

Spring 4-29-2015

An Attempt at Clarity: Understanding the Lives of Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra

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An Attempt at Clarity: Understanding the Lives of Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra

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April 29, 2015

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Introduction

Reconstructing the lives of historical figures is impossible to do perfectly. The purpose of this project is to look at the lives of three women from antiquity and determine what can and cannot be known about them. Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra were all powerful women during their time, but today, what is known about their lives is confusing, jumbled, and sparse.

To understand the lives of these women, it is necessary to use imagination, because the study of history is not a science.¹ Historians tackle this problem in different ways. Alice Deckman laments the lack of information about Roman women, saying, “It is a matter of deep regret that the lives of Roman matrons are shrouded almost utterly in the darkness of the ages.”² In her study of Livia, she attempts to solve the problem by compiling information and comparing the sources at her disposal to determine their validity.

On the other hand, Anne Warren writes an entire story about a slave woman who is only mentioned in passing for a brief moment. Warren believes that “this woman’s life deserves to be reconstructed simply because too many factors have conspired to make that reconstruction nearly impossible.”³

Although more information is available on Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra than on the slave woman, it is still significantly less than that available for their male counterparts. These women were important and powerful historical figures, yet today,

¹ Wendy Anne Warren, ““The Cause of Her Grief”: The Rape of a Slave in Early New England,” *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (2007): 1049, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25094595>.

² Alice A. Deckman, “Livia Augusta,” *The Classical Weekly* 19, no. 3 (1925): 21, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3289695>.

³ Warren, ““The Cause of Her Grief”: The Rape of a Slave in Early New England,” 1033.

their stories are largely forgotten. The study of these women relies on flawed texts and requires sorting through muddled evidence.⁴ Historians “cannot recall [their] subjects to life and ask them to verify [their] claims or to provide more information on the topics they fail to discuss.”⁵ However, the craft of creative writing is able to do just that.

This project brings Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra to life as characters in a story and asks them questions about their lives. Like Warren’s article, this is designed to highlight the gaps in the evidence available in relation to these women. Both the evidence and the gaps are discussed in the essays that follow the story. Even though the records of their lives are inadequate, this story serves as a reminder that Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra once lived and breathed, and their impact on the world should not be forgotten.

For this project, I need a balance of primary and secondary sources for each of the women. For Livia, there is a wide range of sources available. A portrait sculpture made of basanite from 31 BCE shows Livia’s physical features.⁶ The writings of Suetonius, a Roman biographer who lived from around 70 CE to 130 CE, are also used.⁷ Suetonius’ *The Twelve Caesars* provides accounts of specific moments of Livia’s life. *The Annals*, written by Tacitus, a Roman historian who lived from approximately 56 to 120 CE, also provides detailed descriptions of the events in Livia’s life.⁸

⁴ Ibid., 1049.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Empress Livia*, basanite, 31 BCE, Musée de Louvre, Paris, France, ARTstor: LESSING_ART_10311440908.

⁷ Keith R. Bradley, “Suetonius,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

⁸ Ronald Haithwaite, “Tacitus,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

The secondary sources on Livia span multiple decades. Some are from the 1920s and 30s, some from the late 20th century, and others were written in the last few years. Edward Champlin's article "Tiberius and the Heavenly Twins" is particularly useful for its detailed account of Drusus' death and the events that followed. Another helpful article is M. P. Charlesworth's "Livia and Tanaquil" because of its interesting comparison of stories associated with both of these women.

For Tanaquil, the sources are slightly more limited because there are no written documents from the Etruscans on Tanaquil, possibly because the Romans destroyed most of the Etruscan writings.⁹ There are, however, multiple Etruscan artifacts that prove useful for this project. Jewelry from the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, a sarcophagus from the 6th century BCE, and a painting from the 5th century *Tomba Del Leopardi* provide specific images to bring Tanaquil's story to life. For information specific to Tanaquil, I use the work of Livy, a Roman historian who lived from approximately 59 BCE to 17 CE.¹⁰ His *The History of Rome* details the legends associated with Tanaquil.

The majority of the secondary sources on Tanaquil span from the 1970s to the early 2000s. Ellen Macnamara's books *The Etruscans* and *Everyday Life of the Etruscans*, and Larissa Bonfante's article "Daily Life and Afterlife" provide most of the background information on the Etruscans. Due to the lack of information specific to Tanaquil, I make inferences about her personality, opinions, and experiences from this more general information.

⁹ Thyge C. Bro, "Ancient Art and Archaeology: The Copenhagen Collections," Danish Institute for Study Abroad, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2013, lecture.

¹⁰ John Briscoe, "Livy," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

Like those for Tanaquil, the sources for Alexandra are also limited. The primary sources come from Josephus, who lived from approximately 37 to 100 CE.¹¹ He was an “historian but also a Jewish priest of aristocratic descent and largely Pharisaic education.”¹² Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Wars of the Jews* provide detailed accounts of specific moments in Alexandra’s life as well as more general information about her leadership style.

Most of the secondary sources come from the last two decades. The main exception is Edmond Stapfer’s *Palestine in the Time of Christ*, from 1885, which contains information on Judean costume. This is important because physical evidence, such as coins, paintings, and statues, is difficult to find. The more recent book *The Palaces of the Hasmoneans and Herod the Great*, by Ehud Netzer, provides information on the palaces Alexandra would have lived in, which I employ in the creation of the setting in the project. The most useful scholarship on Alexandra comes from Kenneth Atkinson. His article “The Salome No One Knows” and his book *Queen Salome: Jerusalem’s Warrior Monarch of the First Century B.C.E.* provide the most applicable information of all of the secondary sources that specifically relates to Alexandra.

Regardless of the number of sources available, the majority of information about Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra comes from a male perspective. The ancient writers who talk about these women are all male, and when these women are discussed, it is almost always in relation to the men in their lives. Livia is generally examined in relation to Augustus and Tiberius. Tanaquil is talked about because of her relationships with

¹¹ Steve Mason, “Josephus,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, Oxford University Press, 2010.

¹² Edith Mary Smallwood and Tessa Rajak, “Josephus (Flavius Iosephus),” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

Tarquinius and Servius Tullius. Alexandra is remembered for, and often overlooked because of, her connections to Aristobulus I, Alexander Jannaeus, and Hyrcanus. The male perspective on these women is impossible to escape.

In addition, the descriptions of these women often come in extremes. In general, I avoided overly positive and negative portrayals of these women in this project. Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra are not perfect, but they are also not pure evil. For this project, I need a middle ground so that these women can sound more human and be fully developed characters.

The best way to show them as people, while still highlighting the confusion surrounding them, is to write a story. In fiction, it is possible to show confusion and contradiction in ways that a standard academic paper cannot. Fiction also allows these women to appear as characters. This serves as a reminder that they were real people, but it also emphasizes the fictional elements of what are often considered historical facts.

In this story, I try to give Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra distinct personalities and identities. It is difficult to know what these women were actually like because of the varied records of their lives. In the end, I use time period, civilization, position in society, and familial relations to determine the personality of each of the women. Additionally, I use some of the descriptions of personality found in the sources, but only when they seem to be based on events in the lives of the women. The essays that follow the story provide a detailed explanation of the creation of the characters of Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra and the choices involved in writing about their lives.

Clarity

The darkness lifted, to be replaced by a grey haze, but she wasn't sure if that was an improvement. In fact, she wasn't sure of anything at all. Not where she was, or how she was, or why she was. She just was.

“Hello Livia,” said a distant male voice.

Livia tried to look around and realized two things: she couldn't see anything but a grey haze, and she was lying down, which she discovered because she could feel a cold, hard surface under her head as she moved it. She pressed her hands to the surface, feeling the smooth and grainy texture of wood, and pushed herself into an upright position. Her feet stretched beyond the wood into the air, so Livia pushed herself forward until her knees dangled over the edge. As she moved, fabric moved beneath her, and to her relief, she realized she was clothed.

“If you wanna stand up, I'll take you to the others,” the man said.

Still surrounded by grey haze, Livia inched herself over the edge until her feet met solid ground and she eased herself into a standing position as the fabric draped around her. On her feet, her surroundings began to clear, and she could make out the shape of the man who was much closer than she had imagined. He gestured towards a doorway in the wall, and Livia took a few hesitant steps in his direction. Losing her balance for a second, her hip bumped into a small metal ledge, and her shoulder pressed against a smooth wall.

“You okay?” the man asked.

Without responding, Livia regained her balance and shook her head to clear it, but instead...

Livia straightened her shoulders and set her small face into a look of calm determination, pressing her tiny lips together and relaxing her large eyes. She picked up an ornately decorated mirror and held it up to examine her hair, which was done up in the tutulus style, with the vittae holding it on top of her head in a soft bun and allowing waves of hair to flow along the sides. Satisfied, she set down the mirror and wrapped her palla around her stola, feeling the layers of fabric press together. She pulled the palla over her head, creating a veil, as a last gesture of appropriate modesty. Ready at last, Livia let her sandaled feet carry her outside, her tunic swishing along the floor as she walked.

“You still with us?” the man said.

Pulled from her memory, Livia focused her attention on the man who was now leading her down a hallway. Her footsteps echoed off the tile floor and swirled around her head. As they walked, she could just make out the doorways set into the walls, but for the most part, everything was still grey. Up ahead, the man stopped and pushed open one of the doors, motioning for Livia to go inside.

She walked through the door and into a small room, where she could just make out the outlines of two people.

“Livia, this is Tanaquil,” the man said, indicating one of the people. “And this is Alexandra,” he said, indicating the other. “Everyone, this is Livia.”

Tanaquil watched as the man gestured toward the blur standing next to him. She stood in silence and looked around at the three people in the room with her, unable to

make out exactly what they looked like through the haze surrounding them. Tanaquil squeezed her eyes shut, trying to force them to clear, and suddenly...

Tanaquil stepped into a room full of people reclining on diamond-patterned couches, each couch holding a man and a woman with tebennas draped over their bodies. Sounds of laughter filled the air as scantily dressed servants poured them drinks. Tanaquil looked radiant with her hair tied back in one long braid, showing off her round, gold earrings. At each shoulder, a large golden fibula covered in lions made out of tiny balls of gold held her chiton together. Draped over her shoulders and across her back was her tebenna, its long tabs hanging down her front.

