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LIVY

THE EARLY HISTORY OF
ROME



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TITUS LIVIUS was born in 59 B.C. at Patavium (Padua) but later moved to Rome. He lived in an eventful age but little is known about his life, which seems to have been occupied exclusively in literary work. When he was aged about thirty he began to write his *History of Rome* consisting of 142 books of which thirty-five survive. He continued working on it for over forty years until his death in A.D. 17.

AUBREY DE SÉLINCOURT, scholar, translator and athlete, translated Livy's *The Early History of Rome* (Books I-V) and *The War with Hannibal* (Books XXI-XXX), *The Histories of Herodotus* and *The Life of Alexander the Great* by Arrian, all for the Penguin Classics. He was born in 1896 and educated at the Dragon School, Oxford, at Rugby, and University College, Oxford. A schoolmaster of genius for twenty-six years, he retired in 1947 to the Isle of Wight and devoted himself to writing. He also wrote for children, and his last book, a study of the civilized world in the fifth century B.C., was *The World of Herodotus*. Aubrey de Sélincourt, who was married, died in 1962.

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LIVY

THE EARLY HISTORY
OF ROME

Books I—V of
*The History of Rome from its
Foundation*

TRANSLATED BY
AUBREY DE SÉLINCOURT
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
R. M. OGILVIE



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Dates have been added to the text at the top of each page. Those marked *c.* are historically reasonably accurate. Those given in brackets are purely conventional dates based on traditional Roman chronology.

References in the Introduction and at page-heads are to the Latin text of Livy.

INTRODUCTION

LIVY

LIVY (Titus Livius) was born at Padua in northern Italy in 59 B.C., or possibly 64 B.C.¹ We know little about his family background, except that Padua, a city famous for its moral rectitude, had suffered severely in the Civil Wars. Livy himself may have been prevented from going to the university in Greece, as most educated young Romans did, but he made a study of philosophy (according to the elder Seneca,² he wrote philosophical dialogues) and other traditional subjects. Nor does he seem to have aimed at a public career either at the bar or in politics; we have no record of his holding any office or engaging in public activity. Instead he devoted the course of a long life to writing his *History of Rome* which comprised 142 Books (35 are still extant) from the foundation of Rome down to 9 B.C. Most of his life was passed at Rome. His reputation brought him into contact with Augustus but there is little evidence of intimacy between the two men, except that about A.D. 8 he helped the young Claudius (the future Emperor) with his literary efforts.³ Augustus, indeed, disapproved of Livy's outspoken treatment of the recent past (Tacitus says that he called him a Pompeian)⁴ and a note in the summary of Book 121 states that that book (and presumably the remaining books which dealt with Augustus's principate) were not published until after the emperor's death in A.D. 14, for fear, we may assume, that they might give offence. Thus, although in touch with the seat of power, Livy retained an uninvolved independence. He was criticized by a contemporary, Pollio, for his 'Paduaness' (Patavinitas) – a provincial manner of speech.⁵ It is notable that he is not referred to by any contemporary writer. He died at Padua, not Rome, in A.D. 17.

The first five books, which deal with the period from the foundation of Rome to the Gallic occupation in 386 B.C., were conceived and published as a whole. They have a unity of design and construction, with the Commission of Ten at the centre and Camillus' great speech, echoing the foundation of the city, at the end. The Preface is a preface

1. Jerome/Eusebius, *Chron. ad Ann. Abr.* 1958.
2. *Controversiae* X Praef. 2.
3. Suetonius, *Claudius* XLI. 1.
4. *Annals* IV. 34.
5. Quintilian I. 5.56.

