



## [Ovid, \*Metamorphoses\* XIV.829-851](#)

The ascension of Romulus's wife Hersilia to heaven

**Name of the author:** Ovid

**Date:** 3 CE to 8 CE

**Place:** Rome

**Language:** Latin

**Category:** Roman

**Literary genre:** Poetry

**Title of work:** *Metamorphoses*

**Reference:**

XIV.829-851

### **Commentary:**

This passage, which appears as a postscript to Romulus's ascension and deification, closes book fourteen of the *Metamorphoses* (XIV.805-851). Following in the footsteps of her husband, Romulus, now named Quirinus after his deification, Hersilia is also taken up to heaven on the trail of a shooting star (mimicking the ascension of Julius Caesar in *Metamorphoses* XV.745-851), and is there transformed into the goddess Hora, leaving behind both her former earthly appearance and name (XIV.851). Seeing the grief of Hersilia after the loss of her spouse, Juno takes pity, and sends the goddess Iris to the lonely widow with the promise that she will be able to see Romulus once again. Sure enough, Hersilia is led to the hill of Romulus, where he sees her, and from his new abode in the heavens, draws her up to him. Scholars such as Garth Tissol understand Hersilia's apotheosis as purely Ovid's own invention, meaning that he was able to present it entirely as the will of the gods, without having to work with or adapt any existing euhemeristic tradition (Garth Tissol, *Roman History and Augustan Politics*, p. 332).

The significance of this postscript, in that it concludes book fourteen and near enough matches the account of Romulus's apotheosis in both length and detail, has led scholars to question whether Romulus's own deification is in any way undermined by that of his spouse, as this feature (the subsequent ascension of a wife) is not common to the previous ascension accounts of Hercules and Aeneas. Perhaps, however, this might be seen as paving the way for the final apotheosis story of the *Metamorphoses*, that of Julius Caesar in the final book (XV.745-851). Julius Caesar's deification is explained as necessary due to the outstanding achievements of his adopted heir, Octavian, whom, it is argued, given his accomplishments, cannot logically be of mortal descent. The link between divinity and family lines, therefore, is developed across these two stories. Moreover, as Stephen Wheeler states, it is only when Romulus is reunited with his wife in heaven that he is referred to formally as the founder of Rome (XIV.849-850), suggesting that Rome's strength will come from unity (the institution of marriage being one important manifestation of this) rather than war and separation, such as the fratricidal killing of Remus by his twin brother (Stephen Wheeler, *Narrative Dynamics*, p. 113-114). The fact that Romulus and Hersilia are also the mythical ancestors of Julius Caesar and Augustus further strengthens this family connection. In this regard, especially given the mythology of Aeneas that Ovid discusses at length earlier in book fourteen, it is noteworthy that central to Aeneas's founding of Rome's roots in Italy was his marriage to Lavinia, the daughter of the Latin king, whose name was immortalised in the city of Lavinium (the future site of Rome). Given that Ovid composed the *Metamorphoses* after the issue of Augustus's *Leges Iuliae* (18-17 BCE), which were concerned with adultery and marriage law, and particularly the issue of legitimate marriage, it could also be that the implicit emphasis placed in this passage on strong martial union forms part of a broader Augustan message on the issue.

Keywords in the original language:



- [aura](#)
- [conditor urbis](#)
- [coniunx](#)
- [deus](#)
- [dignus](#)
- [gens Sabina](#)
- [matrona](#)
- [templum](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [ascension](#)
- [deification](#)
- [Hersilia](#)
- [marriage](#)
- [Quirinus](#)
- [Romulus](#)
- [union](#)

**Bibliographical references:**

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Wheeler, Stephen M. book *Narrative Dynamics in Ovid's Metamorphoses* Tübingen Gunter Narr Verlag 2000

### [“The House of Fame: Roman History and Augustan Politics in Metamorphoses 11-15”](#)

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**Other sources connected with this document:** Text

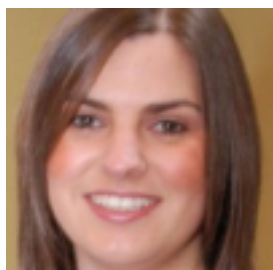
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