

## Consoling Tiber: Rivers and Exemplarity in the *Consolatio ad Liviam*

Writers of ancient consolatory literature faced a difficult task demanded by their genre: how to structure a treatise that strikes a sensitive balance between therapy and exhortation, and whether their argument can have any effect on an addressee. If the pseudo-Ovidian *Consolatio ad Liviam* aims primarily at consolation, it is the only extant example written in verse, thereby complicating our understanding of a genre already “abnormally fluid and hard to define” (Scourfield 2013, 3). In this paper, I draw attention to the peculiarities of this under-studied poem vis-à-vis more typical consolatory works, and to its unique approach to the central task of consolatory literature, specifically in its use of themes and intertexts from Augustan poetry.

I illustrate the poem's particular take on consolatory techniques by analyzing a curious episode at the poem's center involving the Tiber River. The Tiber grieves to such an extent during the funeral of Drusus that he fills his stream with tears and checks his waters in order to flood the pyre and carry Drusus' body away. Mars rebukes Tiber from his temple and consoles him until the Tiber willingly subsides. The passage has been criticized as useless and grotesque (Richmond 1981 and Schoonhoven 1992), but I argue that Tiber's appearance and grief is essential for reinforcing the poem's consolatory purpose.

Though exempla in philosophical consolations typically consist of notable or inspirational deeds by famous figures of the Roman Republic, the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, I argue, purposefully eschews references to traditional stories, preferring instead to set itself apart from prosaic consolations in its deliberate employment of exempla from the poetic tradition. In particular, I demonstrate how the *Consolatio ad Liviam* draws on a well established tradition of the Tiber in Latin poetry and uses the intertextual allusions to recall other moments of loss and recovery.

Finally, my paper touches on the issue of exemplarity and social status when considering the appropriate manner in which to console someone as prominent as Livia. I argue that the Tiber, because of its symbolism and its associations with early Roman legends, is particularly relevant in confronting this problem. The natural qualities of rivers, such as existing forever and setting up boundaries, render them particularly effective consolatory symbols, and this interpretation in the *Consolatio ad Liviam* can feed into a larger discussion of the functions of rivers in poetic landscapes.

### Bibliography

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