Introduction

to these five books and not to the complete work nor to the first book alone. Internal references, such as the closing of the Temple of Janus (I.19.3), suggest that Livy began his task in 29 B.C. and finished the five books by 27 B.C., but the version which we have is almost certainly a revised edition published in or after 24 B.C., because the excursus on Cossus (IV.20.5-11) with the reference to 'sacrilege' is an awkward addition which contradicts the narrative, and can only have been composed after Augustus had adopted the title of *Divi filius* 'son of god'. 29 B.C. is a plausible starting date. The Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. had brought an end to the Civil Wars. However uncertain the future might be, some security and stability had been restored to the world which might encourage a historian to take stock of the situation. It is no accident that the Greek historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who was to cover in his *History* the same ground as Livy, arrived in Rome in 30 B.C.

Livy, therefore, differed from the great majority of his predecessors in that he was not a public man: he did not turn to history as a recreation. For him it was life. We would not expect to find in him the crude political interpretations of history, discussed in the following section, which characterized the approach of earlier writers. Yet it would be a mistake to think of Livy's history as unconcerned with the problems of his generation. The difference between Livy and the others is that his philosophical detachment enabled him to see history in terms of human characters and representative individuals rather than of partisan politics. Livy accepted a tradition going back to Aristotle (especially in the *Rhetoric*) and to Thucydides which explained historical events by the characters of the persons involved. As Aristotle said, 'actions are signs of character'.⁶ Because people are the sort of people that they are, they do the sort of things that they do, and the job of the historian is to relate what happens to the appropriate character. Equally, however, it follows that if similar characters occur in 500 B.C. and 20 B.C. their possessors will tend to act in a similar way, so that one can infer from what a man of a certain character did in 20 B.C. what a similar character must have done in 500 B.C. Human nature, Thucydides argued, is constant and hence predictable.⁷ This philosophy helps to account for the readiness with which historians transferred events from the recent to the remote past (see below, p. 14) but Livy used it as the framework of his history. Instead of a barren list of unconnected events Livy constructs a series

6. *Rhetoric* 1367b.

7. I.22.4.

of moral episodes which are designed to bring out the character of the leading figures. Tullus Hostilius (I.22-31) is fierce (*ferox*) and the events of his reign are tailored to display that ferocity. In the same way Livy moulds the story of the Commission of Ten round the lust of Appius Claudius and the chastity of Verginia (III.36ff) or the stories of Veii and the Gauls round the piety of M. Furius Camillus. The last Tarquin was Proud and pride is the hall-mark of his reign.

This technique had a further advantage besides giving unity and shape to the narrative. It helped Livy to bring the tale alive. The climax of almost every moral episode is a short speech or dialogue uttered by the principal characters. It was a device used, for example, by Horace in his *Odes* to highlight the key moment of the story. But ancient literary criticism insisted that where an author composed a speech either in history or in oratory it should fit the character of the speaker. Thucydides was often criticized for the sameness of his speeches.⁸ To achieve the right effect Livy deployed the whole range of the Latin language but the subtlety of his tones is inevitably lost in any translation, however good. Sometimes he sets out to recreate the great rhetorical effects of the orators of his youth, such as Cicero or Hortensius. When we read the speech of T. Quinctius (III.67-68), C. Canuleius (IV.3-5), Ap. Claudius (V.3-6) or Camillus (V.51-54) we can hear the thundering periods, the political clichés, the emotive vocabulary of the late Republic. For those men were statesmen and that is how statesmen speak. On other occasions he flavours brief utterances with colloquial, archaic or poetical language as the situation demands. The coarse impetuosity of Turnus Herdonius is caught in a single vulgar exclamation (I.50.9); Coriolanus's mother addresses him in tragic language with tragic thoughts (II.40.5). C. Laetorius speaks as a crude, blunt soldier (II.56.9). Horatius Cocles jumps into the Tiber with a thoroughly epic prayer (II.10.11). The list could be multiplied indefinitely and it is important to remember, while reading a translation, that to a Roman's ears each of Livy's characters would have sounded real because he was made to speak in a distinctive and fitting way.

