

Livy and Polybius on the Mutiny at Sucro

This paper argues that Livy uses Polybius' version of Scipio Africanus' speech at Sucro as a model, but interacts with it in a more than merely imitative manner: he makes deliberate additions and alterations to Polybius' account in order to present an original and distinct portrait of the general.

The speech was delivered in 206 BCE during a mutiny of a faction of the Roman armies in Spain. In both Polybius and Livy the episode is portrayed as a defining moment in Scipio's career before Zama (Liv., 28.25.8-9; Pol., 11.25.1). The uniformity of these two accounts in the chronology and content of the overall event suggests strongly that Livy has Polybius as his direct source. The climax of both accounts is a speech that Scipio delivers before the mutinous soldiers, but it is in the substance of the speech that Livy's account begins to diverge from Polybius.

It has long been noticed that Livy often alters Polybian accounts for his own literary agenda. P.G. Walsh remarks in his seminal 1963 book *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods*, that Livy "makes changes or addition to source-content" with an aim to "evoke a more compelling and dramatic atmosphere" (235). D.S. Levene's recent 2010 book *Livy on the Hannibalic War* has argued convincingly that Livy's changes to Polybian narratives are not only cosmetic, but even polemical: "every change that Livy makes to Polybius," Levene later summarizes, "is effectively a critique of his history" (212, "Allusion and Intertextuality in Livy's Third Decade" [2015]). With an eye towards Livy's polemical use of Polybius I compare the two versions of this speech, which appears to have so far attracted no critical attention, to show that Livy rearranges Polybius' content and adds his own in order to present a different portrayal of Scipio. From the difference of portrayals I argue further that Livy sees in Scipio Africanus a

more potentially dangerous political figure, one who resorts more readily to the use of manipulative and populist language and tactics to obtain his ends.

The different uses of parallel imagery and metaphoric language in the two speeches illustrate Livy's sophisticated interactions with Polybius. For example, in both accounts Scipio compares the mutinous soldiers to a sea, and the leaders of the mutiny to agitating winds (Liv., 28.27.11-12; Poly., 11.29.8-12); Scipio uses the image of *fasces* being carried before leaders of the mutiny as an example of the mutineers' usurpation of Roman *imperium* (note the similarity of words and phrasing: *fasces cum securibus praelati sunt* [Liv., 28.27.14] = καὶ ταῖς ῥάβδοις καὶ τοῖς πελέκεσι τοῖς προηγουμένοις [Poly., 11.29.5]). But Livy places these same images in dissimilar contexts: the metaphor of the sea and winds, which concludes the speech in Polybius, is placed in the introduction by Livy, which has significant connotations for its emotional and argumentative force; the carrying of the *fasces* and axes, which is the only privilege of office violated in Polybius, is merely one of many violations in Livy, including the right to issue orders and to set the watchword (Liv., 28.27.14), and, moreover, these violations are likened to religious signs (*portenta*) requiring sacrificial expiation. Thus Scipio leverages the soldiers' superstition.

The admission of details not found in Polybius is equally instructive of the differences between the speeches: in a passage not found in Polybius, Livy has Scipio begin the speech with a rhetorical question as to what name he should call the mutinous soldiers, which evokes a famous anecdote of Julius Caesar's handling of his own mutinous soldiers (Suet. *Jul.* 70.1, Tac. *Ann.* 1.42). This beginning sets a populist tone for the rest of the speech, and recalls to his Roman audience the future that was set in motion by influential generals such as Scipio

Africanus, casting a troubling look ahead on the trajectory of Roman politics in the later stages of the Republic.