

## Tarpeia's Devotion to Rome: A new interpretation

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### 1. Livy 1.11.6-9

*Sp. Tarpeius Romanae praeerat arci. Huius filiam virginem auro corrumpit Tatius ut armatos in arcem accipiat; aquam forte ea tum sacris extra moenia petitem ierat. Accepti obrutam armis necavere, seu ut vi capta potius arx videretur seu prodendi exempli causa ne quid usquam fidum proditori esset. Additur fabula, quod volgo Sabini aureas armillas magni ponderis brachio laevo gemmatosque magna specie anulos habuerint, pepigisse eam quod in sinistris manibus haberent; eo scuta illi pro aureis donis congesta. Sunt qui eam ex pacto tradendi quod in sinistris manibus esset derecto arma petisse dicant et fraude visam agere sua ipsam peremptam mercede.*

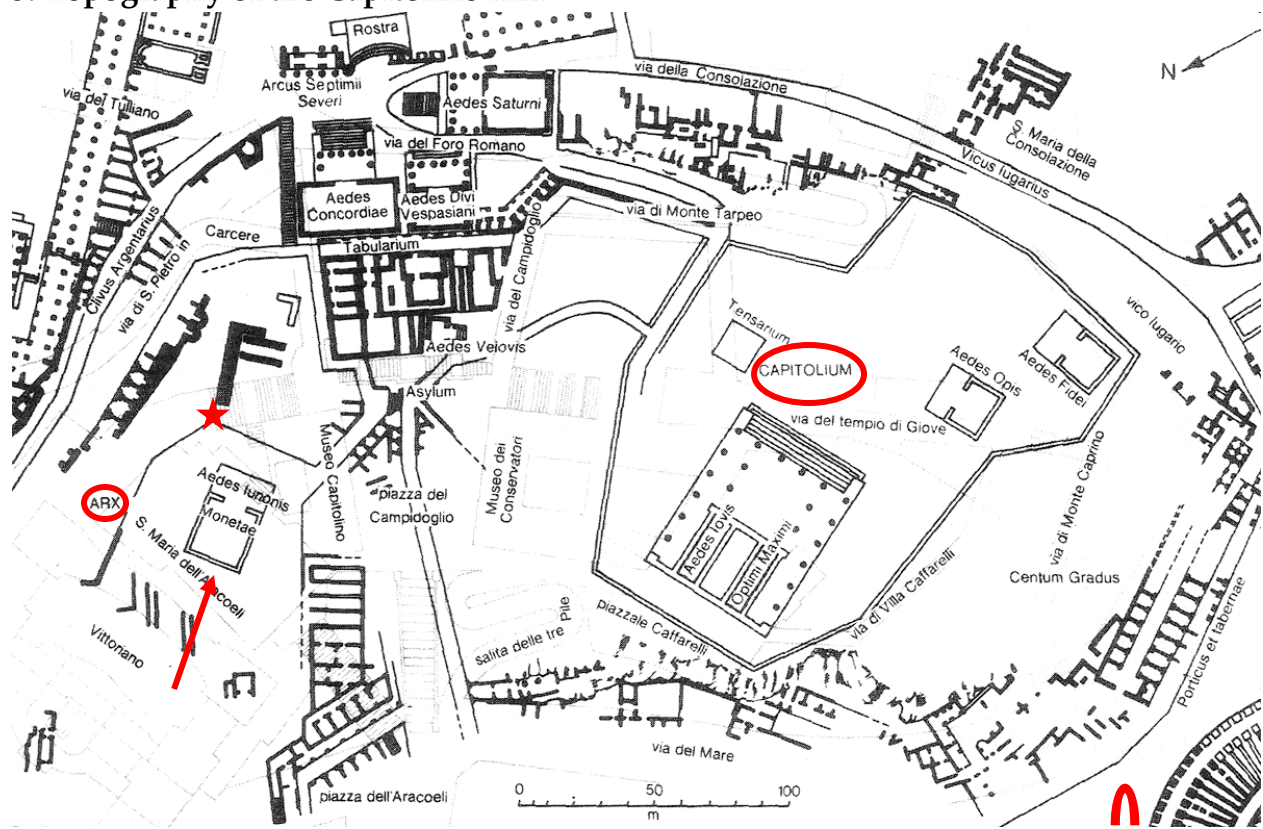
Spurius Tarpeius was the commander of the Roman citadel. Tatius corrupted his virgin daughter with gold so that she would let the armed troops into the citadel; by chance she had gone to seek water for rites outside the walls. Once they were in, they killed her by burying her under their weapons, either so that the citadel would seem to have been taken by force or to show by example that there was no faith in a traitor. There's also a story that the Sabines generally wore golden armbands of great weight and jeweled rings of great beauty on their left arms. She asked them for what they had on their left arms; they showered her with shields instead of gold. There are those who say that after making the agreement for what they had on their left arms, she asked for the weapons; when she appeared deceitful, she paid the price with her life.

