Towards a Reassessment of Livy as Military Historian: Some Preliminary Findings

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Abstract

Contemporary evaluations of Titus Livius's qualities as a historian highlight the numerous deficiencies perceived in his works. One of the most profound is Livy's weakness in discussing military matters. However, given the enormous importance of Livy's work for understanding Roman history and the importance of war in the text itself, a more detailed analysis of how he handles military affairs seems warranted.

This essay will provide such an analysis. Due to the vastness of Livy's work, it will not attempt to discuss the whole of it; rather, it will restrict itself to exploring how war and combat are handled in Livy's first pentad (Books 1-5). It will describe how Livy tends to present military operations, to test the assertion that (as one critic points out) Livy's battle pieces "do not reveal just what [modern military historians might] want to know."

Keywords: Livy, Roman History, Ancient Warfare, Roman Warfare, *pilum*

Hacia una reevaluación de Tito Livio como historiador militar: Algunos hallazgos preliminares

Resumen

Las evaluaciones contemporáneas de las cualidades de Tito Livio como historiador ponen de relieve las numerosas deficiencias percibidas en su obra. Una de las más profundas es su debilidad al abordar cuestiones militares. Sin embargo, dada la enorme importancia de la obra de Tito Livio para comprender la historia romana y la importancia de la guerra en el propio texto, parece justificado un análisis más detallado de su tratamiento de los asuntos militares.

Este ensayo ofrecerá dicho análisis. Debido a la vastedad de la obra de Tito Livio, no se intentará analizarla en su totalidad; más bien,

se limitará a explorar cómo se abordan la guerra y el combate en los primeros cinco libros de Livio. Se describirá cómo Tito Livio suele presentar las operaciones militares, para comprobar la afirmación de que (como señala un crítico) sus piezas de batalla «no revelan precisamente lo que [los historiadores militares modernos] podrían querer saber».

Palabras clave: Tito Livio, Historia romana, Guerra antigua, Guerra romana, pilum

重新评价作为军事史学家的李维——一些初步发现

摘要

关于提图斯·李维作为历史学家的当代评价强调了其作品中的诸多不足之处。其中最突出的不足之处是李维在讨论军事问题上的不足。然而，鉴于李维的作品对于理解罗马史的巨大意义，以及战争在文本中的重要性，似乎有必要对他如何处理军事事务一事进行更详细的分析。

本文将提供这样的分析。由于李维作品之多，本文不会试图讨论其全部内容；相反，本文将仅限于探讨李维在前五部书（第一至第五部）中如何处理战争和战斗。本文将描述李维倾向于如何呈现军事行动，以验证正如一位评论家所指出的断言，即李维的战争作品“并未揭示（现代军事史学家）可能想知道的内容”。

关键词：李维，罗马史，古代战争，罗马战争，皮卢姆重标枪

I. Livy the Military Historian: Modern Appraisals

All modern students of Roman history will readily acknowledge the enormous importance of the work of Titus Livius, commonly referred to as Livy. While less than a third of the 142 books of his mighty *Ab Urbe Condita* remains, the magnitude of his work—which aimed, as that title would imply, to tell of all of the history of Rome from its foundation to the time of Augustus—means that a huge amount of what is known about the Romans comes mostly, and in many cases solely, from Livy. It is probably no exaggeration to suggest that Livy is a pillar by which the entire edifice of Roman historical scholarship is supported. Yet if the *importance* of Livy's work is essentially not questioned, its *excellence* occasionally is. As all who have made more than a passing investigation of his

work will admit, Livy is an indispensable but far from perfect historian, and indeed the appraisals of his qualities in modern scholarship certainly do not hide (and may indeed dwell on) the deficiencies that are perceived to exist in his work. One of the areas in which he is often found to be wanting is in his discussion of military matters, which is of particular importance considering just how prominent war and warfare is in the *Ab Urbe Condita*. As Livy himself states, one of the main elements of his work is his chronicle of *per quos viros quibusque artibus domi militiaeque et partum et auctum imperium sit.*[1] The surviving portions of Livy indicate that this is no idle comment; indeed, as one scholar puts it, "Livy records and narrates more battles than any other ancient writer and for many of these his is the only surviving account."[2] Thus, real or suspected flaws in his presentation of *res militares* are of some significance towards Livy's reputation as a historian and can—and indeed ought to—limit just how reliable his history actually is.

