Tarpeia the Vestal[*]

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ABSTRACT

Tarpeia's role as a Vestal has become a matter of scholarly consensus in the past two decades. This article questions that consensus by suggesting that Varro and Propertius are the two major proponents of this 'Vestal version', which is not present in other major narratives such as Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Plutarch. Propertius' version in particular, which depicts Tarpeia as a Vestal in love, has been overprivileged in analyses of this myth as a dramatisation of individual identity versus loyalty to the state. Varro's account, which also includes Tarpeia's Vestal status, suggests a different interpretation: it is likely that Varro considered Tarpeia a non-Roman Vestal whose Vestal status supported the state. This version resolves certain dissonances in early Roman myth.

Keywords: Tarpeia; Varro; Propertius; Vestals; Alba Longa; Roman myth

I INTRODUCTION

The story of Tarpeia has been at least alluded to, if not explicitly examined, in an abundance of scholarship since the 1990s. Much of this scholarship assumes that Tarpeia's status was that of a Vestal virgin and that it was her priesthood that made the Tarpeian rock particularly suitable for traitors:[1] as scholarship on women and religion has suggested, the Vestals' physical bodies symbolised the safety of the Roman state,[2] hence Tarpeia's breached body metonymised the Sabine attack on Rome. Because the Vestals were protectors of Rome, their treason was particularly egregious and therefore worthy of being monumentalised in myth. Thus, whether one believes that the Tarpeia myth was an early one that later explained the Tarpeian rock, or whether the Tarpeian

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[1] Tarpeia as Vestal: see, for example, Sanders 1904: 8–9; Pais 1905: 105–6; Grimal 1951: 209–11; 1952: 316; Martini 1998: 29–30; Kowalewski 2002: 23–4; Papaioannou 2003: 699; Takács 2008: 7–8; Vout 2012: 70–1; Rea 2006: 114; DiLuzio 2016: 144–5, 233–4; Ogilvie 1965: 74–5; Pausch 2017: 280. Additionally, Stahl 1985: 283, 286; King 1990: 237–8; Rothwell 1996: 839; Janan 1999: 429 and Welch 2005: 65–6 make this assumption, but perhaps more plausibly as they are explicitly interested in Propertius. La Penna 1957: 126; Fraschetti 1984: 98; Baudou 1995: 86 n. 34; Müller 2014: 315 are cautious about the identification. Connection of Vestal status and rock: Sanders 1904: 25, 33; Takács 2008: 7; Pausch 2017: 280. La Penna 1957: 112, 125 is cautious; Cornell 1981: 33 considers the connection problematic, while Cadoux 2008: 215–17 and Kroppenberg 2010: 432 consider it unlikely.

[2] This idea appears independently in Parker 2004: e.g. at 567; Martini 2004: e.g. at 9; and Wildfang 2006: e.g. at 16 and 30; it is widely accepted in subsequent works.

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rock required an aetiology that was supplied by Tarpeia, the identity and affiliation of Tarpeia plays an important role.

In the following pages, I put forward two arguments. The first two sections challenge the scholarly trend of reading Propertius' Vestal Tarpeia as the standard or 'canonical' version of this myth.[3] I argue that Tarpeia's status as a Vestal virgin was an option, rather than required, and has been unduly stressed in modern scholarship as a means of understanding what Tarpeia 'meant' to Rome or to Roman authors. In fact, Vestal status is absent from the majority of our texts and its presence therefore invites discussion. Building upon that insight, I then interrogate the possible rationales for the identification of Tarpeia as a Vestal in Varro's *De lingua Latina*. My second argument derives from this analysis. It attempts to recontextualise Tarpeia outside of the Propertian narrative, and in particular in Varro. While the fragmentary status of *De lingua Latina* on the one hand, and the almost entire loss of the *Antiquitates* on the other, make certainty impossible, the surviving remains of Varro suggest that he has called Tarpeia a Vestal both to emphasise her *non*-Roman status and because of the Vestals' association with the *pignora imperii*.

II THE MYTH OF TARPEIA

The story of Tarpeia is popular, appearing in almost every author who handles early Roman history,[4] but it is also full of variants.[5] Dionysius and Plutarch in particular preserve information of considerable importance, which they attribute to authors of the Hellenistic and republican eras. Despite the variation, the Tarpeia story preserves a coherent plot: during a war, Tarpeia opens the gate to the Capitoline, allowing the enemy into the citadel. As a result, she is buried in a pile of shields and dies. This series of events appears in all authors, and the burial under shields is the subject of imagery on coins and relief sculpture. The manner of death in particular, therefore, provided the means for identifying the story as Tarpeia's. The remaining details are subject to authorial choice, and the story provided fertile ground for moralising about female agency.

The most common divergence found in ancient narratives centres on Tarpeia's motives for opening the citadel to the Sabines: a strand of the tradition going back to Fabius Pictor claimed that she betrayed the citadel for gold, while Propertius depicted her as lovestruck; Calpurnius Piso claimed that she attempted to double-cross the Sabines and there was even

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[3] The concept of *a* canonical version is widespread, although rarely stated. See, for example, Fraschetti 2005: 49–50 (the canon is apparent due to obvious deviations from it); Mazzei 2005: 28; Welch 2015: 241–2 (established by Fabius Pictor), 260 (Hellenistic poetry is not included); *contra* Wiseman 1983: 446 (no canon before Livy).

[4] Livy 1.11, Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.38–40, Prop. 4.4 and Plut., *Rom.* 17 supply the most important narratives; Val. Max. 9.6.1, who relates the story in full, follows Livy, as do the shorter references in Flor. 1.1 and Serv., *Ad Aen.* 8.348; there are brief allusions in Varro, *Ling.* 5.41; Ov., *Met.* 14.775–7; *Fast.* 1.260–1; Sil., *Pun.* 13.841–3; [Plut.], *Mor.* 309C; Festus, *Gloss. Lat.* 464L, 496L; Serv., *Ad Aen.* 1.449; [Aur. Vict.], *De vir. ill.* 2.5–6; Zonaras 2.93 and the *Suda* s.v. Τάρπεια, σφραγίς. I have not included fragmentary authors in this list, since the fragments are almost all found in Dionysius and Plutarch. Welch 2015 provides an essential discussion of these narratives, although I differ from her interpretation on several points, as will be seen below.

[5] This variance makes Tarpeia unlike other popular tales of Roman women, such as Lucretia, whose stories are similarly widespread but show limited (or no) variance in detail. For example, Lucretia is referenced more frequently than Tarpeia (thirty-three to eighteen times), but her story has only four variants: the birth order of the Tarquin princes (for example, Livy 1.53 vs Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 4.64.2); the existence of a contest over wives (for example, Livy 1.57 vs Diod. Sic. 10.20 and Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 4.64). The story of Cloelia, whose story is referenced sixteen times, has three variants: whether she returns to Porsenna voluntarily (for example, Livy 2.13 vs Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 5.33) and the role of Valeria (Plut., *Public.* 19). Tullia, the daughter of Servius Tullius, is referenced twelve times, with no variants. Tarpeia's story, as discussed in-text, has at least ten variants.

a version in which she clearly protected Rome.[6] Other differences included her ethnicity[7] (Sabine or Roman), her status[8] (public priestess or private citizen) and periodisation[9] (Sabine war or Gallic war). The majority of these variants are represented by a small number of ancient texts; only Plutarch, for example, includes the option of Sabine ethnicity. Yet modern scholarship on Tarpeia has not seriously questioned her priesthood, despite the fact that she is explicitly called a Vestal in only two accounts: Varro and the early fourth-century C.E. *Breviarium Vindobonense*.[10]

The large number of variants suggests that we cannot generalise about the myth as a whole from its narrative in a single author, since no single version can claim authority as the 'original' or 'primary' account. Each author begins from the idea of the girl who opens the gate and fits the event to his particular concerns, adjusting the moral, motive, chronology and characters as appropriate. This complexity has been recognised recently by Tara Welch,[11] but her analysis in fact starts from Livy's version and takes it as normative: her opening narrative relates Livy's version and refers to the Propertian evidence as a 'shocking variant'.[12] This language implies that Livy's version is the standard against which other accounts should be measured, rather than one of the many ways in which the story of Tarpeia could be told.

Welch is not alone in collapsing the accounts of Tarpeia into a single narrative. Dennis Pausch, for example, summarises Livy's account as follows: 'the betrayal of one of two strongholds of the Roman city, the Arx Capitolina, by Tarpeia, the young daughter of its commander. She had fallen in love with Titus Tatius, the Sabine king.'[13] This is in fact not what Livy says; it is an amalgamation of Livy and Propertius. Indeed, much modern scholarship that deals with Tarpeia begins from one of these two authors, with particular reliance upon the outlier, Propertius.[14] Modern emphasis on Livy's and Propertius' accounts diminishes the myth's complexity.

Livy's account is compressed but offers four distinct options for understanding Tarpeia's treachery; all centre on greed (introduced by 'corrupted by gold') and Sabine treachery ('a trick').[15] The basic plot of Propertius' narrative sets a lovelorn Tarpeia in opposition to chastity. She falls in love at first sight with Titus Tatius as she is getting water and

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[6] Q. Fabius Pictor *FRHist* 1 F7 = *FGHist* 809 F6 (ap. Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.38–40; cf. L. Cincius Alimentus *FRHist* 2 F3); Prop. 4.4; L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi *FRHist* 9 F7 (also ap. Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.38–40); *Breviarium Vindobonense* = *Chron. Min.* 1.144 (ed. Mommsen *MGH(AA)* 9). For the fragmentary Greek historians, I have used Jacoby's Greek text and the *BNJ* commentary.

[7] Most authors suggest that she is Roman; Antigonos *FGHist* 816 F2 (ap. Plut., *Rom.* 17) states that she is Sabine and this ethnicity is implied by *Breviarium Vindobonense* = *Chron. Min.* 1.144.

[8] Plut., *Rom.* 17 dismisses the account that made her the general; Livy and Dionysius make her the commander's daughter; Plutarch prefers that account, but also includes the possibility that she is one of the Sabine women (see above, n. 7). This option is discussed further below, Section VI.

[9] Livy, Propertius and Plutarch claim that the Tarpeia affair took place within a few months of the foundation (citing Fabius Pictor *FRHist* 1 F6 = *FGHist* 809 F5a); Propertius explicitly sets the treason at the Parilia. Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.31.1 suggests four years after the foundation, following Gn. Gellius (*FRHist* 14 F1). Simylos (ap. Plut., *Rom.* 17) and [Plut.], *Mor.* 309B–C set the story during the Gallic sack of 390 B.C.E.

[10] Varro, *Ling.* 5.41; *Breviarium Vindobonense* = *Chron. Min.* 1.144. This status is strongly implied at several points by Prop. 4.4 (e.g. 17–18, 36), but never stated explicitly; see Martini 1998: 23.

[11] See Welch 2015: e.g. at 2, which I take to supersede Welch 2005: 56–78; 2012; Tarpeia's complexity was noted earlier by, for example, Baudou 1995: 84–6; Cairns 2011: 177. See by contrast, for example, Müller 2014: 311, stating that Tarpeia was an *exemplum* of treason from Fabius Pictor on.

[12] Welch 2015: 1; perhaps better stated, Miller 2011: 339, Propertius 4.4 is a 'unique retelling'.

[13] Pausch 2017: 280, citing Livy 1.11.5–9; he later cites Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.38–40 as evidence that the 'unlucky lover' can be traced to Fabius Pictor and Calpurnius Piso. See my discussion of this evidence below, Section V.

[14] For example, Propertius: King 1990; O'Neill 1995; Janan 1999; Miller 2004: 187–203; Welch 2005: 56–78. Livy: Stevenson 2011: 178–9; Welch 2012; Müller 2014. Both: Papaioannou 2003; Pausch 2017; see also n. 1 above.

