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Elite Women as Tools of Power in First-Century C.E. Rome

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Elite Women as Tools of Power in 1st-century C.E. Rome

Abstract:

For the patrician class, marriage was a form of power intended to uphold Roman patriarchy by providing opportunity for social, political, and financial advancement. However, history has shown that the power of marriage also extended to the women involved in these couplings as well. Through marriage, elite Roman women had the power to perpetuate or decimate Rome's social order. Thus, gender norms were created and enforced in order to maintain patriarchy and broker power. Women who did not live up to the social expectations set by these norms were met with opposition. By examining Roman poetry and literature, Roman politics, and profiling the lives and reputations of real imperial women, we discover that the treatment of women in Rome was a direct reflection of Rome's patriarchal values, and that their narratives were created to serve the Roman patriarchy.

Keywords: Augustus Caesar, Livia Augusta, Julia Major, marriage, sexuality, gender norms

Introduction

In classical antiquity, aristocratic women were catalysts for change in politics and power dynamics between men. Previously established standards for family life and marriage as well as Rome's government highlighted how these women were used to broker power in Rome. The rise of Octavian Augustus Caesar and his subsequent imperial rule, were strong factors in influencing the change of social expectations for women and defining their gender roles. According to Reid (2016), in an effort to reform the moral decay into which he believed Rome had descended, Augustus passed a series of law reforms regarding marriage and adultery, with profound implications for noblewomen. Augustus's wife, Livia Augusta, served as the template for his beliefs regarding the role of women. They heavily emphasized constructs that specifically related to women, such as chastity, sexual modesty, and faithfulness. The historian Livy, his contemporary, also propagated stories that supported and enforced Augustus's views and new regulations. Later authors of the greater Julio-Claudian dynasty, such as Tacitus, also continued these themes and traditions. These mores defined who a proper woman was, and women who

subverted the established standards were portrayed negatively. In this paper, I argue that gender norms and social expectations of women were created and upheld to reinforce and manipulate power and power hierarchies, and that narratives of certain women served that purpose rather than accurately reflected who they were as people.

The authors of *Women in the Classical World* provide a basic overview of the history of Roman women within their context, ranging from the myths and legends of Rome's founding to Augustus's own family. They note how Livy's account portrays "the gamut of attitudes towards women" but do not delve into further detail about how gendered social expectations influenced these attitudes (Fantham et al., 1994, p. 217). This work touches upon Augustus's role in modifying the Roman culture regarding marriage during his reign, stating:

"Octavian seems to have been sufficiently alarmed by the decline of marriage and reproductivity among the privileged classes to use legislation to reinforce its appeal...Ordinary anonymous citizens might continue to be chaste or promiscuous unnoticed, but respectability was now enforced on those in the public eye."

(Fantham et al., 1994, p. 290)

Thus, Augustus had instituted his reforms to specifically combat the aristocrats' propensity towards adultery during this time. It was imperative in Roman culture to preserve wealth, status, and legacy, as well as the legitimacy and gravitas of fatherhood in such a patriarchal culture.

In *Prostitutes and Matrons in the Roman World*, Anise Strong discusses the gender roles of women by examining and comparing Rome's conceptions of "good" women and "bad" women. This book is helpful in scrutinizing the texts of Livy and Tacitus and assessing the narrative choices they make in how they portray women. Strong also uses Roman traditions and

commentaries on gender and social norms to analyze some of the most prominent women, such as Cleopatra, in Roman history through that lens. Strong offers a wider perspective on who these women really were and why they were written in those ways.

Before I start my analysis, let me begin with a brief overview of the cultural expectations and standards that Roman women were held to in the late republic and Pax Romana, the era of peace during Augustus Caesar's reign from 27 BCE to 14 CE. In this paper I am going to do three things: First, I will examine Augustus' laws and reforms in order to get a better understanding of their impact and motivations. Second, I will focus on stories in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* that portray the ideal Roman woman (in her different roles of daughter and wife) to see how, or if, these portrayals align with Augustus' reforms and Roman tradition. Third, I will take a brief look at the lives of real women within Augustus's own family in order to illustrate the above.

