



Empress of Rome: The Life of Livia

Matthew Dennison

Download now

Read Online ➔

Empress of Rome: The Life of Livia

Matthew Dennison

Empress of Rome: The Life of Livia Matthew Dennison

Empress of Rome is a brand-new biography of one of the most fascinating, perplexing and powerful figures of the ancient world: the empress Livia. Second wife of the emperor Augustus and the mother of his successor Tiberius, Livia has been vilified by posterity (most notably by Tacitus and Robert Graves) as the quintessence of the scheming Roman matriarch, poisoning her relatives one by one to smooth her son's path to the imperial throne. In this elegant and rigorously researched biography, Matthew Dennison rescues the historical Livia from this crudely drawn caricature of the popular imagination. He depicts a complex, courageous and richly gifted woman whose true crime was not was not murder but the exercise of power, and who, in a male-dominated society, had the energy to create for herself both a prominent public profile and a significant sphere of political influence.

Empress of Rome: The Life of Livia Details

Date : Published May 1st 2010 by Quercus Books

ISBN : 9781849161107

Author : Matthew Dennison

Format : Hardcover 320 pages

Genre : History, Biography, Nonfiction, Ancient History

 [Download Empress of Rome: The Life of Livia ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Empress of Rome: The Life of Livia ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Empress of Rome: The Life of Livia Matthew Dennison

From Reader Review Empress of Rome: The Life of Livia for online ebook

Vicki Cline says

Livia was the wife of Rome's first emperor, Augustus, and the mother of the second one, Tiberius. She lived to be 86 and had her share of difficult days. Many of us only know her through Graves' *I, Claudius*, where she comes off as a rather efficient murderess. This book takes a dispassionate look at the ancient sources and presents a more balanced view. There's a lot about Augustus and Tiberius in the book, since it's only in relation to them that she was deemed relevant in the olden days. She appears to be intelligent and sympathetic, as well as fairly politically savvy.

Mel says

I have to say I enjoyed this much more than the other book about Livia that was published at the same time. This one was much more detailed. Rather than simply saying "we don't know" about things that happened in her life Dennison gave examples from what is known about women's lives in general at that time. Therefore this book was not just a good book about Livia's life but also about women in Roman times. It did however feel like he was trying to cram too much in. In order to explain Livia's life he had to also explain the political and social history of Rome and often these explanations became a bit confusing. To someone who hadn't already known what was going on I feel that they might have been quite quickly lost. To someone who already knew the history I think they would find it a little frustrating. I was reading it for review and to remember all the things I'd forgotten so for me this was really good. (Though even I had some problems with the style and keeping all the names straight). One of the things that was most exciting was reading about the garden wall paintings of Livia's and then being able to go and see them in Rome. I also gained a much better understanding of her public figure and the reason she did things. Unlike in the other book Dennison seemed to be proud of all the things that Livia accomplished and pointed out several times how she must have been quite extraordinary to stay married to Augustus for all those years without conceiving a child together. While this book still lacked good clear details it's the best I've read so far on the subject.

Colin says

I read this on my Kindle. An excellent biography of Rome's first "empress," Livia, the wife of Augustus. Dennison does an excellent job of drawing together all the extend sources - and there is more there than you might think - and drawing a fairly complete picture of Livia and her place in Augustus' principate.

Rena Sherwood says

Don't know much about Livia, Augustus' wife? You still won't know much after reading **Livia, Empress of Rome: A Biography**. You'd be better off reading *Caesar's Wives*, which is much more entertaining and nowhere near as repetitive. Dennison keeps repeating that the rumors about Livia being a ruthless murderess and then goes on to write that Caligula shagged his sisters -- which has never been proven to have happened. Head. Wall. BANG. (Ouch.)