Livy made history comprehensible by reducing it to familiar and recognizable characters, but the process was one which could not be divorced from his attitude to his own times and his vision of the future. In the Preface he asserts that the present state of Rome was the direct consequence of the failure in moral character of the Roman. 'I would

8. e.g. by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *ad Pompeium* 3.20.

have [the reader] trace the process of our moral decline, to watch, first, the sinking of the foundations of morality as the old teaching was allowed to lapse, then the rapidly increasing disintegration, then the final collapse of the whole edifice, and the dark dawning of our modern day when we can neither endure our vices nor face the remedies needed to cure them.' It was a commonplace among Roman historians that things had got worse and worse; Sallust, for instance, blamed the destruction of Carthage and the capture of Greece for the start of the deterioration, because the one removed an enemy that had kept Rome on her toes, the other familiarized Rome with the enervating vices and luxuries of the Greek world.⁹ You will find in the early books of Livy several pessimistic asides, e.g. (III.20.5): 'fortunately, however, in those days authority, both religious and secular, was still a guide to conduct, and there was as yet no sign of our modern scepticism which interprets solemn compacts, such as are embodied in an oath or a law, to suit its own convenience'.

Yet, on the other hand, there is also in Livy a sense of pride that Rome had now reached the zenith of her power and her achievement, and that all previous history was leading up to this glorious hour. Even in the Preface he speaks of Rome as 'the greatest nation in the world' and claims that her success has been such that she could legitimately claim to have a god (Mars) as her ancestor. So too Camillus's speech at the end of Book V is an inspiring panegyric of the rise of Rome and a promise of the still greater heights that lie ahead in the centuries to come. The culmination is in the present. 'Augustus Caesar brought peace to the world by land and sea' (I.19.3).

At first sight, then, there is a contradiction, an inner tension, in Livy's attitude to history and, in particular, to the place of his own generation. One can see exactly the same tension in Horace and Virgil between pessimism and optimism, between the evils of modern Rome and the dawning of a Golden Age. The resolution of this conflict lay, for Livy, in the education of character through the study of history, which, he says, 'is the best medicine for a sick mind; for in history you have a record of the infinite variety of human experience plainly set out for all to see; and in that record you can find for yourself and your country both examples and warnings; fine things to take as models, base things, rotten through and through, to avoid'. Livy's remedy – all will be well if people's characters improve – was his own; there is no question, as

9. e.g. *Catiline* 9.1–3; *Jugurtha* 41.2.

the facts of his relations with the emperor show, of his handing out some party line for Augustus. Nevertheless it is interesting that his diagnosis and solution correspond closely with that of other thinking Romans of his age. Virgil, who in the *Georgics* had stressed the harshness of nature and the deterioration of life, used the long pageant of Roman legend and history in the *Aeneid* to illustrate those qualities, especially *pietas*, that had made and could keep Rome great. Horace has the same message (*Odes* III.24, written about 27 B.C.): 'whoever shall work to put an end to impious slaughter and civic savagery, if he shall seek to be inscribed on statues as the patron of cities, let him be brave to rein in uncontrolled licentiousness. . . . What is the point of sad lamentations if sin is not pruned by punishment or of laws that are useless without morality.' Above all Augustus himself attempted by legislation and by propaganda to effect a change in Roman character. He introduced moral legislation in 28 B.C. (which he was forced by bitter opposition to withdraw) and undertook the restoration of 82 temples at Rome. At the same time he tried to popularize his ideals by giving them every publicity. In 27 B.C. he set up a golden shield in the Curia Julia commemorating his *virtus*, *clementia*, *iustitia*, and *pietas*. These and other virtues were constantly depicted throughout his reign on coins, public monuments and other objects that came to people's eyes.