[15] Livy 1.11.6: 'auro corrumpit', 'dolus'. For the four versions, see Müller 2014: 310–14; for the relationship of Livy's version to other accounts, see Welch 2015: esp. 135–63.

rationalises her betrayal of the city in a lengthy monologue.[16] Her long speech has attracted significant attention, particularly as a dramatisation of *incestum*. Much scholarship on Tarpeia begins from this contrast between Vestal virginity and *amor* to create an aetiology for treason based in Rome's earliest history.[17]

There is substantially more interest in Tarpeia as a Vestal from the vantage point of scholarship on Propertius 4.4 than there is in scholarship on the Vestals.[18] By assuming that the Vestal version of the Tarpeia story was an important part of her myth from the beginning, critics can incorporate scholarship on Vestals alongside the evidence on Tarpeia, assimilating the Propertian account to numerous Greek parallels about women who betray cities for love.[19] Yet focus on Propertius' evidence has over-emphasised Tarpeia as a model for Vestal *incestum*, which creates problems for understanding other versions of her story. Tarpeia's Vestal role sits uncomfortably with the characteristic events of her myth that I identified above. Scholars who believe that Tarpeia must be a Vestal are forced to concede that she does not, in fact, fit the picture of the Vestal order in many respects: for example, the presence of a Vestal in Romulean Rome is anachronistic, an issue that I discuss in more detail below.[20] Decentring Propertius' evidence offers more options for understanding this story: other accounts are not centred on *incestum* or even Vestals at all.

Although part of the dissonance in the picture of Tarpeia as a Vestal may be related to our lack of understanding of the Vestal college or indeed to changes affecting the Vestal order over time, some aspects of Tarpeia's story — in particular, the circumstances surrounding her death — explicitly differ from our evidence concerning Vestals. A more capacious view of Tarpeia, focusing on other concerns than those of elegiac poetry, complements other stories about Rome's development and openness to outsiders.[21] It is therefore helpful to consider both the ways in which scholars conceive of Tarpeia's connection to the Vestals and why those conceptions are problematic.

III TARPEIA THE VESTAL: STATE OF THE QUESTION

The intersection of Tarpeia's treason with her role as a Vestal has been understood primarily as a means of intensification: her treason is worse because she is a Vestal, since Vestals were expected to protect Rome. This argument has been made most recently by Meghan DiLuzio in her study of female religious personnel in the Roman Republic. Building on Holt Parker's analysis of Vestal bodies as symbols of the permeability of Roman walls, DiLuzio suggests that the story 'reveal[s] a deep fear of invasion or even annihilation as a result of unchastity'.[22] This line of thinking, which is

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[16] Prop. 4.4.31–66 (ed. Heyworth).
[17] Explicitly, for example, Grimal 1951: 211; Rothwell 1996: 839–42; Janan 1999: 435; Welch 2005: 56–78; implicitly, for example, Sanders 1904: 1–47; Pais 1905: 96–108; Martini 2004: esp. 21; Rea 2006: 113–18; Welch 2015: e.g. at 51, 63, 227. See also n. 14 above on Propertius and Livy.
[18] See, for example, Sanders 1904: 1–47; Stahl 1985: 286; Martini 1998: 29–30; Miller 2004: 192–5; Welch 2005: 63–7; 2015: 1; Takács 2008: 80; Rea 2006: 113–18; DiLuzio 2016: 223; Pausch 2017. I have included in this list those who follow Stahl 1985: 279–302 in seeing Tarpeia's story as a tale of 'self versus state', since this interpretation relies on (a) a Vestal Tarpeia and (b) a love story. Rea 2006: 118; DiLuzio 2016: 233 n. 1 and Pausch 2017: 280 conflate the Livy and Propertius versions while citing Welch 2005: 56–78 (who does not).
[19] First laid out in Sanders 1904: 18–21; comprehensive list in Welch 2015: 289–92. Forsythe 1994: 150–2 suggests that this Greek model derives from the earliest period of Roman historiography.
[20] See below, Section IV.
[21] Welch 2015: e.g. at 8; see also Martini 1998: 37–9, who is interested in what it means to be a member of the *nobiles* rather than ethnically Roman; Spencer 2011: 74; 2019: 97–106 on the role of immigrants. Particularly helpful on the issues of early Rome, exemplarity and ethnicity in Livy are Miles 1995; Farney 2007; Pausch 2008. Beyond Livy, see, for example, Roller 2004; Langlands 2018: esp. 29–45.
[22] DiLuzio 2016: 144–5; cf. Parker 2004: e.g. at 581–2.

representative of recent scholarship on Tarpeia, is worth analysing in greater detail, because it makes a number of assumptions about what the story is meant to signify.

The first assumption follows Parker and others in their arguments that the primary religious function of the Vestals was to be physical embodiments of Rome.[23] Vestal chastity, in this view, aimed to protect the city from outsiders — a role akin to our modern notion of border security. Vestal *incestum* thus functioned as a breach of that safety. Parker argues that an unchaste Vestal is a *prodigium* who was sacrificed for the health of the Roman state.[24] In an argument rich with Christian overtones,[25] Parker both conflates and separates the various crimes of Vestals.[26] His hypothesis is that *incestum* must be voluntary rather than simply physical; thus the lovestruck virgin Tarpeia is a model for *incestum*, while the Vestal Rhea Silvia, the mother of Rome's founder, neither is unchaste nor is she punished.[27] This argument is at odds with the ancient evidence on Rhea, with important ramifications for Tarpeia and *incestum*.

The mother of Romulus and Remus is described as a Vestal in Cicero, who attributes the information to Ennius; the same information also appeared in Fabius Pictor.[28] The Vestal mother of the founder thus appears to belong to the oldest written traditions about the city. By the late Republic, Rhea Silvia provided an essential link to the mythical Roman metropolis of Alba Longa.[29] Because many prominent families, among them the Iulii,[30] claimed that they too had migrated from Alba Longa, Alban myth was a topic with wide-reaching ramifications. Rhea's pregnancy has been interpreted by some scholars as a *felix culpa* — a religious error that turns out well for Rome.[31] This language, however, is absent from ancient authors. Instead, the Vestal Rhea Silvia's pregnancy may be seen as the first in a series of miraculous events that culminates in the foundation of Rome: later examples include the twins' survival from drowning in the Tiber and their rescue by a wolf.[32] The twins were thus marked as divine, but this did not necessarily help their

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[23] Parker 2004: e.g. at 567. Similarly, Staples 1998: 130–56 considers Vestals the embodiments of the Roman citizenry; Martini 2004: 65–6 suggests that they are catalysts for change (see also Joshel 1992 for a similar argument regarding other women in Roman historiography); Wildfang 2006: 7–10, 16 argues that Vestals both protect and purify Rome.

[24] Parker 2004: esp. 583–8; *contra* Cornell 1981: 34, who argued that the unchaste Vestal was announced by *prodigia* rather than being a *prodigium* herself; against the idea of the Vestal as sacrifice, see Schultz 2010: 530–4; 2012: 125–33; 2016: 70–2.

[25] The Vestal's crime is uniquely bad because 'she sinned willingly' (Parker 2004: 585, see also 582); she is the union of 'the archetypal roles of *la Vergine* and *la Mamma* into the figure of *la Madonna*' (at 571; emphasis in original).

[26] For example, the extinction of the Vestal fire is akin to *incestum* (Parker 2004: 574, 'as long as the Vestal remained intact, so did Rome. This symbolic function is explicitly stated … Thus the Vestal Aemilia, when the sacred fire went out, prayed to Vesta'); rape, however, is separate because involuntary, based on the mythical Rhea Silvia and the historical Vestal Rubria under Nero (Parker 2004: 582–4; see similarly SHA *Heliogab.* 6). Rhea's punishment is discussed below; the historical examples are unclear. We do not know that Rubria was *not* punished; we know only that Suetonius did not include her fate, perhaps because it was not relevant to his biography of the emperor. The same is true of the Vestal who lost her virginity to the emperor Elagabalus over a century later. Our ignorance regarding the consequences of their rapes cannot be used as evidence that they, as unwilling victims, were not punished.

[27] Parker 2004: 582 nn. 73, 76.

[28] Cic., *Div.* 1.40, the introduction to the dream of Ilia: 'for even in Ennius that Vestal relates' ('narrat enim et apud Ennium Vestalis illa'); Fabius Pictor (*FRHist* 1 F4 = *FGHist* 809 F4). Following the majority of ancient authors, I will refer to the twins' mother as Rhea Silvia.

[29] See, for example, Varro, *Ling.* 5.144 (ed. Kent 1938): 'this city, called Alba Longa, was built. From here came Rhea, the mother of Romulus; Romulus came from her; Rome came from him' ('haec urbs facta … Alba Longa dicta. Hinc mater Romuli Rhea, ex hac Romulus, hinc Roma').

[30] See, for example, Martini 2004: 43–52; Farney 2007: 53–65; Grandazzi 2008: e.g. at 802–14; Pasqualini 1996: 251–2; 2016: 71. I will return to the Alban Vestals below, Section VI.

[31] See, for example, Martini 2004: 11, 82–3; Turcan 2004: 471; Scholz 2010: 302. The same language is used for Tarpeia by, for example, Grimal 1951: 209–11; Martini 1998: 28–9; Janan 1999: 437–8.

[32] The bibliography on Romulus and Remus is vast. See, for example, Wiseman 1995; Ver Eecke 2008: 53–7.

mother. As an Alban Vestal, Rhea was punished differently from the Roman Vestals, but she was punished. Our earliest information suggests that she was thrown into the Tiber,[33] like the hermaphrodites and parricides from whom scholars have tried to disentangle Vestals.[34] Moreover, it seems that Fabius Pictor said that she was imprisoned when her pregnancy was discovered,[35] although her later fate is less clear. She disappears from Livy's narrative and survives to the twins' adulthood in Dionysius;[36] however, she marries the Anio in Ovid's *Amores* and perhaps in the *Fasti*, which supports the idea that she had been drowned as a punishment.[37] Regardless of the means, ancient authors seem certain that she was punished for her rape, whether by imprisonment or by death.[38] Her punishment indicates that *incestum* is not necessarily voluntary.

The behaviour required of a Vestal was not limited to physical virginity. The two Vestals Postumia and Minucia, for example, were accused 'on account of a more attractive appearance than was right' ('propter mundiorem iusto cultum').[39] Although Postumia was acquitted, Minucia was not; her condemnation suggests that *incestum* goes beyond the sexual.[40] The difference in treatment between Postumia and Minucia undermines the argument that Vestal chastity symbolised the physically intact borders of the state,[41] but may support a separate hypothesis, that the unchaste Vestal was a scapegoat for crises in Rome.[42]

Despite these problems, Parker's model of *incestum* has offered a clear line of interpretation for Tarpeia. Because Propertius relates her breach of a physical boundary (the gate of the Capitoline citadel) to her love for an enemy invader, scholars have been eager to read the details of Propertius' story into other accounts of Tarpeia.[43] It is notable that most works on the Vestals omit Tarpeia or mention her only hesitantly, while scholarship on Propertius has endeavoured to explain the Vestal status of the *puella* Tarpeia in 4.4.[44]

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[33] Grilli 2002 argues that Ennius had her drown in the Tiber; however, *Ann.* 44–5 (ed. Skutsch) is more oblique: 'you must bear sorrows first; later fortune will return from the river' ('tibi sunt ante gerendae /aerumnae, post ex fluuio fortuna resistet').

[34] For the comparison, see Schultz 2012: 129–33.

[35] Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 1.72.2, attributed to Fabius Pictor (*FRHist* 1 F4 = *FGHist* 809 F4); followed by Livy 1.4.3.