Given these facts, it is perhaps not untoward to briefly describe some of these failings. One magisterial author dismisses Livy "as a narrator of battle" with the brutally simple statement that he is "beyond reclaim."[3] A later major analysis of Livy's work is of a similar opinion but is slightly more expansive about Livy's faults.[4] There is, first and foremost, a pervasive and, indeed, undisguised pro-Roman bias. Far from simple favoritism, it is claimed, Livy's need to glorify Rome caused him to distort, omit, or even alter facts about engagements in which Romans were worsted, with some massive defeats becoming Wellington's "near-run things." Moreover, in those defeats which Livy does allow himself to present as such, mishaps which may have occurred because of ill-considered battlefield decisions made by commanders whom the author himself wishes to praise were sanitized to remove the general's mistakes from the account.[5] Other detractions include Livy's abiding concern with style and readability, which weakens his discussion of war and battle when it leads him to elide important tactical details in some of his battle accounts for the sake of dramatic tension or clarity of expression.[6] In this manner, Livy's quest for elegance deprives his readers of facts necessary for a complete understanding of the operations. And if it is claimed that Livy was not doctoring his battle narratives or polishing them to the point of erasing crucial details, then he still managed to make significant blunders from sheer incompetence. Livy has a poor grasp of geography, which certainly diminishes his combat reports.[7] Moreover, he "certainly had no military experience; he is so ignorant of the practical aspects of soldiering that he can never have thrown a *pilum* in anger," and is claimed to have been so foolish as to claim that this weapon—the Roman heavy javelin—could be thrust as well as thrown.[8] In the pages of Livy, then, armies perform feats which no collection of soldiers of the time could reasonably have performed, their commanders conduct maneuvers which make no logical sense, and his battle-pieces read as if composed by a man who frankly had no idea how war

was actually fought, presumably because he had never seen it for himself. Even scholars who are more generous in their criticism of Livy nevertheless attribute these kinds difficulties to him—according to the translator of the first Loeb volume of his text, Livy was "(n)either well informed nor specially interested in … the art of war."[9] Another critic, perhaps the most delicate of all (and, coincidentally, the only one who produced significant works of military history of his own), gently observes that "(t)he battle pieces of that admirable man of letters do not reveal just what we want to know."[10]

Such, at least, has certainly been the prevailing opinion of Livy as a military historian for the last seven decades at least. However, in recent years, this assessment has been subject to some scrutiny. First and foremost, many of the authors of these opinions have themselves softened the harshness of their judgment in the very works in which they offer it, usually on the grounds that Livy was apparently not writing for generals but for a far more general audience.[11] Secondly, the premise that Livy is a poor military historian almost always derives from passages in his text that contradict other written sources covering the same material. When this does occur, Livy is generally assumed to be less reliable than the other sources. However, an irresistible justification as to *why* these other sources are to be preferred is rarely furnished. Irritatingly circular logic then ensues. It is well-known that Livy is unreliable because he does not always compare well to other sources, which are more reliable than Livy is. After all, it is well-known that Livy is unreliable; *quod erat demonstrandum*. Many of those who decry Livy's reliability note his Livy's treatment of the Second Punic War, which is contrasted to that of Polybius. Because the authority of Polybius is to be preferred (Livy, in fact, drew upon Polybius himself), such comparisons are almost always unfavorable. However, it is not infrequently the case that the only source to which Polybius *himself* can be compared is Livy. This process is then extended to other periods which Livy covers, even if the parallel source to which he is matched is not regarded as highly as Polybius is. Even if it may be conceded that Livy warps or mishandles the occasional notice from the Hannibalic War, and that Polybius is in every case to be preferred, Livy's text is of such enormity that a few bungled passages amidst his vast corpus might not necessarily reflect the whole text.

Lastly, Livy is often found wanting in his discussion of war and warfare because he has his soldiers perform exploits or describe the use of weaponry, which do not adhere to accepted wisdom about the capabilities of Rome's armies or the function of its arms.[12] Yet in no case is Livy cited with having men do things that would have been flatly *impossible*; in the pages of Livy, there is never a case when a Roman cavalryman lifts a battleship, for example, nor does any infantryman ever eat the sun. His men may occasionally do things that seem to defy conventional logic about how Roman soldiers are supposed to behave. Still, any historian with even a passing interest in war and

