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Introduction

This paper explores the highly gendered role of chastity (*pudicitia*) in the work of the Roman historian, Titus Livius. Livy, who lived from around 64 B.C.E to 12 C.E., composed a monumental work, the *Ab Urbe Condita*, which traced Rome's history from its mythic beginnings to 9 B.C.E. While only a fraction of the work remains, the *Ab Urbe Condita* provides insight into how one writer viewed Roman expansion and how he used the framework of gender to give shape to his vision of Rome's history.

Pudicitia

While rape within Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* has received much scholarly attention, the role that *pudicitia* plays within this context and within the history as a whole has often been overlooked. Rebecca Langlands' recent monograph, *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome*, has taken an important step towards addressing this lacuna in scholarship. Langlands (2006: 115), however, quickly passes over one key aspect of Livy's use of *pudicitia*; the term is applied only to women and children. In the works of other Roman authors of the late Republic and early Empire, *pudicitia* is presented as a value important to women and men alike. Livy's break with tradition calls for further exploration. It will be my argument that Livy's conception of *pudicitia* is an integral part of his construction of sexual violence and its relationship to Roman power at home and abroad. *Pudicitia* is presented as the possession of those who are most vulnerable to attack. This legitimizes the need for the adult Roman male to expand Rome's dominion under the pretense of protecting those whose chastity is in danger.

Sexual Violation in Rome's Early History

Rome's mythic history is full of instances of rape. Perhaps the most famous example is Lucretia, whose story is featured prominently in the *Ab Urbe Condita*. Lucretia is raped by Sextus Tarquinius, the son of Rome's king. Rebecca Langlands notes that, in Livy's presentation, it is Lucretia's *pudicitia* that lies at the center of the

attack (2006: 91). Sextus Tarquinius is said to have been incited to lust by Lucretia's observed chasteness, and it is her "stubborn chastity" (*obstinatam pudicitiam*, 1.58.5) that is said to have been overcome when Tarquinius rapes her. After informing her male relatives that she has been raped, Lucretia commits suicide. Her rape and death serve as the catalyst for political change in Rome; the king and his family are expelled from the city, monarchy ends, and the Roman Republic is born in the year 508 B.C.E. Thus, Livy's presentation highlights the importance of Lucretia's *pudicitia* and links the sexual violation of Lucretia with the overthrow of the kings that is to follow her suicide.¹

In a situation so similar to the rape of Lucretia that at least one scholar has posited it must be a whole-sale fabrication, the attempted rape and death of the plebeian Verginia brings about a new stage in Roman political development in 449 B.C.E.: the overthrow of the *decemviri*, a group of ten men who were ruling tyrannically in Rome.² Verginia's beauty inflames the lust of the *decemvir*, Appius Claudius. In order to gain full access to the maiden, he orders his client to claim her as a slave. To save her from such a fate, her father kills her and promptly rouses the plebs to rid themselves of the *decemviri*. Once again, much of the focus of the episode is on the *pudicitia* of Verginia. Icilius, the fiancé of Verginia, swears to Appius Claudius:

I will marry this virgin, and I will have as my bride a chaste (*pudicam*) woman...If you have taken away from the Roman plebs tribunician aid and the right of appeal, two citadels for defending liberty, it has still not, for this reason, been given to your lust to rule over our children and our wives as well! Vent rage on our backs and necks: let chastity (*pudicitia*) at least be safe. (3.45.6-9)

Icilius draws attention to the *pudicitia* of Verginia and the importance of her possessing that virtue. However, through Icilius' speech, Livy adeptly conflates the idea of sexual integrity and *libertas*. As scholars have noted, the violation of one is a stand-in for the violation of the other.³

Through Livy's portrayal of Lucretia and Verginia, the inviolate woman becomes a symbol of the free citizen. In both cases, the threat to *pudicitia* results in a change in Rome's political structure and increased

1 For discussions of Lucretia's rape as catalyst for political change, see Joshel (1992), Moore (1993), and Philippides (1983).

2 Ogilvie (1965: 476-478) argues that if one of the episodes is based in historical fact, it must be that of Lucretia; therefore, the rape of Verginia was a later invention taken from the same mold.

3 See Joshel (1992), Moore (1993), and Philippides (1983).

libertas for its people. Sandra Joshel has noted that the motif of slavery appears prominently in both accounts (1992: 123). Because the Romans are unable to keep their women's bodies inviolable, their status is no better than that of slaves (whose physical integrity could be violated at the master's whim). Thus, the slavery imagery adds significantly to the connection between sexual violation and the political and social power of Roman males. Joshel, however, goes on to state, "Assured at home that their wives and children will not be treated as the conquered, these men can go forth, conquer an empire, and do to other men and women what they would not have done to their own wives and children" (1992: 126). In this regard, I would argue that Joshel is missing Livy's point about how sexual violation works throughout the course of Roman history. The following section will explore how Livy takes great pains to portray the Romans not as the violators of chastity, but as protectors of it.

