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Women of Early Rome as Exempla in Livy, *AB Urbe Condita*, Book 1

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WOMEN OF EARLY ROME AS *EXEMPLA* IN LIVY, *AB URBE CONDITA*, BOOK 1

ABSTRACT: *This paper examines Livy's depiction of prominent women as exempla in book 1 of his history. It seems that the ideal public role of these women is to support the efforts of their men to make the Roman state strong and stable—a role which appears to be an elaboration of women's efforts with respect to their families. It is clear, however, that Livy complicates each exemplum and that the women generally fall short in this role, so that the overall picture is one of inherent instability, in which men must be wary of the influence of prominent women.*

I. Introduction

The basic aim of this paper is to investigate Livy's depiction of prominent women as *exempla* in book 1 of his monumental history of Rome. What role did these women play in shaping the course of Roman history to the end of the regal period? It seems that their ideal role is to promote their men, in particular the efforts of their men to make Rome strong and stable. They exist in the narrative as a result of public behavior and attitudes, though the support they give to their men appears to be an elaboration of their efforts with respect to their families. It seems clear that Livy deliberately complicates all the *exempla*, and that the interventions and advice of the women are generally flawed. The effect is to describe conditions that are inherently unstable, so that men should always beware of the influence of prominent women in the public arena, even when the women are attempting explicitly to inspire concord. Modern discussions of individual *exempla* would do well to consider the general pattern.

Livy's portrayals of ten women, or groups of women, are analyzed below: Lavinia, R(h)ea Silvia, Acca Larentia, Hersilia, Tarpeia, the Sabine Women, Horatia, Tanaquil, Tullia, and Lucretia. These women all function as *exempla* of a flexible or open type. Their moral qualities govern their political attitudes and behavior; their behavior in turn encourages contemplation of their qualities and attitudes.

II. Lavinia

Lavinia, the Italian wife of Aeneas, played an important role in the establishment of Roman power. When Aeneas died, his son Ascanius had not yet reached manhood. At this point of family and political weakness, however, Lavinia stepped in, maintained the *imperium* for Ascanius, and preserved the Latin state and paternal throne intact for her son: "so strong was Lavinia's character" (*tanta indoles in Lavinia erat*, 1.3.1), says Livy.¹ Lavinia's great service, therefore, was to preserve her son's private and public inheritance until he should come of age. Her preeminence was clearly temporary and extraordinary. If Ascanius had been a man already at Aeneas's death, Lavinia might not have rated a mention. She appears to have been selfless in her

¹ All translations are those of B. O. Foster in the Loeb Classical Library edition of *Livy, Book 1* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1919 [1998]).

motivation and successful in her aim. It might be that she establishes Livy's public ideal for a woman from a prominent family, though of course her character is barely developed. Note the association between moral strength and political stability. It is a major theme of book 1.

III. R(h)ea Silvia

R(h)ea Silvia, the mother of Romulus and Remus, is normally thought of as an innocent victim of tyrannical oppression.² When her evil uncle Amulius deposed her father Numitor and seized the throne of Alba Longa by force, Rhea Silvia was compelled to become a Vestal Virgin so that she would have no male children who could subsequently threaten Amulius's power. Of course, the preordained mission of Rome required that she give birth. The common view, which derives predominantly from Livy, is that she was raped by the war god Mars and gave birth to twins, Romulus and Remus.³ For her "crime," she was shackled, thrown into prison and not heard from again. Her character is not developed in depth because her primary contribution to the narrative is as the twins' mother. This contribution leads to both the foundation of Rome and the downfall of Amulius the tyrant. Livy explicitly emphasizes Amulius's tyrannical character when he writes that, after slaying Amulius (1.5.7), Romulus announced the death of the tyrant (*caedem deinceps tyranni . . . ostendit*, 1.6.1). Yet Livy does not say unequivocally that Rhea Silvia was raped by Mars. He writes: "The Vestal was ravished, and having given birth to twin sons, named Mars as the father of her doubtful offspring, whether actually so believing, or because it seemed less wrong if a god were the author of her fault" (*Vi compressa Vestalis, cum geminum partum edidisset, seu ita rata, seu quia deus auctor culpae honestior erat, Martem incertae stirpis patrem nuncupat*, 1.4.1–1.4.2). The qualification is significant, for while it continues to leave the matter open ("whether actually so believing [that Mars was the father]"), it tends to undercut the innocence or moral purity of the *exemplum*. The reader is made to think twice, not only about Rhea Silvia, a vestal virgin, but about her sons and Amulius too. Just who was the boys' father? Could their mother have lied? Did she compromise her vows as a vestal? How bad was Amulius really? The reader must decide, for the *exemplum* itself lies open or unresolved, and certainly complicated rather than simple. As will become increasingly obvious, Livy's *exempla* in book 1 tend to provide food for thought about the particular examples and about the general process of interpreting them.⁴

² Livy 1.3.11–1.4.3; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.76.1; Plut. *Rom.* 3; J. N. Bremmer and N. M. Horsfall, *Roman Myth and Mythography* (London 1987) 25–30.

³ See e.g., Peter Paul Rubens's painting, *Mars and Rhea Silvia* (c. 1620).

