

LIVY'S CHARACTERISATION OF INDIVIDUALS AND RACES IN BOOK 21

In an unusual modification of his annalistic approach, Livy opens Book 21 with the character of Hannibal. He does so in the context of claims, which consciously and artfully echo Thucydides 1. 1, about the power and status of Rome and Carthage as they embark on 'the most memorable war in history' (1) (all translations are taken from the Penguin translation). The two peoples are described as 'old antagonists', in a conflict fuelled by 'high passions' and 'mutual hatred'. Still in (1), we are told the story of the nine-year-old Hannibal begging his father to be allowed to accompany him on campaign and of the response of Hamilcar, obliging his son to take an oath of enmity towards Rome. We have barely reached (2) as we are apprised of Hamilcar's resentment at the defeat of Carthage in the first war with Rome (264-241 BC) and the fact that 'if he had lived, the invasion of Italy would have taken place under his (Hamilcar's) leadership, instead of Hannibal's'.

In this breathless and portentous opening Livy sets the scene for his account of the beginning of the Second Punic War in 219/218 BC. Already the characters of individuals and peoples are centre-stage. This should not surprise us. At *Preface* 10 Livy declares that history's chief merit is that it provides models from which,

'you may choose for yourself and for your own state what to imitate (and) mark for avoidance what is shameful in the conception and shameful in the result'.

Thus, in contrast to Polybius' focus on institutions, for Livy it is the workings of character that determine success and failure (Luce (1977) 230). Although he expresses the view that the Rome of his own day had witnessed individual and collective moral decline (*Preface* 12), Livy still judges Rome as having been 'richer in good citizens and noble deeds' than anywhere else. Our analysis of character in Book 21 will provide plenty of examples of Livy's judgement being manifest in his accounts of events.

The effectiveness with which he establishes the necessary characterisations will depend on a number of factors. These include the consistency of his portraits, their psychological credibility and explanatory power. At the level of methodology, consideration must be given to Livy's use of direct and indirect characterisation. His employment of speeches and comparisons will be seen to be important, as will the manipulation of religious elements as determinants of success and failure (Levene (1993) 245). Conclusions will be

drawn regarding his portrayal of both individual and collective character, attempting as far as possible to relate these elements to the necessary backdrop of Livy's literary and moral aims exemplified in Book 21.

As reflected in the opening, Hannibal is the book's most prominent personality. Much of Livy's over-all characterisation is engineered through various indirect means. These include a protagonist's own speeches, those of others referring to him and the response of other characters to his actions. For much of the time the reader is apparently left to make up his own mind about the individual (Walsh (1961) 82-83). However, although we will see these methods used for Hannibal, Livy also provides a direct character sketch (4), thus signalling his importance in the narrative. The virtues drawn to our attention by Livy encompass those of the inspirational leader ('power to command fire in the eyes', the common touch), physical courage and indefatigability, tactical skill, dash and confidence. Most of these are also illustrated in the narrative proper. For instance, Hannibal exhorts his troops to fresh efforts when they show signs of flagging before crossing the Alps (30) 'Hannibal's words were not without effect' (31). Later he rides ahead of the struggling column to show them Italy at their mercy, 'you are walking over the very walls of Rome' (35). At 58 he returns to the fray outside Victumulae before a wound is fully healed. He is tactically too smart for mountain tribesmen (34) and for the Romans (54).

However, it is notable that the summary character sketch of 4 does not draw our attention to other of Hannibal's positive qualities manifest elsewhere in Book 21. These include his wily agitation amongst the Spanish tribes (6) and his successful diplomacy with the Allobroges (31). Similarly his anticipation of events, such as over the Roman envoys to Carthage (9), and his delicacy of touch in handling his troops after the capture of Saguntum (21) are not represented in the character sketch. Also missing is Hannibal's evident pragmatism, for instance in dealing with deserters and disaffected troops (23). Perhaps the feature held in common by all these missing elements is that they do not quite fit the character sketch's over-all picture. This presents a charismatic, brave and tireless leader, quick on his feet in a tight spot, but perhaps too ready to dash into danger and (by default) lacking deeper wisdom and moral weight.

The implication is perhaps that in the character sketch Livy provides the view of Hannibal's virtues he would like us to have, but fails to maintain the consistency of this characterisation in the narrative. Support for this analysis may be found in the leader's vices enumerated by Livy in the sketch (4). His reported cruelty, dishonesty, impiety and general lack of honour clearly identify Hannibal as a barbarian, very un-Roman, commander. Even his acknowledged tactical genius is turned against him. Livy more than hints at a distaste for the methods of concealment and surprise used so effectively by

Hannibal. These are indicated to be un-Roman ways of fighting when Hannibal says, ‘the enemy you will find has no eye for this sort of stratagem’ (54). Livy may be suggesting (34) that his very use of such tactics renders him vulnerable and on the same level as barbaric local tribesmen. He clearly wishes Hannibal to be seen, for all his success, as something less than the best sort of leader.

