

NUMA AND PYTHAGORAS: DID LIVY MISREPRESENT VALERIUS ANTIAS?*

Abstract: According to Livy, Valerius Antias claimed that the books of Numa Pompilius, Rome’s second king, contained Pythagorean material, a claim that is chronologically impossible. Other evidence for Antias’ account does not support Livy’s allegation, although it has often been assumed that it does, with the result that the allegation has been widely accepted in modern scholarship. These circumstances have not been helped by the way in which some of the other evidence has been presented. As for Livy’s accusation, that may be little more than the hasty conclusion of a man eager to find fault with a predecessor in whose work he had already found much to criticise.

Keywords: Valerius Antias, Livy, Numa, Pythagoras

If frequency of citation is any indication of use, Livy appears to have had Valerius Antias’ history close to hand when composing much of his own.¹ But frequency of citation is no indication of quality. Valerius Antias’ reputation has long been poor, and this is largely due to Livy.² Livy criticises Antias directly on a number of occasions, for exaggerating and for mendacity;³ he compares him with other historians, to his detriment;⁴ warns his audience

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¹ For Livy’s use of Antias, see *FRHist* 25 F 23, 24, 27a, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55a, 56, 57, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 66a; discussion in Briscoe and Rich (2013) 84–7; Rich (2013a) 299–304.

² Modern attempts to salvage Antias’ reputation are unconvincing, unnecessary, and often feel aprioristic. Laroche (1977), for instance, tries to explain away Antias’ statistics, which Antias appears to have frequently exaggerated, by resorting to the claim that they ‘reflect mystical influence’, but Laroche’s many calculations only succeed in demonstrating that just about any number can be made into a ‘mystical’ one; on the idea that Antias’ work, despite all the indications to the contrary, is actually based on good documentary sources, the Senate’s records in particular, see most recently Rich (2013a) 303–4; see also Rich (2005); for arguments against the idea, see Richardson (2018), with discussion and references to earlier work as well as further work by Rich. Modern criticism has been added to ancient, but it is unnecessary to discuss these further accusations here.

³ Liv. 26.49.3 (= *FRHist* 25 F 28); 33.10.8 (= F 36); 36.38.7 (= F 45); 38.23.8 (= F 48); and see below on 40.29.8 (= F 57).

⁴ See especially Liv. 42.11.1 (= *FRHist* 25 F 60): *plurimum annales, et quibus credidisse malis ...* (‘the histories of the majority, also those whom you would prefer to trust ...’); note also 26.49.3, 5 (= F 28); 30.3.6 (= F 32); 32.6.5–8 (= F 35); 34.15.9 (= F 40); 36.19.11–12 (= F 43).

that Antias is his source;⁵ and points out when Antias has ignored good evidence and followed an account of uncertain credentials.⁶ The most common theme is bogus and exaggerated statistics, of casualties in battle, captured military equipment, plunder, and so on.⁷ Since material of this kind often has little to no bearing on the actual course of events, it is hard to avoid the suspicion that Livy's purpose in including it is sometimes just to disparage Antias. On one occasion, Livy manages to criticise him when the claims of another author, which he notes as well, are significantly greater. Claudius Quadrigarius alleged that about 40,000 men had been killed in battle on Mount Olympus (in 189 BC), while Valerius Antias put the total at no more than 10,000. Livy offers an explanation for Quadrigarius' much larger figure, but when it comes to Antias' claims, he comments only that Antias is normally more unrestrained in exaggerating numbers.⁸

A somewhat unusual episode in Rome's history provided Livy with a further opportunity for criticism, on this occasion for a serious chronological error. In 181 BC a set of books was discovered in a tomb on the Janiculum, only to be destroyed on the Senate's instructions. The books were attributed to Numa Pompilius, Rome's second king, which makes their destruction all the more curious.⁹ The early historians Cassius Hemina and Calpurnius Piso said that the books included Pythagorean material, a claim which is obviously connected with the story that Numa had been a student of Pythagoras. That story is chronologically impossible. Numa lived generations earlier. As Dionysius of Halicarnassus pointed out, not only did Numa live long before Pythagoras, he even lived before the city of Croton, where Pythagoras

⁵ In addition to references in n. 3 above, see Liv. 3.5.12–13 (= *FRHist* 25 F 23); 37.48 (= F 46); 39.41.6 (= F 54); 44.13.12 (= F 61); 45.43.8 (= F 63); note also 30.19.11 (= F 33).