⁴ C. S. Kraus, "Take your Medicine! Livy 1 and History's Exemplary Purpose," *Omnibus* 40 (2000) 18–20: "[*Exempla* t]o imitate, and to avoid [see *Pref.* 10]. Neither is necessarily a straightforward category in Livy: that is the first surprise. . . . Why [does Livy complicate his *exempla*]? Presumably to encourage us, the readers to whom the *Preface* is directly addressed, to think about the exemplary process" (19); "the historian forces us, if we are astute, intelligent readers, to think through the implications of these historical examples" (20).

IV. Acca Larentia

On the orders of Amulius, the newborn twins Romulus and Remus were placed in a basket, which was floated on the Tiber River. The idea was that the basket would fill with water and drown them. As is well known, however, the basket floated downstream to the site that would in time be occupied by the city of Rome, and there it washed up on the banks of the river, near the fig tree later known as the Ficus Ruminalis. Livy records the traditional story that a she-wolf happened along, heard the babies crying, and permitted them to suck at her teats, thereby saving their lives.⁵ They were soon discovered by a shepherd named Faustulus, who gave them to his wife Acca Larentia to rear (1.4.7). As with Lavinia and Rhea Silvia, Livy does not develop the character of Acca Larentia in any depth. This underlines the point that her role in the narrative is secondary and dependent: although she helped the twins grow into strong and formidable youths, it is her “sons” who found Rome and kill the tyrant Amulius of Alba Longa. Yet Livy records in dutiful tone how some writers say that Acca Larentia was a woman of loose morals among the shepherds and was therefore known as *lupa* (which can mean both “wolf” and “prostitute”).⁶ This effectively undermines the boys’ paternity for a second time, given that the claim of Rhea Silvia had been qualified earlier.⁷ The reader is forced to contemplate far less epic origins for the twins—and then indeed for Rome—than might be done in other circumstances. The narrative of Rome’s foundation becomes increasingly less stable.⁸

V. Hersilia

The next woman, Hersilia, the wife of Romulus, is mentioned only once, but she is responsible for an important intervention, which at first glance might appear to be supportive and well intentioned (1.11.2). When the Romans defeated the Antemnates, Hersilia advised Romulus not to kill the parents and relatives of the Antemnite women

⁵ Plut. *Rom.* 4 adds a woodpecker, both being creatures sacred to Mars. On the wolf and twins, see Bremmer and Horsfall (above, n.2) 30–32; J. Scheid, *Romulus et ses frères* (Rome 1990) 18–24, 590–92.

⁶ The first element—that she was the wife of Faustulus and de facto mother of Romulus and Remus—may be found in Licinius Macer (fr. 1 Peter). The second element—that she was a prostitute—may be found in Valerius Antias (fr. 1 Peter), according to whom she was a contemporary of Romulus and left her property to the Roman people. Cato (fr. 16 Peter) was the first to make the connection between she-wolf (*lupa*) and prostitute (*meretrix*); thus the courtesan name *Faula* is linked with Faustulus (*RE* 6.2090–2091; Bremmer and Horsfall [above, n.2] 30–32; *OCD*, 3rd ed. s.v. *Acca Larentia*). Cato’s authority might have been difficult to ignore henceforward, even if a later historian did not like his interpretation.

⁷ S. E. Smethurst (“Women in Livy’s History,” *G&R* 19 [1950] 80–87) notices these qualifications. He thinks that Livy treats Rhea Silvia and Acca Larentia with “genial skepticism” (82).

⁸ G. Miles (*Livy: Reconstructing Early Rome* [Ithaca and London, 1995] 137–78) interprets Livy’s depiction of Romulus as an attempt to emphasize Romulus’s human self-sufficiency—influenced by his austere rustic upbringing—rather than his descent from a god or from a line of heroic kings. The depictions of Rhea Silvia and Acca Larentia are in conformity with such an aim.

who had recently been kidnapped by the Romans (see the “Sabine Women” below). Instead, moved by pleas from the women themselves, Hersilia recommended incorporating the Antemnates into the Roman state, thereby substituting harmony (*concordia*) for conflict, and strengthening the state overall. She argued that “in this way the state would gain in strength by harmony” (*ita rem coalescere concordia posse*, 1.11.2).

The incident as presented might seem relatively straightforward to modern readers. Roman readers, on the other hand, could well have found Hersilia’s interference in a military context disturbing, especially as it was prompted by the pleas of captive women. She was the king’s wife but not a magistrate, nor a soldier, and there is no indication that Romulus sought her advice in any way. Moreover, the advice is patently questionable, given that the Antemnates had recently suffered both abduction of their women and military defeat. Would harmony (*concordia*) necessarily result from incorporating these men into the Roman state? Livy goes on to say that “[Romulus] readily granted her request” (*Facile impetratum*, 1.11.3). Roman readers should have paused and questioned the ease with which Romulus apparently gave in to his wife. The negative potential in the recommended course of action should have been plain, and indeed subsequent events in the narrative (see below) seem to imply that this potential was realized. Romulus hardly comes across as a figure of any political depth at the close of this incident.

