

## REVIEW

### CRITICAL FEMALES IN ROME'S FOUNDATION HISTORY

Peter Keegan, *Livy's Women: Crisis, Resolution and the Female in Rome's Foundation History*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2021. Pp. xxix + 254. Hardback, £120.00/\$160.00. ISBN 978-1-138-55325-5.

In Livy's account of Rome's foundation history, women are both agents of historical change and symbols for the historian's overarching narrative concerns. They appear in times of crisis and are integral to its resolution, performing roles both in the evolution of Rome and in the framing of Livy's history. Keegan is interested in the female experience and representation, as well as the question of how women serve Livy's historical and historiographical purposes. In analysing Livy's representations of women, Keegan searches for resonances between Livy's textual treatment of early Rome and the author's own cultural and intellectual context. In this important new study, Keegan examines Livy's insertion of representations of women into his work and performs a deeply theoretically informed reading of episodes featuring a prominent female figure or female collective.

Keegan situates his monograph securely within the ongoing scholarly discussion on the utility of women in Livy's history. Women have provided a regular subtheme in studies of Livy from the time of Smethurst, and studies on women in Livy have tended to align themselves with one of two camps: either women serve as *exempla* of particular virtues or vices, or they can provide evidence of the lives of Roman women, especially during Livy's own time.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have argued that women had a political role in the development of early Rome, and Joshel remains standard reading for Livy's representations of women as catalysts for historical change.<sup>2</sup> Keegan's principal argument engages with each of these topics. His work comprises an expansive foreword, four lengthy chapters, and a thought-provoking afterword.

<sup>1</sup> S. E. Smethurst, 'Women in Livy's History', *G&R* 19 (1950) 80–7.

<sup>2</sup> 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 and Oxford, 1991) 112–30. Cf. J.-M. Claassen, 'The Familiar Other: The Pivotal Role of Women in Livy's Narrative of Political Development in Early Rome', *AClass* 41 (1998) 71–103.

Keegan's gendered analysis is expansive in scope, addressing both well-known and understudied women in Livy's history. He offers a foreword in lieu of a formal introduction, and places especial importance on Helen's appearance in the first sentence of Livy's work in relation to the overarching foundation story of Book 1. Helen is a notorious emblem of the consequences of an adulterous relationship, and a reminder of the desirability of maintaining a stable marriage. This concern is present in epigraphy, Roman law and custom, and naming rituals; social constraints placed upon women extended from politics to religion, domestic life to public relations. Helen thus performs a central function in Livy's text by connecting ancient myth, female representation, and contemporary concerns of Augustan Rome, exemplifying the various strands of Keegan's central argument.

In Chapter 1, Keegan links representations of women to Livy's aim to present an exemplary history. The author showcases his familiarity with the topography of the city as well as relevant epigraphic and archaeological evidence, guiding readers through the 'visual cues' in the urban space that were available to Livy as he wrote his history (7). By adding architectural structures, monuments, and other aspects of the city to historical sources, Augustan literature, and the social legislation passed during Livy's lifetime, Keegan establishes an innovative framework for his study. He provides tables on female representation as well as the structural relationship of the narrative elements that precede and follow major episodes that feature representations of women (11–12, 14–33). These tables are useful for any reader and reveal that Livy situates women in contexts of change or crisis, when the stability of the state or its traditions faced critical challenges. The rape of Lucretia provides proof of this concept, in which Lucretia figures as 'the genderless idealisation of male expectation filtered through Livy's narrative lens' (40). Livy's Lucretia leaves readers uneasy about the historian's representation of gender, for even in a story about a woman and her 'virile' resolve, 'the reader finds a structurally enclosed and thematically dense expression of an explicitly representative aristocratic male ethos' (42). In Egeria, Carmenta, and the Vestal priestesses, Keegan identifies a pattern in which an established tradition comes under pressure, providing a catalyst for Livy to include a female individual or collective, which leads either to a resolution or complication and partial or complete change to an existing practice. With Damarata, Harmonia, and Heraclia, tales of non-Roman women model Livy's assignment of moral weight to female-centred narratives. Keegan argues that Livy distorts the received historical tradition in order to play to an Augustan audience, emphasising that the place of women is demarcated by men.

Chapter 2 explores gendered collectives in order to explain tensions and ambiguities in matters of gender and social history. On Keegan's reading, the Sabine women represent the total objectification of the female body, while also contending that this body is an object of male respect. The narrative reinforces

the patriarchal order and offers insight into the history of archaic Roman expansion, while also encoding ‘certain problematic elements of the annalistic tradition as gendered’ (77). Veturia and Volturna inherit the Sabine example in a story of maternal *auctoritas* and effective female persuasion; the story is structured as an Aristotelian tragedy that reinforces the gendered thematic motifs by associating them with equally recognisable stage conventions. The debate between Cato and Valerius concerning the repeal of the *lex Oppia* ‘charts the oppositional socio-political and ideological currents running through the entire community’, but both debaters aim at a return to traditional gender boundaries and re-establish patriarchal authority (86). Such ideological currents are relevant to Livy’s own time and the social legislation passed under Augustus. In sum, Livy’s gendered historiography recognises the ability of Roman women to organise and accomplish civil action to address issues affecting them personally and collectively; they overstep traditional gendered boundaries of male-exclusive spaces to achieve their aims, and their actions have resonances in Livy’s contemporary context.

