POLITICS BY THE BOOK:
POLITICS AND EMPIRE IN EARLY LATIN LITERATURE[*]

According to Pliny the Elder, Julius Caesar told Cicero that it was more significant to have extended the borders of Roman *ingenium* ('talent') than the borders of Roman *imperium* ('empire') (*quanto plus est ingenii Romani terminus in tantum promovisse quam imperii*).[1] The intellectual frontiers that Caesar means are specifically those of oratory. In this passage, literary and military achievements are brought together to be contrasted: the imagery of triumph and frontiers applied to Cicero's efforts in Latin oratory underscores the gulf between the two spheres of activity.[2] However, this was not always so; the earlier Republic had seen the intertwining of imperial and intellectual advancement. This article will explore connections between empire and literature in the third and early second centuries BCE.[3] I will argue that Latin literature was, from its beginnings, an instrument for doing politics – and, more specifically, a means for conceptualising and effecting the embryonic Roman imperial project.

My category of 'literature' is a deliberately capacious one, crossing different genres and media. I also adopt an unashamedly historical and instrumentalist approach to this literature. This is not to say that the literature of this period was not composed, read or received in other ways, including less overtly political ones than I argue for here – indeed, one undercurrent of my argument is that this literature was a flexible and uncontrollable medium that served different narratives and agendas simultaneously. But in exploring the political and instrumental possibilities of literature here, I hope to amplify the case for a cross-disciplinary engagement with questions of literature and empire.

1. *Entangled Beginnings*

To focalise some of these connections, I want to start by taking us to the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea, to a site that marks both the end of the First Punic War in 241 BCE and the beginnings of Latin literature. This is an area of the Mediterranean seabed off the coast of the Egadi Islands, to the West of Sicily. On this seabed lies the debris from the final battle of the First Punic War, including a series of bronze *rostra* (rams) from the fronts of Roman and Carthaginian warships.[4] Several of these *rostra* bear inscriptions in Latin or Punic.[5] Their solid bronze weight is material testament to the costs of this battle.

The enmeshment of the end of the First Punic War and the beginnings of Latin literature is a point that has been well made by Matthew Leigh, Denis Feeney and Tom Biggs.[6] But it is worth pausing to reflect again on this moment in 241 because it nicely illustrates the intimate relationship between early Latin literature and empire. As Biggs has shown, it is illuminating

[1] Plin. *HN* 7.117. For the debate over the source of the alleged quotation from Caesar, see VOLK, ZETZEL 2015: 211–20; VOLK 2021: 236 n. 195; they settle on *De Analogia*.
[2] For the irony in the military imagery in this passage see TSCHIEDEL 1981: 75–6; VOLK, ZETZEL 2015: 214, 220.
[3] This article is of course indebted to earlier work on literature and politics in the Middle Republic, especially GRUEN 1990: 79–123; WISEMAN 1994, 2015; FLOWER 1995; HABINEK 1998; LEIGH 2004, 2010; FEENEY 2016; BIGGS 2020.
[4] On the geography and archaeology of this battle site, see TUSA, ROYAL 2012; ROYAL, TUSA 2019.
[5] On the bronze *rostra* and their inscriptions see PRAG 2014, 2017, 2019 (on the Latin inscriptions); GARBINI 2016, 2019; SCHMITZ 2019; GUZZO 2022 (on the Punic inscriptions).
[6] LEIGH 2010; FEENEY 2016; BIGGS 2017B, 2020.

to refract this moment through material objects as well as texts – and there is still more that can be squeezed out of the material evidence, thanks in part to recent archaeological finds.[7]

The battle site and *rostra* illustrate three dimensions of the enmeshment between literature and empire in the Middle Republic. The first is chronological and developmental. The Roman victory in the First Punic War marked the creeping beginnings of permanent Roman institutional presence overseas; the years around 241 saw a cluster of innovations that would later characterise Roman imperialism – praetors, taxation, roads.[8] Likewise, these years marked the start of what Feeney terms the 'crucial century' for the development of Latin literature.[9] September 240, eighteen months after the conclusive battle in the Egadi Islands, marked the performance at the Ludi Romani of the first play translated from Greek into Latin, composed by Livius Andronicus. Livius Andronicus' *Odyssia* and Naevius' *Punic War* followed in quick succession – Leigh's 'epic moment'.[10] These literary and imperial developments happened simultaneously and in dialogue.