VI. Tarpeia

Tarpeia (*RE* 6) is normally seen as a traitor who receives just punishment.⁹ The general outlines of her story are these: her particular vice is greed, so that when Titus Tatius, king of the Sabines, asked her to admit his troops into the Capitol, she supposedly agreed in return for “what they carried on their left arms”; instead of receiving the valuable gold bracelets worn by Sabine warriors around their left arms, however, the troops who had received her help simply threw their heavy shields on top of her, thereby suffocating her and providing a lasting lesson for traitors.¹⁰ What Livy actually writes, on the other hand, is a good deal more complicated and has four main elements (1.11.6–9): Tarpeia was bribed with gold by Tatius to admit his men (1.11.6); once inside, they threw their shields on her, either to make it appear that the citadel had been taken by Sabine assault [rather than by Roman treachery], or “to set an example that no one anywhere might keep faith with a traitor” (*exempli causa, ne quid usquam fidum proditori esset*, 1.11.7); there is an additional story (*additur fabula*, 1.11.8) that Tarpeia had asked for what the Sabines

⁹ For discussion, see R. M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy, Books I–V* (Oxford 1965) 74–75; Bremmer and Horsfall (above, n.2) 68–70.

¹⁰ See E. Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World* (Oxford 1994) 219: “The story reflects Woman as Other, untrustworthy, so petty that she puts love of finery before love of country.”

wore on their left arms, meaning gold bracelets and jeweled rings, and that they outwitted her by heaping their shields upon her; others (*sunt qui*, 1.11.9) write that it was Tarpeia who outwitted the Sabines, for while they thought she meant the bracelets, she proceeded to demand their shields in order to disarm them, and in consequence forfeited her life to the bargain she had struck.

In modern terms Livy has written bad history here because he does not try to resolve any of these contradictions and does not compare the reliability of any of his sources. Yet Livy's *exempla* are not items for resolution or closure, and the point often seems to be about the process rather than the product, or the journey rather than the destination. The cautionary tale of Tarpeia the traitor, which is specifically called an *exemplum* by Livy (1.11.7), was already present in Quintus Fabius Pictor (fr. 8 Peter) and obviously provides an aetiology for the Tarpeian Rock.¹¹ The story of Tarpeia the patriot was evidently passed down by Lucius Calpurnius Piso Frugi (fr. 5 Peter; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.38), who interpreted a public sacrifice made at the supposed tomb of Tarpeia to mean that she was a national heroine, who attempted to disarm the Sabines by trickery. Livy seems to be saying that the *exemplum* of Tarpeia lies open to interpretation. Readers will know the traditional story about Tarpeia the traitor (1.11.6). The precise circumstances are in fact uncertain (1.11.7–9). If her deed was prompted by greed, she deserved her fate (1.11.7–8). If, however, her deed was motivated by patriotism, should she be honored as a heroine (1.11.9)? The question is far from straightforward. Roman readers might not have thought that the “patriotic” bargain was worth the price of admitting the Sabines into the Capitol, even without their shields, and there is no indication that Tarpeia consulted Rome's soldiers beforehand. The implications of the various traditions once more frustrate resolution.

VII. The Sabine Women

The Sabine Women are commonly described as innocent victims of Roman impiety and aggression, enticed to Rome to participate in a religious festival but snatched and distributed among the desperate Romans, who at that time had no women in their community for wives (see Livy 1.9–13). Against the odds, the women quickly settle down with their new husbands and then intercede between their Sabine relatives and Roman husbands to prevent war. They rush the battlefield, aiming to thwart the shocking intrafamilial crime of

¹¹ The Tarpeian Rock was apparently an outcrop extending from the Capitol over a steep drop, from which traitors and murderers were thrown. Varro (*Ling.* 5.41) places it close to the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, but Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* 7.35.4, 8.78.5) puts it at the southeast corner of the hill, above the Roman Forum. The latter location has been favored because it is close to the Carcer and the Scalae Gemoniae, also traditional places of execution (*OCD*, 3rd ed. s.v. *Tarpeian Rock*). See T. P. Wiseman, “Topography and Rhetoric: The Trial of Manlius,” *Historia* 28.1 (1979) 41–45; L. Richardson, *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore and London, 1992) 377–78.

parricide (*parricidium*), so complete now is their identification with the Romans, and take personal responsibility for the conflict (1.13.2). Romulus and Titus Tatius, the Sabine king, subsequently make peace and negotiate a union. Indeed, this union takes place under the name of Rome, so that at first glance Roman power has been enhanced mightily by the role of the Sabine women in the narrative. Livy says that Romulus and Titus Tatius “not only agreed on peace, but they made one people out of two. They shared the sovereignty, but all authority was transferred to Rome” (*nec pacem modo, sed civitatem unam ex duabus faciunt. Regnum consociant: imperium omne conferunt Romam*, 1.13.5).

Several complications, however, temper the impression of a positive outcome for Rome. First, in a way that recalls the case of Hersilia above, women (and captive women at that) are described as interfering in a military context and offering decisive advice in the making of public policy. Second, there are numerous indications of underlying friction and ongoing tensions. Romulus, for instance, went round the Sabine women before the battle “and explained that the pride (*superbia*) of their parents had caused this deed [the abductions], when they had refused their neighbors the right to intermarry” (*Sed ipse Romulus circumibat docebatque patrum id superbia factum, qui conubium finitimis negassent*, 1.9.14). *Superbia* is a particularly strong word to use in the circumstances, given that it is frequently associated with tyrants and that Amulius and Tarquinius Superbus function rather like bookends in Livy’s first book. Certainly, the Romans seem to have forgiven this serious charge of *superbia* when the Sabines forgave the abductions, and the two peoples joined as one. Yet harmony should not be overstated. Romulus, for instance, was not particularly upset by the later murder of Titus Tatius and did not resort to war to avenge it: “This act [the murder of Tatius] is said to have awakened less resentment than was proper in Romulus, whether owing to the disloyalty that attends a divided rule, or because he thought Tatius had been not unjustly slain. He therefore declined to go to war” (*Eam rem minus aegre quam dignum erat tulisse Romulum ferunt, seu ob infidam societatem regni, seu quia haud iniuria caesum credebat. Itaque bello quidem abstinuit*, 1.14.3).