The characterisation of other Carthaginians can be seen to bolster this aim. Hamilcar is a proud and embittered man, the oath that he requires of the boy Hannibal has a savage tinge (1). Hasdrubal’s peaceful and diplomatic policies contrast with the unrelenting militarism of Hannibal’s approach, underscored by the former’s violent end (2). In representing the pro-peace lobby in the city, Hanno provides an ostensibly Carthaginian coda to Livy’s orchestration of Hannibal’s character. Later we will review Hanno’s positive statements about Rome. Crucial for now is the uncompromising view he gives of the reckless aggression inherited by Hannibal from his father: ‘this son of his, with the devil in his heart and the torch in his hand’ (10). We have a vision of Hannibal as literally demonic in his power and violence.

Livy presents his Roman characters in a very different manner. Although not without their blemishes, these individuals are woven into a tapestry of generally positive features that, as we shall see, largely mirrors the view of Romans as a race portrayed by Livy in Book 21. This characterisation of Romans as individuals and en masse is underscored by the picture provided of the Carthaginians and other races. It also serves to highlight aspects of Hannibal’s character presented by Livy as less than fully moral or civilized.

Individual Romans are shown as being blunt and down to earth, for example Quintus Fabius in the embassy to Carthage (18), but also capable of allowing indignation to cloud their judgement, as in Lucius Manlius’ reaction to the Gauls’ mistreatment of envoys (25). The central Roman character, Publius Cornelius Scipio, shows foresight and thoroughness in locating Hannibal on the Rhône (26) and in reorganizing his forces once he realizes that he cannot prevent his adversary reaching the Alps (32). He is swift and decisive in reacting to a possible mutiny by the Gauls (48), as is his brother, Gnaeus, in restoring order in Spain (61). This Scipio also demonstrates clement and far-sighted judgement in bringing back into the fold Spanish tribes that had revolted. His restrained treatment of surrendered Atanagrum is clearly contrasted by Livy with the ‘lust, cruelty and inhuman (reference Hannibal above) beastliness’ inflicted by the Carthaginians on Victumulae (57), even though the town’s surrender should, according to Livy’s rules, have spared it such a fate.

Clouding the lustre of his persona and unlike Hannibal (58), after receiving a wound Publius Scipio appears to be surprisingly squeamish about 'the thought of blood and battle' (53). Although in the cause of raising the spirits of his men, he is still stretching the truth of the earlier account (29) in proclaiming that the cavalry 'had so splendidly routed the enemy horse on the Rhône' (40). Publius Scipio is also shown as capable of dissent and division from his fellow consul, Sempronius (52). However, the latter's recklessness and political opportunism are also evident in his eagerness to fight on the Trebia before being replaced by the following year's consul (53).

Despite the dangerous impiety of that successor, Flaminius (63), Publius Scipio is shown as respectful towards the gods (41). Again this is in pointed contrast to the inconsistent attitude of Hannibal towards the divine in (4), (21) and (45). Through Publius Scipio, Livy indicates another significant Roman characteristic. He appeals during the speech (40) to a generational solidarity between his own troops and those of earlier victorious Roman armies. Publius is thus portrayed as being well in tune with a general Roman feature seen by Livy to be an important ingredient in Rome's historical success.

Other such features include the calm and deliberate approach taken towards crises. Examples in Book 21 include the Senate's debate over Hannibal's initial move against Saguntum (6) and the diplomatic activity before the declaration of war (10-11 and 18). In fact Livy shows signs of impatience with this response, contrasting it with the decisive actions of Hannibal (11). Nevertheless, the underlying point is evident. Even with the Carthaginians established in Italy (59) and ominous portents exercising 'almost the entire community' (62), the normal elections are held and due religious processes take place. Indeed, it is the very irregularity of Flaminius's behaviour on taking office, amplified by what Livy may be implying is a destabilizing attack on senatorial trading activities (63), that provides the book's threatening climax.

Other features of the Roman people can perhaps be seen in their clearest light when contrasted with those of the Carthaginian and other races. In what is admittedly a political speech, the Carthaginian Hanno is described as saying of the Romans that 'their demands are mild, their first steps slow and cautious' (10). Over Saguntum and other aspects of legalities, Rome is portrayed as being honest and just. Although Livy feels that Rome let down her Spanish allies (he may have manipulated his chronology to minimize this by shortening the siege of Saguntum), he has harsh views on the 'perfidy' (4) of Carthaginians and the consistently unreliable and treacherous Gauls (12, 48 and 53).

We have already noted Livy's opinion of the basically stable and successful operation of the Roman State. In contrast, the legitimate government of

Carthage is portrayed as being in the nepotistic control of one family (2) and Livy is less than subtle in his suggestions of high office being obtainable as a reward for sexual favours (3). Publius Scipio appeals to his men's 'indignation and anger' at the injustice of Carthaginian behaviour (41). In contrast, Hannibal is seen to invoke baser motivations in his troops, 'rousing their greed with hope of rich rewards' (11), promising money and tax-free land 'to arouse the fighting spirit' of his Numidian allies (45). Mention has already been made of the Gauls' lawlessness and lack of honour (25). They are also said to covet gold (20).