⁶ Liv. 39.43.1 (= *FRHist* 25 F 55a); note also 39.52.3 (= F 50).

⁷ Liv. 26.49.1–6 (= *FRHist* 25 F 28); 33.10.8 (= F 36); 36.19.11–12 (= F 43); 36.38.6–7 (= F 45); 39.41.6 (= F 54); 45.43.8 (= F 63); note also 30.19.11 (= F 33); for early history, 3.5.12 (= F 23). Large and sometimes suspiciously precise figures at 25.39.14 (= F 27a); 30.29.7 (= F 34); 32.6.7 (= F 35); 33.36.13 (= F 38); 34.10.2 (= F 39); 34.15.9 (= F 40); 37.60.6 (= F 47); 38.55.6–8 (= F 51); 45.40.1 (= F 62); *Per.* 67 (= F 66a).

⁸ Liv. 38.23.8 (= *FRHist* 24 F 67, 25 F 48): *Valerius Antias, qui magis immodicus in numero augendo esse solet* ('Valerius Antias, who is normally more unrestrained in exaggerating numbers'); for Livy's explanation of Quadrigarius' figure, see 38.23.9: *numerus captivorum haud dubie milia quadraginta explevit* ('the number of prisoners no doubt brought the tally up to 40,000'); see also 38.47.6.

⁹ The episode is variously related, see Cassius Hemina *FRHist* 6 F 35; Calpurnius Piso *FRHist* 9 F 14; Sempronius Tuditanus *FRHist* 10 F 3; Valerius Antias *FRHist* 25 F 9a–b, 57–8; Varro, *Antiq. hum.* F 6.3 Mirsch; *Curio, de cultu deorum* F 3–4 Cardauns (= *Logistorici* F 43–4 Chappuis); Liv. 40.29.3–14; *Per.* 40; Val. Max. 1.1.12; Plut. *Num.* 22.2–5; Fest. 178L; Lactant. *Div. inst.* 1.22.5–6; [Aur. Vict.] *De vir. ill.* 3.2.

supposedly taught him, had been founded.¹⁰ According to Livy, Valerius Antias was also guilty of this particularly embarrassing faux pas.¹¹ The problem is that Livy is the only one to make such a claim, while the other sources for Antias' version of the story of Numa's books suggest that Antias did not make this mistake at all, but instead may have dismissed the idea that Numa's books had anything to do with Pythagoras. As will be seen, his version may, however, have left him vulnerable to misrepresentation, whether inadvertent or not.

The first piece of evidence to consider is a passage of Pliny's *Naturalis historia* (13.84–7) in which Pliny sets out the various claims of a number of writers about the contents of Numa's books. According to Pliny, Cassius Hemina said that the books contained Pythagorean philosophy,¹² while Calpurnius Piso said that seven of them contained pontifical law and seven were Pythagorean.¹³ The historian Sempronius Tuditanus claimed instead that the books contained Numa's *decreta*, that is, his decrees or resolutions.¹⁴ Valerius Antias' account was different again. According to him, there were two sets of twelve books; the first set, which were in Latin, were pontifical, while the second set, which were in Greek, contained philosophical precepts (*FRHist* 25 F 9a and 58: *Antias secundo libros fuisse xii pontificales Latinos, totidem Graecos praecepta philosophiae continentes; idem †tertio† et s.c. ponit quo comburi eos placuerit*, 'in his second book, Antias says that there were twelve Latin pontifical books and the same number of Greek books containing philosophical precepts; the same author, †in his third book†, also quotes the decree of the Senate by which it was decided that they should be burnt').

Pliny does not elaborate, but had Antias claimed that the Greek books contained specifically Pythagorean philosophy, there is no reason why Pliny

¹⁰ D.H. *AR* 2.59; for Numa and Pythagoras, see also Cic. *De or.* 2.154; *Rep.* 2.28–9; *Tusc.* 4.3; D.S. 8.14; Liv. 1.18.2–3; Ov. *Fast.* 3.151–4; *Met.* 15.1–481; *Pont.* 3.3.44; Plut. *Num.* 1.2–3, 8.4–10, 22.3–4.

