



Influential Roman Empresses

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Abstract:

A significant number of Roman women have exerted considerable and frequently perilous political influence in Roman history. Indeed, the overt actions and interventions in governance by some of these women repeatedly threatened to undermine the unity, and even the very existence, of the Roman Empire. Conversely, other women played a more positive role, actively contributing to the preservation and continuity of Roman state unity. These figures were distinguished by their wisdom, prudence, political foresight, and prioritisation of the greater good of the state over personal and familial interests.

Keywords: Romans; women; Claudians; Severans; Agrippina; governance; emperors.

Les impératrices romaines influentes

Résumé :

Un nombre important de femmes romaines ont exercé une influence politique considérable et souvent périlleuse dans l'histoire romaine. En effet, les actions et interventions ouvertes de certaines de ces femmes dans la gouvernance ont menacé à plusieurs reprises de compromettre l'unité, voire l'existence même, de l'Empire romain. À l'inverse, d'autres femmes ont joué un rôle plus positif, contribuant activement à la préservation et à la continuité de l'unité de l'État romain. Ces figures se distinguaient par leur sagesse, leur prudence, leur clairvoyance politique et leur priorité accordée au bien commun de l'État plutôt qu'à leurs intérêts personnels et familiaux.

Mots-clés : Romains ; femmes ; Claudiens ; Sévériens ; Agrippine ; gouvernance ; empereurs.

Introduction:

In ancient civilisations, women enjoyed a social status that oscillated between esteem and significant political and social standing among some people, such as Sumerians, Babylonians, Arameans, and others, and between contempt and deprivation of fundamental rights, such as inheritance and the right to choose a spouse, among others, such as Indians. Roman civilisation was among those in which women succeeded in exerting considerable political influence over the system of governance, to the extent of deposing and installing emperors and even altering the very mechanisms of power succession.

The methodology of this study is based on the analysis and utilisation of various Roman literary and material sources from a critical perspective to trace the political role played by some of the most prominent women of the ruling Roman imperial families and highlight the extent of their impact on the fate of the Roman state, both negatively and positively.

1. The Status of Women in Roman Society

Western authors have regarded the Roman period as an era characterised by greater freedom and social advancement for women, who acquired certain rights under Roman law. (G. Duby and M. Perrot, 1990, 57) Roman jurists consider women equal in status to their husbands. A Roman woman was the mistress of her household, exercising authority over female slaves and assigning them arduous tasks. She would sit in the hall designated for noblewomen, spinning and weaving, delegating duties among the servant women, supervising the children, and managing household



Soumission : 01/04/2025 Acceptation : 05/06/2025 Publication : 15/07/2025

affairs. Typically, however, she remained illiterate and uneducated, as Romans generally paid scant attention to the education of their daughters. The primary virtue attributed to a woman was modesty. Upon her death, epitaphs frequently commended her by stating, "She remained in her home, never departed from it, and spun wool." (C. Seignobos, 1905, 200.)

Roman women are invariably subject to the authority of a male figure, whether their father, brother, husband, or nearest male relative. This stringent guardianship aimed to prevent women from freely managing their family's assets. (A. Rousselle, G.a Sissa, and Y. Thomas, 2005, 67-77) Nevertheless, a Roman woman enjoyed autonomy in the administration of her household affairs. She had neither the right to vote nor to participate in any aspect of political life. (Seignobos, 228) Despite these restrictions, certain women eventually attained considerable political influence. (G. Archard, 1995, 36)

Several laws were enacted against Roman women, including the law promulgated in 215 BC during the Second Punic War, known as the Lex Oppia. This law derives its name from Caius Oppius. (P. Laurence, 2012, 22) A tribune of the plebs in Rome. It imposed restrictions on women concerning the purchase of luxury goods, jewellery, and clothing intended to conserve funds required for warfare. The law stipulated that women were forbidden from possessing more than half an ounce of gold or wearing brightly coloured garments. Additionally, it placed restrictions on women's use of horse-drawn carriages within Rome, other cities, or within a mile of city walls, except during festival days. Although this proposal was extensively

debated, its immediate impact on women provoked strong and vehement opposition from them. (T. Livius, 1869)

Their enthusiasm prompted them to seek the abolition of the law, an effort they indeed undertook despite the stringent traditions of Roman society. Women poured into the streets of Rome, the Forum, the steps of the Senate, and the residence of one of the law's most ardent supporters. Although women themselves could not vote, they attempted to persuade men to support the repeal. (T. Livius, 1935)

Lucius Marcus Porcius Cato, an influential and conservative statesman, expressed profound disappointment and indignation at this disgraceful conduct of women, feeling considerable embarrassment as he passed through the gathering of women. According to the ancestral customs to which he firmly adhered, women were not permitted to perform any act, even of a private nature, without a guardian. They were expected to remain under the authority of fathers, brothers, or husbands. However, in his view, they were now permitted to engage in politics, mingle freely with men, and appear before legislative assemblies. (P. Corbier, 2005), 49)

Throughout his life, the politician and writer Cato the Elder maintained this rigid stance toward women, extending even to matters of inheritance. In his opinion, women's shares of inheritance should be administered entirely at the discretion of their male relatives. (Ibid., 49)

Nevertheless, during this same period, certain social customs and traditions preserved some measure of women's familial status and their leading role within society. During the era of the Gracchi brothers, a woman permanently became part of her husband's family if she resided continuously with him for one year without leaving the



Soumission : 01/04/2025 Acceptation : 05/06/2025 Publication : 15/07/2025

marital home. However, she would forfeit this right voluntarily by spending three consecutive nights away from him.¹

In cases of arbitrary divorce, society supported women when they had been unjustly treated. (A. Rousselle et al., op. cit., 117) This was the case in 234 BC, a year notable for witnessing the first divorce after an extended period without any recorded instance. Spurius Carvilius divorced his wife for infertility; despite the legitimacy of this reason, his actions provoked widespread condemnation and reproach, particularly from members of the aristocratic classes. In their view, the desire for offspring should never overshadow love and loyalty toward one's wife, since, had infertility afflicted him, she would have been expected to remain loyal nonetheless.²

Towards the end of the republican period, Roman laws became increasingly stringent toward women, motivated by the emergence of negative consequences associated with their involvement in public affairs and the imperative of safeguarding their dignity from degradation. (G. de La Bédoyère and C. Salles, 2012, 256) In 143 BC, senior officials were prohibited by a consular decree from bringing their wives into the provinces where they served, primarily out of fear that these women might fall captive to enemies. Additionally, the presence of wives was considered likely to interfere with political and administrative decision-making and cause unrest among troops, as certain military

¹ *Digesta, Institutes*, II.110–113, accessed at www.remacl.org/bloodwolf/auteurs/Digeste.htm.