The second dimension of the entwinement of literature and empire visible in this moment is geographical. As Leigh has shown, the seas between Italy and North Africa over which the First Punic War was fought are the same seas of Latin epic: Livius Andronicus' Ulysses wanders through them; when Aeneas makes his first appearance in Virgil's *Aeneid* – and, possibly, in Naevius' *Punic War* too – he is sailing 'just out of sight of Sicilian land' (*uix e conspectu Siculae telluris in altum*, 1.34) so cannot be far from the Egadi Islands battle site; Aeneas' father Anchises was buried at Drepanum, the Sicilian city that the Roman fleet sailed out from to fight this final battle of the First Punic War.[11] Early Latin literature and its reception is thus thick with references to the geography of this conflict.[12] Of significance to my argument about the specifically imperial resonances of this literature is the fact that we are here closer to Africa than to mainland Europe; and Sicily was not at this stage conceptually or politically Italian.[13] That is, these locations of both epic and conflict were outside of Rome and Italy; they were sites of interaction and conquest of foreign territory.

The third dimension of the relationship between literature and empire visible at this battle site concerns translation and the navigation of what Feeney terms 'sameness and difference'.[14] The *rostra* and their inscriptions thematise these issues. Their inscriptions in Punic and Latin have sometimes been taken as evidence of the cultural differences between Romans and Carthaginians, since there is an apparent contrast between the content of the Latin inscriptions and the first of two Punic inscriptions to be found.[15] The Latin inscriptions are brief and

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[7] For Biggs' discussion of the *rostra*, see BIGGS 2017a: 355–7, 2017b: 56–61, 2020: 122–4.

[8] On third-century Sicily as prototype for later Roman imperialism see PRAG 2007, 2013. As Prag stresses, evidence for all these developments – and especially their dating – must be treated with caution, but this period apparently saw the institution of a second praetor in 242 BCE to manage relations between Romans and non-Romans (PRAG 2013: 56); a further increase in the number of praetors to four in 227 BCE to enable one to be sent annually to Sicily and one to Sardinia (PRAG 2013: 54 n. 2, with references); the development of taxation (Prag 2013: 61, with references); the building of a road from Agrigentum to Panormus (UGGERI 2004; PRAG 2006). PRAG 2007 analyses military developments via the use of *auxilia* and *gymnasia*. On developments in the inter-Punic-War period more broadly see FEIG VISHNIA 1996.

[9] FEENEY 2016: esp. 122–3 on the Sicilian conquest as a catalyst, a connection that he stresses goes back to LEO 1913: 47.

[10] LEIGH 2010: 265. As he notes (265 n. 4), the precise dates of the two poems remain unclear.

[11] LEIGH 2010: esp. 275–6 on Livius Andronicus; 272 on Aeneas' first appearance in the *Aeneid*; 273–4 on the geographical and thematic connections between Aeneas' first appearance in Virgil (*Aen.* 1.34–5) and in Naevius (key evidence for which is the commentary of Macrobius, *Sat.* 6.2.30–1); 270, 272 on Drepanum (Leigh makes the connection with the Roman defeat in 249 but not with the battle of 241).

[12] On resonances of the First Punic War in Latin literature more broadly see BIGGS 2020.

[13] Though see PRAG 2013: 56 for the argument that it was in the First Punic War, and the kinship obligations on which it rested, that 'the concept of "Italia" was […] realised in practice'.

[14] FEENEY 2016: esp. 55–64, 111.

