

## Cloelia as a Paradigm of Virtue in Plutarch's *Mulierum Virtutes* and Livy

Why does Plutarch include the story of Cloelia in the *Mulierum Virtutes* (*MV*) (*Mor.* 250A-F)? Plutarch's emphasis on her transgressive and reckless behavior undercuts her bravery and exemplarity. Several scholars have noticed this conflict of virtue in the Cloelia of the *MV* and struggle to explain satisfactorily its inclusion in Plutarch's work (McInerney 2003: 334, Chapman 2011: 112, Warren 2018: 82). In this paper, I propose a solution to this problem that relies on a proper contextualization of Cloelia in the *MV*. Specifically, I argue that Plutarch's Cloelia is best understood as complementary to two other figures in Cloelia's narrative in the *MV*, Tarquinius and Porsenna. Plutarch presents Cloelia as the epitome of excessive and untimely virtue that serves as a direct contrast to the lack of virtue of Tarquinius and as a foil to the idealized moderation of Porsenna. This implicit *synkrisis* of virtue, I argue, substantiates Plutarch's purported aim in the preface of the *MV* to show that the virtues of men and women are the same (*Mor.* 242F).

In Livy's narrative, Cloelia possesses two kinds of exemplary virtue. She exhibits the traditionally masculine virtue of military bravery by leading the women through volleys of spears, and she shows the traditionally feminine *pudicitia* by rescuing the maidens and later by choosing to save the *impubes* (2.13.10) who were of an age "especially prone to wrongdoing" (*maxime opportuna iniuriae*, 2.13.10). At the end of the narrative, Livy attributes to Cloelia a "new type of virtue in a woman" (*novam in femina virtutem*, 2.13.11) for which she receives a "new type of honor" (*novo genere honoris*, 2.13.11) in the form of an equestrian statue on the *Via Sacra*, thereby establishing Cloelia as a paragon of virtue both masculine and feminine (Roller 2018:78-80).

In contrast to Livy, Plutarch, in the *MV*, paints a less exemplary image of Cloelia, whose actions come off as reckless. At the same time, Plutarch develops the character of Porsenna and incorporates the figure of Tarquinius, thus creating three distinct paradigms of virtue and lack thereof. Throughout the narrative, Plutarch emphasizes Tarquinius' vices, highlights Porsenna's equitable moderation, and presents Cloelia as reckless in her uncontrolled display of virtue, creating a slight variation on the pattern of "tyrannical men, good rulers, and heroic women" that Malory Monaco Caterine recognizes in the *MV* (Monaco Caterine 2019: 197). Plutarch paints Tarquinius as waging war on numerous places in order to take back Rome (*Mor.* 250B), as speaking rashly and boldly to Porsenna (*Mor.* 250B), and as ambushing the women as they return from Porsenna (*Mor.* 250D). In contrast, Plutarch highlights the virtues of Porsenna, whom he qualifies throughout the narrative with words such as "just" (δίκαιον) and "good" (χρηστόν) (*Mor.* 250B) and "kindly" (εὐμενῶς) and "generously" (φιλανθρώπως) (*Mor.* 250E) (cf. *Publicola* 19.4: "kindly and cheerful expression" ἴλεω καὶ φαιδρῶ τῷ προσώπῳ). Unlike Livy's Porsenna, who is angry at first and demanding of Cloelia (Livy 2.13.7), Plutarch's Porsenna is not even angry when the hostages return. He desires to know who instigated the escape, but only, as we find out, so that he may reward her, which he does lavishly with a fully equipped horse (*Mor.* 250E; cf. *Publicola* 19.4). Plutarch's Cloelia shows "virtue and boldness" (ἀρετὴν καὶ τόλμαν, *Mor.* 250D) but lacks the moderation and timeliness of Porsenna.

Plutarch, therefore, cleverly manipulates the figure of Cloelia, a woman with a well-established tradition of possessing masculine virtue, while also molding the characters of Tarquinius and Porsenna to fit the role of the contemptible tyrant and the moderate counterpart respectively. I argue that, by creating a trichotomy of lack, moderation, and excess of virtue in the characters of Tarquinius, Porsenna, and Cloelia, Plutarch demonstrates to his reader that the

virtues of men and women are the same, a claim he made programmatically in the preface of the *MV*; at the same time, he instructs his reader that virtues must be exercised in proper measure to be commendable.

#### Works Cited

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