



Becoming a 'Diva' in Imperial Rome

OVID AND THE PROBLEM OF THE 'FIRST LADY'

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In episode seven of *I Claudius*, the celebrated BBC drama on imperial Rome, the empress Livia, widow of Rome's first emperor Augustus, confesses to her grandson Claudius a long-cherished wish: 'I want to become a goddess'. This essay explores the background to Livia's desire to become a *diva*, the Latin term for a mortal woman who was deified. In particular, it examines the crisis in female representation occasioned by the novel emergence of women of power and influence, particularly Livia, in Roman public life during the age of Augustus (31 BC–AD 14) and that of her son, the emperor Tiberius (AD 14–AD 37). Fresh terminology attempted to convey positive images of elite women's newly important roles in public life; at the same time, however, this terminology reflected persistent tensions in Rome's patriarchal society between two conflicting paradigms of Roman womanhood: the retiring, traditional matron and the active, prominent spouse. The ultimate honour was deification, one of the most distinctive and controversial features of Roman religion in the early empire. Deification of prominent Roman leaders has been treated in scholarship as largely a masculine phenomenon, but it was an important female phenomenon too. Livia's

path to becoming a *diva* was a contested one. During her lifetime she wielded a wide range of traditionally masculine powers throughout the empire; however, in her deified image she appeared as wife and mother. Such an image served ultimately to maintain the patriarchal authority of the dynasty founded by Augustus and Livia, the Julio-Claudians. In death but not in life, Livia provided the model for future wives of emperors, a model, moreover, that continues to shadow debate on the public representation of women today.¹ Through the career of Livia, we can observe how gender became an important tool of imperial politics.

Becoming a *diva* in imperial Rome, therefore, needs to be understood in terms of social dynamics, gender asymmetry, and social and political change. I begin with some background on Roman women and the changes that occurred after the collapse of the Roman Republic, when power became concentrated in the hands of one man, Augustus. My particular focus is the work of the contemporary Augustan poet, Ovid (43 BC–AD 17), the brilliant author of the epic poem *Metamorphoses*. Ovid was closely involved in imperial court politics; in AD 8 he was exiled without recall by Augustus for his poetry and some unmentionable political error.² Ovid writes more about Livia and the question of deification than any other surviving writer of his lifetime, not only reflecting the tensions and biases that underpin the new representations of elite women, but also helping to forge the discourse.³ I end by looking at a different type of *diva* to the one fostered by imperial cult. Ovid's calendar poem the *Fasti* provides a number of different models for female deification. In particular, his descriptions of Anna Perenna's cult and her paths to deification do not conform to the family-based imperial ideal. Ovid's treatment of female deification reflects the political tensions between the poet and the imperial family that exiled him as well as the changing face of Rome itself under Augustus, when gender came to play a key ideological role in dynastic politics.

First then, some background to the unprecedented phenomenon of Livia and the new, sometimes tentative, terminology developed for her.

CREATING NEW MODES OF FEMININE REPRESENTATION

In 56 BC, during the latter years of the Roman Republic, the distinguished Roman orator Cicero, defending his friend Caelius in court, claimed that the case really concerned the machinations of Caelius' former mistress Clodia, a woman of an ancient, distinguished family. When he sarcastically referred to her as 'mulier non solum nobilis sed etiam nota' ('a woman not only noble but also well-known', *Pro Caelio* 31), what was biting about this remark was the adjective 'nota', for 'well-known' was the last thing a Roman woman of the late Republic — even one from a particularly prominent family — should be. Domestic virtues of modesty, decorum and devotion to a husband, along with moral rectitude, were the prescriptive ideals for a Roman matron. To be known for these qualities was a mark of honour; to be *well* known was suspect. Certainly, Roman history documents several occasions when women took collective action in public life; they also played an important, again collective, role in the religious life of the state.⁴ Livia's individual prominence in the state was something new.

Livia and other highly connected women in the Augustan family, such as Augustus' sister Octavia, broke boundaries for women in many ways. Although women, elite or not, never held public office in any period in Rome,⁵ these imperial women nonetheless took an active, though extralegal, part in public affairs and exercised male privileges. Removed by her husband early on from the traditional male tutelage over women's affairs, Livia had considerable independent wealth that allowed her to act as a major patron and benefactor at home and abroad.⁶ She and her sister-in-law Octavia built and dedicated temples and other major buildings; they had buildings named after them, which was unprecedented for Roman women. The Porticus Liviae no longer exists, but the entrance to the Porticus Octaviae, named after Augustus' sister, still stands. According to ancient sources, a splendid marble colonnade enclosed a spacious area that included two temples and a library; here the general public could stroll, converse, and enjoy

(opposite)
Fig. 1. Livia Drusilla, wife of Emperor Augustus, by unidentified artist, ca. 31 BCE. Basalt, Roman artwork, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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the outstanding art on display.⁷ Such buildings transformed Rome into a sophisticated, cosmopolitan city after decades of civil wars; they also helped construct the image of the women of the imperial family as religious, devout, cultured, and powerfully wealthy. Moreover, portraits of the leading women of Augustus' family appeared in public art and architecture, granting them unprecedented visibility.⁸ During the Republic, women, with rare exceptions, had not been honoured with public statues; female portraits were intended for private, domestic space. Livia was the first woman to be systematically represented in Roman public portraiture.⁹ The honour of riding in a special carriage known as the 'carpentum' allowed Livia to be on the move in the public world of generally masculine affairs.

Such transgression of gender norms was balanced, at least in part, by the accommodation of women of the imperial family to domestic conventions. The family was central to Augustus' vision of a new, reformed Rome. His moral and social programme was based on the common belief that moral corruption was a major factor in the collapse of the Roman Republic and its dissolution in civil wars.¹⁰ Through controversial legislation, Augustus attempted to encourage marriage and child-bearing among freeborn Roman citizens.¹¹ Women's domestic virtues were regarded as inseparable from civic virtue and thus as crucial to the wellbeing of Rome.¹² Since Augustus' family was head of state, private and domestic virtues were intertwined with dynastic and public needs.