Alexandra wished once again that she could see as the man introduced Livia. It was infuriating, really. Quite ridiculous. The grey haze took away any chance she had of finding out where she was or who these people were or what she was doing here. She spun around, and her hand hit something hard and wooden, but slightly warm, like it was covered in sunshine, and she remembered...

Alexandra stood in a warm patch of sunlight coming from the courtyard and let the cool breeze blow the loose locks of her curly hair. The purple silk of her tunic rippled against her skin, and she let the mantle drape around her. Wrapped multiple times around her waist, a crimson linen girdle held the mounds of fabric together. She took a step towards the courtyard, moving closer to the source of the light and feeling the soft leather of her shoes press against the floor. Alexandra held a small, brightly polished mirror up to her face and examined her darkened eyebrows and thick eyelashes. She

touched a hand to her golden necklace before putting the mirror away and taking another step closer to the courtyard.

“Well, I’ll just leave you here for now. Some people should be by in a little bit, so you can all just make yourself comfortable,” the man said.

Livia heard a few footsteps, followed by a door being closed.

“Did he just leave?” Livia said, forcing the words out of her throat one at a time. She let the question dangle in the air as she squinted to try to see the other two figures.

“Oh good, he’s gone,” said one of the people.

“Do you think more people will be coming?” said the other.

“Excuse me, but who are you?” Livia said. If she squinted just right, she could see clearer outlines of two women, one with curly hair, the other a long braid.

“I’m Alexandra,” the curly-haired woman said. “The man got something right.”

“I’m Tanaquil,” the woman with the braid said. “Did he say your name was Livia?”

“Yes,” Livia said. “Do you know what we’re doing here?”

As she asked the last question, Livia heard voices from the other side of the door. She turned towards it and squinted, and she could just make out a window set into the door. Peering through the window, Livia saw a mass of indistinct people. Closest to the door was the clearest thing Livia had seen since waking up: a little boy. He stood next to the door, staring up at Livia through the window, and Livia squeezed her eyes shut.

Livia stood next to Augustus, squeezing the palla around her body until she thought the fabric might tear apart and reveal the small, weak woman within. But the

fabric did not rip, and that woman remained buried deep inside a tough outer shell. In the distance, Livia could just make out what must be the procession, and even though it was too far away, she thought she could see Drusus' body, pale and unmoving, one leg bent out of shape. Livia took a few deep breaths to calm herself. It would not do any good to give into grief now.

But her son! Her boy! Tears threatened to break free, but that was one step too far for Livia. No one must see her cry. Not now. Not ever.

The procession moved closer, and Livia could see Tiberius leading the way, his face blank and empty and broken. Livia took another steadying breath, straightened her shoulders, and released her grip on the palla. Livia stared at Tiberius' face, the only one in the whole procession that wasn't a blur, and wondered what she could say to her only surviving son.

Tanaquil stared at the outline of Livia standing transfixed next to the door. After a minute, Livia shook her head and stepped away from the window, making space for Tanaquil to look outside. Tanaquil maneuvered around the shadowy objects she was starting to be able to see around her and made her way towards the door. The noise intrigued her. Maybe it was a party? She peered through the window at the crowd of people outside, their bodies too blurry to make out the details, but it didn't look like any party she'd ever seen. Then, at the back of the group, she noticed a large, older man with a young girl, the only two people she could see clearly, and Tanaquil closed her eyes.

Tanaquil stood next to the carpentum, taking one last look at the only home she had ever known. Lucumo sat in the carpentum, tapping his foot and biting his lip, but

Tanaquil ignored him. Rome could look like anything, be anything. But she wanted to remember this, exactly as it was. The shops spread out around the town, mingling with little, single story houses built of unfired brick next to deep stone wells. Somewhere in there were her parents, and although she had already said goodbye to them, she felt a pang in her stomach at the thought that she might never see them again. For a moment, Tanaquil closed her eyes, and their faces painted themselves in her memory. Every strand of hair, every wrinkle. Every last everything. And that's what she needed to do now. She opened her eyes and looked one last time at Tarquinii. Once she had stared so long that the details started to blur, Tanaquil climbed into the carpentum and sat next to Lucumo. She stared out at the open road in front of her as the carpentum began to roll.

“Any questions about this portion of the tour? No? Great. Next stop, the Campus Center.” The woman’s voice coming from outside the door yanked Tanaquil out of her memory and back into the room with Alexandra and Livia.

Alexandra heard the tour leaving and watched Tanaquil back away from the door. The room was starting to clear a little, and she could see the rows of small tables and chairs that filled the room. Across from her stood Tanaquil, her hair in a braid, and Livia, her hair pulled up on top of her head. Alexandra reached her hand up and touched her own hair, feeling the curls crunch beneath her fingers. She squinted at the two women, trying to make out their faces, but her eyes refused to see the details, the color of their eyes, the shape of their ears. Without her sight, Alexandra felt naked and vulnerable.

“So you two were also brought here?” Livia said.

“A nice woman brought me here only a few moments before you arrived. Do you think they’re throwing us a party?” Tanaquil said.

“Don’t be ridiculous. This isn’t a party. We’ve obviously been captured,” Alexandra said. She walked towards the other side of the room, away from the two women, only stopping when she reached the wall.

“Wait, come back. I can’t see you anymore,” Tanaquil said. “And what do you mean by captured?”

Alexandra laughed at the naiveté of the question and turned back towards the women, but she could no longer see them. She took a step in what she thought was the right direction and...

Alexandra entered the room and saw her husband Alexander Jannaeus lying on the bed, so still that she could barely make out his chest rising and falling to the rhythm of his breath. She approached his bed, the silk of her violet tunic billowing around her, and stood at his side. He turned his head to look at her, and Alexandra took a good look at his pale, sweaty face. In that moment, she knew he would die.

Her husband slowly lifted his right hand and extended it towards her, but she backed away from it, repulsed by death. She looked away from him and touched her gold bracelet, rotating it around and around her wrist.

“Alexandra,” he said. “I have to tell you...something...please, look at me.”

Alexandra took a deep breath and turned to face her husband. She tried to look at his face, but the details faded and the best she could do was to look in his general direction.

“You, Alexandra, must take over as Queen.”

Alexandra almost laughed. That was what he needed to tell her? Of course she would be Queen. Since the moment he had fallen sick, she had known it would come to this, but hearing the serious tone of his voice, she knew she must dignify his statement with a response. Alexandra then spoke in a deep, masculine voice unlike her own, "Yes my dear husband, if you wish me to be Queen, then I shall."

Livia stood next to Tanaquil and stared at the other side of the room where Alexandra had disappeared. After a moment, she noticed the fog starting to lift, and she could see Alexandra, standing on the other side of the room, smiling. She watched as Alexandra shook her head and joined them again by the door.

"If you're so sure we've been captured, then why are you smiling?" Livia said.

"Just a happy memory," Alexandra said.

"Did it come in sort of a flash?"

Alexandra nodded.

"I've been getting those too," Livia said. She walked over to one of the tables and sat down.

"So what are your memories of?" Tanaquil said.

Livia stood by Augustus' bed as he lay there, drifting in and out of consciousness. She glanced around at the slightly out-of-focus room and tried to clear her mind by closing her eyes and filling her lungs with air. Thoughts swirled around her mind, past decisions she'd made, what her next move should be. She exhaled and opened her eyes, and the thoughts vanished, leaving her mind clear.

Livia took one last look at her husband, who was now no more than an empty shell, before summoning someone from outside. A shadow entered the room, and Livia spoke to it, her voice strong and steady.

“Set up a watch around the house, and do not speak a word of what you have seen. When you have finished, return to me, and I will give you a letter to deliver.”

Livia shook herself out of the memory and looked at Tanquil, who was waiting for a response to her question.

“Oh, nothing important,” Livia said.

Tanaquil wanted to press further but thought better of it. After all, she didn't even know these women, although she felt that they shared a deep connection, even if they didn't realize it yet.

She looked around the room at the wooden tables and chairs which were much clearer now, though slightly blurred around the edges. She looked back at the other women. Livia sat on one of the tables playing with the fabric of her dress, eyebrows narrowed. Alexandra stood by the door, alternating between peering out the window and letting her eyes dart around the room.

“We should leave,” Alexandra said. “Before those people come back.”

“You want to leave?” Livia said. “And go where, exactly? I would not recommend setting foot outside this room without a proper plan.”

“There's not time for a plan when those people want to do who knows what to us.”

“I'm sure they don't want to hurt us,” Tanaquil said.

“Well I, for one, am less confident in their good intentions,” Livia said. “They could be keeping us here for questioning. Maybe they know something about us?”

“Well I have a feeling that everything’s going to be fine.”

“A feeling?” Alexandra said.

“A strong feeling,” Tanaquil said. “And my feelings are never wrong.”

The carpentum rolled along the road, occasionally bumping over pebbles.

Tanaquil looked around at the landscape, which was flying by too fast for her to make out any of the details. Lucumo sat by her side, and the couple jostled up and down as the carpentum made its way to Rome. Without warning, a figure swooped down and snatched the cap from Lucumo’s head before flying off into the distance.

“What was that?” Lucumo asked, twisting and turning to see where the figure had gone.

Tanaquil remained quiet, waiting. As the carpentum continued on its path, the figure swooped back over them and dropped the cap back on Lucumo’s head. Tanaquil’s suspicions were confirmed: it was an eagle, she was sure of it. The eagle took off in a flash, and Tanaquil turned to her bewildered husband who sat with his mouth gaping open, staring at the place where the eagle had vanished.

Lucumo slowly turned his head towards Tanaquil, and the two of them looked at each other as the scenery around them blurred into nothing. Tanaquil smiled and placed a hand on his cap. She spoke in a deep, piercing voice unlike her own. “In this new land, you will come to greatness.”

Alexandra looked back and forth between Livia and Tanaquil, her eyebrows narrowing. She shuffled closer to the door and glanced out of the window into an empty hall. Perhaps she should just leave now. These two would just slow her down, and besides, she was used to being on her own. She certainly didn't need their permission to leave, or anyone else's for that matter. She was a queen, after all.