¹¹ Liv. 40.29.8 (= *FRHist* 25 F 57). Livy's evidence is generally accepted, and most take it for granted that Antias said Numa's books contained Pythagorean material; for more direct statements to this effect, see for instance Cardauns (1960) 23, 24, 26; Rosen (1985) 69, 74, 75; Gruen (1990) 163, 167; Forsythe (1994) 211, 213, 215; Fox (1996) 249 (but citing only Pliny's evidence, for which see below); Willi (1998) 144; Rich (2013b) 362. A few have, however, maintained that Livy's account is confused; Livy apparently got his sources muddled and ended up attributing to Antias the views of someone else, see Peter (1914) cxc1: Piso's; Chassignet (2004) 225–6; Hemina's and Piso's; this seems an unsatisfactory solution and there is a more straightforward alternative.

¹² *FRHist* 6 F 35: *in his libris scripta erant philosophiae Pythagoricae* ('in these books were writings of Pythagorean philosophy').

¹³ *FRHist* 9 F 14: *libros septem iuris pontificii, totidem Pythagoricos* ('seven books of pontifical law and the same number of Pythagorean books').

¹⁴ *FRHist* 10 F 3.

should have left that information out. It could of course be objected that there is no particular reason why Pliny should have included such information, as it was not important for his argument, but his overview does have a certain precision about it, with all the details and detailed references to his sources that he includes, and he clearly had no qualms about relating the claims of Hemina and Piso.¹⁵ The phrase that Pliny uses to describe the content of these books is also quite specific, if not even distinct—*praecepta philosophiae* and not simply *philosophia*—and that, combined with the change in the number of the books, suggests that Antias was saying something different. Plutarch’s evidence supports this conclusion, and no objection can be made in his case that the argument is one from silence.

Plutarch says much the same thing as Pliny: Antias claimed that there were twelve books on priestly matters and twelve on Greek philosophy. Plutarch does not elaborate either, but what makes his evidence important is the way he uses it. Plutarch begins with what appears to be a different version of the story. He says (*Num.* 22.2–4):

[2] πυρὶ μὲν οὖν οὐκ ἔδοσαν τὸν νεκρὸν αὐτοῦ κωλύσαντος, ὡς λέγεται, δύο δὲ ποιησάμενοι λιθίνας σορούς ὑπὸ τὸ Ἰάνοκλον ἔθηκαν, τὴν μὲν ἑτέραν ἔχουσαν τὸ σῶμα, τὴν δὲ ἑτέραν τὰς ἱερὰς βίβλους ἃς ἐγράφατο μὲν αὐτός, ὥσπερ οἱ τῶν Ἑλλήνων νομοθέται τοὺς κύρβεις, ἐκδιδάξας δὲ τοὺς ἱερεῖς ἔτι ζῶν τὰ γεγραμμένα καὶ πάντων ἕξιν τε καὶ γνώμην ἐνεργασάμενος αὐτοῖς, ἐκέλευσε συνταφῆναι μετὰ τοῦ σώματος, ὡς οὐ καλῶς ἐν ἀψύχοις γράμμασι φρουρουμένων τῶν ἀπορρήτων. [3] ὧ λογισμῶ φασι μηδὲ τοὺς Πυθαγορικοὺς εἰς γραφὴν κατατίθεσθαι τὰ συντάγματα, μνήμην δὲ καὶ παιδεύειν αὐτῶν ἀγραφὸν ἐμποιεῖν τοῖς ἀξίοις. καὶ τῆς γε περὶ τὰς ἀπόρους καὶ ἀρρήτους λεγομένας ἐν γεωμετρίας μεθόδους πραγματείας πρὸς τινα τῶν ἀναξίων ἐκδοθείσης, ἔφασαν ἐπισημαίνειν τὸ δαιμόνιον μεγάλῳ τινὶ καὶ κοινῶ κακῶ τὴν γεγεννημένην παρανομίαν καὶ ἀσέβειαν ἐπεξερχόμενον. [4] ὥστε συγγνώμην ἔχειν πολλὴν τοῖς εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ Πυθαγόρα Νομῶν φιλοτιμουμένοις συνάγειν ἐπὶ τισαύταις ὁμοιότησιν. οἱ δὲ περὶ Ἀντίαν ἱστοροῦσι δώδεκα μὲν εἶναι βίβλους ἱεροφαντικὰς, δώδεκα δὲ ἄλλας Ἑλληνικὰς φιλοσόφους τὰς εἰς τὴν σορὸν συντεθείσας.

