

The Moral Republic: Reconciling Livy's paradoxical approach to republic and *princeps*

Much of Livian scholarship is centered around the question of whether Livy was an apologist or a detractor of the Augustan regime. This debate is centuries old and has yet to find a satisfactory answer which accounts for specific passages praising Augustus within a work which carries an overt Republican theme. The paradox exists not only within *Ab Urbe Condita* but also in the life of the author himself, in that he was a personal friend of Augustus, yet was also designated by him "*Pompeianus*" because of his republican sentiment. This paradox has divided modern scholarship, some claiming that Livy was anti-Augustan: "By many of these allusions [Livy] intended to warn his contemporaries, especially Augustus, that he was anything but the emperor's panegyrist and propagandist, his message being: Romans will not tolerate unmitigated monarchy" (Petersen, 1961). Syme, of the opposite opinion, argues that Livy was pro-Augustus, calling him, "Augustus' historian," and portraying him as an Augustan propagandist (2002).

Scholarship has attempted to reconcile this paradox by various means, scholars of one persuasion suggesting that Livy, though pro-republic, was the target of intimidation and censorship by the Augustan regime; those of the other arguing that Livy, though pro-Augustus, remembered fondly the republic even as he accepted the necessity of its end. Yet another school of thought is represented by Walsh, who argues that Livy sought to influence Augustus by his republican ideals: "The conclusion must be that Livy was constructively forming public policy in this direction rather than sedulously praising it." (1970)

In the final evaluation, all of these answers, though plausible, lack convincing force. The first argument assumes unattested Augustan censorship, the second fails to acknowledge Livy's hope for a return to the values of which he writes, and the final assumes both that the audience for Livy's massive work was one man and that Livy presumed his work would be the guiding

force in Augustus' policy. Although they are each possible solutions to the paradox, they fail to produce a unified image of Livy that accounts for his republicanism, his praise of Augustus, and his drive to create such an immense history.

I posit that this seeming paradox of Livian character is caused by a defect in our perspective. Each of the above views assumes 1) that Augustus was recognized by his contemporaries as the bane of Republicanism, and 2) that Livy, in his praise of the Old Republic, praised specifically its forms and *libertas*. The first assumption is not supported by the historical context in which Livy wrote and in which Augustus ruled immediately after Actium, while the second is not supported by the text of *Ab Urbe Condita*. In fact, proper historical context and close textual examination make it clear that to Livy's early perspective Augustus was not the enemy of republicanism but its champion. An examination of Augustus' early reign within the context of Rome's precedents for autocracy shows that Augustus—particularly before, but even after the constitutional settlement of 23 BC—ruled well within the political precedent set by previous Roman autocrats, such as Sulla, and thereby maintained the name of a republican even as he laid the foundations for the *principate*. Further, an examination of Livy's preface and most notable *exempla* shows that Livy's focus, when reflecting on the early republic, was not on the political forms or *libertas* of the republic but rather the *mores, vita, and artes* of the early republicanism. Once it is clear that Livy viewed Augustus as a republican and viewed the republic as a collection of *mores* rather than of constitutional forms, it is evident that Augustus' image as a morally conservative Roman—based in his vows, anti-Antonian propaganda, and moral legislation—makes him the ideal champion for Livy's morality. Therefore, the Livian paradox is resolved by understanding that in Livy's view Augustus was not anti-Republic, nor

was the republic essentially the constitutional forms which Augustus changed, but rather the *mores* which the *princeps* championed.

Works Cited

- Petersen, Hans. "Livy and Augustus." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 92 (1961): 440-452.
- Syme, Ronald. *The Roman Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Walsh, P.G. *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.