moral tradition was famously conservative, Roman society – in a state of fundamental transformation during most of the Republic's history – accepted the inevitability of change and, whilst disparaging novelty, embraced reform more often than this stereotype allows.²

Livia's 'progress' is to be explained against the backdrop of a political revolution – and, in particular, the revolutionary career of her husband Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, better known to history as Augustus. The latter proved himself a master of a delicate balancing act: respecting and manipulating tradition on the one hand and forging change on the other – and that skill, combined with his longevity, ensured an age named after him *and* his pedestalization as an epoch-marker. He conventionally marks the watershed of two eras: 'Republic' and 'Empire.' That observation immediately confronts an important historical question. Are such periodizations relevant to women's history?³ I would cautiously share the view of Phyllis Culham that such a chronological division is indeed relevant here⁴ – and perhaps more sharply so than it is in other applications of the Republic/Empire dichotomy. That may seem too much a concession to a masculinist perception of History, but it is not the full picture. Livia proved a formidable partner to Augustus, and her personal role was significant. Unfortunately for historians, Livia was all too successful in veiling her personality from posterity: no small part of her achievement.

In the world into which Livia was born, participation within the political

arena was strictly curtailed. 'Women have no place in assemblies'.⁵ So ancient custom ordained. Women were to be consigned to a different sphere.

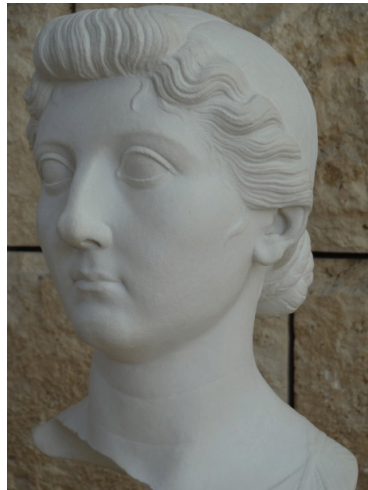
'No magistracies, no priesthoods, no triumphs, no insignia, no rewards or spoils of war can fall to them: elegance, adornment, dress – these are the insignia of women; in these is their delight and their glory; these are what our ancestors called 'female decoration'/ 'the woman's world' (*mundus muliebris*).'⁶

And custom persisted. Valerius Maximus, whose lifetime overlapped with much of Livia's, writes of women's 'natural condition and the modesty befitting the *stola* (the matron's gown)' which should ensure their silence 'in the forum and law-courts' Laws confirmed the 'infirmity' of the female sex.⁷ That did not prevent individuals of talent, resources and social standing from making their political sentiments known, and many women of the Roman elite in the late Republican period – soundly educated, occupying positions of respect within their own families, *patronae* of individuals and of communities, and often with considerable funds at their own disposal – were individuals of substance. Moreover, women of the Roman elite were not cloistered in the way that their Greek contemporaries were. They participated in family councils (and these were often the domain of politics). To this we may add the Roman recognition of *materna auctoritas* (maternal authority); a woman's influence exercised within the family, and from within the home, was clearly regarded as legitimate and traditional. This has led some scholars to account the 'daughters of the *nobilitas*' as more influential than 'the average senator'.⁸ Yet, given the restrictions and force of custom, any forays into the political sphere needed to be essayed with great caution: the art of influence was not to claim it. Behind-the-scenes influence is ubiquitous in most political cultures, and the most successful instances will be those that remain unknown. They must, then, be 'suspected' (and that is a loaded word). Women of the Late Roman Republic who were 'suspected' of informally influencing their kinsmen (when those men were in public office) risked damaging the reputations of the very individuals through whom they must exercise their will and thus defeating their own aims. Much of the 'evidence' that survives for reputedly influential women in this era stems from polemical allegations thrown at male politicians. The allegations in themselves must be treated warily, and the rhetorical motif served, at the time, as a deterrent to women of talent and political interests.⁹