[2] They did not cremate Numa’s body, as he forbade it, it is said, but made two stone coffins which they buried under the Janiculum. One of

¹⁵ It has been argued that Pliny got (much of) this material from Varro’s work (see Münzer (1897) 185–6; Rosen (1985) 68; Forsythe (1994) 207; Briscoe (2013) 177), but that does not affect the point. Nor is there any reason why Varro should have left this information out.

these coffins contained his body, the other contained the sacred books which he had himself written, just as the lawgivers of the Greeks write their own tablets. While he was living, he had taught the priests what he had written and had instilled in them the habit and meaning of it all. He ordered that the books were to be buried together with his body, as he did not think it right to entrust such mysteries to lifeless writings. [3] It is for this reason, they say, that the Pythagoreans do not preserve their doctrines in writing, but establish the memory and teachings of them in the worthy by word of mouth. And when their treatment of difficult and mysterious geometrical problems was passed on to a certain unworthy person, they said the gods threatened to punish this transgression and impiety with a large and widespread catastrophe. [4] We must therefore pardon those who strive to make Numa an acquaintance of Pythagoras, on account of the numerous resemblances. Antias relates that twelve priestly books and twelve more Greek philosophical books were put in the coffin.

Although he had earlier declined to engage in the debate about Numa's acquaintance with Pythagoras, Plutarch now makes his position clear: it is necessary to forgive those who argue on account of the many similarities between them that Numa knew Pythagoras. It is at this point that Plutarch notes Antias' claims about the content of Numa's books. Plutarch is not explicit, but given the context in which he mentions Antias' views, Antias can hardly have said that the books contained Pythagorean material.

None of this will, however, be visible to anyone who relies on the various collections of the fragments of Antias' work, because of the way the evidence is handled. The fragment from Plutarch's account, as it is presented in *FRHist*, reads (the text in bold follows *FRHist* 25 F 9b): οἱ δὲ περὶ Ἀντίαν ἱστοροῦσι **δώδεκα μὲν εἶναι βίβλους ἱεροφαντικὰς, δώδεκα δ' ἄλλας Ἑλληνικὰς φιλοσόφους τὰς εἰς τὴν σορὸν συντεθείσας.** This is accompanied with the following translation (although the work is incorrectly attributed to Pliny): 'Antias reports that **the books placed in the coffin comprised twelve priestly books and twelve more Greek philosophical books.**' The context of the fragment is thus lost entirely. This is also the case in previous collections of the evidence for Antias' work, including those which quote more extensively from Plutarch's account. Plutarch's argument is consistently omitted, and naturally so, as it is not part of Antias' work, but the consequences of this are obvious.¹⁶

¹⁶ Chassignet (Antias F 9a) also quotes just the one sentence. Peter (Antias F 7) and Beck and Walter (Antias F 9a) include part of Plut. *Num.* 22.2, the same sentence as *FRHist* and Chassignet (from *Num.* 22.4), and the rest of the account as far as the destruction of the books (22.5), but they too omit Plutarch's comments (22.2–4). Some editions of Plutarch's

Had Antias said that Numa's books contained Pythagorean material, Plutarch's citation of him would be inconsistent with his own argument and thus somewhat illogical. It would be entirely disingenuous too, given Plutarch's description of the books' content as Greek philosophy and not specifically Pythagorean philosophy. And this would also require the coincidence of similar treatment by Pliny, who refers only to philosophical precepts and not to Pythagorean philosophy. There is, moreover, no reason why Plutarch should have needed to misrepresent Antias in this way (that is, again, had Antias actually said that the philosophy was Pythagorean); he did not after all need to mention Antias' claims, and there were also plenty of other accounts that he could have used instead, including some in which the idea that Numa knew Pythagoras was explicitly rejected.

