

Ann Vasaly

Livy's Political Philosophy: Power and Personality in Early Rome. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. xi + 209 pp. \$90.00. ISBN 9781107065673 (hbk).

Vasaly's *Livy's Political Philosophy* is a welcome addition to a renaissance in Roman political thought, joining works by Atkins, Baraz, Connolly, Hammer, Strauman, and Zarecki, among others.¹ Deeply attentive to the philological nuances of Livy's writing along with his relationship to his Greek and Latin predecessors and contemporaries, Vasaly portrays Livy as a republican writer by stressing the didactic functions of Livy's history, the moral dimensions of his use of *exempla*, and the centrality of *concordia* as a social and political ideal. The only recent English language monograph on Livy's political thought in *Ab urbe condita*, it will be of interest to ancient historians, classicists, political theorist, and ancient philosophers.

The book consists of six substantive chapters, along with an introduction and conclusion. In the introduction Vasaly situates her reading of Livy's political thought against the backdrop of the tumultuous 1st century BCE, highlighting Livy's goal of 'rebuilding the state' (p. 8) through his historiography. Chapter 1, 'The Historiographical Archaeology', centers on a comparison between Thucydides, Polybius, Sallust, and Cicero's archaeologies and the first pentad of Livy's *Ab urbe condita*. Vasaly argues that Livy's similarity to Cicero suggests that the first pentad's 'chief value resided not in its historical accuracy but in its ability to convey abstract ideas' and to address 'the civic crisis facing the Roman state' (p. 21). In Chapter 2, 'Livy's Preface: A Reader's Guide to the First Pentad', Vasaly focuses on the framework that emerges from the preface to the first pentad, noting Livy's goal of focusing his reader's attention on 'the role both of cultural and political *instituta* in explaining how [Rome's] *imperium*' had developed (p. 30). Vasaly also suggests that Livy makes use of

1 Jed Atkins, *Cicero on Politics and the Limits of Reason: the Republic and Laws* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); Yelena Baraz, *A Written Republic: Cicero's Philosophical Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2012); Joy Connolly, *The Life of Roman Republicanism* (Princeton University Press, 2014); Dean Hammer, *Roman Political Thought from Cicero to Augustine* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); Benjamin Straumann, *Crisis and Constitutionalism: Roman Political Thought from the Fall of the Republic to the Age of Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2016); and J. Zarecki, *Cicero's Ideal Statesman in Theory and Practice* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014). I also note my *Republicanism, Rhetoric, and Roman Political Thought: Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus* (Cambridge University Press, 2011). Due to space limitations, I note here only recent monographs, and not the numerous articles and book chapters published on Roman political thought in the last 10 years.

the 'didactic' *exemplum* (p. 33), evident in his manipulation of sources, as in his depiction of Manlius Torquatus engaging in single combat with a Gaul in Book 3, with the Gaul 'motivated only by his desire for glory', and Manlius acting from 'obligations inherent in his position within a wider social nexus' (p. 33). To be sure, Livy has fictionalized the distant Roman past, as others have argued, but this fictionalization, on Vasaly's view, serves a moral and didactic purpose: to portray 'general truths' over historic specificity (p. 35). Such truths are central to Chapter 3, 'Monarchy and the Education of the Roman People', which deals with the 'political development' of Rome and the Roman *populus* in the regal period. Drawing our attention to the 'situational' ethic (p. 40) at play in the leadership of Romulus and Numa, who deploy tactics such as deception for 'the welfare of the state' (p. 46), as opposed to the immorality of Tanaquil and Servius, who seek only to secure power, Vasaly traces a process in which monarchy becomes arbitrary. This arbitrariness, in turn, shows 'how fragile is the restraining force of conscience and tradition under an absolute ruler' (p. 52), while *libertas* requires political 'maturity' (p. 54) on the part of the Roman people, who come of age during the regal period. Chapter 4, 'Tyranny and the Tyrannical Temperament', focuses on the role of 'familial stereotyping' of particular *gentes* across the first pentad, paying particular attention to the Appii Claudii, with Appius Claudius Crassus, a *decemvir*, embodying sexual libido, 'an expression of the depravity of the tyrant' and 'an analogue for the lust for power and the satisfaction of that lust through despotism' (pp. 69, 70). The *plebs*, analogized to Verginia's chastity, are portrayed as 'vulnerable, in need of vigilance and courage on the part of' their protectors, and 'possessing a passive rather than an active role in governance' (p. 72). We encounter, in Chapter 5, 'The Best Citizen and the Best Orator', model aristocrats – such as Manlius Capitolinus and L. Quinctius Cincinnatus – who cement *concordia* through their actions and speech, and who stand in contrast to demagogic leaders 'who manipulate the feelings of their audience in order to aggrandize their own positions without concern for the harm done to the state' (p. 90). The final substantive chapter, 'The Roman People and the Necessity of Discord', depicts the *plebs* as having a fairly fixed character, volatile at times, but also capable of spontaneous action marked by 'discipline and restraint' (p. 99) when responding to threats or harms. Popular leaders, in turn, may be either *vindices libertatis*, pursuing 'a *iusta seditio* against tyranny' (p. 109), or demagogues, deploying 'incendiary rhetoric' especially in service of the agrarian laws (p. 114). The true strength of the *plebs'* judgment, though, is evident in choosing patricians as military tribunes in Book 4, displaying 'moderation, fairness, and high-mindedness' (p. 121). In the Conclusion ('Livy's "Republic"'), Vasaly compares Livy and Cicero, both of whom sought to revive