Roman Women

Epigraphy often demonstrates the archetype of the *femina bona* [the good wife], a chaste, loyal *matrona* [mother] who uses her talents and financial resources to support her husband and family. According to Anise Strong (2016), “the seven most common adjectives used to describe women in Roman epigraphy are: *dulcissima* [sweetest], *pia* [dutiful], *bene merens* [well-deserving], *sua* [his], *carissima* [dearest], *optima* [best], and *sanctissima* [holiest] (p. 19). *Sanctissima* connotes purity in the sense of sexual self-restraint and faithfulness. The Roman woman's accomplishments in the public realm only had merit if they were in relation to her husband, which is most emphasized by *sua*. There is also a general lack of defining characteristics, specifically pertaining to the woman herself; these qualities are all generic and

could apply to any woman, and that was likely the point: proper women should all act and behave the same.

Roman Clothing

Clothing conferred status, hierarchy, and customs in Roman society. Senators wore the *toga praetexta*, a long, draped garment with a purple sash to signal their occupation. Prostitutes wore togas, like men, to reflect their presence in the public domain, and allude to their working status (Strong, 2016, pp. 21-22). A respectable matron wore a *longa vestis* or *stola*, a long ankle-length dress with a *palla*, a cloak, effectively hiding her body while in public. These garments acted as symbols of morality and marital-status, so they were physical representations of womanly virtue (Strong, 2016, p. 21). Weaving, spinning, and wool-working were particularly valuable skills because they enabled women to make their own clothing, as opposed to buying expensive wares from the marketplace, and are frequently symbols of the dutiful wife in myth.

Roman Sexuality

Sexuality was one of the methods Roman society used to categorize women and their interactions with the public realm. A *femina bona* absolutely had to portray *pudicitia*, which translates to sexual modesty and is one of the most essential virtues of the Roman woman, specifically upheld to maintain her public image, lest she be confused for a *meretrix*, a prostitute (Strong, 2016, pp. 19-20). A good woman was sexually unavailable, belonging only to her husband. A bad woman was sexually available, belonging to no one, and can be purchased and dominated by any man. The *femina bona*, while publicly present, still worked at home and her power was limited to the private affairs of the household, but the *meretrix* practiced her profession in the public domain. The greatest distinction between a *femina bona* and a *meretrix*

was their economic roles. A *meretrix* (she who earns) did not need to marry a man for sustenance and lodgings when she could make her own money by selling her body, whereas the *femina bona* depended on her husband to be the provider, though she may have had a few assets of her own if she were of a higher social class. This meant that a *meretrix* had personal agency and independence, was bound by no one, and could disrupt the social order that Augustus vehemently wanted to reinvigorate and protect. *Meretrix* is also a term that came to be associated with women who exercised too much power or influence in politics because of its connotations of autonomy and self-interested motivations. Cleopatra was the first exceptional woman to be labeled a *meretrix*, for her personal wealth and power.

Roman Family and Marriage

A Roman's worth and social standing in society was highly determined by their *gens*, or lineage. The Romans conceptualized a *familia* as being a branch of a patrilineal *gens* including not just immediate family members but also extended family members. Ancestry and family predetermined a Roman's opportunities and perception in the public sphere. Augustus claimed to be a descendant of Aeneas, the legendary son of Venus and grandfather of Rome, who led the survivors of the Trojan war to Italy to settle a new homeland. Being a descendant of a god added prestige and cemented Augustus's divinity and authority when he came into power. A Roman's deeds and actions not only represented him or herself but also their whole family. Patricians valued superiority, rank, authority, talent, and achievement in service to the state (Flower, 2004, p. 113).

A blood relationship was not the only way to be a part of a *gens*. Adoption was also a popular, legitimate method of securing heirs in the event of lacking biological children due to

infertility or child mortality, and it was common among the patricians to adopt an heir from a respectable family as a means of securing their family line when all other options failed. This is how Augustus was eventually able to claim *Julius* as his new *nomen* and *gens* by extension. Julius Caesar had no legitimate children after his daughter died while giving birth, so he adopted Augustus and left him an inheritance in his will. While Augustus was actually related to Julius Caesar by blood through his mother, who was Caesar's niece, he was technically a part of a different *gens* because their kinship was matrilineal and thus not legally recognized. In becoming Julius Caesar's adopted son, Augustus also took his great uncle's full name and added his original *nomen* to become *Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus*, officially becoming the patriarch of *gens Julia* after Caesar's death.