## 2. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, AR 2.40.1-3

Ἐπειτα πάλιν ὁ μὲν Πείσων φησὶ τῶν Σαβίνων τὸν χρυσὸν ἐτοιμῶν ὄντων διδόναι τῇ κόρῃ τὸν περὶ τοῖς ἀριστεροῖς βραχίονσι τὴν Τάρπειαν οὐ τὸν κόσμον ἀλλὰ τοὺς θυρεοὺς παρ' αὐτῶν αἰτεῖν. Τατίω δὲ θυμὸν τε εἰσελθεῖν ἐπὶ τῇ ἑξαπάτῃ καὶ λογισμὸν τοῦ μὴ παραβῆναι τὰς ὁμολογίας. δόξαι δ' οὖν αὐτῷ δοῦναι μὲν τὰ ὄπλα, ὥσπερ ἡ παῖς ἠξίωσε, ποιῆσαι δ' ὅπως αὐτοῖς μηδὲν λαβοῦσα χρήσεται, καὶ αὐτίκα διατεινόμενον ὡς μάλιστα ἰσχύος εἶχε ῥῖψαι τὸν θυρεὸν κατὰ τῆς κόρης καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις παρακελεύσασθαι ταῦτ' οὕτως ποιεῖν. οὕτω δὲ βαλλομένην πάντοθεν τὴν Τάρπειαν ὑπὸ πλήθους τε καὶ ἰσχύος τῶν πληγῶν πεσεῖν καὶ περισωρευθεῖσαν ὑπὸ τῶν θυρεῶν ἀποθανεῖν. οἱ δὲ περὶ τὸν Φάβιον ἐπὶ τοῖς Σαβίνοις ποιοῦσι τὴν τῶν ὁμολογιῶν ἀπάτην· δέον γὰρ αὐτοὺς τὸν χρυσὸν, ὥσπερ ἡ Τάρπεια ἠξίου, κατὰ τὰς ὁμολογίας ἀποδιδόναι, χαλεπαίνοντας ἐπὶ τῷ μεγέθει τοῦ μισθοῦ τὰ σκεπαστήρια κατ' αὐτῆς βαλεῖν, ὡς ταῦτα ὅτε ὤμνυσαν αὐτῇ δώσειν ὑπεσχημένους. ἔοικε δὲ τὰ μετὰ ταῦτα γενόμενα τὴν Πείσωνος ἀληθεστέραν ποιεῖν [ἀπόκρισιν]. **τάφου τε γὰρ ἔνθα ἔπεσεν ἠξιώται τὸν ἱερῶτατον τῆς πόλεως κατέχουσα λόφον, καὶ χοὰς αὐτῇ Ῥωμαῖοι καθ' ἕκαστον ἐνιαυτὸν ἐπιτελοῦσι, (λέγω δὲ ἅ Πείσων γράφει) ὧν οὐδενὸς εἰκὸς αὐτήν, εἰ προδιδούσα τὴν πατρίδα τοῖς πολεμίοις ἀπέθανεν, οὔτε παρὰ τῶν προδοθέντων οὔτε παρὰ τῶν ἀποκτεινάντων τυχεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἴ τι λείψανον αὐτῆς ἦν τοῦ σώματος ἀνασκαφὴν ἕξω ῥιφῆναι** σὺν χρόνῳ φόβου τε καὶ ἀποτροπῆς ἔνεκα τῶν μελλόντων τὰ ὅμοια δοῦναι. ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ μὲν τούτων κρινέτω τις ὡς βούλεται.

Again Piso says that the Sabines were ready to give the girl the gold which they had on their left arms, but Tarpeia demanded from them not the jewelry but the shields. At this treachery, Tatius was filled with fury, but found a way to avoid breaking their agreement. He decided to give the weapons, as the girl asked, but in a way that she would never be able to use them. At once stretching out his shield, he threw it upon the girl as hard as he could and commanded the others to do the same. Thus hit from all sides, Tarpeia fell due to the number and strength of the blows; she died buried by shields. But those following Fabius claim that the deceit in the agreement was on the Sabines' side; for when it was necessary to deliver the gold that Tarpeia asked for according to the agreement, they became grouchy at the cost and threw their shields at her, as if they had promised to give her these when they had sworn. But the version of Piso seems more likely to be true. **For there where she fell she was honored with a tomb set on the most sacred hill of the city, and the Romans make liquid sacrifices each year – I repeat what Piso writes –** which no one would be likely to do if she had died betraying her country to the enemy, neither those who were betrayed nor those who killed her. Instead, in time **they would have dug up any part of her body that was left and thrown it away** to inspire fear and ward off anyone who would act similarly. But let each one judge it as he will.

### 3. Topography of the Capitoline Hill



Map from Richardson 1992, p. 69, with my additions:  
 Tarpeian rock marked with a star  
 Carmenta Gate marked with an arch  
 Arrow points to Temple of Juno Moneta  
 Arx and Capitol are circled

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