² Valerius Maximus, II.1.4, accessed at www.remacl.org/bloodwolf/liege/LFR/Trf2.6.htm.

commanders demonstrably submitted to their wives' orders and advice, precipitating military crises that jeopardised Roman control in numerous rebellious regions. (Tacitus, 1990)

During the early imperial period, writers' perceptions of women, their social status, and their roles experienced a degree of improvement compared with earlier eras. (F. Gilbert and D. Chasteney, 2007, 35) Pliny Younger (AD 62–115), a renowned lawyer and literary figure, discussed the role of women as mothers and wives in one of his celebrated letters, particularly praising his wife, whose profound affection for him demonstrated her loyalty and keen interest in his literary and legal accomplishments. (P. the Younger, 1935)

Whereas specific legal texts from the first and third centuries highlight the social position and cultural influence of prominent women in society, especially concerning their economic contributions, inscriptions provide insights into women's familial roles, their worth, and status within the family as household supervisors, mothers, and wives roles that were considered sacred duties exclusively assigned to freeborn women. The Latin term *matrona* denotes the mother of a family, a distinguished lady, and a respected woman in society; the term derives from *Matrice*, signifying a guardian goddess entrusted with protecting a place. (N. Boëls-Janssen, 1993, 122)

Inscriptions frequently depict women as mothers, household mistresses, and family matrons. This portrayal is exemplified by a funerary inscription from Rome dated 43 BC, in which the husband of the deceased woman commended her exemplary virtues and dedicated service to him and her family, writing: "She was renowned for marital



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loyalty throughout her forty-year marriage, and her numerous virtues, including fidelity, commitment, kindness, gentleness, diligence in wool-spinning, chastity, and reverence for married life (as praised by her husband)."¹

Literary sources occasionally attempt to undermine or distort this idealised portrayal of women as virtuous exemplars, adorn with moral excellence and devoted to the welfare of others, whether within the family or broader society. (J. Vons, 2000) This tendency can be discerned through literary accounts, archaeological data, and material remnants such as inscriptions, stelae, and other monuments that depict women as inherently weak individuals. (P. Corbier, *op. cit.*, 49)

For example, the African author Apuleius Madaurensis, in one of his works, attributes reprehensible qualities to the wife and daughter of one of his adversaries, publicly maligning their reputations with profoundly derogatory terms. Apuleius references this episode during his defence before the court, following accusations against him of sorcery and witchcraft. (A. de Madaure, 1836) Furthermore, in his second novel, entitled *The Golden Ass* or *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius again harshly criticises the moral conduct of contemporary women. He comments disapprovingly on how women of his time receive their husbands' guests and socialise with them without embarrassment, as well as on wives' questionable relationships, their pursuit of lovers, and the fulfilment of sexual desires outside the boundaries of marriage. (A. de Madaure, 1836)

¹ *Éloge d'une matrone romaine*, I,27–24, accessed at www.remaacle.org/bloodwolf/liege/LFR/Trf11.htm.

Despite his undoubtedly exaggerated and negative portrayal of the moral standards of Roman women in his time, Apuleius, in other parts of his writings, also offers praise for his wife, Aemilia Pudentilla, a wealthy woman from Tripolitania. She owned extensive estates and vast property on the outskirts of the city, where hundreds of slaves and labourers were employed. She managed and oversaw these holdings, supervised their administration, and collected revenues with the assistance of her son. This attests to the fact that women, in contrast to their earlier characterisations, did indeed enjoy legal rights to property ownership and business administration. (A. de Madaure, 124)

During the period marking the early spread of Christianity within society, women's status, behaviour, and way of life came under intense scrutiny and harsh criticism from early Church fathers, many of whom were staunchly opposed to any manifestations of social mingling, adornment, or the public presence of unveiled women in the streets and public squares. The chief among them was Tertullian, Bishop of Carthage, who urged Christian women to avoid attending amphitheatres, theatres, marketplaces, or public festivities and games, all of which involved prohibiting interaction with men and contravening Christian values. (Tertullien, 1852)

Tertullians, believing that women had been implicated in original sin, proposed an alternative path by which they might atone and attain greater beauty and grace. In his treatise *On the Apparel of Women*, he writes, "Lower your gaze, place silence upon your lips, bow your heads in obedience to your husbands. Occupy your hands with spinning wool and confine your feet to your homes. In doing



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so, you will become more attractive and charming than if you had adorned yourselves with gold. Let righteousness be your silk, and holiness your garment, for with such adornment and ornaments you shall win the love of the Lord.”

In another letter, he encourages Christian women to emulate Roman pagan women who, despite their prior lives of licentiousness and moral laxity, arguably desired marriage and motherhood. He further praises certain virtuous qualities and commendable moral standards that pagan society strictly imposed on women, aimed at preserving their chastity for their future husbands. (Id., 1852)

This concerns the general role and status of women in Roman society and public life. With respect to the political sphere, a number of women from ruling imperial families came to prominence because of their attempts to seize control of power, both for themselves and on behalf of their sons. Such interventions had serious repercussions for the stability of governance and the unity of the Roman state. Given the limited scope of this article, we restrict our attention to the most prominent of these women whose involvement in political affairs had a profound impact on the course of Roman politics, both domestically and abroad.

2. Exemplary Women of Influence in Roman History

2.1. The Republican Period

Fulvia (77 BC–40 BC)

Fulvia was the wife of Marcus Antonius. While he was in Alexandria indulging in leisure and pleasure, she agreed with his brother, Lucius Antonius, and then served as consul

to protect the cities and lead the opposition against him. They aimed to depose Marcus Antonius and strip him of authority over Rome. This led to a confrontation between Lucius and his sister-in-law Fulvia on one side and Octavian on the other at Perugia. Lucius eventually surrendered; nevertheless, Octavian did not punish him nor deprive him of the administration of Gaul following the death of its governor. Fulvia and Lucius seemingly intended to drive the state into the utmost state of disorder.