Against that backdrop we may trace Livia's career. Born into privilege (it

seems her father had been adopted by one of Rome's wealthiest men), she was born into a dangerous world. Her grandfather had been assassinated as a result of Rome's excrescent public violence; and her own world was turned upside down in 44 BC – when she was around fourteen – by the assassination of Julius Caesar. In the following year (probably the first year of her marriage to Tiberius Claudius Nero, her first husband), the ensuing political chaos saw the creation of the Triumvirate, a three-man dictatorship, and the institution of proscription lists whereby a bounty was placed (literally) on the heads of the triumvirs' enemies. Within the following years, both Livia's father and husband would find themselves gravely endangered. In 42 BC, her father committed suicide. In the following month, Livia gave birth to her first child, Tiberius Claudius Nero junior. Within two years, it was her husband on the run; Livia was with him, exposed to personal danger and injury. Much of the wealth to which Livia had been born must have by now been lost (and beyond formal recovery), but in some fashion she had come to the attention of Octavian, Caesar's adopted son and heir and a member of the Triumvirate. She was, we are told by a contemporary, preeminently beautiful. Although she was by now with child, Octavian sought her hand and her husband was in no position to object. The marriage was conducted hastily on January 17th, 38 BC (again, note in passing that we have the date), and the twenty-year old Livia's fortunes had changed forever (though neither she nor Octavian could be confident that their future was secure).

Nor would Rome's fortunes ever be the same. These were revolutionary times, and radical changes could be effected – for political purposes – without opposition. In these times of upheaval, violence could be done also to tradition. The historian Dio reports that Octavian's sister and Livia were granted statues, the right to conduct their own affairs without a guardian



A plaster copy from an original now preserved in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen. This copy is displayed in the Ara Pacis Museum, Rome. Photograph by the author.

(*tutor*) – i.e., an unprecedented privilege commensurate with that allowed to the Vestal Virgins, and the inviolability accorded to the tribunes of the Plebs. I would think the second and third of those dispensations, freedom from *tutela* and *tribunician sacrosanctitas* were simply extraordinary; Emily Hemelrijk would emphasize rather the granting of statues – inspired by the honorific practices of the Greek East – as the innovation that transformed the visibility of women in the Latin West.¹⁰ The precise context and the reason for this innovative measure will remain debated, but the revolutionary nature of the development can scarcely be denied. Livia's transformation had begun.

In retrospect, it can be seen that the era of more violent revolution came to an end with Octavian's military victory over Antony and Cleopatra in 31 BC. The new system of government would experience more than a decade of 'teething' troubles, but its metamorphosis was signalled in 27 BC by Octavian's adoption of the new name *Augustus*, crystallizing the overarching moral authority by virtue of which he expressed himself ready to 'save' the Roman State. It is the very nebulous nature of his evolving position, so imprecise, ill-defined and, indeed, indefinable, that helps to explain the evolving role of Livia. Modern scholarship has often seen the traditional concept of *auctoritas* as the key;¹¹ Augustus professed in the self-eulogy composed towards the end of his life to have excelled all in *auctoritas* from this date (*Res Gestae* 34.3). If such an attribute, lying outside and above politics underlay Augustus' increasing dominance and underwrote a moral authority that others thought it inappropriate to question, it becomes easier to understand how the wife of one regarded with a mixture of fear, awe, wonderment and hope might come to occupy an unprecedented place – all the more so given that *auctoritas* was a quality which women, as we have seen above, might exercise. But the solution is not as simple as it might have seemed a few years ago. A recent study has challenged the customary picture, seeking to dispel 'the numinous haze' surrounding the word and arguing that the attribute was indeed *awarded* – conferred by virtue of Octavian's investiture in 28 BC as *princeps senatus* (the Leading Man of the Senate).¹² If so, Augustus' 'authority' (on this score) was, in fact, official – and the employment of *auctoritas* cannot be waved as some sort of magic wand to explain a complex historical development. Yet the complexity remains for historians to navigate. The imprecise nature of Augustus' position is not to be gainsaid, and can be spotted in his own dying contemplation of those who might aspire (worthily or otherwise) or

be thought worthy of the more embrative *principatus* (not just leadership within the senate but something enigmatically broader) which he was on the point of vacating (Tacitus *Annals* 1.13). In this ambiguous world we might look to the very definite role played by Livia, *Romana princeps*. (The formulation is not my own; it was, perhaps, contemporary.)¹³ It is difficult to translate with the same precision – Rome's Leading Lady? It is the application of a feminine adjective to this the noun *princeps* that gave the formula what must have been its startling nature.¹⁴

So much part of Augustus' success was his 'moral program'; Rome was to be reinvigorated (indeed, saved) by a *return* to the values of the past. The impact on the womanhood of Rome would be considerable. Quintessentially illustrative is a manifesto by Horace (*Odes* 3.6). The themes of necessary expiations, the cessation of civil war, the restoration of temples sat comfortably alongside the call for the reinstatement of domestic morality, threatened, for example, by the Greek dances currently taught to *virgines* – leading, as surely as soft drugs foreshadow hard, to inebriated adultery in marriage. What was called for was the integrity of the old family unit; the poet lauds the hardy peasantry of yesteryear, raised to obey the commands of a stern mother (*severa mater*): 'a hardy generation ... brought up to carry home at dusk, when the sun relieves the tired ox, the chopped wood to please a strict mother ...' An allusion to a demanding father might have fitted as easily here, but it is their mother's approval these sturdy sons of old Rome sought.