Statue of Roman historian Titus Livius at the Austrian Parliament Building. Titus Livius, known as Livy, was born in 59 BC and died in AD 17. He was a Roman historian best known for his monumental work Ab Urbe Condita, which chronicled the history of Rome from its legendary founding. [Photo by Bwag, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons]

combat can readily call to mind several episodes in the works of unimpeachably "reliable" historians in which the actions of men or use material departs from what is typically expected. Even the alleged howler about the incorrect use of the Roman javelin, offered as a succinct illustration of Livy's naïveté, inexperience, or ineptitude, has not incontrovertibly persuaded all modern historians of these defects. For one thing, Plutarch specifically mentions that *pila* were used in battle as thrusting weapons, a maneuver ordered by no less illustrious a commander than Julius Caesar himself.[13] Additionally, as another commentator on Livy points out, the bungle about the *pilum* seems to come from 9.19.7-8, where the operative phrase in Latin is *pilum, haud paulo quam hasta vehementius ictu missuque telum*. Because *ictus* is paired with *missus*, that sentence is often translated as "the javelin, a weapon more powerful thrust or thrown than a spear." It can, however, just as easily mean "the *pilum*, which is more powerful than a spear *on being thrown and finding its target*." The fact that Rome's heavy javelins could regularly pin two thick Greek *hoplon* shields together shows that this estimation is not a bad one for the relative levels of penetration a *pilum* could achieve when used for its main purpose, *id est* when it was thrown, which is precisely how Livy indicates they were deployed in the passage.[14]

Questions about Livy's competence (or, more specifically, the generally accepted lack thereof) have recently come under further investigation. However, there is certainly room for further inquiry of this sort. This may, perhaps, be explored more fully elsewhere. However, there remains that line of argument hinted at above; namely, that Livy's depiction of war is less than ideal, not because of what he *does* describe, but because of what he *does not*, and therefore "(t)he battle pieces of that admirable man of letters do not reveal just what we want to know." To put it another way—students of military history would find Livy frustrating (the argument runs), not because of the answers he provides, but because of the questions he elects—or neglects—to ask. It should be noted that this mild critique is the only one made by an actual modern student of ancient military history, as opposed to other scholars whose concerns are more philological in nature. It is also perhaps the one whose amplification is the most valuable—whether Livy's information is accurate is of no use if the information provided is not the right kind. Unfortunately, the author who respectfully offers it does not himself elaborate on how Livy may not be furnishing the right type of information. Nor, in fact, is such an analysis found in any of the other critics just mentioned, and even though, again, attempts are beginning to be made to "rehabilitate" Livy as a military historian, those attempts invariably focus on Livy's answers, not his questions. It may, perhaps, not be untoward to propose that such a study might be undertaken with profit.

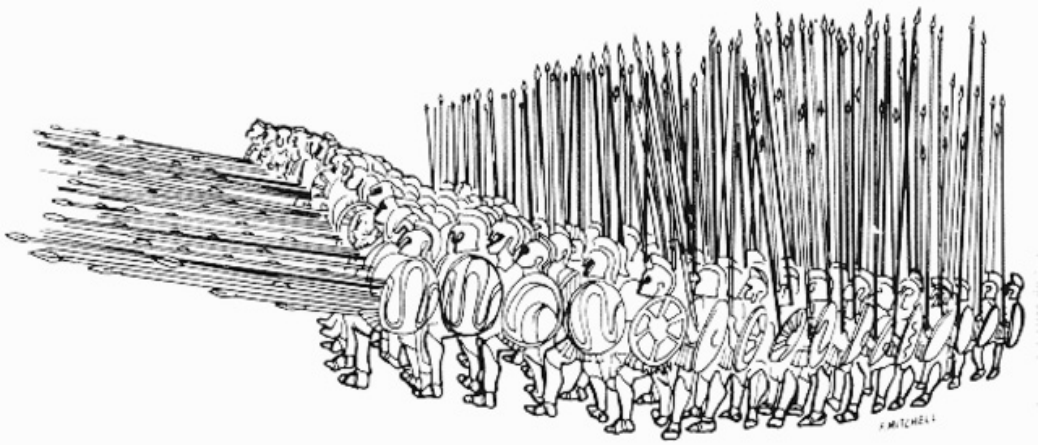
Modern portrayal of Roman legionaries carrying pila. The pilum (plural: pila) was a heavy javelin used by Roman soldiers. It was about 2 meters (6.5 feet) long, with a wooden shaft and an iron shank ending in a pyramidal tip. Designed to penetrate armor and shields, it was thrown before close combat. Upon impact, the iron shank often bent, making shields unusable and preventing enemies from throwing the pila back. Roman legionaries carried two pila, launching them in volleys to disrupt enemy formations before engaging with their gladius. This tactic weakened opponents, leaving them vulnerable. The pilum was a key weapon in Rome's military dominance, evolving over centuries before being phased out in the 3rd century AD. [Wikimedia Commons]