Alexandra, her hair plaited in the back with an ivory comb, paced around her room in the palace as she planned her first big moves as Hasmonean Queen. She would make peace with the Pharisees, that much was certain. Alexander Jannaeus had spent way too much time fighting them, and where had that gotten him? Alexandra laughed and the sound bounced off the walls. She felt a twinge of guilt in her stomach for laughing but immediately shrugged it off.

So she would work with the Pharisees. But what about the high priest? She might be Queen, but she certainly couldn't be the high priest as a king would have been. The two must be separated. She supposed one of her sons could do it. Probably Hyrcanus. He was the most likely candidate. Alexandra shuddered at the thought of explaining that choice to Aristobulus, and the room shook with uncertainty and anger. It started to rotate, and Alexandra bounced around it, thinking of Alexander Jannaeus and the Pharisees and her sons. Those boys were so sensitive.

The door to the room opened, and a woman with a tall forehead and beady grey eyes entered, clutching a large black bag in her hands.

“Livia, would you come with me?”

Livia glanced at Tanaquil and Alexandra, neither of whom said a word or even returned her look. The woman tapped her fingers on the black bag. Livia walked around the desks to the woman, who led her out of the door and into the hallway. Unlike earlier, Livia could see the details of the hallway, from the chipped, dirty floor to the papers covering the drab, tan walls. At the end of the hall, the woman held open a set of doors for Livia, who pulled what extra fabric she had over her head before exiting into the outside world.

Then the woman led the way down a path lined with trees, and a few birds chirped at Livia as she passed a patch of flowers, then a wooden bench, then a puddle. Up ahead, the woman entered a large brick building.

“This is the Campus Center,” the woman said. “If you’ll just follow me inside, I’ll take you to the theater. It’s where we give all the academic lectures.”

Livia stepped inside the Campus Center. Inside was a small hallway that led to a large theater. At the front of the theater was a black stage with a single chair on it. The rest of the theater was packed with rows of seated students. The woman walked onto the stage and spoke to them, her voice filling the room.

“Thank you all for coming. I’m so glad you could make it to today’s lecture. Now please help me give a warm welcome to Livia!”

Livia stood on stage in front of the crowd without having any idea how she got there. The audience clapped, and the lights blazed overhead.

“Welcome, Livia,” said the woman, motioning towards the chair.

Livia sat down, facing the audience, whose faces were pale in the lights from the ceiling.

“Okay Livia, let’s begin.”

Livia watched the woman until...

Tiberius threw his hands in the air and let out a half scream of anger. Livia watched him, her eyes narrowed, glinting, preparing for a fight, as he stormed back and forth across the room, a grown man’s temper-tantrum.

“For the last time, I will not put him on the juror’s list,” Tiberius said, turning to face Livia.

“Tiberius, be reasonable.”

“I should be reasonable? I am not the one who is being unreasonable! I cannot grant you favors every time you ask for them!”

“Really, this is quite uncalled for. I don’t see that it should matter to you either way, so there is really no reason to refuse.”

“Well if you want this as much as you say you do, then I’ll do it. And while I’m at it, I’ll write up an official document that explains to everyone that this decision was forced upon me by you!”

Livia stared, her face motionless and unreadable. She watched as Tiberius shook with anger in front of her. Or maybe he just shook, because the walls around him were shaking too, and Livia was the only part of the room that was still. And as the floor shook beneath her, Livia strode across the room and opened a strong-box, pulling out letters that vibrated in her hand. She turned to face Tiberius but could no longer make him out, his shaking having turned him into a large blur.

Livia shoved the letters towards the blur and screamed, “Do you see these? Do you know what terrible things they say? Do you know who they’re from?”

The whole building shook with Livia's anger as she spoke in a deep, masculine voice unlike her own. "They're from Augustus!"

Tanaquil and Alexandra stood in the room and watched as the door opened again and a man entered, a backpack slung over his shoulder.

"Hey Tanaquil, could you come with me?"

Tanaquil swept around the desks and followed the man out of the room, down a long stretch of hallway, and out into the fresh air. Tanaquil inhaled the clean, damp smell of wet earth and felt the breeze toss her hair. The man led her across a patch of grass, and Tanaquil smiled as the earth squished beneath her. Across the field, the man opened a large wooden door and ushered Tanaquil inside.

"Welcome to the library," the man said. "That's the circulation desk right there." The man pointed at two people sitting behind a desk. They smiled at Tanaquil before looking away to greet other people entering the building. Behind them were large shelves covered in books of every color and size.

"The class is right in here," the man said. He headed towards a smaller room in the distance, and Tanaquil followed him into it, where a group of twelve students stood waiting.

"Why doesn't everybody take a seat on one of the couches," the man said.

"Tanaquil, you can sit in that chair right there."

Tanaquil sat down, and the man took a seat in an orange chair opposite her.

“Okay, it looks like the class is all here. Everyone, this is Tanaquil. Tanaquil will be helping us in our semester long quest to learn more about the Etruscans,” the man said. Suddenly...

Tanaquil heard screams in the distance and ran towards them. At least, she meant to run towards them, but she wasn't quite sure where they were. The people blurred around her, and the buildings faded in and out of focus. Another scream echoed around her head, and in a rush to reach it, Tanaquil tripped over her tebenna. Catching herself, she hurried on, finally stumbling across a circle of people, which spun around and around. Tanaquil pushed her way to the center of the crowd where a small boy lay sleeping on a bench, his head in flames. As the flames flickered, so did the image of the boy, and the crowd of onlookers screamed louder.

Someone rushed forward with a bucket of water, but Tanaquil raised her hands and the bucket froze. For a moment, the circle stopped spinning, and the flames on the boy's head danced higher and higher as he slept. The crowd watched Tanaquil, and Tanaquil watched the boy, entranced by something no one else could see.

“What is going on here?”

Tanaquil whipped around to find Tarquinius standing next to her, his face contorted in concern. She looked around at the crowd and saw her husband's face looking back at her a dozen times over, the same look of concern on each of the spectator's faces.

Tanaquil turned back to the boy with the flaming head and spoke in a booming voice unlike her own. “We must care for this boy, Servius Tullius, for he will one day be a protector of the royal house.”

Alexandra paced around the empty room, occasionally bumping into a table for lack of focus. The door opened once again and a woman entered.

“Alexandra, if you could come with me please...”

Alexandra stared at the woman for a minute before following her out of the room, into the hallway, and through a large set of double doors that led to a small outdoor patio. The woman crossed the patio and headed down a path lined with flowers. Alexandra followed, keeping her eyes on the woman, but also being aware of her surroundings. There were no other people on the path, and Alexandra found the building they entered to be just as empty. It was small and dark, and a few lumpy chairs sat in the corner.

“We’re just gonna go down these stairs,” the woman said. “Everyone else is in the computer lab.”

Alexandra followed the woman down the flight of stairs and into a bright, cramped room.

“Oh good,” the woman said. “You already got computers.”

Alexandra realized she was talking to the only other people in the room, three women who were each sitting at a computer. Hesitantly, Alexandra took a seat in a chair, while keeping an eye on both the door and the strange women.

“So I guess we should get started,” said the woman who had brought Alexandra to the room. “I think we’re supposed to do the interview first, so let’s start with that.”

Alexandra narrowed her eyes at the women...

Alexandra paced around the room, her crimson tunic billowing out behind her in waves of silk that covered the entire floor. Tigranes had moved further south into

Palestine. He'd already taken control of the Phoenician coast and was attacking the gateway to Ptolemais. And her sons wouldn't stop fighting, and it seemed like it was taking forever for the twin palaces to be finished so she could finally keep them separated. Alexandra let out a high-pitched screech that multiplied in the air, a thousand birds screaming at once. The waves of her tunic circled around her faster and faster to form a hurricane of silk with her at the eye of the storm.

From the distance, a voice called out, "Queen Alexandra, you sent for me?"

"Yes," Alexandra said in a deep voice. "Send envoys to Tigranes with the gifts, as we talked about."

The other speaker left, but Alexandra couldn't tell. All she could see was crimson silk.

Livia sat in a chair on the stage, staring out at the rows of students. The harsh ceiling lights hurt her eyes.

"Okay Livia, I'm just going to ask you a few questions to get to know you. Don't worry, you won't have to say a thing. Just nod if the answer is yes, and shake your head if the answer is no." The woman's voice filled the room. "Do you understand?"

Livia nodded.

"Great! Let's begin with something simple. Your name is Livia Drusilla?"

Livia nodded.

"Good, good. And you were born around 59 BCE to Marcus Livius Drusus Claudianus, your father, and Alfidia, your mother?"

Livia nodded.

“And in 43 BCE you married Tiberius Claudius Nero? And you had two sons by him? Tiberius and Drusus?”

Livia felt a twinge in her stomach at the mention of Drusus. Who was this woman, and why was she asking so many questions? Livia tried to take her mind off it by staring at the stage. It was smooth, black, and covered in dust from years of neglect.

“Livia, is that correct?”

Forcing herself to look at the woman, Livia nodded.

“Good, let’s continue. In 38 BCE you were divorced from your husband Tiberius Claudius Nero and married to Augustus?”

Livia nodded.

“And in 9 BCE, Drusus died?”

Livia slumped down in her chair and nodded again.

“Great. Moving on, you had a decent number of privileges, right? Like you could use a carpentum? And dedicate temples and statues? Like when one of your grandchildren died, you and Augustus dedicated a statue for that grandchild?”

Livia nodded, but she was starting to lose patience. Glaring at the woman, she decided not to answer any more of her impertinent questions.

“It looks like we have time for one more question, so let’s open it up to the audience... Yes, the young man in the back?”

“Did you, Livia Drusilla, murder your husband, Augustus, the first emperor of Rome?”

Livia stared at the young man in the audience, then straight at the woman on the stage, noticing the sharp line of her jaw, the way she tapped her fingers on her notebook. A smile spread across Livia's face.

Livia could see Tiberius as he approached the house, which was surrounded by a strict watch. At least, she assumed it was Tiberius, though he looked like a mere shadow gliding across the ground. Livia turned back around and saw Augustus lying still on the bed. One of his fingers twitched, and Livia jumped, clutching her hands to her heart, which felt like it might break through her chest. Breathing deeply to calm herself, she removed her hands from her chest and raised them up to her face. They were pale, and they shook as she turned them over in front of her eyes. She pressed them against her forehead, but they burned her face. Pulling them away, she saw red hands where her pale ones used to be, red-hot searing hands, dripping.