The traditional Roman family was highly patriarchal. The *paterfamilias* [father of the family], who was the oldest living male, wielded absolute authority over his family and its affairs as a patriarch. This authority known as *patria potestas* [paternal power] was applied to every male and female of the *gens*, not just direct offspring. The *paterfamilias* could also inflict punishment on any member of the family, possibly except his wife, depending on the agreement reached between each family's respective *paterfamilias* prior to marriage. The *paterfamilias* arranged the marriages of his descendants and a marriage was only legitimate if the patriarch of both families approved of it. Roman marriage traditions complicated the wife's role in relation to her husband and affected the extent of his authority over her.

In a Roman wedding, a woman *nubit* [marries] while a man *duxit* [leads] in matrimony, signifying the woman's objectification, but only if the woman *convenire in manum* [entered into his hand] did the husband have any control over her and her legal affairs. There were two

different types of marriages, *cum manu* and *sine manu*. *Cum manu* stipulated that guardianship and power over the wife was transferred from her father to her husband. Thus, a bride formally left her family behind and entered her husband's family, falling under its command. Only then could she ever become a proper *materfamilias* [matriarch] instead of a mere *uxor* [wife] when her husband became the *paterfamilias*. In a *sine manu* marriage, the father retained legal authority over the bride and she remained a part of the *gens* that she was born into. By the late republic, *sine manu* marriages were the most commonplace for useful and methodical reasons. If the *paterfamilias* retained *potestas* [power] over his daughter, then he could legally divorce his daughter from her husband (Flower, 2004, p. 124). Divorces among the patricians often took place in order to form other marriages that were more politically, financially, or socially advantageous than the original marriage. These marriages were essentially alliances between families.

By the late republic, these rigid social rules were being flouted by the nobles who benefited the most from them and so adultery had become more common among both men and women. *Women in the Classical World* states,

In the last years of the republic, the more independent women of good families were now beginning to decide for themselves what kind of social occasion they enjoyed. Both in ostensibly factual texts and in imaginative writing, a new kind of woman appears precisely at the time of Cicero and Caesar: a woman in high position, who nevertheless claims for herself the indulgence in sexuality of a woman of pleasure. (Fantham et al., 1994, p. 280)

Augustus Caesar's only biological child, Julia Major, was ironically a prolific embodiment of this new, sexually indulgent woman. The emergence of sexually provocative and dominant women as well as the promiscuous attitudes that Augustus vehemently tried to abolish, were reflected in elegy and other poetry in the works of poets such as Ovid and Catullus, both of whom were prominent patricians. Here is a scandalous excerpt from Ovid's *Amores* about a seditious seduction at a dinner party:

When he pats the couch, put on your respectable-wife expression
and take your place beside him—but nudge my foot
as you're passing by. Watch out for my nods and eye-talk
pick up my stealthy messages, send replies...(Amores 1.4.1-4, 15-18; Green;
1982: 89-90). (Fantham et al., 1994, p. 287)

Ovid is describing an extramarital liaison, reflective of the typical behaviors among the Roman elite, but how did these attitudes originate? The authors state that the instability and the uncertainty of the late republic led these women to neglect their traditional duties as faithful wives because these social expectations lost value in the civil unrest and repeated disruptions of the status quo. Women whose husbands were away on military campaigns as well as women who were political pawns in arranged marriages, especially the commonplace *sine manu* agreements, lacked incentive for being good wives. Without *potestas* over his wife, the cheated husband had no recourse for penance in fear of retaliation from his wife's family. Thus, the strong emphasis on the moral virtues of womanhood was not just time-honored tradition, but a guard for the patriarchal power structure of Roman society.

Julia Major was most infamous for publicly rejecting the qualities that were supposed to epitomize the Roman *matrona*. Julia, bound by the *patria potestas* of her father, had been married to Marcus Vipsansius Agrippa and Augustus's successor Tiberius, but she was far from the epitome of being a proper *matrona*. According to Tacitus (117 C.E./2004), "Sempronius Gracchus...had defiled the same Julia during her marriage to Marcus Agrippa" and "[Julia]...for her immorality had formerly been shut away by her father Augustus." Despite her father's efforts to galvanize the virtue of Roman women through the *Lex Julia de adulteriis* (Reid, 2016, p. 186), which vehemently condemned adultery, Julia still continued to engage in illegal sexual liaisons. Julia's flouting of her own father's law strongly demonstrated her disregard for the social mores and her active utilization of her personal and sexual agency through her extramarital affairs.