Plutarch could presumably have consulted Livy's work, or even Dionysius', for Numa's writings and for arguments against Numa's association with Pythagoras at least; Dionysius did not go as far as the events of 181.¹⁷ Plutarch knew both works well and, although he mentions Dionysius by name only in his life of Romulus, it would appear that he consulted Dionysius' work for his biography of Numa too.¹⁸ Plutarch also knew and used Varro's work, for both his *Romulus* and his *Numa*.¹⁹ According to Pliny (as his text currently stands, but there are some inconsistencies), in his *Antiquitates rerum humanarum*, Varro said that twelve pontifical books in Latin and twelve Greek books containing philosophical precepts were found in Numa's tomb; that is, he apparently said the same thing as Valerius Antias.²⁰ In his *Curio, de cultu deorum*, one of his *Logistorici*, however, Varro precluded not only Numa's knowledge of Pythagorean philosophy for straightforward chronological reasons, but Greek influences altogether. He said that Numa had used the Persian art of hydromancy to learn which *sacra* he should establish. The books that were buried with him contained information about the reasons for those *sacra*, which he did not wish anyone to know; the *sacra* themselves were kept by the pontiffs

text begin a new paragraph with Antias' claim, but it is in the following sentence that Plutarch moves on to the events of 181; i.e., the material from Antias belongs in the previous paragraph; see Forsythe (1994) 211: Pliny and Plutarch were both drawing on Antias' account of Numa's burial (from his second book) and not his account of the discovery of Numa's books in 181 (from his fifty-third book, on Forsythe's reckoning).

¹⁷ Livy explicitly rejects the story that Numa was a student of Pythagoras, see 1.18.2–3, 40.29.3–14 (see below); D.H. *AR* 2.59 (Numa and Pythagoras), 2.63.4 and 3.36.4 (Numa's writings).

¹⁸ Livy: e.g., *Plut. Caes.* 47.3–6, 63.9; *Cam.* 6.2; *Cato Mai.* 17.4; *Flam.* 18.4, 20.5; *Luc.* 28.7, 31.8; *Marc.* 11.4, 24.4, 30.4; *Sull.* 6.10; Dionysius: *Plut. Rom.* 16.8. On Plutarch's sources for his *Romulus* and *Numa*, see the evidence collected in Peter (1865) 146–72.

¹⁹ Varro, *Antiq. hum.* F 19.2 and 22.8 Mirsch (= *Plut. Rom.* 12.3–6 and 16.7); see further Peter (1865) 146–72.

²⁰ Plin. *HN* 13.87 (= Varro, *Antiq. hum.* F 6.3 Mirsch).

in their books (which were not buried with the king).²¹ Plutarch may have been aware of Sempronius Tuditanus' work too, which he appears to cite in his biography of Flamininus.²² He did not, therefore, need to choose Antias' account to support his argument about Numa and Pythagoras. He did so presumably because Antias did not claim that Numa was a student of Pythagoras, or at least did not say that Numa's books contained Pythagorean material.

Pliny and Plutarch, whose accounts appear to be independent of one another, are both in complete agreement: Antias said that the twelve books in Greek contained philosophy. Since neither of them said anything further than that, it may be that Antias did not either. Such an approach would certainly have provided an easy solution to the impossible claim that the books included Pythagorean material. Sempronius Tuditanus may have already gone in this direction, with the idea that the books contained Numa's resolutions.²³ It is conceivable that one or the other or both of these accounts are evidence of awareness of the relative chronologies of Numa and Pythagoras, although given the variation in the several versions of the story and the state of the evidence, it is impossible to know.

There is a further detail in Antias' version that may perhaps be relevant. The Pythagoreans appear to have attributed a particular importance to the number seven. They claimed that it was 'appropriate' (*καίρως*), since natural things come to completion in periods of seven.²⁴ Comparable ideas can be found in Aulus Gellius' account of Varro's seemingly lengthy discussion in the first book of his *Hebdomades* of the virtues and powers of the number seven, a discussion for which Varro evidently drew on the work of (among others) Nigidius Figulus, a noted Pythagorean.²⁵ But Varro himself also took an

²¹ Varro, *Curio, de cultu deorum* F 3–4 Cardauns, *Logistorici* F 43–4 Chappuis (= August. *De civ. Dei* 7.34–5). See Richardson (forthcoming) on the inconsistencies in the evidence for Varro's views, and for an attempt at an explanation (when it comes to Antias' views, the discussion errs on the side of caution); Varro's handling of matters in his *Curio* cannot be used to support the argument that Antias (whom, Pliny's account suggests, Varro had followed in his *Antiquitates*) did not claim that Numa's books were Pythagorean.

