

## Tarpeia's Devotion to Rome: A Reinterpretation of Livy 1.11-12

Tarpeia has long posed a puzzle to researchers, who have debated her status as a Vestal Virgin, the role of her *exemplum* in various works of history and poetry, and even her periodization. Most scholarship is agreed that there were two co-existing myths of Tarpeia: one in which she attempted (but failed) to save Rome by double-crossing the Sabines, and another in which she attempted (but failed) to betray the city to the Sabine enemy (for a detailed examination of the various accounts, see the recent treatment of Welch 2015). In this paper, I argue for the existence of a third tradition that connected the myths of Tarpeia and Mettius/Manius Curtius as *exempla* of *devotio* for the safety of Rome.

My paper draws primarily on Livy 1.11-12, as well as iconographic evidence. I suggest that Livy purposefully juxtaposed the narratives of Tarpeia and Mettius Curtius. This story is then modified by the direct reference back to book 1 at the retelling of the Curtius tale at 7.6, providing a double narrative of the foundation of the Lacus Curtius. This double narrative, like the double narrative of Tarpeia in 1.11, offers Livy's readers two different takes on Roman monuments: one that glorifies Sabine ancestry, and one that privileges Roman ancestry. My argument thus reframes early interpretations of the Sabine War that place Romulus' temple of Jupiter in opposition to Mettius Curtius (e.g., Jaeger 1997:30-56).

As Versnel 1976 has demonstrated, there was more than one way to sacrifice yourself for Rome. In fact, ancient authors supply at least two rituals for the *devotio*, and as Parker 2004 suggested (expanding the arguments of Frascchetti 1984; see also Sacco 2010), the live burial of a Vestal provided a third. But in Parker's rather pessimistic reading, there is a significant difference between the *devotio* of a male general and the burial of a Vestal: the *dux* chooses to dedicate his own life for the betterment of the *res publica*, while the Vestal is penalized for not

putting the *res publica* at the center of hers. This model of Vestal sacrifice cannot account for Tarpeia, whose treachery is (as Grimal 1951 points out; see also Turcan 2004) a *felix culpa* for Rome.

I suggest instead that Livy's association of the two *devotiones*, male and female, Curtius and Tarpeia, is meant to glorify the sacrifice of Tarpeia, rather than to condemn her. My interpretation fits better with the other glorifying tales of the early city that are displayed in Livy 1, which generally avoids poor *exempla* in order to focus on positive models.

My paper closes by suggesting the wider scope of my investigation: that is, beyond Livy. If correct, my reading may in turn suggest that the association of the Lacus Curtius with the Tarpeia tale drew on L. Calpurnius Piso's history. We know from Dionysius of Halicarnassus (2.41.3) that in Piso's version of this tale, Tarpeia was a heroine who tricked the Sabines. Although Livy does not mention this variant, Guittard has plausibly argued that he draws silently on patriotic accounts in other episodes (e.g., Guittard 1984 on the *devotio Deciana* and Accius). Livy's narrative can be fruitfully set alongside Dionysius' account as an outline of the alternative, more "patriotic" version of Tarpeia's tale.

### Bibliography

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