II. Livy the Military Historian: What Kinds of Questions Does He Ask?

Thoughts of this kind, at least, have led to the beginnings of precisely such an investigation, the very early stages of which will be offered here. Yet a few things should be indicated before this appraisal begins. Firstly, this essay will avoid offering extensive commentary on the "truth" of what Livy narrates, especially through a synoptic comparison of that author with other ancients who relate some or all of the same events that he does. Again, such a task is itself not without merit, and a few works have begun to take steps in that direction. Still, such will not be attempted here—Livy's qualities as a military historian will be evaluated strictly based on what he says (or does not say) himself and will not be filtered through the prism of other sources. Secondly, a thorough investigation of all of Livy's books would

easily overwhelm the space allotted to this piece and could easily fill volumes. For the present, therefore, books one through five—the so-called first "Pentad," encompassing the military history of Rome from the arrival of Aeneas to the departure of the Gauls after the sack of Rome in the fourth century—will be the object of survey.[15]

To commence—Livy, by his own account, was determined to write a history of the Romans and the deeds in peace and war that built their empire. The pages of books 1-5 of the *Ab Urbe Condita* are therefore filled with war and battles, describing 229 separate military engagements (defined for these purposes as an indication of violence in which a body of organized men who either were the authorized representatives of their communities, or who claimed to be such, fight another group of armed men representing another community). If, in Livy's descriptions of these 229 engagements and the wars of which they are part, there is not "just what we want to know"—if, another words, Livy does not ask the right questions—then an analysis of his treatment of this warlike ought to begin with precisely what questions he does ask to see how far short of what it is "we want to know" his lines of investigation are.



Drawing of the Macedonian Phalanx. The Macedonian Phalanx was a military formation developed by Philip II of Macedon and later employed by Alexander the Great. It consisted of heavily armed infantrymen known as phalangites, who wielded sarissas—long pikes measuring 15 to 21 feet (4.5 to 6.5 meters). The phalanx operated in tight, rectangular formations, with multiple rows of soldiers advancing in unison. This formation's advantages included its superior reach and strong frontal defense. Such a complex battlefield maneuver required highly trained phalangites. However, the rigid formation made it difficult to adapt to uneven terrain and left it vulnerable to cavalry or light infantry attacks on its flanks. Ultimately, Roman legions outmaneuvered the phalanx with their more adaptable formations. [Wikimedia Commons]

a) The Basics

Of all the things military historians might want to find in the reports of Livy, a few fundamental types of fact readily suggest themselves. It seems logical to assert that, at minimum, a modern scholar looking at the battles of Livy would reasonably expect to know who fought, when, where, and what the outcome of the combat was.

To all of these basic questions, Livy may generally be relied upon to give some answer; clearly, these questions concerned him, too. Proceeding to them severally—to the question of "who fought," Livy returns the names of the parties involved in all 229 cases, whether these parties be Roman or whether—as is the case in seventeen of these clashes—Livy is discussing wars waged between other people which would have affected the Romans (such as, for example, the battles between the Etruscans and the Gauls in Book 5).[16] To the question of *when* these parties fought, Livy's answers are slightly more nuanced. This is because, despite the title given to his work (which may not have been the one its author had bestowed upon it), Livy very rarely uses "ab urbe condita" (or "years from the foundation of the city") to date events in Books 1-5. The first of these books, after all, recounts the wars fought in Italy's mythic past throughout the end of the Roman monarchy, including four fought centuries before the city was founded in 753 BCE.[17] For the battles fought during the monarchy, far more common are indications in the text of times *terminus ante quem*, such as the nine led by Romulus Rex, which must have been fought between the foundation of the city and the forty years given as the length of his reign 1.15.7).[18]

Beginning in Book 2 (which coincides with the foundation of the Republic), Livy typically provides the names of the chief magistrates in office at the time when an event occurred to provide chronological context. Since in Livy's time these could be compared to the *Fasi Capitolini* (lists of these magistrates known to have been but in public places), for the 190 battles outlined in Books 2-5, Livy furnishes reasonably precise dates for all but fourteen of them.[19] Of the remaining fourteen, two were mentioned earlier—namely, they are the battles between the Gauls and Etruscans in Book 5, ones that seem to have occurred at a time which Livy himself apparently did not know precisely.[20] The others are found between Chapters 39 and 40 of Book 2, discussing the vengeful rampage of the exiled Coriolanus against the city, which happened at some time after 491, the year of his banishment, and 487.