Given the significance of the family in Julio-Claudian political thought, Livia was a key figure in Augustan image-making. She was not only the emperor's spouse; she was also the mother of two sons by a previous marriage, one of whom, Tiberius, became Augustus' heir in AD 4, thereby exalting Livia to even greater prominence. In her public devotion to husband and family she modelled ideal female behaviour, albeit through non-traditional means such as public art. The building that bore her name, the Porticus Liviae, enclosed a temple to Concordia, the personification of marital harmony.¹³ Her early statuary portrait type, of which numerous examples survive, projected not sensuality

but modesty and restraint; her hair is tied back neatly in a bun (fig. 1).¹⁴ She conveyed the virtues that Augustus wished to promote in his moral legislation: marital fidelity and chastity.¹⁵ Livia bridged the private and the public spheres by her association with these key domestic and civic virtues.¹⁶ Symbolically, she guaranteed the continuity of the family that represented Rome.

Her exceptional position in the state was also marked in text and image by her close association with Roman state goddesses, in particular Juno and Ceres, Roman goddesses of marriage and procreation (even although she remained childless by Augustus), and Vesta, goddess of chastity and a pivotal deity of the Augustan regime;¹⁷ Ovid refers to Livia as 'Vesta of chaste mothers' (*Pont.* 4.13.29).¹⁸ Livia's public image was thus largely accommodated to socially accepted norms, while her associations with Roman state goddesses linked her to the divine.

This crossing of the boundary between the public and private realms occasioned, however, extreme charges against her, recorded in the historical tradition.¹⁹ These persist today in the popular imagination where, despite scholarly efforts, Livia is largely regarded as a wife and mother characterised by ruthless ambition.²⁰ We must remember that the family life of her husband Augustus was plagued by tragedy. His two grandsons and heirs (by a previous marriage), Gaius and Lucius, died young; his daughter Julia was exiled on the charge of adultery. Livia's powerful position in the Augustan family worked against her reputation. In major historical sources Livia became the focal point of blame for Augustus' dynastic troubles, playing the villain of this tragic script. The historian Tacitus (c. AD 56–c. AD 117) and the imperial biographer Suetonius (c. AD 69–AD 122) insinuated that Livia was a schemer, and possibly even a poisoner and murderess, who stopped at nothing to ensure that her biological son Tiberius, and not Augustus' grandchildren by his daughter Julia, became emperor. As Tacitus tersely described her, 'Livia, as a mother a curse on the state, as a stepmother, a curse to the house of Caesars' (*Ann.* 1.10). According to Suetonius, Caligula called her 'Ulixes stolata', 'Ulysses in drag' (*Suet. Cal.* 23.2), a witticism that expresses



gendered anxieties that Livia's true nature was that of a ruthless, scheming man disguised, however, in the Roman *stola*, a long dress that indicated a woman of high rank. Tacitus and Suetonius wrote almost a century after Augustus' death in AD 14. For contemporary literary representations of Livia, we can turn to Ovid, whose poetry shows that Livia was a key focus of Augustan ideological image-making; in the honours she was both granted and denied, and in the terminology used of her, we can discern the debates surrounding the crafting of a new language of feminine power.

LIVIA AND OVID: THE NEW TERMINOLOGY

While Ovid is a significant source for Roman imperial cult and female deification, his approach to Livia is admittedly shaped by his bitter experience of political exile. His interest in Livia has often therefore been interpreted as flattery, designed to secure his recall from dismal conditions on the frontier of the Roman Empire at Tomis on the Black Sea.²¹ However, the ambivalence that Ovid demonstrates in his exile poetry towards the emperor Augustus as both his executioner and possible saviour is also present, if more subtly, in the language he uses of Livia.

Ovid is the only Augustan poet to refer to Livia by name.²² He first does so in the *Art of Love* (published 2 BC), where he provocatively suggests that Livia's new Porticus in Rome is a stylish place to pick up girls (*Ars* 1.71–2). In exile, he seeks her support from afar through the intercession of his wife, who had stayed in

Rome.²³ But apart from references to Livia by name, there was no ready-made terminology for her unprecedented public status as wife of Augustus and, after AD 4, mother of his heir Tiberius. For instance, Livia is commonly referred to as 'empress', but that is a modern term; there was no Latin equivalent. The word 'imperatrix' is rare and appears only once in the classical period, when it is used ironically by Cicero (apparently of Clodia) to mean an emasculating 'female commander' (*pro Caelio* 67); only in Late Antiquity is the word used in the sense of 'empress'.

'Princeps' was the title chosen by Augustus to describe his unprecedented position as sole head of state. The word means 'leading man', and it smoothed over the reality of Augustus' autocratic powers. For Livia, Ovid gives us the term 'femina princeps', 'the woman princeps', or 'the leading woman'. He uses the term twice, both times in a letter to his wife about Livia. In the first instance he writes, 'femina... princeps | te docet exemplum coniugis esse bonae' ('the "woman princeps" teaches you the example of a good wife', *Tr.* 1.6.25). The startling, oxymoronic novelty of the term is somewhat offset by Livia's representation as the model of the ideal spouse. Ovid later describes Livia in similar terms as 'femina sed princeps' (*Pont.* 3.1.125). Here, as Jenkins suggests, the insertion of 'sed' ('but') between 'femina' and 'princeps' expresses the tension between the (formally) powerless woman and the powerful concept of an Augustan 'princeps'.²⁴ The term 'femina princeps' suggests how exceptional Livia's position was — and also how paradoxical: how

(above)

Fig. 2. Roman silver denarius showing on the obverse: AVGVSTVS DIVI F(ilius) [Augustus, son of the divine (Julius)] and on the reverse: M SANQVI-NIUS IIIIVIR [Marcus Sanquinius, triumphator], by unidentified artist, 17 BCE. 2 cm, transfer from Classics Department to CU Art Museum, University of Colorado Boulder, 2014.06.412.