²² Plut. *Flam.* 14.2–3 (= *FRHist* 10 (F 9)); on the attribution, see Smith (2013) 224; Rich (2013b) 366–7.

²³ See Garbarino (1973) 248–9; Gruen (1990) 167 n. 38 dismisses the idea, but for no good reason. See also Grilli (1982) 195; Rosen (1985) 75.

²⁴ Alexander of Aphrodisias in *Metaph.* 38.17–18 (from Aristotle's treatise on the Pythagoreans): seven in connection with birth, teething, adolescence, and the first beard. See also Calcidius *Comm.* 100.6: for the Pythagoreans, seven is the best, most natural, and most sufficient number.

²⁵ Varro, *Hebdomades* F 1 Chappuis (= Gell. *NA* 3.10): seven and the development of the foetus and teeth. On Figulus, see Cic. *Tim.* 1; Schol. Bob. Cic. *Vat.* 14; Jerome *Chron.* 156H; Volk (2016) 45–8; Volk (2021) 262–4, with references to further work.

interest in Pythagoreanism, and was even buried in the Pythagorean way.²⁶ And similar ideas can be found again in Varro's discussion of Pythagoras' views in his *Tubero, de origine humana*, which was another of his *Logistorici*.²⁷ The change in the number of Numa's books may not be without significance. While others said that there were two sets of seven books,²⁸ Antias said that there were two sets of twelve. Many numbers did of course have further meaning of one kind or another for the Pythagoreans, but the particular focus in these Roman sources on the number seven may lend support to the evidence of Pliny and Plutarch which already suggests that Antias had rejected the idea that Numa's books were Pythagorean.

One final detail in Pliny's evidence for Antias' account should be taken into consideration at this point. According to Pliny, Antias quoted the Senate's decree in which it was decided that Numa's books should be burnt.²⁹ If Antias had access to the text of the decree, and if his claims about the number and content of Numa's books came from that source, this would explain his version. It would also mean that he was not himself modifying the details of the books. This would have significant implications for the interpretation of the events of 181 and for the accounts of Antias' predecessors, Hemina and Piso in particular, as the idea that the books contained Pythagorean material would have to be a subsequent invention (that is, subsequent to the destruction of the books).³⁰ But it is much more likely that Antias' claim to be quoting the Senate's decree is spurious, and was intended to lend support to his own account. A similar approach almost certainly lies behind the precision in so many of his statistics. Such methods were designed to make fabrications look authentic.³¹ For present purposes, the possible origins of Antias' version

²⁶ Plin. *HN* 35.160.

²⁷ Varro, *Logistorici* F 92 Chappuis (= Censorinus, *De die natali* 9.1, 9.3, 11.2–9, 11.11–12): the development of the foetus. On Varro and Pythagoreanism, see variously Rawson (1985) 161–2; Cardauns (2001) 70–1; Volk (2016) 45.

²⁸ The number of the books and the significance of that number for the Pythagoreans have already been noted; e.g., Grilli (1982) 188; Rosen (1985) 74.

²⁹ Plin. *HN* 13.87 (= *FRHist* 25 F 58).

³⁰ Rich has argued repeatedly and at length that Antias carried out archival research and consulted the Senate's decrees (see n. 2 above); the evidence for this hypothesis is, however, extremely thin (see Richardson (2018) 67–72 for the evidence and an assessment of it), and such an approach would also be out of keeping with what other evidence suggests about Antias' standards and methods; for detailed refutation of Rich's argument, see Richardson (2018). The implications, both for what happened in 181 and for the accounts of Antias' predecessors, should Antias' version of Numa's books really be based on the Senate's decree, raise further problems for Rich's argument.

³¹ Note in particular Liv. 3.5.12–13 (= *FRHist* 25 F 23) on Antias' handling of a battle fought in 464 BC; Antias dares to give statistics, Livy notes, and Livy comments on the precision of them too. For ancient criticism of such methods, see Pol. 3.33.17–18; see further

fortunately do not matter; the crucial point is that the evidence of Pliny and Plutarch makes it clear that, in Antias' account, Numa's books did not contain Pythagorean material.