Next: to the matter of *where* these battles were fought, Livy, again, almost always has an answer—for 197 of the 229 battles in Books 1-5, Livy provides some indication of the where it transpired, either by identifying a specific place or by giving enough in the full narrative description of hostilities for a reasonable guess for the location to be made. Finally (and perhaps most importantly), for only three battles across the expanse of Books 1 through 5 does Livy not mention an outcome, so few that each can be briefly mentioned.

The first of these is conveyed in 2.8.6, where Livy mentions that the consul fought the city of Veii, but does not explicitly mention or even allude to what happened. More complicated is the battle in 4.26.6, which at first glance is fairly straightforward—Livy mentions that "some sources" pass along that the Aequi and Volsci were met on the Algidus river, and that their defeat of the Romans by the consuls led to the appointment of a dictator. However, the previous several sentences cast doubt on whether a battle actually occurred, and whether the unusual amount of time taken by the generals to entrench and train led to the recall of the consuls. Finally, in 4.30.14, Livy notes that there was a battle against the Veientines and Fidenates at Nomentum, and while it was followed by a truce, it is left ambiguous whether the Romans won, lost, or were held to a draw. For the other 226 engagements, Livy supplies either an implicit or explicit statement as to what had happened, even if merely noting that the battle had been inconclusive.

b) Specifics

In general, then, Livy fairly consistently provides his readers with the bare minimum of who fought, when, where, and to what outcome, in the battles he mentions. Beyond these fundamentals, however, his details are less abundant. For example, while Livy often furnishes particulars as to why the combatants in the battles he describes took to arms, he omits such reasoning for almost a quarter of them (57 out of 229 battles). If he gives any *casus belli* at all for these 57, it comes in the form of a desultory "rumors reached Rome that some enemy was preparing for war, and the Romans marched against them." Once war is declared, Livy offers practically nothing about what the specific strategic role, if any, these battles play in the wars of which they are constituents, generally contenting himself with conflating the cause of the war with the objectives of fighting. To put it another way, if (for example) the Romans went to war because their territory has been ravaged by the Aequi, Volsci, or Sabines (against some combination of whom the Romans fought practically all of the battles discussed in Book 3), then the strategic objectives of the battles that resulted were to repel and avenge the invasion. In only six instances throughout Livy's five books there are variations from this formula. Four of these six involve wars declared without provocation in Book 1, of which one was a battle fought by king Tullus Hostilius for apparently the sole purpose of fighting a successful war (1.22.1-1.25.14), and three were fought by Ancus Marcius, apparently to capture prisoners to increase Rome's population (1.33.4-5). The other two are in Book 2, where the Latins, bound by treaty obligations to the Romans, sought permission to fight the Aequi who had invaded their lands. The Romans instead fought the Aequi for the Latins, for the sole purpose—Livy claims—of keeping the Latins from becoming too comfortable with fighting their own enemies and reaffirming their dependence on Rome (2.30.7-9; 2.31.4-6).

In a similar vein, when actual combat is joined, Livy is decidedly selective about the details of operations

he tends to include. For instance, if the battle he is documenting is one fought by Romans, Livy will almost always identify the commander of the Roman side. For only thirty-six of these engagements does Livy fail to do so, and almost every one of these battles either involved a raid on Roman territory (in which the Romans are not combatants, but victims of aggression), or occurred during the period when the Romans experimented with a magistracy called "military tribunes with consular power." Since anywhere from three to eight of these could be elected in a year, Livy will sometimes fail to specify which one was in command during the particular battle. By contrast, he is far less apt to include the name of an enemy captain, such that of all the battles fought by the Romans in Books 1-5, only fourteen enemy commanders are named.[21] Indeed, of these fourteen, no fewer than five were themselves at one point Roman: Titus Tatius, L. Tarquinius Superbus, Arruns Tarquinius, Titus Tarquinius, and Gnaeus Marcius Coriolanus.