Eventually, Augustus used the law to exile her to a barren island in 2 BCE. Thus, Julia is regarded as the first *meretrix Augusta* [imperial whore], despite never being directly referred to as one (Fantham et al., 1994, p. 292). By being openly promiscuous, Julia portrayed herself as unchaste and unvirtuous in a public space and did not curb her behavior in direct opposition to Roman tradition. Her behavior was in violation of the proper way for a woman of her ancestral, social, and economic stature to act. Strong (2016) asserts, "although sexually promiscuous, [Julia] still fulfilled a traditional familial role of the fecund mother and wife...Julia was a disappointment and a 'cancer' to her father but not dangerous as an individual" (p. 111). Julia even once proclaimed, "I never take on a passenger unless the ship is full," a witty remark about how she never conceived illegitimate offspring (Fantham et al., 1994, p. 291). Julia was an adulterer, but she still did part of her duty by bearing only her husband's children. She also

proved herself to be non-threatening to the political nuances of Rome by remaining largely detached from that area of public life, unlike her stepmother Livia Drusilla.

Marriage in Politics: Augustus's Strategy and Ascension to Rulership

The civil war that began between Augustus Caesar and Mark Antony, formally ending the Republic and initiating the Empire, was catalyzed by a divorce and an unorthodox remarriage. Mark Antony, who had an uneasy relationship with Augustus, had formed an alliance with him by marrying his sister Octavia. However, Mark Antony later had a disastrous military campaign. In order to strengthen his forces, he ended his marriage to Octavia and remarried Cleopatra, who provided him with funding and soldiers. By choosing to divorce Octavia, Mark Antony effectively severed his relationship to Augustus and actively antagonized him. In this instance, both Augustus and Mark Antony used marriage to consolidate power and strive for more, and Octavia was the means that allowed them to do so. Mark Antony's divorce had also given Augustus the opportunity to formally end their alliance and seize power for himself by defaming Antony before the Senate. By choosing to abandon his legitimate, noble wife for a foreign lover, Mark Antony damaged his credibility and likability, giving way to the civil war between them that ultimately led to Augustus's dominion over Rome and its ever-expanding empire. Augustus Caesar won this war after defeating Mark Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium and established his principate. Augustus Caesar, despite calling himself *princeps* (first citizen) instead of *imperator* (emperor), became the de facto monarch of the Roman empire.

Cleopatra's immense wealth and authority is how Augustus was able to further his war against Mark Antony, by framing Cleopatra (a foreign monarch) as a significant threat to Rome. Propaganda emphasizes her perceived sexual promiscuity, especially by juxtaposing her, the

meretrix regina [prostitute queen] and *Aegyptia coniunx* [Egyptian wife] against Octavia, the *Romana matrona* (Strong, 2016, p. 106). Cleopatra is then the sexually available prostitute that seduced Mark Antony, causing him to stray from his faithful wife and betray his homeland in order to challenge Rome itself. Thus, Augustan poets objectify Cleopatra, despite her being the wealthiest, most powerful woman in the Mediterranean. Such sexualization became the perceived real reason that Mark Antony formed his marriage-alliance with her. This speaks to Rome's need to rule by patriarchy and remain male-oriented and male-dominated. Augustus's true motive in his war against Mark Antony and disparagement of Cleopatra was to further elevate himself and establish his Julio-Claudian dynasty.

The Relationship Between Official Rules and Dissemination of Expectations

Prominent Roman emperors and leaders generally held significant control and sway over the politics and social rules of their reign. The works of authors such as Livy offer a lens through which to analyze the ideas being approved and transmitted by Augustus. Livy wrote his works during the era of Augustus, who had a profound impact on gender roles and the expectations of women through his law reforms. Augustus's reforms were conservative, intending to transform the norms and beliefs specifically related to sex and marriage due to an observed "steep decline" in Roman morality (Reid, 2016, pp. 183-184). Augustus's law on adultery was the most iconic and the most radical.

