A PORTRAIT OF LIVIA

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Livia was married to Octavian, afterwards known as Augustus, when she was nineteen and he was twenty-five. Both had been married and divorced. Octavian soon overthrew his rival, Antony, in the battle of Actium and became master of Egypt—allowing its queen, Cleopatra, to die by suicide—and, being supreme in Rome, received the title of Augustus. He was a delicate man, but he lived to be seventy-seven, and Livia, surviving him, was eighty-six when she died. Both were beautiful, both princely, and they esteemed each other. The years of their married life are among the shining half-centuries of all time, in politics, in empire, and in the arts, and these two creative personalities were at the center of their world. The main current of Livia’s married life was serene, in spite of the slanders of Tacitus and the occasional infidelities of her husband. She exerted a deep and moderating influence on Augustus and retained his devotion to the end. Though their union was childless, Livia eventually secured the succession to her own son, his stepson, Tiberius, who became the second of the Roman emperors.

On this and the following pages is a bronze portrait bust of a lady, set into a support of acanthus and mounted on a round base. It is a woman in her early seventies, the empress in her early dowagerhood, still a beauty. The brows are contracted, the muscles over the cheeks have loosened, and there are wide brackets round the mouth, which sag a little at the corners. The nose is not young; some teeth are perhaps missing, front and back. If there was a sagging of the under-chin and throat, the sculptor disregarded it, for he had stated her age by other means. Her hair is done in a new fashion, a departure from the classical style that had prevailed all her life. It was a radical fashion that was adopted slowly and lingered long and was the forerunner of later elaborations. It is parted again and again to make braids, two falling tresses, and curls that wind up at the ends, all of it heavily lacquered into place. None of the hair is necessarily false, on a Mediterranean woman in her seventies.

The identification of Livia’s face is controversial, owing to several circumstances which the reader can understand by pursuing the references given below. Though many attributions have been made, few are generally accepted, and these are subject to argument and review, as this one will be, for it cannot be based on clear identity with an inscribed example. But the skull and face are not incompatible with the certified likenesses. And here is a work of imperial quality, made by the finest sculptor, got up as a bijou (was it one of a pair, the late husband and the living wife?), and it is the portrait of a towering personality. One is at a loss to think of what woman it is, in a time so docu-
Livia, the wife of Augustus. (Born 57 B.C., died 29 A.D.) Edith Perry Chapman Fund, 1952
mented in biography, if it is not she. And who else is this woman who so powerfully resembles Livia's son, the Emperor Tiberius?

The base, support, and bust are cast separately but bear the marks of their contact in antiquity. The arrangement is not without parallel, examples of small bronze portraits mounted in this way having survived.

*Acc. no. 52.116. Formerly in the possession of E. P. Warren. Total height 9\(\frac{3}{8}\) in. (24 cm.); height from crown to chin 4 in. (10.2 cm.). The problems of the identification are discussed in R. Delbrück, Antike Portraits, 1912, pp. xlvii ff.; F. W. Goethert, in Festschrift Andreas Rumpf, 1952, pp. 101 ff., and the references there given.*
On these two pages: profile views of the bronze bust of Livia