[36] See Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 1.83.1, still attributed to Fabius. Jocelyn 1989/90 provides an important discussion of all ancient accounts of Rhea.

[37] Ov., *Am.* 3.6.45–82; *Fast.* 3.596–7. Scholz 2010 argues that this tradition originated in Ennius.

[38] See, for example, Enn., *Ann.* 35–50 (ed. Skutsch); Livy 1.4; Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 1.76–9. The varied fates of Rhea are outlined in Turcan 2004: 467–9.

[39] Livy 8.15.7 (Minucia); see also Livy 4.44.11 (Postumia): 'in the same year the Vestal Postumia was tried on the charge of *incestum*. She was innocent, but she was particularly open to suspicion on account of her appearance and wit; the former was more luxurious, the latter freer than was suitable for a virgin' ('eodem anno Postumia uirgo uestalis de incestu causam dixit, crimine innoxia, ab suspicione propter cultum amoeniorem ingeniumque liberius quam uirginem decet parum abhorrens').

[40] Lovisi 1998: 712–15, 721–5 argues that men were typically punished alongside an errant Vestal; Wildfang 2006: 53–6 asserts that *incestum* always has a sexual element. Postumia and Minucia drew male attention through their dress, making them possibly culpable.

[41] Parker 2004: 582 admitted as much by emphasising 'the linking of betrayal and unchastity' in figures such as Horatia and Tarpeia.

[42] Parker 2004: 582 n. 73. The idea of a scapegoat had been introduced earlier by Staples 1998: 136–7 and is discussed independently by Martini 2004: e.g. at 65, 98. Problematic, however, is Livy's utter silence about significant strife or *prodigia* in Minucia's case, which does not suggest a need for scapegoating. See also Gallia 2014: esp. 235–7, who discusses the case of Postumia in his argument that Vestal chastity is a more extreme matronal chastity.

[43] She is therefore listed as a Vestal in Parker 2004: 593–5, hesitantly; Martini 2004: 98–100; DiLuzio 2016: 144–5, 233; see also n. 17 above.

[44] Tarpeia appears on only one page in Staples' analysis of the Vestals (Staples 1998: 144) and not at all in other standard works. For example, she is absent from Beard 1980; 1995; Cornell 1981; Lovisi 1998; Wildfang 2006; Takács 2008; Schultz 2010; 2012; 2016. Fraschetti 1984: 98–9 specifically excluded her from consideration in his examination of Vestal *incestum*.

Because specialists on the Vestals are not interested in Tarpeia, arguments that focus on the Vestal Tarpeia tend to centre on the Vestal functions that are most similar to the character we see in Propertius 4.4: most importantly, chastity (redefined as lack of *amor*, rather than physical virginity) and the ritual use of water.[45] In doing so, however, these arguments elide the substantial disagreements regarding Vestals among specialists in Roman religion. Robin Wildfang, for example, has suggested that the Vestals protected the Roman food supply, rather than its physical boundaries; Ariadne Staples has argued that the Vestals, because they lacked legal families, represented the entire Roman community.[46] These roles, however, have no parallel in Propertius and are never discussed in analyses of the Vestal Tarpeia. This decision on the part of modern critics reduces the complexity of the Vestals; moreover, it limits our understanding of Propertius' poem by restricting discussion to the permeability of the physical boundary of Rome. Similarly, because Propertian scholarship in general is interested in questions of gender, the Propertian Tarpeia has been examined as a locus of gender confusion.[47] Yet the connection of the Vestals to gender ambiguity relies on a retracted hypothesis. In 1980, Mary Beard suggested that the Vestals had aspects of virgins and *matronae* and possibly also men; revisiting this argument in 1995, she stated that the evidence could not support their masculine status.[48] Rather, she maintains, the Vestals occupied a unique but female role in that they retained characteristics of (unmarried) daughters and of wives. Their feminine status has been reiterated by more recent scholarship.[49]

The previous paragraphs demonstrate that we can only make sense of Tarpeia's story as an aetiology of Vestal *incestum* by understanding the role of the Vestals in a very specific way: that their virginity was a metaphorical safeguard of Rome. Yet even if the argument that the Vestals were the embodiments of public safety holds, this idea that the Vestal body is a symbolic manifestation of either the state's security or the body politic is problematic when applied to Tarpeia. She does not fit the criteria for *incestum*, even in the narratives when she is in love; she does not sexually act on her feelings and thus no man is punished alongside her. Her desire for gold bracelets is similar to the cases of Postumia and Minucia — but those examples, as we saw above, were equivocal, with only one of the two Vestals being condemned. Therefore, it stands to reason that the desire for gold is, in itself, not enough to assimilate Tarpeia to a Vestal or to convict her of *incestum* — except in Propertius. In the following paragraphs, I list some of the conceptual difficulties and incoherences of Propertius' account.

The first difficulty lies in the applicability of *incestum*. As previous analyses of Vestal *incestum* have shown, there were two requirements for the punishment of an unchaste Vestal: first, a demonstrable lapse in duty, such as the extinction of the Vestal fire or a plague; and second, a demonstrable lapse in behaviour on the part of one of more Vestals.[50]

[45] See, for example, Prop. 4.4.15–16; O'Neill 1995: 57; Janan 1999: e.g. at 435.

[46] Wildfang 2006: 10, 22 (purification), 29–30 (storage); Staples 1998: 153–5. For Vestals and food, see also Thomas 1990: 146–8 on the connection between the Vestals and the Penates; Mekacher 2006: 60–1 on the Vestalia. For Vestals and purification, see also Fraschetti 1984: esp. 101; Martini 1997: 500–2; Takács 2008: 36–44. For Vestals as representatives of the citizen body, see, for example, DiLuzio 2016: 140; Pasqualini 2016: 79. Gallia 2015 offers a re-evaluation of the evidence for Vestal kinship structures, arguing that they were not as isolated from their families as previous scholarship has suggested.

[47] For example, King 1990: 236; Janan 1999: 436–8; Welch 2005: 76–8.

[48] Beard 1980, to be read with Beard 1995; see esp. 1980: 17, 'their male aspect is much less clear'; 1980: 17 n. 45, the 'admittedly tentative arguments concerning the masculine status of Vestals'; 1995: 168, 'a tentative claim for a *male* dimension too' and 1995: 175 n. 6, 'the *perhaps* [of the original article] has a nasty tendency to get left out in transmission'; original emphases. See also Gallia 2014: 222 for an updated bibliography on the state of the question.

[49] Beginning with Staples 1998: 141–2, 187–8 n. 13, 189 n. 38; she is followed by Parker 2004: 566–7 nn. 10–11 explicitly; implicitly by Martini 2004: e.g. at 65–6; Wildfang 2006; Takács 2008.

[50] See, for example, Cornell 1981: 28–34; Fraschetti 1984: 102–9; Lovisi 1998: esp. 701–5, 715–21; Parker 2004: 575–88.

The miraculous salvation of select Vestals, such as Tuccia,[51] indicates that either lapse on its own was not enough to secure condemnation. Tarpeia's story in fact demonstrates the opposite of what we would expect from a story of *incestum*. In the case of *incestum*, disaster comes first: the disaster or prodigy is a warning from the gods that the Vestal's body has been breached.[52] This divine warning triggers a search for the unchaste Vestal. But there is no disaster to warn the Romans of Tarpeia's treachery. In fact, the treachery itself is the disaster: it is only at the moment of her death that Rome is harmed by the breach of the Capitoline.

The second difficulty comes with Tarpeia's death. Unlike the punishment of an unchaste Vestal, the death of Tarpeia does not repair the damage done by her treason. Tatius enters the citadel and continues to hold it after he has killed Tarpeia.[53] The harm to Rome is only ameliorated later, when Romulus vows a temple to Jupiter Stator. Tarpeia's death is exactly the opposite of the standard narrative about unchaste Vestals.[54] If Tarpeia's physical body represents the city's safety, the city should remain safe: her unpenetrated death ought to protect the citadel, rather than act as an indication of its fall. This inversion of the expected narrative should make us suspicious about the exemplary quality of Tarpeia's Vestal status.

Lastly, a Vestal Tarpeia poses problems for Titus Tatius' role in the narrative. On the one hand, as the judge of Tarpeia's actions and the person who initiates her murder, Tatius is similar to the pontifex maximus. This role is unlikely for a foreigner. The alternative is no better: to condemn Tatius for violating Tarpeia's sacrosanctity by killing her. This religious error would be true even in the case of an unchaste Vestal, since our authors are careful to point out that the participants in the Vestal's execution do not touch her or even see her as she descends into her tomb.[55] Although Tatius does not touch Tarpeia as he throws his shield on her, he is far more involved in her death than any of the Romans involved in a Vestal funeral. Yet Tatius' actions are described approvingly by ancient authors, which does not suggest sacrilege.

These inconsistencies suggest that Tarpeia's Vestal status was not a required piece of her story. Rather, it was one possible option that ancient authors could use to express an important feature of her treason. In order to identify that feature and the likely reason for choosing the Vestal option, it is necessary to agree on the ancient authors who depict Tarpeia as a Vestal. As indicated above, the majority of scholarship takes Vestal status as a given in Tarpeia's story. In the next section, I will argue that there are in fact only a small number of authors who definitely conceive of Tarpeia as a Vestal.

IV ACCOUNTS OF THE VESTAL TARPEIA

The first evidence for Tarpeia as a Vestal comes from Varro's aetiology of the Tarpeian rock. Varro's narrative is one of the earliest to survive, which complicates any argument about the

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[51] Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.69; Plin., *NH* 28.12. See Meulder 2006: esp. 329–31, 344–5, for the most extensive analysis of this 'miracle'. Other examples are the Virgo Maxima Aemilia (see, for example, Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.68.3–5; Val. Max. 1.1.7) and, in some versions of the story, Claudia Quinta (see, for example, Ov., *Fast.* 4.305–47; Val. Max. 1.8.11). The latter is a particularly appropriate parallel for Tarpeia: see, for example, Leach 2007: 13, 'her [Claudia's] specific Vestalization is a product of later sources that may well have confused her with two other Claudian women of the late Republic'. In some accounts, Tarpeia is one of the first Vestals under Numa: see, for example, Plut., *Num.* 10.

[52] See, for example, Staples 1998: 133; Kroppenberg 2010: 428–30; n. 24 above.

[53] The continuing threat to Rome is made clear in Livy 1.12.1, usually understood as a 'Vestal' version: 'still, the Sabines occupied the citadel' ('tenuere tamen arcem Sabini'). Livy's evidence is discussed below, Section IV.

[54] For example, Fraschetti 1984: 102–9; Kroppenberg 2010: 428–32.

[55] Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.67; Plut., *Num.* 10; *Quaest. Rom.* 96. The Vestal is veiled and even the executioner turns away as she descends the staircase to the room in which she will die. See also Lovisi 1998: 725–7; Schultz 2012: esp. 133.

absolute (rather than relative) primacy of his evidence: while Varro may have been the first to call Tarpeia a Vestal, this may also be an accident of transmission. Yet there are a number of reasons for thinking that the Vestal version of Tarpeia's tale was not the popular version. First, it does not seem to have been widely followed, as I will argue below. Moreover, as tradition made Vestals come to Rome under Numa, a *Romulean* Vestal Tarpeia is anachronistic.[56] The only known parallel, Rhea Silvia, is not Roman; she is an Alban Vestal.[57] The difference is significant. Alba Longa was Rome's metropolis and the presence of an important religious office there early in Rome's history reinforces the significance of the continuing rites on the Alban Mount.[58] While silence is of course not conclusive proof, it is notable that the authors who discuss Numa's introduction of the Vestals (such as Livy and Dionysius) omit the detail of Tarpeia's Vestal status, while authors who are only interested in Tarpeia (such as Propertius) include the anachronism. And finally, for the reasons I discussed above, much of the information that we do have about the Vestals, and particularly about *incestum*, does not apply to Tarpeia.