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could a woman, traditionally confined to the domestic sphere and subordinate to men in the gender hierarchy, be a 'princeps', that is, 'first' in state? Thus the term 'femina princeps' suggests a sort of gendered hybridity. At the same time, the bipartite term expresses uncertainty about whether the two parts of the equation are unequal in weight; perhaps for that reason the term did not catch on. It appears elsewhere only in one anonymous work, the *Consolation of Livia*, which is probably close in time to Ovid's poetry but may postdate it.²⁵

Ovid also addresses Livia with the honorific title 'Julia Augusta'. After Augustus' death in AD 14, Livia was made joint heir with Tiberius and was officially adopted into Augustus' family with the new name of Julia Augusta (Suetonius, *Div. Aug.* 101; Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.8.1). This was an unprecedented honour. Never before had a

in Vergil's *Aeneid* 8 (333–6) and Ovid's *Fasti* (1.471–2) as the mother of Evander, the wise, virtuous king from Arcadia who, as a refugee, created a settlement on the site of the future Rome. But unlike Vergil's Carmentis, who is a nymph (and thus already divine), Ovid's Carmentis is a mortal woman who predicts both her own eventual deification and that of Livia (535–6). Barrett claims that in this passage Ovid makes an extravagant expression of adulation towards Livia and 'throws restraint to the winds'.²⁸ But Ovid enters the deification debate cautiously. The reference to Livia's probable deification is couched not in Ovid's own words but in the essentially non-committal form of an ancient prophecy spoken by Carmentis. Still, Ovid suggests that deification of mortal women had ancient roots; according to his *Fasti*, Carmentis, Evander's mother, was deified

FOR OVID'S CONTEMPORARIES, FEMALE DEIFICATION WAS
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man *adopted* his wife, even posthumously.²⁶ By birth, Livia belonged to the Claudian family. But through her new title, Livia was connected directly with the Julian family, which traced its ancestry back to the goddess Venus. The title Julia Augusta recalled Augustus and served as a constant reminder of the ultimate source of Livia's power and position. At the same time, Livia could now emphasise her exceptional status as wife of a *divus*. She was appointed head of Augustus' divine cult, a priestly role that prepared her own path to receive divine honours.

Ovid is the first writer to refer to Livia as Julia Augusta; the particular context strongly suggests the possibility of her deification. In his poem the *Fasti*, which he revised throughout his period of exile (AD 8–AD 17), the prophet Carmentis predicts that, 'just as I shall one day be consecrated at eternal altars, | so shall Julia Augusta be a new divine power' (*Fasti* 1.535–6). Though not a household name now, Carmentis was an ancient goddess of Republican Rome, important enough to have her own 'flamen', or special priest; she had an altar in the centre of Rome near the Capitoline Hill.²⁷ She appears

before the foundation of Rome.²⁹ With this invented story, Ovid presents the idea of female deification as not foreign to Roman practice, linking it moreover to Rome's noble origins and thus establishing a precedent for Livia.

For Ovid's contemporaries, female deification was generally regarded as transgressive and foreign. Admittedly, Velleius Paterculus, writing in the reign of the emperor Tiberius (AD 14–AD 37), praises Livia as 'ementissima et per omnia deis quam hominibus similior femina' ('a most distinguished woman, and in all respects more like the gods than humans', Velleius 2.130.5).³⁰ Yet this apparent praise hints at the dangerous nature of Livia's extralegal position in the state; 'a woman more like the gods' is someone who has far exceeded her mortal limits. The powerful Egyptian queen Cleopatra had claimed divinity, but for the Romans she was a dangerous enemy of the Roman state. Velleius may be hinting at the controversy over Livia's possible deification. Although on Augustus' death in AD 14 the Senate voted significant honours for Livia, Tiberius vetoed most of them; he seems to have feared that her

power base, significantly expanded under the generous terms of Augustus' will, threatened his supremacy. According to Tacitus, Tiberius made gender an excuse by declaring that 'women's privileges needed to be kept within bounds', thus publicly insisting on her identity as a subordinate woman, not as a dangerous rival for power.³¹ Upon Livia's death in AD 29 Tiberius also refused to consider her deification, even although the Senate wished it.³² It was not until she was long dead and no longer a threat that Livia's deification could safely occur; in AD 42 the emperor Claudius, Livia's grandson, finally granted her that honour.

What then were the qualifications for becoming a goddess in Rome?

DEIFICATION IN ROME

First, some background to deification at Rome.³³ Did the Romans really believe their rulers could become gods? There is much evidence in elite literature of scepticism and debate over deification in general.³⁴ In the course of Rome's earlier history no Roman had been deified apart from Romulus, the founder of Rome and its first king; no human being had been the object of sacred cult between him and Julius Caesar. But in the first century BC deification was in the air, so to speak, as Rome absorbed new ideas from its expanding empire. Hellenistic and Egyptian royalty had long been regarded as gods in their lifetime as well as after death.³⁵ Philosophers imputed divine qualities to exceptional beings. Cicero's *Republic* is a key work that promotes the idea that worthy Romans could deserve immortality.³⁶ For instance, in its sixth book, Scipio Africanus, hero of the second Punic War, appears in a dream vision to his grandson to give counsel that, through exceptional service to one's country, the soul could achieve immortality.³⁷ Thus the idea of rulers becoming gods grew out of a religious and intellectual background in which it was understood that certain exceptional individuals had, at the very least, divine qualities in them.

