

*Sic eat quaecumque Romana lugebit hostem: The Power of Women's Mourning*  
in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*

The affect of women's mourning in the Greek world and in Greek literature has received much attention (Holst-Warhaft; Alexiou, Dunham), but Roman women's public mourning has not garnered the same systematic study. Studies such as Ochs group Greek and Roman funeral practices; Richlin's essay on the topic is a rare exception. Works on women's experiences in war explore their losses, with public mourning is a side topic (Chrystal, Keith and Fabre-Serris). The purpose of this paper is to add to the understanding of the role and power of women's mourning in one Roman text.

During the Second Punic War, so many women had lost family members to Hannibal's armies that it was not possible for the religious rituals due to Ceres to be performed and the senate even went so far as to limit the period of mourning to thirty days to ensure that the public and private religious duties could be performed with minimal interruption (Liv. 22.56). The public nature of grief and mourning in the Roman world meant that its influence was not confined to the home or to a private expression of loss: mourning defined the status of women in a way that temporarily removed them from the duties of the citizen body. By limiting that official status, the senate attempted to ensure that the Roman state could function in dire circumstances.

This regulation of public mourning occurred when Rome was established as a state. Two earlier instances demonstrate the affect and the reaction that women's mourning or even the threat of mourning could have. First the threat: when the Sabine women rush between the battle lines of their husbands and fathers, they recast the war as a battle between family members

(1.13). If the war continues, no matter which side wins, the women will be in mourning either for their fathers or their husbands: they will be mourning the enemy. There is much about this episode that will have resonated with Livy's audience – Romans whose lives have been affected by civil war between Pompey and Caesar or between Octavian and Antony (no matter how Augustus attempted to recast it).

The third episode also involves a woman who mourns an enemy. After the battle of the Curiatii and the Horatii, Livy recounts the young Horatius' triumphant return to Rome, which is then interrupted by the wails of his sister (1.26). Horatia's mourning the man to whom she had been betrothed in public in the midst of his victory celebration infuriates her brother so much that he kills her and threatens the same death for any Roman woman who mourns "an enemy." Mourning does not highlight the victory, but rather it emphasizes the cost of war. Thus, in her brother's view, Horatia displayed her grief at the wrong time and for the wrong person(s). The celebration should take place first; the mourning should be for their brothers and happen at the appropriate time and place. Such a situation again must have seemed familiar to Livy's audience.

Women's public grief in the earliest part of Livy's narrative highlights the liminal position of women in a political state that is still growing and is not self-contained. The Sabines and Horatia have natal families on one side of the battle and marital families on the other. No matter who wins, the women will mourn. The Sabines forestall that situation, but Horatia cannot nor can the wives and mothers in the Second Punic War. Yet the women in the Second Punic War are in a different position: they are not torn between the two sides. Their grief is for Roman men. Because the women are firmly part of the state, the state can both respect and regulate their mourning. The limitation on mourning is, itself, a signal to the women that all of their contributions to the state are necessary and valued.

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