

## MOVING LIVY\*

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*Abstract:* In this paper it is argued that Velleius’ apparent back-dating of Livy is unlikely and results from textual error.

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*Keywords:* Velleius Paterculus, Livy, literary history

Velleius Paterculus separates Part I of his history from Part II by means of two successive digressions (1.14–15 and 16–18), of which the second is mostly devoted to the phenomenon whereby the outstanding writers in a particular genre tend to cluster within the same period of time. In Velleius’ own terms there is nothing unusual in any of this. Like other Latin historians, he will use digressive sections to articulate his narrative;<sup>1</sup> his frequent attention to matters of chronology and dating is almost obsessive (e.g., 1.7.2–4, 2.4.7);<sup>2</sup> and he inserts literary-historical material elsewhere (1.5, 1.7.1, 2.9, 36.2–3).<sup>3</sup> All three of these features combine in his digression on generic synchronicity, a phenomenon which he illustrates first from Greek literature (1.16) and then from Latin (1.17.1–4), beginning—after the dismissal of some unnamed pioneers – with tragedy, comedy and historiography. The standard text of this passage reads as follows (1.17.1–2):<sup>4</sup>

Neque hoc in Graecis quam in Romanis euenit magis. nam nisi aspera ac rudia repetas et inuenti laudanda nomine, in Accio circaque eum Romana tragoedia est; dulcesque Latini leporis facetiae per Caecilium Terentiumque et Afranium subpari aetate nituerunt. <sup>2</sup>historicos et<iam>, ut Liuium quoque priorum aetati adstruas, praeter Catonem et quosdam ueteres et obscuros minus LXXX annis circumdatum aeuum tulit, ut nec poetarum in antiquius citeriusue processit ubertas.

eum *Burer* : eorum *PA* et<iam> *Vossius*

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Woodman (1977) 154. The precise status of 1.14–18 has attracted comment from, e.g., Münzer (1907) 261, Sumner (1970) 280 n. 130 [p. 281], and Rich (2011) 74. For the language with which Velleius introduces the two digressions (1.14.1) cf. Liv. 45.43.1, misleadingly described as ‘unique’ by Briscoe (2012) ad loc.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Feeney (2007) 22.

<sup>3</sup> The standard treatments are Schöb (1908) and Gustin (1944); more recent discussion and bibliography in Russo (2008).

<sup>4</sup> This is the text in the Loeb edition of Shipley (1924), the Budé edition of Hellegouarc’h (1982) and the Teubner edition of Watt (1988/<sup>2</sup>1998).

This phenomenon occurred among the Romans as well as among the Greeks. For, unless one goes back to the rough and crude beginnings, and to men whose sole claim to praise is that they were the pioneers, Roman tragedy centres in and about Accius; and the sweet pleasantries of Latin humour reached its zenith in practically the same age under Caecilius, Terence, and Afranius. In the case of the historians also, if one adds Livy to the period of the older writers, a single epoch, comprised within the limits of eighty years, produced them all, with the exception of Cato and some of the old and obscure authors. Likewise the period which was productive of poets does not go back to an earlier date or continue to a later. (Trans. F. W. Shipley)

Modern commentators tend to explain *aspera ac rudia ... et inuenti laudanda nomine* as an allusion to Livius Andronicus and Naevius.<sup>5</sup> The explanation is not unreasonable: Andronicus was conventionally described as ‘primus’ (e.g., Cic. *Brut.* 72, Liv. 7.2.8, Val. Max. 2.4.4), while Naevius is regarded as inventor of the *fabula praetexta*;<sup>6</sup> Andronicus was described as not worth a second read by Cicero (*Brut.* 71), while Naevius was famously dismissed by Ennius (*Ann.* 206–7 Skutsch); each of them wrote both tragedy and comedy, the two genres with which Velleius begins his exposition; and in standard modern works of reference the two authors are regarded as contemporary (roughly 280–200 BC).<sup>7</sup> Since Velleius wants to suggest that the zenith of Latin tragedy was around the time of Accius, with whom Cicero was acquainted (cf. *Brut.* 107) and who was a much later author (170–86 BC), a pre-emptive relegation of Andronicus and Naevius is understandable.