There is, therefore, a real sense in which Livy's *History* was deeply rooted in the Augustan revival, despite stories that Livy's recitations from it at Rome were poorly attended. Its fame was immediate. There is a legend of a man who came all the way from Cadiz just to look at Livy.¹⁰ And it quickly established itself as a classic, being accepted as such by Tacitus¹¹ and by the critic and rhetorician Quintilian.¹² It superseded previous histories so completely that only scattered fragments of them have survived. Its very size, however, deterred men from reading it all, so that at an early date abridgements of it were made. A senator, Mettius Pompusianus, had an anthology of speeches from Livy which earned him death at the hands of the Emperor Domitian,¹³ and Martial refers in a poem to a 'pocket' Livy.¹⁴ These abridgements, of which three survive in part or whole, meant that by later antiquity only the most readable and exciting books of the original were still in circulation. The great pagan senator, Q. Aurelius Symmachus, was

10. Pliny, *Letters* II.3.8.

11. Cf. e.g. *Agricola* 10.3.

12. e.g. X.1.101 ff.

13. Suetonius, *Domitian* 10.3.

14. *Epigrams* XIV.190.

responsible about A.D. 396 for a new edition of the first ten books, presumably because they evoked for him the finest spirit of classical Rome, and it is to this edition that we owe the survival of these books through the Dark Ages.

THE EVIDENCE

What sort of evidence did Livy have for the early history of Rome? It comes as something of a shock to discover that the first Roman to write about Rome's history, Q. Fabius Pictor (I.44.2), lived as late as 200 B.C., over three hundred years after the expulsion of the Kings. Pictor was followed by a succession of historians who covered the same ground, adding new information or offering new interpretations. Livy refers to some of them, such as L. Calpurnius Piso (I.55.9) who was consul in 133 B.C., C. Licinius Macer (IV.7.12) who was tribune of the *plebs* in 73 B.C., Valerius Antias (IV.23.1) and Q. Aelius Tubero (IV.23.1), probably the son of a friend of Cicero's. They all have certain features in common: they were, for the most part, statesmen who turned to the writing of history as a leisure pastime; they were not interested in historical research as such but were concerned to use history as a means of reflecting the issues and controversies of their own times. Pictor, for instance, who wrote in Greek during the troubled times of the Second Punic War, was concerned to display Rome as a city with a heroic past which could rival Athens and Sparta in its achievements and its civilization. Licinius Macer, who was a partisan of Marius, rewrote history to foreshadow the policies and events of the Marian regime. Although they were interested in antiquarian curiosities and made use of them to add originality to their work, as Licinius Macer discovered, and exploited some linen-rolls in the Temple of Juno Moneta giving the names of early magistrates (IV.7.12), they did not seriously investigate or question the credentials of the traditional version of Roman history which had become established by the time of Pictor. They took it on trust and embroidered it.

If, however, you examine in detail this traditional version as it is retold by Livy, you quickly discover that it is not a true record of the past. Many of the stories are not really Roman but Greek stories re-clothed in Roman dress. Even some of the most famous turn out on inspection not to be native memories. The twins, Romulus and Remus, sons of a god, exposed by the river, suckled by a wolf and discovered

by a shepherd, are an adaptation of an old Near Eastern myth, found in Greece in the legend of Neleus and Pelias, sons of the god Poseidon exposed on the river Enipeus and suckled by a bitch and a mare (I.4.3ff.). The fatal quarrel between the twins culminating in Remus derisively vaulting Romulus's walls recalls similar Greek legends of Oeneus and Toxeus or Poimander and Leucippus (I.7.2). The treachery and fate of Tarpeia was a familiar Hellenistic motif (I.11.6ff.). Sometimes the debt is even more obvious. Two of the most notorious events of Tarquinius Superbus's reign are openly imitated from the Greek historian Herodotus – the lopping of the poppy-heads (I.54.6) was Thrasyboulus's message to Periander (Hdt. 5.92.6) and the infiltration of Gabii by Sextus Tarquinius (I.53.5) was suggested by Zopyrus's ruse against Babylon (Hdt. III.154). Sometimes events which were chronologically close in Greek and Roman history have become assimilated. The tyrants at Athens were expelled as a result of a love-affair in 510 B.C.; it is no accident that the Tarquins are similarly expelled about 510 B.C. as a result of a love-affair also. The heroic stand of the 300 Fabii at Cremera (II.50) in 479 B.C. echoes down to the smallest particular the fate of the Spartans at Thermopylae. Even Coriolanus (II.34ff.) acquires the deeds and character of Themistocles who, banished from Athens in 471 B.C., led his country's enemies against it. There is practically no extensive story from early Roman history which cannot be proved to be Greek in origin.