This Augustan program, essayed in the twenties and taken up with a will in 19 BC, naturally had an impact on the women of the first family. The training of Augustus' daughters and granddaughters in the atavistic arts of spinning and weaving was publicized (Suetonius, *Augustus* 64.4-5); confinement seems the order of the day but with atavism came advancement. Paradoxically, the hopes of an era rested on both change and reversion. These women became public figures – both for dynastic and ideological reasons. And front and centre was the *Romana princeps*. Moving forward to the dedication of the Altar of Peace, the *Ara Pacis*, on January 30th, 9 BC, we see in clear relief the significant part played by the women of Augustus' household in the Augustan 'program', Livia in particular. Dynasty and ideology: the Roman aristocracy traditionally liked to have its children publicly associated with family achievements; it forecast hoped – for continuity. Sons rode in their fathers' triumphal chariots or on the horses that drew them. In retrospect, it seems inevitable that such



Photograph of a group on the side panel of the Ara Pacis (Altar of Peace).
Photograph by the author.

celebration would be commemorated in self-advertising art. In recognition of those who might attain to their father's station, the children of Augustus' extended household were featured – in touching detail – on the flanking north and south external panels of the *Ara Pacis* depicting the procession of dignitaries celebrating its inauguration. If the children are there, so are their mothers. But the women are not present simply in that role. As we have seen, Octavia and Livia had attained an extraordinarily visible status. They were not to be denied this acknowledgment. More to the point, the novelty of the depiction of this gathering of men, women and children visually articulated the new ideology. Featured here were the traditional roles of women (roles constrained, but not without authority). The virtues, the power of womanhood were to the fore in this moral revival, nowhere perhaps more manifest than in the grand figure of nurture on the left-hand panel of the east face of the Altar: 'the ever-controversial personification of peace and plenty, Tellus/Italia.'¹⁵ Or was she Venus? Ceres? An allegorical allusion to Livia?¹⁶ No source underwrites the connection, but was it a coincidence that the altar was dedicated on Livia's birthday? The image is strong, indelible, and speaks volumes.¹⁷

In the commemoration of women within family ranks there was nothing new. There was nothing here that challenged propriety or, more to the point, the Augustan 'revival'. But the women of the Augustan household were now part of *state art*.¹⁸ And there was something else.

As members of a family that was busily engaged in changing the nature of Roman government forever, and drawing on their traditional status within a leading family, the women of the Augustan household had access to power on an unprecedented scale. (Much could now be done within the household without the suggestion of improper female intervention, or much could be suspected of having been done behind closed doors.) The historian Dio, writing more than two centuries after these events, treats the new state of affairs as an historiographical problem; what had once been conducted in public (the essence of *res publica*) was now determined behind doors (53.19.1–3) – the traditional domain of a woman's influence. It was suspected that Livia was one of those concealed forces.¹⁹ Yet her influence did not have to be clandestine. Women of the elite houses, as we have noted, had always exercised patronage – usually through their men folk, but occasionally through the mobilization of their own considerable fortunes. Whereas, however, the elite houses had traditionally grappled for primacy amongst themselves, one family now prevailed; and the influence of household members was recognized in public edicts (even when unsuccessful).

Thus when, in the mid-twenties BC, Augustus refused exemption from taxes for the island of Samos, he formally acknowledged Livia's suit on the islanders' behalf. 'I am well disposed towards you and would like to grant this favour to my wife, who is eager on your behalf, but not to the extent of breaking my established rule.'²⁰ Recourse by provincials to the goodwill of a governor's wife was not without precedent, but Livia was now embedded within what was, in effect, the government. This made the patronage that she could offer far wider reaching. Her intercessions were made public, and put on formal record.