There was also a political impetus to imperial deification. Julius Caesar was proclaimed a god after his assassination. His deification was politically expedient for his heir Augustus; as Ovid puts it at *Met.*

15.761–2, Julius Caesar had to become a god so that Augustus could after death become one too. As a god-in-the-making, Augustus could thus legitimate his one-man rule and his establishment of a dynasty. Deification was not granted while he was living, though citizens could privately worship the emperor at their individual discretion.³⁸ Deification was a posthumous honour, and was not automatic upon an emperor's death; it had to be ratified by the Senate in a formal process. Following the senatorial decree, an official cult of the new deified emperor was set up with a temple and priests. The title 'divus', used of a human being who had been made a god, as distinguished from the permanent 'dei' ('gods'), was added to the name.

The deification of Julius Caesar was the founding moment for Roman acceptance of deification. In 44 BC, at the funeral games for Julius Caesar, a comet shone brightly in the sky for seven days. According to Augustus' own account, preserved in Pliny's *Natural History* (*Nat.* 2.23.94), the people interpreted the comet as a sign that Caesar's soul had risen to heaven and that he had become a god. Capitalising on popular belief, the Senate officially decreed Caesar a *divus*; a star was added to his bust in the Forum, as seen on the reverse of this Augustan coin (fig. 2). The apotheosis of Julius Caesar provided Augustus 'a direct ticket to divinity'.³⁹ Prior to Caesar's apotheosis, merit was the main basis for deification. For instance Romulus, the chief 'historical' precedent for a Roman ruler attaining divinity, was a man of outstanding virtue and 'the guardian of his country' (Cicero, *Republic* 1.64).⁴⁰ With the Augustan dynasty, political reasons emerged as crucial factors too.

But how about women? As we have seen, female deification was particularly controversial in a paternalistic society like Rome. The notion of female deification actually occurs a year before Caesar's comet, in an extraordinary series of letters Cicero wrote to his friends on the death of his beloved daughter Tullia in 45 BC.⁴¹ Utterly bereft, Cicero writes of his therapeutic plans to deify her and establish a cult by building a shrine filled with artworks that would honour her and her intellectual gifts.⁴² These plans were met with resistance



(above)

Fig. 3. **Intervention of the Sabine Women** by Jacques-Louis David, 1799. Oil on canvas, 385 x 522 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

PUBLIC DOMAIN VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS, <[HTTPS://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FILE:THE_INTERVENTION_OF_THE_SABINE_WOMEN.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Intervention_of_the_Sabine_Women.jpg)>

and lack of comprehension by his friends. The idea that a mortal woman could become a goddess was a threat to the stability of the gender hierarchy on which Roman society was established; moreover, Cicero's model of the learned woman would not catch on for imperial deification. Nor of course was there a political motivation to deify for the sake of creating and authorising a dynasty.

OID AND LIVIA: BECOMING A DIVA

Let us now turn back to Livia and Ovid. As the first Roman to be made a god, Romulus, Rome's founder, was the prototype for imperial deification.⁴³ There were, however, no historical Roman precedents for the deification of a mortal Roman woman. As we saw, in the *Fasti* Ovid probably invented the idea of deification



for Evander's legendary mother Carmentis. In his epic poem the *Metamorphoses* he again invents a historical precedent for Livia with his unique story of the apotheosis of Romulus' wife Hersilia (*Met.* 14.829–51). This narrative follows directly after his account of the deification of Romulus, thus forming the book's climactic end.⁴⁴ As founding figures, Romulus and Augustus were closely connected

in contemporary ideology. Ovid's pairing of Romulus' apotheosis with that of Hersilia suggests that he is establishing a precedent for Livia's deification by emphasising her right to join her deified spouse. Ovid's description of Hersilia's apotheosis, moreover, suggests her link with the Julian family (*Met.* 14.846–8): 'A star fell from the sky to earth; her hair burning with its light, Hersilia departed into

the air with the star.' The portent of the falling star and Hersilia's fiery hair connects her with Julius Caesar's comet which, in Ovid's account in the following book, shone with a burning hair-like trail, a sign of apotheosis (*Met.* 15.848–50).

Hersilia's deification, moreover, is represented as a political act associated with the Augustan ideal of conjugal harmony. She is granted the extraordinary honour of deification not for her sexual attractiveness, as often happens in Greek myth, but for her love and loyalty. When Romulus disappears into the heavens, Ovid declares, 'she wept as a wife for her lost husband' (*Met.* 14.829). Devotion to her husband earns her a place in the stars, by his side (*Met.* 14.849–51): 'The founder of Rome welcomes her with familiar hands and changes her name along with her body and calls her 'Hora', who now as a goddess is yoked with Quirinus (the deified Romulus)'. Ovid thus makes the idea of female deification palatable. With Romulus in charge of Hersilia's change of body and name, she stays subordinate to her husband; 'she was a most worthy wife for Romulus the man and now likewise for Romulus/Quirinus the god' (*Met.* 14.833–4). As Sara Myers points out, the idea of the 'worthy wife' is the sort of conventional sentiment about women one finds on Roman epitaphs.⁴⁵

The invention of Hersilia's apotheosis was, nonetheless, a bold move on Ovid's part. Prior to his invention, tradition seems to have held that Romulus found a new, divine wife in heaven, just as Hercules on his apotheosis left behind a mortal wife, Deianira, for the divine Hebe.⁴⁶ Interestingly, Ovid's Hersilia has another, less gender-bound, role in Roman history. According to *Fasti* 3.201–33, Hersilia was a Sabine woman who married Romulus after the infamous 'rape of the Sabine women'. She stopped the war between the new Roman husbands and the angry Sabine fathers by intervening with a delegation of women on the battlefield, an event depicted in David's famous painting (fig. 3).⁴⁷ Like a general before a fight, Hersilia makes a speech arousing the women's morale (*Fasti* 3.205–14), and her plan succeeds in making peace between the rival male parties. In the *Fasti* Hersilia steps out of normative gender roles for women; her plan is both 'bold and dutiful' (*Fasti* 3.212). While she crosses the

line into masculine space, she does so to make peace. There is no mention here of her eventual deification, however. In *Metamorphoses* 14 her appearance as the devout rather than the outspoken wife is a more diplomatic model of female deification for Rome. Indeed, there is some evidence that Hersilia was believed to have introduced marriage customs to Rome.⁴⁸

