

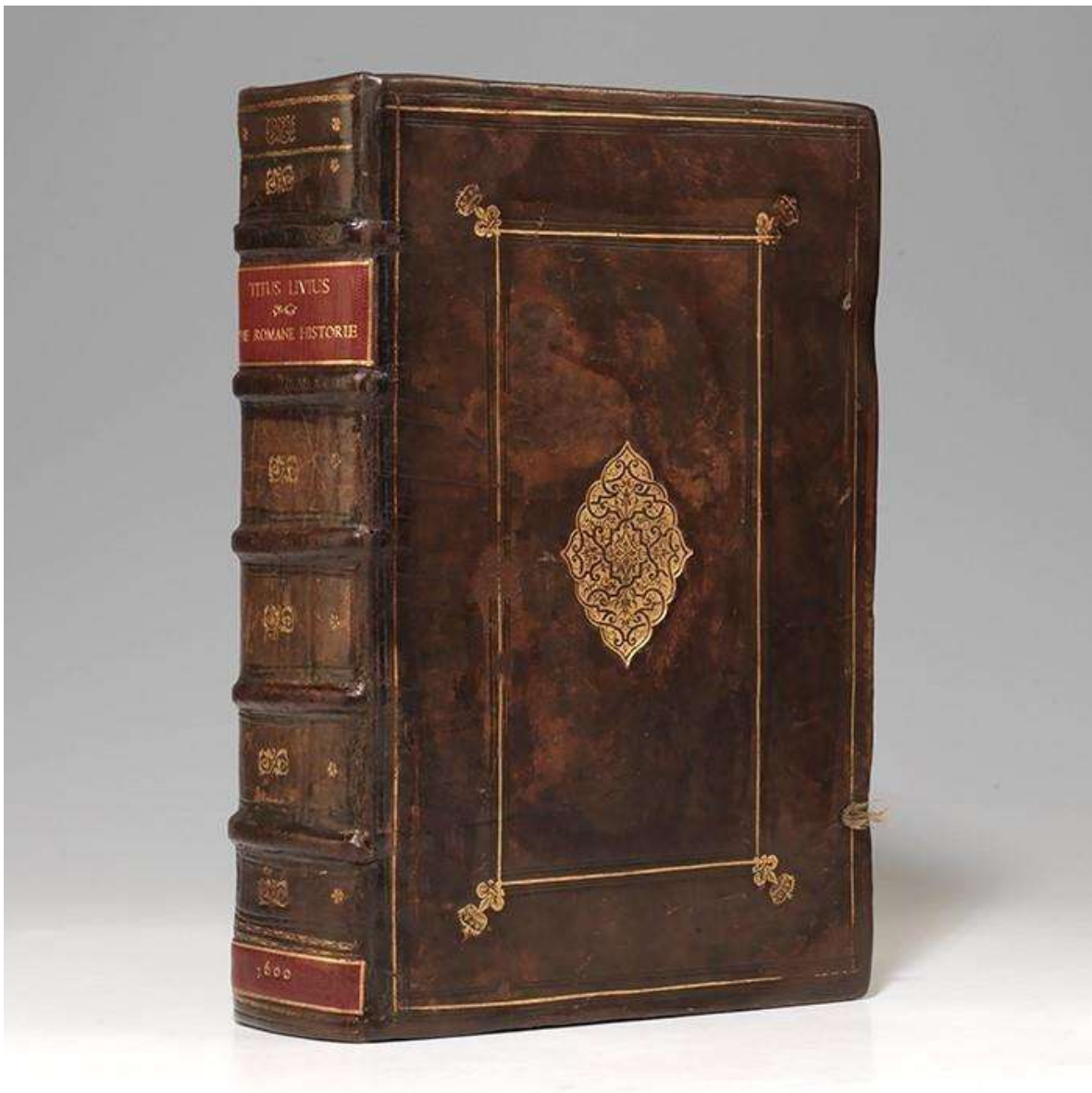
# "Romane History" (first English edition 1600) by Livy: A Canonical Book:

Curated by Stephen A Batman

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## Summary of this Particular Rare First Edition

**Livy, The Romane Historie Written by T. Livius of Padua. Also, the Breviaries of L. Florus: with a Chronologie to the whole Historie: and the Topographie of Rome in old time, 1600**



THE  
ROMANE  
HISTORIE WRIT  
TEN BY T. LIVIVS  
OF PADVA.