   The statement that Livy omits reference to Tarpeia's priesthood needs more explanation, as it has been argued that his account hides a reference to the Vestals.[59] Livy's account is short and he at no point names Tarpeia; instead he calls her Tarpeius' virgin daughter ('filiam uirginem').[60] Arguments in favour of Tarpeia as a Vestal depend on the word *uirgo* as shorthand for *uirgo uestalis*. Livy's account can then be made to harmonise with Propertius' account, yielding a common, Hellenising myth: the betrayal of a city for love.[61] This argument is tenuous, however; Livy's phrasing is probably not a reference to the Vestal version of the story. Although Henry Sanders argued more than a century ago that *uirgo* alone could indicate Vestal virgins, his evidence is contentious; only two examples, both Ciceronian, stand up to scrutiny.[62] Elsewhere, the word *uirgo* in itself is not indicative of priestly status, but of sexual or age status; for example, Livy calls the foreign Sabine women *uirgines* in 1.9 and 1.12, and it would be absurd to argue on the basis of this language that the Sabine women were all Vestal virgins.[63] Nor is this an isolated example.[64] The language used to describe Vestals in Livy's first pentad is consistent:

non-priesty virgins are *uirgines*, while Vestals are *Vestales*, a linguistic differentiation that includes mythological Vestals like Rhea Silvia. The presence of a *uirgo* in a context that suggests a Vestal virgin should invite further scrutiny. Livy's use of *uirgo* for Tarpeia does not stand up to that scrutiny, suggesting that Livy does not depict Tarpeia as a Vestal; rather than referring to a specific *religious* role, Livy is identifying Tarpeia's age and life-stage.

Surviving Greek authors also differentiate between Vestal and non-Vestal virgins. Dionysius, for example, refers to Tarpeia as a θυγάτηρ and a παρθένος, but not as a Ἑστιάς[65] or a ἱερὰ παρθένος,[66] terms used to describe Vestal virgins in Greek. Because Dionysius discusses various republican accounts of Tarpeia at length, his evidence suggests that Fabius Pictor, Calpurnius Piso and other early historiographers did not say that Tarpeia was a Vestal virgin.[67]

In addition to language, the fact that Tarpeia leaves the citadel to fetch water has been used to suggest that Livy considered Tarpeia a Vestal.[68] This activity is parallelled by some accounts of Rhea Silvia[69] and seems to have been part of Vestal activity historically.[70] But Livy's account of Rhea does not include her fetching water, nor does this appear in his other accounts of Vestal duties.[71] Moreover, supplying water for the household was a common female task in antiquity, both in Rome and elsewhere, and remains common in some cultures to the present day;[72] it cannot be taken as a conclusive identifying feature of a single cult and its personnel.

The final point that has been offered in support of the Vestal version is Tarpeia's death. Tarpeia was buried alive, as all accounts agree; unchaste Vestals, too, were buried alive.[73] But closer analysis reveals that the modes of death and burial are not particularly similar. Historical Vestals were not buried under piles of shields, as Tarpeia was. By all accounts, Tarpeia's death was quick and violent: she was crushed before an audience of Sabine soldiers.[74] In contrast, the Vestal was left to suffocate unseen.[75]

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uirgo has been assumed to mean 'Vestal', but that is not necessarily the case. The most contentious example is Hor., *Carm.* 3.30.9, where the 'pontifex with the silent virgin' ('cum tacita uirgine pontifex') climbs the Capitoline Hill. The association of the *uirgo* with the pontifex does seem to imply Vestal status. But based on our understanding of Vestal life, it is not clear that this *uirgo* is a Vestal. She may be on her way to becoming one: that is, this line may refer to the Vestal *captio*. The only evidence for this ritual, from Gell., *NA* 1.12 (esp. 9–13), suggests that it occurred on the Capitol. Since Horace does not provide further details, this line cannot be used as proof that the *uirgo* is a Vestal already, rather than a *uirgo* about to become a Vestal.

[65] This is the word used to describe Rhea Silvia in Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 1.76.3, 1.76.4; Plut., *Rom.* 3. Dio uses a similar phrase: ἱερεῖα τῆς Ἑστίας (e.g., fr. 1.6 on Rhea Silvia; 55.22.5 reforms of Augustus).

[66] This phrase is used by Plutarch (e.g., *Rom.* 22, *Num.* 9; Ἑστιάσι παρθένοις, *Num.*13; similarly *Cam.* 20, *Cat. Mai.* 20) to refer to Vestals, although not by Dionysius.

[67] Piso, at least, seemed to think that she was a minor deity; since Dionysius agrees with that version, the distinction between a priestess and a divinity seems relevant to his discussion, if he had come across it. On Tarpeia as a divinity, see, for example, La Penna 1957: 112 (with full bibliography in n. 3); Mazzei 2005: 28–32; 2009; below, n. 79.

[68] Livy 1.11.6: 'by chance she had gone outside the walls to seek water for rites' ('aquam forte ea tum sacris extra moenia petitum ierat'). In Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.38 and Prop. 4.4, Tarpeia sees Tatius from the Capitoline; the water is an optional part of the story.

[69] See, for example, Cic., *Div.* 1.40; Tib. 2.5.51–4.

[70] See, for example, Plut., *Num.* 13; Takács 2008: 30 with further references; also cf. Martini 1998: 23–5.

[71] Livy 1.3.11–4.2 (Rhea).

[72] Rome: see Pl., *Rud.* 130–5 (water for rites *of Venus* with the same phrasing as Livy: 'aquam sacris petere'); Hyg., *Astr.* 2.29, water sacred *to all the gods*; Ov., *Fast.* 2.249–50, to Apollo. Elsewhere: see, for example, Gen. 24:11–20; Ex. 2:16. King 1990: 233–4 identifies fetching water as women's work; Wildfang 2006: 8–12 observes that fetching water is not unique to Vestals.

[73] See, for example, Martini 1998: 30; Welch 2015: 29–33, 107: 'Tarpeia's unpenetrated [*sic*] death mimics Vestal punishment.' The crime of *incestum* implies that the Vestal was, in fact, penetrated — just not in her ritualised murder.

[74] See Livy 1.11.8: 'eo scuta illi pro aureis donis congesta' ('and so shields were piled on top of her instead of golden gifts'); *congesta* taken with *obrutam* (1.11.7) suggests that the shields' weight, rather than lack of air, was thought to be the primary cause of Tarpeia's demise.

[75] See above, n. 55.

The visibility of Tarpeia's death is emphasised in iconography. Her death is depicted on three surviving artefacts: two coins, one republican and one Augustan, and a panel of the Basilica Aemilia frieze.[76] On the Basilica Aemilia frieze, the helmeted figure to the far left (variously identified as Mars, Romulus or Titus Tatius[77]) explicitly watches as his soldiers throw their shields on Tarpeia, and the soldiers' sight lines also centre on her. Tarpeia herself looks directly out at the viewer. Unlike an unchaste Vestal, her face is not hidden or veiled, and her falling dress reveals one of her breasts. Even accounting for her obvious distress, she is not depicted as a Vestal; she is missing the *infula* and *uittae* that identify Vestals in Roman iconography.[78] In the absence of these visual signals of Vestal status, a viewer would not be able to identify the woman on the frieze as a Vestal.[79]

The two coins likewise lack these visual cues. They depict Tarpeia's hair as unbound and streaming, a far cry from the elaborate *seni crines* of the Vestal. On the republican coin, Tarpeia is the object of her executioners' gaze, as on the Basilica Aemilia frieze.[80] The Augustan coin, which may be modelled on the Basilica Aemilia depiction, shows Tarpeia looking directly out of the frame at the viewer. While Tarpeia's dress is more modest on the coins than on the frieze, she is still visible as she dies; the coins seem to celebrate her demise. Taken together, the three depictions of Tarpeia suggest that her death was meant to be viewed, unlike the secretive murder of an unchaste Vestal.

Other differences, perhaps less profound, nonetheless reiterate that Tarpeia's death was dissimilar to the Vestals' execution. The locations are different: Tarpeia was buried on the Capitoline, while unchaste Vestals were buried near the Porta Collina.[81] And finally,

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[76] *RRC* 344/2, minted by L. Titurius Sabinus in 89 B.C.E.; *RIC* I² Augustus 299, minted by P. Petronius Turpilianus *c*. 19–4 B.C.E. The date of the Basilica Aemilia frieze is disputed. Kränzle 1994: 96–7 n. 28 suggests the second quarter of the first century B.C.E.; Ertel and Freyberger 2007: 121–9 suggest the late first century; Lipps 2011: 53–4 suggests the early first century C.E.; Freyberger *et al.* 2007: 502–4 and Freyberger and Ertel 2016: 61–77 prefer an Augustan date.

[77] Mars: for example, Furuhagen 1961: 143–4; Romulus: for example, Rehak 2006: 114, while Picard 1957: 183 argues that the figure is Roman; Titus Tatius: Evans 1992: 121–3.

[78] See Goette 2012: 25–7 and Lindner 2015: 99–125, esp. 103–9 for relief sculpture; neither discusses depictions of Tarpeia. Granino Cecere 2003: 75 points out that even non-Roman Vestals are depicted with the *infula*. In Lindner's view, the bared shoulder of one figure in the Palermo Vestal relief is inappropriately revealing for Vestals and implies that the woman is not a Vestal (at 105–6). Tarpeia's semi-nudity on the Basilica Aemilia further separates her from Vestal imagery. I analyse the iconography of Tarpeia more fully in a forthcoming article (Neel forthcoming).

[79] Mazzei 2005 (quoting 29) has even argued that the iconography of Tarpeia depicts her 'come una divinità amazzonica', which has a parallel in Propertius' description of Tarpeia in love (4.4.71–2; see Warden 1978, Ercolani Cocchi 2004 and Neel forthcoming). Mazzei ties the iconography to linguistic arguments about the derivation of Tarpeia from the Greek *tropaion* (Picard 1957: 107–16; Gànšiniec 1949; Mazzei 2005: 31–2; 2009; *contra* Morel 1962: 39–43). Linguists suggest that a relationship to the Etruscan root *tarχ-* is more likely; see Sanders 1904: 46–7 (with earlier references); Devoto 1958: e.g. at 23; Baudou 1995: 83–5; Calderini 1995/97: 132, 143 (also suggesting Oscan); Haudry 2002: 72. La Penna 1957: 114–22 discusses the options with extensive references at 121 n. 30. While the etymology of Tarpeia is disputed, the difference between Amazon iconography and Vestal iconography is significant and Mazzei's argument emphasises the non-Vestal appearance of Tarpeia.

[80] The republican coin is one of a series that seems to promote the Sabine *origo* of the moneyer. Three of his coins feature the head of Titus Tatius on the obverse, while their reverses, in addition to Tarpeia, depict the Sabine women and Victory in a chariot. These three coins seem to allude to Rome's wars with the Sabines and the Sabines' subsequent incorporation into the Roman community; see, for example, Morel 1962: 32–6; see further below, Section VI.