Livia leapt back from the deep red pool forming at her feet, dragging little drops of blood with her. Her hands dropped to her side, and at the sound of voices from nearby, she whipped around to face the entrance to the room. Augustus stood in the doorway, glowering down at her.

Livia stumbled backwards and slipped in the pool of blood, landing on the floor with a thud. She stared up at the bed, where Augustus lay motionless. She glanced back at Augustus standing in the doorway, then back at him lying in bed. Back and forth and back and forth until the room spun around and around, and Livia sat in a pool of blood as the room faded into nothing around her.

She heard footsteps getting closer, a door opening, but she couldn't see anything. Livia scrambled to her feet. It must be Tiberius, after all she had summoned him. Livia

turned in the direction she thought Tiberius must be and spoke in a deep, masculine voice unlike her own. "Soon the people will know Augustus is dead, and soon, Tiberius, it will be your time."

In the theater, the woman stood on the stage, staring at the now empty chair next to her. She looked out at the audience and spoke into the microphone, "Well, I guess that concludes our lecture for today. Thank you all very much for coming."

Tanaquil sat in a squashy orange chair in a room lit by a soft glow, which illuminated the large wooden shelves covered in books that lined the walls. Across from her, the man sat in an identical chair, a notebook on his lap. A dozen students sat around them, paper and pens at the ready.

"Okay Tanaquil, we've been studying the Etruscans all semester, and we're very excited for you to be joining us today. I'm going to ask you a few simple questions, just to get some basic information. All you need to do is nod if the answer is yes or shake your head if it's a no. Do you understand?" the man said.

Tanaquil nodded, finally admitting to herself that this was not a party.

"Awesome, then let's get started. Your name is Tanaquil, and you were born in the mid 7th century BCE?"

Tanaquil nodded. Her stomach squirmed as she watched the students take notes.

"And you're from a noble family in the Etruscan city of Tarquinii?"

Tanaquil looked at the orange chair the man was sitting on. It was decorated with a pattern of tiny golden triangles. She nodded.

“Awesome. And you married Lucumo, son of Demaratus and a Greek from Corinth, and you had two sons, Lucius and Arruns?”

The gold color of the triangles reminded her of her favorite pair of circular, golden earrings, and she nodded.

“You and Lucumo traveled to Rome around 630 BCE, where he changed his name to Lucius Tarquinius Priscus? And he became king, making you the queen?”

Tanaquil nodded. The sound of a dozen pens scratching on a dozen pieces of paper filled Tanaquil’s ears. She thought her head might burst.

“Okay, does anyone have a question for Tanaquil?”

A young girl on Tanaquil’s right spoke in a nasally voice. “When your husband died, Servius Tullius took the throne instead of one of your sons. Were you responsible for that happening?”

Tanaquil took the piece of paper out of the girl’s hand and stared at it. The words on the page meant nothing to her. Absolutely nothing. She laughed.

Tanaquil burst into the room containing Tarquinius’ body, the screams of the public fading behind her. She threw out all witnesses before grabbing materials to heal his wound. She stumbled around in a daze, as Tarquinius lay crumpled on the floor, covered in blood and beyond saving. From out of nowhere, Tanaquil’s sons appeared in the room, but without a word, she sent them away. The room spun and flickered, and Tanaquil called out, “Bring me Servius Tullius.”

In a moment he was there, although his body remained out of focus. Tanaquil took a deep breath in and turned to face him.

“The kingdom now belongs to you.”

Servius Tullius protested, but Tanaquil silenced him with a look before turning around and walking away from him and back towards the crowd of people in uproar. She stepped outside and faced the sea of subjects, and the world disappeared altogether into a grey mist. The deafening screams died away, making room for a deep, piercing voice.

“Tarquinius is injured but alive. While he recovers, Servius Tullius will be your king.”

The man grabbed the piece of paper off of the now empty chair across from him. He handed it back to the girl, who stuffed it into her backpack.

“Good class, everybody. See you all next week,” the man said.

The students put away their notebooks, grabbed their bags, and left the small room in the library.

Alexandra sat in a hard, uncomfortable chair in a brightly lit room full of rows of computers on wooden tables. The computer lab felt cold and cramped to Alexandra as she watched the women staring at her.

“Okay then, now that we’re all settled, I’m going to ask you a few questions we wrote up that should help us with our project. All you have to do is nod for a yes or shake your head for a no. We’re going to be using the keyboards and the computers to record your answers. Do you understand?”

Alexandra nodded.

“Perfect. Your name is Alexandra Salome, and you were born in 142 BCE?”

Alexandra nodded. One of the women typed something into the computer.

“At some point you married Alexander Jannaeus, who became a Hasmonean king? And you had two sons, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus?”

Alexandra nodded, glaring at the woman typing down her answers.

“When your husband died, you ruled as queen from 76 BCE until 67 BCE? So for nine years?”

Alexandra considered not answering. If this woman knew she was a queen, why was she treating her like this? Alexandra nodded anyway.

“Now, as queen, you brought peace to Judea? And you did this by settling conflicts with neighboring civilizations, as well as by making peace with the Pharisees?”

The noise from the keyboard started to hurt Alexandra’s ears, and she clenched her jaw as she nodded her head.

“Under your rule, the army was strengthened, there was a separation between the kingship and high priesthood, and your son Hyrcanus was appointed high priest?”

Alexandra nodded. Her hand twitched towards the keyboard.

“Okay Alexandra, I think we’ve got enough for a five minute presentation. I just have one more question for you regarding your marriage, or should I say marriages. Are you, Alexandra Salome, the wife of Alexander Jannaeus and the Hasmonean queen, the same Alexandra that was married to Alexander’s brother Aristobulus I before his death?”

Alexandra jumped to her feet and glared down at the women. One of them was still typing furiously. The clacking filled the room. Alexandra reached out, grabbed the keyboard, and yanked it away from the computer, throwing it on the ground.

“Alexandra will see you now.” The voice of the man was muffled from the other side of the door.

Alexandra held up a small mirror to her face, but she couldn't see anything in it but a shadow. She put it away and straightened her tunic, feeling the silk drag against the palace floor. Looking out towards the courtyard, Alexandra could see Aristobulus I pacing back and forth along one side and throwing his arms wildly about his head. On the other side of the courtyard, Alexandra watched Alexander Jannaeus stumbling around, tripping over his feet. She watched the two of them, entranced, but neither Aristobulus I nor Alexander Jannaeus noticed Alexandra or each other, even when they started walking towards each other. Alexandra watched as the two men passed right through each other, Aristobulus I throwing his hands and Alexander Jannaeus zig-zagging around the courtyard.

From behind her Alexandra heard footsteps, and she turned to face the person who entered, but she couldn't tell if there was a person there at all. And now where Alexandra had stood, another woman stood next to her, and both faced the person entering the room. And though their outlines were the same and their voices were the same, it was impossible to know if their faces were the same because the grey haze was descending so fast that nothing was left but a deep, masculine voice emanating from each of them. "I am Alexandra."

Analysis of Livia

Livia was a Roman woman belonging to the *Gens Claudia* who was born around 58 BCE and died in 29 CE.¹³ She was the wife of Augustus, the first Roman emperor, as well as the mother of Tiberius, Augustus' successor. Despite her position of political prominence, Livia's life is shrouded in mystery. She is also a popular topic for both ancient and modern writers, although Livia herself has had no control over the ways she has been portrayed. Suetonius provides some very detailed accounts of Livia's life, but they generally revolve around her relationships with either Augustus or Tiberius. This causes the accounts to read more like political propaganda than an accurate depiction of Livia's life. Tacitus also provides a few accounts of Livia, interspersed with his own commentary and negative personal opinions.

Many modern scholars have tried to describe Livia, but it is often in relation to Augustus or Tiberius. Both ancient and modern sources were used to write Livia's character in the story. Since the sources constantly conflict with each other, Livia's character is full of contradictions.

At the beginning of the story, Livia wakes up in the present day, where she is unable to see her surroundings. Everything is blurry as an indication that she is literally of the past and cannot be completely understood in the present. The first sign of Livia's personality comes when she is relieved at being clothed, which represents the modesty for which she was known.¹⁴

¹³ Deckman, "Livia Augusta," 21.

¹⁴ Richard A. Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1992), 125.

The initial flashback shows what Livia might have looked like, and it is clear and detailed. This is because there is an abundance of information about Roman dress, and little knowledge of Livia herself is required to describe it. The only part specific to Livia is the description of her face, which comes from a bust of Livia.¹⁵ The rest of her appearance is based on her status as a married woman.

For undergarments, Livia could have worn the *subligaria* and the *strophium*, over which would go the under tunic.¹⁶ The first garment that would have been seen was the *stola*, which was worn over the tunic by married Roman women.¹⁷ The outermost layer was the *palla*, which could be pulled over the head as a veil.¹⁸ Roman matrons also wore sandals and used *vittae* to pull their hair up into the *tutulus* style.¹⁹

Proper clothing would have been important to Livia because it was a key element in projecting her image as a proper Roman woman. She was known for being stoic, with a distaste for emotional weakness.²⁰ Livia was said to be strong-minded, frugal, and chaste, and had a reputation for integrity.²¹ She was also “an active supporter of Augustus’ program insofar as her participation did not violate any of its precepts too blatantly, such as the modesty of the traditional Roman matron.”²² Wearing the proper

¹⁵ *Empress Livia*, Musée du Louvre.

¹⁶ Phyllis G. Tortora and Keith Eubank, *Survey of Historic Costume: A History of Western Dress*, 5th ed. (New York: Fairchild Books, 2010), 88.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁰ J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Roman Women: Their History and Habits*, (London: The Bodley Head, 1974), 92.

²¹ Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, 125.

²² Patricia J. Johnson, “Ovid’s Livia in Exile,” *The Classical World* 90, no. 6 (1997): 407, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4351991>.

clothing for a Roman matron was an outward representation of the values Livia was known for and the values Augustus was trying to spread.

When the flashback ends, Livia comes back to the present, where she interacts with Tanaquil and Alexandra for the first time. Although it is still blurry, her surroundings are slowly starting to clear. Soon after meeting the other women, Livia is drawn to the boy with the tour group outside the door. This is because Livia had two sons, Tiberius and Drusus.²³ Therefore, seeing the boy causes her next flashback, which involves the death of one of her sons. This flashback is almost completely clear, although as the present becomes clearer, the past is starting to fade.