Livy's handling of Antias' claims is different. He says—without identifying his source—that seven of Numa's books contained pontifical law and seven were about a system of knowledge (*de disciplina sapientiae*) which could be of that time, that is, which could actually date to Numa's day (*septem Latini de iure pontificio erant, septem Graeci de disciplina sapientiae, quae illius aetatis esse potuit*, 'there were seven Latin books on pontifical law and seven Greek books on a system of knowledge which could be of that time').³² Since Antias had two sets of twelve books, he cannot be Livy's source for this information.³³ It is, however, at this point that Livy (40.29.8) notes that, according to Antias (*FRHist* 25 F 57), the books were Pythagorean; indeed, his clause about the knowledge which could be of that time immediately precedes his comments about Antias, which may make the clause come across as a little pointed.³⁴ And Livy adds that Antias' claim thus supported, with a plausible falsehood, the common view that Numa was a disciple of Pythagoras (*adicit* [the verb supports the idea that Livy was changing sources at this point] *Antias Valerius Pythagoricos fuisse, volgatae opinionis, qua creditur Pythagorae auditorem fuisse Numam, mendacio probabili accommodata fide*, 'Valerius Antias adds that the books were Pythagorean, giving credibility with a plausible lie to the common opinion in which it is held that Numa was a disciple of Pythagoras'). Livy thus implies that Antias likewise maintained that Numa was Pythagoras' student, although he is not explicit about it, or about whether Antias had himself actually used this plausible falsehood as proof of a connection between the two men.

Badian (1966) 21 (Antias' work contained 'plausibly detailed mendacity' and 'with Valerius the invention of "archival material" seems to have reached new heights') and 35 n. 108 (Badian singles out the Senate's decree: 'Since some of [the archival material] is certainly forged, all of it must be suspect. See, e.g., the Senate's decree ordering the destruction of the "books of Numa" ...: the story had been told before, but Valerius is the first to quote the "document"!'); Oakley (1997) 75–6, 91–2; Beck and Walter (2004) 183; Richardson (2018) 71–8.

³² Liv. 40.29.7. Cf. Liv. 1.18.1: [Numa] *consultissimus vir, ut in illa quisquam esse aetate poterat, omnis divini atque humani iuris* ('[Numa] the most learned man, as far as anyone could be in that age, in all divine and human law'); Livy then goes on to reject the story that Numa had been a student of Pythagoras.

³³ Briscoe (2013) 178; Rich (2013b) 362. It is much easier to suppose that Livy changed sources than that there was early textual corruption, in Antias' work or elsewhere, which affected the accounts of both Pliny and Plutarch; e.g., Grilli (1982) 189; Forsythe (1994) 211.

³⁴ Pace Pontiggia (2023) 128 who thinks that Livy was referring to 'some sort of Presocratic philosophy'. This misses the point of Livy's comment; note as well his similar comment in his first book (for which, see n. 32).

Livy is alone in his claims, and the reason why he included his comment about Antias, which is entirely unnecessary for his account, is quite clear. It was to criticise him. After all, had Livy wanted only to be critical of the story itself, he could have handled the question of Numa and Pythagoras as others do, and as he had himself done in his first book, and not name anyone.³⁵ If he had wanted to show up earlier historians, he could no doubt have named more than one, or just gone for a plural *quidam auctores*, and made himself look even more the better historian.

Details in his description of the books suggest that Livy may have consulted Calpurnius Piso's work (both have two sets of seven books, and they handle the pontifical books similarly; Piso: *libros septem iuris pontificii*; Livy: *septem Latini de iure pontificio*). Rich rejects this idea, because 'Piso made the philosophical books Pythagorean, and Livy could hardly have blamed Antias for this if he was also using Piso's account'.³⁶ That would seem logical enough, although it is worth recalling Livy's handling of the casualties on Mount Olympus, where Claudius Quadrigarius' tally of the dead was considerably greater than Antias', and yet it was still only Antias whom Livy criticised. Logic does not necessarily carry any weight in such circumstances. Rich argues, as others have done, that Livy's source was 'most probably' Claudius Quadrigarius. 'Quadrigarius', he says, 'will have followed Piso on the number of books, but omitted the Pythagorean claim, perhaps recognizing its chronological impossibility'.³⁷

Since Quadrigarius' account of the discovery of Numa's books is lost (assuming that he even related the episode), this can naturally only be a suggestion. Another suggestion is that the phrase *de disciplina sapientiae* may be Livy's own, given Livy's subsequent comments about what was possible for that time, that the phrase does not involve the word *philosophia*, and also that Livy is relating what the books supposedly did contain, before getting on to discussing what they could not have been about.³⁸ The only other evidence for the phrase *de disciplina sapientiae* in connection with this episode is found in Valerius Maximus and Lactantius, and they both appear to have been drawing on Livy's account.³⁹ That is, Livy may have taken from Piso's work (and no

³⁵ See n. 10 above for references.