Ovid's nuanced approach to imperial female deification suggests that this topic was a sensitive one, not only because the practice seemed foreign but because it transcended conventional gender roles. However, in his poetry written from exile, Ovid several times represents Livia directly as a figure with divine qualities and stature. For instance, he writes that every day he worshipped silver statuettes of Augustus, Livia and Tiberius (*Pont.* 2.8.1–10).⁴⁹ Notably, Ovid includes Livia along with the men, in fact using the same phrasing to describe Livia as he used of Hersilia at *Metamorphoses* 14.851; Livia too in the form of a divine image is 'yoked' ('iuncta') to her husband and son (*Pont.* 2.8.4). Thus even as he exalts Livia as part of the imperial trio of rulers, he also accommodates her to her conjugal and genealogical roles. Ovid's depictions of Livia overall suggest the inscrutability of Livia's authority, and the difficulty of finding adequate terms for her powerful but unofficial position in the state.

Some scholars have interpreted Ovid's hints of Livia's divinity as subversive. In particular, several times in his exile poetry Ovid associates Livia with Juno, the powerful consort of Jupiter and Roman goddess of marriage and childbirth, and hence a favourite portrait type for Livia.⁵⁰ After Augustus' deification, Livia as Juno edged dangerously close, perhaps, to the mythological tradition of divine consorts. For in literary tradition, Juno was extremely volatile and a rival in power to her husband. At *Pont.* 3.1.114–18 Ovid writes that Livia possesses the character of Juno and alone was found worthy of her husband's bed. The comparison lent itself to possible irony, given Juno's reputation for cruelty and anger against her serially adulterous spouse; the Olympian gods in general formed a slippery, hyperbolic point of comparison for mortal rulers.⁵¹ As Garth Tissol has argued, hyperbole is a feature of Ovid's

exile poetry, and is often double-edged.⁵² Such a divine comparison can honour Livia while also suggesting her potential, like Juno, for either clemency or anger. Ultimately, Ovid's poetry reveals the impossibility of writing about Livia in an uncontested way.

When Livia was finally deified by the emperor Claudius in AD 42, her exceptionalism was curbed. In accordance with Roman commemorative practices for married couples, she was honoured as Augustus' spouse, not as a powerful public figure in her own right. Her cult was joined to that of Augustus in the same temple;⁵³ Claudius struck coinage to celebrate the event that showed both deified husband and deified wife, 'Divus Augustus' on the obverse, 'Diva Augusta' on the reverse, counterparts but not equals. Like Ovid's Hersilia of *Metamorphoses* 14, as 'diva' she joins her spouse. Claudius' closest blood links were with Livia, his grandmother. Because of his various infirmities, Claudius had not been expected to become emperor. Livia was chiefly important to him as the genealogical founder of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.⁵⁴ Her deification legitimated his rule and gave it divine sanction; it also demonstrated his devotion both to his grandmother and to the social and political ideals represented by the emperor Augustus. Probably too Romans by this time could more easily accept Livia as a 'diva' both because she was no longer a political threat, and because, during the first century AD, Rome had become a global, cosmopolitan superpower, more accepting of the foreign habit of deifying monarchs.

Livia was not the first imperial woman to be deified in Rome. The emperor Caligula, with great extravagance, deified his sister Drusilla on her death in AD 38;⁵⁵ her cult was short-lived, however.⁵⁶ Unlike Caligula, Claudius was cautious in his deification of Livia.⁵⁷ He emphasised that Livia was part of a sacred family, not an individual; otherwise she had little political value.⁵⁸ This approach to female deification became the norm when apotheosis became more routine in the second century AD; Livia provided the model for future imperial 'divae'.⁵⁹ For instance, in Rome the base of the column of Marcus Antoninus Pius (emperor AD 138–161) shows his apotheosis and that of his wife

Faustina.⁶⁰ Faustina died twenty years before her husband in AD 140, but not until his death and deification was she too shown as deified.⁶¹

The associations of the term 'diva' in imperial terminology were thus quite different from what they are today. Becoming a 'diva' in imperial Rome may seem perhaps not very exciting or glamorous. The woman who became a 'diva' was a respectable wife who showed loyalty to her imperial spouse. (In Greek myth, by contrast, divine rape, rather than marriage, was often the route to the stars.) Yet Ovid's *Fasti* also offers other models of female deification that have little to do with the family writ large as the state. His poem reveals the diversity of early Roman religion and the multitude of female deities who played important cultural roles in Rome's history. In conclusion, I look briefly at one such goddess, Anna Perenna. She is of particular interest as a mortal woman who earned deification not because of marriage, but because, according to Ovid, of a political act. The account of her cult and deification is by far the longest in Ovid's poem. Moreover, her festival fell on a key date for the Julian family, the Ides of March.

ANNA PERENNA

Today the Ides of March is closely associated with the assassination of Julius Caesar, and the Shakespearean warning, 'beware the Ides of March'! In the *Fasti*, however, Ovid chooses to highlight the rather bawdy festival of Anna Perenna and the origins of this goddess (3.523–696); Anna is given one hundred and seventy-four lines, Caesar's assassination and subsequent apotheosis fourteen (3.697–710). The two events could not be more different, the one associated with a new imperial god, the other with an ancient, Republican goddess.