By the time that the *Ara Pacis* was dedicated, Livia was preeminent amongst women (her peer, Octavia, had died in 11 BC). When she suffered a mother's grief at the death of her younger son, she was awarded, in consolation, special privileges by the Senate: the *ius trium liberorum* (the rights accorded to the mothers of three children) and statues (an Augustan law of *circa* 18 BC, promoting marriage and legitimate procreation, established that women who had borne three children were liberated from the need to conduct business through a guardian). The actual concessions to Livia amounted to little, since she had held these privileges since 35 BC, yet they amounted to public recognition – and solemn recognition of rights gained during a period of irregularities. It has been seen to mark

her emergence into a public role.²¹ She was not, however, upon the stage, alone. Augustus' daughter Julia, who had given him three grandsons in whom he reposed great hopes, was commemorated on coins in 13 BC (a *denarius* showing her flanked by her two older sons) – again we see the advertisement of The Family. But Julia fell spectacularly from grace in 2 BC, a victim of her father's outrage and the need to be seen to conform to the moral legislation he had himself promoted, and both those sons died prematurely in AD 2 and 4 – at different ends of the empire.²² (Malicious rumours were quick to suggest that Livia had had a hand in those capricious twists of fate, and Tacitus was happy enough to pass them on.)²³ There followed the adoption by Augustus of his stepson, Livia's surviving child, the very able Tiberius. Livia's situation was consolidated – as was her stake after her own and Augustus' deaths.²⁴

At the same time, for the duration of her husband's life, though she was clearly a formidable force within the household (Augustus was said to have written out notes before conversations with her),²⁵ she remained above all the discrete and chaste wife of the Leading Man. The *femina princeps* stood as a model, teaching other wives chastity by inspiration.²⁶ She spun clothes for her husband,²⁷ and professed not to interfere in any annoying way.

'When someone asked her how and by what course of action she had obtained such a commanding influence over Augustus, she answered that it was by being scrupulously chaste herself, doing gladly whatever pleased him, not meddling with any of his affairs, and, in particular, by pretending neither to hear of nor to notice the favourites that were the objects of his passion.'²⁸

But this was not the end of the story. Let us contemplate the sheer longevity of the woman. Next year, 2014, will see the bimillennium of the death of Augustus. We have been celebrating his *bimillenia* for a long time; the celebrations of his birth took place in the late 1930s. If we take 31 BC as the beginning of his premiership (after that year no alternative power was able successfully to challenge him), Augustus has been with us as dux (in terms of bimillenia) for 44 years (since 1969). By the time of his death he will have been with us in a position of great and glorious Leader for 45. Livia, roughly his coeval (she was half a decade younger), will be with us for another sixteen. This should remind us that Livia was a fixture. And Augustus ensured that her light would shine even more brightly. By his will, she was adopted into the Julian household – as his daughter!

Livia Drusilla was now Julia Augusta. After Augustus' death, it was Livia (to play upon Augustus' proud boast alluded to above) who excelled all in *auctoritas*.²⁹ The Senate had no doubt as to its cue. It suggested that she be given the title 'Parent of the Fatherland' or 'Mother of the Fatherland' – and that Tiberius be addressed as 'Son of Julia'; that is, in addition to the customary *patronymic*.³⁰ She may have held *auctoritas*, but not *potestas*. Executive power rested effectively with Tiberius, who resisted these honours with the explanation that it was necessary to moderate the *honores* of women, a sign that traditional thinking had not been abandoned in all quarters. Tacitus suggests that Tiberius was in fact moved by jealousy, feeling that 'the elevation of a woman was a diminution of himself' (a further interesting indication, whether it reflects the thinking of Tiberius or Tacitus, of the endurance of the theme underlying the polemic we observed earlier). Thus was set the scene for a struggle that would continue until Livia's death.

Augusta is a word that the historian Livy applies to temples and shrines, even unto the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus itself.³¹ It was an unprecedented name for a woman, just as the name Augustus had been for a man. She was his daughter, but she need not have inherited that particular honorific name (a *cognomen*). It would become a title of great significance in subsequent eras. But what did it mean at the time? It would have been hard to say, but it surely resonated (Augustus had himself thought long and hard about his assumption of the "name"). If nothing else, it elevated her to the same type of ill-defined status as her late husband. It meant both more and less than it came to mean. Less, because it carried none of the formulaic baggage that later went with the routine application of the term to women of the imperial household; there was no precedent to give the designation such a clear semantic signification. On the other hand, it meant so much more precisely because it was unprecedented.³² The now fashionable formula of representing characters on the world stage as on "the right side" or "the wrong side of history" seems to place individuals in a Braudelian landscape, diminished by ineluctable forces over which they have little personal control – but this title put her *above* history. As such, she was a period marker. She oversaw a transformation of Rome that her husband could *not*, on *his* deathbed, have confidently regarded as inescapable. As he drifted towards that final oblivion, and instinctively engaged with that most Roman of obsessions, his *fama* and the desire not to be forgotten, it was to Livia he turned *in extremis*; and his earnest entreaty

was that she remembered their personal bond. 'Livia, live in memory of our matrimony. Fare well.' (*Nostrum coniugium*; conjugality might be a better word, catching as it does the bond between them, and the sense of the two as yoke-mates.) She was not about to forget, but she still had work to do.

