

Never a Friend or Always an Enemy?: Political Context for Livy's Hannibalic Oath

This paper analyzes Livy's account of Hannibal's oath of enmity against Rome, which modifies the earlier text recorded by Polybius, Livy's apparent source. Recent scholarship discussing Hannibal's oath has focused primarily on the way Livy changed Polybius' version in order to villainize Hannibal (Eckstein 2014) or to give him a more personal stake in the war and potentially set him up as a foil for Scipio (Rossi 2004) and a negative *exemplum* for Rome (Levene 2010). However, these approaches have failed to consider the manner in which Livy's modification correlates with similar ancient oaths of enmity. This paper engages with previous theories while comparing Hannibal's oath to three similar oaths: a general oligarchic oath discussed by Aristotle (Ar. Pol. 1310a9-11; V.vii.19), an Athenian oath of revolt reported by Thucydides (Thuc. 8.75.2), and an oath of loyalty in war recorded in an inscription in the city of Delos, on Crete (*Syll.* 527; IC 1.9.1). These three oaths all deal with the support or overthrow of tyrannical, oligarchic governments and bear remarkable similarities both to Polybius' account that Hannibal will "never be a friend to the Romans" (Poly. III.11.8) and to Livy's "be an enemy to the Roman people as soon as [he is] able" (Livy *AUC* XXI.1.5). Building off of Levene's (2010) interpretation of Livy's Carthaginians as a mirror of the Romans and an indication of the beginning of Roman decline, this paper analyzes the connections between Livy's and Polybius' accounts of Hannibal's oath and the pattern indicated by these other oaths to demonstrate that Livy may have modified Hannibal's oath against the Romans in order to illustrate the early decline of Roman morality.

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