During the events of the Perusine War, Antonius left Alexandria for Tyre, where he issued the necessary orders to counter threats emerging from certain eastern Seleucid enclaves. He then proceeded to Cyprus, Rhodes, and finally Athens, where he met Fulvia. She informed him of what had transpired and how his political fortunes had begun to decline in both Italy and Gaul. Antonius hastened his journey and attempted to disembark at Brundisium, but the commander of the local garrison denied him entry. He thus landed in the surrounding countryside, where Octavian arrived shortly thereafter. (W. Durant, 1944, 445)

Fulvia, the wife of Antonius, died from a severe illness compounded by the failure of her ambitions and her sorrow over Antonius's neglect. Both parties had mobilised their forces in preparation for battle; however, the troops, influenced by both Italians and Romans, refused to engage in combat. Consequently, the two sides reached an agreement at Brundisium, which stipulated the division of the Mediterranean and its basin into two spheres of influence: Antonius assumed control over the eastern territories. At the same time, Octavian dominated over the western regions. (J. H. Breasted, 1935, 122)



2.2. Imperial Period

2.2.1. *The Julio-Claudian Dynasty*

- **Livia Drusilla (58 BC - AD 29)**

Livia Drusilla, the mother of the second emperor, Tiberius Augustus, was born on 30 January 58 BC. Renowned for her striking beauty and charm, she married Augustus following a love affair between them. She stands as one of the most prominent women of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Livia regularly intervened in her son's affairs. She wielded considerable influence over him, believing that it was her careful orchestration that had paved the way for his accession to the throne. She made it clear to him that he held power merely as her representative. During the first year of his reign, official documents bore both his signature and her signature.

At the time, Livia herself became a political challenge within the state. Tiberius's inability or unwillingness to remarry left him exposed to the domination of a formidable woman accustomed to exerting profound influence over him. Although he was nearly sixty years old at the time, she was unwilling to be his equal in governance; instead, she sought to impose her authority upon him and began to administer all state affairs as although she were the sole ruler.

Tiberius bore this situation with dignified patience, even though Livia outlived her husband Augustus by fifteen years. He constructed a palace for himself and allowed his mother to retain undisturbed possession of the palace built by Augustus. She was honoured with the title *Augusta*. (F. Zosso and C. Zingg, 2009), 21)

Livia died after a sorrowful year, alone in the house of her former husband. Tiberius (Tacite, I.8) did not attend her funeral and had seen her only once since his departure from Rome. With her death, his advisor Sejanus was liberated from the constraints that Livia might have imposed upon him through her influence. She had shown concern for the welfare of the citizens and instructed her son Gaius to distribute ninety million sesterces among them. (Durant, , 455)

- **Valeria Messalina (AD 20–48)**

Valeria Messalina was sixteen years old when she married Claudius. Although not considered exceptionally beautiful, her head being flat and her complexion ruddy, a woman such as her did not require beauty to be adulterous and unfaithful to her husband. Upon Claudius's accession to the imperial throne, she adopted the demeanour of royal women and claimed for herself the privileges associated with their status. She accompanied him in his triumphal processions and orchestrated celebrations for her birthday across the entire empire.

Messalina fell in love with the dancer Mnester. When he rejected her advances, she appealed to her husband to command him to be more compliant with her wishes. Claudius granted her request, and Messalina rejoiced at the success of her scheme, which had cost her little effort. For those who continued to resist her, officials under her influence fabricated charges against them. Their properties were confiscated, their social standing revoked, and, in some cases, they were deprived of their very lives. (Durant, 261)

When the empress found herself in need of money to support her indulgences and reckless lifestyle, she resorted



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to selling public offices, recommendations, and contracts for state work. Her depravity eventually reached such extremes that she formally married a handsome young man named Gaius Silius while her husband was away in Ostia. The wedding was conducted with full ceremonial rites in a grand public celebration. (Tacite, XI.1)

Narcissus conveyed news of the marriage to the emperor through his concubines and warned him of a conspiracy aimed at assassinating him and placing Silius on the throne. Claudius hastened back to Rome, summoned the Praetorian Guard, and ordered the execution of Silius and several of Messalina's other lovers. He then withdrew to his chamber, physically and emotionally shattered. For the empress, she hid herself in the Gardens of Lucullus, which she had previously confiscated and transformed into a setting for her pleasure and amusement. Claudius sent her a message summoning her to appear and defend herself. Fearing that the emperor might pardon her and turn his wrath instead upon him, Narcissus dispatched a group of soldiers with orders to execute her. They found her alone with her mother, and one of them killed her with a single blow, leaving her corpse in her mother's arms. Claudius later declared to the Praetorian Guard that they were absolved in any guilt should he marry again, and from that moment onwards, he never again mentioned Messalina's name. (Durant, 259)

▪ **Agrippina the Younger (AD 15-59)**

Agrippina Younger was one of the most powerful women in ancient Rome. She was the granddaughter of Emperor Augustus and the sister of Emperor Caligula. She exerted significant influence over two subsequent Roman emperors:

her husband Claudius and her son Nero. Throughout her life, her singular ambition was to see her son ascend to the imperial throne, whether through succession after Tiberius or, if necessary, by usurpation.

Her second husband, Gaius Crispus, whom she poisoned, left her a vast fortune, which she used to further her ambitions. Her objective was to marry Claudius, eliminate his son Britannicus by some means, and ensure that Nero, once adopted by Claudius, would become his designated heir. The fact that she was Claudius's niece did not hinder her pursuit. Instead, it provided a convenient opportunity for her to draw close to the ageing emperor and awaken in him feelings not characteristic of a maternal uncle toward his niece. Claudius, overtaken by these sentiments, abruptly appeared before the Senate and requested authorisation to marry again. The Senate approved his request, and the Praetorian Guard ridiculed him for it. Agrippina thus attained the imperial throne. (Pline l'Ancien, 1980)

At the time, Agrippina was thirty-two years old, while Claudius was fifty-seven and already in a state of physical decline. She, by contrast, was in the full strength of her youth and completely dominated him through her beauty and charm. She persuaded him to adopt Nero and to arrange a marriage between the sixteen-year-old youth and Octavia, his thirteen-year-old daughter. (G. Minaud, 2012, 65-96)

Once she had achieved this, Agrippina continued to expand her political authority year after year, until at last she succeeded in sitting beside Claudius on the imperial throne. ((Anthony A. Barrett, 2005, 234) She then summoned the philosopher Seneca, who had been exiled by order of Claudius, and appointed him as the personal tutor to her son. (V. Girod, 2015, 37)



