

## Public Speech as a Prelude to Violence in Livy's First Decade

In this paper I explore instances of public speech in the first decade of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* that figure as preludes to violence. Battlefield exhortations and deliberative speeches delivered in *contiones* or before the senate can lead to violence, whether against Rome's foreign enemies or amongst citizens at home. What political and social factors, according to Livy, give rise to a speech in which the speaker calls for his audience to resort to violence? How are the intended targets of the violence characterized and presented? How does the speaker, in turn, justify or valorize violent action? Pursuing questions such as these constitutes an attempt to understand what relationship Livy understood existed between public speech and violence in early Roman history.

Violence and civil strife are ubiquitous in the first ten books of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, a point that is underscored at the beginning of Book 6: here Livy, resetting his narrative in 389 BC following the sack of Rome by the Gauls, notes that his account of Roman history in the first five books in particular included "wars abroad and civil strife at home" (*foris bella, domi seditiones*, *AUC* 6.1). The centrality of violence to Roman identity can be said to be reflected in the mythical origin of their city founder, Romulus, who was said by his mother, Rhea Silvia, herself a victim of rape, to be the son of Mars, the god of war (*AUC* 1.4). Oratory, in turn, while presented by Cicero in the early *De Inventione* as instrumental for human community formation (Cicero, *Inv.* 1.2), was viewed by Maternus in Tacitus' *Dialogus* as a source for civic unrest and disorder during the Republic. In the face of such competing claims about oratory's social worth, how does Livy, as a historian of the regal period and the early Republic, present and describe public speech that leads to violent outcomes?

The complexity of the question can be glimpsed from a consideration of *AUC* Book 1. In the dramatic course of events in Livy's narrative that brings about the overthrow of the Roman monarchy, two instances of public speeches that lead to violence are of markedly differing character and yield almost diametrically opposed outcomes politically. In the coup undertaken by Sextus Tarquinius to seize power, he verbally attacks Servius Tullius in his absence before the senate, and once Servius arrives, he turns to physical assault, throwing the king down the stairs of the senate house (*AUC* 1.47-48). This is an example of an actor who moves from violent language to violent action. Near the conclusion of the book, however, after the rape and suicide of Lucretia, L. Iunius Brutus delivers a speech in a packed forum that stirs his audience to such anger that they immediately repeal the power of the king Tarquinius and command him, his wife, and children to be exiles (*AUC* 1.59). The first of these speeches, Tarquinius', results in tyrannical government attained by violence; the second, Brutus', is a primary impetus for the realization of *libertas* at Rome, and yet this is also attained by violence. Accordingly, as violence is so important for Roman culture and identity, analyzing the public speech—in terms of style, speaker, target, context, occasion, end result—that prompts violence is a fruitful line of inquiry for understanding Livy's presentation of Roman politics in the regal period and early Republic.

Of course, casting a shadow over this topic are the events of 6 January 2021, when the president of the United States delivered a speech that was responsible for (or at least contributed to) a violent act of insurrection. Accordingly, an investigation into public speech as motivation and justification for violence in a key historian of the Roman Republic is timely and demonstrates how we can turn to the Classics in order to illuminate current cultural and political issues.

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