Daniel Kukwa says

I wish I could give this a 3.5 star rating, but I'm keeping it at 3 due to the reading experience being not quite as smooth as I would have liked. It's almost an anti-Livia biography, and it goes out of its way to debunk her popular image. While it does this very successfully, the end result makes her the least interesting guest at this particular Roman history party. Each page in the book places her in the company of more compelling & more villainous characters; the small section on Cleopatra alone is more vibrant & impressive than most of the book's actual subject matter. While it's certainly a useful research tool, I wish Matthew Dennison was a bit more interested & captivated Livia herself...then I might have been as well.

Samantha says

Dennison might be a great researcher, but he's no story teller. He took a fascinating figure from history and wrote a very boring book about her.

Rachel says

This is a really interesting book. The author makes connections and comes to good conclusions based in a sound appraisal of the existing sources and an understanding of then-current Roman outlook with no benefit of historical hindsight. This book could have been up there with Anthony Barrett's biography of Livia.

Yes, I said "could have."

I don't know why, but this book seems to have suffered from the lack of a good copyeditor. The author frequently chooses large or impressive words when a sharper one would have served, making the prose, in places, bulky and distracting. Maybe there was a copyeditor, but I can see so many places where further attention could have been paid to polish the outstanding raw material at hand.

I still highly recommend this book to serious readers of Roman history or women's history, but leave the caveat that the prose is rough through most of the book, particularly the second half, and may make for ornery reading.

Aaron says

I picked up this book because I have been interested in Livia since watching "I, Claudius" in my college years. She was a wife, mother, and grandmother to a number of earliest emperors of Rome. History has also left her with a reputation of being willing to do anything to help her family, including poisoning and murdering rivals to the men in her life.

This book and its author strive to paint a different picture of Livia, a woman from a very old and established

Roman family. Since most of the historians who focused on her wrote a great deal after her era, there reliability is questionable, at best. Dennison highlights this and how all of the artwork representing her and the official records of the period indicate a woman who took back seat and really played the role of model wife and mother.

Overall, the book was good, though, at times it seemed more like a history of the the Roman Empire during her lifetime than really a biography. So little is known about the specific details of her life that Dennison also draws rough conclusions based on stories about like peers rather than known fact. Ironically, this is largely what he complains about what the historians have done.

With that said, I am a Roman Empire fan and this was good reading!

Caroline says

Livia's always held a certain fascination for me. She's a fairly obscure figure among non-history-buffs. (Versus Cleopatra. Everyone knows about Cleopatra.) Yet during her era, no other woman held the sort of precedence that she did. Praised for her beauty--praised, at the time, for her matronly virtues--she would go down in history as a wicked stepmother sort of figure, a scheming matriarch who makes men's penises shrivel up at the sound of her name. (No, seriously. Is it any surprise that "I, Claudius", the work that would make Livia infamous, was written by a man?) So imagine my happiness and surprise at finding a whole biography just about Livia. How did it turn out? Eh. Results were mixed.

The Good

Matthew Dennison very clearly appreciates his subject. He places great care in small but helpful details, like the color of Livia's wedding veil and certain omens that she put great store in. There's a slight, but not overpowering, feminist edge to his work. Personally, I believe that when attempting to rehabilitate a defamed woman's image, it's always helpful to approach the subject with a feminist eye. Dennison doesn't attempt to modernize Livia in any way, but attempts to understand her motivations from the perspective of a woman in her day and age. I particularly commend a male historian for being able to do this effectively, as I tend to find them a little lacking in that department.

At the same time, Dennison is careful to keep from projecting his ideas and viewpoints onto Livia. He keeps strictly to the facts. Very rarely does he do the thing that many biographers are criticized for: assume. He only draws conclusions when he absolutely must.

Dennison also manages to give us an effective look at Augustus, who I found myself liking a lot more than I expected. (I'm an Antony and Cleopatra fan. We tend to look at Augustus with a bit of disdain. Man didn't know how to party.) He's remarkably human in Dennison's hands, perhaps moreso than his wife.

The Bad

Unfortunately, there's a reason why Livia biographies are so hard to find. Ancient sources are very difficult to uncover--particularly accurate ancient sources. Dennison, again, never wants to draw his own conclusions--not even when they're reasonable. That accounts for the book's slim pagecount.

