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Comments: “Excellent- well-chosen passages, appropriate translations and a strong overall analysis” (Dr. Califf)

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Livy First Decade Essay

While Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* serves as an account of early Roman history, its primary purpose is to offer moral and political instruction for his contemporary audience, rather than to provide an exact, factual account of their history. In his preface, Livy establishes that the historical events he intends to depict will be situated in a context that glorifies Roman virtues rather than adhering strictly to historical accuracy:

“Quae ante conditam condendamve urbem poeticis magis decora fabulisquam incorruptis rerum gestarum monumentis traduntur, ea nec adfirmare nec refellere in animo est” (pr. 6)

“The things which, before the city was founded or about to be founded, are more suitable for poetic tales than they are handed down by the uncorrupted records of things having been done, I intend neither to affirm nor deny” (pr. 6)

Additionally, Livy asserts his belief that the right of the Roman people to consecrate their origins is divinely ordained, confirming his intent to situate his account of early Roman history within a context that serves his authorial agenda:

“Et si cui populo licere oportet consecrare origines suas et ad deos referre auctores, ea belli gloria est populo Romano” (pr. 7)

“And if it is right for any people to be permitted to make holy their origins and to relate their founders to gods, that glory of war is for the Roman people” (pr. 7)

Within the first decade narratives of the Founding of Rome, Horatius at the Bridge, and Mucius Scaevola, Livy argues that Rome's endurance and success are rooted in the virtues of individual sacrifice and commitment to the state. He references these early examples to criticize the moral and civic retreat from traditional Roman virtues that he perceives in his own time, asserting that a return to these foundational values is essential for continued prosperity and survival of Rome.

In Livy's account of the Founding of Rome, the fraternal conflict between Romulus and Remus, coupled with Romulus's ultimate triumph, represents the foundational Roman virtues of sacrifice and dedication to the state reinforces Livy's beliefs about the moral expectations for Rome's future citizens. Initially, Livy relates the fraternal conflict between Romulus and Remus, born from their shared ambition for kingship, to broader ideas of sacrifice and dedication to the state to establish that individual sacrifice is essential for the collective benefit and the enduring success of Rome:

“Intervenit deinde his cogitationibus avitum malum regni cupido, atque inde foedum certamen coortum a satis miti principio” (1.6.4)

“Then, an ancestral evil, the desire for kingship, interrupted these thoughts, and from there, a wicked contest arose from a mild beginning” (1.6.4)

From a rhetorical perspective, Livy's reference to "regni cupido" (the desire for kingship) reflects the ambition of both Romulus and Remus to reign as the inaugural ruler, a desire that inevitably leads to conflict, but is lauded for its commitment to statesmanship. From Livy's perspective, even personal ambitions can serve the collective good when channeled toward the welfare of the state, affirming his belief that Rome's success ultimately depends on the balance between individual ambition and civic responsibility. Additionally, Livy's reference to the traditional

depiction of Remus's death reflects tension between personal ambition and the sanctity of Rome's nascent boundaries:

"Vulgatior fama est ludibrio fratris Remum novos transiluisse muros; inde ab irato Romulo, cum verbis quoque increpitans adiecisset, 'Sic deinde, quicumque alius transiliet moenia mea,' interfectum." (1.7.2)

"A more common story is that Remus, in mockery of his brother, jumped over the new walls; then, from an angry Romulus, who, while also rebuking him with words, added, 'So it shall be for anyone else who leaps over my walls,' he was killed." (1.7.2)

In this way, Livy references the traditional interpretation of Remus's death to symbolize the tension between ambition and greater responsibility to the state, reflecting his argument that the endurance of Rome relies on the sacrifice of personal relationships in favor of the collective good. Thus, his depictions of fraternal conflict and the victory of Romulus affirm his belief that Individual sacrifice and unwavering commitment to the state are not only foundational virtues necessary for the survival of Rome, but its continued political and cultural dominance.