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Agrippina succeeded in appointing her confidant, Afranius Burrus, as prefect of the Praetorian Guard, thereby consolidating absolute power. She governed the empire with strength worthy of men, and order prevailed within the imperial household. Had she not indulged her greed, obsession with wealth, and thirst for vengeance, her rule might have brought benefit and mercy to Rome. (V. Girod, 2021, 201) However, she gave free rein to these inclinations, ordering the execution of Julia Paulina simply because Claudius, in an unguarded moment, remarked upon her grace. She also arranged for the poisoning of Marcus Silanus, fearing that Claudius might designate him as his heir. (W. Durant, 1944, 122-23)

Claudius eventually became aware of Agrippina's plans following their marriage and resolved to put an end to her influence and to undermine the arrangements she had made for Nero. He thus named Britannicus heir to the throne. However, Agrippina was more resolute than he was and less inclined to heed the voice of conscience. Upon learning of the emperor's intentions, she risked everything and served Claudius a poisoned dish of mushrooms on 13 October AD 54. After twelve hours of excruciating agony, he died without being able to utter a single word. (C. Salles, 2015, 18)

Upon her son Nero's accession to the throne, Agrippina sought to dominate the machinery of state and assert control over imperial governance. As the granddaughter and daughter of prominent Roman leaders, she enjoyed considerable support within the military and succeeded in placing loyal commanders in key positions. Confronted with his mother's absolute authority, Nero, backed by Seneca and Burrus, the Praetorian prefect, decided to strip her power.

Opposition to Nero would have meant civil war. However, Agrippina nevertheless chose to align herself with her daughter-in-law Octavia, who faced the threat of divorce, and to oppose Nero's intended marriage to his mistress, Poppaea. (J. M. Kivuila-Kiaku, (2004, 87–101) This conflict ultimately ended with Agrippina's assassination, following several failed attempts. (X. Darcos, 2007, 136) Her son was instigated in the spring of AD 59. She was killed in her villa on the Bay of Messina by a soldier of the fleet. Before her death, she addressed her killer with the words "*Strike the womb that bore this monster*" (*ventrem feri, qui hoc monstrum portavit*). (Tacite, XIV.8)

2.2.2. The Flavian Dynasty

Domitia Longina (c. AD 50–130)

Domitia Longina was the wife of Emperor Domitian, a man noted for his quick learning, particularly the belief that all things belonging to others were, by extension, the emperor's by right. In AD 70, at the age of just seventeen, Domitian abducted the young and beautiful Domitia from her husband, Aelius Lamia. She had been born on 11 February between AD 50 and 55, the daughter of the general Corbulo, who had achieved a series of military victories that provoked the jealousy of Nero, leading to Corbulo's execution by imperial order. Domitia bore Domitian a son, who died in infancy. When Domitian ascended to the throne in September AD 81, he elevated his wife to the rank of *Augusta*. However, in AD 83, he expelled her from the palace, allegedly due to misconduct, although she was reinstated later that same year. (F. Zosso and C. Zingg, 2009, 58–59)



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In his pursuit of absolute authority and response to opposition from the Senate, Domitian increasingly resorted to repression, show trials, and mass executions on charges of treason. This fostered widespread discontent and opposition. Some within his inner circle saw assassination as the only viable course. In AD 96, Domitian was killed allegedly at the instigation of Domitia and with her participation by two commanders of the Praetorian Guard, thus bringing the Flavian dynasty to an end. (Brian W. Jones, 2012, 121–46.) (It should be noted, however, that certain historical accounts and critical studies dispute her involvement.)

Following her husband's death, Domitia withdrew entirely from political life and spent the remainder of her years in seclusion, leading a simple existence. (F. Zosso and . Zingg, 68)

2.2.3. The Antonine Dynasty

Annia Galeria Faustina the Elder

During the reign of the emperors of this dynasty, several women played influential roles, among them Annia Galeria Faustina the Elder. (F. Zosso and C. Zingg, 79) The wife of Emperor Antoninus Pius. Her family was of Spanish origin; her mother, Rupilia Faustina, gave birth to her around AD 105 and was the wife of the brother of Emperor Hadrian.¹ Thereby making Antoninus his nephew by marriage. (F. Zosso and C. Zingg, 89

On 13 May AD 145, Annia Galeria Faustina (also known as Annia Aurelia Galeria Lucilla) married Marcus Aurelius

¹ *Histoire Auguste*, “Vie de l’empereur Adrien,” I.1.

at the age of fifteen. On 1 December AD 147, when Marcus Aurelius was granted *imperium* and *tribunician power*, he elevated his wife to the rank of *Augusta*. Later, in AD 174, she was honoured with the titles “Mother of the Camps,” “Mother of the Nation,” and “Mother of the Senate.” (F. Zosso and C. Zingg, 89-94)

This marriage produced eleven, or possibly as many as thirteen, children: seven sons and six daughters. Of these, only one son and four daughters survived: Commodus, the future emperor; Annia Lucilla, who was executed in AD 181 by order of her brother; Fadilla, who died in AD 192; Cornificia, who was forced to commit suicide by Caracalla in AD 211; and Vibia Aurelia Sabina, who likely died during the reign of that same emperor. (F. Zosso and C. Zingg, 2009, 94)

The historian Dio Cassius, along with the author of the *Vita Augusti* from the *Historia Augusta*, portrayed her as a capricious woman who betrayed her husband with Roman gladiators, driven by her fascination with combat and bloodsport. She was also alleged to have maintained a relationship with Avidius Cassius, whom she deceived, leading him to commit a grave misjudgement. Expecting her husband’s death at any moment due to his declining health and fearing that someone else might seize control of the empire, thus stripping her status as an empress, she acted to secure her position.

Given that her son Commodus was still young and lacked resolve, she feared that imperial power might have fallen into the hands of another. In this context, she secretly persuades Avidius Cassius to prepare himself to assume supreme authority upon Antoninus’s death by marrying her and taking the throne. (D. Cassius, LXXX, 7) When she died



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in early summer of AD 176 in the region of Halala, in the Taurus Mountains, a city was named in her honour: Faustinopolis. Opinions differ regarding the cause of her death. Some claim she died from gout, from which she had long suffered, whereas others suggest an alternative cause intended to conceal her possible complicity with Avidius Cassius. (D. Cassius, 1870)

Whenever her husband attended the theatre, he would carry with him a golden statue of her on his chariot and place it in the seat she had customarily occupied, compelling the Roman noblewomen to surround it in homage. (D. Cassius, 1870) Ultimately, he consented to bestow upon her divine honors under the title *Diva Faustina Pia* ("the Pious Divine Faustina") or *Diva Augusta Faustina* ("the Deified Augusta Faustina"). (F. Zosso and C. Zingg, 2009), 94.)