There just isn't that much Livia in a book about Livia. I can understand a lot of material on Augustus and Tiberius, as they were huge parts of her life. But sometimes I felt like I was reading a biography on the vs. Livia, particularly in the case of Tiberius. Extremely noticeable in this regard were entire pages going on

about people who weren't even that important to Livia.

Often Dennison was forced to go on tangents about women who would have been Livia's contemporaries. He would have to draw his conclusions about how Livia "may" have had similar experiences. I couldn't help but feel that this issue could have been handled more deftly--in a way that more directly related to the subject.

The Ugly

Livia is a remarkably fascinating woman. So I must credit the book's tendency to stray from its focus with why it sometimes ventured into boring territory.

The Verdict

Nothing overly amazing or groundbreaking here. However, "Empress of Rome" is interesting and helpful. If you want to learn more about Livia and are going into it knowing little to nothing, I recommend it. If you're an expert or a history buff, you might want to skim it and otherwise look elsewhere.

Nikki says

Empress of Rome is a meticulously detailed biography of the first empress of Rome, Livia, the wife of Augustus. It deals with the accusations of murder that were levelled at her by later writers, touches on the reason for Tacitus et al.'s hatred of her, and tries to present a positive image of her. It notes her happy marriage and her faithfulness to both Augustus and her first husband (though she abandoned the first husband for Augustus ultimately), and examines the role she played in defining the way a virtuous Roman woman should behave.

In the end, she seems a distant figure, but one who definitely lived, breathed, loved, had ambitions, and knew exactly how to get what she wanted. She played the faultless Roman matron throughout her life, but found ways to wield power regardless. She seems likeable, actually -- though I doubt you could have got to know and love Livia, only to rather worship her, from the sound of all this!

It's a very readable biography, though it takes quite a while to get through -- as I said, it's meticulously detailed.

Sue says

I wasn't sure how to rate this book. Dennison is a good writer and presented a lot of great historical information that was easy to read. However, I think the book isn't titled correctly. There is some information on Livia but most of the information is on Roman culture and the place of women in their culture. I did enjoy Dennison's theories on Livia and her relationship with her son, Tiberius and her husbands, Nero and of course Augustus. This is a book worth reading as long as you're prepared for the fact that a great deal of the book is on Roman culture and how it treats women and not necessarily on Livia.

Katy M says

This was pretty boring. And uninteresting.

Sasha says

Author is completely focused on presenting Livia as a virtuous roman empress rather than poisonous behind-the-scenes villainess. There might be something about it, as every historical document dating from contemporary times describes her as a cautious and regal presence - gossip and speculations about her assumed ambitions, power and influence came much, much later after her death and it might be that historians simply detested the idea of woman having a power that Livia had. Unfortunately, while making his point that real Livia was not-as-bad as posterity remembered her to be, Dennison in fact somehow presents far less interesting personality - fictional or not, Sian Phillips in TV adaptation of Robert Graves' novel "I Claudius" is formidable, this Livia simply meek. And who needs meek Livia?

Erika says

A well written, approachable and enjoyable book it doesn't really reveal anything overwhelmingly new about Livia but then there doesn't seem to be much out there at all. What I did enjoy was how he used what little there is known to create at least a feeling of what her life may have been like and to point out the inconsistencies and biases in the recorded histories that paint her as a villainess without trying to claim that none of them were true.

Not an earth shattering book but enjoyable, I came away with at least some feeling for what the life of a high level Roman woman may have been like.

Juliana James says

Well researched and composed, particularly given how little about Livia is documented. However, the book jumps around in time and topics. It doesn't really root itself in anything or give the reader something substantial to follow. Feels more like a rebuttal to I, Claudius rather than a biography standing on it's own. It would have been nice to see the author add up the known facts of Livia to illustrate a person, life or figure head; but he never gets far into the Livia he believed existed, before slipping into a defensive ditch against Graves or Suetonius.