[81] For example, Livy 22.57.2: 'she was put to death underground near the Porta Collina, *as is customary*' ('sub terra, uti mos est, ad portam Collinam necata fuerat'; emphasis mine); Plut., *Num.* 10. The relevance of intra-pomerial burial is not clear, as the Capitoline may not have been included within the *pomerium*; see Richardson 1992: 70 (s.v. *Capitolium Mons*). Even if Tarpeia's burial was intra-pomerial, this is not enough to equate her with a Vestal: male characters from early Roman history were also buried within the *pomerium*. For example, Faustulus was buried in the Forum (Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 1.87.2; while this is before the foundation of the city, Dionysius notes that there was a burial marker in his own day) and Valerius Publicola was buried ἐντὸς ἄστεος ('inside the city', Plut., *Public.* 23). The human sacrifices of the Gauls and Greeks

Vestals were killed for *incestum*, which, as I argued above, cannot be mapped on to Tarpeia's crime. Tarpeia was killed for making a bargain with Titus Tatius and for opening a gate to allow enemies into the city. The accounts of historical Vestals indicate that meeting a man, in itself, was not *incestum*: Plutarch, in his *Life* of Crassus, relates that the Vestal Licinia was accused of *incestum* and acquitted when it was revealed that she was meeting with her cousin Crassus about her property.[82] The reasons for the meeting and the person met mattered: treason, not sex, was the primary cause of Tarpeia's murder. Burial while still living, yet through different means, for different reasons and in different places, does not offer a particularly compelling parallel. It is all the more important, therefore, to consider why Varro calls Tarpeia a Vestal.

V TARPEIA IN VARRO

Varro engaged in significant research and it is not possible to argue that he invented the Vestal version of Tarpeia's story. But he did substantially influence accounts of early Roman history via (for example) his inquiry into Trojan ancestry and his determination that Rome was founded in (our) 753. It is likely, moreover, that Propertius followed Varro's usage in his account of Tarpeia,[83] and it may not be going too far to say that Varro brought the Vestal version to prominence. Although there has been significant discussion of Propertius' reasons for including the Vestal Tarpeia, Varro's rationale remains largely unexplored.[84] Yet Varro, as far as we know, was providing an unusual detail. In this section, I contextualise Varro's description of Tarpeia within both *De lingua Latina* and the late republican intellectual environment with the goal of identifying places in the narrative that were open to a Vestal re-interpretation.

In this section of the *De lingua Latina*, Varro circles through Rome's topography explaining the names of various landmarks. The reference to Tarpeia appears in a longer discussion of the Capitoline hill:

> The Capitoline is so called because a human head is said to have been found there when the foundations of the Temple of Jupiter were being dug. This hill previously was called 'Tarpeian' from the Vestal Virgin Tarpeia, who was killed there by Sabine weapons and buried. A memorial to her name is preserved, because even now the cliff face is called the 'Tarpeian rock'. Tradition has it that the hill was previously called 'Saturnian' and from it Latium was called the 'Saturnian land', as Ennius too calls it. It is written that an ancient town, Saturnia, was on it. Three remnants of it still remain today: the shrine of Saturn at the entry [to the hill]; the 'Saturnian' gate, which Junius recalls being there, that they now call 'Pandana'; and, in the laws about building, back walls for private citizens behind the shrine of Saturn are called 'Saturnian'.

> Capitolinum dictum, quod hic, cum fundamenta foderentur aedis Iouis, caput humanum dicitur inuentum. Hic mons ante Tarpeius dictus a uirgine Vestale Tarpeia, quae ibi ab Sabinis necata armis et sepulta: cuius nominis monimentum relictum, quod etiam nunc eius rupes Tarpeium appellatur saxum. Hunc antea montem Saturnium appellatum prodiderunt

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were also intra-pomerial burials. See also Sanders 1904: 14 for a similar point; Schultz 2010: 530–4; 2012: 129–33; 2016: 68–72 for arguments distinguishing other types of capital punishment from both Vestal interment and human sacrifice (I would like to thank Celia Schultz for pressing me on this point in Michigan).

[82] Plut., *Crass.* 1.

[83] See Deschamps 1987: 86–8 for Propertius' reliance on Varro, albeit not using this example; Welch 2005: 57 suggests that Propertius follows Varro here. Cairns 2011: 182 argues that Propertius read historical works and therefore that his account of Tarpeia the Vestal was a purposeful choice. For Varro's influence on poetry in general, see, for example, Palombi 2006: 23–5; Butterfield 2015b.

[84] La Penna 1957: 124, 126 n. 47 and Welch 2015: 105–24 (for example) discuss Varro.

et ab eo Lati<um> Saturniam terram, ut etiam Ennius appellat. Antiquum oppidum in hoc fuisse Saturnia<m> scribitur. Eius uestigia etiam nunc manent tria, quod Saturni fanum in faucibus, quod Saturnia Porta quam Iunius scribit ibi, quam nunc uocant Pandanam, quod post aedem Saturni in aedificiorum legibus priuatis parietes postici 'muri <Saturnii>' sunt scripti.[85]

Varro refers to the 'Vestal Tarpeia' casually and without argument,[86] and modern scholars have assumed that he was trying to refer to Tarpeia as an unchaste Vestal. In doing so, they follow Propertius' lead, rather than allowing Varro's evidence to speak for itself.[87] We should not assume that the version Propertius made memorable is the version Varro told. Indeed, as Steven Green suggests, there is substantial reason to believe that Varro's version was different, since 'it is clear that Propertius sets out to make his Tarpeia as treacherous as possible' by adding the Parilia setting to the Vestal Tarpeia.[88] It is necessary to examine Varro in context to determine what message he is likely to be promoting.

Perhaps surprisingly, given Varro's status as the most renowned intellectual of his day, his evidence for Tarpeia has been mostly overlooked.[89] Lucienne Deschamps argued that Varro was the source of Propertius' account of Tarpeia in 4.4, but her aim was to analyse Varro's influence, not his motivations.[90] More recently, Carolyn MacDonald has argued that Propertius and Varro both attempted to reconstruct a multivalent Roman history from the variety of aetiologies available in the Roman landscape.[91]

Tara Welch has offered the most systematic attempt to analyse Varro's account of Tarpeia to date. She approaches the evidence via Varro's linguistic theory of words formed by analogy and words formed by anomaly.[92] This analysis leads to the conclusion that Tarpeia is an anomalous[93] figure due to the formation of her name. From this conclusion, she argues that Tarpeia's confused gender status as a Vestal highlights and normalises the confusion of the late Republic.[94] The gender-fluid

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[85] Varro, *Ling.* 5.41–2 (ed. Kent 1938; the differences from Goetz and Schöll 1910 are minor and do not affect the argument here). The truncation of this lemma (to 5.41 only) in most texts on Tarpeia is problematic: Welch 2015: 123, for example, wrongly states that the hill is 'unnamed' before Tarpeia.

[86] Varro frequently introduces information that differs from later authorities without marking it as argumentative; see, for example, Spencer 2011: 74–5 on the Palatine and 2015a: 106 on the Forum Boarium, both of which Varro derives from animal sounds rather than Greek heroes; Wiseman 2015: esp. 93–4, on Varro's idiosyncratic account of Romulus.

[87] See above, Section II.

[88] Green 2004: 363–5 (quoting 364). See also Miller 2011: 347–50 for Propertius' emphasis on *amor*, clearly inappropriate for a virgin priestess. We cannot use Propertius to reconstruct lost bits of Varro; see Hinds 2006: 13, '[Propertius] do[es] not so much reproduce Varro's patterns of explanation as rather usurp them'; Spencer 2019: 135–7 on Varro's comparative optimism about Rome's past. See Wiseman 1979: 37–8 for examples of 'dramatic irony' similar to Propertius' tale; for example, that L. Metellus, who saved the Palladium, was also punished with blindness for seeing the Palladium. Wiseman suggests that declamatory exercises are at the root of such ironic tales; on myth and declamation, see, for example, Beard 1993.

[89] Varro himself has, meanwhile, been increasingly an object of scrutiny: see, for example, Cavazza 1981; 1984; Di Pasquale 1992; Larmour and Spencer 2007; Zehnacker 2008; Butterfield 2015a; Spencer 2019. These analyses have centred on linguistic questions more than aetiological ones; the aetiological analyses have omitted Tarpeia. In particular, Diana Spencer's series of articles (2011, 2015a, 2018) and recent book (2019) on Varro's 'tour' of Rome, while illuminating Varro's methods, centre on other aetiologies (for example, Spencer 2011: 73, a discussion of Saturnian walls in 5.41–2; 2015a: 107, the Arx Capitolina; her discussion in 2019: 135–6 emphasises the brevity of Varro's account of Tarpeia and refers readers to Welch 2005).

[90] Deschamps 1987: esp. 86–8.

[91] MacDonald 2016: esp. 197, 201–4.

[92] Welch 2015: 115–24.

[93] In both its normal English sense and the technical usage with which Varro imbues it; the latter indicates new coinage through novelty and subsequent usage. See Welch 2015: 115–19 for a discussion of Varronian linguistics as they relate to Tarpeia; Cavazza 1984; Russo 2011; Butterfield 2015b; Taylor 2015; Spencer 2019 *passim* for Varro's theories more generally.

[94] Welch 2015: 105–6: 'In her refusal to be easily mapped onto a stable set of behaviors and identities, and in her

depiction of Tarpeia may make sense of the Propertian evidence, but it is less obviously relevant to Varro: what does Vestal status add to his conception of the story that a *uirgo* would not? According to Welch, Varro's interest in gender is signalled by the appearance of the adjective *tarpeius* in all three grammatical genders (referring to the *Mons Tarpeius*, *Saxum Tarpeium* and Tarpeia herself).[95] But in a book dealing with the Latin language, these references indicate not the fluidity of Tarpeia, but of Latin and thus of Rome itself.[96]

As recent work by Diana Spencer has demonstrated, the heart of Varro's project is the inscription of Roman identity through language, including the 'destabilizing' effect of words.[97] Varro offers a series of aetiologies that are grounded in Roman history and its built environment. Although some of these explanations, such as the discussion of the Aventine and Velabrum,[98] do engage in etymological speculation, Varro makes no real attempt at a linguistic discussion of Tarpeia.[99] Rather, his discussion of Tarpeia is part of a larger-scale explanation of the aetiologies of Rome's hills. Some of these aetiologies, like the Capitoline's, present changes over time; for others, like the Aventine (which follows it), Varro suggests competing explanations. In discussing the Capitoline, Varro begins with the current name of the hill, which goes back to the sixth-century foundation of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. He then adds that previously (between Romulus and Tarquin, in the eighth and seventh centuries) it was called Tarpeian and before that (that is, before Rome was founded) it was called the Saturnian hill. These aetiologies introduce Varro's identification of Rome as the city of seven hills.[100]

Varro's explanation of the Capitoline's names proceeds in reverse chronological order and it is clear from his account that later names replace earlier names only in part. This 'palimpsestic' approach to landscape is typical of Varro's description of the city and recalls Roman techniques for memorisation.[101] Just as Tarpeia's name remains present in the form of the Tarpeian rock, Saturn's name leaves three traces in the Roman landscape: a shrine, the Porta Saturnia and the concept of 'Saturnian' walls.[102] No one is erased from the Capitoline's history; Tarpeia is not unique in this regard.[103] Rather, she is integrated into a process of historical change that preceded her and will continue after her death.

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ability, moreover, to embody seeming opposites, a Vestal Tarpeia acts as an analogue for the political and social crisis of the end of the Republic.' See Spencer 2011: 68–9; 2015a: 108; 2019: esp. 160–83, for Varro's response to the crises of the late Republic.

[95] Welch 2015: 111–15; she also considers this interest in gender to be typical of the mid-first century B.C.E. (112–13).

[96] Although the grammatical point is different, similar wordplay is on display in Varro's use of diminutives relating to the Mons Caelius; see Varro, *Ling.* 5.46: Caelius, Caelianus, Caeliolus. Spencer 2011 offers a particularly helpful analysis of this Varronian 'city-as-discourse' (at 68).

[97] Spencer 2015a: 109; see also Spencer 2011: 72 on the intertwining of words, identity and space; 2015b: 73–6 on the relationship of words and Romanness and 2015a: 99 on 'language as the key tool for understanding the Roman experience of reality'. I will return to this last argument below, Section VI.