About the soldiers themselves, Livy has even less to say (or so it appears at first glance). If it is a commonplace that ancient authors grotesquely exaggerate the numbers of participants in the battles they record, Livy might well be the exception, at least in Books 1-5. This can be asserted because there is frankly nothing to exaggerate: in only nine battles in Books 1-5 does Livy offer any indication of the numbers of participants involved at all. Of these nine, for three of them only the number of Romans are given (2.30.7-9, 2.31.1-3, 2.50.1-11), and in five others, it is the merely numbers of the enemy that are included (3.18.4-9, 4.57.7, 4.59.3-10, 5.32.3, 5.32.4).[22] In only one confrontation are numbers passed along for both sides (2.30.10-15, when the Romans are described as having fielded three legions' worth of men against the Volsci, and their enemy is held to have marshalled the exact number). And if Livy is reticent about the number who take part, he is equally reticent about those who fall. In just eight episodes, Livy conveys the approximate number of casualties. For three of these, it is only the Roman slain who are numbered: the two Horatii brothers, who died facing the Curiatii triplets in the regal period (1.22.1-1.25.14); the 305 members of the *gens Fabia* who die in their private war with Veii in 477 (2.50.1-11); and the 5,800 Romans who died across several battles with the Hernici in 464 (3.4.7-8, 3.5.5-9, 3.5.10-11). The enemy dead are only given in four engagements outside of the aforementioned Curiatii triplets who fell against the Horatii (the dead of the Aequi and Volsci who fell in the two encounters discussed in 3.5.1-3; 13,470 more Volsci killed in 3.8.6-11; and 7,000 more Aequi killed in 3.31.3-4).

If Livy rarely numbers the soldiers in his reports, he somewhat more frequently takes note of what "branch of the service"—if the term may be forgiven—they fought; thirty-six of his battle reports mention that cavalry was involved to varying extents.[23] On the other hand, he is particularly reticent—almost maddeningly so—about whatever weapons and armaments they may have used. Although *use* of weapons is portrayed quite frequently in Livy, the

weapons themselves are almost never named; instead, Livy uses generic terms like *tela* (for weapons of all kinds) and *ferrum* (literally "iron," the Roman equivalent of "cold steel"), and has his soldiers protected by *arma* (literally "arms" in a non-anatomical sense). Only fourteen times does Livy directly name any of these *tela* or *arma*, in which instances naming the *gladius* or sword four times, the *hasta* or thrusting spear five times, and *parma* or cavalryman's shield twice.[24] The remaining four notices involve words which usually mean "javelins," namely *pilum* (2.30.10-15; 2.45.1-2.47.9; 2.65.1-6) and *verutum* (2.20.9). Yet only once, when a verutum is being employed, are these weapons being treated as missile weapons; each mention of the *pilum* sees it used, not as a javelin, but as a spear. There are several possible explanations for this. One is that the *pila* were indeed being used as thrusting spears, a function that they could perform (see above). Another may be that Livy used a term for "javelin"—*pilum*—to mean "spear," in much the same way as modern audiences might mention "throwing" spears (even though "spear" properly refers to a stabbing weapon which stays in the hand), and that this was a stylistic choice rather than one dictated by ignorance about which was which. As far as weapons borne by the army as a whole, Livy describes the use of siege engines—and names those engines—a total of three times: once in the context of the siege of Pometia in 502 (2.17.1-7), once in discussing a siege of Fidenae in 435 (4.22.2-6), and once in his description of the lengthy campaign to besiege Veii from 405-396 (5.1.1-7.13).

Once the battle finally commences, Livy typically provides a straightforward account of what transpires. Certain incidentals are typically omitted, however. Livy almost never mentions the time of year in which a battle occurs, for example, and does so only twice (both in discussion of battles waged in Rome's mythic past by its founder-king Romulus: 1.5.7-1.6.2; 1.9.10 - 1.10.2). Nor does he often mention the time of day, either; in only seventeen reports is the specific time of day given for a single engagement.[25] Livy is generally loath to note the duration of a particular battle, doing so only 41 times and almost always to note when an engagement lasted for more than one day. Finally, in only 27 battles does Livy mention any geographical feature of the field on which the battle occurs, and in every case, the feature is mentioned because it plays a direct role in the battle.

III. Conclusions

The foregoing sought to reexamine Livy, often regarded as a poor military historian, and determine if, at the very least, he endeavors to pose the right kind of questions, regardless of how sound the answers he provides are. It is far from a complete survey: after all, questions of the type outlined above are not the only ones which might be sought in Livy's text, and there are many others which Livy ought to ask for "(t)he battle pieces of that admirable man of letters" to "reveal just what we want to know." Furthermore, the First Pentad (under sur-

vey here) represents just a little over a thirtieth of what Livy had once written and is not quite a sixth of what remains. Additionally, the period encompassed by that First Pentad was a time when the Romans did not write history as it is now known, largely contenting themselves with producing yearly notices of a few sentences in length which briefly summarized the events of the year (the first acknowledged Roman historian, Fabius Pictor, would not start writing more expansively on Rome's past until the 200s BCE).[26] Hence, even if Livy had wanted to be more fulsome in his account of Rome's wars, it can be doubted whether he would have found much more information to include. Finally, more research (currently in progress) will be needed to determine whether the treatment of war and warfare in the First Pentad represents its treatment by Livy in the whole (or at least the remaining parts) of the *Ab Urbe Condita*. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to venture that, if the First Pentad is indeed a representative enough sample, Livy as a narrator of battle is hardly beyond reclaim, and that in fact he goes far toward being able to tell the modern historian much of what he, she, or they might want to know.