Elements of the story have been linked persuasively with the conditions of Roman marriage in historical times, which involved a *captio* ceremony, along with careful negotiations both political and economic in character.¹² Modern writers differ over whether to emphasize recurring tensions or resultant unity between the families. David Konstan argues that Roman women were often caught in cross-familial loyalties, where they needed to choose between their husbands and their fathers.¹³ For Andrew Feldherr, the story of the

¹² Miles (above, n.8) 179–215, 218; see Bremmer and Horsfall (above, n.2) 43–45, who dismiss theories that the story originates from an Indo-European custom of marriage by rape. M. Jaeger (*Livy’s Written Rome* [Ann Arbor 1977] 30–56) analyzes the story in relation to space at Rome.

¹³ D. Konstan, “Ideology and Narrative in Livy, Book 1,” *CIAnt* 5 (1986) 197–215.

Sabine women emphasizes the forging of communal unity out of family bonds.¹⁴ It seems that marriages produced mixed results in reality, so that a problematic *exemplum* with disturbing associations is appropriate.

Later renderings of the tale manage both to question and to reinforce the patriarchy.¹⁵ Ovid (*Ars am.* 1.101–132) underlines the savagery of the abductions but is still able to blame the victims, whose confusion enhanced their attractiveness.¹⁶ Even a comparatively amiable reception of the tale supports the abductions. In the 1954 MGM musical *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, for instance, the song about “Sobbin Women” springs from a mangled reading of Plutarch’s account of the Sabine women of ancient Rome.¹⁷ This song is performed by Howard Keel when he encourages his brothers to kidnap their favorite young women and carry them off to the Oregon mountaintop on which they all live. An avalanche prevents the first attempt at rescue. Before the snows melt and their relatives can rescue them, of course, the kidnapped women fall in love with their suitors, who have been punished and made to learn respect by the character played by Jane Powell. When their male relatives arrive, the women intercede on behalf of Keel’s brothers and end up marrying them. If such an outcome is probably not to the taste of contemporary audiences, it might be recalled that one of the most famous scenes in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), one of Hollywood’s best-known movies, is the angry confrontation which ends with Clark Gable carrying Vivien Leigh up the red-carpeted staircase to rape her.¹⁸ She next appears in bed on the following morning, yawning and stretching contentedly. There is an unsettling undercurrent to each of these depictions. Unlike the films and works of art, however, Livy’s story of the Sabine women is an episode in a sequential historical narrative, so that each *exemplum* should be assessed comparatively as well as individually. When this is done it becomes clear that Livy’s readers are consistently meant to find complication and instability beneath the surface.

¹⁴ A. Feldherr, *Spectacle and Society in Livy’s History* (Berkeley 1998) 134, 211, 217.

¹⁵ The rape of the Sabine women became a regular theme in Western painting, e.g., Poussin, *Rape of the Sabine Women* (1636–1637); Adriaen Backer, *Rape of the Sabine Women* (1671); Luca Giordano, *Rape of the Sabine Women* (1672–1674); Jacques-Louis David, *Intervention of the Sabine Women* (1799); Pablo Picasso, *Rape of the Sabine Women* (1962–1963).

¹⁶ J.-M. Claassen, “The Familiar Other: The Pivotal Role of Women in Livy’s Narrative of Political Development in Early Rome,” *AClass* 41 (1998) 83; see Fantham (above, n.10) 217: “[Ovid shows] the gamut of attitudes to women, from respect toward the mother of one’s children to indulgent mockery of the naive but charming young creatures needing to be fulfilled by masculine lovers.”

¹⁷ *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, starring Howard Keel and Jane Powell (MGM 1954). The film’s credits indicate that the script is based on a short story, *The Sobbin’ Women*, by the American writer Stephen Vincent Benet (1898–1943).

¹⁸ *Gone with the Wind*, starring Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh (Selznick International Pictures 1939).

VIII. Horatia

The attitude and behavior of the next woman, Horatia, are conventionally described in terms of family and state disloyalty.¹⁹ Horatia's life coincided with conflict between Rome and the inhabitants of Alba Longa, in particular a "battle of champions" involving her three brothers, the Horatii, who fought against three Alban brothers, the Curiatii. After a dramatic contest, during which the odds were at one point three to one against him, the surviving Horatius brother emerged victorious.²⁰ Upon his return to the city in exuberant spirits, he saw that young Horatia was weeping for one of the Curiatii, to whom she had been betrothed. Horatius promptly drew his sword and ran her through (1.26.3), shouting angrily that she had forgotten her brothers, the dead and the living, as well as her native land (*oblita fratrum mortuorum vivique, oblita patriae*, 1.26.4). "So perish every Roman woman who mourns an enemy of the state," he says (*Sic eat quaecumque Romana lugebit hostem*, 1.26.5).