After initial difficulties in passing legislation through the Senate, Augustus finally managed to pass the *Lex Julia de adulteriis* in 18 C.E (Reid, 2016, pp. 185-186). It stipulated that "adultery might only be committed where a man has sexual relations with a married woman", but an unmarried woman who was widowed or a virgin was only guilty of sexual misconduct. The

point of this was to ensure legitimate heirs for the *gens* of the married woman (Reid, 2016, p. 187). Thus, the *Lex Julia de adulteriis* is phrased in such a way that only women are culpable for the crime of adultery, and only unmarried women are punished for sexual misconduct. Since only the children borne by a man's legal wife and himself are considered legitimate, he is still free to copulate with anyone besides married women, because an illegitimate child cannot be an inheritor or an heir to any fortune or title. Augustus deemed that only a woman needs to be chaste, because of her sole ability to bear children, in order to protect the legitimacy of family lineages, and it subsequently becomes a hallmark virtue and a firm expectation of how a Roman woman ought to be. I will now begin to discuss Livy and his *Ab Urbe Condita* [*Histories*] in greater depth.

By the time Livy had begun writing his *Histories*, there was no concrete evidence to explain the origins of the Roman republic or of the city itself because the oral histories did not survive. What Livy (hesitantly) refers to as history is more-so a collection of urban myths. This gave Livy the ability to create the narrative he wanted people to believe as truth. Livy had strong political ties to Augustus that undoubtedly influenced how he chose to portray women, and that he likely wrote with ulterior motives to satisfy his ruler rather than with a commitment to objectivity and honesty (Reid, 2016, p. 183). Charles Reid believes that the stories Livy chose to include in *Ab Urbe Condita* were intended “to build a moral case for the return to ancient virtue” (p. 183). Sexual violence is a recurring theme in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, through his chapters on the “Rape of the Sabines” and the “Rape of Lucretia.” The ways in which these women treat their sexuality and act within the confines of Roman customs in their respective stories allow Livy to perpetrate deliberate messages about women. These messages underscore the importance

of paternity, and further emphasize the power women passively held in their ability to transform and elevate Rome while simultaneously lacking agency in the process. Fundamentally, these two stories are foundational myths that hinge on sexual domination.

The Rape of the Sabines

Livy begins discussing the "Rape of the Sabines" by first explaining the historical context that led to this event. He wrote that Rome was founded as an asylum for refugees and other undesirable men. Despite the city's rapid growth, it would not be able to sustain and further expand its population because the city lacked a sufficient number of women to bear progeny (Liv. 1.9.1). Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome, had sent envoys to neighboring Italian towns, soliciting marriage partners for his citizens without success. Livy states, "Ac plerisque rogitantibus dimissi equod feminis quoque asylum aperuissent: id enim demum compar conubium fore" [And the dismissed envoys were often asked if they had built a refuge for women too: for that would be the only equal marriage] (Liv. 1.9.5). It is an insulting rejection but it echoes long-standing marriage practices that were ubiquitous and integral to Augustus Caesar's views on marriage—no one should marry outside his or her social class. Consequently, Romulus concocts a plan to hold a solemn religious festival and invite the families from the neighboring towns to celebrate the holiday in Rome while he and his men abduct their unwed, virgin daughters.

After his plan succeeded, Rome went to war with the Sabines, which was waged until the wronged Sabine women valiantly interceded and stopped the fighting to spare the lives of their fathers and the fathers of their children. This is consistent with Roman tradition and notions of loyalty and female virtue in that their actions are in the interest of their family and children, not

themselves. It should also be stressed that despite his desperation for his citizens to procreate, Romulus still insists on capturing those specific women. The Sabines deem his men unworthy because Rome was still a newly established city full of men of unruly social order. This further highlights the importance of a woman's marital status and *pudicitia*, since, according to Livy, Romulus would not accept just any woman, but a *femina bona*.