Rape and Roman Expansionism

Verginia's death and the overthrow of the *decemviri* signals the reestablishment of *libertas* in Rome. The ten tyrants are summarily punished and Livy writes, "the shades of Verginia, who was more fortunate dead than alive, having wandered through so many houses to seek vengeance, were finally at rest, since no guilty man remained" (3.58.11). Despite Livy's assertion that Verginia's shades are finally at peace, they are quickly resurrected so that a war of Roman expansion can be fought in her name. Upon taking the field against Rome's enemies, the consul Valerius, one of the avengers of Verginia, provides a harangue to his troops that invokes the murdered maiden. Livy writes:

...the consul urged the Romans to remember that on that day they were fighting as free men for a free Rome for the first time...It would be shameful to have shown more spirit against their fellow citizens than against the enemy and to have been more afraid of enslavement at home than abroad. It was Verginia alone whose chastity (*pudicitiae*) had been in danger in peace; it was Appius alone, a Roman citizen, who had been possessed by a dangerous lust. But if the fortune of war turned against them, there would be peril for the children of all of them from so many thousands of enemies. (3.60.1-4)

Valerius' speech clearly links the sexual violation of Verginia and the war the Romans are about to undertake.

However, while the men surrounding Verginia used the attempt against her *pudicitia* as a catalyst to civil strife, Valerius makes sexual violation a centerpiece of Roman expansion.

The protection of sexual integrity plays another role in addition to serving as a rallying cry against a foreign threat; Livy portrays the Romans as the universal protectors of sexual inviolability. This paternal expansionism justifies Roman rule on three fronts. First, it suggests that Rome's enemies are violators of physical inviolability. Second, it suggests that those under Roman control are not able to protect their own women and children, thus, justifying Roman domination. Finally, it presents Roman expansion as a benign force, which works in the best interests of Rome's subjects.

Livy's treatment of Philip, king of Macedonia, is paradigmatic of how the historian utilizes paternal expansionism in the *Ab Urbe Condita*. The historian paints Philip as a cruel and libidinous tyrant on numerous occasions. The most dramatic account of the tyranny of Philip is the story of Theoxena. In 182 B.C.E., Philip, attempting to entirely stamp out a rebellion, orders that the children of the rebel leaders be arrested. Theoxena, mother of some of these children, fears the worst for them. Livy writes that "after she heard about the edict of the king concerning the arrest of the children of those men who had been put to death, believing that her children would be the plaything of the lust not only of the king but even of the guards, she turned her mind to a horrific deed and dared to say that she would sooner kill them all with her own hand than let them fall into the power of Philip" (40.4.6-7). In the end, Theoxena kills her children rather than letting them suffer abuse.

In addition to painting Philip as a tyrant, who engages in and sanctions sexual assault, Livy explicitly depicts the Romans as the protectors and liberators of Greece. In the middle of the war with Philip, a Roman delegate goes to an assembly of the Greeks to encourage them all to ally themselves with Rome. In answer to some accusations that the Romans had overstepped their boundaries in the war, he states:

Let this be our statement in defense of ourselves and against Philip, whose domestic murders, whose slaughter of relatives and friends, whose lusts, nearly more unnatural than his cruelty, you know better than I, since you are nearer to Macedonia. In regards to you, men of Aetolia, we undertook the war against Philip for you, and you made peace with him without us. (31.31.17-18)

By means of the Roman delegate's speech, Livy's Romans frame themselves as protectors and defenders of the

chastity of other nations.

Rape and Rome's Decline

Livy's expansive history covers not only the height of Roman moral standing, as he sees it, but also its decline. Another instance of rape within the *Ab Urbe Condita* points to the beginnings of Rome's lapse in morality. In 189 B.C.E., while the Romans are encamped during a battle with the Tectosagi, one of the Roman centurions rapes a female captive, referred to by Livy only as the wife of Orgiago. Orgiago's wife has her attendants kill the soldier during a ransom exchange. She then returns to her husband and, tossing the centurion's head at his feet, explains what has happened. Livy states that, "she confessed to her husband the injury done to her body and the vengeance for her forcibly violated chastity (*pudicitiae*), and, as it is reported, by the sanctity and dignity of her life, in other respects she preserved to the end of her life the glory of that matronly deed" (38.24.10). Livy's account of Orgiago's wife brings *pudicitia* back to the fore. The only time that this virtue is directly applied to a non-Roman, it indicates Livy's attempt to garner as much sympathy for the victim as possible. His readers are more likely to relate to a victim who shows the same concerns regarding virtue as the Romans do.

It is worth noting that Livy does not attempt to distance the Romans from the rape of Orgiago's wife. Rather, Livy frankly tells the story, and even says that the rape was carried out with the lust of a soldier (*libidinis...militaris*, 38.24.2), as if there was an understood connection between soldiers and rape. As with all of his descriptions of sexual violence, this is an intentional choice by the historian. By not distancing the Romans from this act, Livy presents the rape as a sign of the decline of Roman *mores*. He has marked a new and unhappy chapter in Rome's history and he does so through the figure of violated *pudicitia*.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of *pudicitia* and its violation, one can trace the development of Roman expansionist ideology as Livy perceives it. Initially, the sexual violation of women leads to civil liberties in Rome. Once the

Republic is established, the threat of sexual violation is used to motivate Romans to war, for the enemy is portrayed as a threat to Roman women and children. Livy also presents the threat of sexual violation as a justification for Roman control over others, for Romans claim to be the universal protectors of sexual integrity and liberty. However, the historian continues to use the trope of rape even when Roman *mores* are on the decline; in fact, by starkly presenting the Romans as violators of chastity, Livy portrays the extent to which Rome has fallen.

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