

BOOK REVIEW

Julia Augusta: Images of Rome's First Empress on Coins of the Roman Empire. By TRACENE HARVEY. London, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2020. Pp. xiv + 263. Hardback, \$155. ISBN: 978-1-4724-7868-9.

In Julia Augusta, Tracene Harvey examines the impact of coin images of Livia and reveals the detailed visual language that was developed for her numismatic program. The book emerged from Harvey's PhD thesis and comprises an introduction, four chapters, a brief conclusion, three appendices (a catalogue of coins, an illustrated conspectus of Livia's coin portraits and epigraphic data) and closes with an index.

Chapter 1 seeks out the origins for the numismatic depictions of Livia. Harvey demonstrates how these depictions were influenced by the representation of both royal women and female divinities on Greek coins. The author furthermore stresses how women of myth, or who were distinguished ancestors, appeared on coins in Republican Rome and argues that it is in the tradition of these earlier numismatic representations of women, both Greek and Roman, that those of Livia developed.

Chapter 2 consists of detailed analyses of Livia's coin images and how they functioned as a distinct visual medium. It includes a discussion of the typologies that scholars such as Gross, Winkes and Bartman have established for sculptural portraits of Livia, and the role coins have played in identifying these portraits. The chapter clearly demonstrates how Livia's portrait images were part of an extensive visual programme in a variety of media. They did not, Harvey argues, have to stand as true likenesses, but were rather designed by means of individual image elements (hairstyle, facial features, attributes etc.) which stood, as a composite whole, for Livia. This means that even though some die engravers may have had difficulties in creating precise portraits of Livia on the small surfaces of coins, there are plenty of visual indicators on them that enabled a viewer to read these images as representations of Livia.

Having mapped the visual elements that comprised Livia's programmatic commemoration on coins, Harvey turns her gaze in Chapter 3 to how the provinces developed, adapted, adjusted and implemented that program. This is an

important question as Livia was featured on coins from the eastern part of the Empire, especially Asia Minor, during the reign of Augustus and onwards, but only appeared in a significant way in the western provinces from the reign of Tiberius. Harvey argues that Livia's visual program was based on modes of sculptural and cameo representation that developed under the auspices of the imperial regime in Rome. These representational modes were then cited, and adapted, by mints in the provincial cities in order to communicate the socio-political and religious ideologies linked to that regime. There is, however, no firm evidence that Livia's iconography on coins was determined at an imperial level; the images that developed in the provinces may have been local initiatives. A more thorough discussion of the extent to which the visual program for Livia's representation on coins in the eastern provinces was transmitted to the imperial regime in Rome would therefore have further enriched the study.

Chapter 4 examines how coins can deepen our understanding of gender-based ideologies in the Julio-Claudian period, and how Livia's coin images were symbols of her power and authority. Harvey details the manifold images of Livia on coins and how some of them challenge the communication of social status and gender roles by infusing her image with exceptional, and even at times masculinizing, iconographic elements such as the laurel or sceptre (in addition to the fact that she appears on coins in the first place). Harvey builds on recent studies by Levy and others to argue that heterarchy, as opposed to the pyramidal rigidity of hierarchy, can be used to explain the shifting representational format in which Livia is portrayed on coins. The numismatic depictions show her in various gendered roles such as *matrona* and priestess, which hierarchically placed her above other women in each of these gender categories. But her coin images, especially when imbued with certain attributes, also confer on her a status superior to nearly all men in the Empire. Livia's image was symptomatic of her power and status in Rome, and also of the monopoly on power held by imperial family members.

Harvey's main focus is the intended meaning of Livia's coin images rather than received meaning on the part of viewers. While the study clearly shows how coins became an important means of conveying ideological messages, one could have wished for a more extensive discussion of the question of agency and audience, especially given that the vast majority of the coins were minted in the provinces. For example, Livia's numismatic representations could add to our knowledge of the sophisticated communication and interplay between the imperial family and their subjects, and how ruler and ruled each affirmed the position of the other. Nevertheless, the study is an important reminder of the potential of numismatic

evidence as a source for visual communication, gender studies and Roman imperial history in general. Harvey provides the reader with a deeper understanding of a dimension of Livia's visual program that has often been overlooked, and the catalogue of coins adds to the volume's utility. Coins can no longer be passed over due to their diminutive images.

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