Augustus' death had, in many ways, crystallized the state of play. The new state of affairs was nowhere more apparent than in an odd incident that happened within days of Augustus' death – as the Senate grappled with Tiberius' reluctance to recognize the *status quo*. A high-ranking senator, having pushed too hard for resolution and fearing disfavour, went to the *Palatium* (Tiberius' residence on the Palatine hill) to ask pardon, and threw himself at the knees of Tiberius as he was walking. Too vigorously. Tiberius toppled, and his guard were on the point of killing the senator. (A guard now shadowed the Leader.) The terrified man 'entreated Augusta, and was saved by her most earnest intercessions.'³³ Important transactions would now occur in the house of the Caesar – and, there, Livia had a certain clout. Her role would be seen as one of intervention and support rather than executive initiative. But it was neither idle nor vain. She busied herself with advancing favourites. Her patronage of individuals, such as, for example, the future emperor, Servius Sulpicius Galba, and the father of the future emperor Otho, became a matter of historical record (and the debt owed her by many senators would become a matter of documentary record (see below)).

But she was still sailing into the wind (and gender-grounded battle lines were perhaps clearer than ever, given the manifest transformations apparent in her elevation). An open conflict as to what was considered an appropriate role for a woman was now to the forefront, fought out in a changing political situation in which no appeal could be made to a constitution that underpinned the old ways, or endorsed the new. Dio's account of Tiberius' moves to constrain Livia is indicative of both just how much power Dio believed Livia wielded during Augustus' lifetime and of the various ways she was held in check.³⁴ It begins with an implicit profile of a busy life. Dio describes Tiberius receiving senators, honouring the annual magistrates 'as if it was a democracy', not indulging favourites in special honours, attending public spectacles in as modest a manner as possible, and attending to the needs of personal friends as if he were a private citizen.

'... [Tiberius] bade his mother conduct herself in a similar manner, so far as it was fitting for her to do so, partly that she might imitate him and partly to prevent her from becoming over-proud.¹³⁵

That much might seem simply ceremonial. She was, in effect, the woman of the household (Tiberius was without a wife); but it is clear that there was more to it than that. Livia was Tiberius' link to his Caesarian ancestry, his right-to-be (in the sense that the Senate seemed hell-bent in wanting him to envisage his role). It should not have been that way. Adoption, in the time-honoured fashion, should have been the end of it. The Senate, it seems, thought that it could be refined. It wanted him to be the son of Julia Augusta, replacing the traditional patronymic (as seen above) with a legitimating matronymic, emphasising that Tiberius had been (only) a stepson of Augustus.

'For she occupied a very exalted station, far above all women of former days, so that she could at any time receive the senate and such of the people as wished to greet her in her house; and this fact was entered in the public records. The letters of Tiberius bore for a time her name, also, and communications were addressed to both alike. Except that she never ventured to enter the senate-chamber or the camps or the public assemblies, she undertook to manage everything as if she were sole ruler. For in the time of Augustus she had possessed the greatest influence and she always declared that it was she who had made Tiberius emperor; consequently she was not satisfied to rule on equal terms with him, but wished to take precedence over him. As a result, various extraordinary measures were proposed, many persons expressing the opinion that she should be called Mother of her Country, and many that she should be called Parent. Still others proposed that Tiberius should be named after her, so that, just as the Greeks were called by their father's name, he should be called by that of his mother. All this vexed him, and he would neither sanction the honours voted her, with a very few exceptions, nor otherwise allow her any extravagance of conduct.'

Tiberius subscribed to the gendered *apartheid* system mentioned earlier.

'For instance, she had once dedicated in her house an image to Augustus, and in honour of the event wished to give a banquet to the senate and the knights together with their wives, but he would not permit her to carry out any part of this programme until the senate had so voted, and not even then to receive the men at dinner; instead, he entertained the men and she the women.'¹³⁶

Finally, unable to curb Livia by force of personality, he resolved to repress her by exclusion. How successfully? In some ways Tiberius' retirement to Capri in AD 26 can be seen as Tiberius ceding the field. Tiberius proved that he could effectively direct affairs from afar, but the battle of wills had been won (and not by him).