[15] BEARD 2015: plate 8; BIGGS 2017a: 357.

bureaucratic, recording a process of quality control: for example, *L(ucius) Quinctio(s) C(aii) f(ilios) quaistor probauet*; 'Lucius Quinctius, son of Gaius, quaestor, checked (this)'.[16] Consensus on the translation of the first Punic inscription has not been reached, but it seems to include an invocation to the god Ba'al and a reference to destruction via the sea.[17] However, Biggs has attractively shown that the concerns of this Punic text echo those of contemporary Roman monuments and literature, which also invoke gods, seas and storms.[18] And there are more explicit similarities between the Latin inscriptions and the second Punic inscription found in 2017. Exactly like the Latin ones, this text is bureaucratic and gives the name of the magistrate who checked the ram alongside the name of its maker.[19] As Jonathan Prag has pointed out, there is further evidence of cultural overlap in the homogeneity of the design of the *rostra*; placed side-by-side it is impossible to tell which is Roman and which Carthaginian without the evidence of the inscriptions and iconography, both of which might be missed at first glance.[20]

Thus, though the *rostra* are evidence of conflict between Rome and Carthage, they simultaneously speak to similarities and exchanges between these powers.[21] This navigation of sameness and difference was inherent to both early Latin literature and early Roman imperialism; questions about how Rome should relate to other states and what was distinctively Roman became urgent as Roman control expanded overseas. Ancient authors themselves focalised these questions through the issue of linguistic difference and translation. The theme of translation is played upon in the first line of Livius Andronicus' *Odyssia,* where Ulysses is described as a *uirum…uersutum* (Livius' adaptation of Homer's ἄνδρα …πολύτροπον); Stephen Hinds and Feeney have emphasised the multiple connotations of *uersutum*: not just 'wily' and 'well-travelled' but 'translated'.[22] The question of how Livius' Latin relates to Homer's Greek – where it is similar and where pointedly different – runs through the text and its reception. In the third and second centuries, Romans were also confronting issues of translation and multilingualism in their political interactions with other states – the real-life counterpart to the Latin literary project.[23]

The *rostra* and their historical context emblematise some of the shared themes that permeated literature and empire at this incipient moment. The rest of this article will explore these enmeshments in more detail. First, I will outline some broad structural connections

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[16] PRAG 2019 provides a full catalogue and edition of all eight Latin inscriptions on *rostra* found up to 2017. The quoted inscription is on ram no.8 (see PRAG 2019: 79–80).

[17] SCHMITZ 2019: 121: '[…] wrath pour out on him/it O Ba'al; opposite Greece may a lightning storm and its waters pull our enemy dow[n…]'. Cf. GARBINI 2019: 117.

[18] BIGGS 2017a: 355–7; he notes similarities with evidence including Anchises' invocation of Neptune in Naevius' *Bellum Punicum* (Blänsdorf 9 = Flores XI) and Scipio's dedication of the Aedes for the Tempestates (*CIL* 6.1287).

[19] 'Baalhanno son of Balyahon has covered (?) the spoils of war, he has checked it / Arish son of Abdashtart made this assault weapon': DE SIMONE 2019: 162.

[20] PRAG 2015: 85, also noted by BIGGS 2017a: 355. Curiously, Biggs' acknowledgement of the Carthaginian and Roman rams' physical similarities does not prevent him from interpreting them as 'visibly' foreign when displayed as *spolia* in the Roman Forum (see BIGGS 2017b: 57); I would argue harder for an ongoing, and poignant, balance between sameness and difference in this display context. On the rams' iconography, see OLIVERI 2019; ROYAL 2019.

[21] On Carthage as imperial model for Rome more widely see QUINN 2017.

[22] HINDS 1998: 61; FEENEY 2016: 54. For more instances of *uertere* as 'to translate' see MCELDUFF 2013: 195–6.