Livia's son Drusus died in 9 BCE.²⁴ His death was possibly due to gangrene, which was caused by a broken leg.²⁵ Tiberius is said to have brought Drusus' body to Rome, walking ahead of it the entire way.²⁶ Livia and Augustus joined Tiberius and the rest of the procession at Ticinum.²⁷ Livia is often credited with a large amount of self-control, especially in relation to Drusus' death.²⁸ However, it stands to reason that Livia felt terrible pain at the loss of a beloved son. In the story, the character of Livia is conflicted between her grief and her desire to maintain a strong appearance.

The flashback ends, and Livia returns to the present, where she interacts with the other women. They discuss some theories about what is happening to them, and they

²³ Geraldine Herbert-Brown, "Livia," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, Oxford University Press, 2010.

²⁴ Nicholas Purcell, "Livia and the Womanhood of Rome," in *Augustus*, ed. Jonathan Edmondson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 165.

²⁵ Edward Champlin, "Tiberius and the Heavenly Twins," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 101 (2011): 76, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41724873>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Grace Harriet Macurdy, *Vassal-Queens and Some Contemporary Women in the Roman Empire* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1937), 13.

realize they are all having flashes of memory. The present world is becoming clearer as the past, represented by the flashbacks, becomes unclear.

In the next flashback, Livia remembers Augustus' death. As Augustus is dying, Livia sends for Tiberius and takes control of the crisis.²⁹ Part of this plan involves Livia surrounding the house with a strict watch to ensure protection for her family.³⁰

The flashback ends, and Livia returns to the room with Tanaquil and Alexandra. Livia then expresses an interest in creating a plan to leave because she is concerned that she is going to be interrogated. Writers often accuse Livia of killing her husband and his potential successors, so her worry in the story is an allusion to the possibility that she has committed murder. At this point, the present world is starting to come into focus, and Livia is feeling more herself, causing her to try to take charge. She is comfortable in a leadership role, as demonstrated during her time as wife, and later mother, to the emperor. When a fire started near the Temple of Vesta, "Livia was directing the populace and soldiery in person, as though Augustus were still alive."³¹ Livia was also accustomed to business activity and owned property in Palestine, Asia Minor, and Gaul.³² Therefore, Livia would not act rashly in the present, although she would definitely want to find a solution for their situation. She would also want to assist Tanaquil and Alexandra, since she was known for helping others. When Tiberius was the emperor,

²⁹ Tacitus, *The Annals*, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (New York: Random House, 1942), Perseus Digital Library, Tac. Ann. 1.5.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. Robert Graves (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 139.

³² Joyce E. Salisbury, *Encyclopedia of Women in the Ancient World* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 195.

Livia “intervened more than once to save her friends whose husbands were in trouble.”³³ Livia also contributed to the dowries of senatorial girls.³⁴ In the present, she displays this trait by trying to help Tanaquil and Alexandra escape captivity.

Before she has time to make a plan, Livia is led by a woman to a lecture hall full of students ready to hear an academic talk. The subject of that talk is Livia herself, and by the time she takes a seat on stage, her surroundings have become clear. The succeeding flashback highlights the clarity of the present by being chaotic and complex.

This flashback shows Livia fighting with Tiberius because she wants him to put a new citizen on the juror’s list.³⁵ During the fight, she calls him by his praenomen, Tiberius, because as her son, he is closely related to her.³⁶ Tiberius rejects the favor for Livia unless she allows an official document saying it was forced on him by his mother.³⁷ According to Suetonius, “Livia lost her temper and produced from a strong-box some of Augustus’ old letters to her commenting on Tiberius’ sour and stubborn character.”³⁸ At this point, Livia refers to her husband by the name Augustus. This is most likely not historically accurate, but it is an intentional choice in the story. When Livia speaks here, she does not use her own voice, but the voice of historians. Because of this, she refers to her husband by his popular historical name, Augustus. The quarrel between Livia and

³³ Balsdon, *Roman Women*, 92.

³⁴ Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 216.

³⁵ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, 139.

³⁶ William M. Seaman, “The Roman Name in Historical Fiction,” *The Classical Journal* 51, no. 1 (1955): 28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3293749>.

³⁷ Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 183.

³⁸ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, 139.

Tiberius is seemingly insignificant, but Suetonius gives it as the reason for Tiberius' retreat to Capreae, which gives it much greater importance to Livia's life.³⁹

In Suetonius' description, Livia's relationship with Tiberius was rocky at best, but it is hard to know if that was true. In the section on Tiberius, Suetonius shows Livia in a bad light, but he seems to do so in order to emphasize the negative qualities of Tiberius. This is evident when compared to the section on Augustus, where Livia is shown as a devoted wife and the perfect Roman woman. Suetonius uses Livia to describe the emperor in question instead of giving her definitive character traits. The devolving clarity of the scene is due to the change in Livia's character and the likely fictional nature of her fight with Tiberius.

When the flashback of the quarrel ends, the woman interviews Livia on stage in an attempt to ascertain facts, or the closest things to facts that exist in history. Her name is Livia Drusilla.⁴⁰ She is the daughter of Alfidia and Marcus Livius Drusus Claudianus.⁴¹ In 43 BCE, Livia married Tiberius Claudius Nero, and she had two sons, Tiberius and Drusus.⁴² Livia was pregnant with Drusus at the time of her marriage to Augustus in 38 BCE.⁴³ In general, Livia is considered to have been a loving and supportive wife to Augustus.⁴⁴ He sought her advice, she nursed him when he was sick, and "her influence on Augustus was likely to have been a humanizing influence."⁴⁵

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 88.

⁴¹ Herbert-Brown, "Livia."

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, 88.

⁴⁴ Balsdon, *Roman Women*, 90.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 91.

In the story, Livia feels a twinge in her stomach at the mention of Drusus because she is pained by the memory of his death in 9 BCE.⁴⁶ Livia then starts to grow tired of the questions and tries to ignore them. However, the woman persists in the interrogation, steering the discussion towards Livia's privileges.

One of these privileges was the right to use a *carpentum*, a ceremonial vehicle.⁴⁷ Livia also went to games with Augustus and travelled with him on state business.⁴⁸ She was personally involved in building shrines and temples.⁴⁹ She and Augustus were in close contact with their grandchildren and dedicated a statue in honor of their favorite grandchild who died.⁵⁰

The last question comes from a student in the audience, who asks Livia if she murdered Augustus. This is a highly debated topic among scholars. Some claim that "Livia was probably responsible for eliminating all Augustus' relatives whose existence obstructed Tiberius' succession."⁵¹ This is a serious accusation, one with which other scholars firmly disagree and try "to demonstrate the utter absurdity and baselessness of such a notion."⁵² The division of scholarly opinions creates two opposing characters of Livia. The next scene, Livia's final flashback, plays with the idea of Livia's ability to commit murder and highlights the confusion and chaos that is reflected in her character when such contradictions exist.

⁴⁶ Purcell, "*Livia and the Womanhood of Rome*," 165.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁴⁸ Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 75.

⁴⁹ Purcell, "*Livia and the Womanhood of Rome*," 182.

⁵⁰ Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 33.

⁵¹ Herbert-Brown, "Livia."

⁵² M. P. Charlesworth, "Livia and Tanaquil," *The Classical Review* 41, no. 2 (1927): 55, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/701198>.

The flashback starts with Tiberius arriving at the house. Livia is said to have summoned Tiberius with a letter, but that “it has not been thoroughly ascertained whether at the city of Nola he found Augustus still breathing or quite lifeless.”⁵³ Tacitus claims that after this, favorable reports were published until finally “the same report told men that Augustus was dead and that Tiberius Nero was master of the State.”⁵⁴

The account given by Tacitus of the death of Augustus and subsequent accession of Tiberius is very similar to the passage where Livy describes Tanaquil’s role in the rise of Servius Tullius to the throne.⁵⁵ In both stories, the male ruler is already dead, but his wife postpones delivering the news to the public until the new ruler, chosen by her, has been firmly established. The similarities between the narratives confirms that these are, in fact, just stories, because it would be unlikely for them both to be true.⁵⁶ It is difficult to believe that two powerful women have such similar stories, but it is much easier to believe that perhaps Livy’s version, which was written first, influenced Tacitus’ work. This is not unheard of, since much of court history involves the repetition of similar narratives.⁵⁷

The altered reality of the scene in which Livia’s hands start pale and then turn red with blood shows the dichotomy of opinions regarding Livia’s alleged murder of Augustus. Tiberius also seems to be arriving, right when Livia sees two Augustuses, one

⁵³ Tacitus, *The Annals*, Tac. Ann. 1.5.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Charlesworth, “Livia and Tanaquil,” 55.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Charlesworth also compares the accession of Tiberius with that of Nero. Both stories involve an emperor, Augustus or Claudius, who was convinced to choose a stepson as his heir. When the emperor shows signs of changing his mind, he dies, and the mother of the potential heir, Livia or Agrippina the Younger, keeps this information from the public until her son has become the new emperor.

alive and one dead. This shows the uncertainty of whether Augustus was alive or dead when Tiberius arrived at the house. At the end of the scene, Livia speaks in a masculine voice, which represents how these stories are only told by men, never by Livia herself. Therefore the voice that has been passed down through the centuries is not her own.

The character of Livia in the story represents the jumbled and vague depictions of the real Livia from ancient and modern writers. There are few facts about Livia agreed upon by all historians, and primary sources such as Suetonius and Tacitus describe Livia to fit their own interests and do not give her the characteristics of an actual person. When attempting to understand Livia, it is important to consider the existing biases in the available sources. The contradictions that are prevalent in the accounts of her life combine to make the confusing character in the story.

Analysis of Tanaquil

Tanaquil was a woman born to an unknown wealthy Etruscan family in the 7th century BCE.⁵⁸ When she married, she and her husband moved to Rome, where he became the king and she became the queen. There are few sources available that contain information specific to Tanaquil, leaving large gaps in her life's account. In this story, general information on Etruscan life gathered from tomb paintings, jewelry, and other archaeological evidence obtained through excavations is used in an attempt to fill in those gaps. There are no surviving documents written by Tanaquil herself or even ones about her from an Etruscan perspective. Instead, the most substantial written evidence from an ancient author comes from Livy, who wrote about Tanaquil mostly in the form of legends. The mythic quality and lack of specific details in the existing information on Tanaquil led to the creation of a character based in large part on general material about Etruscan women, rather than on Tanaquil specifically. The story also shows the likely false nature of the legends associated with Tanaquil and how those legends cannot function as historical fact.