Ovid describes the festival of Anna Perenna as an outdoor event where couples of all ages let their hair down with sex, heavy drinking, dancing, and licentious songs (3.525–30):

The common people come and scattered all over the green grass they drink and lie down each with his partner. Some rough it under the sky, a few pitch tents, for others a leafy hut has been made from branches; some,

when they've set up reeds as sturdy pillars,
have stretched out togas and put them on top.

People get a bit too tipsy and by evening's end
they are staggering home:

When they return they are staggering
and are a spectacle for people to behold;
I recently ran into the procession; a drunk
old man was being pulled along by a drunk
old woman (539–42).⁶²

The image of the drunken old woman dragging
along a drunken old man is far from Augustan
standards of proper behaviour, especially since
women were rarely allowed 'to take the lead' —
or to drink wine.⁶³ Later in his account of the
festival Ovid tells us that on this day young girls
could sing bawdy songs (675–6).⁶⁴ The festival
has a carnivalesque quality in that social
proprieties are inverted in a period of licensed
freedom, including freedom of speech.⁶⁵ The
contrast between the two different events on
the Ides of March makes this a highly charged
date in Ovid's calendar poem.

Among Augustus' many powers was
oversight of the Roman calendar, which Julius
Caesar had reformed by putting the months
into alignment with the solar year.⁶⁶ Augustus
altered the calendar by adding many new
festive days honouring himself and the family.
As Mary Beard has argued, the calendar
(Roman 'fasti') was not simply a record of
measurements of Roman time; it was also a
religious and political instrument for shaping
Roman cultural memory. It was thus a key
element, often controversial and changing, of
Roman identity;⁶⁷ we might think of Australia
Day, for instance. Roman calendars were not
like our calendars, hung on interior walls,
but were public monuments, carved in the
Augustan age in gleaming marble as symbols
of their importance to the state. By using
the calendar as an ideological instrument,
Augustus could publicly display that Rome was
no longer Republican but Augustan in place
and time.⁶⁸ In contrast, in his poetic *Fasti* Ovid
explores a distinct, multifarious view of Roman
identity and time. Exiled for his earlier, racy
poetry, Ovid joins the Augustan discourse on
religion and time, but he does so to comment

on and critique Augustus' autocratic regime.

In antiquity, Anna Perenna was generally
believed to be Roman goddess of the year (Latin
'annus') and of new beginnings in spring, and
thus also of fertility.⁶⁹ Ovid emphasises instead
that she was originally a mortal woman, and
invents two explanations of how she became
a goddess. The first, which need not detain us
here (3.545–654), involves an invented, parodic
sequel to Rome's national epic, the *Aeneid*, in
which Augustus' ancestor, Aeneas, appears in
an unheroic light in a triangular relationship
with his wife and Anna, here identified with
the sister of Aeneas' former lover, Dido queen
of Carthage. The second, which Ovid seems
to favour — 'it seems close to the truth', he
comments (3.661–2) — associates her with
democratic freedoms (3.661–74). He draws
on a historical occasion, though the role of
Anna seems to be his invention. In 493 BC
the plebeian class revolted against the elite by
leaving Rome and occupying the Mons Sacer
('Sacred Mountain'), a few miles distant, until
the elite agreed to let them have their own
representatives, two tribunes of the people
(Livy 2.32–33). According to Ovid's *Fasti*, Anna
was an old woman from the town of Bovillae
(about ten miles from Rome) who gave the
famished plebeians home-baked cakes. When
peace was made a statue was erected in her
honour and she was made a goddess. On
the Ides of March, a day associated with the
assassination of Julius Caesar and the symbolic
end of the Roman Republic, the route to female
deification is provocatively connected with
populist, Republican sympathies.

Scholars have wondered why Ovid made this
elderly Anna come from Bovillae, a small town
south of Rome near the Alban lake. I suggest that
this is because Bovillae had a major connection
with Julius Caesar and his family. The town was
an offshoot of Alba Longa, which was believed
to have been founded by Iulus, son of Aeneas.
The Julian family had their family shrines at
Bovillae, and special games and festivals were
held in their honour. After Augustus' death,
Tiberius erected a public shrine to the deified
emperor in AD 16.⁷⁰ On the Ides of March, a day
associated with the making of a new imperial
god, Julius Caesar, Ovid provocatively promotes
from the Julian heartland a Roman 'diva' of a

very different stripe. The stories Ovid tells about Anna Perenna remind us of the importance of traditions of feasting, song, love, and liberty of speech as key aspects of Roman cultural identity.

We know from a recent archaeological find in Rome that the cult of Anna Perenna continued to be celebrated well into the fourth century AD.⁷¹ At some point, however, the date of her festival was changed from the provocative Ides of March to June, and the cult moved to a point three miles away from the imperial centre, with its major civic monuments.⁷² Thus the tensions that can be traced in Ovid's text between a populist female cult and an elite male ruler cult seem to have been officially recognised by the physical and temporal removal of Anna Perenna by the imperial government. Archaeology and epigraphy thus give us a clearer sense of the audacity of the poet's highlighting of Anna Perenna in his calendar poem on the Ides of March, written at a time when family and marriage were central to the official notion of the Roman *diva*. (Interestingly, Anna's spirit lives on in the southern hemisphere today as the inspiration for an award-winning southern Australian red wine, Anaperenna [*sic*]).⁷³

To conclude, Ovid was writing at a time when the notion of female deification was still fluid. From his poetry we get a sense of contemporary debate over female deification as an important, if controversial, part of imperial image-making. Livia lived to see her exceptional powers enhanced by Augustus and curbed by her son; her career highlights the important role that gender played in the evolution of imperial court politics. Ovid's calendar poem the *Fasti* also provides several examples of female deification which do not conform to the family-based model and do not have spousal counterparts. Apart from Anna Perenna, Carmentis — the mother of Evander who prophesies Livia's deification at the start of the *Fasti* — is the first of several mortal, if legendary, women in the *Fasti* who become 'divae'. Ovid calls her 'doctae', 'learned' (499); her very name recalls the Latin word 'carmen', 'poem'. At the start of the *Fasti* Carmentis offers a model for female deification that harkens back to Cicero's Tullia: eloquence and learning can also provide the route to the stars. The

power of the emperor and his spouse was closely tied up with aspirations to immortality; but it was the poet, whose works are still read today, who ultimately had the authority to confer that immortality and shape the lasting cultural memory of Rome. As Ovid writes in exile, 'If it is permitted to say this, gods too are made by poetry | and their great majesty needs the poet's voice' (*Pont.* 4.8.55). ¶

