

**Matthew ROLLER**  
**Exemplarity in imperial Rome: the case of Cloelia**

Cloelia, the story goes, was given as a hostage to Porsenna; she escaped his camp on the Janiculum, swam the Tiber, and so returned safely to Rome. Her deed was commemorated in a narrative (given in numerous Augustan and later literary sources) and by an equestrian statue on the Velia, which did exist in the first few centuries A.D. (Papi, *LTUR* 2.226). This legend offers problematic evidence for archaeologists concerned with the history and typology of statuary (Sehlmeyer 1999, Bergemann 1990, Papi), and for students of early Roman religion and history (Gagé, *Mélanges le Bonniec* 1988; Arcella, *SMSR* 1985; Conde Guerri, *Helmantica* 1978). Yet this legend, as we have it, provides excellent evidence for one sociohistorical question, which I examine here: the functioning of an historical exemplum in imperial Roman society.

The exemplary phenomenon consists of four elements: an action embodying a crucial social value; a judging audience of "primary spectators" who observe and evaluate this action; commemoration (here through a statue and narrative) that makes the action and its initial evaluation known to "secondary spectators" who were not eyewitnesses (Jaeger 1997); and imitation: spectators are enjoined, implicitly or explicitly, to reproduce the action in due course.

Through exemplarity, past and present are ethically linked. Imperial Romans, as secondary spectators, enter into the ranking debates of their forebears: Manilius, Livy, and Pliny weigh Cloelia's accomplishment and honors against those of her peers. Moreover, imperial authors enlist their forebears' evaluations in the service of later contestations: Seneca, Silius Italicus, and Cassius Dio cause her to be compared to later Romans, who have (on their accounts) strikingly succeed or fail in emulating her. Her most notable exemplary effects follow from being a virgo who displays military valor, *virtus* (etymologically, "manly qualities"). Imperial authors stress the masculine character of both her exploit and her statue (see Sehlmeyer) either embracing the paradox of the manly woman, or regendering her (Livy, *Val. Max.*, *Sen.*, *Silius*, *Plut.*, *Florus*, *Serv.*)

For imperial Romans, then, Cloelia embodies a status dissonance: a traditional military hero, yet a woman (who therefore rivals men). As an exemplum simultaneously canonical and anomalous, she poses a gender puzzle that spurs attempted resolutions in light of imperial standards of gendered behavior, while also providing a unique behavioral canon with which imperial authors can intervene in other urgent contestations over social value.