[98] Varro, *Ling.* 5.43–4.

[99] The relationship of Tarpeia to *turpe*, which Boyd 1984 has argued is on display in Propertius 4.4, is not openly present in Varro.

[100] Varro, *Ling.* 5.41: 'The area now called "Rome" was once called "Septimontium" [i.e. "Seven Hills"] from the number of the hills which the city embraced within its walls' ('ubi nunc est Roma, Septimontium nominatum ab tot montibus quos postea urbs muris comprehendit'); see, for example, Palombi 2006: 22–9; Vout 2012; de Souza 2017 on the concept of Roman hills; Hinds 2006: 38–48; Spencer 2011: 73; 2019: 135–7; MacDonald 2016: 209–10 on this passage. Varro will continue to discuss the various Roman hills (there are in fact more than seven) until §56, providing names that are explicitly historicised to (usually) the era of Romulus. Tarpeia fits into this environment both thematically and temporally.

[101] Spencer 2018: 66; see further Spencer 2011: 68–72; 2015b: 91–2; 2019: 42–67, esp. 49–52.

[102] See Varro, *Ling.* 5.42: 'Three reminders of him [i.e. Saturn] remain even today' ('eius uestigia etiam nunc manet tria'). For a discussion of this passage, focusing on the Tarpeia story, see Marcattili 2014: 72–3.

[103] *Pace* Welch 2015: 112.

As Spencer has demonstrated, Varro perceived Rome through dual lenses. The city was at once the rural/pastoral homeland of Romulus and the urban metropolis that began with 'la grande Roma dei Tarquini'.[104] His exploration of the Capitol navigates that change without abandoning the earlier referents. Saturn represents the pre-urban phase of the city as a wholly rural deity;[105] the Capitoline temple shows the city at its urban height. Tarpeia mediates between these two eras, a role which is particularly appropriate for a Vestal. The Vestals, as modern scholarship has suggested, could represent the community of citizens, regardless of censorial status; they were, ideally, freed from familial ties; their role embraced the full spectrum of femininity, from *uirgo* to *matrona*. If these arguments about the role of the Vestals as representatives of all aspects of Roman society are correct, a Vestal Tarpeia bridges the rural past of Roman culture and identity with its urban present.

As the fragmentary republican historians preserved in Dionysius and Plutarch make clear, Varro had several options for the aetiology of the Tarpeian rock. He does not always shy away from discussing variant accounts; in the aetiology of the Lacus Curtius several chapters later, he retells three different versions in full.[106] Perhaps he did not want to spend time describing a name that was no longer in current use. But possibly we have overlooked his contribution: that the hill was named after Tarpeia, not a Tarpeius. Both possibilities appear in a lemma in Festus:

> They say that the Tarpeian rock is that part of the hill which got its name because the girl Tarpeia was buried there — the one who made an agreement to betray that hill to the Sabines. Or because a certain Lucius Tarpeius, when he opposed King Romulus over the stolen women, was killed by a hideous punishment in that area where the rock is. Therefore they did not want that gloomy place associated with the rest of the Capitoline.

> \<Sa\>xum Tarpeium appell\<atam aiunt partem mon\>tis qui ob sepultam Ta\<rpeiam ibi uirginem, quae\> eum montem Sabinis pro\<dere pacta erat, ita\> nominatus est. Vel a\<b eo, quod, quidam nomine\> L. Tarpeius Romulo \<regi cum propter rap\>tas uirgines aduersa\<retur, in ea parte, qua sa\>xum est, de noxio poena \<sumpta est. Quapropter\> noluerunt funestum locum \<cum altera parte\> Capitoli coniungi.[107]

Festus offers the explanation of Tarpeius as an alternative to the naming of the Tarpeian rock after Tarpeia. We are fortunate to have a republican source for the Tarpeius aetiology, which suggests that it may have been an option available to Varro: according to Plutarch, it is at least as old as the historian Sulpicius Galba.[108] The context of the two aetiologies is similar: both explanations date back to Romulus and in particular to the Sabine wars; both explain the rock with reference to a horrible death. Because aetiologies deriving from a man are more typical of Roman historiography, the female Tarpeia requires further explanation.

In a variant that is generally considered obscure, Calpurnius Piso states that the Capitoline possesses a monument to Tarpeia.[109] This monument was not the Tarpeian rock, as Dionysius' account suggests: 'for there where she fell she was honoured *with a tomb set*

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on the most sacred hill of the city and the Romans make liquid sacrifices each year — I repeat what Piso writes' (τάφου τε γὰρ ἔνθα ἔπεσεν ἠξίωται τὸν ἱερώτατον τῆς πόλεως κατέχουσα λόφον, καὶ χοὰς αὐτῇ Ῥωμαῖοι καθ᾽ ἕκαστον ἐνιαυτὸν ἐπιτελοῦσι, (λέγω δὲ ἃ Πείσων γράφει)).[110] Unlike Varro (and later Festus), Dionysius does not associate the story of Tarpeia with the Tarpeian rock. In this respect, it is notable that neither Livy nor Plutarch make the aetiological connection, either; Plutarch, at least, cites Varro immediately before the story of Tarpeia and Dionysius does the same soon after.[111]

If we can trust Dionysius' summary of what Fabius Pictor and Cincius Alimentus wrote, they may not have included the naming of the Tarpeian rock, either; rather, as Dionysius argues, the traitor would not be honoured by having her memory perpetuated in a monument. He supports his preference for Piso's version with the explanation 'if she had died betraying her country to the enemy … in time [the Romans] would have dug up any part of her body that was left and thrown it away to inspire fear and ward off anyone who would act similarly' (εἰ προδιδοῦσα τὴν πατρίδα τοῖς πολεμίοις ἀπέθανεν … εἴ τι λείψανον αὐτῆς ἦν τοῦ σώματος ἀνασκαφὲν ἔξω ῥιφῆναι σὺν χρόνῳ φόβου τε καὶ ἀποτροπῆς ἕνεκα τῶν μελλόντων τὰ ὅμοια δρᾶν).[112] While this opinion may not fairly represent what Fabius and Cincius wrote, it suggests that their version did not include a *monumentum* to Tarpeian treachery.[113] Tarpeia as eponym makes more sense in the context of an honour.

There are no surviving traces of this memorial to Tarpeia on the Capitoline. Yet Pier Luigi Tucci has uncovered evidence that the Capitoline was substantially restored in the mid-first century B.C.E., when Varro was writing.[114] Not only did these restorations affect the areas surrounding the Tarpeian rock; they may have affected loci of Tarpeia's memory elsewhere on the hill. Tucci has argued that the shrine of Tarpeia, mentioned by Piso in the passage quoted above, may have been decommissioned during these renovations. If we follow Tucci's argument, we can hypothesise that Varro's ambiguity about Tarpeia's role on the Capitoline may have been in dialogue with these renovations that were transforming the city. Returning to Spencer's analysis of aetiology as a form of civic activity, we can see a statement about the centre of Rome's empire in the choice of the female eponym Tarpeia.[115] This argument, while it does not replace the Greek parallels for Tarpeia that have been the topic of discussion for more than a century, does invite a Roman perspective.[116] Varro's reference to Tarpeia as a priestess supports the renovated landscape: instead of forgetting a cult that has been displaced, he offers a renewed significance. His version relates the story to the new appearance of the city. In the final section, I suggest several possible avenues for understanding this changed context in the mid-first century B.C.E.

VI TARPEIA BECOMES A VESTAL

Once we remove the requirement of Vestal status, Tarpeia's relationship with the Capitoline becomes more open to exploration as an authorial decision. In this final

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[110] Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.40.3; my emphasis.
[111] Plut., *Rom.* 16, on the *spolia opima*; Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.47.3, on the reconciliation between Romulus and the Sabines.
[112] Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.40.3.
[113] See Welch 2015: 114, on Varro: 'the Tarpeian rock is a monument — a reminder — not of her deed but of her name.'
[114] See Tucci 2005: 21–5, 27–8; 2006: 66–7; 2018: 44–7 for recent discoveries in the Aracoeli garden; MacDonald 2016: 195–7. The movement of Tarpeia's Capitoline shrine is retrojected into the regal period by Plut., *Rom.* 18.
[115] See particularly Spencer 2011: 70–2 and 77; 2019: 129–59 for the difficulties involved in navigating the changing Roman landscape of the late Republic.
[116] See, for example, Sanders 1904: 18–21; Reinach 1908: 64–74; La Penna 1957: 115–16.

section, I offer two speculative attempts to account for the information that we find in Varro without relying on the *incestum* narrative from Propertius. My suggestions extrapolate from the republican-era variant of Piso and a fragment of the Hellenistic historian Antigonos (preserved in Plutarch), among others, in order to maximise the possibilities that would have been available to Varro. My goal in this section is not to assert that these speculative reconstructions offer us a 'better' or 'more original' Tarpeia story. Rather, I offer possible ways to understand Varro's assertion of Vestal status.

Varro's decision to make Tarpeia a Vestal is surprising because he also claims that Vesta was a Sabine, rather than a Roman, goddess.[117] This information is repeated by Plutarch, who does not note an inconsistency.[118] Hence, a reader of *De lingua Latina* would be confronted with a Roman woman serving a Sabine goddess and subsequently betraying Rome to the Sabines. This situation benefits the Sabines on both counts, which fits Varro's pro-Sabine outlook but makes little narrative sense.[119] This Sabine Vesta is, moreover, brought to Rome by Tatius, so a Vestal confronting Tatius is confusingly anachronistic. While it is possible that Varro contradicted himself and Plutarch either did not notice or did not call attention to the discrepancy, both hypotheses are made less probable by the proximity of these two statements. Instead, this apparent contradiction may better be explained by turning to what Varro does not say: he never claims that Tarpeia is Roman.

A group of authors, referenced by Plutarch, told a variant in which Tarpeia was Sabine.[120] After relating the version of the story that Livy prefers, in which Tatius kills Tarpeia in disgust over her treachery, Plutarch mentions variants that he has read and rejected.

> Some tell different stories about Tarpeia. Those who say that she was the daughter of Tatius the Sabine king who was forced to live with Romulus, and moreover that she did and suffered such deeds because of her father, are not credible. Antigonos is one of them.

> Τῶν δ᾽ ἄλλα περὶ Ταρπηίας λεγόντων ἀπίθανοι μέν εἰσιν οἱ Τατίου θυγατέρα τοῦ ἡγεμόνος τῶν Σαβίνων οὖσαν αὐτήν, Ῥωμύλῳ δὲ βίᾳ συνοικοῦσαν, ἱστοροῦντες ταῦτα ποιῆσαι καὶ παθεῖν ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός: ὧν καὶ Ἀντίγονός ἐστι.[121]

In this account, Plutarch seems to imply that Tarpeia was one of the raped Sabine women. Rather than betraying her own city, she remained loyal to her Sabine family and betrayed her Roman captors.[122] Tarpeia as a captive fits the narrative logic of the Sabine wars, since one rationale for the rape of the Sabine women is Rome's lack of potential brides.[123] The

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[117] Varro, *Ling.* 5.74. On this passage, see Deschamps 1983: 163–73; 1985–86: 131–4; 1990: 294–5.

[118] Plut., *Num.* 10; one cannot exclude the possibility that his information is derived from *De lingua Latina*.

[119] On Sabine identity in general, see, for example, Dench 1995: 85–94; Farney 2007: 97–112. On Sabinism as represented by Tarpeia, see, for example, Poucet 1967: 105–35; Musti 1985: 78–9; Semioli 2010. On Varro's Sabinism, primarily from a linguistic perspective, Collart 1952; Dench 2005: 316–21; Zehnacker 2008: 426; Russo 2011.