About the Author

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Endnotes

1 Preface of Book 1, section 9. For context, the slightly expanded reference is: *Ad illa mihi pro se quisque acriter intendat animum … per quos viros quibusque artibus domi militiaeque et partum et auctum imperium sit* ("To these matters may the reader pay particular attention … through what men and by what methods in peace **and in war** [emphasis added] was Rome's power born and increased").

2 Samuel Koon, *Infantry Combat in Livy's Battle Narratives* (Oxford, UK: BAR Publishing, 2016), 23.

3 Sir Ronald Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1958), 156.

4 Much of what will be discussed in the paragraph to follow is the opinion of Patrick Walsh, *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), with specific citations below.

5 For a discussion of such "patriotic distortions" see Walsh, *Livy*, 98-99, 105.

6 Walsh, *Livy*, 197-201, 204.

7 Walsh, *Livy*, 153-157.

8 Walsh, *Livy*, p. 4 (for the conclusion that Livy never experienced combat, though this is an inference rather than a conclusion based on any literary source that explicitly confirms this lack of experience), 157-158 (mentioning the *pilum* specifically), and 143 (though Walsh suggests that is the result of a mistranslation from the Greek of Livy's sources).

9 B. O. Foster, "Introduction." In *Livy in Fourteen Volumes I: Books I and II* (B.O. Foster, trans.), ix-xxvi. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1919), p. xxvi. Burck agrees (E. Burck, "The Third Decade." In *Livy*, edited by T.A. Dorey(editor), [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971], p. 38), noting that "expert knowledge and little interest in detailed accuracy by Livy has long been proven in the spheres of military life, strategic planning, battle reports and the nature of siege operations," as does Luce (Torrey Luce, *Livy: The Composition of His History* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977], p. 41), who declares that "Military maneuvers per se did not particularly interest him."

10 Frank Adcock, *The Roman Art of War Under the Republic* (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1960), pp. 8-9.

11 So Burck, *loc. cit.;* Walsh, *Livy*, 159. Similar is Luce, *Livy*, xvii.

12 Walsh (*Livy*, 143) notes two fairly egregious examples. The first (which Walsh does not cite but is from Livy 38.7.10) involves the Romans besieging Ambracia, who had resorted to dig a mine under its walls and attempted to use a barricade against counterminers made out of doors. This appears to be Livy attempting to make sense of Polybius 22.28, where the miners and counterminers protected themselves with large square sheilds (**θυρεός** in Greek. This word descends from the Greek **θύρα** (door), so it is easy to see how that might have been mistranslated. However, it is *also* possible that Livy's version is the correct one, since the same Polybius passage also mentions that combatants protected themselves with "wicker-work" (**γέρρον**), which, which can mean "ox-hide shields" but far more commonly means "wattled screens from the marketplace." Romans and Ambraciots could easily have used improvised materials to block each other, just as Livy says. The second "howler" (for which Walsh again does not give citation) is a comparison of the final stage of the battle of Cynoscephalae, found in Livy 33.6.1-33.10.10 and Polybius 18.20-27. At the climax of this battle, Macedonian King Philip orders his reinforcements to do *something* with their spears and charge downhill against the Romans and rescue the men already engaged. Polybius uses a verb form of **καταβάλλω**, which can mean "lower" (in the sense of level) but can also mean "throw down; discard." This latter is how Livy recounts it (*hastis positis*), which is said to be an error of translation and inexperience; after all, why would a phalanx ever discard their spears, the primary weapon of that formation? Except even the text of Polybius provides a possible answer: the Macedonian *sarissa* was over fifteen feet in length, and with these cumbersome weapons soldiers were being asked to charge downhill (into their own troops, whom they were to rescue) after a thunderstorm the night before, which would have rendered the ground slippery and treacherous (as Polybius himself explicitly states). An attack with swords – far lighter and more maneuverable) might in fact make perfect sense here. Nor does the misunderstood gesture of surrender Polybius reports – that the Macedonians raised their spears, their king having retired – invalidate this hypothesis, as Polybius directly states that this action was performed by Macedonians who had reached the summit in their flight (and who could thus have easily resumed their spears, perhaps precisely so they could make this sign of surrender). Livy himself seems to suggest that these unfortunates were a reserve who had never been sent down the hill at all, thus without *hastis positis*. Thus, in both of these cases Livy may not have "mistranslated" Polybius nor had the "temerity" to correct him (Walsh's word; Luce, *Livy* 39 also states that this is happening with Livy's depiction of Cynoscephalae) but was presenting a version which diverges from Polybius but is not nonsensical for that.

