

REVIEW

A NEW READING OF LIVY'S FIRST PENTAD

Ann Vasaly, *Livy's Political Philosophy. Power and Personality in Early Rome*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. xi + 209. Hardback, £55.00. ISBN: 978-1-107-06567-3.

In this book, Ann Vasaly (henceforth: V.) offers a careful, detailed, and diligent (as well as intelligent) close reading of the first pentad of Livy's *Ab urbe condita* (*AUC*). She takes these first five books 'as a coherent and separable whole', intentionally organized by a highly 'complex structure' and ingenious 'architecture' (123)—as Livy himself suggested in his famous introduction to book 6 (6.1.1–3). It is partly based on previous publications by the author,¹ but also contains many innovative, interesting, and inspiring insights in Livy's strategies and methods of (re)constructing the past, his 'didactic aims' and 'hidden agenda', his 'politics' and positions vis-à-vis the problems and challenges of his own day. These insights are pretty equally distributed over a text which at first sight seems mainly to be based on yet another reading of well-known themes and topics, topoi and motifs, historiographical as well as literary, but all in all her observations on particular passages, metaphors, and the semantics of concepts, as well as some of her general results concerning Livy's historical artistry, go well beyond mere synthesis.

Right from the outset, and in a refreshingly straightforward manner ('Introduction: Livy and Domestic Politics', 1–8), V. makes her basic assumptions and interpretative programme clear: she wants to read the first five books of *AUC* as 'a politically didactic text' and to identify the concrete 'lessons', which Livy intended to teach at a time when the development of the body politic under Octavian/Augustus seemed still to be open. This assumption is inseparably connected with another one, namely 'that the momentous, frightening, and violent events that formed the backdrop to the first third of Livy's life would have left a deep impression on the historian': internal violence, the lawlessness of mobs in the city and the loss of civic cohesiveness, the rise of autocratic military leaders and civil war (8 and 124).

In the following chapter 1 ('The Historiographical Archaeology', 9–21), V. glances at 'archaeologies' in the broad sense of 'various encapsulated histories of the distant Roman past' in general and explores the function of an 'archaeology' not contained in a work of history, but in a political treatise, namely

¹ Vasaly (1987), (1999) and (2015).

Cicero's *De republica*, in some detail (10). She shows that this 'idealizing historical narrative' of wise leaders from Romulus onwards, 'proposing laws and institutions with prescient understanding of Rome's present and future needs', was intended 'to do the didactic work of abstract political theory' (21).

In chapter 2 ('Livy's Preface: A Reader's Guide to the First Pentad', 22–35), V. clearly defines her idea of 'striking similarities' between Cicero's 'archaeology' and Livy's general characterization of his own approach to the early history of Rome and looks at the latter's 'didactic aims' and methods. According to V., Livy wanted to create 'a selective, coherent, and carefully constructed account' of the distant past 'by carefully culling, elaborating, and structuring the stories he had inherited from his predecessors, not by creating them'. The 'chief value' of this account 'resided not in its historical accuracy but its ability to convey abstract ideas about political and social realities governing the operation of the republic in the past and, therefore, crucial to understanding and addressing the civic crisis facing the Roman state in Livy's present' (21; 35, cf. 31 and 58).

In chapter 3 ('Monarchy and the Education of the Roman People', 36–54), V. offers a keen analysis of book 1, which concentrates on Livy's construction of the series of 'founder kings' from Romulus to Servius Tullius, who in turn were 'responding to the progressive changes in the Roman people', and the tyrannical perversion of Tarquinius Superbus, which leads to the establishment of the *libera res publica* (53–4). She reads this as a consistent narrative of 'the long maturation of the Roman people under the monarchy that prepares them for the end of autocracy and the creation of a free government "of laws rather than of men"' (75), 'achieved through a series of carefully considered choices' in Livy's treatment of his sources and epitomized in the preface to his second book (Livy 2.1.1; at 54, cf. 55–6 and 99–100 on 2.1.1–6).

The central theme of chapter 4 ('Tyranny and the Tyrannical Temperament', 55–76) is a detailed and perceptive reading of book 3, which revolves around the well-known stories of Appius Claudius the *decemvir* and second quintessential tyrant, his ambivalent character and 'ardent temperament' and puts these stories in the context of the 'familial stereotyping' of the Claudii focussed on their *insita superbia* (59).² According to V., the whole book is intended to show 'the reversion to a tyranny like that of Tarquinius Superbus ... necessitating a second revolution against autocratic power and a "new birth of freedom"' (75).

The following chapter ('The Best Citizen and the Best Orator', 77–95) rather unsurprisingly opens with a close look at Camillus³ as the 'most conspicuous figure' and 'hero who dominates both halves of book 5' (77). However,

² Cf. also Wiseman (1979); Ungern-Sternberg (2006).

