

Romulus and the Sabine Kings in Tacitus' *Annales*¹

1. Tacitus, *Annales* 3.26.4-28.2

nobis Romulus ut libitum imperitaverat: dein Numa religionibus et divino iure populum devinxit, repertaque quaedam a Tullo et Anco. sed praecipuus Servius Tullius sanctorum legum fuit quis etiam reges obtemperarent.

...

exim continua per viginti annos discordia, non mos, non ius; deterrima quaeque impune ac multa honesta exitio fuere. sexto demum consulatu Caesar Augustus, potentiae securus, quae triumviratu iusserat abolevit deditque iura quis pace et principe uteremur.

Romulus had wielded *imperium* over us as he liked. Next, Numa bound the people with rituals and law from on high, and certain things were devised by Tullus and Ancus. But Servius Tullius chiefly authored laws that even kings would obey.

...

Thereafter [i.e. after the death of Pompey] were dissensions, non-stop for 20 years, no custom, no law; all the worst deeds were done without penalty, and many good deeds were cause for ruin. Finally, in his sixth consulship, Caesar Augustus, secure in his power, abolished what he had ordered during the triumvirate and gave laws that we would use when there was peace and a princeps.

2a. Tacitus, *Annales* 1.10.5

abducta Neroni uxor.

His wife was taken away from Nero.

2b. Tacitus, *Annales* 5.1.2

Caesar cupidine formae aufert marito, incertum an invitam.

Caesar [Augustus], out of desire for her beauty, stole [Livia] from her husband—it is uncertain whether it was without her consent.

2c. Tacitus, *Annales* 12.6.2 (cf. Suetonius, *Caligula* 25.1)

audivisse a parentibus, vidisse ipsos abripi coniuges ad libita Caesarum.

That they had heard from their parents, had themselves seen spouses snatched away at the pleasure of the Caesars.

3a. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 14.849-15.1-6

hanc manibus notis Romanae conditor urbis / excipit et priscum pariter cum corpore nomen / mutat Horamque vocat, quae nunc dea iuncta Quirino est.

...

quaeritur interea qui tantae pondera molis / sustineat tantoque queat succedere regi: / destinat imperio clarum praenuntia veri / fama Numam; non ille satis cognosse Sabinae / gentis habet ritus, animo maiora capaci / concipit et, quae sit rerum natura, requirit.

¹ All translations are my own.

The founder of the city of Rome takes [Hersilia] up with marked hands and changes her former name equally with her body, and calls her Hora, who now is a goddess joined to Quirinus.

...

Meanwhile is it asked who would shoulder the weight of so great a burden and who could succeed the king: rumor, the herald of truth, designates for *imperium* the renowned Numa; it was not enough for him to have learned the rites of the Sabine race, he grasps greater things with his capable mind and researches what is the nature of things.

3b. Tacitus, *Annales* 1.11.1

ille varie diserebat de magnitudine imperii sua modestia: solam divi Augusti mentem tantae molis capacem.

[Tiberius], out of his own modesty, made various claims about the magnitude of *imperium*: only the mind of the deified Augustus had the capacity for so great a burden.

4a. Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.17.1-7

patrum interim animos certamen regni ac cupido versabat; necdum ad singulos, quia nemo magnopere eminebat in novo populo, pervenerat: factionibus inter ordines certabatur. oriundi ab Sabinis, ne quia post Tati mortem ab sua parte non erat regnatum, in societate aequa possessionem imperii amitterent, sui corporis creari regem volebant: Romani veteres peregrinum regem aspernabantur. in variis voluntatibus regnari tamen omnes volebant, libertatis dulcedine nondum experta. timor deinde patres incessit ne civitatem sine imperio, exercitum sine duce, multarum circa civitatum inirritatis animis, vis aliqua externa adoriretur...id ab re quod nunc quoque tenet nomen interregnum appellatum. fremere deinde plebs multiplicatam servitutem, centum pro uno dominos factos.

Meanwhile competition and lust for kingship embroiled the passions of the senators; nor had it fallen to individuals, since no one stood out more than others among a new people: competition occurred in factions between the orders. Those originating from the Sabines wanted someone from their own body made king lest, because after the death of Tattius nobody from their side had been king, they lose possession of *imperium* in fair cooperation. The original Romans scorned the idea of a foreign king. Despite the difference in inclinations all still wanted to be ruled by a king, the sweetness of liberty not yet having been tasted. But then a fear entered the senators lest, with the passions of many surrounding states provoked, some external force attack a state without *imperium* and an army without a leader...it is from this affair that even now it has a name called *interregnum*. But then the *plebs* began to murmur that their slavery had been multiplied, that 100 masters had been created instead of one.

4b. Tacitus, *Annales* 1.4.1-3

igitur verso civitatis statu nihil usquam prisci et integri moris: omnes exuta aequalitate iussa principis aspectare, nulla in praesens formidine, dum Augustus aetate validus seque et domum in pacem sustentavit. postquam provecata iam senectus aegro et corpore fatigabatur, aderatque finis et spes novae, pauci bona libertatis in cassum disserere, plures bellum pavescere, alii cupere. pars multa maxima imminentis dominos variis rumoribus differebant: truce[m] Agrippam et ignominia accensum non aetate neque rerum experientia tantae moli parem, Tiberium Neronem maturum annis,

spectatum bello, sed vetere atque insita Claudiae familiae superbia, multaque indicia saevitiae, quamquam premantur, erumpere.