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1. The model was not, however, firmly established until the later first century AD, after the perceived excesses of various imperial women and their spouses.
2. Ovid gives two reasons for his banishment to the Black Sea, 'a poem and an error' (*Tr.* 2.207). The poem was almost certainly the risqué *Art of Love*; the error seems to have been connected with the imperial family, but beyond that is mere speculation.
3. See Kenneth Scott, 'Emperor Worship in Ovid', *TAPA*, 61 (1930), 43–69.
4. Nicholas Purcell, 'Livia and the Womanhood of Rome', *The Cambridge Classical Journal*, 32 (1986), 78–105 (pp. 82–5). On highly controversial examples of highborn Roman women who assumed unofficial public roles in the disintegrating world of the late Roman

- Republic, see T. Corey Brennan, 'Perceptions of Women's Power in the Late Republic: Terentia, Fulvia, and the Generation of 63 BCE', in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, ed. by Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 354–66.
5. John Crook, 'Feminine Inadequacy and the Senatusconsultum Velleianum', in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, ed. by Beryl Rawson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 83–92.
 6. Male guardianship was removed at the same time for Octavia, in 35 BC; see Dio 49.38.1. On Livia's role as benefactor and patron see Purcell, p. 87; Antony Barrett, *Livia: First Lady of Imperial Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 195–9.
 7. See Pliny, *Nat.* 34.31; 35.114, 139. Also S. B. Platner, 'Porticus Liviae' and 'Porticus Octaviae', in *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), pp. 423, 427.
 8. Statues were first voted for Livia and Octavia in 35 BC, during Augustus' ascendancy to power; see Dio 49.38.1.
 9. Elizabeth Bartmann, *Portraits of Livia: Imagining the Imperial Woman in Augustan Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. xxi and passim. On the iconography of Livia, see also Susan E. Wood, *Imperial Women: A Study in Public Images, 40 BC–AD 68* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 75–142.
 10. See Catharine Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 163–8.
 11. See Peter Davis, 'Ovid's *Amores*: A Political Reading', *CPh*, 94.4 (1999), 431–49 (p. 435).
 12. Kristina Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 43.
 13. See Kathryn Welch, 'Velleius and Livia: Making a Portrait', in *Velleius Paterculus: Making History*, ed. by Eleanor Cowan (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2011), 309–34 (pp. 322–5).
 14. See Bartmann, *Portraits of Livia*, p. 38.
 15. See Wood, *Imperial Women*, p. 103.
 16. See further Welch, 'Velleius and Livia'.
 17. Ceres was Livia's most widespread, and most politically innocuous, divine evocation; see Bartmann, *Portraits of Livia*, pp. 93–4.
 18. See also Ovid, *Met.* 15.864–5, who names the goddess as 'Caesar's Vesta', installed among the imperial household gods; Geraldine Herbert-Brown, *Ovid and the Fasti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 71; Alessandro Barchiesi, *The Poet and the Prince* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 137–40; Bartmann, *Portraits of Livia*, pp. 94–5.
 19. Purcell, 'Livia', p. 85.
 20. See Purcell, 'Livia', pp. 79–80; Wood, *Imperial Women*, p. 87; Bartmann, *Portraits of Livia*, p. 42; Gerturde Grether, 'Livia and the Roman Imperial Cult', *AJPh*, 67.3 (1946), 222–52.
 21. See Scott, 'Emperor Worship'.
 22. Herbert-Brown, *Ovid and the Fasti*, p. 130.
 23. See Barrett, *Livia, First Lady*, pp. 192–5.
 24. Thomas E. Jenkins, 'Livia the Princeps: Gender and Ideology in the *Consolatio ad Liviam*', *Helios*, 36 (2009), 1–25 (p. 17).
 25. See Jenkins, 'Livia the Princeps'.
 26. See Brian Rose, *Dynastic Commemoration and Imperial Portraiture in the Julio-Claudian Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 22.
 27. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 1.32.2.
 28. Barrett, *Livia: First Lady*, p. 194.
 29. Carmentis' origins are obscure. See Franz Bömer (ed.), *P. Ovidius Naso: Die Fasten*, vol. 2 (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1958) on *Fasti* 1.471, p. 55.
 30. See Welch, 'Velleius and Livia'.
 31. Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.14; Suetonius, *Tib.* 50.
 32. Tacitus, *Ann.* 5.2. On Tiberius' restrictions on his mother's power see Grether, 'Livia and the Imperial Cult', pp. 233–6.
 33. The bibliography is extensive. Fundamental is Duncan Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West: Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire*, 3 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1987–2005). See also John Scheid, 'To Honour the Princeps and Venerate the Gods', in *Augustus*, ed. by Jonathan Edmonson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 275–99, especially pp. 295–99. On official Roman procedures for deification see Gwynnaeth McIntyre, 'Deification as Consolation: the Divine Children of the Roman Imperial Family', *Historia*, 62 (2013), 222–40 (pp. 222–3).
 34. On elite scepticism see Denis Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 109–10; Spencer Cole, 'Elite Scepticism in the *Apocolocyntosis*: Some Qualifications', in *Seeing Seneca Whole*, ed. by Katharina Volk and Gareth D. Williams (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 175–82.
 35. See Rose, *Dynastic Commemoration*, pp. 4–7.
 36. On the importance of Cicero's *Republic* in late Republican thinking about apotheosis, see Spencer Cole, 'Cicero, Ennius, and the Concept of Apotheosis at Rome', *Arethusa*, 39 (2006), 531–48.
 37. Cole, 'Cicero', pp. 545–6.
 38. See the succinct discussion of emperor worship in *Ovid Epistulae Ex Ponto I*, ed. by Jan Felix