Dio's retrospective analysis might be regarded as suspect. Was he speculating in the light of later developments? Let us turn to documentary evidence. The 1980s brought to light, in Spain, a Senate Resolution on bronze, dramatically revealing the public reverence for Livia. The *senatus consultum* of AD 20 outlines the Senate's findings with regard to the trial of Cn. Calpurnius Piso and his wife Plancina (Livia's friend) for their part in the premature demise of Tiberius' nephew Germanicus. Plancina faced 'many extremely serious charges' but threw herself upon the mercy of Tiberius and the Senate, and relied upon an even more potent advocate: Livia. Tiberius wrote to the Senate 'often and meticulously' on Plancina's behalf, offering – in explanation – 'the intercession of his mother':

'[Tiberius] accepted for himself the very just explanations that she offered, and as a consequence he wished his mother to obtain her request; the Senate thinks that support and indulgence should be granted to Julia Augusta, who deserves the best from the *res publica* not only for having given birth to our *princeps*, but also because of the very many and great favours (*beneficia*) that she has done for men of every order such that she is owed, with justice and propriety, the things that she seeks from the senate – though she uses (this privilege) sparingly – and to the *pietas* ("sense of appropriate duty") of our *princeps* towards his mother. It pleases the Senate to remit the penalty of Plancina.'³⁷

The document "gives the most striking confirmation of the powerful position occupied by Livia".³⁸ Here indeed is hard evidence of the debt felt by so many in return for the patronage we had seen attributed to her above. It kept her busy indeed. She was envisaged, even in Augustus' lifetime, as never at leisure (Ovid, *Letters from Pontus* 1.3.141–2).

Her star continued to rise. Poets might compare her qualities to those of Venus and Juno;³⁹ Ovid was even willing to let his prophetic vision go further.⁴⁰ That was poetic license. Yet even in her lifetime, she was accorded in the provinces honours equal to those of a goddess.⁴¹ The Greek East pointed the way, seeing nothing strange in the use of terms such as *basilissa* or *basileia* for the women of the ruling house;⁴² Livia would eventually be hailed a Queen, such as in the relief frieze with honorific inscription from

Pergamum:⁴³ [Hera Ne]a Ba[sileia] Sebaste Ioulia ('New Hera Queen Julia Augusta') – and members of the Hellenistic royal houses were customarily accorded cultic associations; hence Livia's associations with many goddesses, especially Ceres.⁴⁴ What was *actually* intended by honours equivalent to those offered to deities is difficult to define. Therein lay one of the strengths of what would become the familiar imperial ruler cult.⁴⁵

Livia had won a prominence beyond that of any Roman woman before her. A number of factors have been seen to come together. The first was that women's status had been long undergoing a transformation, so that many regarded the very concept of women's *infirmity* as an outmoded concept. This allowed women to exercise a considerable degree of control over their own affairs. Secondly, it is possible that the misogynist polemic found as a trope in Republican rhetoric 'misfired' in that it broadcast a construct that prompted ambitions and/or engendered a vision of possibilities contrary to the traditional and contrary to the aims of its retailers. Thirdly, women of imperial families (by which I mean the women attached to the governor of a province, i.e., a man who held *imperium*, 'the right to command'), had even during the years of the late Republic been venerated by the provincials for their potential influence and perhaps for patronage in their own right, and had been rendered *visible*, the recipients of honorific statues. (The influence of the Greek East, the seat of Hellenistic monarchies, had had a significant impact upon Roman elite thinking.) It is also clear (a fourth significant factor) that, at the time of Livia's entry upon the public stage, an era of revolution was not only violent in the most deadly terms; it was violent to tradition. Barriers tumbled. But most significantly (and paradoxically) of all, I would see the imposition of Roman traditional *mores* (under an effectively autocratic regime seeking legitimacy) as essential. The key role of the family, trumpeted as a core Roman value, was in many ways the *face* of the 'Augustan Revolution'; the program was intended to put men – and especially women – 'in their place'. At the same time, one Family prevailed. In the most traditional of ways, the women of that household exercised timeworn roles; were advertised for their qualities; and made visible (though to an extraordinary degree) as a way of promoting that family's right to pre-eminence. That much was business as usual. But, in the success of that Family, the Roman world was transformed. Livia, her sister-in-law Octavia and her daughter-in-law Julia would remain tightly bound to the household (and its public duties), but that household was now the government: the *domus Caesaris*.⁴⁶ A politician's staff had often been provided from within

his household, slaves and freedmen alike (the *familia* in the broader sense); women were present in family councils. The *familia Caesaris* now administered an empire. As a penultimate point, I have stressed Livia's longevity. Her peers, and even the next generation, had fallen at hurdles either natural or designed by a cruel fate.