[23] The problem of translation and linguistic difference is a recurring theme in both Livy and Polybius' histories of the period: see, for example, Polyb. 20.10 and Livy 36.27 on differences between Roman and Aetolian understandings of the term *deditio* in 191 (on which episode see ECKSTEIN 1995); Livy 45.29 on Aemilius Paullus announcing the arrangements for Macedon in 167 in Latin and delegating the Greek translation to his praetor (cf. Flamininus proclaiming the freedom of the Greeks in Greek at the Isthmian Games in 196: Polyb. 18.46); App. *Sam.* 3.7.4–7 on Tarentines mocking Roman ambassadors for their poor Greek in 281. The *senatus consulta* sent out to the Greek East and written in a Greek liberally inflected with Latinisms exemplify the potential power dynamics of translation: on their language see SHERK 1969; ADAMS 2003: 6, 12, 36–7.

between literature and empire in the Middle Republic; second, I will consider a specific case study that shows the more active role that contemporary literary themes and associations played in the construction and conception of Rome's developing empire.

2. *Literature and Empire*

The years surrounding the First Punic War were a period of innovation and experimentation in Roman imperial control during which strategies and structures of rule were gradually developed. However, this process of development is obscured by the patchiness of our sources on early Roman administration in Sicily and by Polybius' teleological narrative, whose driving question takes the fifty-three years from 220–167 as an inexorable march to Roman hegemony, supported by already-effective civic and military institutions.[24] An alternative view of early Roman imperialism as contingent, fragile and experimental foregrounds its uncertainties and explains the need for spaces in which problems and conceptions of empire could be worked out; literature provided one such space.[25]

Connections between early Latin literature and early Roman empire ran broadly and deeply, with cross-fertilisation between the two spheres in the authorship, subject matter, performance and funding models of literary works.[26]

Authors of the earliest Latin literature are described as participants in, and in some cases products of, Roman imperialism. Both Ennius and Naevius had connections to leading Roman generals, Ennius to the Scipios, and Marcus Fulvius Nobilior and Naevius to the Claudii Marcelli.[27] Originally from southern Italy, Ennius is said to have been first brought to Rome from Sardinia by Cato the Elder in 198 BCE – an action that Nepos deems equally worthy of praise as military victory over the island.[28] Ennius later accompanied Marcus Fulvius Nobilior during his Aetolian campaign.[29] Both ancient and modern commentators have speculated that Livius Andronicus was enslaved and trafficked to Rome. Cicero cites Accius' claim that Livius was taken as a prisoner-of-war from Tarentum in 209; though since this postdates Livius' known literary works, modern scholars have often supposed that Accius' date is wrong and

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[24] Polyb. 1.1. On the patchiness of sources for the first decades of Roman control in Sicily see PRAG 2007, 2013.

[25] FEENEY 2016 esp. 122–151 likewise sees a close link between development of literature and development of imperial control, especially in Sicily; but where he emphasises the staging and projection of imperial power in this new literature, I put more emphasis on literature as a means for experimenting with and constructing empire (cf. FEENEY 2016: 129 for a brief reference to the Ludi as 'a tool of imperial conquest'). Habinek's notion of the new Latin literature as a response to the 'identity crisis' provoked by empire (HABINEK 1998: 35–6) gets at some of the uncertainty of the Roman imperial project, but I resist the idea that this was an identity crisis restricted to the aristocratic elite. Many elements of an argument about the importance of empire to the Roman literature of the mid-Republic are present in GRUEN 1990, but his emphasis on literature as a tool and articulation of 'national' character and achievements obscures the imperial dimension. ELLIOTT 2013: 275 comments briefly on the 'need' for an 'explanation' of Rome's growing world dominance as a 'driving force behind' Ennius' *Annales*; but, as she herself notes, the historical circumstances are not her primary concern.

[26] Important work on the historical context of early Latin literature includes ZORZETTI 1980; WISEMAN 1994: 1–22, 2015; LEIGH 2004; GOLDBERG 2005; MANUWALD 2011. On the political dimensions of literature see GRUEN 1990: 79–123; HABINEK 1998: 34–68; NICOLET 1980: 361–73 and GRUEN 1992: 183–222 on the theatre; FLOWER 1995 on *praetexta*.

