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NOTES ON LIVY'S CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

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In my work »God and Fate in Livy» I discussed Livy's attitude to irrational factors in the making of history. My conclusion was that Livy regarded the course of events as mainly determined by human beings and not by the gods and fate.[1]

Livy's attitude is clearly stated in the preface. In §§ 6—7 he explains that he will not attach much importance to legends, and in § 8 he remarks that *haec et his similia*, that is to say irrational factors in general, will not be paid great attention. In the following paragraph (§ 9) Livy gives the factors which determine the course of events and states the theme of his work:

Ad illa (notice the contrast to *haec et his similia* above) *mihi pro se quisque acriter intendat animum, quae v i t a, qui m o r e s fuerint, per quos v i r o s quibusque a r t i b u s domi militiaeque et partum et auctum imperium sit;*

labente deinde paulatim d i s c i p l i n a velut desidentis primo mores sequatur animo, deinde ut magis magisque lapsi sint, donec ad haec tempora quibus nec vitia nostra nec remedia pati possumus perventum est.

In the first half of the sentence Livy indicates the factors to which Rome's rise to power was due (*vita, mores, viri, artes*); in the second he describes Rome's moral decay as a consequence of the failure of *disciplina.* The factors which according to Livy determine the course of events may be described as sociological and psychological.[2] The theme of his work stated here is the rise and fall of Rome.

A little later Livy deals with moral decay in greater detail (§§ 11—12):

Ceterum aut me amor negotii suscepti fallit, aut nulla umquam res publica nec maior nec sanctior — — nec in quam civitatem tam serae a v a r i t i a l u x u r i a q u e immigraverint, nec ubi tantus ac tam diu paupertati ac parsimoniae honos fuerit. — — nuper divitiae avaritiam et abundantes voluptates desiderium per luxum atque libidinem pereundi perdendique omnia invexere.

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[1] Annales universitatis Turkuensis, Series B, Tom. 64, Turku 1957, p. 101.

[2] Cp. *ibid.* p. 23.

Rome's moral decay was due to excessive prosperity, which undermined the old simple way of life by giving rise to greed and luxurious living. The sentence *nec in quam civitatem* . . . implies that moral decay is an inevitable process which will sooner or later befall every prosperous state. Rome's moral superiority is seen in the fact that its decay arrived so l a t e.

Now there are two questions requiring answers: »Was this idea of Roman history Livy's own?», and »Did Livy really, in writing history, follow the theme given in the preface?» The last question is very important.

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The first question must be answered in the negative. Livy is no original thinker, so it is *a priori* unlikely that this view of Roman history can be ascribed to him. The view is in fact found in Greek and Roman historians long before Livy's time, and can be traced back to Polybius, though the contribution of Posidonius was considerable.

In the 6th book, where he discusses his view of the greater pattern of Roman history, Polybius offers a philosophy of history that might be termed b i o l o g i c a l. He argues that every state is subject to the laws of growth, bloom and decay and that these laws hold good for the Roman state (9, 10—13). Later on in the book he expounds the idea with greater precision. By the law of nature (*φύσεως ἀνάγκη*) all creatures (*πάντα τὰ ὄντα*) are subject to decay (57, 1). The state may decay either by external factors, about which no fixed rule can be laid down, or by the growth of the state itself, this being the regular process (57, 2). When a state has obtained uncontested supremacy and its prosperity is great, a love of power and extravagance takes hold of the citizens (57, 5—6). Finally the populace, who think that they have been wronged by the greed of certain persons and who are puffed up by the flattery of others, who aspire to office, seize all power, and the result is nominally freedom and democracy, in fact mob-rule (57, 7—9).

Polybius argues that Rome's prime coincided with the time of the Hannibalic war (6, 51, 4—8). Elsewhere he remarks that the first clear signs of moral decay were to be seen in the extravagance and laxity of the Roman youth after the victory of Pydna (168 B.C.), when Roman supremacy had become uncontested and the riches of Macedonia were transported to Rome (31, 25, 3—7).

