

REVIEW

A NEW COMMENTARY ON LIVY 26

Luca Beltramini, ed., *Commento al libro XXVI di Tito Livio*. Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2020. Pp. 544. Paperback, €45.00. ISBN 978-88-467-5859-0.

Livy's twenty-sixth book is a gem. Smack in the middle of the Third Decade, it features Hannibal's failed march on Rome, the Roman capture of Capua, Scipio's election, departure to Spain, victory at New Carthage, and his infamous Continece. Amid all this, the Romans find time for their favourite sports: political mischief at home and hubristic condescension to their allies abroad. That it is so much ignored can be ascribed first to the general lack of enthusiasm for books of Livy numbering in the double digits, and second (and relatedly) to the lack of robust commentaries on those books. Indeed, the third decade remains a remarkably untrodden scholarly field, even with David Levene's *Livy and the Hannibalic War* making the case for its literary worth.

Luca Beltramini's commentary on Book 26 is the 'primo tassello' of a larger project to comment on the entire Third Decade, focusing especially on the historiographical functions of Livy's narrative, style, and language, but with more historical discussion where warranted. There is good reason to start such a project as a commentary on the Third Decade in the middle, as it were. Quite apart from the wealth of material, the book is an important structural pivot in the overall architecture of the Decade (Beltramini covers the narrative structure of the whole Decade in pp. 21–4 of his *Introduction*). It falls roughly into two parts, the first concerning Capua (with diversions to Rome and to Sicily), and the second focusing on Scipio's exploits in Spain. These also mark the end of the long wait for the *dux fatalis* to finally come into his own, which he does in inimitable fashion. From there, the 'Roman counteroffensive' (23) leads directly to Hannibal's defeat at Zama.

To complement this pivotal role, Book 26 also comes with a 'proemio al mezzo' (23–4) in chapter 37, wherein Livy undertakes a careful synthesis of the victories and defeats racked up by both sides. As Beltramini nicely demonstrates (363), Livy does this in his usual elegant way, 'in una sequenza a cornice che abbraccia la vasta geografia del conflitto prima da ovest a est, e poi in direzione contraria'. A neat table then shows how the Roman list runs from

Spain and Sicily through Tarentum, Rome, and Capua and finally to Greece, while the Carthaginian list retraces the same locations, omitting only the bookends of Greece (26.5) and Sicily (26.2). The *lemmata* following this more general discussion of the passage drill down to the nitty-gritty, providing the usual fare of comparanda and intertexts, elaborating on Livy's diction (e.g., *tumultuarius dux* in 26.38.8), and noting textual problems as relevant.

This pattern—an interpretative blurb followed by briefer technical *lemmata*—is typical of the commentary, and it gives Beltramini room to discuss Livy's stylistic and structural choices, following on from his more extensive introductory essay (39–43). Often, however, the division can seem too stark, leaving the reader looking for more interpretative guidance, especially when it comes to the familiar commentary trope of *cf. e.g.* Drawing again on the treatment of 26.37, Beltramini offers a list of intertexts for the idea of the commingling of joy and sadness with which Livy opens the chapter (364 *ad* 37.2 *luctum et laetitiam miscuerant*), but there is no attempt to do anything with those intertexts, or even explain why they are there and whether or not the list is representative or comprehensive. This is especially frustrating because some of these intertexts include such juicy morsels as the end of Sallust's *Catiline* (61.9 *laetitia, maeror, luctus atque gaudia*) and the death of Augustus early in Tacitus' *Annales* (1.7.1 *lacrimas gaudium ...*), one of which offers a snapshot of the complexity of grief during a near-civil war, and the other of an equally complex state of hypocrisy—two quite different approaches to intertextual readings. Has either to do with the situation in Livy 26.37 specifically, or is the notion of tears mixed with joy simply a commonplace, in which case why the long list? In the case of Sallust, at least, we might suspect something more systemic at work, since the end of 26.37.9 *integra spe, integro metu*, seems to allude to the end of Sallust' other monograph, the *BJ* (114.4 *quo metu Italia omnis contremuerat ... et ea tempestate spes atque opes civitatis in illo sitae*). Beltramini does not mention this intertext, which is a matter of interpretation, but it would have been interesting to see what he might have done with such closural intertexts, which support on the micro level his more general idea that Book 26 is built on narrative mechanisms 'in qualche misura monografici' (9). And what about Aemilianus' tears at the destruction of Carthage, complete with a citation from Homer (Pol. 38.22)—a parallel that would have made interesting reading with Polybius 9.21, which Beltramini cites as the source for 26.37.1, with its own citation from Homer, and with an enticing sense of foreboding at this crucial junction in the war.

Similarly, Beltramini's focus on structure, however satisfying, reveals only part of Livy's artistry, because as often with Livy, the architecture belies a more complex message underneath. In this case, there is something almost laughable about Livy's careful accounting of victories and losses in two

separate lists, given that any Roman victory was a Carthaginian loss and vice versa—there is no other way for the list to go other than to double back on itself. Livy cannot have been unaware of this, and part of the reason he does it anyway must lie in the very different ways the two sides understand and feel about the same events. The Romans feel panic and fear (37.4 *terrorem ... pauoremque*) at Hannibal's attack on Rome, and turn to jubilation (37.4 *in laetitiam uertit*) with the capture of Capua. The Carthaginians, meanwhile, remember the failed march on Rome with a pride (37.6 *in gloria ponebant*) that turns to embarrassment (37.6 *pigebat*). They also keenly feel the contempt (37.7 *pudebatque*) dealt them by the Romans—an emotion for which the Roman list has no parallel, probably because for the Romans supplying the Spanish army was a matter of survival rather than defiance. Beltramini is aware of this loaded vocabulary, and of the way Livy stylises it by using 'termini antitetiche o sinonimiche' (363) such as *spe ac metu* (38.1, antithetical) or *obsessae et oppugnatae* (38.4, synonymous). The focus on structure however leaves out some important nuance, not least that the Romans are assigned nouns and the Carthaginians verbs. The Romans feel themselves on the way up, while the Carthaginians feel their success blunted. The score may be level, but the momentum is all on the Roman side.