And so with the state of society overturned nothing anywhere remained of former and intact custom: with equality divested all looked to the orders of the *princeps*, with no fear for the present, so long as Augustus was vigorous in age and kept himself and his household at peace. Later on, as his advanced old age was now tiring him out with his feeble body, and the end was at hand, and new expectations, a few discussed the benefits of liberty in vain, more grew fearful of war, some desired it. The greatest part by far began distinguishing their imminent masters with all sorts of talk: Agrippa was crude and inflamed by disgrace, no equal to so great a burden by his age or experience of affairs, while Tiberius Nero was ripe in years, proven in war, but of the old and inherent arrogance of the Claudian family, and many signs of cruelty, although they were suppressed, had burst out.

5. Tacitus, *Annales* 4.38.4-5

perstititque posthac secretis etiam sermonibus aspernari talem sui cultum. quod alii modestiam, multi, quia diffideret, quidam ut degeneris animi interpretabantur. optimos quippe mortalium altissima cupere: sic Herculem et Liberum apud Graecos, Quirinum apud nos deum numero additos: melius Augustum, qui speraverit.

After this, [Tiberius] persisted, even in his private conversations, that he rejected any such worship of himself. Some read this as modesty, many that he was diffident, certain that he was of a degenerate mindset: indeed, the best of mortals desire the highest things. In such a way Hercules and Liber among the Greeks, and among us Quirinus was added to the number of the gods. Augustus did better, who aspired.

6a. Tacitus, *Annales* 1.54.1

idem annus novas caerimonias accepit addito sodalium Augustalium sacerdotio, ut quondam Titus Tatius retinendis Sabinorum sacris sodalis Titios instituerat.

The same year admitted new religious usages by the addition of the priesthood of the Augustal fellows, just as once upon a time Titus Tatius had established the Titian fellows for preserving the rites of the Sabines.

6b. Tacitus, *Historiae* 2.95.3

laetum foedissimo cuique apud bonos invidiae fuit quod extractis in campo Martio aris inferias Neroni fecisset. caesae publice victimae cremataeque; facem Augustales subdidere, quod sacerdotium, ut Romulus Tatius regi, ita Caesar Tiberius Iuliae genti sacravit.

A happy sight to all the foulest, and a cause of ill-will among good men, was the fact that [Vitellius] had performed funeral rites for Nero with altars in the Campus Martius. Victims were publicly slaughtered and burned; the Augustals applied the torch, which priesthood Tiberius Caesar had dedicated to the Julian clan just as Romulus had for king Tatius.

7a. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinorum XIII, 1668*

'quondam reges hanc tenuere urbem, nec tamen domesticis successoribus eam tradere contigit. supervenere alieni et quidem externi, ut Numa Romulo successerit ex Sabinis veniens, vicinus quidem, sed tunc externus, ut Anco Marcio Priscus Tarquinius.'

'Once upon a time kings controlled this city, yet it did not befall them to hand it over to successors within their household. Unrelated people took over and, in fact, foreigners, as Numa, coming from the Sabines, succeeded Romulus, albeit a neighbor, but at the time a foreigner, just as Tarquin the Elder succeeded Ancus Marcius.'

7b. Tacitus, *Annales* 11.24.4

'at conditor nostri Romulus tantum sapientia valuit ut plerosque populos eodem die hostis, dein civis habuerit. advenae in nos regnaverunt.'

"Yet our founder Romulus was so full of wisdom that he counted very many peoples enemies, then citizens, on the same day. Immigrants have been kings over us."

8. Tacitus, *Annales* 12.24.2

regum in eo ambitio vel gloria varie vulgata sed initium condendi, et quod pomerium Romulus posuerit, noscere haud absurdum reor...forumque et Capitolium non a Romulo, sed a Tito Tatius additum urbi credere. mox pro fortuna pomerium auctum. et quos tum Claudius terminos posuerit, facile cognitu et publicis actis perscriptum.

The ambition, or rather bragging-rights of the kings in this matter is a subject of varying popular accounts, but I reckon it not out of place to identify the initial plan of the foundation and the *pomerium* that Romulus set...and the Forum and Capitol were added to the city not by Romulus, but by Titus Tatius, they believed. Subsequently the *pomerium* was expanded in proportion to fortune. And what boundaries Claudius set at the time is easy to learn and recorded in the people's transactions.

Selected Bibliography

- Angelova, D. N. 2015. *Sacred Founders: Women, Men, and Gods in the Discourse of Imperial Founding, Rome through Early Byzantium*. Berkeley.
- Beard, M. 2015. *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome*. New York.
- Boatwright, M. T. (1984). "Tacitus on Claudius and the *Pomerium*, *Annals* 12.23.2-24." *CJ* 80.1: 36-44.
- Domenicucci, Patrizio. 1991. "La caratterizzazione astrale delle apoteosi di Romolo ed Ersilia nelle *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio." In I. Gallo & L. Nicastrì (eds.), *Cultura, poesia, ideologia nell'opera di Ovidio*. Salerno: 221-228.
- Joseph, T. A. 2008. "The Metamorphoses of *Tanta Moles*: Ovid, *Met.* 15.765 and Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.11.1." *Vergilius* 54: 24-36.
- Petersen, H. 1961. "Livy and Augustus." *TAPA* 92: 440-452.
- Simmons, D. 2008. "*Exempla Augusto*: Allusions and Warnings in *Ab Urbe Condita*, I." *Studia Antiqua* 6.1: 59-66.
- Strunk, T. E. 2014. "Rape and Revolution: Tacitus on Livia and Augustus." *Latomus* 73: 126-48.
- Wiseman, T.P. 1983. "The Wife and Children of Romulus." *CQ* 33.2: 445-452.