In Livy's account of Horatius at the Bridge, his portrayal of Horatius reflects the virtues of individual sacrifice and unwavering dedication to the state, affirming his belief that the political and military strength of Rome depends on individual fortitude. Initially, Livy introduces Horatius as a primary defender of the city, establishing his commitment to stand against the advancing enemy, even at the risk of his own life:

"Itaque monere, praedicere ut pontem ferro, igni, quacumque vi possint, interrumpant: se impetum hostium, quantum corpore uno posset obsisti, excepturum." (2.10.4)

"Therefore, he advised and urged them to break the bridge with iron, fire, or whatever means they could; he would withstand the enemy's attack, as much as one body could hold off." (2.10.4)

Horatius's decision to face the enemy alone at the bridge while urging his fellow Romans to destroy it reflects his willingness to sacrifice his life on behalf of the city. The phrase "quantum corpore uno posset obsisti" (withstanding as much as one body could) demonstrates the physical

and moral burden he accepts, embodying Livy's belief that the prosperity and security of the state depends on the sacrifices of individuals on its behalf. Later, Livy's presentation of Horatius standing alone at the front lines reflects how his the splendor of his fortitude momentarily halts the advancing enemy:

"Insignisque inter conspecta cedentium pugnae terga obversis cominus ad ineundum proelium armis ipso miraculo audaciae obstupescit hostis" (2.10.5)

"Standing out among the retreating backs of his comrades, he turned to face the enemy at close quarters, and by the sheer miracle of his audacity, he stunned the enemy" (2.10.5)

Here, Horatius not only remains at the bridge while the others retreat, but his sheer courage stuns the enemy into inaction. The moral implications of his devotion to the state reinforce Livy's belief that the security of a state depends on the character and strength of its defenders. By depicting Horatius as a defender of Rome and its traditions, Livy establishes the virtues of sacrifice and fortitude as the defining characteristics of an ideal Roman.

In Livy's account of Mucius Scaevola, Mucius embodies the virtue of self-subjugation on behalf of the state, reflecting Livy's belief that a commitment to statesmanship and fortitude reinforces the strength of the state. In the context of the intense political and military pressure exerted by Etruscan king Lars Porsenna, Mucius's bold declaration of his commitment to his Roman identity reflects Livy's belief in nationalism as a prevailing ideal:

"Romanus sum," inquit, "civis; C. Mucium vocant. hostis hostem occidere volui, nec ad mortem minus animi est, quam fuit ad caedem; et facere et pati fortia Romanum est." (2.12.8-9)

"I am a Roman citizen," he said, "they call me Gaius Mucius. I wished to kill my enemy, and I have no less courage in facing death than I did in striking the blow; both doing and enduring brave deeds is the mark of a Roman" (2.12.8-9)

By introducing himself as "Romanus civis" (a Roman citizen), Mucius asserts his identity not only as an individual but as a representative of Rome's values. His statement, "nec ad mortem minus animi est, quam fuit ad caedem" (I have no less courage in facing death than I did in striking the blow), reflects his complete commitment to the Roman state—he is as brave in defeat as he was in his attempt to oppose the enemy. After being captured, Mucius demonstrates his resolve by subjecting himself to extreme physical pain, reflecting Livy's belief that Rome may be preserved and glorified through individual sacrifice:

“‘en tibi,” inquit, “ut sentias quam vile corpus sit iis qui magnam gloriam vident,’ dextramque accenso ad sacrificium foculo inicit.” (2.12.13)

“‘Here, for you,’ he said, ‘so that you may feel how worthless the body is to those who seek great glory,’ and he thrust his right hand into the burning sacrificial fire.” (2.12.13)

Mucius's dramatic act of self-inflicted pain acts as a compelling representation of Roman virtue in which he asserts that physical suffering is insignificant in comparison to the pursuit of honor and glory. By burning his hand, Mucius symbolically rejects the limitations of the body, establishing himself as an individual whose loyalty to Rome transcends physical suffering. Through Mucius's fearless suppression of suffering in pursuit of honor, Livy asserts that Rome's endurance depends on individual fortitude and sacrifice.

Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* transcends mere historical narration, acting as a representation of the moral and civic values that Livy believed were undermined by his contemporaries. By depicting individual acts of fortitude, like those of Romulus, Horatius, and Mucius, Livy critiques the moral decline he observed among contemporary Romans, urging them to return to the foundational virtues that had once secured the city's prosperity. These parabolic legends serve as reminders that the endurance of Rome depends not only on the sophistication of its political systems, but on the morality of its inhabitants. Thus, Livy establishes that Rome's success relies

not on divine favor or military strength alone, but on the integrity and resilience of individuals who uphold the values of the state.