

The Source of the Sound: *Fama* and *Rumor* in Livy

Hardie (2014) has done extensive work on the use of *fama* throughout Western literature, including on the Roman historians Tacitus and Livy. While Hardie does draw attention to the idea that Livy has specific “episodes” of *fama* in which he relays the information and then examines its believability and its author’s reliability, I explore this further in respect to not only *fama* but also *rumor*. Livy uses *rumor* in a similar way, but whereas *fama* appears extensively throughout our extant books, *rumor* occurs only rarely (31 times total). I suggest that in *Ab Urbe Condita*, the historian uses *rumor* distinctly and differently from *fama* in order to distinguish when a report has more credibility.

In particular, I bring attention to the decision to use *rumor* instead of the more frequent *fama*, especially if the instances relate to the fragments of Valerius Antias (Laroche 1988; Rich 2005), who Livy cites often but often with critical commentary. Given that Hardie’s examples are drawn primarily from books 21 and 22, this paper builds on his beginning to offer a case study of the pentad containing books 36-40.

Most examples of *rumor* indicate that the reported material is baseless with the use of different tactics, which include adjectives that imply inaccuracy, verbs that convey gossip, the admission that the information is probably *sine auctore*, fabricated stories created to serve a purpose, and/or the link of gossip to a collective, such as the Roman people or the soldiers in an army. Some examples may not fit into these designated categories seamlessly, but the majority do and some even fit into multiple categories.

As an example of my argumentation, *rumor* is used in one of these episodes of “short-term narrative,” where two out of the only three uses of *rumor* in the entire pentad occur (Liv. 37. 48). Following Hardie’s idea of segmentation, Livy has separated this section by highlighting

Valerius Antias' name at the very start of the passage; given that he is the *auctor* of the noteworthy rumor (*celebrem rumore*, 37.48.1), this is as if to make it clear from the beginning that he, Livy, is not responsible for the questionable information he is about to reveal. The chapter itself comes at an emphatic point in the narrative, since it starts out the events happening in Rome in 189 BCE. Livy then goes on to say that Antias then appended to this piece of fiction (*subtextit deinde fabulae huic*) what the Aetolian envoys were asked before the senate (37.48.6). The use of the word *fabulae*, with its associations with tall tales and fables, in conjunction with *rumor* earlier implies how little weight Livy gives the information. Finally, and most tellingly, Livy reports that he had no other author of this *rumor*, but that he feels it should not be wholeheartedly accepted nor out-right rejected (37.48.7).

In addition, there is a noticeable pattern to Livy's inclusion of *sine auctore* or some variation thereof throughout the corpus. While Livy does identify the author here, Valerius Antias, he seems to be emphasizing that if you cannot rely on your informant, it is almost equal to having an anonymous testimony. When it comes to Valerius Antias, Livy often seems distrustful of the information that he is imparting, and yet, he still chooses to include it. Though he may not believe it the report himself, but he does not have absolute certainty that it does not hold some grain of truth at all, and so, Livy portrays himself as compelled to include it. Thus, Livy's use of *rumor* throughout this section both portrays Antias as an unreliable source of information and shows a noticeable contrast with his common uses of *fama*.

Bibliography

Hardie, P. 2014. *Rumour and Renown Representations of Fama in Western Literature*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Laroche, R. A. "Valerius Antias: Livy's Source for the Number of Military Standards Captured in Battle in Books XX-XLV." *Latomus* 47, no. 4 (1988): 758-71.

Rich, J. "Valerius Antias and the Construction of the Roman Past." *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 48 (2005): 137-61.