Thucydidean Themes in Livy's 3rd Decade

When approaching Livy's engagement with the Greek historiographical tradition, scholars quite naturally focus on Polybius, who serves as an important source for the events Livy recounts in the 3rd decade (Levene 2010) and beyond (Tränkle 1977). Livy's literary engagement with Thucydides, by contrast, is generally considered to be limited to a few specific episodes (Rodgers 1986, Polleichtner 2010, Levene 2017), or occasional allusions (e.g. Walsh 1973, Levene 2006, 2017). In this paper, I contend that Thucydides provides Livy with several fundamental themes of the 3rd decade. I will argue that the intertextual references to Thucydides in the preface of Book 21 should be taken as programmatic, after which I will discuss the way Livy reprises Thucydidean themes to show that Rome's mixed constitution allows her to combine the particular strengths of Athens and Sparta while avoiding the weaknesses inherent in their purely democratic and oligarchic forms of government that prevented either from becoming a major Mediterranean power.

Livy opens by claiming to do in the preface to this decade what other historians have done at the beginning of the whole, namely telling the greatest war ever (21.1), implicitly establishing a rivalry with Thucydides, the first to do this. Thucydidean language about the power of the combatants immediately follows (21.1; cf. Thuc. 1.1.1). Taken together, and when seen in light of the conventions of the Augustan poetry book (cf. Vasaly 2002, Levene 2010 on structural affinities), these allusions can reasonably be considered signs of a Thucydidean program. Thus the allusion to the two hegemons of the Peloponnesian war serves as an invitation to compare Rome and Carthage with Athens and Sparta, and in addition to recall the

specific terms in which Thucydides compared them, such as national character, relationships with allies, and forms of government.

Regarding national character, Livy constructs Rome at the war's outset as a slow-moving, oligarchic Sparta, failing to defend its ally Saguntum due to a desultory senate that vainly hopes to avoid conflict (21.6-7, 16; cf. Corinthian complaints in Thuc. 1.67-71), while Carthage emerges as Athenian in its rapid aggression and the innovative strategy of crossing the Alps, spearheaded by the enterprising Hannibal.

When it comes to treatment of allies, the defection of Capua and its subsequent abandonment by Hannibal despite promises of aid reprise the experience of the major Athenian ally Mytilene, whose revolt never received promised aid and whose leading men also perished after a siege. The punishment of Capua points up the Roman degeneration into Hannibalic cruelty, recalling the growth of Athenian savagery. In the Spanish theater, however, the younger Scipio emerges as a Brasidas figure, seducing the Celtiberian Allucio through his charming kindness (26.50; cf. Brasidas at Amphipolis, Thuc. 4.105-8).

In the debate in Book 28, the Sicilian expedition is evoked, but its outcome avoided due to the mixed nature of the Roman constitution. The underlying issue in the debate is not its purported topic—whether or not invading Africa is a good idea (pace Rodgers 1986, Levene 2010)—but whether a jealous aristocrat can undermine the good of the state out of personal envy.Thus the true Thucydidean parallel to Fabius's hostility to Scipio is not Nicias, but the Athenian demos, which suspects the aristocratic, young Alcibiades of aiming at tyranny. While the fickle democracy revokes Alcibiades' command, Scipio's invasion goes forward due to the constitutional blending of aristocracy with democracy. Scipio successfully forces the senate's hand by leveraging the popular assemblies, gaining the allotment of Sicily (28.45). But the same

senate's salutary influence corrects Scipio's Alcibiadian excesses: a threat to recall Scipio from Sicily for acting like a luxurious Greek—another parallel with Alcibiades, whose manners appeared foreign and revolutionary—and an inspection by senatorial envoys oblige Scipio to shore up *virtus* in the army. The episode epitomizes the upshot of Livy's method of refracting the war through the lens of Thucydides: both Athenian democracy and Spartan moderation are needed to ensure Roman victory.

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