The crux of the conflict described here between the Romans and the Sabines is about the inherent mismatch between good, properly raised virgin women and Romulus's band of fugitives and refugees. Livy stresses this with the phrase *compar conubium* [equal marriage]. It is simply a ludicrous, unreasonable proposition. So unsurprisingly, Romulus abducts them because there was no other way to break tradition. This is a mutual understanding on part of both parties as Romulus does not deny the social inequity, yet Livy spins the story to justify Romulus's actions. His motivations for the rape revolve around the need for progeny, not just lust for lust's sake. Brown (1995) argues that the "Rape of the Sabines" epitomizes the Roman ideal of *concordia* [marital harmony] which was reportedly one of Livy's most fervent beliefs (p. 302). This distinguishes Livy's rather unique interpretation of this event from other accounts and serves a socio-political purpose.

The conclusion of the "Rape of the Sabines" is marked by Romulus's offers of reconciliation and of *societas*, friendship, and partnership. However, *concordia* itself literally translates to "a joining of hearts," going beyond the simple camaraderie that *societas* suggests. Brown (1995) states:

Societas in fortune, citizenship, and children is precisely what Romulus offers the women in a speech which sums up the Roman marital ideal. The possibility of

concordia, a more affective notion than *societas*, is glimpsed...in the women's loyalty to their husbands in the face of their kinsmen's attack on Rome...Representing the Sabine women as increasingly active partners was for Livy a way of defining a particularly Roman ideal of marital cooperation. At the same time, of course, he limits the participation of the women to what is socially acceptable. (pp. 313-314)

In accordance with Roman tradition, the Sabine women take their newfound roles as *matronae* very seriously, placing their obligations to their new husbands and offspring above their own humiliation and injury. This constitutes *concordia* and the type of marital and familial bonds Augustus wanted to encourage through his law reforms.

This story marks the transformation of Rome from a small village that ranked poorly on Italy's social hierarchy to a full-fledged city, and this is owed to the Sabine women. Without bearing the children whose descendants would later become the upperclassmen of Rome, the city could not have flourished into the wide-reaching glory it possessed by Livy's era. "The Rape of the Sabines" places the grand burden on its titular characters of either losing their fathers or the fathers of their children. It is an unrealistic expectation for these women to sacrifice their humanity for the greater good of their families and their country, but this event brought Rome closer to realizing its destiny as the hegemon of the Mediterranean and that was all the justification needed.

The Rape of Lucretia

While the "Rape of the Sabines" is the foundational myth of Rome itself, the "Rape of Lucretia" is the foundational myth of the Roman republic, ending the era of the Roman monarchy that

began with Romulus. Livy depicts this legend beginning with a military camp wine party in Ardea in the residence of Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the King Tarquinius Superbus. Sextus Tarquinius and the other Tarquinius debate the virtues of their wives, one of whom was Lucretia, who was married to Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus. They agree to ride to Collatia to see for themselves how virtuous their wives actually are, and find that Lucretia is the most dutiful among their spouses. While the wives of the Tarquinius were enjoying a lavish feast, Lucretia was spinning wool with her maids. Having won the contest, Collatinus invites the Tarquinius into his home, where Sextus Tarquinius formally met Lucretia and is overtaken with "mala libido" [wicked lust] (Liv. 1.57.10). Impressed by her beauty and *pudicitia*, he decides to make sexual advances towards her (Liv. 1.57.4-10). It is glaringly ironic that Sextus Tarquinius's attraction to Lucretia is spurred by her chastity but it is that very quality that would prevent Lucretia from ever accepting his sexual advances in the following chapter.

After a few days, Sextus Tarquinius returns to Lucretia without Collatinus's knowledge and naturally, is warmly welcomed into the home and treated to dinner. At night, Tarquinius assaults the sleeping Lucretia in her bed, beseeching her to have sex with him, and she predictably refuses. He then threatens to kill her and a slave and place their nude bodies together, then claim that she committed adultery and was killed when caught. Lucretia subsequently yields to Tarquinius's demands (Liv. 1.58.1-5). Objectively, this would have been a much worse fate than being violated by Tarquinius when considering how criminal it is for a Roman woman, let alone a noblewoman such as Lucretia, to commit adultery, especially examining this situation through the lens of Rome's social moderation of women and Augustus's marriage laws. The disgrace of a tarnished public reputation and how that would reflect on her family was the worse

option. There is also the shame of a woman engaging in intercourse with a person of such lower status that might warrant the label of *meretrix* due to the perceived sexual availability.