[27] For a shrewd assessment of the evidence for Naevius' apparently turbulent relationship to leading political figures see GRUEN 1990: 92–106. Debate about Ennius' relationship to political figures has been fierce: see ELLIOTT 2013: 15 n. 36. Foundational contributions include BADIAN 1972 and JOCELYN 1972. SKUTSCH 1985 (see e.g. p. 1–2) emphasises the influence of patrons on Ennius; GRUEN 1990: 106–22 offers a balanced overview of the evidence, seeing no conflict between Ennius' closeness to Roman *nobiles* and the pursuit of a wider agenda; GOLDBERG 1995: 113–34 and ELLIOTT 2013: esp. 41 stress Ennius' independence.

[28] Nep. *Cato* 1.4. For exploration of this claim see BADIAN 1972: 155–63; ZETZEL 2007: 11 is unconvinced.

[29] Cic. *Arch*. 27; Cic. *De or*. 2.276; cf. the sceptical ZETZEL 2007.

that Livius may have been brought to Rome earlier, after the sack of Tarentum in 272.[30] Terence may likewise have been enslaved; Suetonius tells us that he was born at Carthage and enslaved by the senator Publius Terentius Lucanus. However, doubt about Terence's biography is cast even within this passage: Suetonius says there is dispute between historians about whether he was captured in war and is himself muddled on details, claiming for example that Terence cannot have been traded to a Roman general before the end of the Third Punic War since there was no trade between Africa and Italy until after 146 (when Polybius describes trade resuming between Carthage and Rome rapidly after the First Punic War).[31] This uncertainty is one klaxon of the need for scepticism about later sources' claims about these early Latin authors' biographies. Yet regardless of the veracity of individual anecdotes, the consistent perception of these authors as closely entangled with the Roman imperial project, and in several cases as subjects of imperialism, is striking.[32] It is one indication that the new Latin literature was not straightforwardly written by the victors but had a knottier relationship to empire.

Multiple early Latin poems and plays had imperial conquest as their subject. Naevius' epic told the story of the First Punic War and his play *Clastidium* recalled Marcus Claudius Marcellus' victory over the Celtic Insubres in 222, when Marcellus gained the *spolia opima* for killing the king in single combat; Ennius' *Ambracia* commemorated Marcus Fulvius Nobilior's campaign against the Aetolians in 189; and Pacuvius' *Paullus* retold Aemilius Paullus' victory at Pydna in 168.[33] The paucity of surviving evidence makes it difficult to know how these plays might have framed these specific events, but there are indications that Roman drama did not only present a triumphalist narrative and instead put empire – and its agents – under scrutiny.[34] Seth Jeppesen has highlighted the prominence of the theme of fallen cities in early Roman drama, arguing that these plays treated the subject in a manner that prompted both triumph and lament.[35] Amy Richlin has emphasised the landscapes of war, displacement and enslavement that formed the backdrop to Roman comedy of the third and second centuries BCE and has persuasively shown that the perspectives of people uprooted and traumatized by conflict can be recovered from the texts.[36] Captives, mercenaries, slaves and foreigners made frequent appearances on the comic stage, and their characterisation was complex.[37] Audiences as well as authors and subjects of literary texts had diverse relationships to Roman imperialism;

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[30] Cic. *Brut*. 72–3; Jerome *Chron*. Olymp. 14.8.2 suggests he was enslaved in the household of Livius Salinator. For a summary of the evidence and debate see GRUEN 1990: 80–3; FULKERSON, TATUM 2024: 15. Gruen is convinced by Livius' Tarentine connection though questions the idea he was enslaved, ultimately dismissing the question of how and why he came to Rome as 'unimportant' (83); Fulkerson and Tatum are firm on the notion of Livius' foreign and enslaved origins though stress that his literary compositions followed his manumission and enfranchisement.

[31] Suet. *Vita Terenti* 1; cf. Polyb. 1.83. For a recent assessment of Terence's biography and its modern reception, with emphasis on Terence's black African origins, see ČULÍK-BAIRD 2025.

[32] GRUEN 1990: 80 and UDEN 2020 stress more broadly the 'marginal' status of authors, scholars and grammarians at Rome. Uden notes (580) that more than half came from outside Rome; and many were enslaved or employed in the households of the political elite.