Also, the Breviaries of L. Florus: with a Chronologic to the whole  
Historie: and the Topographie of Rome in old time.

*Translated out of Latine into English, by PHILEMON HOLLAND,  
Doctor in Physick.*



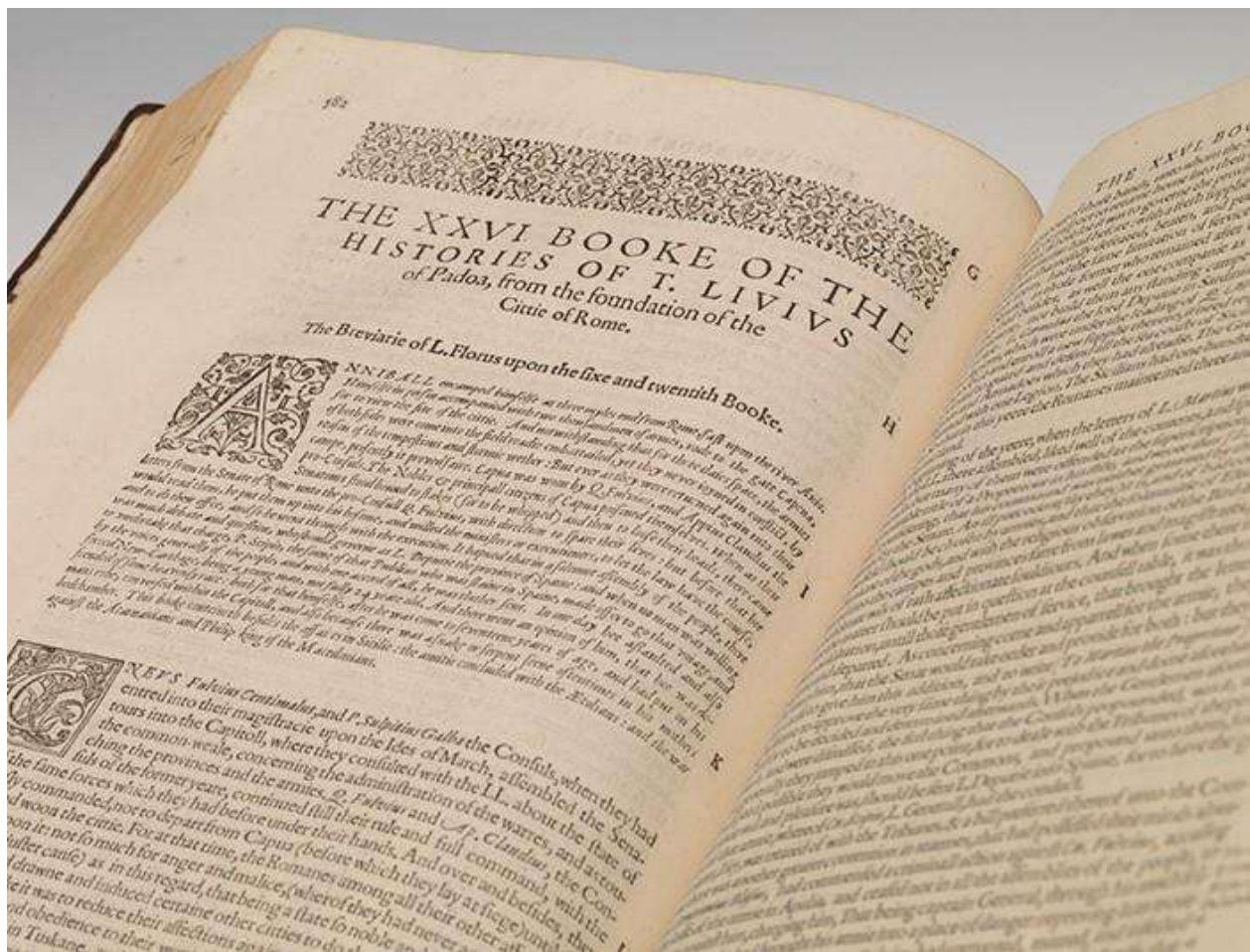
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Printed by Adam Ifflip.  
1600.

