

## A More August Preface: Re-examining Livy's *Praefatio*

This paper examines Chapter 1, pr. 6–9 of the *Praefatio* to Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, where the historian qualifies his intent to transcribe Rome's history while lamenting its present condition. I argue that Livy's language reflects revision for a republication of his First Pentad (i.e. the first five books of *AUC*) around 27 BCE, after the Senate had bestowed upon Octavian the honorific title "Augustus." The fact that Livy chose several words that share common roots with this title —namely, *augustior*, *auctores*, and *auctum*— could be more than coincidental. My dating for Livy's First Pentad, and the *Praefatio* it accompanies, relies heavily on the paradigm presented in Burton's scholarship from 2000 and 2008, which places the initial publication of Livy's First Pentad and its *Praefatio* soon after *ca.* 32 BCE. If indeed Livy edited his *Praefatio* upon republishing the First Pentad in 27 BCE, in order to better resonate with the political climate of Augustan Rome, then that has key implications for the *Praefatio*'s tone.

In Section 1, I review twentieth- and twenty-first-century discourse about the dating of Livy's First Pentad. Historically, scholars placed the First Pentad and its *Praefatio* somewhere between 27 and 25 BCE, after Octavian assumed the title "Augustus" and before the second closing of the Temple of Janus. This dating rested primarily on two passages, 1.19.3 and 4.20.5–11. In 1.19.3, for example, Livy mentions that the Temple of Janus had only been closed twice since the reign of Numa, and that Augustus' victory at Actium was the second instance. This means that Octavian was already using the name Augustus, which places the text after 27 BCE, but that he had not yet closed the Temple of Janus again in 25 BCE, which places the text before then. However, citing substantial evidence that suggests both 1.19.3 and 4.20.5–11 are later insertions, Burton (2000, 2008) instead dates Book I of Livy's *AUC* to 33 BCE and its *Praefatio*

to 32 BCE. He argues that the “extreme pessimism” Livy displays in this preface would have become incompatible with the ideology of Augustan peace by 27 BCE.

However, Burton’s dating of the *Praefatio* does not account for highly suggestive language in Chapter 1, pr. 6–9. In Section 2, I examine thematic and linguistic evidence from Livy’s *Praefatio* that aligns with key aspects of Augustan propaganda, claiming that he intentionally selected three words associated with the new princeps’ new title: *augustior*, *auctores*, and *auctum*. These words and concepts are not just evocative in themselves but also in their context, often gesturing towards contemporary circumstances in freshly Augustan Rome. For example, the assertion that “mixing human with divine origins makes states more august” (*ut miscendo humana divinis primordia urbium augustiora faciat*) recalls Julio-Claudian claims to divine descent from Venus and the deification of Caesar. Likewise, Hirst (1926) noted the charged application of *augustior* to Hercules and Romulus elsewhere in the First Pentad. The terms *augustior*, *auctores*, and *auctum* reflect key etymological connections surrounding Augustus’ name, which were explicitly known to Romans as evidenced in the writings of Ovid (*Ov. Fas.* 1.608-12), Suetonius (*Suet. Aug.* 7.2), and Cassius Dio (*Cass. Dio* 53.16.6-8). Livy emphasizes Rome’s decline from the *mos maiorum* to present immorality, and likewise calls for a return to ancestral virtue, both concepts which harmonize with the Augustan cultural messaging.

In conclusion, I argue that the composition of Livy’s *Praefatio* was not isolated to 32 BCE, but that it was at least edited upon the republication of Livy’s First Pentad *ca.* 27 BCE. Read this way, the *Praefatio* embodies both Livy’s trepidatious yet hopeful personal voice and provides a better account of the political nuances characterizing Rome at the dawn of Augustus’ principate.

## Bibliography

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