

Peccavit igitur: From Ennius' Romulus pulcher to Cicero's Romuli

Many ancient authors address the foundation myth of Rome, particularly the augury scene, the characterization of Romulus, and the death of Remus. These details change depending on the author. Earlier authors tend to cast Romulus in a more favorable light, since he establishes precedents that anticipate the republic, while authors in the first century BC view Romulus more harshly in light of Julius Caesar's civil war.

In this paper, I address Cicero's shifting depictions of Romulus in the *de Re Publica* and the *de Officiis* in relation to Ennius' version of the foundation myth. I focus specifically on the vocabulary and rhetorical techniques that Cicero employs in each description of Romulus. Few scholars have addressed Cicero's views of Romulus, especially concerning his change in the founder's characterization from *de Re Publica* to *de Officiis*. Zetzel (2007) explores Cicero's interest in Ennius as a source for the historical virtues critical to the republic. Elliott (2013) delineates fragments of Ennius preserved in Cicero's corpus, but she does not offer in-depth analysis of the content of the fragments. Goldschmidt (2013) argues for how the *Annales* might have been read, taught, and interpreted in the first century BC, specifically in terms of how it offered historical *exempla* to imitate and to avoid. Neel (2015) discusses the shifting opinions on Romulus in the first century BC, including in Cicero's works, but her reading focuses on the idea of competition and the cultural background rather than on the diction and rhetoric that Cicero uses.

First, I examine Ennius' depiction of the augury with particular attention to his word choice. I focus on a lengthy fragment of the *Annales* (XLVII in Skutsch; preserved in Cicero's *de Divinatione*) in which Ennius describes the contest for founding the city. In this fragment, Ennius begins with the twins on equal footing, which Neel argues foreshadows the consuls' shared

authority. Ennius continues by likening the augury's spectators to the audience in a chariot race. This comparison removes his readers from mythological time with a simile grounded in republican Rome. Although his descriptions echo the status of the republic during his lifetime, Ennius also undercuts his comparison: his account of the myth ends with a fratricide.

Next, I compare Cicero's characterization of Romulus in the *de Re Publica* to Ennius' model, again with specific attention to vocabulary. Cicero states that he will follow the precedent of Cato to discuss the origins of Rome and its people in book 2. Although Cicero references Cato for this specific myth, he cites Ennius throughout much of his corpus, solidifying the *Annales* as a cultural and historical authority. Cicero mentions Remus only once, choosing instead to focus on Romulus, whom he depicts as superior to his peers and divinely motivated to found Rome (*et corporis viribus et animi ferocitate tantum ceteris praestitisse*, 2.2).

Finally, I compare this version of Romulus to the one that Cicero describes in *de Officiis*. In this work, Cicero more closely follows Ennius' version of the quarrel between the brothers; Remus reappears in the story, only to be killed by Romulus in his desire for sole rule over the city. Cicero employs language that echoes the violence between the brothers (*pepulit, interemit*). His rhetoric mimics the events of the story: Romulus builds up his justification for the murder (*causam opposuit*) as if it is a physical barrier like the wall around the city. Cicero condemns Romulus' actions (*peccavit*), spurning him no matter if he is a god or a man (*vel Quirini vel Romuli*, 3.41).

By comparing Cicero's opposing depictions of Romulus with the precedent that Ennius establishes, it is clear that Cicero paints the city's founder in light of the current political circumstances. While Ennius lives in a time of relative stability, Cicero's republic is much more volatile. By comparing the motivations and actions of Rome's founder to those of the consuls,

Cicero legitimizes the institution of the republic, making plain his opinions of the current political circumstances through reshaping mythology crucial to Rome's cultural history.

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