Many factors, then, converged in such a way that women would have a very different profile in the imperial period to follow. None of the foregoing should distract us from another all-important factor: what must have been the extraordinary personality of the woman herself. Faced with dangerous circumstances and challenging opportunities, in temperament, she was closer to her husband than she was to her son. Augustus, whilst fundamentally appreciating the power of tradition seized the opportunity of an unfolding situation and the changing political scene. Tiberius, on the other hand, was a throwback. (Others may disagree, but I see him as reluctant, resentful of being denied traditional opportunities to shine.) Livia also knew the value of public reverence of the old ways; but ran with the times. Her grandson famously tagged her *Ulixes stolatus* (sometimes translated 'Ulysses in a petticoat' which catches the playfulness of the epithet; it means 'Ulysses in a matron's gown'). The sobriquet has been discussed by many. Yes, it is disrespectful (it hints at transgressive behaviour; it suggests a veiled agency), but one has also to suspect that, coming from Caligula, there is an element of appreciation. She was an adventurer with craft. The 'Livian Revolution' might not have occurred in any other incarnation.

Notes

1. For discussion, see Anthony Barrett, *Livia. First Lady of Imperial Rome* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002), 9; 309–10; 348 n.22.
2. I have here been much influenced by the essays to be found in Mario Pani (ed.), *Continuità e trasformazioni fra Repubblica e principato. Istituzioni, politica, società* (Bari: Edipuglia, 1991).
3. The question was posed most influentially by Joan Kelly-Gadol in her essay 'Did women have a Renaissance?' Her conclusion: the Renaissance was a watershed indeed, but not one favourable to women; *Women, History & Theory. The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 19–50.
4. 'Did Roman Women Have an Empire?', in M. Golden and Peter Toohey (eds.) *Inventing Ancient Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 192–204. Others might disagree. See Culham's opening paragraphs.
5. Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 5.19.10.
6. Livy *History* 34.7, putting words into a second-century BC mouth, and playing upon

the double meaning of the word *mundus*.

7. See, e.g., *Digest* 3.1.1.5; Ulpian 11.1.
8. See, e.g. Ronald Syme, *Sallust* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), 25.
9. I have written of this phenomenon elsewhere: "Republican Politics, Women, and the Evidence", *Helios* 16 (1989): 165–182; "On the Stage, Behind the Curtain: Images of Politically Active Women in the Late Roman Republic," in Barbara Garlick et al. (eds), *Stereotypes of Women in Power. Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992), 37–64.
10. See Emily Hemelrijk, "Octavian and the Introduction of Public Statues for Women in Rome", *Athenaeum* 93 (2005): 309–317; cf. Barbara Scardigli, "La sacrosanctitas tribunicia di Ottavia e Livia", *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere et Filosofia dell'Università di Siena* 3 (1982), 61–64; and Meyer Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 72 (for further references).
11. Professor Karl Galinsky devotes a long opening chapter to *auctoritas* as a "principal concept" (*Augustan Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 10–41).
12. Gregory Rowe, "Reconstructing the Auctoritas of Augustus", *Journal of Roman Studies* 103 (2013), 1–15. (I thank Professor Rowe for sending me an advance copy.)
13. It is a formula found in the [Ovidian] "Consolation to Livia on the Death of (her son) Drusus" (dramatically dated to 9 BC – though the date of composition is contentious; cf. (on the date) H. Schoonhoven, *The Pseudo-Ovidian ad Liviam de Morte Drusi* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1992), where the epithet is diluted by virtue of application to Livia's daughter-in-law, the widowed Antonia – a product, perhaps, of the piece's later composition. But something similar is found in Ovid's *Tristia* (1.6.25) and *Letters from Pontus* (3.1.125).
14. An effect of which Ovid was no doubt aware when he added a disjunctive particle; *femina seu princeps, femina sed princeps*, respectively.
15. Barbara A. Kellum, "What we see and what we don't see. Narrative structure and the Ara Pacis Augustae", *Art History* 17 (1994): 26–45, at 26.
16. See, for debate, Eugenie Strong, "Terra Mater or Italia?", *Journal of Roman Studies* 27 (1937), 114–126; Erika Simon, *Ara Pacis Augustae* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1968), 26–27; G. Karl Galinsky, "Venus on the Relief of the Ara Pacis Augustae," *American Journal of Archaeology* 70 (1966): 223–243; Galinsky, *Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 191–241; Barbette S. Spaeth, "The Goddess Ceres in the Ara Pacis Augustae and the Carthage Relief", *AJA* 98 (1994): 65–100; L. Berczelly, "Ilia and the Divine Twins. A Reconsideration of the two Relief Panels from the Ara Pacis Augustae," *Acta ad archaeologiam et artum historiam pertinentia* 5 (1985): 89–149; N. de Grummond, "Pax Augusta on the Ara Pacis Augustae," *AJA* 94 (1990): 663–677; Galinsky, "Venus, Polysemy, and the Ara Pacis Augustae," *AJA* 96 (1992): 457–475; Wood, *op.cit.*, 99–104; Spaeth, *The Roman Goddess Ceres* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1996), 125–151; Orietta Rossini, *Ara Pacis* (Rome; Electa, 2006), 36–45.
17. For a discussion of the Ara Pacis in the wider context of the Augustan program, see Paul Zanker's *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Eng. trans. A. Shapiro,

- Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990).
18. Diana E.E. Kleiner, "The Great Friezes of the Ara Pacis Augustae," *Mélanges de l'École française de Roma* 90 (1978): 753-785.
 19. Livia's influence is well known, especially as played up by Tacitus with all the innuendo he can marshal. For a straightforward coverage of Tacitus' portrait of Livia, see Gunhild Vidén, *Women in Roman Literature. Attitudes of Authors under the Early Empire* (Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia 57, Göteborg 1993), chapter 2. But with all of the images of particular women in the ancient sources, we need to peel back the layers. See, for example, the image of Livia emerging from Ovid's *Fasti*. Geraldine Herbert-Brown, *Ovid and the Fasti. An Historical Study* (Oxford 1994), 130-172 finds it illustrative of the author's predicament in the face of unresolved dynastic tensions in which the women of Augustus' household played a major role.
 20. Joyce Reynolds, *Aphrodisias and Rome: Documents from the Excavation of the Theatre at Aphrodisias Conducted by Professor Kenan T. Erim, Together with Some Related Texts* (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 1982), 104 (trans. F. Millar). Livia was finally successful in the winter of 20/19 BC.
 21. Marleen Flory, "Livia and the History of Public Honorific Statues for Women in Rome," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 123 (1993): 287-308, at 299.
 22. A succinct summation of these events will be found in Alison E. Cooley, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 161-64.
 23. Tac. *Ann.* 1.3.
 24. The simultaneous adoption of his third grandson, Agrippa Postumus, was undermined by the latter's severe personality disorders (Suetonius, *Augustus*, 65).
 25. Suetonius, *Aug.* 84.2.
 26. Ovid *Tristia* 1.6.25-7.
 27. Suet. *Aug.* 73.
 28. Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 58.2.5 (trans. Cary).
 29. Tacitus, with characteristic artistry, plays on the word *gravis*, translated in the second opening epigraph as "grievous". It can also mean "weighty", "respected", even "august". No-one could mistake Tacitus' meaning, but the ambiguity was allowed to echo.
 30. Tacitus *Annals* 1.14.1.
 31. See, e.g., Livy 42.3.6 and 3.17.1.
 32. See Barrett's full discussion; op.cit. 150-157.
 33. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.13.
 34. Dio 57.12.1-6.
 35. Dio 57.12.1 (trans. Cary).
 36. Dio 57.12.2-5; 57.12.5, respectively.
 37. Adapted from the translation of D.S. Potter and Cynthia Damon, "The Senatus Consultum de Cn. Piso patre . Text, Translation, Discussion," *American Journal of Philology* 120 (1999): 13-42.
 38. Miriam Griffin, "The Senate's story : review article" *Journal of Roman Studies* 87 (1997): 249-263, confirming also, as she says the picture drawn of Livia by Nicholas Purcell, "Livia and the womanhood of Rome," *Proceedings of the Cambridge*

- Philological Society* 32 (1986): 78–105.
39. Ovid, *Letters from Pontus* 1.3.114–119.
40. Fasti 1. 535–6. Cf. Herbert-Brown, *op.cit.*, 159–162.
41. See Barrett, *op.cit.* 207–213 for details.
42. See Ulrike Hahn, *Die Frauen des römischen Kaiserhauses und ihre Ehrungen im griechischen Osten anhand epigraphischer und numismatischer Zeugnisse von Livia bis Sabina* (Saarwellingen: Saarbrücker Studien zur Archäologie und Alten Geschichte 8, Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 1994), 21–27 ('Das Erbe des Hellenismus').
43. IGR IV 319.
44. See Barrett, *op.cit.*, 145; 210–213; 263 for details; Wood. *op.cit.*, esp. 87–124.
45. Hillard, "Vespasian's Death-Bed Attitude to his Impending Deification", in *M. Dillon* (ed.) *Religion in the Ancient World: New Themes and Approaches* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1996), 193–215.
46. Ovid, Fasti 1. 532 speaks in those very terms.