



Photo: Rosie Morris (Expanded Interiors)

Type: Silver bust of Livia
 Chronology: 1st century AD
 Origin: Herculaneum, Naples (Italy)
 Actual location: Parco Archeologico di Ercolano,
 storerooms inv. 4205/79502

This is a silver bust of Livia, wife of the emperor Augustus. The portrait comes from Herculaneum and was badly damaged by the eruption of the Vesuvius that hit the city in AD 79. The empress features her usual hairstyle but interestingly she wears a diadem of laurel leaves. Laurel was commonly associated with the celebration of martial virtues and used as a male attribute in Roman imperial contexts. So, why is Livia portrayed with such an unusual attribute? The use of the laurel crown as a female attribute is considered an innovation of the Augustan era, as there are no examples of Hellenistic queens wearing a similar attribute. It is likely that the adoption of the laurel in the portrait of Livia had to do with the role that laurel gained within Augustan ideology: since 27BC Augustus had obtained by the Senate the right to decorate the front of his house on the Palatine with two bay trees, and had gradually taken on himself the right to associate himself to laurel, by excluding anyone else from triumphal celebrations with the exception of the members of his family. A wood of bay trees also decorated the villa of Livia ad Gallinas Albas, from which the emperor used to take branches while celebrating his triumphs. At the death of Augustus, in AD14, and in the delicate aftermath of the succession of Tiberius to the throne, Livia was bequeathed the posthumous adoption by Augustus, becoming an effective member of the *gens Iulia* and a descendant of *Venus*. Livia could then be portrayed wearing a laurel crown, a powerful symbol of her belonging to the *gens Iulia* and of her role as the mother of the new emperor.

MY RESEARCH

This bust features in Expanded Interiors, a Fine Art and Archaeology project led by artist Catrin Huber at Newcastle University. Get inspiration from Catrin's work in Pompeii and Herculaneum for your own EPQ project by checking the Expanded Interiors website: <https://research.ncl.ac.uk/expandedinteriors/>