

Servius Tullius' Imperial *Nachleben*

Among the complicated characters reported to have taken the Roman throne, the sixth king, Servius Tullius, has been read as especially enigmatic (Ridley 1975). By taking a stand in the debate, Livy acknowledges a varied tradition over the king's noble or servile origins (Liv. 1.39.5). While on balance the historian commends him as a good king who worked for the good of the people, Livy nevertheless concedes that he was the first to take power unconstitutionally (Liv. 1.41.6). Finally, Livy mentions the tradition that Servius, after his various political reforms, was intending to abdicate and found the Republic himself before he was assassinated by the Tarquinian conspiracy (1.48.9). Livy's complicated Servius is one among his regal colleagues who can be read as reflections of, or even models for, Augustus himself (Petersen 1961; Simmons 2008).

This paper explores the reception of Servius Tullius in imperial historiography after Livy, a literary tradition that both reshapes Livy's texts and draws from alternative sources, in the process untangling the Servian enigma. I argue that imperial historians present Servius as a model of monarchy, one that is either positive or negative as suits the author's political aims and experience under various emperors. The authors I examine are Tacitus, Florus, Appian, Cassius Dio, and Eutropius. I show through the example of one king how Rome's founding fathers, ever the touchstones of *Romanitas*, are reshaped over the *longue durée* of imperial Roman history, subject to the creative independence of authors within the historiographical tradition, and are much more than simply abridged facsimiles of the Livian characters.

First, Tacitus presents Servius in the *Annales* as the first to enact laws "that even a king would obey," along with rites for the expiation of incest (Tac. *Ann.* 3.26.4, 12.8.1). I show how Tacitus contrasts these aspects of Servius with emperors like Augustus who put themselves

above the law, and Claudius who defies precedent in marrying his niece (Green 1998). Florus, on the other hand, sees Servius as anticipating the constitutionality of Augustus' principate, while also reflecting the political ideology of Hadrian through his industrious rise from humble, even servile origins to the highest rank (Flor. 1.6.1).

Florus is soon followed by two Greek historians, Appian and Cassius Dio. Appian retrojects his optimism for the empire of Antoninus Pius that promoted his career back onto the original Roman monarchy. While his account of the kings is little more than a Byzantine synopsis, Appian's use of Servius' *exemplum* in his extant narrative of the late Roman Republic suggests that he styled Servius similarly to Romulus, as a paternalistic ruler who loved the common people, yet was assassinated by an elite who cried tyranny (Phot. *Bibl.* 57). While also a staunch monarchist, Cassius Dio, on the other hand, casts Servius in a largely negative light. To an historian who advocates an imperial monarchy that collaborates amicably with the senatorial and educated elite (Jones 2016), Servius represents a monarch who draws his power from the common rabble from whom he sprang, and threatens to plunge the state into chaos by removing the stability of one-man rule. No wonder Servius' assassination is presented as the common cause of the whole Senate and not merely of a cadre of Tarquinius' friends (Zonar. 7.9).

With Eutropius, finally, we see the exception that proves the rule of Servius' obsolescence as an exemplary king in a Late Antiquity defined politically by a post-Diocletianic aggrandizement of monarchical power. Eutropius reasserts Servius' noble pedigree, and mentions the census as his only unique accomplishment (Eutr. 1.7.1)

This paper traces the evolution of one exemplary monarch across multiple centuries of historiography, in order to demonstrate how the *exempla* of the kings of Rome can function as barometers of Roman attitudes toward monarchy at a given time. It advocates the creative

independence of imperial historiography in its reception of Rome's remote past, not least its making of that regal past in the image of the imperial present.

Bibliography

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