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Huntingtown, Dyfart. 1729. History  
Compared with y<sup>e</sup> Latin  
& think it a bad Translation



Lionel Tolmache  
Earl of Dyfart.





## **"LIVY GAVE ROME HER EPIC": 1600 FIRST EDITION IN ENGLISH OF LIVY'S HISTORY OF ROME**

*First edition in English of Livy's monumental history of Rome, translated by Philemon Holland, in exceptionally lovely early calf boards.* Titus Livius commenced his great history between 27 and 25 B.C., completing it only shortly before his death in A.D. 17. His genius lay in lively storytelling rather than critical history; his aim was to rekindle his fellow Romans' patriotic spirit by recounting their ancestors' heroic deeds.

"Livy's heroes were to revive again and again—in 18th-century Virginia and in Revolutionary Paris. There are still statues in the public parks of the founders of the American and French Republics clad in the togas or the armor of Cincinnatus or Horatius... Livy, not Virgil, gave Rome her epic" (Rexroth, 92-93).

"This was the first of that stately array of folio translations of the classics which issued from the pens of Philemon Holland, the 'translator generall in his age' (Pforzheimer 495). 'Holland's knowledge of Greek and Latin was accurate and profound, and his renderings are made in a vivid, familiar and somewhat ornamented English' (Drabble, 469).

The section on the "Topographie of Rome in old time" is translated from the work of J. Bartholomew Marlian. With woodcut-engraved title, initials, head- and tailpieces, woodcut portrait of Livy, and a woodcut-engraved portrait of Queen Elizabeth, to whom this edition is dedicated, on verso of title. Occasional mispagination as issued without loss of text; without initial blank.

STC 16613. Brueggemann, 634. Harris, 94. Lowndes, 1374. Engraved armorial bookplate of the Earl of Dysart.

LIVY. The Romane Historie Written by T. Livius of Padua. Also, the Breviaries of L. Florus: with a Chronologie to the whole Historie: and the Topographie of Rome in old time. London: Adam Islip, 1600. Thick folio (8-1/2 by 13 inches), early full paneled brown calf gilt rebacked and recornered with original spine laid down, raised bands, renewed red Morocco spine labels, remnants of cloth ties.

Three small tears along inner margin of title page, not affecting letterpress or woodcuts. A clean, nicely restored and handsomely bound copy.

## **Introduction**

"Romane History," the first complete English translation of Livy's monumental work "Ab Urbe Condita" (From the Founding of the City), was published in 1600 by Philemon Holland, marking a significant literary and cultural milestone. The original Latin text was composed by Titus Livius between 27 and 9 BCE during the reign of Emperor Augustus, a pivotal period that witnessed the transformation of Rome from a republic to an empire[3][12]. This comprehensive history chronicles Rome's journey from its legendary founding in 753 BCE through the expulsion of kings in 509 BCE and continues to Livy's own time under Augustus[12]. Though

originally consisting of 142 books, only 35 have survived intact, covering events from 753 to 293 BCE (books 1-10) and from 219 to 166 BCE (books 21-45)[12].

The publication of Holland's English translation in 1600 occurred during the Elizabethan era, a time of expanding intellectual horizons and growing national confidence in England. The late 16th century witnessed a surge in classical scholarship and a hunger for ancient wisdom among the educated classes. Queen Elizabeth I, whose portrait appears in the first edition alongside that of Livy, represented the embodiment of Renaissance ideals of learned rulership[1].

Economically, England was experiencing increased trade and prosperity, while politically, the Tudor dynasty had brought relative stability after the tumultuous Wars of the Roses. This environment created fertile ground for the reception of Livy's work, which offered both practical political wisdom and moral instruction through historical examples.

Philemon Holland's motivation for translating this massive work stemmed from the Renaissance humanist belief in making classical knowledge accessible to a wider audience. His translation was characterized by a sophisticated rendering of Livy's Latin into accessible English, preserving the rhetorical power of the original while making it comprehensible to Elizabethan readers[1]. The publication of "Romane History" in English allowed the educated non-Latin-reading public to access these influential historical accounts and moral lessons that had previously been the exclusive domain of those educated in classical languages.

