

## Livy's Building Project: Sacrificial Women and the (Raped) Body Politic

The reign of Augustus represents a monumental pivot point in Roman history: Rome's transition from Republic to Empire, oligarchy to (veiled) autocracy. It is also a juncture where we see significant political and cultural revisions to the role of women in Roman society. These revisions were largely effected by Augustan legislation regulating sex and women's bodies (Milnor 2007), and rendered women more valuable political and politicized objects than under the Republic. Given these substantial changes and the centrality of women to them, we must read the literature of the transition and the women contained therein with extreme care and attention.

This is especially true for Book 1 of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, where he literally and figuratively constructs the rise of the city through a narrative of its formative years. As Livy builds Rome, he inherently also builds the body politic, a metaphor to which women are of enormous significance. Indeed, scholarship has recognized women's pivotal role in Rome's evolution, particularly as victims of rape at moments of major political change. These assaults satiate the body politic and facilitate the civilization's progression (Claassen 1998; Joshel 1992; Klindienst 1990). Through this "building project" Livy defines women's role within the body politic, explaining Rome's rise through rapes from its foundational history, namely the Sabines and Lucretia. As an author from the liminal period between Republic and Empire, Livy's representations of these rapes therefore offer a politically and chronologically-specific perspective on women and the body politic.

Applying the same analytical method to Cicero and Ovid, I contrast Livy's account of the Sabine women and Lucretia with those contained in the *De Republica*, *Ars Amatoria*, and *Fausti*. I assess the differences in each narrative's descriptiveness and central concern—rape's benefit the

state, the violence of the rape, or both. I argue that each authors' representation of the rapes reflects their contemporary political landscape, and conclude that there is a clear escalation of violence across them which grows increasingly more detailed and less concerned with the state as Rome approaches autocracy.

Cicero's portrayals of the rapes are short, impersonal in tone, and unconcerned with the women involved, focusing solely on rape as a useful contribution to the state's health. This is a firmly Republican perspective inundated with contemporary fears of the state's decline and the "diseased" body politic (Levick 1982). In contrast, Ovid's reports of the same events are highly emotional, graphically violent, and indifferent to rape's benefit to the body politic. I read this as reactionary towards the Augustan moral reform laws, a viewpoint from within Rome's established autocracy; it is no coincidence that violence escalates in literary rape motifs immediately after sole rule and regulations on sex and reproduction are imposed. Livy, I argue, falls between these two authors in chronology and perspective, and includes both Ciceronian/Republican and Ovidian/Augustan elements within his version of the rapes. The mix of these elements is indicative of Rome's liminal position between Republic and Empire, inviting a wealth of interpretive possibilities about the reconstruction of the (raped) body politic in that moment.

It might seem an odd choice to compare these texts together. They are poetic and prosaic works of different genres, part of larger works which have vastly different aims and purposes. But these considerations are less pertinent to my analysis than the illustrations of the rapes themselves; here I investigate how representations of women and the body politic motif shift over time within depictions of the same foundational rapes by authors who symbolize different, significant political moments in Rome's history. The texts' chronological diversity is thus an

advantage of this study. This narrow focus illuminates the broad category of state and the body politic through the specific lens of rape and reproduction, ultimately shedding light on how the body politic motif developed over time and across literature, what role women played within that, and how they contributed to the body politic itself. If nothing else, this study offers a new lens through which to view Rome's transition from Republic to Empire.

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