

## BOOK REVIEW

*Faustina I and II: Imperial Women of the Golden Age.* By BARBARAK.LEVICK. Oxford Women in Antiquity. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, Date. Pp. xi + 248. Hardcover, \$65.00. ISBN 978-0-19-537941-9.

The two Faustinas were the most prominent women of the Roman Empire for the forty years of the combined reigns of their husbands, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. In her Introduction, Levick outlines the methodology she will use in the absence of definite, reliable biographical information: she will situate the Faustinas in the context of women in Roman history, as links between powerful, prominent families, and in a few occasions, as interveners in events. Levick will also contrast the Faustinas with their predecessors, including the transgressive imperial women such as Agrippina the Younger and with modest and discreet imperial wives such as the Matidiae. The many surviving coins, statues, and inscriptions enable Levick to elicit insight into the empresses' public status around the empire and their modeling of conjugal *Concordia*.

In Chapter 1 ("Sources") Levick admits that we do not have much definite information on the Faustinas, such as their dates of birth and death. Levick points out that we have no second century biographers of either the Faustinas or their husbands (which might give some information on the two women) and only one historian, Dio, while the *Historia Augusta* has its own problems as a reliable source.

Chapter 2 ("The Empresses and Women's Power") discusses what is meant by "women's 'power'" in the imperial context. The Faustinas are likely to have had no more education than other elite women, and like them were subject to their husbands. They did, however, have wealth, which they could manage themselves, and the influence that wealth, and marriage to an emperor, brought. One of the more interesting sections in this chapter is Levick's analysis of what qualified a woman to be an empress, or rather the wife of a man that could be selected as an emperor's successor. While Levick analyzes the empresses' dependency upon their husbands and their vulnerability, she also emphasizes their ability to act independently of their husbands and the distinctions and public honors they might be awarded (e.g. "Augusta"), including, in the case of Faustina II, "the right to coin", though it is unclear what that right might have meant.

How Faustina I and her husband came to be the imperial couple Levick reviews in Chapter 3 (“The Succession to Hadrian”), which focuses primarily upon Antoninus Pius and Hadrian’s succession plans and sets the scene for the next chapter. Chapter 4 (“The Faustinas as Empresses, 138–175”) discusses whether the new titles “Pius, Pia” given to Antoninus and Faustina I are indicative of a trend to monarchy, and how the Faustinas functioned as advisors to their men and, in the case of Faustina II, what role she played in marrying her daughter Lucilla to Augustus L. Verus. Levick covers the scandals, political interference, and the many adulteries attributed to Faustina II, and the “mystery” behind her sudden death at age forty-five.

One important aspect of Antonine imperial life and politics was their theatricality, which Levick points out was “a vital part of the imperial family’s public face and its construction as a durable dynasty”, and thus Chapter 5 (“Public and Private in the Dynasty”) takes up how the two women were presented as models and ideals for Roman society. Levick reviews the changing portraits of the empresses, their various public activities and public progresses, before taking up the question how the two women helped Pius create what he hoped would be a stable dynasty. She reviews the information on the “Faustian Girls”, the private (including sexual) lives of the emperors and their wives, and the numerous progeny of Faustina II and the questions of their birth order.

Chapter 6 (“The Deified Faustinas: Association, Assimilation, and Consecration”) contrasts them with their deified predecessors and surveys their assimilation to various deities and the ceremony of their consecration. Levick, however, focuses only on how the Greek east handled their divinization; it would be useful if she had done the same with the Latin west to determine what, if any, differences in reception there were between the two cultural halves of the empire. The final chapter, “Faustina’s Children and the End of the Antonines”, reviews how Commodus came to power and what happened to his sisters Lucilla, Fadilla, Cornificia, and Vibia, and (rather oddly in my mind, but nonetheless of some interest) to what extent the name Faustinus/Faustina survived among the Roman elite, later saints, and into later times.

Levick helpfully provides a “Who’s Who” of the multitude of names mentioned in the chapters; stemmata of Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, the Annii and Ummidii Quadrati, and Ceionii and L. Verus; and a chronology beginning with Augustus’ reign and ending with the reign of Philip the Arabian. In addition to the Notes there is a Persons Index (very much needed as a separate index given all the names mentioned) and a detailed Subject Index.

Levick succeeds in demonstrating that, despite omissions and the stereotypes of gender in our sources, it is possible to delineate in broad terms the significance of these two women in imperial politics and life. Unfortunately she does not discuss how they affected or complicated the role of empress for their successor, Julia Domna, which is a topic that could have been included in Chapter 7.

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