[120] See Plut., *Rom.* 17, citing Antigonos (*FGHist* 816 F2), possibly the Hellenistic Greek author from Carystus; despite the controversy over his origin, the dating to the Hellenistic period is reasonably secure. Antigonos himself is known for 'glimpses of archaic narratives that were soon challenged by an increasingly authoritative Roman tradition' (*BNJ* ad Antigonos 816 (Beck)). Plutarch's continuous use of the plural suggests that more than one author proposed this Sabine variant.

[121] Plut., *Rom.* 17.

[122] See n. 110 above. This hypothesis resembles the version found in Piso, but inverted; Tarpeia would double-cross the Romans, rather than the Sabines. The cause of her death, in such a story, is difficult to discern; one possible explanation would be that she was killed for her lack of chastity in sleeping with Romulus. If so, the change from this lack of chastity in a non-priestess to the lack of chastity leading to the death of a Vestal would be a plausible re-reading of the available evidence. See also Plut., *Rom.* 14 for a similar story regarding Hersilia. Both Hersilia and Tarpeia are discussed in Wiseman 1983: see esp. 445–7 for a reconstruction of the early versions of the rape of the Sabine women.

[123] See, for example, Livy 1.9.1: 'lack of women' ('penuria mulierum'); Plut., *Rom.* 14. Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.30 suggests that Romulus wanted to strengthen diplomatic ties through marriage.

coin of L. Titurius Sabinus, discussed above, may support the idea that Tarpeia, like Titus Tatius, was Sabine. Aside from Tarpeia, the coins include figures who can be associated with Sabine identity: Titus Tatius, the Sabine women and Saturn.[124] Propertius, too, may allude to a version in which Tarpeia was Sabine. In her monologue, Tarpeia expresses a wish to become 'a captive beside your Penates' ('ad uestros … captiua Penates').[125] Propertius here has a Roman woman wish to be a Sabine captive, an inversion of the Sabine women story in general. The irony would be stronger, however, if the death of a Sabine captive Tarpeia were widely recognised.

A Roman Vestal was sacrosanct; her death could only be accomplished naturally or through the method of burial while alive discussed above. To kill her otherwise is to commit a gross breach of religious piety. Yet this breach is exactly what Titus Tatius would accomplish in killing Tarpeia the Roman Vestal. According to Fabius, he deceives her; according to Livy's first explanation, he is simply brutal.[126] These depictions of Tatius are unlikely to have been Varro's. As Deschamps has argued, Varro depicted Rome's Sabine rulers carefully.[127] Titus Tatius and Numa were idealised in Varro's conception, and in particular, the Sabine kings were ideally *pius* — exactly the sort of ruler who would not kill a sacrosanct priestess without observing the appropriate rituals. If Tarpeia were not a Roman Vestal, but a Vestal of different ethnic origin,[128] her death would not have required the same rituals as we see in Rome: as noted above, Rhea Silvia, an Alban Vestal, was punished differently for *incestum* than Roman Vestals. Once Varro had depicted Tarpeia as a Vestal, her Sabine identity would have preserved Tatius' status as a good king; the different penalty would then be comprehensible. The broad outline of her story would also follow that of Rhea Silvia's: the Vestal Rhea Silvia is raped by Mars, punished but ultimately remembered; a Vestal Tarpeia, one of the raped Sabine women rather than a traitor, is also punished and memorialised in the Tarpeian rock.

A Sabine identity for Tarpeia is not the only option; it is also possible that she, like Rhea Silvia, could have been understood as an Alban. According to Dionysius, Alban and Etruscan reinforcements came to help Romulus in the Sabine war.[129] Although Dionysius puts the Romans on the Esquiline and the Etruscans on the Quirinal, he does not say who was guarding the Capitoline. The Albans are likewise left unaccounted for. Dionysius may have taken these details from his sources, who make clear that Tarpeia is *on the Romans' side*, but not that she is herself Roman.[130] Dionysius' information in this chapter is not attributed, but in the story of Romulus more generally he cites Fabius Pictor and Cincius Alimentus extensively and other early annalists (Cato the Elder,

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[124] See Poucet 1967: 318–24 for the supposedly Sabine origin of Saturn, including references.

[125] Prop. 4.4.33.

[126] Fabius Pictor *FRHist* 1 F7 = *FGHist* 809 F6 = Cincius Alimentus *FRHist* 2 F3 (ap. Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.40.2): 'but those following Fabius claim that the deceit in the agreement was on the Sabines' side; for when it was necessary to deliver the gold that Tarpeia asked for according to the agreement, they resented the expense and threw their shields at her' (οἱ δὲ περὶ τὸν Φάβιον ἐπὶ τοῖς Σαβίνοις ποιοῦσι τὴν τῶν ὁμολογιῶν ἀπάτην· δέον γὰρ αὐτοὺς τὸν χρυσόν, ὥσπερ ἡ Τάρπεια ἠξίου, κατὰ τὰς ὁμολογίας ἀποδιδόναι, χαλεπαίνοντας ἐπὶ τῷ μεγέθει τοῦ μισθοῦ τὰ σκεπαστήρια κατ' αὐτῆς βαλεῖν); Livy 1.11.7: 'Once they were in, they killed her by burying her under their weapons, either so that the citadel would seem to have been taken by force or to set an example for traitors' ('Accepti obrutam armis necauere, seu ut ui capta potius arx uideretur seu prodendi exempli causa').

[127] See especially Deschamps 1983: 163–71.

[128] See also Wildfang 2006: 77–8, who notes that Vestals of the regal period are non-Roman in origin. Alban Vestals obeyed slightly different restrictions from Roman Vestals, according to Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 1.76.4.

[129] Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.37.2.

[130] Tarpeia is the 'daughter of a distinguished man' (θυγάτηρ ἀνδρὸς ἐπιφανοῦς, Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.38.2), but neither she nor her father are identified as Ῥωμαῖος/Ῥωμαῖα; similarly, Livy 1.11.6; Val. Max. 9.6.1; Plut., *Rom.* 17; Festus, *Gloss. Lat.* 464L, 496L identify the Sabines but no other ethnicity. See Dumézil 1947: 280 for an earlier statement of this point based in the narrative logic that Rome had no women at this period.

Aelius Tubero, Calpurnius Piso) less so. Romulus' Etruscan allies appear in other accounts, including Varro.[131] Therefore, Varro may have known about Alban allies; there is no reason to believe that Dionysius invented them.

If Varro considered Tarpeia an Alban, he would have a clear rationale for identifying her as a Vestal: she would join Rhea Silvia as a non-Roman Vestal whose role emphasises the importance of the cult to Rome.[132] Rome is founded by a Vestal's son and the cults on the Capitoline are guarded by a Vestal during their first war — the only war fought on Roman soil before the priestesses became permanent under Numa. As discussed above, Alban identity had contemporary relevance.[133] Pierre Grimal has argued that Propertius' Tarpeia, caught between the Sabines and Rome, offered a metaphor for Caesar's identity;[134] this would be equally, if not more, relevant to Varro. Perhaps more importantly, Varro was interested in religion and may have had access to information about the Vestals of other cities that we do not.

Alban Vestals did exist, although it is not clear whether they persisted from archaic Latium or were a relatively recent 'rediscovery'.[135] Epigraphic evidence tells us that the cult was in operation by the Principate, but it is not clear that the women were active in Varro's day.[136] According to Asconius' commentary on Cicero, the *uirgines Albanae* gave critical evidence at Milo's trial *de ui* in 52 B.C.E.[137] Maria Grazia Granino Cecere has cited this passage as evidence that the Alban Vestals were active in the late Republic, but, as discussed above, *uirgo* alone does not necessarily indicate *uirgo Vestalis*.[138] Because the age of the Alban Vesta cult is not known, Varro's engagement with it is difficult to assess. If the cult had continuously functioned since the archaic period, an Alban Tarpeia could function similarly to the Alban Rhea Silvia, providing a continuous relationship between Rome and Vesta and between Rome and its metropolis from Romulus to the first century. Because Varro suggests that hearths are at the heart of a city, this long-standing Vestal connection may have been attractive to him.[139] Yet a later revival is equally plausible; Augustus' interest in religious revival is well known and he also took an interest in the cults of Bovillae-Alba Longa.[140] It is possible that increasing interest in archaic cults, at least in part due to the antiquarian activity of late republican scholars like Varro, encouraged a revival of this priesthood. Such a revival in itself could demonstrate the interest in and importance of these pre-Roman connections to Alba.

Rome's connection to Alba went beyond the Alban Vestals and Romulus' parentage. The annual festival on the Alban Mount was a required event for Roman magistrates.[141] Surviving texts make it clear that local Vestals participated in these rites, as did the Roman consuls; Pliny says that there were parallel rites on the Capitoline.[142]

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[131] Varro, *Ling.* 5.46.
[132] See, for example, Gallia 2015: 77–82 for the importance of Vestals in the politics of the Republic. Compare Hor., *Carm.* 3.30.8–9; Livy 1.20. Grandazzi 2008: 716–27; 2010 argues that Alba is crucial to understanding Roman identity; see esp. 2008: 639–44 on the role of the Vestals.
[133] See Section III.
[134] Grimal 1952: 316; see also 1951: 212–14 on the Caesarian resonance of Tarpeia's view from the Capitoline.
[135] For the arguments on either side, see Grandazzi 2008: 639–43 (very old) and Pasqualini 2016: 89 (recent).
[136] Granino Cecere 1996: 307–16; 2003: e.g. at 70–1.
[137] Asc., *Mil.* 40C: 'moreover, the Alban virgins said' ('uirgines quoque Albanae dixerunt …')
[138] Granino Cecere 1996: 308; 2003: 69–70; above, Section IV. Lewis 2006: 246 disputes the idea that the women were Vestals and instead considers them cult personnel of Bona Dea.
[139] Varro, *Ling.* 5.141: 'buildings get their names *pars pro toto*, like many things: for it's quite clear that building (*aedificium*) comes from hearths (*aedes*) and making (*faciendo*)' ('aedificia nominata a parte ut multa: ab aedibus et faciendo maxime aedificium').
[140] For this evidence, see Granino Cecere 2003: 69 nn. 21–4; on old cults and potential revival, see, for example, Scheid 1990.
[141] On the *Feriae Latinae*, see, for example, Grandazzi 2008: 517–729; Smith 2012; Pasqualini 1996: 242–3.
[142] For example, Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 8.87.6; Luc. 1.549–52; Plin., *NH* 27.45.

This parallelism of Capitoline and Alban Mount is significant for understanding Tarpeia: just as there were Vestals on the Alban Mount, there is a Vestal on the Capitoline.[143] Moreover, an Alban Tarpeia creates an unbroken chain from Rhea, continuing to the instantiation of the Vestals from Alba by Numa to Alba's ultimate conquest and destruction by Tullus Hostilius. This continuity emphasises the eternity of Roman institutions at a time when the city was undergoing significant change.

Interest in Alba was particularly relevant because of its connection to the Iulii; Caesar capitalised on this connection in the final years of his life, when Varro was writing *De lingua Latina*.[144] Although a connection to Alba is never stated in Varro's text, if the Alban Vestals were either prominent or being revived between the years 52 and 44 B.C.E., the statement of Tarpeia's Vestal status would have had immediate political and cultural relevance. The Iulii claimed dominance over the Alban cults at Bovillae.[145] If one of those cult personnel were present in Romulus' Rome, it could have an immediate impact on Caesar's claim to be a new Romulus:[146] the contribution of the Iulii is clear from the foundation, but Tarpeia's treasonous behaviour does not promote the family's image. Varro's phrasing is carefully neutral, however, and his account of the death of Tarpeia could be understood as rightful punishment (as in Fabius Pictor) or heroic self-sacrifice (as in Piso); his brief account does not pass judgement on whether Tarpeia benefited Rome and hence offers studied ambiguity on Caesar. In the context of a later religious revival, Cicero's much-quoted praise of Varro — 'that we could at last recognise who and where we were' ('ut possemus aliquando qui et ubi essemus agnoscere')[147] — reminds us of the influence of Varro's work on later antiquarian efforts.

