

Roman Wolves, Worries, and Wasting Disease

The centrality of animals in ancient life is well-documented (e.g., Campbell 2014) and the metaphorical use of animals to describe human characteristics and human behaviours has long been recognized as a commonplace in our ancient sources (Lloyd 1983: 35-43). The cultural resonance of particular animals, however, can be confounding. In Roman evidence, for example, the wolf appears so often and in so many different contexts that its metaphorical meanings and cultural associations may seem excessively amorphous. The wolf was, for example, the life-saving nurse of Romulus and Remus, yet also the image used to describe prostitutes (e.g., Hor, *Odes* 4.13; Juv. 6.123), thieves (e.g., Tib. 1.1.33; Verg. *Aen.* 2.355-360), and greedy cheese merchants (Apul. *Met.*1.5). Witches were sometimes reputed to transform into wolves (e.g., Verg. *Ecl.* 8.97). Pliny the Elder reports that wolf-products figured in the management of fevers, poisons, and children's night terrors, and could even bring about easy birth (e.g., *HN* 28.157, 228, 247-248, 257); yet according to Cassius Dio, a wolf-sighting obviously portended an epidemic (53.33.4). Is it possible to detect common threads of meaning running through these various literary impressions and popular uses the wolf in Roman culture? This paper argues that it is: coherence emerges by examining animal behaviour as metaphor for human emotions within the framework of popular ideas about the wasting effects of envy on the self (Dunbabin and Dickie 1983, Mitchell 2013: 281-293) and others (Dundes 1992). Examination of the wolf as a cultural theme can therefore help to illuminate shared ideas about the physical threats posed to individuals by the emotions of others.

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