After committing the crime, Sextus Tarquinius happily left Lucretia in her home. Horrified at the events, she messages her father and husband, both of whom traveled from Rome and Ardea respectively with companions, and confesses her rape, remarking "quid enim salvi est mulieri amissa pudicitia" [for what is well for a woman with lost honor?] (Liv. 1.58.7). They try to comfort her and alleviate her sorrow but she was resolved to punish herself for Tarquinius's offence after calling on these witnesses to avenge her. Lucretia tells them, "supplico non libero; nec ulla deinde impudica Lucretiae exemplo vivet" [I am not free from my crime; nor will the unchaste (woman) live through the example of Lucretia] (Liv. 1.58.10). She then takes a knife and plunges it into her chest (Liv. 1.58.7-10). Lucretia's suicide is framed as noble because it then spurs the beginnings of the Roman republic after her husband and father successfully lead the overthrow of the Tarquin family for this offense. It also establishes another moral standard for women to aspire to. An important indication to make is that Lucretia does not kill herself because she blames herself for her rape, but because she no longer fit the mold of a *femina bona*.

Sextus Tarquinius had made Lucretia impure. Regardless of the circumstances, she is no longer the chaste, holy wife that she is supposed to be, and this is stressed by Livy's use of *pudicitia* [chaste] in juxtaposition to *impudica* [unchaste] in her dialogue. Lucretia's reasoning that she should not live because she would be a bad example to other women echoes Livy's agenda in only depicting women that behave with sexual modesty and complete devotion, supporting Augustus Caesar's desired social schemes, which were intended to serve a political purpose in the bigger picture. Melissa Matthes asserts a socio-political perspective of the "Rape

of Lucretia" that connects to Augustus's motivations in his marriage reforms. Matthes (2000) writes,

The Tarquins are usurpers. The legitimate heir, Egerius ("the needy one") grows up to become the father of Collatinus, Lucretia's husband. Thus, Sextus's rape of Lucretia is designed, in part, to prevent the legitimate paternity of the Collatine line, a lineage thwarted from the onset of the Tarquin reign. Lucretia's husband, then, is both literally and metaphorically the son in subjection to Tarquin's paternal as well as obvious political power...To violate Lucretia is in effect to violate her father and husband, to exert power over them, to demonstrate forcibly that they cannot control their women, cannot guarantee paternity and therefore cannot assume political authority/power. (p. 28)

Unchaste, married women held the power to subvert their husbands by potentially denying them legitimate heirs. Considering Augustus's reign represented a return to a familial transfer of power, this commentary is especially relevant in that Augustus himself would have wanted to ensure his own heirs were legitimate when he inevitably died and relinquished the power of *princeps* to a true successor.

From a sociocultural and historical standpoint, the narratives of the "Rape of the Sabines" and the "Rape of Lucretia" function as more than just stories to fill gaps in Rome's early history. Given how closely ancient Roman women's sexuality was linked to their perceived value and social capital, these sexually violent stories reinforce gender expectations by providing a model of "good behavior" that Livy insists women should follow. From the perspective of men, it is in their best interest that a woman's sexuality is heavily monitored and consequently shamed

because maintaining a legitimate line of succession, especially for an aristocratic or royal family, is of utmost importance. Livy's writings regarding women strongly aligned favorably with the political climate of his time, namely Augustus's marriage reforms and call for a return to better moral values in an observed time of moral decay. It is likely that Livy wrote these tales in the manner that he did to appease Augustus's interests on the matter, given his close ties to the emperor, as well as avoid punishment or even exile for authoring works that the emperor would not approve of, like Ovid. Therefore, Livy wrote with the specific intention of perpetuating social norms and gender roles, ultimately serving special interests and influencing ideas of gender, social expectations of women, and women's sexuality.

Livia Augusta

Livia Drusilla was the quintessence of the ideal woman, so much so that Augustus venerated her with the title *Augusta* and formally adopted her into the family in his will, thus becoming Livia Augusta. This was a substantial gesture that rarely occurred. Livia was dignified, faithful, modest, as close to perfect as any *matrona* in this time period could come, but even she was not above scrutiny. Livia was a role model for Roman women, but imperial status placed her in a special position of power and influence through her marriage to Augustus that was previously unheard of. Tacitus's portrayal of Livia emphasizes how untraditional it was for a woman to be so involved in public life. While embodying archetypal womanhood, Livia simultaneously transcended a fine line between the domestic private sphere and the political, public sphere, which adds weight to the slander that Tacitus writes about her, whether his reports are true or not. Tacitus credits Livia with actions as far-reaching as manipulating the line of succession, and in doing so, he also ascribes her with the power to change Rome, like the Sabines and Lucretia.