[33] For a full list of titles, patrons and possible occasions/dates of *praetextae* see FLOWER 1995: 189. She goes as far as to say (180) that 'most of the *praetextae* we know of […] have a connection with triumphal themes and the celebration of *imperium*'. See now DWYER 2021 on the performance of the *palliatae Hecyra* and *Adelphoe* at the funeral games of Aemilius Paullus as expressions of the 'ethos of conquest'.

[34] LEIGH 2004: 158–91 on Terence's *Adelphoe*, perhaps reperformed at Aemilius Paullus' funeral games (Leigh argues alongside Pacuvius' *Paullus*), as an excellent case study of how even plays commissioned or performed to celebrate an individual could question or critique their actions.

[35] JEPPESEN 2021. On ancient ways of thinking about city destruction more broadly see PURCELL 1995.

[36] RICHLIN 2017; see also BURTON 2020 on the themes of war and imperialism visible in Plautus. Cf. LEIGH 2004 for an earlier reading of the historical circumstances of war and conquest playing out in Roman comedy; he emphasises that plays frequently staged debates about contemporary circumstances.

[37] See FRANKO 1996 for one study of the intermixing of 'sympathetic' and 'unsavoury' elements in Hanno's characterisation in Plautus' *Poenulus*.

plays were likely watched by people of mixed genders, social and legal statuses, conquered as well as conquerors.[38]

The opportunities that literature provided to reflect on empire were reinforced by the fact that, as Harriet Flower has argued, plays were performed at games that were themselves vowed in return for success in conquest.[39] Livy (39.5) describes M. Fulvius Nobilior vowing games to Jupiter on the day he captured Ambracia. These games were eventually staged in 186 (Livy 39.22) and may have been the occasion when Ennius' *Ambracia* was first performed.[40] The connections between Nobilior's victory and the literary sphere were consolidated by his removal of the Muses from Ambracia and his dedication of spoils at the Temple of Hercules and the Muses in Rome.[41] This relocation of the Muses was commemorated in Latin literary texts and their reception; it may have marked the end of the fifteenth (and originally final) book of Ennius' *Annales*.[42]

In Livy's account, Nobilior's announcement of the games to the Senate follows an attempt by the tribune Aburius and the consul Aemilius to block his triumph on a combination of technical and moral grounds, namely that he had not captured Ambracia with sufficient force and had sacked its temples (Livy 39.4–5). As Flower suggests, the challenge to Nobilior's triumph might have made a dramatic staging of his victory especially attractive; but it was a matter not simply of aristocratic pride and competition, but of different conceptions of imperial conquest and its sacred and secular expectations.[43] In putting on a play, Nobilior could publicly push his own narrative of conquest, an attempt to control the debate and quash uncertainties – though we cannot know what narrative the play ended up promoting.

The *ludi* were funded and enabled by human and material results of conquest.[44] Livy describes Nobilior's games in 186 featuring numerous artists (*artifices*) from Greece (39.22); that is, not only was the play's subject imperial conquest but it was literally enacted by defeated Greeks. Moreover, the games were paid for with money collected from Aetolian cities specifically for that purpose. Yet these funding models were also subject to scrutiny. When P. Cornelius Scipio requested funds from the senate for *ludi* he had vowed during his campaign in Spain in 194, he was denied and told he must pay for them either out of his own share of the spoils (*manubiae*) or his personal funds, because he had taken the decision to vow the games on his own initiative (Livy 36.36).

In both form and content, literary performances thus represented narratives and constructions of imperial conquest, and they also revealed some of the anxieties surrounding it. The staging of literary performances was wrapped up with debates about the appropriate allocation of spoils, the experiences and treatment of the conquered, and the power of the individual commander versus the power of the Senate and people.

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[38] On the mixed audiences of early Roman drama see GRUEN 1996: 155; DUTSCH, JAMES AND KONSTAN 2015; FEENEY 2016: 129–31; RICHLIN 2017; JEPPENSEN 2021: 153. For a summary of different approaches to the audience of early Roman literature, see MURRAY 2020: 107 n. 1.