## The Author

Titus Livius, commonly known as Livy, was born in 59 BCE in Patavium (modern-day Padua, Italy) and died in 17 CE[3]. Unlike many prominent Romans of his era, Livy did not pursue a military or political career but instead devoted himself entirely to scholarship[11]. This provincial background and scholarly focus would shape his perspective on Roman history and values.

Livy's life spanned one of the most transformative periods in Roman history—the collapse of the Republic and the rise of the Empire under Augustus. Though he lived through these tumultuous times, including the assassination of Julius Caesar and the civil wars that followed, Livy chose to document Rome's entire history rather than focusing solely on contemporary events. His comprehensive approach reflected his belief that understanding the past was essential for navigating the present[3].

Despite his close association with Emperor Augustus, who counted him as a friend and took interest in his work, Livy maintained a degree of intellectual independence[3]. He was famously criticized by Augustus for being a "Pompeian," suggesting sympathy for the republican cause that had opposed Julius Caesar[3]. This tension between Livy's republican sympathies and his position within the Augustan cultural milieu created a fascinating dynamic in his work, allowing him to subtly critique the imperial present while celebrating Rome's republican past[8].

Livy's historical approach was distinctly moralistic. He viewed history as a repository of exemplary tales that could inspire virtue and discourage vice. His narrative is filled with vivid character portraits and dramatic scenes designed to illustrate moral principles[3]. This approach made his work not just a chronicle of events but a guide to ethical conduct, which explains its enduring influence beyond purely historical interest.

Though widely respected at the imperial court, Livy's relationship with power remained complex[6]. His work reflects both patriotic pride in Rome's achievements and concern about moral decline in his own time. This tension between celebration and critique gives his history a depth and nuance that transcends simple propaganda, making it a lasting contribution to historical literature[8].

## **Why this is a Canonical Book**

"Romane History" deserves canonical status primarily because of its profound influence on American political thought and constitutional development. The Founding Fathers were deeply immersed in classical literature, and Livy's work stood among their most cherished texts, providing both inspiration and practical guidance as they crafted a new republic[11]. Thomas Jefferson, in particular, valued Livy so highly that he expressed distress when his daughter struggled with the text, considering mastery of Livy essential to her development as a true American[10].

The book's emphasis on republican virtue resonated powerfully with early American leaders who sought to establish a government based on similar principles. Livy's accounts of how Rome evolved from humble origins into greatness through the collective virtue of its citizens rather than through the genius of a few exceptional individuals provided an appealing model for the young American republic[10]. This narrative of collective achievement aligned perfectly with American democratic ideals and helped shape the national self-conception as a virtuous republic of citizen-farmers.

Livy's portrayal of heroic republican figures like Cincinnatus, who left his plow to save Rome and then returned to his farm once the crisis had passed, directly inspired American leaders[11]. George Washington was frequently compared to Cincinnatus, and his decision to relinquish power after his presidency was seen as embodying this classical republican virtue[11]. The Society of the Cincinnati, formed by officers of the Continental Army, took its name from this Roman hero celebrated in Livy's pages.

Beyond specific examples, Livy's moral approach to history—his belief that historical events unfold largely due to the moral qualities of key actors—aligned with the biblically-informed worldview of many American founders[11]. This moral framework provided a language for discussing political virtue and corruption that proved invaluable in early American political discourse.

Furthermore, Livy's work offered Americans a usable past at a time when they were consciously attempting to create a new political tradition. By studying Rome's rise from modest beginnings to world power, Americans could see their own national journey reflected and projected forward. Colonial Americans frequently referred to themselves as "the New Romans," explicitly drawing parallels between their own republican experiment and the Roman Republic described by Livy[10].

The first English translation by Philemon Holland in 1600 made these classical ideas accessible to generations of English-speaking readers, including the American colonists. Without this translation, Livy's influence might have remained confined to those with classical education. Holland's work thus served as a crucial bridge between ancient Roman political thought and American constitutional development.