If the story were to end at this point, a superficial reading might generate sympathy for Horatius's point of view. Yet the story continues, and the events which follow make it clear that the simple reading of Horatia as a traitor to her family and to Rome is inadequate.²¹ Livy describes a profound difference of opinion among those who witnessed her slaying. It was an atrocious act (*atrox*, 1.26.5) and the question was whether Horatius's heroism on behalf of the state outweighed the crime of murdering his sister. Horatia's father held that she had been justly slain (*iure caesam*, 1.26.9), but Horatius might nevertheless have been pronounced guilty by duumvirs if Tullus Hostilius had not permitted him to appeal to the Roman people. He was ultimately acquitted, though "more in admiration of his valor than from the justice of his cause" (*absolveruntque admiratione magis virtutis quam iure causae*, 1.26.12). The qualification is a heavy one, and if emphasis is placed on the process leading up to the acquittal rather than the acquittal itself, Horatius's status as a hero becomes unsure. Consequently, his sister's status as a traitor is destabilized too. In other circumstances, her identification with the family of her betrothed might have been deemed unifying or

¹⁹ Livy 1.26.2–5; Claassen (above, n.16) 85; Feldherr (above, n.14) 132–36.

²⁰ Ogilvie (above, n.9) 109. The fight between the Horatii and the Curiatii, including the slaying of Horatia (Camilla), is another favorite theme in Western painting, e.g., Francesco de Mura, *Horatius Slays Camilla* (1760); Jacques-Louis David, *The Oath of the Horatii* (1784).

²¹ For the contradictory nature of the two Horatius stories (killing the Curiatii, killing Horatia) and their complications as *exempla*, see Kraus (above, n.4) 19–20. J. B. Solodow ("Livy and the Story of Horatius, 1.24–26," *TAPhA* 109 [1979] 251–68; repr. in J. D. Chaplin and C. S. Kraus, eds., *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Livy* [Oxford 2009] 297–320) selects the story of Horatius as a departure from Livy's practice of presenting clear *exempla* either to imitate or to avoid, and proceeds to emphasize the story's lack of resolution and Livy's decision to leave his readers with a moral problem they must resolve for themselves. The analysis is welcome; the only question is whether Livy's *exempla* are more complicated as a general rule than is allowed, especially in respect of prominent women in book 1.

otherwise praiseworthy. After all, what she did was really what the Sabine women did, though in reverse: she identified with the family of her husband-to-be from another community. The crucial difference in this case is that the community was not Rome. Horatia's *exemplum* serves to illustrate how the Sabine women might have been perceived by members of their own community, whose anger would hardly help to establish concord in the new state.

IX. Tanaquil

The next woman, Tanaquil, achieves unprecedented public prominence.²² Her particular talent seems to lie in her ability to perceive the will of the gods and thereby promote her men to become kings of Rome. The two men concerned are her husband, Lucius Tarquinius Priscus (formerly an Etruscan named Lucumo), and Priscus's successor as king, Servius Tullius, who was raised in the royal household under the tutelage of Tanaquil. It was Tanaquil, according to Livy, who encouraged her husband to leave their home city of Tarquinii and migrate to a new *patria*, Rome, in search of appropriate recognition (*honor*) for someone of his ability (1.34.5). "She had no trouble in persuading a man to whom Tarquinii was only his mother's birthplace" (*Facile persuadet ut cupido honorum et cui Tarquinii materna tantum patria esset*, 1.34.7). As they were approaching Rome, an eagle swooped down, lifted Priscus's cap, and then replaced it on his head. Tanaquil interpreted this as an omen that her husband should "expect transcendent greatness" (*excelsa et alta sperare*, 1.34.9). Livy says that Tanaquil was "a woman skilled in celestial prodigies, as was the case with most Etruscans" (*perita, ut volgo Etrusci, caelestium prodigiorum mulier*, 1.34.9). Consequently, the omen appears to show the gods' support for public aspirations of the highest order. At the death of Ancus Marcius, Priscus duly became king, aided greatly by the fact that the former king's heirs were not yet of age. Friction with these heirs ultimately saw Priscus assassinated by an axe blow to the head. Tanaquil duped the citizens into thinking that her husband was still alive and, having previously interpreted a fire omen in favor of Servius Tullius, proceeded to organize his accession. She thereby became responsible for the elevation of two kings of Rome (1.41.5, 1.47.6).

Three points can be made here. The first is that the women of Livy's first book have been recognized as agents for political bonding or change.²³ The second is that Tanaquil is the first woman in Livy's narrative to be drawn in substantial detail.²⁴ The Etruscan monarchy, therefore, coincides with a significant change in Livy's depiction of female *exempla*. It seems natural to conclude that the unprecedented

²² Livy 1.34–41; Smethurst (above, n.7) 81–82; Ogilvie (above, n.9) 140; Claassen (above, n.16) 85–87; Feldherr (above, n.14) 213–17.

²³ Fantham (above, n.10) 223; see Claassen (above, n.16) 75: "the outcome of most of Livy's tales about women in early Rome is political."

²⁴ Fantham (above, n.10) 225.

attention given to Tanaquil and her successors in Livy's narrative is a way of preparing readers for the greatest political change of book 1: from monarchy to republic. The third point concerns the view that the strongly patriarchal society of Augustan Rome did not like the involvement of powerful women in politics.²⁵ A positive reading of Tanaquil's role in elevating Tarquinius Priscus and Servius Tullius to power might weaken this view. Yet again, however, her contribution proves decidedly questionable.

