

Triste Exemplum: Livy's Titus Manlius Torquatus in the Political Imagination

A well-known *exemplum* before Livy narrated his deeds in his *Ab Urbe Condita*, Titus Manlius Torquatus inspired awe and dread. Storied above all for his duel with a leader of the Gauls, an encounter which served as an etiology for the *Torquatus* in the *gens Manlii Torquatii*, and for sentencing his son to death for disobeying orders, Manlius Torquatus epitomized the strict morality of the Roman *res publica* that was so central to Roman identity. His story was retold by several writers, but none so textured as the notice he receives in Livy. In my paper, I focus on Livy's portrayal with an eye to Livy's broader political and pedagogical projects. In a close reading of Manlius' activities in the seventh and eighth books of Livy's history, it becomes clear that Livy does not mark out Manlius as a mascot for old-school *pietas*, but as a highly ambiguous figure who delimits what is appropriate behavior in the *res publica*.

Indeed, Livy's portrayal of Manlius Torquatus left its mark on the trajectory of Roman political thought: Niccolò Machiavelli found within Livy's Manlius Torquatus lessons for the kind of leader he hoped to promote. Returning to Machiavelli's reading allows us to re-animate Livy's political concerns. My paper has been guided by two Machiavellian insights. In his *Discourses on the First Decade of Livy* (1533), Machiavelli selects Manlius Torquatus as a case study in cruelty (*crudeltà*) and further compares Manlius Torquatus to his contemporary Valerius Corvus as the two exemplary figures whose lives offer opposite "modes of proceeding" for the student of Livy (*Discourses* III.22). Machiavelli's own political project demonstrates how Livy's Manlius Torquatus responds to two of the most vexing political values of Livy's day: *severitas* and *clementia*. Machiavelli's choice to compare Manlius Torquatus and Valerius Corvus likewise finds a basis in Roman political thought and in Livy's text as well.

As more recent studies have demonstrated, notably Andrew Feldherr's *Spectacle and Society in Livy's History* (1998), Livy creates verbal parallels between the stories of Valerius Corvus and Manlius Torquatus, most of all in the duels that made both of them famous as young men and earned their descendants their respective *cognomina*. I maintain that Livy parallels Manlius and Valerius not only in their exemplary duels but in their public careers, compelling his readers to weigh the vastly different examples, and, as he states in his preface, choose what to imitate and what to avoid.

While focused on Livy's portrayal of Manlius Torquatus, my paper forms part of a larger project to reclaim Livy's centrality to Roman political thought. Machiavelli's engagement with Livy shows the vitality that the "father of political science" found in the Roman historian. Political theorist Dean Hammer has credited to Livy a "method of political thinking that might reanimate political vision" (Hammer, 125). I use Manlius Torquatus to put this to the test.

Sources

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Hammer, Dean. *Roman Political Thought and the Modern Theoretical Imagination*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 2008.