Obviously the idea of the biological life of a state cannot have originated

with Polybius: we cannot ascribe such originality to the practical Polybius. Some scholars hold that Polybius was indebted to his friend Panaetius for the idea.[1] It may well be so. On the other hand, the idea that a state obeys the natural laws of growth and decay was well-known in antiquity. We have an example in Plato, who admits that even his ideal state is subject to inevitable decay (*Pol.* 546 A). We may surmise that Polybius found the idea in the Greek historical or other writing of his own age and applied it to Rome.

Posidonius, who continuing Polybius' work wrote a history of Rome from the fall of Carthage (146 B.C.) to the Sullan time (88 B.C.), thought that life in the natural state was ideal. That is why he eulogized the simple way of life, the piety and the righteousness of the ancient Romans (fr. 59, JACOBY). The assertion by later Roman writers of the moral superiority of their uncouth forefathers was largely due to Posidonius' influence. Contemporary Rome, however, was corrupt, and Posidonius attributes the corruption to Rome's undisputed supremacy, the consequences of which were extravagance and moral laxity (Diod. 37, 2, 3, evidently taken from Posidonius [2]). Here he does not differ from Polybius. But Posidonius introduces a new factor to account for the decay which took place after Rome's rise to power. He thinks the f e a r inspired by a powerful enemy is necessary to keep a people in good order. This idea is put into the mouth of Scipio Nasica, who opposes the destruction of Carthage on the ground that fear of Carthage makes the Romans unanimous and easy to govern (Diod. 34, 33, 3—6 = Posidonius fr. 112, 3—6, JACOBY). Diodorus (Posidonius) remarks that Scipio's forebodings were realised after the fall of Carthage, when all kinds of disorder harassed Rome and Italy. Though some scholars attribute the idea to Nasica himself [3], there can be little doubt that it is Posidonius' own.[4]

We found that the idea of the state being subject to elementary natural laws was well-known in antiquity, and that Polybius applied it to Rome. The same may be said of the idea just discussed. Plato argues in *Leg.* 699 C that the fear of Xerxes united the Athenians and Aristotle explains in *Polit.* 1334 A that most military states remain safe while they are waging war but perish after they have won themselves an empire; in peace-time they lose their sharpness of temper. The idea is found in Polybius too. In 6, 18, 2—6

[1] W. SCHUR, Sallust als Historiker, Stuttgart 1934, p. 64.
[2] SCHUR, *op.cit.* p. 70.
[3] M. GELZER, Nasicas Widerspruch gegen die Zerstörung Karthagos, Philologus 1931, p. 277.
[4] SCHUR, *op.cit.* p. 69.

he mentions that in Rome civil strife often grew less in wartime but blazed up anew after peace had been made. In 6, 44, 3—8 the same idea is made use of to explain the peculiarities of Athenian history. It was, however, Posidonius who applied this idea to the general pattern of Roman history, which is why, for him fall of Carthage became the turning-point in the decay of Roman society.

These ideas of Polybius and in particular Posidonius had a great effect on Sallust[1], who discusses the same theme in all his works. In Catilina he praises the ancient Romans, who enjoyed peace at home and success abroad because of their *virtus*, *concordia* and *aequitas* (6—9). After the fall of Carthage, however, *otium* and *divitiae* initiated decay. Excessive ambition and, after the Sullan age, even greed made an end of all Roman *virtutes* (10—13). In Jugurtha the idea of the fear inspired by an enemy is elaborated. Before the fall of Carthage the people and the senate were unanimous, for *metus hostilis* kept the state in good order. But as soon as that fear vanished, the consequences of success, *lascivia* and *superbia*, made their appearance (41, 2—3). The picture is still more dismal in the Histories. Human nature is evil (I fr. 7, MAURENBRECHER: *vitio ingenii humani*), and even Rome's early history, which in Catilina was considered a time of innocence, was in reality marked by class struggle. It was only due to the existence of a powerful enemy that there was temporary unanimity, but the fall of Carthage gave free reins to man's evil nature.[2]

These instances show that in Greek and Roman historiography there was before Livy's time a fully developed idea of the pattern of Roman history. The Romans owed their empire to their ancient *virtutes*, but, after all their enemies had been defeated, excessive prosperity and external security undermined the old simple way of life and brought an end to national unity.