[39] FLOWER 1995. On the contexts and performances of plays in the Middle Republic, see also TAYLOR 1937; ZORZETTI 1980; DUPONT 1990; FLOWER 1995; MANUWALD 2011: 41–125; KRAGELUND 2016: 24–45.

[40] FLOWER 1995: 185; cf. GRUEN 1990: 117.

[41] *CIL* 1.615; see GRUEN 1990: 89 n. 39; GILDENHARD 2003: 95–7. For the debate over the date of Nobilior's triumph (187 or 179 BCE) see PONTIGGIA 2023: 131. On the temple of Hercules Musarum see VISCOGLIOSI, *LTUR* 3: 17–19.

[42] SKUTSCH 1985: 553; ELLIOTT 2013: 62 (with n. 148 giving the Ciceronian evidence for this assumption), 301; PONTIGGIA 2023: 131 supports a date of 179 for the dedication and so suggests that Book 15 ended later than often assumed, extending to Nobilior's censorship.

[43] FLOWER 1995: 185–6 centres the issue of aristocratic competition; cf. ZORZETTI 1980: 76; GRUEN 1990: 114–7 who stresses the play's significance both for Nobilior's reputation and its wider 'patriotic' themes.

[44] On the broader dynamics of appropriation in Roman culture and literature see LOAR, MACDONALD AND PADILLA PERALTA 2018.

Yet literature not only staged and represented imperial conquest; it also played a more active role in the conceptualisation and structuring of Rome's growing empire. One famous instantiation of this is Scipio Aemilianus' emotional outburst at the fall of Carthage in 146; watching the city burn, he wept and recited Agamemnon and Hector's prophetic words from the *Iliad* that predicted the fall of Troy (Il. 4.164–5 = 6.448–9).[45] Asked by Polybius what he meant by these verses, Scipio replied that he was imagining Rome's future fate. That is, Scipio turned to Homer's poetry not, or not only, to comment upon Carthage's destruction but to channel his own fears for Rome.

In the next section, I explore a set of inscriptions – the dedications of Lucius Mummius – that likewise suggest how literary narratives shaped Roman constructions of empire. These inscriptions also demonstrate the permeation of themes and geographies of early Latin poetry into the physical landscape – what Matthew Roller has termed the 'intersignification' between literature and monuments.[46]

3. *Mummius' Literary Geography of Empire*

Following his destruction of Corinth in 146, Lucius Mummius placed a long series of inscribed dedications in cities and sanctuaries across the Mediterranean.[47] Epigraphic evidence of these dedications survives from Aulis, Epidauros, Oropus, Tegea, Thebes, Thespiae and Olympia in Greece;[48] Italica in Spain;[49] and Cures Sabini, Fregellae, Nursia, Parma, Pompeii and Trebula Mutuesca in Italy.[50] Additionally, literary evidence records Mummius' dedicatory activity at Delphi, Isthmia and Pergamon.[51] My focus here is on Mummius' dedications in the Greek East, which formed a coherent set: all were addressed to gods where those in Italy and Spain were dedicated to communities. Indeed, their consistency has led Liv Yarrow to suggest that they were all dictated by Mummius or one of his staff whereas Italian communities were left with greater agency over the manner of inscription.[52]

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[45] Polyb. 38.22 (preserved App. *Pun*. 132).

[46] See Roller 2013 who deploys the concept in relation to the monuments and literature of Augustan Rome. Guénette 2023 applies it to describe the network of memory and meaning that Mummius created via his dedicatory activity, though without considering the literary significance of the sites. For other instances of cross-fertilisation between literature and inscriptions in the Middle Republic see Gildenhard 2003: esp. 100 on Ennius' creative merging of Greek poetry and the material remnants of elite display (records, *tituli*, *elogia*); Burton 2020: 306–7 on the echoed language of triumphal vows and dedications in Plautine comedy. As Wiater 2022: 40 notes in relation to Polybius' relationship to contemporary inscriptions, the influence between literary and epigraphic texts need not be direct, but regarded together they speak to shared concerns.

[47] On these dedications see especially Yarrow 2006; at 68–70 she gives an appendix of all the epigraphic texts and at 57 notes that the original list of sites where Mummius dedicated may have been even longer.