Tanaquil's prophetic gifts and inspirational role in the Tarquin dynasty were probably features of the earliest written accounts.²⁶ Other portrayals, however, focus on her family virtues,²⁷ whereas Livy emphasizes her political skills and makes her a figure of substantial public importance. This has been thought to reflect the higher public profile of Etruscan women,²⁸ but it accords with other portrayals of women in Livy's first book. Tanaquil's temporary pre-eminence at the time of her husband's death recalls that of Lavinia, though the two women differ in their support for royal heirs not yet of age. Tanaquil's intervention on crucial public matters is reminiscent of the behavior of Hersilia and the Sabine women. Indeed, she probably represents the apex of such intervention, given her role as double kingmaker. Yet her patronage of the two kings led to friction with other claimants and ultimately caused the deaths of both men. Her husband Tarquinius Priscus ended up with an axe in his head—a fate that immediately calls into question the accuracy of Tanaquil's interpretation of the eagle omen. Did this omen in fact call attention in a prescient way to Priscus's head? Was Priscus too easily persuaded by his wife's advice, as, for example, Romulus might have been with Hersilia? Servius Tullius too died horribly, at the hands of one of the natural sons of Priscus and Tanaquil (see below). It could be argued, therefore, that Tanaquil fits the pattern of female aspirations and advice serving to undermine rather than strengthen the state. If so, the point is underscored dramatically in the next *exemplum*.

X. Tullia

Livy now describes the most evil woman in his first book—Tullia, the daughter of Servius Tullius.²⁹ As is well known, Tullia's inspirational role led to violence and tyranny. The younger daughter of Servius Tullius, she is said to have propelled her brother-in-law Lucius Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud) to murder her

²⁵ R. A. Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (London 1992) 10–11.

²⁶ See Fabius Pictor fr. 11b Peter; Enn. *Ann.* 145–146 Skutsch.

²⁷ See Enn. *Ann.* 147 Skutsch; Plin. *HN* 8.194; Paul. *Fest.* 85 Lindsay.

²⁸ E.g., Fantham (above, n.10) 225; *OCD*, 3rd ed. s.v. *Tanaquil*.

²⁹ Livy 1.46–48; R. Thomsen, *King Servius Tullius: A Historical Synthesis* (London 1980) 279. For the creation of spectacle in Livy's narrative of Tarquin's accession, see Feldherr (above, n.14) 187–94, 213–17; A. M. Feldherr, "Livy's Revolution: Civic Identity and the Creation of the *Res Publica*," in Chaplin and Kraus (above, n.21) 409–38, esp. 421–22, 428.

husband and sister, to marry her, and to seize power by killing her father, at which point just and lawful kingship died at Rome. Tarquin, it should be noted, was just as bad as Tullia. "Evil was drawn to evil," says Livy, "but the woman took the lead" (*malum malo aptissimum; sed initium turbandi omnia a femina ortum est*, 1.46.7). She felt no shame about appearing in public to proclaim Tarquin king (1.48.5–6), and even drove her wagon over the body of her dead father (1.48.7–8), an act that has attracted much attention in western art.³⁰ The tyrannical elements of the story—pride, lust for power, sexual lust, murder, impiety, injustice, illegality—seem clearly influenced by Greek depictions of tyrants and their fates. Livy is in fact explicit about this: "For the royal house of Rome produced an example of tragic guilt, as others had done [sc. the houses of Atreus and Oedipus], in order that loathing of kings might hasten the coming of liberty, and that the end of royal power might come in that reign which was the fruit of crime" (*Tulit enim et Romana regia sceleris tragici exemplum, ut taedio regum maturior veniret libertas ultimumque regnum esset quod scelere partum foret*, 1.46.3). The tragic elements were probably present in Fabius Pictor (*OCD*, 3rd ed. s.v. "Tullia [1]"), but the decisive influence of Tullia could well be Livy's contribution, making her the direct heir of his Tanaquil. As an *exemplum*, Tullia brings clearly to fruition the disturbing potential of the inspirational and advisory roles played earlier by women in Livy's first book. She tends in consequence to stand less far apart from the others than might initially seem the case, given her violent and impious behavior. The monarchy had experienced a wide range of women playing inspirational roles. The next woman would inspire a completely new political system.

XI. Lucretia

Livy's first book ends in 510 B.C.E. with the momentous rebellion against Tarquinius Superbus, the seventh and last king of Rome, and the establishment of the Roman Republic. The least virtuous woman in the narrative (Tullia) is now succeeded by the most virtuous, whose name, of course, is Lucretia (*RE* 38), the wife of Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, who was the great-nephew of Tarquinius Priscus.³¹ Lucretia, a chaste and modest wife, whose first appearance is at the loom in her home (1.57.9), is raped by Sextus, the son of Tarquinius Superbus. She becomes the ultimate victim of tyrannical cruelty, deception, and lust. Her subsequent suicide, motivated primarily by concern for her husband and family, takes place after her husband

³⁰ E.g., Jean Bardin, *Tullia Rides over Servius Tullius* (1765).