On the other hand, it will be seen that Velleius’ account of Latin historiography looks distinctly odd. Latin historiography is said to have flourished within the confines of a period of eighty years, which he does not define,<sup>8</sup> but the phenomenon of synchronous excellence works only if Velleius (a) regards Livy as having written earlier than he actually did, and (b) ignores Cato the Elder altogether. Now it is bad enough to dismiss the author who is generally thought to have written the first work of historical prose in Latin, but it is even worse to move Livy from a later generation to an earlier. Not only is Livy’s writing life properly identified as post-Sallustian in the further digression in Book 2 (36.3: ‘consecutus Sallustium Liuius’) but Livy and Velleius were of

<sup>5</sup> See Elefante (1997) or Ruiz Castellanos (2014) ad loc.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Gratwick (1982) 93–4.

<sup>7</sup> See now too Viredaz (2020) 25–8 and 48.

<sup>8</sup> If we assume from the context that the period of eighty years ends with Sallust, who is thought to have died c. 35 BC, it would begin with someone like Coelius Antipater and would include Claudius Quadrigarius, Sempronius Asellio, Valerius Antias, Sisenna, and Licinius Macer.

course themselves contemporaries. Livy's dates are usually said to be 59 BC–AD 17; the final events in Velleius' history belong to AD 29 (130.3–5), and he is likely to have started to write some years before that:<sup>9</sup> if, for the sake of argument, Velleius started to write in AD 27, he is separated from Livy, who is traditionally thought to have died 'pen in hand',<sup>10</sup> by a mere decade. It smacks of utter desperation if, to preserve his thesis of synchronicity, Velleius has to adopt the quite implausible tactic of moving Livy from his own generation to another.

This problem will disappear if we assume that at some stage in the textual transmission T. Livius the historian has been confused with the tragedian Livius Andronicus, who in Latin texts is almost always called simply 'Liuius' (he is in fact not called 'Liuius Andronicus' until Quint. 10.2.7).<sup>11</sup> Confusion of the two writers is almost inevitable, as has happened in the text of St Jerome (*Chron.* p. 137 H: 'Titus Liuius tragoediarum scriptor'). If this is what has happened also in the text of Velleius, we must assume that the words *et ut Liuium quoque priorum aetati adstruas* have been wrongly moved to their present position; and *et*, which Vossius was obliged to emend to *etiam* when the clause was assumed to refer to Livy, perhaps provides a clue as to the original position of the words:

Neque hoc in Graecis quam in Romanis euenit magis. nam nisi aspera ac rudia repetas et inuenti laudanda nomine, et ut Liuium quoque priorum aetati adstruas, in Accio circaque eum Romana tragoedia est; dulcesque Latini leporis facetiae per Caecilium Terentiumque et Afranium subpari aetate nituerunt. <sup>2</sup>historicos praeter Catonem et quosdam ueteres et obscuros minus LXXX annis circumdatum aeuum tulit, ut nec poetarum in antiquius citeriusue processit ubertas.

The co-ordination of two clauses each featuring an indefinite second-person subjunctive ('nisi ... , et ut ...') is attractive,<sup>12</sup> yet the transposition, while solving one problem, seems to give rise to another: how does it make sense for Velleius to advocate back-dating Andronicus to a generation to which he was thought already to belong? The answer to this question is to be found in Cicero's *Brutus* (72–4), where we learn that there was in fact controversy in antiquity over the dating of Andronicus, whose chronology was placed significantly later by

<sup>9</sup> Woodman (1975) 273–82 = (2012) 201–13; *contra*, Rich (2011) 84–7.

<sup>10</sup> Syme (1959) 38 = (1979) 1.412, who proceeded to argue (40–2 = 414–16) that Livy's dates should be 64 BC–AD 12.

<sup>11</sup> See Suerbaum (2002) 93–4.

<sup>12</sup> The *ut*-clause is of a type (*OLD ut* 29) which is regularly introduced in English by 'if' (as in Shipley's translation above); likewise, *ut idem separetur Cato* at 1.17.3 (just below) means 'if Cato may again be set aside'.