At the beginning of the *Annals*, Tacitus states that there were four potential candidates who could succeed Augustus Caesar as *princeps*, Gaius and Lucius Caesar and Agrippa Postumus, his grandsons, as well as his stepson by Livia, Tiberius Nero. However, Augustus's grandchildren had passed before Augustus, supposedly "carried off by fatefully early deaths or by the guile of their stepmother Livia," suggesting that Tacitus believes Livia to be culpable for their untimely passing (Tacitus, 117 C.E./2004). Tacitus also mentions that Livia "had so shackled the elderly Augustus that he deported his one and only grandson, Agrippa Postumus, to the island of Planasia... (Tacitus, 117 C.E./2004). This remark insinuates that Livia was scheming to secure her personal interests by ensuring that her son Tiberius was the only remaining heir to the empire. Tacitus also conveys a persistent rumor regarding Augustus Caesar's death, claiming "suspected crime on the part of Livia" (Tacitus, 117 C.E./2004). He holds Livia responsible for making Tiberius the sole heir of Augustus, and thus believes that she had enough leverage to arrange the situation that most benefited herself and her son.

By describing Livia as the sole reason for Tiberius's ascension to *princeps*, Tacitus credits Livia with utilizing power that was only available to her because of her close connection to Augustus. Tacitus resents Livia because he believes that she successfully honed her power in an untraditional manner, projecting dominance that could lead to corruption, abuse and independence, that are unbecoming of a Roman *matrona*. According to Strong (2016), Tacitus also "criticizes [Livia] for being unemotional and coldhearted", as opposed to being *dulcissima*, as would be expected of her (p. 111). From Tacitus's perspective, Livia was too shrewd and cunning, and unwomanly by extension for exerting these more traditionally masculine qualities in a sector of Roman life that she was unwelcome to participate in. By playing an important role

in the succession of the principate, Livia influenced the affairs of Rome's public domain. The way in which Livia conducted herself was a threat to the traditional ideal of a Roman woman of elevated status, accounting for Tacitus's negative depiction of her.

Conclusion

Elite women in ancient Rome played a greater role in the brokerage of power than is initially presumed; their stories are more so a reflection of their social reputations than anything else. The most essential reason for studying history is to get a better understanding of ourselves and to understand others. There are many aspects of the social expectations and gender roles for women in first-century Rome that mirror the expectations we have of women now in modern times. Understanding the ideology that the Romans conceived for women can help us understand our notions and our prejudices of women in our era. Massey (2015) states, "the new dominant ideology is inculcated through social practices, as well as through prevailing names and descriptions" (p. 11). Fields (1990) also notes,

Ideology is best understood as the descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence, through which people make rough sense of the social reality that they live and create from day-to-day. It is the language of consciousness that suits the particular way in which people deal with their fellows. It is the interpretation in thought of the social relations through which they constantly create and re-create their collective being, in all the varied forms their collective being may assume: family, clan, tribe, nation, class...(p. 95)

These statements describe precisely how traditional Roman culture, literature, and legislation coalesced to form the Roman ideology of womanhood. The Romans defined female virtue

through social relations, through the woman's relationship to her father, husband, children, and even to society at large. We operate in a similar way in modern times. We tend to assume better of women who are more wealthy and well-connected (as long as they are not in a position of power), and marriage is still used as a means to achieve those ends, especially among the upper class. Just as the Romans placed significant importance on image, we do as well, but we also currently live in an era of misinformation, so it is important to constantly question our sources and whether we are being nudged to see someone, especially powerful women, a certain way, just as Livy had nudged his countrymen to see characters like Lucretia and the Sabines a certain way, and Tacitus after him in his account of Livia Augusta. When a strong powerful woman is at the forefront of social consciousness, what do we assume, and why? Are we really seeing her, or a caricature? The answer to this question is found by looking at the bigger picture and considering how the social, political, and economic context of the environment feeds into her narrative.

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