It is easy to see that Livy's theme in his preface follows the same idea: *vita*, *mores*, *viri* and *artes* won Rome her empire, until inevitable decay set in. The immediate cause of the decay was too much prosperity. In the preface Livy seems to follow Polybius more closely than Posidonius and Sallust in that he does not mention the important part played by *metus hostilis*. But, as we shall see, there are traces of this idea elsewhere in Livy.

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[1] Cp. F. KLINGNER, Über die Einleitung der Historien Sallusts, Hermes 1928, p. 165 ff.; SCHUR, *op.cit.* p. 74 ff.

[2] These ideas of Sallust are cited by Augustinus, *De civ. D.* 2, 18 (= fr. 11, MAURENBRECHER): Rome had been harassed by civil strife from the very beginning, but *discordia*, *avaritia*, *ambitio*, as well as the other vices usual in a time of prosperity greatly increased after the fall of Carthage. Cp. further 3, 17 (= fr. 12, MAURENBRECHER).

It might, however, be argued that the preface does not show Livy's real attitude, because in writing it he may have availed himself of the conventional ideas, typical of the prefaces of ancient historical works. In my work »God and Fate in Livy» I have, however, demonstrated that Livy's attitude, expressed in the preface, to the influence of irrational factors on the course of events is in conformity with his practice of paying little attention to them in the narrative.[1] The same may be said about that part of the preface in which Livy sets out his view of the pattern of Roman history.

Livy argues in the preface that the rise of Rome was due to *vita* and *mores* of the ancient Romans. Now one of the most salient features of Livy's work is his praise of the exemplary conduct of *maiores*. Almost every page will bring this out. One point may suffice to illustrate the contribution of the *vita* and *mores* to the building up of the empire: Livy's insistence on the toughness of the Romans which prevents them ever admitting defeat. Notice e.g. the exclamation in 9, 19, 9: *Uno proelio victus Alexander bello victus esset: Romanum quem Caudium, quem Cannae non fregerunt, quae fregisset acies?* It is precisely in his description of Rome's recovery from the Cannensian defeat that Livy pays his most explicit tribute to the spirit of the Roman people. In one passage Livy writes that when the defeat became known, the fear and consternation reigning in the city were so great that he is unable to describe them (22, 54, 7—8). A new shattering defeat had been added to Flaminius' destruction the year before, and the whole of Italy was soon at Hannibal's mercy (54, 9). But, exclaims Livy full of pride, the spirit of the Roman people was unbroken (54, 10): *Nulla profecto alia gens tanta mole cladis non obruta esset.* He mentions the defeats of the Carthaginians in both Punic wars, and points out the difference (54, 11): *nulla ex parte comparandae sunt (scil. clades) nisi quod minore animo latae sunt.* The same note is sounded at the end of book 22, which contains the story of the most shattering defeat of the Romans after the Gallic invasion (61,13): *Nec tamen eae clades defectionesque sociorum moverunt, ut pacis usquam mentio apud Romanos fieret.* In this passage another quality of the Roman people is eulogized: the greatness of soul which makes them forget bitterness and petty political rivalries in time of danger (61, 14): *quo in tempore ipso adeo magno animo civitas fuit, ut consuli ex tanta clade, cuius causa maxima fuisset, redeunti et obviam itum frequenter ab omnibus ordinibus sit et gratiae actae, quod de re publica non desperasset.* The patricians refuse to take advantage of Varro's defeat to revenge themselves on the great democratic leader.

[1] See p. 52.