- Gaertner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 12–14.
39. Bill Gladhill, 'Gods, Caesars and Fate in *Aeneid* 1 and *Metamorphoses* 15', *Dictynna*, 9 (2012), 2–17.
 40. See Cole, 'Cicero', pp. 534–45.
 41. On the importance of these letters for understanding the process of female deification, see McIntyre, 'Deification as Consolation', pp. 231–3.
 42. See *ad Att.* 2.18; Han Baltussen, 'A Grief Observed: Cicero on Remembering Tullia', *Mortality*, 14 (2009), 355–69.
 43. See *Ovid Metamorphoses Book XIV*, ed. by Sara Myers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 200–202. A competing tradition held that Romulus was murdered by senators; Ovid refers only to Romulus' deification, the tradition that was politically important to the ruling family
 44. See Marleen B. Flory, 'The Deification of Roman Women', *The Ancient History Bulletin (AHB)*, 9.3/4 (1995), pp. 129–30.
 45. Dio 56.5.5; Myers, *Metamorphoses XIV*, pp. 208–209.
 46. See Ennius, *Annales* 100.
 47. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 2.45–46.1 offers a more muted version of the story. See also Cicero, *De Republica* 2.13; Livy 1.13. I am indebted to Reina Callier's discussion of Ovid's two Hersilias in 'Missing Persons: Character, Context, and Ovidian Poetics' (doctoral thesis, University of Colorado, 2015).
 48. Myers, *Metamorphoses XIV*, p. 209
 49. See also *Pont.* 3.1.161–4; *Pont.* 4.9.105–12.
 50. Wood, *Imperial Women*, pp. 9–10; Grether, 'Livia and the Imperial Cult', pp. 228–9.
 51. See for instance Patricia J. Johnson, 'Ovid's Livia in Exile', *CW*, 90 (1997), 403–20 (pp. 414–17); Stephen Hinds, 'First Among Women', in *Amor: Roma. Love and Literature*, ed. by Susanna M. Braund and Roland Mayer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 123–41.
 52. *Ovid: Epistulae Ex Ponto Book I*, ed. by Garth Tissol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 16–18.
 53. See Dio 60.5.2; Suetonius, *Cl.* 11.2.
 54. See Flory, 'Deification of Roman Women', pp. 133–4.
 55. See Dio 59.11.2–3.5; Suetonius, *Cal.* 24.
 56. On Caligula's promotional use of his family see Gwynnaeth McIntyre, 'Constructing a Family: Representations of the Women of the Roman Imperial Family', *Acta Patristica et Byzantina*, 21.2 (2010), 109–120 (pp. 110–113). Later the emperor Nero was criticised for deifying his wife Poppaea; her funeral pyre was loaded with more perfumes than Arabia could produce in one year (Pliny *Nat.* 12.41.83). Although, unlike Livia, but like Drusilla, Poppaea was venerated in her own temple, her cult too was short-lived. See Patrick Kragelund, 'The Temple and Birthplace of Diva Poppaea', *CQ*, 60.2 (2010), 559–68.
 57. Dio 60.5.2; Suetonius, *Cl.* 11.2.
 58. Flory, 'Deification of Roman Women', p. 134.
 59. Grether, 'Livia and the Imperial Cult', pp. 251–2.
 60. Platner, 'Columna Antonini Pii', p. 131.
 61. See Barbara Levick, *Faustina I and II: Imperial Women of the Golden Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
 62. Translation, slightly adapted, from Ann Wiseman and T. Peter Wiseman, *Ovid: Times and Reasons: A New Translation of Fasti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
 63. T. Peter Wiseman, *Roman Drama and Roman History* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998), pp. 68–9, suggests that prostitutes took part in the festival since Ovid mentions couples camping out under togas for shelter, and only elite males and prostitutes wore the toga.
 64. T. Peter Wiseman, 'The Cult Site of Anna Perenna: Documentation, Visualization, Imagination', in *Imaging Ancient Rome*, ed. by Lothar Haselberger and John Humphrey (*JRA Suppl.* 61), 51–61 (p. 59), suggests that formal competitions in song and dance may also have been part of the festival.
 65. See Carole Newlands, 'Transgressive Acts: Ovid's Treatment of the Ides of March', *CPh*, 91 (1996), 320–38.
 66. See Denis Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).
 67. Mary Beard, 'A Complex of Times: No More Sheep on Romulus' Birthday', *PCPhS*, 33 (1987), 1–15.
 68. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar*, p. 189.
 69. See Macrobius 1.12.6; also Martial 4.64.16–17, with Wiseman, 'The Cult Site of Anna Perenna', pp. 59–61. Ovid also briefly offers four other possibilities at 3.657–9: she is a moon goddess, the goddess Themis, the goddess Io, or a nymph who gave the infant Jupiter his first food.
 70. See Stefan Weinstock, *Divus Iulius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 5–7; Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.41.
 71. Marina Piranomonte, 'Anna Perenna a dieci anni della scoperta', *MHNH*, 9 (2009), 251–64; Wiseman, 'The Cult Site of Anna Perenna'.
 72. A fourth century calendar, the *Fasti Filocaliani*, records the date of the Anna Perenna festival as 18 June. See also Stephen J. Heyworth, 'Roman Topography and Latin Diction', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 79 (2011), 43–69.
 73. The vintner, Ben Glaetzer, claims on his website to have been directly inspired by the Roman 'diva'.