To strengthen ties and cooperation, Marcus Aurelius betrothed his daughter, Annia Aurelia Galeria Lucilla, to Lucius Verus on 7 March AD 161, which coincided with her birthday. His involvement with a woman from the city of Smyrna prompted Marcus Aurelius to send his daughter Lucilla to Ephesus and formally announce their marriage. This union produced a daughter named Aurelia Lucilla.

Following the death of her husband in September or October of AD 169, Lucilla married Claudius Pompeianus on AD 181. Lucilla, however, was no more rational than her brother Commodus, and her conduct was no less depraved. She scorned her husband Pompeianus and spread rumours at court, alleging that he was conspiring against the emperor. When the falsity of her accusations was uncovered, she was exiled to the island of Capri and was executed

shortly before Commodus officially assumed full power in AD 181. (D. Cassius, 1870)

Dio Cassius noted the moral failings of Empress Annia Galeria Faustina the Younger, claiming that Commodus was the offspring of her affair with a Roman gladiator. Officially, Commodus was recognised as the penultimate child of the eleven or possibly thirteen children she bore to Marcus Aurelius. (D. Cassius, 1870)

In the summer of AD 178, Bruttia Crispina married Emperor Commodus and was granted the title *Augusta*. She had longstanding ties to the imperial family dating back to the reign of Hadrian. However, in AD 183, Commodus accused her of adultery and exiled her to the island of Capri. In AD 192, she was executed, and her eternal damnation was publicly proclaimed in a state ceremony. No children resulted from this marriage. (F. Zosso and C. Zingg, 2009, 93–99)

2.2.4. The Severan Dynasty

Women, whether mothers, sisters, wives, or daughters, are generally regarded as favoured and close figures to the emperor. They often left a strong imprint on the moral life of the court. However, they were not immune to the influence of corrupt entourages, which transformed the imperial palace into fertile ground for intrigue. While women occasionally intervened in political matters, such involvement never reached the extent it did under the Severan dynasty, where their influence expanded significantly and their authority became firmly established in affairs of state, particularly with the emergence of several princesses of Syrian origin. (A. Aymard and J. Auboyer, 1995), 162)



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Julia Domna (c. AD 160–217)

The second wife of Emperor Septimius Severus, Julia Domna, was born around AD 170. She was the daughter of the high priest of the god Baal in the city of Emesa (modern-day Homs). Renowned for her beauty, ambition, intelligence, admirable conduct, and regal bearing, she approached life with remarkable vitality. Astrologers had foretold that her destiny would lead her one day to sit upon the throne of Rome. (A. Aymard and J. Auboyer, *Op. Cit.*, 199.)

She was also a courtesan-like figure, known both for her infidelities and for the role she played in advancing her husband's career. At the same time, she was a woman of learning who surrounded herself at court with an elite circle of intellectuals, scholars, philosophers, and writers. She bore Septimius Severus four children: Caracalla, born in Lyon on 4 April AD 186 or 188; Geta, born in Milan on 7 March AD 187; and two daughters whose names remain unknown. (M. Sartre, 1997, 231)

On either 1 June AD 193 or 9 June AD 193, she was granted the title *Augusta*. She was honoured with divine epithets such as the "new Demeter," the "Roman Hera," and the "Heavenly Virgin," all of which became the subject of formal cultic worship. She accompanied her husband on all his military campaigns, earning her the additional title *Mother of the Camps*. (F. Zosso and C. Zingg, *Op. cit.*, 121–122) Her strong character, moral authority, and considerable influence led public life in the empire to adopt increasingly Eastern modes of conduct. These tendencies would reach their fullest expression morally during the reign of

Elagabalus and politically under Diocletian. (A. Aymard and J. Auboyer, *Op. cit.* 324)

Following the death of her husband and the accession of her son Caracalla to the imperial throne, Julia Domna was appointed as his private secretary for petitions and correspondence. She either accompanied him or acted in his stead in receiving politicians and high-ranking foreign dignitaries. She outlived her husband and both of her sons. It is said that she was exiled to Antioch after being barred from any involvement in imperial affairs for six years. There, she reportedly chose to starve herself to death. (A. Aymard and J. Auboyer, 1995, 326)

On the other hand, it is said that Macrinus, the assassin and successor of her son Caracalla, treated her with respect. However, when she developed breast cancer, he had her transferred to Emesa (modern-day Homs), where she died in AD 217 as a result of illness and grief. The emperor granted her the title *Diva Julia*. (F. Zosso and C. Zingg, 2009, 122) According to the accounts of both Dio Cassius and Herodian, she is believed to have died by suicide. (C.Dio, 1990.)

Between 9 and 15 April AD 202, Caracalla married Publia Fulvia Plautilla, the daughter of Plautianus. (J.-P. Martin, A. Chauvot, and C.-G. Merielle, 2003, 233) On the night of their wedding, he granted her the title *Plautilla Augusta* while she was still living, thereby elevating her to the rank of empress, equal in status to his mother, Julia Domna. (B. Levick, 2007, 18.) However, the marriage was short-lived; the couple never lived under the same roof, and Caracalla came to loathe her, primarily due to his hatred of her father, who had usurped imperial authority. Their union remained childless. Following the death of her father Plautianus,



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Plautilla was exiled to the Lipari Islands. On 4 April AD 211, Caracalla had her executed. (J.-P. Martin, A. Chauvot, and C.-G. Merielle, *Op. cit.*, 234)

Julia Maesa (AD 170–224)

Julia Domna had a sister named Julia Maesa, who was no less capable or influential than she was. Following the death of her sister and the assassination of her nephew Caracalla at the hands of the Praetorian Prefect Macrinus, Maesa swiftly returned from Rome to Emesa (modern-day Homs), where her two grandsons, whom she was grooming for a great future, were being raised. One of them was the son of her daughter Julia Soaemias. This youth, a priest of the god Baal, was named Varius Avitus and would later be known as Elagabalus, after the mountain deity he worshipped. Elagabalus, the god of creation. (W. Durant, 1960, 227)

Julia Maesa spread the rumour that Varius was the illegitimate son of Caracalla, born from an extramarital relationship with his cousin, the daughter of Maesa's sister. In reality, however, he was the son of Varius Marcellus. She gave him the name Bassianus and began preparing the path for his accession to the imperial throne. For Maesa, preserving the imperial crown within her family was more important than safeguarding the reputation of her daughter, Soaemias, especially since Varius Marcellus, the boy's father, was already deceased.