Again, in the preface Livy ascribes the Roman empire to the *artes* of the Romans. It is likely that this term means much the same as the *iustitia* and *aequitas* to which Sallust makes frequent reference. This is in fact brought out by a passage where Livy dwells on the beginnings of Rome's moral decay. Perseus had been deceived by false hopes of peace. The senate approved of this, but not unanimously (42, 48, 4): *veteres et moris antiqui memores negabant se in ea legatione R o m a n a s agnoscere a r t e s.* They point out that it had not been the habit of the Romans to defeat their enemies by deceit (48, 5 ff.). A good example of how the *artes* of the Romans brought them success is found in the story of Camillus. The city of Falisci, besieged by Camillus, surrendered out of gratitude because he had freed the children of certain noble Falisci brought to him by a treacherous paedagogus (5, 27). Camillus explains his principle to the paedagogus (27, 6): *Sunt et belli, sicut pacis iura, i u s t e que ea non minus quam f o r t i t e r didicimus gerere. Iustitia* and *fortitudo* are here put side by side as factors which make for Roman successes. Livy brings out the moral of the story in 5, 28, 1: *Camillus — — i u s t i t i a f i d e q u e hostibus victis cum in urbem redisset.*

Finally, in the preface Livy asks the reader to pay attention to the *viri* who helped to build up the Roman empire. It is highly improbable that he refers to the whole Roman people by this term. We have found that Livy has a conception of history which is in many respects similar to Sallust's. Here, again, we can point to the example of Sallust. Reflecting on the course of Roman history, Sallust remarks in *Cat.* 53, 4: *Ac mihi multa agitanti constabat p a u c o r u m v i r o r u m egregiam virtutem cuncta patravisse.* A rapid glance at Livy's work suffices to convince us that for him the Roman empire was largely the work of some few outstanding persons. Romulus and Numa, who respectively, founded the city by force of arms and ruled it with law and morality, Camillus, who saved the Romans during the Gallic invasion, Fabius Maximus, who frustrated Hannibal's attempt to make an end of the war, Scipio Africanus, the conqueror of Hannibal, and Aemilius Paulus, the conqueror of Perseus, figure in Livy's work as such persons. There are, however, limits to Livy's hero-worship. No hero can alter the working of the historic laws that determine the rise and fall of nations. The heroes could work miracles as long as they were supported by the unspoilt *vita* and *mores* of the Roman people, but when decay had begun, no hero could change the course of history. This is shown by Livy's attitude to Augustus' social legislation (see p. 62 f.).

This may suffice to illustrate the fact that Livy, in writing history, genuinely follows the principle stated in the preface. The Roman empire was not won by any superhuman agency. It was due to the *virtus* and *iustitia* of the Romans and to the work of the great Roman leaders.

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It is more difficult to decide the question of whether Livy, in writing history, really follows the theme of Rome's inevitable and ever increasing moral decay and its culmination in his own age. Livy's history, in the form in which it has come down to us, ends with the events of the year 167 B.C., whereas the decay was regarded as having really set in after the year 146 B.C. There is, however, evidence that Livy pursues the theme of decay in the lost part of his work. In the first place, we have found that the attitude expressed by Livy in the preface to the factors to which the greatness of Rome was due concurs with his practice in the narrative. Why, then, should Livy have failed to pursue the other part of the theme explicitly stated in the preface, Rome's moral decay? Moreover, the narrative contains certain references to the beginning and the causes of the decay.

We have found that there were two factors generally held responsible for the corruption: excessive prosperity, which undermined the old, simple way of life, and external security, which rendered strong discipline superfluous. These ideas are to be found in Livy's narrative.

As to the former idea, Livy puts special emphasis upon the corrupting influence of the riches of Asia. In one important passage he mentions that the troops of Cn. Manlius were made *ditiores quam fortiores* by the easy circumstances of Asia (39, 1, 3—4), and that they introduced the beginnings of foreign luxury into the city (6, 6—9). The similarity of this to a passage in Polybius (31, 25, 3—7, p. 56 above) is obvious. It is almost certain that Livy dwelt upon the consequences of prosperity and luxurious living in the lost parts of his work.

