

Memory, Credibility, and Narrative Value in AUC II

The first pentad of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, depicting events from the mythical founding of Rome to the city's sack by the Gauls, is particularly problematic given the largely legendary nature of the monarchical period and the questionable accuracy of the early pontifical sources (Forsythe 1999). This admittedly murky period raises issues for a historian interested in its memorialization, a difficulty that Livy acknowledges in the preface to book six. Yet this same uncertainty allows Livy an opportunity to exercise the greatest power that a historian has—the ability to shape a narrative and, in effect, to fabricate social memory (Halbwachs 1998). Scholars have taken an interest in the historiographic role that memory plays in Livy's work, citing the author's penchant for connecting topography to certain Roman ideals (Jaeger 1997). The result is a lively piece of literature that both imbues the places of Rome, so familiar to the reader, with the patina of the glorious and often seedy Roman past and signals its intention to judge this same past through the power of its narrativization of events (White 1977)—events that thus become *digna memoria*, or “worthy of memory.” Livy is particularly fond of this phrase as an indication to the reader of narrative and memorial importance. Yet it is the negative aspect of the phrase, *nihil dignum memoria*, that has been unexplored until now.

This paper will therefore showcase a particular facet of Livy's historiographical method, a literary *damnatio memoriae* used to articulate that “nothing worthy of memory” (*nihil dignum memoria*) took place in a certain year. This specific phrasing (*nihil dignum memoria*) surprisingly only appears four times in Livy—twice in Book II, once in Book VII, and once in Book XXXX—and not again until the fourth century CE, in the work of the historian Sulpicius Severus. In order to examine closely Livy's use of this phrase, I restrict myself to its two occurrences in Book II (AUC 2.18.9 and 2.43.5), which decline to describe events that Dionysius

of Halicarnassus fortunately relays. The variants in the two authors' accounts—two men writing from wholly different perspectives, though for a shared audience—are a boon to understanding Livy's exclusion of certain events.

The first use of the phrase comes as Livy, having relayed the events of 501 BCE, when Titus Lartius was appointed Rome's first dictator, describes the following year, 500 BCE, as a "respite of calm truce" (*tacitae induitiae quietum*). Beyond the truce, however, nothing takes place that Livy deems worthy of memory (*nihil dignum memoria actum*). This omission was certainly not due to a lack of intrigue; after all, Dionysius of Halicarnassus speaks of a Latin conspiracy that was only quelled by the consuls of 501 BCE—and he does so in six paragraphs of text. Instead, I posit a tripartite explanation for Livy's choice. First, there is a concern for maintaining the integrity of the annalistic historiographical mode; Livy can only omit a year from his historical narrative at the cost of his credibility as a historian. Second, this relegation to immemorial of an entire year's worth of history paradoxically signals Livy's ability to navigate his sources. The reader therefore presumes Livy's close scrutiny of events, further enhancing his credibility. Third, and most importantly, the omission allows Livy to place a greater emphasis on the surrounding years and their events—namely, the dictatorships of 501 and 499 BCE.

The second, more complicated instance in Book II again highlights Livy's concern for manipulating his narrative in order to emphasize certain events and themes. Here, in the midst of hostilities with the Veientes and discord amongst the *plebes*, Livy describes Caeso Fabius' campaign against the Aequi, while choosing to largely ignore Sp. Furius' campaign against the Veientes (*in Veientes nihil dignum memoria gestum*). I suggest that Livy declares Furius' military actions to be unworthy of memory due to Furius' success and popularity with the *plebes*, as well as Livy's own interest in emphasizing the broader conflict between the *populares* and the

optimates. Livy's willingness to designate memorial worth in such a negative, exclusionary manner in both cases indicates his interest in emphasizing the two major themes that permeate his work—dictatorship and class conflict—and how they affect the *res publica* (Walsh 2001).

Bibliography

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