Furthermore, Maesa promised the soldiers that, should they proclaim Elagabalus emperor, she would reward them with a generous donative. The camp where she spread these rumours lay some sixty kilometres from Emesa, where she resided. The soldiers often spent their leave in the city and

frequented its temple, where her late husband, Sextus Varius Marcellus, had served as high priest. From there, Maesa, aided by loyal agents among the troops, succeeded in winning them to her grandson's cause. The soldiers placed their trust in her promises and accepted her proposal. Through her wealth, Maesa secured the loyalty of the army that Macrinus had dispatched to eliminate her and her grandson. (C. Dio, LXXVII.31-32.)

At the same time, Julia Maesa was able to rely on the support of two capable figures: one, a former soldier named Publius Valerius Eutychianus Comazon, and the other, Janis, who became the lover of her daughter. Janis was an educated man of notable political acumen and strategic skill, as attested by the historian and senator Dio Cassius. These two individuals secretly orchestrated affairs in favour of the young emperor and his mother.

One year and five weeks after the assassination of Caracalla, on 15 May AD 218, Janis, acting independently and without consulting either Maesa or Julia Soaemias, fearing they might disapprove, proclaimed Bassianus emperor. He invited him to don the purple imperial cloak that had once belonged to Caracalla and had been preserved by Julia Domna in her residence in Emesa. Accompanied by six deserters from Macrinus's army, they made their way to the military camp. Bassianus's appearance in the imperial purple instantly stirred the enthusiasm of the soldiers, who welcomed him, opened the gates of the camp, and hailed him as emperor. (P. Petit, 1974, 332)

Upon hearing the news, Julianus, commander of the forces in Emesa and a close associate of Macrinus, attempted to suppress this separatist uprising. He launched a campaign to crush the rebels, but the small size of his forces and the



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defection of most of his soldiers convinced him that it would be impossible to overcome them without reinforcements from Macrinus. He therefore withdrew toward Apamea. However, a group of former supporters of Caracalla and soldiers loyal to Bassianus laid an ambush and killed him, sending his severed head to his master, Macrinus.

Following Julianus's death, the Syrian garrisons and neighboring regions, except for Egypt, declared their allegiance to Elagabalus. (P. Petit, *Op. cit.*, 333)

Julia Maesa, together with her daughter, succeeded in exploiting the general political climate in Rome to win over both members of the Senate and the broader populace, persuading them to accept her grandson as an emperor. This became particularly feasible after Macrinus appointed his nine-year-old son, Diadumenianus, as *Caesar*, clearly preparing him as his successor to the imperial throne.

In addition to this unpopular decision, Macrinus had failed to achieve any significant military victories against the Persians, who were increasingly threatening the empire's eastern borders. When summoned to Rome from Antioch to take part in the New Year's celebrations, he refrained from attending, having become fully aware that he had lost the support of the Senate. His authority eroded further after he openly challenged the Senate and accused many of its members of conspiring against him and supporting the Severan dynasty.

So dire was his standing that, when he attempted to placate the Senate in a letter writing that he was confident that no senator wished to see him dead, one former consul, known for his hostility toward Macrinus, replied bluntly: "Indeed, we do wish it, and we pray for it."

Macrinus also suffered from low popularity among the people of Rome, who resented his appointment of his young son to high office. (*Histoire Auguste*, 1994) Viewing it as an act of arrogance and poor judgment.

With no other option remaining, Macrinus resorted to military confrontation against Maesa and her supporters. He led a large force toward Antioch, making significant advances, especially after some hesitation among the Syrian mercenaries regarding their loyalty to the young emperor's grandmother. However, he and his Praetorian Guard suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of Comazon, who arrived unexpectedly at the head of a substantial army. Julia Maesa and her daughter played a decisive role in the battle. Both leapt from their carriages and rallied hesitant troops, leading them to victory. As one contemporary remarked, "The men of Syria were women, and its women were men." Following his defeat, Macrinus fled toward Rome, but the garrison at Chalcedon captured him and returned him to Antioch, where he and his son were executed shortly thereafter. (P. Petit, 1974, 332)

Following this significant victory, Elagabalus entered Rome on 29 September AD 219, accompanied in a grand procession by his grandmother Julia Maesa and his mother Julia Soaemias. (A. Chastagnol, 1994, 496) One of his first actions upon attending the Senate was to request permission for his mother to be seated beside him during the proceedings.¹ Soaemias, which possessed sufficient wisdom, withdrew from the chamber and contented herself with presiding over the lesser council, the *Council of Women* originally established by Sabina, which deliberated on

¹ *Histoire Auguste*, "Vie d'Antonin Élagabale," IV.



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matters such as women's garments, jewellery, ceremonial protocols, and etiquette. She left the governance of the state to Maesa, who effectively ruled in all matters and exerted the influence she wished over the Senate. Julia Maesa was thus regarded as the first woman in Roman history to enter the Senate building and participate in its deliberations as an equal member. (Ibid)

The true rulers of the empire during Elagabalus's reign were his grandmother, his mother, and their advisors Janis and Comazon, the Praetorian Prefect. Julia Maesa was granted the title *Augusta*. This governing group maintained consistent policies in both public and private matters. However, some disagreements arose on minor ceremonial issues, most notably Elagabalus's insistence on appearing in public in traditional Aramaean priestly attire rather than Roman imperial dress. (P. Petit, 333)

In the first half of AD 220, to gain favour with the Senate, Elagabalus married Julia Cornelia Paula, a noblewoman of Rome, who appears to have been approximately ten years his senior. He elevated her to the rank of *Augusta*, but the marriage lasted only a few months. By the end of the year, he had divorced her, citing infertility as the reason. (Herodianus, V.14)

As a result of intense pressure from the Roman populace, Elagabalus later became engaged in and married Julia Aquilia Severa, a twenty-five-year-old virgin who had consecrated herself to the service of the goddess Vesta. Through this union, he sought to symbolise the fusion of his Eastern religion, in which he served as high priest, with the Roman religion, and to produce divinely sanctioned offspring from the marriage. This was the justification he

offered to the Senate in defence of what was, by Roman standards, a sacrilegious act.

