

Pythagorean Astronomy and *Pietas* in Livy

On June 21, 168 B.C., shortly before the battle of Pydna, there was a solar eclipse. In Livy 44.36–37.9, we are told that C. Sulpicius Gallus, as military tribune under Lucius Aemilius Paullus, predicts and explains the eclipse to the Romans, preventing the Roman soldiers from being dismayed or treating it as a bad omen. In Livy’s account, Paullus’s only reaction to the eclipse is to perform sacrifices. As Burton (2017:216–218) points out, however, in Zonaras (9.22.4–5), Paullus himself predicts the eclipse, Plutarch, in his *Life of Aemilius Paullus*, has no prediction at all, and Polybius does not mention a prediction either, although the fragmentary state of this Polybian section prevents us from knowing for certain all of the details of Polybius’s account. Readers of Cicero’s *De Re Publica* (1.23–24) will recall that Cicero claims Gallus explained the eclipse but said nothing about Gallus predicting it. Gallus’s predicting the eclipse appears to be a Livian innovation. This paper explores two questions: 1.) Why does Livy have Gallus predict and explain the eclipse?; 2.) Why is Livy’s Paullus not involved with these processes? I argue that Livy wanted to represent Gallus and Paullus as Pythagoras and Numa figures, respectively, in order to suggest that while Greek philosophy can have its uses, it is ultimately the *pietas* of an exemplary Roman like Paullus that leads to military victories and ‘refounding’ warlike states.

We can see Gallus as a Pythagoras figure because we know from Pliny (*NH* 2.83) that Gallus’s theories of astronomy were heavily influenced by Pythagorean ideas. In addition, while the soldiers of Paullus had considered the *sapientia* of Gallus nearly divine (*prope divinam*), Moore (1989: 115) has argued that his *sapientia* was “knowledge of natural phenomena which

was to the ancients the domain of philosophy...Sulpicius' *sapientia* is presented as something remarkable, certainly not typical of a Roman."

We can see Paullus as a Numa figure for two reasons. First, the *Aemilii* were one of the families that claimed descent from Numa (Volk 2016: 19). As Vasaly (2015:91–93) has shown, Livy frequently suggests that members of the same *gens* should be expected to act in similar ways, so Livy's "stereotyping by *gens*" would encourage his readers to see Paullus as a Numa figure. Second, Paullus's clearly demonstrated *pietas* and his role as law-giver and 'refounder' of a now peaceful Macedonia would also recall Numa. In Livy 1.19.1, Numa 'refounds' his new city, previously founded by force and arms (*urbem novam, conditam vi et armis*), by means of justice, laws, and customs (*iure...legibusque ac moribus*), and Livy's Paullus gave laws to Macedonia (*leges Macedoniae dedit*), a region originally made famous by the conquerors Philip II and Alexander the Great.

Many legends of Pythagoras's influence on Rome and alleged student-teacher relationship with Numa had sprung up in the Middle and Late Republic, but some Romans preferred a Numa whose wisdom was 'homegrown' to a Numa influenced and instructed by Pythagoras. Livy himself attributed no role to Pythagoras in any of Numa's laws. In 40.29, Livy records the burning of Numa's books, and Walsh, *ad loc.*, suggests that the senate burned the books because they seemed to present Numa as a Pythagorean. While Atkins (2013: 49–79) has argued that Cicero in *De Re Publica* used Gallus's astronomy as a model for the "science of politics" Cicero had wanted to develop, Livy suggests that the Roman leader who actually 'refounded' Macedonia, like Livy's Numa, had no connection to Pythagoras. This paper will conclude by examining the importance of this Pythagoras-Numa dichotomy for Livy's contemporary audience.

Bibliography:

Atkins, J. W. 2013. *Cicero on Politics and the Limits of Reason: The Republic and Laws*.

Cambridge.

Burton, P. J. 2017. *Rome and the Third Macedonian War*. Cambridge.

Moore, T. J. 1989. *Artistry and Ideology: Livy's Vocabulary of Virtue*. Frankfurt.

Vasaly, A. 2015. *Livy's Political Philosophy: Power and Personality in Early Rome*. Cambridge.

Volk, K. 2016. "Roman Pythagoras." In K. Volk and G. D. Williams, eds., *Roman Reflections:*

Studies in Latin Philosophy, 33–49. New York.

Walsh, P. G, ed. 1996. *Livy Book XL (182 – 179 B.C.). Edited with an Introduction, Translation*

& Commentary. Warminster.