## Five Timeless Quotes

1. "Better late than never" (*Potius sero quam numquam*)[6]

This concise maxim from Livy encapsulates a timeless principle of pragmatism and perseverance. In our current era of rapid technological change and complex global challenges, this quote reminds us that delayed action is preferable to permanent inaction. Whether addressing climate change, social inequality, or political reform, the principle acknowledges that while prompt action is ideal, the window for meaningful intervention rarely closes completely. For business leaders and policymakers alike, this wisdom encourages decisive action even when optimal timing has passed. The quote's enduring relevance lies in its recognition of human imperfection while still maintaining the imperative to act—a balance particularly valuable in our polarized political climate where perfectionism often becomes the enemy of progress.

2. "There is danger in delay" (*Periculum in mora*)[6]

This quote forms a perfect complement to the previous one, highlighting the tension between patience and urgency that leaders must navigate. In today's fast-paced world, where markets, technologies, and geopolitical situations can shift overnight, this ancient wisdom remains remarkably relevant. For corporate executives, investors, and government officials, the quote serves as a reminder that hesitation carries its own significant risks. The 2008 financial crisis and the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic both demonstrated how delayed responses can compound problems exponentially. In our contemporary context of accelerating climate change and technological disruption, Livy's warning about the dangers of delay speaks directly to our most pressing challenges, urging timely action even in the face of uncertainty.

3. "Experience is the teacher of fools" (*Stultorum iste magister est*)[6]

This provocative statement challenges our modern valorization of experiential learning by suggesting that the wise learn from others' experiences rather than requiring personal hardship.



In today's information-rich environment, where the collective experiences of humanity are more accessible than ever before, Livy's insight encourages us to leverage this wealth of historical and contemporary knowledge. For business leaders, it emphasizes the value of studying case studies, market histories, and the trajectories of other companies rather than learning exclusively through trial and error. For citizens and policymakers, it underscores the importance of historical literacy and comparative analysis when addressing social and political challenges. The quote's enduring value lies in its challenge to individualistic notions of wisdom acquisition, promoting instead a more collective and cumulative approach to knowledge.

4. "Friendships should be immortal, enmities mortal" (*Amicitiae immortales, mortales inimicitias debere esse*)[6]

This profound ethical principle speaks directly to our current era of intense political polarization and tribal animosity. Livy's wisdom suggests that while conflicts are inevitable, they should be temporary, while alliances and goodwill should be preserved indefinitely. In today's hyperpartisan political landscape, where former colleagues across the aisle are increasingly viewed as enemies rather than loyal opposition, this ancient wisdom offers a corrective perspective. For international relations, it suggests a path beyond permanent antagonisms toward more flexible and constructive engagement. For business leaders navigating competitive markets, it encourages maintaining professional respect even amid fierce competition. The quote's timeless value lies in its recognition that social cohesion depends on our ability to limit and transcend conflict while nurturing and preserving positive relationships.

5. "Words instruct, examples lead" (*Verba docent, exempla trahunt*)[6]

This insight into human psychology and leadership remains as relevant today as in Livy's time. It acknowledges that while verbal instruction is necessary, behavioral modeling exerts a far more powerful influence on others. For contemporary leaders in business, politics, and education, this principle emphasizes that their actions will inevitably speak louder than their stated values or policies. In our media-saturated environment, where inconsistencies between words and actions are quickly exposed and amplified, Livy's wisdom highlights the crucial importance of authentic leadership. For parents and educators, it reinforces the understanding that children learn more from what adults do than what they say. The quote's enduring value lies in its recognition of the fundamental human tendency to follow examples rather than instructions—a psychological reality that shapes everything from corporate culture to political movements.

## Five Major Ideas

### 1. The Moral Foundation of Political Liberty

A central theme throughout Livy's work is the inextricable connection between moral virtue and political freedom. He portrays Rome's rise to greatness as fundamentally dependent on the character of its citizens, particularly their discipline, courage, and civic-mindedness[8].

Conversely, he attributes Rome's decline to moral corruption, luxury, and self-interest. This moral-political framework posits that republics cannot survive without virtuous citizens, as freedom requires self-restraint and public-spiritedness. Livy's narrative demonstrates how shame (pudor) and sexual virtue (pudicitia) functioned as essential social regulators that preserved republican liberty[8]. When these moral constraints weakened, political corruption and tyranny followed. This perspective profoundly influenced American political thought, particularly the Founders' emphasis on civic virtue as the foundation of their new republic. The idea that liberty depends on moral character rather than merely on constitutional arrangements remains a powerful concept in American political discourse, informing debates about education, citizenship, and public service.