He elevated Julia Aquilia Severa to the rank of *Augusta*, but she was deposed in July AD 221 due to widespread public outrage. In that same month, he contracted a third marriage to Annia Faustina, a granddaughter of Commodus. This new bride was approximately twenty years older than Elagabalus. She too was granted the title *Augusta*, only to have it revoked within the same year, AD 221. (F. Zosso and C. Zingg, 2009, 141-142)

It appears that his mother, Julia Soaemias, was absorbed in her concerns, observing the marital, religious, political, and social scandals committed by her son Elagabalus with the detached indulgence of one who was unaffected by, or indifferent to, their consequences. (Herodianus, V.15-17)

However, his grandmother, Julia Maesa, closely observed the situation and recognised that her grandson had exceeded all bounds. She foresaw that the army, the Senate, and the Roman populace would soon turn against him and that such a revolt could result in the complete downfall of her family's reign. Determined to intervene, especially after her daughter proved incapable of restraining him, Maesa persuaded Elagabalus to adopt Alexius, whose name was changed to Alexander Severus, the son of his cousin Julia Mamaea. He was to be appointed *Caesar* and entrusted with the governance of the empire. At the same time, Elagabalus would devote himself solely to priesthood and religious affairs, which were so dear to him. Maesa also circulated a second rumour, claiming that Alexander was an illegitimate son of Caracalla to endear him to the soldiers. (Herodianus, *Op. cit.*, V.17)



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Together with his mother, Julia Mamaea, Maesa ensured that Alexander was secretly educated in various branches of Greek and Latin knowledge under the guidance of prominent scholars, most notably the philosopher Ulpian. They trained him in the principles of governance and the duties of imperial office, pursuing every possible means to present him to the Senate and the people as a virtuous alternative to his cousin, the deranged priest-emperor, who had disgraced Rome and sought to lead Alexander down the same ruinous path. (Herodianus, *Op. cit.*, V.18)

Julia Soaemias, the mother of Elagabalus, eventually revealed the full extent of conspiracy. She realised that her sister, Julia Mamaea, and her mother, Julia Maesa, laid the groundwork for his deposition and Alexander's accession to the throne. In response, she incited the Praetorian Guard against her sister and nephew. Elagabalus himself attempted by all possible means and in vain to eliminate Alexander without provoking the soldiers, whose loyalty had already shifted toward the young Caesar.

However, Maesa and Mamaea proved more decisive in both argument and strategy. They extended generous bribes to the Praetorian Guard. On 13 March AD 222, (Herodianus, *Op. cit.*, V.19-22) guards killed Elagabalus and his mother. Their bodies were dragged through the streets of the city and around the amphitheatre and then thrown into the Tiber River. The soldiers subsequently proclaimed Alexander Severus emperor, and the Senate approved his elevation to the throne. (P. Petit, *Op. cit.*, 333)

Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander ascended the throne, having been raised with exceptional care by his mother, who

had devoted herself thoroughly to the cultivation of his body, mind, and character.¹

Mamaea's persistent guidance did not diminish his affection or devotion toward both his mother and grandmother. She would recite to him the verses of Virgil. This great Roman poet exhorted the Romans to leave the refinement of culture to other nations and to prepare themselves instead to establish and govern a universal empire in peace. Together with his mother, he worked to restore Roman temples and rituals to their former dignity. He also encouraged his people to adopt the moral virtues of both Jews and Christians. His mother showed particular favour toward Christians, extending her protection to them, and even summoned their chief bishop to explain the principles of their faith to the public. (Herodianus, VI.1)

Julia Maesa died shortly after Alexander ascended the throne and was buried with a funeral befitting an empress. (Ibid., VI.2)

Nevertheless, the credit for restoring the Severan dynasty to power after its interruption belongs to her. Despite significant challenges and opposition from senior military commanders and senators, she succeeded through her political acumen and Machiavellian manoeuvres in securing the throne for her descendants, even at the expense of some among them. Through a series of calculated political decisions, she restored the prestige of the empire, which internal struggles for power and external threats had previously diminished. (Jean-Baptiste Giard, "R. A. G. Garson, 1963, 177-178.)

¹ *Histoire Auguste*, "Vie d'Alexandre Sévère," III.



Julia Mamaea (AD 180–235)

Following the death of her mother, the responsibilities of governance passed to Julia Mamaea, who had acquired considerable experience in state affairs under Maesa's guidance. She successfully suppressed a rebellion by the praetorian guard against her son, executing its leader, Abagathus. To secure her son Alexander's throne and ensure the loyalty of the aristocracy and senatorial class, Mamaea arranged his marriage, between AD 225 and 227, to Sallustia Barbia Orbiana, a member of one of Rome's most noble and distinguished families. However, Mamaea later forced her son to divorce Orbiana and expelled her from the palace, driven by jealousy over the emperor's deep affection for his wife and her desire to retain the title of empress exclusively for herself.

When Orbiana's father sought the title *Augusta* for his daughter and the title *Caesar* for himself, (W. Durant, *Op. cit.*, 330) Mamaea had him executed. To eliminate Orbiana's influence, she ordered her exile to the province of Africa, where she later died. (Herodianus, *Op. cit.*, VI.5)

Julia Mamaea and Ulpian, her son's tutors, were the principal figures directing the affairs of the state and formulating its political strategies and administrative reforms. Among their initiatives was the selection of sixteen distinguished members of the Senate, from whom they formed an imperial council. It was decreed that no significant governmental action would be carried out without the council's prior approval. (*Idem*, 332) In AD 224, Mamaea was granted the title *Mother of the Camps* (*Mater Castrorum*), and in AD 226, she received the title *Mother of the Senate* (*Mater Senatus*). (F. Zosso and C. Zingg, *Op. cit.*, 145)

According to contemporary historians, Julia Mamaea exercised an extraordinary degree of control over the affairs of the state, effectively ruling in place of her son, over whom she held absolute sway. He did not decide without her counsel, and although all decrees were issued in his name, it was she who honestly governed. Throughout his thirteen-year reign, he is not known to have disobeyed her even once, despite his visible frustration and resentment at her usurpation of his imperial authority.

Under the pretext of accumulating gold and treasures for times of need and to ensure the army's loyalty to her son if circumstances are needed, Herodian accused her of appropriating state funds for herself. She was even said to have confiscated the wealth and inheritances of certain citizens, despite her son's opposition to such measures. However, he was entirely powerless to resist her.