The Romans seem to have had no mythology of their own. They did not have the resources of oral epic or choral lyric by which the Greeks preserved and handed on the memories and myths of their pre-history. Nor were there substantial written records before the fourth century. At the beginning of his sixth book Livy writes that the majority of earlier records were destroyed in the fire which devastated much of Rome during the Gallic occupation in 386 B.C. This fire can be traced archaeologically and evidently destroyed many of the main buildings, such as the Royal Palace (Regia) in the Forum, where such records might have been kept. When, therefore, the Romans came to re-construct their own history in the centuries before Pictor, they had to borrow heavily from Greek literature and legend.

They also re-used events from their own more recent history. It was one of the beliefs of the ancient world, first expressed by Thucydides, that human nature remains the same and, since men do the things that they do because they are the kind of people that they are, it was

reasonable to expect that history would repeat itself in the past as well as in the future. Historians, familiar with the popular measures of the Gracchi, such as agrarian legislation and corn subsidies, assumed that similar tactics had been employed in earlier times. Hence they had no qualms about attributing these same measures to demagogic figures like Sp. Cassius (II.41) or Sp. Maelius (IV.13ff.). If such a dangerous plot as the Catilinarian Conspiracy could occur in 63 B.C., there was every reason to suppose that many of its characteristic features would have occurred before, as in the plot by which Tarquinius Superbus gained the throne (I.47ff.) or in the abortive coup by the sons of Brutus (II.3-5).

Yet the fact that most of the flesh and blood of Livy's narrative is fictitious should not lead one to doubt the bare bones. There were at least four ways by which authentic facts were transmitted to the fourth and third century when the Romans became interested in their own history.

In the first place, Rome's neighbours to the south included several Greek colonies. Cumae, for instance, was founded as early as c. 750 B.C. and enjoyed a flourishing civilization comparable with that of mainland Greece and far more advanced than that of Rome. Greek writers were interested in the fortunes of the remarkable little town on the Tiber. There were probably local histories of Cumae which included information about Rome, especially since the Tarquins took refuge there (II.21.5). But the writers of Greece proper also paid attention to Roman history. We know, for instance, that the historians Hecataeus of Miletus (c. 500 B.C.) and Hellanicus of Mytilene (c. 450 B.C.) made reference in their works to Rome, while a fragment of Aristotle survives to show that he had a detailed knowledge of the Gallic occupation in 386 B.C. A little later Timaeus of Sicily (c. 356-260 B.C.) gave a substantial account of Roman affairs in his *History*. The Etruscans, Rome's neighbours to the north (see p. 18), may also have had a historical literature but, if so, it has left no trace.

Secondly, there was a variety of contemporary documents which had lasted down to the first century B.C. The earliest surviving inscription, a religious law from the Roman forum, is at least as old as 500 B.C. but Roman historians cite several other inscriptions which no longer exist but which have every sign of being genuine. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek contemporary of Livy, refers to an archaic inscription concerning Servius Tullius' dedication of the Temple of Diana (I.45)¹⁵.

