

The Roman Cycle: Parricide, Stability and Assimilation in Livy 1

There are many contradictions at the heart of Roman identity. Is moral virtue determined by where a person comes from, or who they are? How “Roman” are conquered peoples, especially other Italian states who were conquered long in the past? Furthermore, the question of what it meant to be “Roman” took on an even greater importance in the civil wars of the first century BCE, when political rivals were all too willing to define Roman identity in ways that excluded their enemies.

In this paper, I argue that parricides in the first book of *Ab Urbe Condita* function as metaphors for the violent homogenization process in the formation of “Roman” identity. As Roman society grows throughout Livy 1, there is a recurring cycle in which there is growth in some area of the Roman state (population, territory, and/or social organization), which prompts a decrease in political or social stability owing to the incorporation of wild new elements that have not yet found their place within Roman society. This instability comes to a head between members of the Roman state, framing a battle *between* Romans for what it means to *be* Roman - and one way to depict this for a historian who focalizes historical narrative through characters and *exempla* is via parricide. The composite Roman identity becomes analogous to a family; kin-murder, and likewise the murder of thematic doubles, is how stability is restored in Roman society writ large.

To make this argument, I perform three close readings of three instances of parricide in Livy 1. First, I examine the murder of Remus in terms of the conflict of the orders, arguing that the murder culminates in the subordination of plebeian identity to patrician identity. Then, I show that the stretch of narrative beginning with the battle between the Horatii and Curiatii and

ending with the execution of Mettius Fufetius, focusing on the murder of Horatia, is an extended narrative of the subjugation of Alban ethnic identity to the nascent Roman one. Finally, I consider a more nuanced example in the murder of Servius Tullius. I argue that Tullia's actions are a violent act of self-identification: she aligns herself against Servius Tullius's proto-Republican program, in which a person's worth is judged by their innate qualities, by emphasizing the primacy of birth identity, all while simultaneously ignoring the ambiguities in her own birth identity. I compare these through the dual modes of Tanaquil's exhortation to Servius Tullius to "consider who you are, not from where you were born" (*qui sis, non unde natus sis, reputa*) (1.41.3).

Through these three examples I argue that within a system of Roman identity that was composed of disparate groups of people, the Roman elite had a keen interest in controlling what (and thus who) was the normative 'Roman.' Parricide becomes a historical-narrative tool for civic unification, through constructing Roman-ness along certain lines (male, aristocratic, freeborn, Roman), and through subjecting (or even effacing) dissident strains within the composite Roman identity.

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