## **2. Collective Achievement Over Individual Genius**

Unlike other ancient historians who emphasized the role of exceptional individuals, Livy presents Roman greatness as the product of collective virtue and shared sacrifice[10]. His history often downplays individual achievements, sometimes not even naming the specific Romans who accomplished great feats. This approach portrays national development as an organic process involving the entire citizenry rather than the work of a few geniuses or heroes. This democratic vision of historical progress resonated deeply with American colonists, who saw in it a validation of their own egalitarian aspirations[10]. The idea that ordinary people of humble origins could, through hard work and moral rectitude, build something extraordinary offered a powerful narrative for the American experiment. This concept continues to inform American self-understanding, supporting both the ideal of meritocracy and the notion that national greatness emerges from the collective contributions of ordinary citizens rather than from elite brilliance alone.

## **3. The Cyclical Nature of Political Systems**

Livy's history presents a nuanced view of political development that challenges simplistic notions of linear progress. Unlike contemporaries who predicted Rome's inevitable upward trajectory, Livy recognized the cyclical patterns in political systems, where virtue leads to success, success to wealth, wealth to luxury, luxury to corruption, and corruption to decline[2]. This cyclical understanding acknowledges both the achievements and vulnerabilities of republics, suggesting that maintaining freedom requires constant vigilance against moral and political decay. This perspective influenced American constitutional thinking, particularly the system of checks and balances designed to prevent power concentration and corruption. The Founders' concerns about faction, luxury, and moral decline echo Livy's warnings about the internal threats to republican governance. This cyclical view continues to provide a valuable framework for understanding political development, offering a middle path between naive progressivism and fatalistic determinism.

#### **4. The Power of Historical Examples**

Livy's work embodies the belief that history serves not merely to record past events but to provide moral and practical guidance through exemplary stories. His narrative is filled with vivid accounts of heroic figures whose actions illustrate virtues to be emulated and vices to be avoided. This approach treats history as a repository of wisdom accessible through compelling narratives rather than abstract principles. The educational power of these historical examples was central to classical and Renaissance understanding of history's purpose, and it significantly influenced early American civic education[11]. The Founders frequently invoked classical examples from Livy to illustrate political principles and inspire virtuous conduct. This narrative approach to moral and civic education continues to influence American political discourse, where historical analogies and examples from the founding era are regularly deployed to frame contemporary issues and inspire civic action.

#### **5. The Tension Between Republic and Empire**

Throughout his history, Livy explores the complex relationship between Rome's republican institutions and its imperial expansion. While celebrating Rome's achievements, he subtly questions whether republican liberty can coexist with imperial power[8]. This tension reflects Livy's own historical context—writing during the transition from republic to empire under Augustus—and his ambivalence about this transformation. His work simultaneously glorifies Rome's greatness while mourning the loss of its republican virtue, creating a nuanced meditation on power and freedom. This exploration of the republic-empire tension proved particularly relevant to Americans as their own republic expanded across the continent and eventually developed global influence. The question of whether republican values can be maintained alongside great power status continues to animate American political discourse, informing debates about foreign policy, military intervention, and the proper limits of American power in the world.

### **Three Major Controversies**

#### **1. Historical Accuracy versus Moral Instruction**

One of the most significant controversies surrounding Livy's work concerns the tension between historical accuracy and moral instruction. Modern historians have frequently criticized Livy for prioritizing dramatic storytelling and moral lessons over factual precision[9][14]. Particularly in his accounts of early Rome, Livy blends historical facts with legends and myths, acknowledging himself that these early traditions "are more fitted to adorn the creations of the poet than the authentic records of the historian"[12]. His insertion of fictional speeches into historical narratives, while standard practice in ancient historiography, further complicates the historical reliability of his work. This approach has sparked ongoing debates about the proper relationship between history and moral instruction. Some critics argue that Livy's moral focus undermines his credibility as a historian, while defenders contend that his work should be understood primarily

as literature with historical themes rather than as modern history. This controversy reflects broader tensions between different conceptions of history's purpose—whether it should primarily inform, instruct, or inspire—that continue to animate historiographical debates today.