Keegan centres his argument in Chapter 3 on non-Roman women. Representations of non-Roman women bring order to critical moments in Roman history, and their actions align with the structural template of Livy’s gendered history: a threat is introduced, women intervene, and the result is conducive to the re-establishment of social order. Thus non-Roman women complement rather than complicate Livy’s historiographical focus. The Bacchanalian conspiracy of the second century BCE can be read as a romanticised narrative suitable for Hellenistic and Roman New Comedy in which the ambiguous character of Hispala Faecenia is key: Livy utilises this woman on the margins of society to explore the customs of civil Roman society, and inserts credible information into the tale in order to convey historical accuracy. Keegan extols Hispala’s character as, ‘Livy’s formulation of the ordinary human condition, that flawed, inconsistent social being wherein mind and heart interact in unpredictable and irregular fashion’ (120). His conclusions are relatively banal: the episode reflects anxieties concerning gender and status and ends with the restoration of traditional distinctions between men and women. Keegan then turns to nine brief gendered incidents deploying Roman and non-Roman women from the eighth to the early second centuries BCE. Hersilia and Sophonisba illustrate a female influence on influential men within elite society; Tarpeia and Cloelia present oppositional models of betrayal and honour when Rome faces an outside threat; the woman from Pandosia and Busa showcase civilised behaviour and generosity; the wife of Mandonius and fiancée of Allucius display model sexual chastity and allow Africanus to become a model of sexual control as well; Theoxena’s murders of her extended family emerge as acts of heroism that increase the hatred of Philip V and provide an underlying cause for his downfall.

Two central questions remain: the extent to which the roles assigned by Livy reflect a traditional or revisionist interpretation of gender; and the historicity of the text. Chapter 4 aims to address both. Keegan argues that Livy places women in situations where they illustrate a particular point or raise concerns about societal crises. Women are thus engaged in the process of history. Keegan analyses a familiar catalogue of influential women, including Horatia, Verginia, Lavinia, Rhea Silvia, Larentia, Tanaquil, Tullia, and the Fabiae sisters. Lavinia is capable of acting as a regent without endangering the preservation of the state, and Rhea Silvia illustrates the vulnerability of women as scapegoats for male desire; Tanaquil thematises the productive role of women in securing the continuation of the development of Rome, while the Fabiae sisters provide a model for Livy's process of questioning traditional Roman social values and virtues. Among the more straightforward readings, Keegan's interpretation of Tullia stands out. He connects Tullia to a general theme of the role of women in tyrannical usurpations of government, reading Tullia as a 'product of her domestic environment as much as the instigator of its inevitable collapse' (169). The structure of her episode repeats a common pattern and indicates an overarching method in Livy's deployment of female figures: in sum, 'AUC women are members of a textual architectonic which exploits varied thematic rhythms both for ornament and for point' (170). Tullia's narrative exhibits parallels with mythological and historical predecessors. Her household is modelled on the fall of the houses of Atreus and Laius. As a king maker, social disruptor, female influencer, and interventionist, Tullia has similarities with Tanaquil. Her persuasive speech provides the focus of the study and has recognisable Catilinarian echoes.

Keegan advances gendered readings of Livy by arguing that the historian himself overlays a gendered lens on critical events in Rome's foundational history. By foregrounding this interpretative framework, Keegan provides original readings to long-studied episodes and adds new perspective by considering all moments featuring representations of women. Livy's women provide examples of virtues and vices, and are embedded in particular episodes in order to draw attention to specific historical moments. They assist in Livy's historiographical aims and objectives, and are employed in order to address contemporary issues in Augustan Rome, from moral concerns to the value of the annalistic record. Keegan searches for both Livy's personal ideological perspectives on issues of gender, as well as societal views. He concludes that women are encoded as 'emblematic narrative signifiers and integral historical elements of Rome's collective memory about the restitution and preservation of the customary socio-political order, as expressions of the convergence of different traditions and historical contingencies, and as mediators of literary need' (181).

The Afterword places the monograph within several ongoing scholarly questions and introduces concepts that could have been more profitably

integrated throughout. Keegan considers Roman conceptions of gender and whether Livy espouses a traditional or revisionist interpretation, agrees with a general scholarly consensus that Roman society blurred distinctions of public and private, and explores conjunctions of literature and history. He repeats the theme linking representations of women to turning points in Roman history, arguing that this represents an ‘intentionally revisionist treatment of the annalistic imagination’ (216). Livy demonstrates that the continuity and security of Rome relies upon the actions of women, and Keegan connects this concept to the crises of the late Republic and early Principate. In the end, Keegan concludes that women are not passive caricatures that conform to or disrupt a received female stereotype: women play pivotal roles, neither totally autonomous nor passive, and are knowledgeable about the ways that society functions and able to employ their knowledge to achieve personal and communal goals. Setting aside typographical errors and the repetition of aspects of the essential argument, Keegan’s central claims and their discussion constitute a significant contribution to studies on women in Livy. Keegan’s work is a dense read that many will find profitable in the undertaking.

*Brandeis University*

CAITLIN GILLESPIE  
cgillespie@brandeis.edu