At the beginning of the story, Tanaquil meets Livia when she enters the classroom. The blurred elements of the scene serve as a contrast to the clear and detailed flashback that follows. This first flashback takes place at an Etruscan party full of reclining couples, a scene taken from the *Tomba Del Leopardi*, which is located in Tarquinia.⁵⁹ The banquet scene consists of three groups of two people, each reclining on a diamond-patterned flat surface like a chair, while a few naked figures stand around

⁵⁸ Anne Commire and Deborah Klezmer, *Women in World History: A Biographical Encyclopedia* vol. 15 (Detroit: Yorkin Publications, 2002), 154.

⁵⁹ Etruscan, *Copy of Tomba Del Leopardi*, tomb painting, 480-470 BCE, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Denmark.

them.⁶⁰ This scene from the *Tomba Del Leopardi* shows a group of people at a feast being waited on by slaves who are pouring wine for the Etruscan couples to drink.⁶¹ This was common practice in Etruria at this time since men and women reclined together, often on the same couches.⁶²

In the same flashback, the descriptions of Tanaquil's clothes are quite detailed because there is a large amount of information about Etruscan dress, even though none of it is specific to Tanaquil. In the scene, Tanaquil wears her hair arranged in a single braid, which was a common style during the Archaic Period.⁶³ She also wears golden earrings, which are based on an Etruscan ear stud with a circular pattern made from stones and granulation.⁶⁴ Tanaquil also wears a fibula at each shoulder based on a large Etruscan fibula with decorative lions made from granulation.⁶⁵ The technique used on the earrings and the fibulae, granulation, was common in Etruscan jewelry.⁶⁶ Granulation is a complex process that requires skill and patience and "often goes with metalworking of a high level."⁶⁷ Showing Tanaquil in jewelry of such a high quality indicates her status as a member of the Etruscan elite. The other items of Tanaquil's costume serve a similar function as the jewelry. She wears a *chiton* with a *tebenna* draped over it and sandals on

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Mette Moltesen and Marjatta Nielsen, *Catalogue: Etruria and Central Italy: 450-30 B.C.* (Copenhagen: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 1996), 20.

⁶² Etruscan, *Sarcophagus of the Married Couple*, polychromed terracotta, 520-510 BCE, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France, ARTstor: LESSING_ART_10311441963.

⁶³ Tortora and Eubank, *Survey of Historic Costume*, 79.

⁶⁴ Etruscan, *Ear Stud*, gold filigree and granulation and glass paste, 530-480 BCE, British Museum, London, United Kingdom, ARTstor: LESSING_ART_10311440198.

⁶⁵ Etruscan, *Large Disk Fibula (Gold Fibula)*, gold, 670-650 BCE, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, Vatican City, ARTstor: SCALA_ARCHIVES_1039779596.

⁶⁶ Diane Lee Carroll, "A Classification for Granulation in Ancient Metalwork," *American Journal of Archaeology* 78, no. 1 (1974): 33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/503754>.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 39.

her feet to separate her from the servants in the room and to indicate that she is a proper Etruscan woman.⁶⁸

The entire flashback is quite clear, especially when compared to the grey haze of the previous, present-day scene. Over the course of the story, this switches so that the present is clear while the past is blurry. This highlights how the historian's struggle to understand Tanaquil is never ending.

The contrast is immediately shown again when the flashback ends and Tanaquil returns to the hazy present, which is starting to come into focus as the personalities of the women emerge. Here, Tanaquil displays a more positive attitude towards men than the other women. This is because "women had a considerable degree of equality" in Etruscan society.⁶⁹ Wealthy Etruscan women were more independent than women in other societies at that time.⁷⁰ Women were also able to recline with men, attend games, and sometimes hold places of honor.⁷¹ In the story, Tanaquil accepts the current situation and is comfortable with the present-day man.

In the present, Tanaquil looks out of the window in the door, and though everything remains indistinct, she sees a tour group. At first, she thinks it may be a party, which is a reflection of her earlier flashback to an Etruscan banquet. Tanaquil then sees a girl and her father, which prompts her to recall the day she left Tarquinii and presumably never saw her family again. This flashback is clearer than the previous scene and shows

⁶⁸ Tortora and Eubank, *Survey of Historic Costume*, 78.

⁶⁹ Maja Sprenger and Gilda Bartoloni, *The Etruscans: Their History, Art, and Architecture*, trans. Robert Erich Wolf (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1983), 19.

⁷⁰ Larissa Bonfante, "Daily Life and Afterlife," in *Etruscan Life and Afterlife*, ed. Larissa Bonfante (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), 236.

⁷¹ Ellen Macnamara, *Everyday Life of the Etruscans* (London: B.T. Batsford LTD, 1973), 169.

the Etruscan city of Tanaquil's origin, Tarquinii.⁷² From there, Tanaquil traveled to Rome with her husband in 630 BCE.⁷³ According to Livy, Tanaquil went to Rome, "forgetting the love she owed her native land, if she could only see her husband honoured."⁷⁴ This explanation most likely reflects the prejudice of contemporary societies against Etruscan women for being more equal to men, and therefore does little to explain Tanaquil's character.

Before setting off on the journey to Rome, the character of Tanaquil looks out over Tarquinii and attempts to commit its haphazard appearance to memory. In the 7th century BCE, Etruscan cities showed "little evidence of large-scale grid planning."⁷⁵ The shops and houses were spread together in an irregular manner.⁷⁶ The houses themselves were single story buildings made of unfired brick, which usually had their own deep stone wells.⁷⁷ Tanaquil takes in these details before climbing into the *carpentum* and leaving for Rome, ending the flashback.⁷⁸

In the increasingly clear present, Tanaquil continues to trust her surroundings despite Livia and Alexandra's negative attitudes. Unlike those two women, there is no evidence to suggest Tanaquil would dislike or mistrust other people. She was said to have been "a woman of coolness and resource, devoted to the cause of her husband and children."⁷⁹ As an Etruscan, her public and private life were not as separate as in

⁷² Commire and Klezmer, *Women in World History*, 154.

⁷³ Salisbury, *Encyclopedia of Women in the Ancient World*, 107.

⁷⁴ Livy, *The History of Rome*, trans. Benjamin Oliver Foster (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), Perseus Digital Library, Liv. 1.34.5.

⁷⁵ Macnamara, *Everyday Life of the Etruscans*, 63.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁷⁹ Charlesworth, "Livia and Tanaquil," 56.

contemporary societies. Therefore, the character of Tanaquil in the story is more relaxed in the present situation than Livia and Alexandra. Tanaquil also tells the other women she has a feeling they will be fine in their present situation, which is related to the fact that Etruscan women were said to be “skilled in celestial prodigies.”⁸⁰ This leads to a flashback that is hazier than the ones that precede it.

In this flashback, Tanaquil and her husband Lucumo are on their way to Rome when an eagle takes Lucumo’s cap off of his head, flies away with it, returns, and places it back on his head.⁸¹ Tanaquil interprets this as a sign that Lucumo will achieve greatness.⁸² After this incident, Lucumo is said to have changed his name to Lucius Tarquinius Priscus and become the king of Rome.⁸³ This story is unlikely to be historically accurate and reads, instead, like a legend about how Tarquinius became king of Rome. It plays off the idea of the “‘etrusca disciplina’ of augury and bird lore,” since it involves an eagle acting as a sign.⁸⁴ Tanaquil’s interpretation of the event reflects how the Etruscans were known for reading signs.⁸⁵

After the flashback ends, Tanaquil is taken to the library to be interviewed by a class of students who are studying Etruscans. The man brings Tanaquil to the library because, like the lecture hall Livia is brought to, it represents a place where people, specifically students, go to learn. Everything in the present is clear at this point, which contrasts with the chaotic flashback that follows.

⁸⁰ Livy, *The History of Rome*, Liv. 1.34.9.

⁸¹ Ibid., Liv. 1.34.8.

⁸² Ibid., Liv. 1.34.9.

⁸³ Commire and Klezmer, *Women in World History*, 154.

⁸⁴ Bonfante, “Daily Life and Afterlife,” 233.

⁸⁵ Livy, *The History of Rome*, Liv. 1.34.9.

The next flashback tells the story of Servius Tullius, a child, whose head burst into flames while he was sleeping.⁸⁶ Tanaquil hears screams and runs over to find a group of people standing around the boy on fire. Tanaquil calls for quiet and prevents the spectators from putting out the fire.⁸⁷ Then, Tarquinius appears, although he is out of focus. This is because Tanaquil is said to have taken her husband aside to predict that the boy would “one day be a lamp to [their] dubious fortunes, and a protector to the royal house in the day of its distress.”⁸⁸ According to Livy, Tanaquil and Tarquinius began raising the boy as a son, which is shown by Tanaquil announcing in a manly voice that they would care for the boy. The only voice on this matter comes from Livy, so it is really his voice, and not Tanaquil’s, that speaks here.

The chaotic and unrealistic description of this story parallels the likely false nature of it. It serves as a way to explain Servius Tullius’ rise to power, since he was not related to Tanaquil and Tarquinius by blood and is included in the story about Tanaquil because it is one of the only extant accounts of her.

The Servius Tullius flashback ends, and Tanaquil returns to the present, where she is being interviewed in the library. In the interview, the man attempts to confirm facts about the life of Tanaquil so that the class can learn about her.

The man starts with some basic information about Tanaquil, who was born in the mid 7th century BCE to a noble Etruscan family. She married Lucumo, a Greek from Corinth, and had two sons Lucius and Arruns.⁸⁹ She traveled from Tarquinii to Rome around 630 BCE and is said to have urged her husband to make this journey so that he

⁸⁶ Ibid., Liv. 1.39.1.

⁸⁷ Ibid., Liv. 1.39.2.

⁸⁸ Ibid., Liv. 1.39.3.