Returning to Varro's entry on the Capitoline, one further reason that an Alban Vestal in Romulean Rome might be necessary appears: to guard the *pignora imperii*. At the beginning of Varro's aetiology, we see that the contemporary name of the hill was given by the discovery of a *caput*. In Livy's version of the discovery, the head was interpreted by various seers as signalling that the Capitol would become the centre of the world ('it meant that [the Capitoline] would be the defender of [Rome's] rule and centre of affairs'[148]). This theme is echoed by other accounts of the head, although they all postdate Varro. In other words, the *caput* is one of the *pignora imperii*.[149] Since one of the stated duties of the Vestals was to care for these signs of empire, this may have provided the link for Varro: the hill was the source of one of the signs, so it needed to have a Vestal to guard it as soon as it became part of the city.[150] Admittedly this suggestion is speculative; Varro in his surviving works does not discuss the duties of Vestals or even mention the *pignora*. The earliest surviving attestation of the pledges as

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[143] For the parallelism, see Pasqualini 1996: 242–4; the two hills are 'complementari e interdipendenti' (at 243). The origin of the festival is disputed by ancient authors, with some attributing it to Latinus and others to Tarquin; both options appear in *Schol. Bob. Cic., Planc.* 23 (ed. Stangl pp. 154–5).

[144] See, for example, Weinstock 1971: esp. 353–60; Farney 2007: 56–8; Smith 2012: 275–6. Pasqualini 1996: 228 points out that Caesar was not alone in emphasising an Alban *origo*.

[145] See, for example, Weinstock 1971: 7–9; Farney 2013.

[146] See, for example, Ver Eecke 2008: 420–86; Neel 2014: 140–74, esp. 108–10 on Prop. 4.4.

[147] Cic., *Acad.* 1.9.

[148] Livy 1.55.6: 'arcem eam imperii caputque rerum fore portendebat.' Sanders 1904: 7 (followed by Welch 2015: 112, 123–4, 143 n. 18) argues, based on Plut., *Rom.* 18, that the head is Tarpeia's. There is no suggestion in the Greek that this is the case and when the head is named, it is consistently named for 'Olus': see next note.

[149] See Thein 2014; Neel 2017: 20–6. Ancient texts: Varro, *Ling.* 5.41–2; Livy 1.55.5–6, 5.54.7; Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 4.59–61; Plin., *NH* 28.15–16; Plut., *Cam.* 31; Flor. 1.7.9; Arn., *Adv. Nat.* 6.7; Serv., *Ad Aen.* 8.345; [Aur. Vict.], *De vir. ill.* 8.4; Mart. Cap. 3.223; Zonaras 7.11; Isid., *Or.* 15.2.31; *Suda* s.v. Καπιτώλιον; *Breviarium Vindobonense = Chron. Min.* 1.144 (ed. Mommsen *MGH(AA)* 9). Only Arnobius, Servius, Martianus Capella and the *Breviarium* name the head.

[150] For the association with Vestals, see, for example, Livy 5.52; Sen., *Controv.* 1.3.1; Florus 1.105; the evidence is collected and thoroughly discussed in Dubourdieu 1989: 454–69; see also Pasqualini 2016: 83–6, focusing on the Penates. According to Staples 1998: 152–3, the Vestals function as living *pignora*.

a group comes from Livy,[151] although Cicero associates a singular *pignus* (the Palladium) with Vesta.[152] But it may be more relevant that immediately before he talks about the Capitol, Varro discusses the etymology of the word *praedia*, using *pignus* to explain the concept of pledge;[153] the word could have reminded him of the head on the Capitol. As Spencer has argued, these apparently weak links are in fact structurally key to Varro's project;[154] they help inscribe Varro as a guide to a turbulent and changing Rome.

There is further evidence in favour of an Alban origin for Tarpeia in Alexandre Grandazzi's work on Alba Longa. Grandazzi has argued that one of the roles of Alba in Roman myth was to explain the unification of Latin cities. Among the rites on the Alban Mount, he suggests, was a human sacrifice.[155] However, the examples he cites (Mettius Fufetius, Turnus Herdonius) make it clear that mythological examples of the rites were not sacrifice as we understand it, but what Celia Schultz has termed 'ritual murder'.[156] Both of Grandazzi's examples involve horrifying deaths due to treason, involve multiple peoples (that is, not only Romans) and are connected to important early cults of Rome: the *fetiales* for Fufetius and Diana for Herdonius. A Latin author, whether Varro or an earlier writer, may have noticed the similarity — that Tarpeia also was ritually murdered in a situation involving treason and a mix of Romans and non-Romans and that her death brought about the unification of Rome and Cures — and decided that Tarpeia made the most sense in the context of these Alba-related deaths. As the most prominent unmarried female religious personnel in Rome, the Vestals offered the best parallel to the other priests and in the time of Romulus would have come to Rome from Alba.

VII CONCLUSIONS

Accounts of Tarpeia are comprehensible without assuming that she was a Vestal. This suggests that the Vestal detail was not an integral part of her legend. Instead, her Vestal status was one option for telling this story and the detail could be introduced if it furthered the author's goals for his work. The identification of Tarpeia as a Vestal in Livy, Dionysius and Plutarch, as well as in minor accounts, should be questioned; rather than taken as a given, Tarpeia's Vestal status must add something to the narrative. Because the major accounts, with the exception of Propertius, do not appreciably change with the identification of Tarpeia as a Vestal, they most likely do not depict Tarpeia as a Vestal.

Varro does explicitly call Tarpeia a Vestal and this statement is worth further investigation. Whether the Vestal alternative existed before Varro or was Varro's original contribution cannot be determined from the evidence. The limited information in Varro regarding Tarpeia and the Sabines, however, does not suggest that Varro

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[151] Livy 5.52, the speech of Camillus on not leaving Rome.
[152] Cic., *Scaur.* 48 (ed. Clark); *Phil.* 11.24; Cicero states both times that it is under Vesta's protection ('Vestae custodiis continetur').
[153] Pledges and the need for good faith are consistent themes of the Tarpeia story. See Livy 1.11; Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 2.40; Sullivan 1984: esp. 33, on Prop. 4.4.
[154] See, for example, Spencer 2015a: esp. 109–10; 2019: e.g. at 160–5; cf. Taylor 2015: 22–3 on Varro's 'eclectic' method and 'arbitrary' organisation.
[155] Grandazzi 2008: 580–94; at 595–610 he discusses the deity (Saturn and Jupiter are the most relevant to the Capitol). Pasqualini 1996: 243 also emphasises the importance of this cult as a founding myth of the Latin people. Whether human sacrifice occurred in Rome is a controversial question (see, for example, Eckstein 1982; Rives 1995; Várhelyi 2007; Schultz 2010); since we are speaking of mythic time, the central issue is not *did* it happen so much as did Romans *believe* it did.
[156] See Schultz 2010: e.g. at 530–4 and 2012: e.g. at 125–9; on the Turnus Herdonius episode in particular, Ampolo 1984.

thought Tarpeia was a Roman Vestal who was sacrilegiously murdered by Titus Tatius; another explanation for his identification of Tarpeia as a Vestal killed by the Sabines is needed. Attempts at explaining his information must engage in speculation due to the limited source material. Yet this material is perhaps less scarce than previous scholarship on Tarpeia would suggest. Dionysius' and Plutarch's more detailed explications of Roman myth in general suggest alternative accounts of Tarpeia, many of which differ from surviving Latin-language narratives.

I have put forward two suggestions, both of which derive from material that would have been available to Varro. The first suggestion is that Varro responded to a tradition that made Tarpeia one of the Sabine women and used her Vestal status to explain why, in Roman authors, she was killed by the Sabines. As a Sabine Vestal, her death need not have been accomplished in the Roman manner and in particular the prohibition on viewing Vestal punishment would not necessarily apply. This suggestion preserves Sabine *pietas*, which is called into question when Tarpeia is a Roman Vestal. As we know from other passages of Varro, his Sabine origin was important to him and he was interested in the role played by Titus Tatius.[157] The second suggestion is that Tarpeia could have been conceived of as an Alban, rather than a Roman, priestess and that this change in ethnicity likewise negates the sacrilege of her death at Tatius' hands. As we see from the death of Rhea Silvia, Alban Vestals obeyed different rules than Roman Vestals and did not face the same ritualised death ceremony. The increased attention on the family lore of the Iulii in the first century B.C.E. would have made an Alban origin particularly topical and the association of both Alba and the Capitoline with the *pignora imperii* makes an Alban parallel attractive. Neither suggestion is without difficulties,[158] but both options allow Varro to anchor the Vestals in the heart of Roman topography and culture before the priesthood was formally introduced to Rome.

It is less probable that Varro viewed Tarpeia as a Vestal in love, an innovation that should instead be assigned to Propertius. In prose accounts, her death was due to other causes: greed, sympathy with the other side or the desire to help Rome. Following the lead of these authors, scholarship on Vestals identifies Tarpeia as an unchaste Vestal only cautiously, if at all. Reassigning the story of Tarpeia's *amor* to Propertius enriches our understanding of his inventiveness: if, as I have argued, Varro did not think Tarpeia was Roman, Propertius' Roman Tarpeia in love ratchets the stakes of her story even higher. It may even be the case that Tarpeia's monologue, which envisions a unification of Sabines and Latins, mocks earlier accounts which depicted the Tarpeia episode as a step towards integration — with Rome, of course, coming out on top. A Propertian allusion to the Sabine Tarpeia story of Antigonos is consonant with his treatment of Greek mythology in earlier books.[159]

In this article, I have argued for decoupling the Vestal element from the rest of Tarpeia's narrative. This separation has significance not only for Varro, but also for the remaining authors who retell the story of Tarpeia. The idea that Tarpeia can only be a model for Vestal *incestum* cannot be sustained. If her Vestal status is an option rather than required, we must consider why any author chooses to include or exclude this status in his account — and thus to consider what Vestals meant to Rome, especially in its infancy. In regard to Varro specifically, my analysis paves the way for further investigation: I have suggested that Varro saw Tarpeia as non-Roman and that this understanding of Vestals fits well into the intellectual context of the first century B.C.E. Previous scholarship has emphasised the importance of local ethnicity to the political life

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[157] For example, Varro, *Ling.* 5.74, 6.68.
[158] A Sabine Tarpeia is attested, but is not a Vestal, and no Sabine Vestals are attested elsewhere. Although Alban Vestals are attested, an Alban origin for Tarpeia is not; moreover, Tarpeia's death is different from the Alban Rhea Silvia's.
[159] See most recently Heslin 2018: esp. 20–9.

of the late Republic; Varro's influences ranged from his Sabine roots to the Julian emphasis on Alba Longa. Making Tarpeia a Vestal, and particularly a non-Roman Vestal, offers Varro the chance to establish a clear lineage of the cult, from Alban Rhea to Tarpeia to the Roman Vestals established by the Sabine Numa. The presence of a Vestal, whose religious duties were crucial to many Roman rites, is intellectually satisfying: it explains how Romulus was able to establish the earliest Roman cults.[160] And lastly, the persistently archaic cult of the Vestals provides a continuous link between Rome's past and its future, a link that was as relevant to Romulus in his new city as it was to the renovated Rome of Caesar.

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[160] On Varro's religious depiction of Romulus, see, for example, Wiseman 2009: 81–98.

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