All the combatants, Romans, Spaniards, Carthaginians and Gauls are characterized as being capable of courage and of fighting hard. However, the Romans are given the particular quality of steadfastness and relentless pursuit of a carefully considered aim, for instance in Hanno's speech (10). By contrast, there is a wildness about Livy's Gauls (28 and 42), manifest in their 'insatiable appetite for blood' (16). The Vaccaeii (in Spain) are shown as being rather dim in trying to wade across a river to fight cavalry (5). Even the bravery of the self-immolating senators of Saguntum (14) strikes an exotic, if not barbarous, note. The apprehension (32) of the Carthaginians at the prospect of the Alps seems quite justified by Livy's description of the crossing. Their endurance (35) and resourcefulness (37) are duly chronicled. However, the Romans are certainly not painted as any less courageous, for instance in their losing struggle at the River Trebia (55). Livy certainly does not shrink from describing the panic at Rome following Hannibal's early victories in Italy (57). However, as has been indicated, the normal political and pious religious routines are maintained and of course the response to the threat provides an opportunity for Livy's colourful prose and heightens the ensuing drama.

Livy's presentation of character in Book 21 can now be mapped against the criteria of effectiveness with which this analysis began. He is too good a writer and, who knows, perhaps too honest a historian to present us with wholly black-and-white, one-dimensional, characterisations. Nevertheless, apparent inconsistencies in personifications, such as those of Hannibal and Publius Scipio, do not mask the essentially schematic nature of Livy's accounts. In *Preface* 9 he declares his aim to be to 'commemorate the deeds of the foremost people in the world'. Thus, his determinedly Romano-centric approach should not surprise us. Its manifestations, however, may be more pervasive than seem obvious at first glance. The apparently antiquarian interest shown by Livy in the racial make-up of the Saguntines in fact identifies them as being in part descendants of Virgil's Italian (anti-) hero, Turnus (7). They are therefore in a sense 'us' rather than 'them'. Although Livy allows the Allobroges to be powerful and famous (31), such status is kept squarely in the context of Gaul, indicating no comparability with Rome.

Scipio and Hannibal express mutual respect (39), but we have already noted the limitations of Livy's positive view of Hannibal's character. It is probably meant to be to the Carthaginian's discredit that he later boastfully dismisses his adversary as 'that six months' general' (43). The characters in Book 21 might have acquired extra dimensions if we had available to us Livy's preceding decade (Books 11-20), covering the periods of the First Punic War and Pyrrhus. The long range of some of his illustrations of character, such as the unlikely early appearance of Scipio Africanus (46), is suggested by Jaeger ((1997) 137-143). As it is, the criticisms of Walsh ((1961) 88), that characters are often types, lacking individuality, finds some support in Book 21, particularly with regard to races. The negative attributes of Hannibal's personality can be seen as magnifications of general Carthaginian characteristics, while those racial features are themselves closely related to contrasting Roman virtues (Usher (1985) 176).

Nevertheless, there can be no doubting that Livy's colourful narrative is assisted rather than hindered by his portrayal of character. Grant ((1995) 16) notes the criticism of Livy that the high emotion and dramatic sweep of his accounts are more like those of a novel than a history. Livy's description of despair in Rome (57) can be seen, for instance by Feldherr ((1998) 7), as an example of the sensationalist approach to history, much criticised by Polybius (2. 56). In fact, in the context of the present topic it may not be unreasonable to turn that criticism into praise. In relation to Livy's stated aims and the extant works of other ancient historians, the characterisations in Book 21 are certainly memorable and vivid.

Pliny the Younger writes of a man who travelled all the way from Gades to Rome just to see Livy, so famous was he in his own day (*Letters* 2.3). Although he does not spell out why Livy was so renowned, it is worth recalling that Pliny was himself a self-confessed fan of history (9.16), correspondent of Tacitus and conscious stylist. The exact context of his story about Livy is praise of the rhetorician Isaeus. In vain *we* may wish for clearer indicators of historical accuracy in Livy. Whereas, based in no small part on the strength of his characterisations, it is perhaps no accident that the historian was in Pliny's thoughts when he commented on Isaeus, 'it is difficult to choose between his powers to instruct, to charm, or to move his hearers'.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Feldherr, A. (1998). *Spectacle and Society in Livy's Rome*. London. University of California Press
- Grant, M. (1995). *Greek and Roman Historians*. London. Routledge
- Jaeger, M. (1997). *Livy's Written Rome*. Ann Arbor. University of Michigan Press
- Levene, D. S. (1993). *Religion in Livy*. Leiden. E. J. Brill
- Livy. *The War with Hannibal*. Penguin, 1965
- Livy. *Preface*. Loeb Vol 1, (1976)
- Luce, T. J. (1977). *Livy: The Composition of his History*. Princeton. Princeton University Press
- Pliny the Younger. *Letters*. Penguin, 1963
- Polybius. *Histories*. Penguin, 1979
- Usher, S. (1969). *The Historians of Greece and Rome*. Bristol. Duckworth
- Walsh, P. G. (1961). *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods*. Cambridge. University Press.