³¹ Livy 1.58–59; I. Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia* (Oxford 1982); S. R. Joshel, "The Body Female and the Body Politic: Livy's Lucretia and Verginia," in A. Richlin, ed., *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (New York 1992) 112–30 [repr. in Chaplin and Kraus (above, n.21) 380–408]; Fantham (above, n.10) 225–26; Claassen (above, n.16) 88–89; Feldherr (above, n.14) 188, 194–204; J. D. Chaplin, *Livy's Exemplary History* (Oxford 2000) 168–96; M. M. Matthes, *The Rape of Lucretia and the Founding of Republics* (Philadelphia 2000) 23–50.

and father have sworn revenge. Before plunging a knife into her heart, she says: “Not in time to come shall ever unchaste woman live through the example of Lucretia” (*nec ulla deinde impudica Lucretiae exemplo vivet*, 1.58.10).³² The matter to this point had been a family one, except that Rome’s most powerful family, that of Tarquin, was involved. It is Lucius Junius Brutus who makes the political consequences inevitable when he draws the knife from Lucretia’s wound and swears a bloody oath to expel kingship from Rome (1.59.1). The influence of Greek tyrant literature on Livy’s narrative is profound, and the association of Brutus’s revolt with Lucretia’s dramatic suicide had long since been made by Fabius Pictor (*OCD*, 3rd ed. s.v. “Lucretia”). It is, however, Livy who describes Lucretia as the paradigmatic Roman *matrona* (married woman), adhering resolutely to the fundamental importance of her chastity, even when doing so causes her to commit suicide under circumstances in which no blame attaches to her. She intends explicitly to become an *exemplum* (1.58.10, quoted above): no Roman women caught in adultery shall cry rape and escape punishment on the strength of her precedent. The great complication is that, although her motivation is not primarily political, she must have been aware of the political implications of her act for Tarquin’s perverted monarchy, given that Tarquin’s son was involved.³³ The moral ideal she represents is in this case incompatible with ongoing tyrannical rule and requires civic freedom (*libertas*). Thus her suicide opens the way for Brutus to become the liberator of the city (*liberatores urbis*, 1.60.2). There had been rapes as a result of tyrannical attitudes and behavior before, e.g., Rhea Silvia, and perhaps the *superbia* that led to the rape of the Sabine women. This time, however, the representative of Rome was in the wrong, so that the monarchy itself had to be removed for justice to return.

Still, it remains disturbing that Lucretia decides to kill herself as a lesson to adulterous women when she has in fact been raped. In doing so she equates the consequences of rape and adultery, though the circumstances are very different. Even in the context of a strong patriarchy, her attitudes and behavior should have engendered debate, as they continue to do. Jane Chaplin thinks that Lucretia’s example subsequently proved unsuccessful, since rape victims did not usually commit suicide.³⁴ The message of Lucretia, however, seems to have been aimed at adulterous women. Rather than trying to encourage rape victims to commit suicide, she was trying to discourage married women from adultery (and from making excuses for it) by forcing on them her view of how seriously the consequences should be assessed (and of appropriate punishment). Associated parts of Livy’s narrative might imply that she was quite successful in this. Brutus seems to

³² The dramatic suicide has become a staple of Western artists, e.g., Titian, *Lucretia* (1568–1571, 1570–1576); Rembrandt, *Lucretia* (1664).

³³ On the challenges presented by the exemplary process in relation to Lucretia’s *exemplum*, see Chaplin (above, n.31) 168–96; Kraus (above, n.4) 19.

³⁴ Chaplin (above, n.31) 1–2, 168.

have been inspired by Lucretia's stand, and so too were the women who mourned him as the avenger of chastity in book 2.³⁵ On the other hand, adultery certainly took place in Roman society, and few would have agreed that circumstances did not matter. Moreover, it hardly seems that Lucretia's circumstances made suicide inevitable, for all those present were convinced that rape had taken place. Would some readers therefore have judged Lucretia's suicide to be less compelling as the inspiration for revolt than is normally thought? Would they have questioned her reasoning? Her advice begins to take on some of the unsteadiness that has been found in female advice above. Certainly, the *exemplum* remains difficult.

There is, therefore, a developing pattern in Livy's first book of women from prominent families forming attitudes independently of their men, interposing themselves at critical times, giving crucial advice on public matters, having that advice easily (*facile*) adopted by their men, with the results tending on reflection to generate discord rather than concord for Rome. These women exist in the narrative ostensibly as supporters of their men, but their contributions require careful evaluation and often turn out to be of dubious value. The great question is why Livy should fashion female *exempla* in the manner described above—open, unresolved, complicated, and thought-provoking. Perhaps two major sets of reasons may be suggested: the nature of Livy's historical writing, and the sociopolitical environment of Augustan Rome.

The topic of Livy's historical writing has been heavily debated, but the models by which he has been judged are often anachronistic or unfair. He was not someone who produced a patchwork quilt of excerpts taken from his predecessors; nor was he a "scientific" historian who insisted on high standards of critical analysis of evidence; nor was he merely a literary artist who aimed at style or drama; nor were his interests primarily political and military in nature. He was a complex writer who was fundamentally interested in morality, especially in "models" of virtue and vice. As is well known, he says that his aim is to provide *exempla* for his readers to imitate and to avoid (*Pref.* 10). The study of these *exempla* has become more refined in recent decades.³⁶ In particular, scholars have noted how frequently the *exempla* remain open or apparently unresolved through the course of Livy's narrative. Gary Miles explains this by underlining the function of history in Augustan Rome:³⁷

[Scholars] have failed to appreciate the positive functions that displays of analytical confusion perform in their immediate contexts and in the larger context of the narrative as a whole. . . . History in this version

³⁵ M. Jaeger, review of J. Chaplin, *Livy's Exemplary History*, in *AJPh* 123.3 (2002) 529.