Polybius, 150 years earlier, had seen a treaty between the Romans and the Carthaginians which he dated to 507 B.C.:¹⁶ Polybius has been disbelieved but striking confirmation appeared in 1966, when parallel Punic and Etruscan texts, dating from about 500 B.C., were discovered on gold leaves in a temple at the little port of Pyrgi, a few miles north of Rome. The scholar Verrius Flaccus, also a contemporary of Livy, seems to have transcribed an inscription from Rome, giving a list of notables killed in a battle against the Volsci: this battle may well be connected with the wars of Coriolanus (II.35ff.). Livy himself mentions that the treaty made by Sp. Cassius with the Latins was preserved on a bronze column (II.33.9) and alludes to a monument, also described by Cicero (*Phil.* IX.4-5), commemorating the four Roman ambassadors executed by Lars Tolumnius, King of Veii (IV.17.6). Above all, the great code of Roman Law, the Twelve Tables, which contained a mass of information about the social, legal and political situation in the middle of the fifth century, was on public display and was memorized by generations of Roman school-children.

There were also records of a more regular kind. Every year from its foundation a special magistrate drove a nail into the wall of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitol, probably as a means of averting plague. Later, enthusiasts came to count the nails, thereby establishing the date of the temple and so of the beginning of the Republic, if, as Polybius and Livy assert, the two events are connected – approximately 507 B.C. This practice is also known from the Etruscan town of Nortia but nail-fixing as a means of time-reckoning was common in Rome: Cicero speaks of an annual calendar with holes opposite each day, on which you marked the day by moving a peg into the appropriate hole, and fragments of such a calendar have actually been discovered.¹⁷ The Roman religious year was complicated and its secrets were for a long time jealously guarded by a body of priests (*pontifices*). In order that the ordinary man might know which were holy days or special festivals and on what days he could conduct public or legal business, the *pontifices* annually erected a large whitened board outside the Royal Palace. On this they entered from time to time the events of special religious significance – the dates of festivals, the occurrence of untoward incidents (plagues, floods, eclipses, famines, triumphs, etc.), the census totals (I.44.2) and, probably, the names of the chief magistrates (praetors, as they were called at first; later, consuls) and

16. III.22.4-13.

17. *ad Atticum* V.14.1; *Notiz. Scavi* 4 (1928), 202ff.

priests. We do not know for certain what happened at the end of the year, but it seems likely that the principal items were transcribed into a book-roll to provide a body of precedents to help the *pontifices* with the maintenance of religion and that the board was then rewhitened for the following year. Despite Livy's assertion (how could he have known?) that most of what was in the Commentaries of the Pontifices perished in the fire of 386 B.C. (VI.1.2), it is clear that in fact much of it survived. The mass of petty detail which is recorded for the fifth century B.C. could not conceivably have been invented by imagination alone, and when a Pontifex Maximus, P. Mucius Scaevola, who had been consul in 133 B.C., made these records (called the *Annales Maximi*) generally available by publishing them, he seems to have included material going back to the Regal period.

Thirdly, the Romans were conservative in their institutions. It is notable, for instance, that the festivals which still ranked as major occasions in the religious year in the first century B.C., were those which had been established at least four hundred years earlier. Many of them, e.g. the Robigalia (concerned with blight), belonged to a primitive agricultural community and were quite inappropriate to a busy, commercial city; many of them had become quite unintelligible. But they were still maintained. So too the cumbersome electoral and legislative system devised by Servius Tullius (I.43) – the *comitia centuriata* – remained the same with elaborations and refinements in Cicero's day. A scholar studying the religious and constitutional arrangements of his own time could validly work back from them to a picture of Roman society in the first years of the Republic.

Finally we should not underestimate the strength of memory. It is easy to believe that individual families would hand down the traditions of their own past, how the Fabii defended Cremera (II.50), how the Claudii migrated to Rome (II.16.4), how the Papirii served religion or how the Quinctii had provided a saviour of the state in Cincinnatus (III.26). Equally there were events of national importance that would impress themselves on public consciousness, such as the unification with the Sabines (I.13.8), the foundation of Ostia (I.33.9), the expulsion of the kings (I.60) or the war with Veii (V.1ff.).

The job of the historian is to separate fiction from fact and, on the basis of the available facts and with the help of such tools as archaeology, to reconstruct the story. In the following section a brief attempt is