13 Plutarch, *Pompeius* 69.2-3; *Caesar,* 45.

14 Koon, *Infantry Combat,* 24 (which also references one of the passages of Plutarch mentioned above). However, see below about Livy's use of *pilum.*

15 Livy's use of five-book Pentads to organize his work is explored extensively by Luce, *Livy*, beginning with page xviii. Walsh, *Livy*, 5-8 also provides lengthy discussion of these, as do several of the contributors to Dorey, *Livy.*

16 Battles such as those found in 1.1.3; 1.1.5-9; 1.2.1-3; 1.2.5; 1.5.3-4; 1.5.7-1.6.2; 1.7.1-3; 2.14.5; 2.14.6-9; 2.53.1-3; 2.53.4-5; 3.7.5; 4.10.5; 5.34.9; 5.35.2; 5.36.5-8; and 5.45.1-3.

17 Found in 1.1.3, 1.1.5-9, 1.2.1-3, 1.2.5. Three others include two fought by supporters of Romulus and Remus against Alba Longa (1.5.3-4, 1.5.7-1.6.2), as well as another between the followers of Romulus and those of Remus, with its tragic result (1.7.1-3).

18 However, it seems that this was an approximation, as the reign of Romulus is states as having been thirty-seven years in 1.21.5. Similar dating ranges are used for all the subsequent later kings; for example, the three wars fought by Tullus Hostilius must have happened during his reign, given as having begun eighty years after the first year of Romulus (as Romulus is claimed to have ruled for thirty-seven years, as was noted above, and his successor Numa Pompilius to have done for forty-three as mentioned in the same spot) and lasting for thirty two years (1.22.8).

19 Modern readers can be guided by these magistrates, as well, since the existing fragments of the *Fasti* have allowed for their reconstruction to reasonable completeness.

20 5.34.9; 5.35.2.

21 Amulius, Titus Tatius, Mettius Fufetius, Arruns Tarquinius, Lars Porsenna, Octavius Mamilius, L. Tarquinius Superbus, Titus Tarquinius, Gnaeus Marcius Coriolanus, Attius Tullius, Cloelius Gracchus, Aequian named Cluilius, Lars Tolumnius, Brennus.

22 In fact, of these the total number of the enemy is directly stated only once (3.18.4-9); the others mention merely the number of prisoners taken, from which the enemy strength can (somewhat imprecisely) be extrapolated.

23 1.12.1-1.13.1; 14.4-11; 1.27.4-11; 1.30.4-10; 1.37.1-4; 1.37.5-6; 2.6.4-2.7.3; 2.17.1-3; 2.19.3-20.13; 2.25.1-2; 2.25.3-4; 2.25.5; 2.26.1-3; 2.31.1-3; 2.42.3-4; 2.43.7-10; 2.45.1-2.47.9; 2.49.9-12; 2.53.1-3; 2.53.4-5; 2.65.1-6; 3.22.3-9; 3.23.3-6; 3.28.1-10; 3.69.8-3.70.14; 4.17.10-19.8; 4.26.11-29.5; 4.32.8 - 34.7; 4.37.6-39.9; 4.47.1-4; 4.47.5; 5.1.1-7.13; 5.28.8-13; 5.32.3; 5.32.4; 5.39.1-42.18.

24 Swords: 1.22.1-1.25.14; 2.30.10-15; 2.45.1-2.47.9; 4.37.6-39.9; spears: 1.27.4-11; 2.6.4-2.7.3; 2.19.3-20.13; 2.45.1-2.47.9; 4.17.10-19.8; cavalryman's shield: 2.45.1-2.47.9; 4.37.6-39.9.

25 1.11.5-9; 1.12.1-1.13.1; 2.26.1-3; 2.51.6; 2.59.6-11; 2.64.8-11; 3.28.1-10; 3.60.1-61.10; 3.61.10-63.4; 4.9.14-10.4; 4.37.6-39.9; 5.26.3-8; 5.28.8-13; 5.45.1-3; 5.45.4-8; 5.45.8; 5.47.1-7.

26 This is the theme of Bruce Frier's *Libri Annales Pontificum Maximorum: The Origins of the Annalistic Tradition*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).