This is perhaps too much to ask of a commentary to dig out from a single passage of Livy, and indeed it goes to show that Beltramini provides ample material for a reader to work with the text productively. Indeed, it is highly welcome to see a commentary explore Livy's textual architectures at this medium scale, filling the gap between Kraus' focus on the sentence level and the more standard focus on the episode, the book, and the pentad as units of composition.¹ Nor is it to suggest that Beltramini is too telegraphic in his *lemmata* or overall treatment. His overview of the book's narrative organisation (26–9) is a sensitive account of how the annalistic schema interacts with Livy's own purposes and with the difficulties imposed by the conditions of the Hannibalic war. And while I think there is more to Book 26's *episodi e temi* than the doublet of Capua and Scipio, Beltramini does a stellar job exploring how the cult of personality has narrative consequences. The first half of the decade, by necessity, is oriented around Hannibal, which means not only that nature fashions herself to suit his needs (p. 34), but also that the Roman leadership is measured against him, as Fabius Maximus demands of the *centuria prerogativa* in 24.8.2: *Hannibali imperatori parem consulem nomino*. Indeed, Book 26 has its own matching episode, 26.22, where Manlius Torquatus attempts to dissuade the voters from electing him, citing his poor eyesight as an excuse, and reminding the voters that the war is ongoing, and Hannibal the opposite general.

¹ See C. S. Kraus, ed., *Livy: Ab urbe condita Book VI* (Cambridge, 1994).

Beltramini's discussion of this short electoral episode is deep on the literary aspects. He points out the connection between this episode and the one in 24.8, and thoroughly covers the two commonplaces Torquatus invokes: an old man refusing a return to public life and the hereditary cruelty of the Manlii Torquati, with ample attention to Livy's rich and metaphoric language. If I could wish for one more thing it would be to note the dark humour in a man with poor vision and a reputation for cruelty declaring himself no match for Hannibal, a man with a missing eye and a reputation for cruelty—a humour that the intratext with 24.8.2's emphasis on *parem* only makes drier.

One of the consistent strengths of this commentary is the balance it manages to strike between the historical and the literary, a refreshing attitude to find in a field that still sees Livy as either an artist or as source material, but not often both. There is plenty of 'proper' historical material throughout: the various locales of Hannibal's march of Rome are provided with Barrington Atlas coordinates and Scipio's siege of New Carthage comes with a helpful reproduction of the city taken from Walbank's Polybius commentary.² On the literary side, too, Beltramini provides ample material to work with: there are throughout structural breakdowns, side-by-side comparisons of Livy and Polybius, and extensive comparanda, with many of the shorter texts given in full (though with no translations). Beltramini is also good on showing how the two modes of analysis work together. The *Introduction* begins by pointing out that the year 211 finds Rome engaged on no less than four fronts: Capua and Campania, Sicily, Greece, and Spain. Beltramini then spends a few pages outlining where things stand in each theatre, which is not only helpful for the reader who comes to Book 26 cold, but also leads directly to the discussion of Book 26's position in the architecture of the decade and the narrative challenge in uniting the many threads of the war into a single structure. Beltramini argues that Book 26 'riveste evidentemente un ruolo di primo piano, tanto sul piano narrative quanto su quello ideologico' (23), and this idea is carried throughout the commentary, for example when discussing Scipio's continence at New Carthage. Beltramini gives an extensive analysis of the passage, including but not limited to Livy's differences from Polybius' account. One of those, Beltramini points out, is that where Polybius treats the episode as an *exemplum* of Scipio's personal *uirtus*, Livy has Scipio elevate his good conduct to a national *exemplum*, explaining to Allucius that no good Roman would have dreamed of behaving otherwise. Here, Beltramini suggests, Livy is deploying a familiar rhetorical move, traceable back to such episodes as the duel of Manlius and the Gaul, where the combatants too become 'rappresentanti dei

² F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius. Volume II: Commentary on Books VII–XVIII* (Oxford, 1967).

rispetti popoli' (453). The analogy is imperfect, but intriguing: both Scipio and Manlius are young men asking to do glorious things for their country, albeit on a vastly different scale.

One last aspect to note here is Beltramini's fluency with Livy's manuscript tradition. Unlike, say, Propertius, the state of Livy's text is not fraught enough to be at the forefront of every discussion, but Beltramini's reminder here of the vivaciousness of the philological debate undergirding our editions is salutary. As is normal practice for this commentary, there is a substantial overview in the Introduction (48–64), and then briefer notices throughout the *lemmata*, which is especially welcome to remind us that textual criticism does not stop when the reading begins.

All in all, this is a useful commentary, written in accessible Italian and with enough material in Greek and Latin that even the Italian-less would be able to benefit from browsing. At 544 pages in paperback, it is not quite as unwieldy as the page-count would suggest, and the quality of the paper and printing is excellent. Livy's third decade remains woefully under-supplied in reading and teaching aids, but Beltramini's volume makes an excellent addition to that arsenal.

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