In truth, Alexander's reign, marked by his kindness, justice, compassion toward his subjects, and abhorrence of bloodshed, was among the finest periods the Roman Empire had known. His only lasting reproach was his perceived weakness and failure to assert himself against his mother, who committed numerous excesses to preserving power in her own hands at any cost. (Herodianus, VI.3-5)

Her well-known traits of frugality, stinginess, and thrift served to curb corruption and brought about a noticeable improvement in the economic situation during the early years of her son's reign, while he remained preoccupied with reading, bird-keeping, and practicing singing and music. (R. Lee Cleve, 1982, 128-159)

The external threats that began to endanger the empire both along its eastern frontiers and within its borders accelerated the decline of Alexander's reign. The Sassanid



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king Ardashir I, founder of the new ruling dynasty in Persia, invaded Mesopotamia in AD 230 and threatened Syria. Meanwhile, Germanic tribes, seizing the opportunity created by the withdrawal of Roman legions from the Rhine and Danube, redeployed to reinforce the Syrian front, rose in revolt. They broke through fortified Roman roads and ravaged eastern Gaul.

In response, Alexander, accompanied by his mother Mamaea, travelled to the region after concluding a truce with the Persians, following the catastrophic defeat suffered by his forces. He joined the remainder of his army and marched at its head toward Mainz (*Mayence*). However, instead of following the advice of his generals, who urged a decisive campaign to crush the Germanic threat, he made a grave miscalculation by heeding the counsel of his mother. He chose to negotiate with the enemy, offering them an annual subsidy in exchange for maintaining peace.

His soldiers viewed this act as a sign of weakness, cowardice, and an affront to the honour and reputation of the Roman army. They attributed their previous defeat by the Persians to his indecisiveness and lack of resolve. In their view, he had missed a strategic opportunity to launch a counterattack, as the Persian king, Ardashir, had dispersed his forces following the battle. (Herodianus, VI.16-17)

The troops also grew weary of being ruled by a domineering woman and a weak young man. They began to voice their discontent over the meagreness of their pay and the severe restrictions placed on military expenditures, especially when contrasted with the large sums of money being offered to the Germanic enemies of the state. They openly mocked Alexander Severus, deriding him through

his dependence on his mother, saying: "*The emperor is still bound to wear the child's apron his mother has fastened on him.*" (W. Durant, *Op. cit.*, 331)

These events, combined with the personal resentment harboured by Maximinus, the commander of the army, further escalated tensions. His hostility toward the emperor's mother stemmed from an earlier incident in which she had rejected his request to marry one of her female relatives, instead arranging her marriage to the son of a senator. Maximinus perceived this decision as a personal insult and humiliation. (A. Aymard and J. Auboyer, 1995, 283)

On 10 March AD 235, the soldiers stormed the tent of Alexander Severus and killed him, along with his mother and their close associates. (W. Durant, *Op. cit.*, 332) This marked the tragic end of the Severan dynasty. (J. Pierre, A. Michel, and C.-G. Murielle, 2003, 233)

Thus, Mamaea's authoritarian grip on power, coupled with her greed and domineering nature, ultimately led to her death before the age of forty. (Herodianus, VI.18) Her fate mirrored that of other Syrian princesses who had preceded her, women renowned for their boundless ambition and unwavering determination to seize and retain power at any cost. (A. Aymard and J. Auboyer, *Op. cit.*, 533)

The Constantinian Dynasty

Flavia Julia Helena (c. AD 248–250 – c. 330)

In AD 270, Flavia Julia Helena became the concubine of Emperor Constantius I, known as Constantius Chlorus. Historical sources remain unclear as to whether she had been a servant in an entertainment house in Drepanum (modern-day Yalova) in the province of Bithynia or the



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daughter of a barbarian king. The Church later sanctified her image, portraying her as a virtuous woman who bore Constantius a son, Constantine the Great. (E. Gibbon, 1819, 165)

Constantius Chlorus dismissed her when Maximian chose him to serve as *Caesar*. From that painful separation onwards, she lived the life of a Christian widow. Beginning in AD 306, she took up residence in the imperial court of her son, and on 8 November AD 324, Constantine elevated her to the rank of *Augusta*. (Lactantius, 1864)

In the second half of AD 326, Helena undertook a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. There, she constructed a small church in Bethlehem on the site that was traditionally believed to be the birthplace of Jesus. In an act of humility, she served the nuns who ministered in that Church. She died in AD 327, shortly after returning to Nicomedia, near her son Constantine. From the fifth and sixth centuries onwards, the Eastern Church venerated her as a woman of great purity, commemorating her with a feast on 21 May. The Church of the East continued this tradition until the eleventh century, assigning her a separate feast day on 18 August. (J. W. Drijvers, 1992, 11)

In AD 293, when Constantius Chlorus was appointed *Caesar* to assist Maximian in governing East China, the latter compelled him to separate from Helena and marry a new wife, Flavia Maximiana Theodora, the stepdaughter of Maximian's wife. Theodora bore him six children: Flavius Dalmatius, Flavius Julius Constantius, Flavius Hannibalianus, Flavia Julia Constantina, Anastasia, and Eutropia. (François Zosso and Christian Zingg, *Les empereurs romains* (Paris: Éditions Errance, 2009), 241-242.)

Helena's most significant influence on the fate of the Roman Empire is evident in the transformation of her son, the emperor's attitude toward Christianity. She played a decisive role in guiding him toward treating its adherents with tolerance and compassion, an approach that gradually evolved into active support for the faith. The series of measures he implemented over time laid the groundwork for Christianity to be later proclaimed the official religion of the state, even though he did not formally embrace it until he lay on his deathbed. (P. Maraval, 2006, 211)

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study has allowed us to draw several findings by examining a number of Roman empresses who played an active role in the highest echelons of Roman political life, namely, the imperial throne and the Roman Senate. Some of these women wielded complete power in the presence of weak emperors, whether husbands who fell under their influence, as was the case with women of the Julio-Claudian and Antonine dynasties, or sons over whom they acted as regents. Other empresses sought political dominance and governed the state with an iron fist, assisted by men whom they enticed with wealth and office, yet their fate ultimately proved tragic, as was the case with women of the Severan dynasty.

What is particularly noteworthy, however, is that at no point in the political history of Rome did the wife or mother of an emperor attempt to claim sole rule, don the purple, and officially ascend the throne, as this was contrary to the political traditions governing succession in Rome. No matter



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how great the influence and power some empresses attained within the political sphere, no one dared to violate these customs; they continued to rule from behind the scenes.

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Soumission : 01/04/2025 Acceptation : 05/06/2025 Publication : 15/07/2025

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