Accius than by others. The controversy has spilled over into modern times too, since several scholars have thought that Accius was right.<sup>13</sup> But Cicero regarded Accius as completely mistaken (*Brut.* 73: ‘tantus error Acci’), and, given Velleius’ well established concern for chronology and his late timing of the zenith of Roman tragedy, it makes perfect sense for him to make clear that in his opinion ‘Livius too’ (‘Liuium quoque’) is an early writer and that his own position is the same as Cicero’s, with whose *Brutus* he was familiar (note esp. *Brut.* 74: ‘notatione temporum et ad id quod *instituisti*’ ~ Vell. 1.17.4: ‘quisquis temporum *institerit notis*’).

Thus Velleius’ reference to ‘Romana tragoedia’ is still preceded by allusions to Andronicus and Naevius, except that, after the proposed transposition, each author now has a clause to himself. Moreover, since both authors are known to have written comedies as well as tragedies, they are appropriately placed not only before the naming of Accius but also before that of Caecilius, Terence and Afranius: if Andronicus and Naevius are eliminated from consideration, they are no barrier to the hypothesised clustering of the comic writers any more than they are to that of Accius and his tragic contemporaries. The semi-colon which is conventionally placed after *Romana tragoedia est* should perhaps be changed to a comma.

Whereas Latin comedy is illustrated by a plurality of names, as is to be expected in the context, who is to be placed alongside Accius in order to illustrate the thesis of synchronicity as applied to tragedy? One might have expected a reference to Pacuvius, as at 2.9.3, and perhaps also to Ennius, since these three form a recognised trinity (e.g. Cic. *Opt. Gen. Or.* 18, *De Or.* 3.27, *Ac. Post.* 1.10); and it may be that these are the names implied by the phrase *circaque eum*, ‘around his time’. But is this phrase correct? *eum* is Burer’s emendation of the transmitted *eorum*, but, although the phrase makes good sense in itself, it fits less well into the sentence as a whole. No matter how we translate *in Accio ... Romana tragoedia est*, which seems to be an idiomatic way of saying ‘Roman tragedy means Accius’ or ‘is embodied in Accius’,<sup>14</sup> it is difficult to see how this idiom can co-exist with *circaque eum*: ‘Roman tragedy means Accius and around his time’ makes little sense. If Burer’s *eum* is correct, we would expect it to be followed by a further ablative such as *ingeniis* (‘Roman tragedy means Accius and the talents around his time’). Although it is admittedly difficult to see how *ingeniis* might have been omitted before *Romana*,<sup>15</sup> omissions of individual words or even of groups of words are a feature of Velleius’ text, sometimes

<sup>13</sup> See the discussions by Douglas (1966) on Cic. *Brut.* 72 and Oakley (1998) on Liv. 7.2.8; also Viredaz (2020) 26–7.

<sup>14</sup> For some comparable uses of *in* + abl. see K–S 1.564 (top), *OLD sum* 11b (e.g., Mela 1.106: ‘Taberani ... quibus in lusu risuque summum bonum est’).

<sup>15</sup> Though the word is a Velleian favourite, it is suggested only *exempli gratia*.

without any evident reason for the omission. If such a supplement has any validity, the original text of the whole passage perhaps went like this:

Neque hoc in Graecis quam in Romanis euenit magis. nam nisi aspera ac rudia repetas et inuenti laudanda nomine, et ut Liuium quoque priorum aetati adstruas, in Accio circaque eum <ingeniis> Romana tragoedia est, dulcesque Latini leporis facetiae per Caecilium Terentiumque et Afranium subpari aetate nituerunt. <sup>2</sup>historicos praeter Catonem et quosdam ueteres et obscuros minus LXXX annis circumdatum aeuum tulit, ut nec poetarum in antiquius citeriusue processit ubertas.

Nor did this happen more amongst the Greeks than the Romans. For, unless you go back to the rough crudities which deserve praise only on account of their invention, and if you add Livius too to a previous generation, Roman tragedy means Accius and the talents around his time, and the delightful witticisms of Latin humour shone brightly through Caecilius, Terentius, and Afranius in almost the same generation. Historians, apart from Cato and some old and obscure figures, were produced in a circumscribed epoch of less than eighty years; similarly neither did the abundant crop of poets spring up in an earlier or nearer season than it did.

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