³⁶ E.g., Miles (above, n.8); Chaplin (above, n.31). For Livy's reference to *exempli documenta*, see *Pref.* 10.

³⁷ Miles (above, n.8) 74.

remains useful not because it represents accurate reconstructions of past events that can serve as analogies in the present but rather because it perpetuates and interprets the collective memory on which the identity and character of the Roman people depend. This is not the only kind of history, to be sure, but one particularly well suited to a society that regulated itself less by a body of written law than by stories, examples, and wisdom transmitted through a rich array of oral traditions that had only recently begun to be reduced to writing.

Accordingly, Livy's narrative embodies "subversive possibilities."³⁸ For Chaplin, *exempla* are malleable and can be invoked in different ways, depending on the speaker, the audience, and the immediate situation. History does not achieve closure; rather, people move beyond it, because they have learned its lessons. Livy's narrative does not provide a set of ossified lessons about the past but a set of lessons in how to engage with that past.³⁹ Such an approach perpetuates the process of contemplating *exempla*, keeping the past alive and the *exempla* themselves fresh and relevant. People may take from them what they will in their particular circumstances, accepting or rejecting the viewpoints of historical figures as they please.⁴⁰

The second set of reasons for the female *exempla* of Livy's first book derives from the sociopolitical environment of Augustan Rome. *Exempla* are certainly part of the Roman historiographical tradition, but Livy emphasizes them far more than his predecessors. His greater interest in them seems to be something he shares in common with his contemporaries, in particular the emperor Augustus, whose Forum was populated with statues of outstanding men designed to stand as *exempla* for present and future generations. The technique was evidently deemed appropriate for "a generation whose past had collapsed and whose future was uncertain."⁴¹

Smethurst thought that women were mere "puppets" in Livy's history.⁴² They were "incapable of positive action, except when impelled by base motives," and their role was that "of foils illustrating the almost entirely masculine virtues that Livy wished to inculcate."⁴³ Such a black-and-white view tends to convert Livy's narrative into a kind of reflex patriarchal response to anxieties about real women, but the idea that women in Livy's narrative can be reduced to foils, whose character is fundamentally base, is overly reductive. The women

³⁸ Miles (above, n.8) 54.

³⁹ Chaplin (above, n.31) 1–31.

⁴⁰ Chaplin (above, n.31) 50–72.

⁴¹ Chaplin (above, n.31) 31, 168–96 (Livy, Augustus, and *exempla*). On the fraught environment at Rome during the 30s and 20s B.C.E., see J. Osgood, *Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge 2006) 152–201.

⁴² Smethurst (above, n.7) 80.

⁴³ Smethurst (above, n.7) 82, 87.

in book 1 are far more complex than this. Certainly their roles are primarily public, with political consequences; but the motives for their actions may in some cases be read as well intentioned (e.g., Lavinia, Hersilia, the Sabine Women, Lucretia) or at least uncertain (Rhea Silvia, Tarpeia, Horatia); and Livy is careful to write that both Tullia and Tarquin are evil, though the woman took the lead (1.46.7). Base character was not a prerogative of women and the narrative leaves a large amount unresolved. The point is more about the dubious quality of women's advice and the serious problems that can flow from this. One notable feature of the civil wars was the intrusion of prominent women into political and military deliberations, and the consequent targeting of them by opposition forces. Contemporaries were in particular shocked by the disturbing roles played by women such as Fulvia and Cleopatra during the tumultuous years of the 40s and 30s B.C.E.⁴⁴ Indeed, if Livy's first pentad was complete by 27 B.C.E., it was written in years that were more "Actian" than "Augustan," so that he would surely have had these women in mind, along with others at various levels of a shaken society.⁴⁵

The narrative of book 1 results in a momentous change in the political form of the Roman state: the monarchy gives way to the republic. Livy associates women fundamentally with this change, in that the female *exempla* exercise ever more decisive and destabilizing power on the public stage. It seems that Livy's women have the potential to promote concord but greater potential over time to inspire discord and change in the developing sociopolitical environment. Consequently, their characterizations and roles in the narrative are complex rather than simple, open rather than closed, unresolved rather than resolved. It is not that Livy has lost creative control among conflicting sources. On the contrary, he seems to be emphasizing not just the complexities of his *exempla* but the complexities involved in assessing these *exempla*. Livy's underlying message, it would seem, is that Roman men have to regulate public contributions by prominent women, and not accept female advice too easily, without prolonged consideration. Continual vigilance is required if civil conflict is to be averted and *concordia* maintained.

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⁴⁴ For Antony's wife Fulvia, see *ILLRP* 1106, 1112 (sling-bullets inscribed with slogans directed at her, used during the Perusine War); *OCD*, 3rd ed. *s.v.* *Fulvia*. For the Cleopatra legend, see L. Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams, and Distortions* (London 1990) 54–94 ("The Story According to Octavius"); D. E. E. Kleiner, *Cleopatra and Rome* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2005).

⁴⁵ T. J. Luce, "The Dating of Livy's First Decade," in Chaplin and Kraus (above, n.21) 17–48. Luce shows that book 1 is normally (and the first pentad is often) dated between 27 and 25 B.C.E. (17–18); he believes that the first pentad was complete by 27 B.C.E. and that it was not, therefore, "Augustan" as such (46).