## **2. Republican Nostalgia versus Imperial Reality**

A second major controversy involves Livy's complex political positioning within the Augustan regime. While benefiting from Augustus's patronage and friendship, Livy maintained republican sympathies that occasionally surfaced in his work[8]. His history can be read as a subtle critique of imperial power, using the glorious republican past to shame his contemporaries who had accepted autocratic rule. Some scholars argue that Livy's work contains subversive elements designed to undermine the ideological foundations of the Augustan principate by highlighting the virtues of the lost republic[8]. Others maintain that Livy ultimately accommodated himself to the new imperial reality while preserving republican values in literary form. This controversy reflects the perennial tensions faced by intellectuals working under authoritarian regimes—how to maintain integrity while avoiding dangerous opposition. It also raises questions about the political function of historical writing: whether it primarily serves to legitimize existing power structures or to preserve alternative political visions during periods of authoritarian rule. These questions remain relevant for understanding the role of historical scholarship in contemporary authoritarian contexts.

## **3. Aristocratic Bias versus Popular Achievement**

A third controversy concerns Livy's social and political biases, particularly his attitude toward Rome's class conflicts. Critics have noted Livy's apparent sympathy for the patrician class and his tendency to portray popular leaders in a negative light[3]. This aristocratic bias potentially distorts his presentation of Rome's social struggles, understating the legitimate grievances of the plebeian class while emphasizing the wisdom of the Senate. However, this critique is complicated by Livy's emphasis on collective achievement rather than elite brilliance, suggesting a more nuanced view of Rome's social dynamics[10]. The controversy reflects broader debates about how class perspectives influence historical interpretation and whether elite-authored histories can adequately represent popular experiences and contributions. This issue remains relevant for evaluating contemporary historical scholarship, particularly regarding the representation of marginalized groups and social movements. It also connects to ongoing debates about meritocracy and social mobility in American society, where narratives of collective achievement often exist in tension with persistent structural inequalities.

## **In Closing**

Civic-minded Americans should read Livy's "Romane History" because it provides an indispensable foundation for understanding the classical republican ideas that profoundly shaped American political thought and institutions. The Founders were steeped in Livy's narratives, drawing from them both practical governance principles and moral inspiration as they crafted a

new republic[11]. By engaging with this text, contemporary citizens can access the intellectual wellspring that nourished the American constitutional tradition, gaining deeper insight into the classical antecedents of concepts like checks and balances, civic virtue, and the dangers of faction.

Beyond its historical significance, Livy's work offers timeless wisdom about the fragility of republican government and the conditions necessary for its preservation. His analysis of how moral decay undermines political liberty speaks directly to current concerns about civic disengagement, polarization, and institutional erosion[8]. By studying Rome's trajectory from virtuous republic to corrupt empire, Americans can better recognize similar patterns in their own political development and perhaps avoid Rome's fate.

Livy's emphasis on exemplary historical figures also provides powerful models of civic leadership that remain relevant today. Stories of figures like Cincinnatus, who relinquished power voluntarily after serving the republic, offer compelling counterpoints to modern tendencies toward power accumulation and celebrity politics[11]. These classical examples can inspire a renewed commitment to servant leadership and civic responsibility among contemporary Americans.

Furthermore, Livy's moral approach to history challenges the modern tendency to separate ethics from politics. His insistence that character matters—that the personal virtue of citizens and leaders directly affects political outcomes—offers a corrective to purely procedural or institutional understandings of democracy[3]. This perspective encourages citizens to consider not just what policies they support but what kind of people they are becoming through their civic participation.

Finally, reading Livy connects Americans to a shared Western intellectual tradition that transcends current political divisions. In an era of cultural fragmentation and competing historical narratives, engagement with foundational texts like "Romane History" can foster a common vocabulary and frame of reference for civic discourse. By wrestling together with Livy's complex legacy—appreciating his insights while acknowledging his limitations—Americans can practice the kind of thoughtful, nuanced engagement with the past that healthy democracies require.

For all these reasons, Livy's "Romane History" remains not just a historical artifact but a living resource for civic renewal—a canonical text whose wisdom continues to illuminate the challenges and possibilities of republican government in the twenty-first century.



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