⁸⁹ Commire and Klezmer, *Women in World History*, 154.

could advance himself.⁹⁰ Livy claims that Tanaquil and her husband were both responsible for their journey to Rome because “the self-confidence implanted in his bosom by his wealth was heightened by his marriage with Tanaquil, who was a woman...not of a character lightly to endure a humbler rank in her new environment than she had enjoyed in the condition to which she had been born.”⁹¹ The sources seem undecided as to why Tanaquil went to Rome, since some see her as responsible and others her husband. However, once in Rome, Tanaquil worked to make Tarquinius king.⁹²

To conclude the interview, one of the students asks Tanaquil about Tarquinius’ death and Servius Tullius’ subsequent rise to power. This is the legend that most clearly shows Tanaquil in a powerful light, moving her beyond her earlier role as a simple interpreter of signs. When a student asks a question about the legend, Tanaquil gets angry at the class for taking notes. She grabs a piece of paper from one of the students but the words on it mean nothing to her. This represents how the questions being asked and the so-called factual answers do not truly allow the students to understand Tanaquil.

The final flashback shows that Tanaquil “was very much the mistress of the situation when, after the death of her husband, she set aside her own sons in order

⁹⁰ Macnamara, *Everyday Life of the Etruscans*, 27.

⁹¹ Livy, *The History of Rome*, Liv. 1.34.4.

⁹² Bonfante, “Daily Life and Afterlife,” 233. Cary, M. and H. H. Scullard, *A History of Rome Down to the Reign of Constantine*, 3rd ed. (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1975), 39-50.

Cary and Scullard say that Tarquinius gained the throne peacefully in 616 BCE. At this time, the king was chosen by the Senate and the people, not by familial relation.

that...Servius Tullius, might become king of Rome.”⁹³ Since Tanaquil is given credit for choosing the heir, that is what she does in the story.

People are in uproar as Tarquinius is dying, so Tanaquil shuts out the screams of the public.⁹⁴ Then she orders the palace be closed and removes all witnesses before gathering supplies to heal Tarquinius’ wound, although it is clear that he is beyond saving.⁹⁵ Tanaquil then summarily dismisses her sons and summons Servius Tullius, telling him that the kingdom belongs to him. She addresses him, “We, too, were foreigners, yet we reigned. Consider what you are, not whence you were born. If your counsels are benumbed in this sudden crisis, at least use mine.”⁹⁶ Tanaquil then tells the crowd that her husband is alive but that they should obey Servius Tullius for the time being.⁹⁷ In the story, this is shown when Tanaquil stumbles outside as the memory fades away into a grey haze and she announces that Tarquinius is alive but that Servius Tullius will take over for now. She speaks in a manly voice because there is no record of her doing this other than in legends written by Livy centuries later. She never had the chance to speak for herself, so even when she talks in the story, it is not her voice that is heard, but that of a man.

Like Livia, Tanaquil was a powerful woman in her time, but today she is an elusive figure. The information about Tanaquil comes mostly in the form of legends, which should not be mistaken for historical fact. In the story, the character of Tanaquil is a combination of these legends and general knowledge of Etruscan women, and the

⁹³ Macnamara, *Everyday Life of the Etruscans*, 168.

⁹⁴ Livy, *The History of Rome*, Liv. 1.41.1.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, Liv. 1.41.2.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, Liv. 1.41.3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Liv. 1.41.5.

chaotic elements of the story represent the fictional qualities of the accounts of Tanaquil's life.

Analysis of Alexandra

Alexandra Salome was a woman who ruled as Hasmonean Queen for nine years. Although there are a few solid accounts of her reign, the story of Alexandra's life before becoming queen is murky. There was an Alexandra married to the Hasmonean King Aristobulus I, and there was also an Alexandra married to the next Hasmonean King Alexander Jannaeus. This Alexandra became queen after the death of Alexander Jannaeus, but it may or may not have been the same Alexandra that was married to Aristobulus I.⁹⁸

Most of the confusion surrounding the life of Alexandra stems from a lack of historical evidence. Josephus provides the most information about Alexandra, but his accounts are often contradictory and tend to devolve into his opinions on her leadership abilities as opposed to historical facts. He often assigns Alexandra little control over her actions, instead giving credit to her husband or religious leaders for her accomplishments. However, Josephus probably gives the most complete account of Alexandra's life, making it difficult to separate facts and opinions.

Contemporary scholar Kenneth Atkinson has written extensively on Alexandra and praises her excessively. Atkinson believes that the Alexandra married to Alexander Jannaeus was not the same Alexandra married to Aristobulus I, although other scholars disagree with him. Atkinson devotes a large amount of scholarship to Alexandra, something other modern scholars have neglected to do. Instead, these scholars have a tendency to mention her in passing while focusing on her husband and sons. The lack of information and confusion about basic historical facts, such as her identity, made it

⁹⁸ Isaiah Gafni, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 17, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), s.v. "Salome Alexandra."

difficult to write Alexandra's character. The structure and content of the story emphasizes the confusion surrounding her life.

Alexandra's story starts in the present, which is quite blurry, much to her annoyance. Her character dislikes the lack of control, since Alexandra is said to have "preferred the power of an imperious dominion above all things."⁹⁹ The hazy quality of the scene also sets up the contrast to the first flashback, which takes place near a courtyard.

The flashback is clear because it involves relatively basic information and is not particularly controversial. It takes place near a courtyard in a palace based on the one Alexander Jannaeus and his family used to have in Jericho, where they would go for the winter.¹⁰⁰ In the palace, there is a "square at the center of the mound and the walls around it served as the foundations of a peristyle courtyard in the middle of the building, which was the principal source of light and ventilation."¹⁰¹

Next to the courtyard is Alexandra, wearing a purple tunic and mantle, with a linen girdle around her waist and her hair blowing in the breeze. At this time, women often wore their hair in curls or fastened with pins into a plait.¹⁰² Wealthy people generally wore linen and silk, often in bright colors like purple and crimson.¹⁰³ Women wore large, full tunics and mantles with a girdle wrapped multiple times around their

⁹⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston (Auburn and Buffalo: John E. Beardsley, 1895), Perseus Digital Library, J. AJ 13.430.

¹⁰⁰ Ehud Netzer, *The Palaces of the Hasmoneans and Herod the Great* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2001), 26.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰² Edmond Stapfer, *Palestine in the Time of Christ* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1885), 198.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 190.

waist.¹⁰⁴ Women also wore shoes made of soft leather and gold and silver necklaces, bracelets, rings, and hair ornaments.¹⁰⁵

Alexandra looks at her face with a mirror, which is small and made of bright metal. Women also darkened their eyebrows and eyelashes with “a powder made with an extract of lead.”¹⁰⁶ The makeup would have been kept in horn tubes and applied with a needle made of ivory or bone.¹⁰⁷

The flashback of Alexandra in the courtyard ends, and Alexandra returns to the present, which starts to clear as she talks to Livia and Tanaquil. Alexandra feels vulnerable and worries that she has been captured, which stems from her time resolving international conflicts as queen. When Tanaquil suggests that this is a party, Alexandra laughs at what she considers naiveté. This demonstrates her personality as “a strong-willed and independent monarch.”¹⁰⁸ Josephus referred to Alexandra as “a woman... who showed no signs of the weakness of her sex, for she was sagacious to the greatest degree in her ambition of governing.”¹⁰⁹ Although Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra are all strong women, Alexandra is the most decidedly independent. She lived to be 73 and reigned as the sole ruler of Judea for nine years.¹¹⁰

Alexandra then has a flashback to Alexander Jannaeus on his deathbed telling her to rule as queen. This story comes from Josephus, who says that when Alexandra saw Alexander Jannaeus was ready to die, “she came to him weeping and lamenting, and

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 193.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 194.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 195.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 195.

¹⁰⁸ Kenneth Atkinson, “The Salome No One Knows,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 34, no. 4 (2008): 72.

¹⁰⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, J. AJ 13.430.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

bewailed herself and her sons on the desolate condition they should be left in.”¹¹¹ While on his deathbed, Alexander Jannaues instructs Alexandra to take power and work with the Pharisees.¹¹²

Some modern scholars describe Alexandra’s marriage as difficult, since Alexander Jannaeus “was much involved in warfare, including prolonged and bloody civil war. He also kept a number of concubines and was a heavy drinker.”¹¹³ Regardless of her relationship with her husband, when he died, “Alexandra continued his military campaign, successfully captured Ragaba and returned home to Jerusalem as the nation’s new monarch.”¹¹⁴

Josephus paints Alexandra as a devoted wife following the orders of her now dead husband. Some modern scholars show Alexandra as a woman with a difficult past and incredible military skills. She was also said to have “experienced a strong taste of power along with a sense of right to rule and preserve the dynasty.”¹¹⁵ These conflicting portraits translate into the Alexandra in the story who accepts advice from her dying husband but also feels completely at home in her new leadership role.

The flashback of Alexander Jannaeus’ death ends and Alexandra returns to the present, where she remains in the room with Livia and Tanaquil. Alexandra decides she does not trust the modern people and wants to leave. She was known for exercising her authority and being knowledgeable of politics, so in the story she is comfortable making

¹¹¹ Ibid., J. AJ 13.398.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Joseph Sievers, “The Role of Women in the Hasmonean Dynasty,” in *Josephus, the Bible, and History*, ed. Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 136.

¹¹⁴ Atkinson, “The Salome No One Knows,” 64.

¹¹⁵ Ellen Irene Case, “Salome Alexandra: A Study in Achievement, Power and Survival,” Master’s thesis, York University, 1997, 29.

quick judgments and decisions.¹¹⁶ This is “demonstrated by her doings at once, that her mind was fit for action.”¹¹⁷ She was also said to prefer the present to the future, which is why she, unlike Livia and Tanaquil, is the most ready to act in the present day.¹¹⁸

Alexandra is generally described as the kind of person who would rather act than react to events, so this is how her character behaves in the story.

The interactions of the three women in the present lead to the flashback of Alexandra making plans for being queen. Alexandra was allegedly told by her dying husband to resolve the dispute between the Pharisees and the Sadducees.¹¹⁹ The Pharisees were “an influential religious group among Jews in the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods.”¹²⁰ They are said to have believed in life after death and in the ability of man to control his destiny, while still being subject to fate, and they are known for having been the correct interpreters of the law.¹²¹ Sadducees are generally portrayed “as opponents of the Pharisees in matters concerning law or theology.”¹²² They did not believe in fate or life after death, and they are thought to have been “the rich and powerful part of Judaeen society.”¹²³

¹¹⁶ Macurdy, *Vassal-Queens and Some Contemporary Women in the Roman Empire*, 66.