Though Livy does not refer in the preface to the influence of *metus hostilis*, it is evident from the narrative that this idea is very important for him. He sometimes remarks upon the fact that civil strife raged when there was peace abroad, but, with the outbreak of war, order was restored, e.g. 2, 54, 2: *Paci externae confestim continuatur discordia domi;* 3, 9, 1: *Sic res Romana in antiquum statum rediit, secundaeque belli res extemplo urbanos motus excitaverunt.*[1] Again,

[1] Cp. God and Fate in Livy p. 61.

the idea of *metus hostilis* is clear in the story of Numa.[1] According to Livy The purpose of Numa's religious reforms was to prevent the Romans being corrupted by the leisure his policy of peace had brought them (1, 19, 4): *ne luxuriarent otio animi quos m e t u s h o s t i u m disciplinaque militaris continuerat.* We may argue as follows: Livy thinks the fear inspired by a powerful enemy is necessary to keep a people in good order and to prevent corruption. With the fall of Carthage that fear vanished. Accordingly, the result was general decay. Some words put into Hannibal's mouth seem in fact to foreshadow developments after 146 B.C., (30, 44, 8): *nulla magna civitas diu quiescere potest; si f o r i s hostem non habet, d o m i invenit.* Unfortunately the books which deal with the third Punic war have been lost, but we can see from *periochae* 48 and 49 that Livy paid great attention to Scipio Nasica's opposition to the destruction of Carthage. I think we are safe in assuming that the Posidonian theory of the consequences of the fall of Carthage was discussed in Scipio Nasica's speeches.

It might, however, be argued that Livy did not consider the decay brought about by *divitiae* and *otium* as an inevitable process, because the Augustan restoration inspired him with new hope. This view is in fact maintained by some scholars who assert that pessimism is only a secondary motif for Livy, an aftermath of the experiences of the revolutionary period.[2] There is, however, an unmistakable reference to Livy's own age in the preface: *haec tempora quibus nec vitia nostra nec remedia pati possumus.* H. Dessau, it is true, asserted that this is a reference to the social legislation proposed but withdrawn by Augustus in the year 28 B.C. Dessau maintained that Livy's words indicate approval of Augustus' policy, though Livy is aware of the fact that the corrupted state of Roman society means that even measures to remedy the evils meet with opposition.[3] I, however, agree with those who are sceptical about the existence of such a view in Livy.[4] He is clearly pessimistic about the present, as may be concluded from many remarks in which the great

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[1] *Ibid.* p. 43.

[2] E. Burck, Livius als augusteischer Historiker, Welt als Geschichte 1935, p. 469; E. Howald, Vom Geist antiker Geschichtschreibung, München & Berlin 1944, p. 170 ff.; F. Klingner, Römische Geisteswelt, München 1956, p. 435 ff.

[3] Die Vorrede des Livius, in: Festschrift zu Otto Hirschfelds 60. Geburtstage, Berlin 1903, p. 461 ff.

[4] See P. G. Walsh, Livy's preface and the distortion of history, American Journal of Philology 1955, p. 370, fn. 10: »There is no real evidence — — that Livy prostituted his talent to serve Augustus' moral revival. One should rather ascribe to him disgust about the immoral state of contemporary Rome, with some scepticism about the feasibility of Augustus' reforms».

past is contrasted with the immoral state of contemporary society, e.g. 4, 6, 12: where is now the *modestia, aequitas, altitudo animi* which once reigned in the whole people; 10, 9, 6: *pudor hominum* was once sufficient to uphold the authority of the laws; 26, 22, 15: parents were once respected, but now their authority has disappeared. It is unlikely that Livy thought Augustus capable of putting a stop to Rome's moral decay. That decay was due to the working of the historic laws which were quite as inflexible as natural laws.

But though Livy thinks Rome will decay further, he is not as pessimistic as Sallust. Between the two men there is a difference. Sallust, who lived at the darkest moments of the revolutionary period, was inclined to deny even Rome's early history any real greatness. Livy recognized the high moral status of the ancient Romans, and, full of pride, proclaimed that no other state had succumbed so late to *avaritia luxuriaque.*