³ Cf. also Coudry (2001); Späth (2001); Ungern-Sternberg (2001), not mentioned here.

although this towering figure, the 'leader chosen by fate' (*fatalis dux*), 'father of his country and second founder of the city' (5.19.2, 49.7; cf. 7.1.10), his heroic feats and his speech to the people (5.51–4) undoubtedly provide 'a fitting culmination of the entire pentad, which moves from Rome's founding by Romulus in Book 1 to its symbolic refounding here by Camillus', V. does not simply take him as the one and only 'chief positive exemplum' of leadership in war as well as in peace, but chooses to look for another 'imitable model of ideal aristocratic political leadership within the first five books' (78–9). Her search for such a model leads her to two particularly prominent members of the *gens Quinctia*, namely T. Quinctius Capitolinus (consul 471, II 468, III 465, IV 446, V 443, VI 439) and L. Quinctius Cincinnatus (*consul suffectus* 460, dictator 458 and 439). According to V., both are not only construed as 'brilliant tacticians and courageous generals in war', who become saviours of the state, but also as 'disinterested champions of the common welfare in peace', as 'anti-Claudii' and 'archetypal patrician promoters of *concordia*', whose 'exemplary' character shows itself in their 'severe but effective popular rhetoric' (80, 91, and 93), well received by the Senate as well as the people (3.19.4–12, 20.1, 67.1–68.13, 69.1; cf. 4.10.8–9).

The 'potential dangers and benefits of mass oratory' (80) also figure prominently in chapter 6 ('The Roman People and the Necessity of Discord', 96–121), which deals with the *populus Romanus* and its role as 'another unchanging character in Livy's exemplary text' alongside the prominent individual 'stereotypical personae' (101). In this context, V. systematically discusses the different types of the latter: she differentiates between the negative variant of 'upper-class champions of the people', namely the type of the 'elite demagogue' (Sp. Cassius, Sp. Maelius, M. Manlius Capitolinus), and the positive variant, namely the 'elite *popularis* hero' (P. Valerius Publicola, L. Valerius Potitus, and M. Horatius Barbatus), on the one hand and the 'positive and negative stereotypes' of 'plebeian champions of the people', namely the 'brave, honest, and passionate' type of the 'heroic soldier-leader' (e.g. Publilius Volero, L. Verginius), and the 'more demagogic *popularis* tribunes' on the other (113–14); finally, the tribune C. Canuleius and his carefully elaborated and therefore obviously important speech (4.3.1–5.6) certainly deserve particular attention as 'the only full-scale rhetorical composition in the pentad in *oratio recta* assigned to a plebeian' (116).

The central theme, according to V., is the definition—or rather: the varying definitions—of (plebeian) *libertas*, which resurfaces in different guise in the final chapter ('Conclusion: Livy's "Republic"', 122–39). V. comes back to her initial assumptions concerning the continued relevance of Livy's view of the distant past for his own day and proposes to discuss the three 'most important political issues', which constitute Livy's 'hidden agenda' in the first pentad as

a whole, ‘in the light of certain formulations found in Cicero’s political treatises’: ‘the threat of tyranny to the *res publica*’ and the dangers for *libertas*, the functions of speeches to the people and the ‘ideal models of public oratory by political leaders’, and the creation and protection of *concordia* among the citizenry (126).

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This is a very fine book, learned as well as elegantly written, and well worth reading by all scholars interested in Livy. However, hard-boiled ancient historians among the classical community at large will perhaps be disappointed, as the complex problems of Republican political and social history of the fifth and early fourth centuries are—at best—only mentioned in passing (e.g. n. 3 to ch. 3, at 153; 65 with nn. 29–32 to ch. 4, 163; nn. 44–5 to ch. 6, 177).⁴

What is more regrettable, at least in the view of this reviewer, is the fact that V. does not mention the ongoing modern debates on the character, media, discursive strategies, and dynamics of the Roman (republican and early imperial) ‘memorial culture’, which guaranteed a particular ‘presence of the past in the present’⁵—let alone take a position of her own. Her opinion would have been most welcome, for example in her excursus on the ‘raw material’ used by Livy as ‘an author engaged in the process of creating coherent and persuasive narratives about early Rome’. Without further discussion, V. just refers to ‘archival records, family histories, religious ritual, artistic and architectural monuments, inscriptions, drama, oral traditions’, on the one hand, and ‘the work of predecessors who had engaged in this very same enterprise’, on the other (91–2, cf. 123).

KARL-JOACHIM HÖLKESKAMP

ala20@uni-koeln.de

Universität zu Köln

⁴ General reconstructions, as well as particular problems, remain highly controversial: cf. Cornell (1995); Hölkeskamp (2004), ch. 1 and 2; Forsythe (2005), with my review in *Gnomon* 79 (2007) 50–6, and the contributions in Raaflaub (2005); Hölkeskamp (2011), ch. 1 and pp. 305–10.

⁵ Cf., e.g., and the comprehensive analysis by Walter (2004), as well as Hölkeskamp (2004), ch. 5 and 6; Gowing (2005); Hölkeskamp (2005) and (2006), and recently Gallia (2012), with my review in *Gnomon* 85 (2013) 137–45. The debate on the complex phenomenon of *memoria* is continuing: cf. the contributions in Galinsky (2014) and (2016), and Galinsky and Lapatin (2016).

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