³⁶ Rich (2013b) 362; although, as Rich notes, Livy 'was doing Antias an injustice', since Hemina and Piso likewise made the books Pythagorean, and (Rich (2013a) 301) he exaggerates Antias' contribution. Cf. n. 11 above on Livy and Piso.

³⁷ Rich (2013b) 362. See also Klotz (1940) 58; Rosen (1985) 69; Briscoe (2013) 178.

³⁸ As Garbarino (1973) 248: Piso 'parlava infatti di sette libri di diritto pontificale e di altrettanti pitagorici (come Livio dunque, con la differenza però che Livio respinge il collegamento con Pitagora e parla perciò genericamente di *disciplina sapientiae*)'.

³⁹ Val. Max. 1.1.12 (*libri ... Latini septem de iure pontificum totidemque Graeci de disciplina sapientiae*, 'seven Latin books on pontifical law and the same number of Greek books on a

doubt Antias' too) only information that he could use for his own account of the discovery of the books. He surely did not have to rely on some intermediary source, such as Claudius Quadrigarius, to modify the story for him and remove the claims about Pythagoras, especially when he knew that those claims were impossible (he had already rejected them in his first book, in his account of Numa's reign). Livy was perfectly capable of creating his own version of events from the different sources that were available to him.

Regardless of whether Livy consulted Piso's work or not, or Quadrigarius', it remains the case that he singles out Antias and disparages only him, and does so for more than just the immediate question of Numa's books, since he implies that Antias' lie about the books was used to support the claim that Numa had been a student of Pythagoras. The fault is not just one of chronology but also integrity. Livy, however, misrepresents Antias (even if only implicitly) when it comes to the number of the books and, if Pliny's and Plutarch's evidence is any indication, he misrepresents him about the content of the books too. Livy attributes to Antias the kind of argument that Plutarch was rejecting.

According to Pliny and Plutarch, Antias said that Numa's books dealt with priestly matters and Greek philosophy. Neither says that this philosophy was Pythagorean, and Plutarch's use of Antias' account implies that it was not. When Livy claims that Antias said that the books were Pythagorean, it is quite possible that he had simply been too quick to assume that the philosophy in question was that of Pythagoras. That may be understandable, when that is what other authors had claimed. Pliny's handling of Hemina's account, in which Numa's books contained Pythagorean philosophy, is worth noting. Pliny says that the books were burnt because they were philosophical writings.⁴⁰ He thus goes from 'Pythagorean philosophy' to just 'philosophy', an approach that was probably not uncommon, if only for the avoidance of repetition or the sake of economy. But this sort of approach may have helped to encourage the already easy assumption that 'philosophy' in the context of this story meant specifically 'Pythagorean philosophy'. No doubt it would not have helped that Livy's opinion of Antias was poor to begin with, and that may well explain his further comments about Antias' use of plausible mendacity, since mendacity was a charge Livy had already laid against him on a number

system of knowledge'); Lactant. *Div. inst.* 1.22.5 (*septem Latini libri de iure pontificio, item Graeci totidem de disciplina sapientiae*, 'seven Latin books on pontifical law and the same number of Greek books on a system of knowledge'); compare Liv. 40.29.7 (*septem Latini de iure pontificio erant, septem Graeci de disciplina sapientiae*, 'there were seven Latin books on pontifical law and seven Greek books on a system of knowledge').

⁴⁰ Plin. *HN* 13.86.

of occasions.⁴¹ A conclusion along these lines is certainly preferable to the idea that Livy had deliberately misrepresented Antias' account, in order to criticise it, but given Livy's handling of Antias' work elsewhere and his singling out of him in his discussion of this episode, that cannot, perhaps, be ruled out entirely.

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⁴¹ As Rich (2013b) 362: Livy 'regards the claim that the philosophical books were Pythagorean as an instance of what he had by now come to regard as Antias' habitual mendacity'.

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