¹¹⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, J. AJ 13.430.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Peter Richardson, *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 76.

¹²⁰ Martin David Goodman, “Pharisees,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Martin David Goodman, “Sadducees,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

Alexandra did make peace with the Pharisees, although there is no real reason to believe that it was Alexander Jannaeus' idea.¹²⁴ At that time, the Pharisees “had the support of the masses, and through them exerted influence on the political and religious institutions of their day.”¹²⁵ Traditionally, wealthy and influential women are associated with the Pharisees, exchanging financial support for more religious and legal rights than the Sadducees gave them.¹²⁶

It seems logical that Alexandra could have been a Pharisee, being herself a powerful woman of the time. Although Pharisees were often considered to be exclusively male, Tal Ilan argues that “women apart from men or with no relationship to men, had followed the Pharisees.”¹²⁷ Some scholars credit Alexandra with great bravery for the decision to live as a Pharisee, since “she had, after all, remained a Pharisee at the time when her husband had persecuted, and even crucified, members of this religious movement!”¹²⁸ However, Josephus accused Alexandra of being under the control of the Pharisees, saying, “while she governed other people...the Pharisees governed her.”¹²⁹ This is interesting coming from Josephus, who at other points praises her leadership abilities.

¹²⁴ Macurdy, *Vassal-Queens and Some Contemporary Women in the Roman Empire*, 65.

¹²⁵ Tal Ilan, “The Attraction of Aristocratic Women to Pharisaism during the Second Temple Period,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 1 (1995): 9.

¹²⁶ Atkinson, “The Salome No One Knows,” 65.

¹²⁷ Ilan, “The Attraction of Aristocratic Women to Pharisaism during the Second Temple Period,” 10.

¹²⁸ Atkinson, “The Salome No One Knows,” 72.

¹²⁹ Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston (Auburn and Buffalo: John E. Beardsley, 1895), Perseus Digital Library, J. BJ 1.110.

The flashback also shows Alexandra determining what she should do about the high priesthood, which was separated from the kingship during her reign.¹³⁰ She chose her elder son Hyrcanus as high priest instead of Aristobulus.¹³¹ According to Josephus, this decision was made because of Hyrcanus' age and "his inactive temper, no way disposing him to disturb the public."¹³²

As the flashback comes to an end, it starts to shake under the forces of Alexander Jannaeus, Hyrcanus, Aristobulus, and the Pharisees. There are many more uncertainties and controversies surrounding Alexandra's support of the Pharisees, which translates into the physical confusion of the scene. The past is starting to break down, just as the present is finally starting to come into focus.

In the present, Alexandra goes to the computer lab, which, like a lecture hall and a library, is a place full of information. When she arrives in the computer lab, she is greeted by students who are working on a group project for a class. Everything is almost completely clear, which serves as a contrast to the next flashback.

This flashback shows Alexandra dealing with the Armenian king Tigranes and her own sons. During Alexandra's reign, Tigranes started extending his power into Palestine. He had taken control of the Phoenician coast and attacked Ptolemais, now directly threatening Judea.¹³³ Alexandra tried to stop Tigranes' invasion, so she sent an embassy to meet his court.¹³⁴ According to some scholars, Alexandra "confronted the Armenian

¹³⁰ Richardson, *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans*, 241.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹³² Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, J. BJ 1.107.

¹³³ Martin Sicker, *Between Rome and Jerusalem: 30 Years of Roman-Judaeian Relations* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001), 41.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

king Tigranes, who abandoned his plan to invade Judea and left the region.”¹³⁵ Other scholars believe that “before Alexandra’s diplomacy even had an opportunity to begin to explore the resolution of the immediate crisis, the matter was resolved unilaterally by Rome.”¹³⁶

Regardless, during her reign, Alexandra worked through difficult political problems, all while balancing her personal ones. When Alexandra became the queen, her sons fought over the high priesthood and had trouble living under the same roof.¹³⁷ It seems likely that Alexandra built the twin palaces near the main palace to keep her sons separated.¹³⁸ Of course, the twin palaces were built in such a way so as not to disrupt the view from the main palace, which shows Alexandra’s control and power at this time.¹³⁹

The flashback, where she contemplates Tigranes and her sons, is more indistinct than the previous ones because of the amount of inference needed to create it. It is unclear how much control Alexandra actually had over the Tigranes situation. There is also little evidence about the relationship of Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, so the story is centered on specific problems based on the limited information available.

After the flashback, Alexandra is interviewed by the students in the computer lab, and everything is completely clear. The interviewer tries to pinpoint facts about Alexandra and attempts to get to know her, while the others type the questions and answers into the computer. Alexandra Salome was born in 142 BCE and was the wife of

¹³⁵ Atkinson, “The Salome No One Knows,” 64.

¹³⁶ Sicker, *Between Rome and Jerusalem*, 41.

¹³⁷ Netzer, *The Palaces of the Hasmoneans and Herod the Great*, 30.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

Alexander Jannaeus, a Hasmonean king.¹⁴⁰ She had two sons, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus.¹⁴¹ After the death of Alexander Jannaeus, Alexandra ruled as queen from 76 BCE to 67 BCE.¹⁴²

She inherited a country weary from years of war and full of conflicting religious sects, and she guided the country in the transition from a period of war to that of peace.¹⁴³ She managed the kingdom, built up the army, and brought peace to the country.¹⁴⁴ Alexandra also “appears to have made peace with her husband’s enemy, the Nabatean king Aretas, and apparently undertook a military expedition to help him regain Damascus from a strongman named Ptolemy Mennaeus.”¹⁴⁵ This was said to have “brought peace to Judea’s eastern and northern frontiers,” which had been a source of conflict during Alexander Jannaeus’ reign.¹⁴⁶

The final question asked to Alexandra concerns her identity, since the woman who married Aristobulus I may not have been the same woman that married Alexander Jannaeus.¹⁴⁷ At this point, Alexandra is annoyed by the questions and the recording of her answers, so she grabs the keyboard and throws it on the ground in frustration at not being truly understood.

¹⁴⁰ Macurdy, *Vassal-Queens and Some Contemporary Women in the Roman Empire*, 64.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁴² Ross S. Kraemer, “Jewish Women and Women’s Judaism(s) at the Beginning of Christianity,” in *Women and Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D’Angelo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 50.

¹⁴³ Case, “Salome Alexandra: A Study in Achievement, Power and Survival,” 31.

¹⁴⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, J. AJ 13.408.

¹⁴⁵ Atkinson, “The Salome No One Knows,” 64.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Kenneth Atkinson, *Queen Salome: Jerusalem’s Warrior Monarch of the First Century B.C.E.* (London: McFarland & Company, 2012), 96.

This leads to the final flashback of Alexandra, which is intentionally confusing. It is meant to create two Alexandras, the wife of Aristobulus I and the wife of Alexander Jannaeus. When they turn around, it is impossible to tell if they are the same person. The two possible husbands stumbling around the courtyard and the two Alexandras near them are meant to illustrate the confusion surrounding Alexandra Salome's identity.

Atkinson is the principal scholar that argues for the existence of more than one Alexandra, while other scholars believe that she is one and the same. After the death of Aristobulus I, his wife Alexandra would have been married to Alexander Jannaeus, his brother, in accordance with Jewish law of levirate marriage.¹⁴⁸ This means there are two valid ways to look at the life of Alexandra, which makes it impossible to determine which one is historical fact.

When Alexandra speaks at the end, it is in a masculine voice, which represents the way her life has come down to the present, entirely through the male voice. In the ending scene, it is unclear who Alexandra is, and the closer the group seems to get to the truth, the further away from it the students actually are.

Alexandra, the Hasmonean Queen, is difficult to research and impossible to understand. The seemingly unreliable accounts of her life, limited amount of scholarship, and disagreement over her identity make Alexandra an elusive historical figure. The character of Alexandra in the story reflects the difficulties involved in studying the life of this Hasmonean Queen.

¹⁴⁸ Gafni, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Salome Alexandra."

Conclusion

For this project, I wrote a story about Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra and analyzed that story in three separate essays. This was intended to shine a light on the lives of these women and explore what can and cannot be known about them from the extant historical sources.

To further this project, the story could be lengthened to include more interactions between the women in the present day. Doing this would allow the present storyline to contain a stronger narrative arc separate from the flashbacks, which would help the story itself stand alone as a piece of fiction.

Furthering the present interactions could also allow more information about religious beliefs, thoughts on the afterlife, marriage, motherhood, and daily life to be incorporated into the characters of Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra. The women could connect over their complex relationships with their husbands and sons. They could express their thoughts on religion and their ideas about the afterlife, which could lead to a debate on where they believe they are in the present. The use of all of this information would allow for a greater comparison of Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra and ultimately provide a deeper understanding of the lives of these women.

As the project stands, it is clear that the information about Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra is often unreliable and contradictory. The number of sources on each of these women varies widely, and researching them can be difficult. This problem is not unique to Livia, Tanaquil, and Alexandra, but is present for many historical women. Studying these women can be challenging, but the struggle to understand them is worthwhile and ultimately, rewarding.

Glossary

Carpentum – two-wheeled cart or a ceremonial vehicle

Chiton – a tunic held together at shoulders with pins; the Etruscan chiton was shorter and less voluminous than the Greek version and often had sleeves cut and sewn into the garment for a more fitted look

Granulation – tiny metal globules used to decorate jewelry

Palla – draped shawl placed over the outer tunic; could be worn draped like a toga, across the shoulders, or over the head as a veil

Stola – a sleeveless outer tunic with straps worn over an under tunic by married Roman women

Strophium – band of fabric that supports breasts

Subligaria – feminine loincloth

Tebenna – a capelike garment with curved edges worn by men and women, often with long tabs hanging down the front

Tunic – basic garment reaching to ankle or floor

Tutulus – hairstyle made by drawing hair to the top of the head and wrapping it in vittae worn by Roman matrons

Vitta – a woolen band used to bind the hair of a Roman matron

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