[48] Aulis: *SEG* 25.541; Epidauros: *IG* 4.1183 and Peek 1972: no. 47; Oropus: *IG* 7.433; Tegea: *IG* 5.277; Thebes: *IG* 7.2478a; Thespiae: *IG* 7.1808. Of these, the inscriptions from Oropus, Tegea and Thebes are very fragmentary and so Yarrow 2006: 63 says it is difficult to determine whether they are dedications from Mummius or bases of honorific statues of him. However, as she suggests, the fact that his name is in the nominative in all three cases makes it overwhelmingly likely that they are dedications by him. For a summary of other inscriptions associated with Mummius from Greece see Pietilä-Castrén 1991 and Yarrow 2006: n. 17 p. 63. These include honorific statue bases at Olympia and Argos, agonistic honours from Eretria, a judgement on the Nemean games, and a judgement in a land-dispute between Messene and Sparta from Olympia.

[49] *ILLRP* 331; cf. *AE* 1985.551 where Canto suggests it is associated not with Mummius but with Aemilius Paullus. See Yarrow 2006: 62 for the two different interpretations.

[50] Cures Sabini: *ILLRP* 328; Fregellae: *CIL* I² 2930; Nursia: *ILLRP* 329; Parma: *ILLRP* 330; Pompeii: Martelli 2003: 403–5; Trebula Mutuesca: *ILLRP* 327. The dedications from Cures Sabini and Nursia are now lost.

[51] Delphi and Isthmia: Polyb. 39.6.1; Pergamon: Paus. 7.16.8: see Yarrow 2006: 62.

[52] Yarrow 2006: 65–6; cf. Cadario 2014: 87.

Scholars have previously noted the sacred and cultural significance of Mummius' dedications: the places where he dedicated include some of Greece's most important cult-sites and several were the locations of agonistic competitions.[53] In several cases, Mummius chose to reinscribe existing monuments and statuary, thereby writing himself and his conquest into the longer history of these sites.[54] Mummius' reinscriptions mirrored Aemilius Paullus' earlier choice to appropriate a pillar at Delphi intended for a monument to King Perseus in order to broadcast his victory at Pydna.[55] Both Mummius and Aemilius Paullus left earlier inscriptions visible, underlining the message that the Romans were both following and superseding earlier political dynamics. Other examples of Roman leaders using culturally sensitive sites for set piece communications include Flamininus' famous announcement of his policy of freedom for the Greeks at the Isthmian Games in 196;[56] notably, the Romans first received invitations to these Games following victory in the First Illyrian War in 228.[57] Mummius thus followed a pattern established over the preceding century, but went further and wider.

The point I want to emphasise, however, is the literary and mythological significance of sites where Mummius chose to dedicate. Thespiae, near Mount Helicon, was renowned as the home of the Muses.[58] Though it is unclear whether Mummius dedicated at the cult site itself and though, according to Cicero, he left the consecrated statues alone, he apparently brought the statues of the Thespiadae – often conflated with the Muses – back to Rome.[59] As we have already seen, the broader theme of Roman appropriation of the Muses was visible in both literary and epigraphic evidence of the period.[60] Meanwhile Thebes, another city where Mummius dedicated, was the centre of a myth cycle, a city made famous and symbolic in both Attic tragedy and archaic epic.[61]

Yet Mummius' dedications had connections to two mythological and literary narratives in particular, themselves both generative models for empire and linked to other contemporary literary projects at Rome. The first is Hercules. There were cults to the hero at Tegea, Thespiae and Thebes; indeed, Thebes had a particular connection to him as his birthplace.[62] Mummius' desire to associate himself with Hercules is further demonstrated by the fact that he dedicated a temple to Hercules Victor upon his return to Rome, attested in an inscription written in

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[53] See especially CADARIO 2014; GUÉNETTE 2023 esp. 94–102; and, also on Mummius' wider agonistic activities, PIETILÄ-CASTRÉN 1991. The connections to agonistic sites is especially interesting in light of PRAG 2007, who stresses the role of *gymnasia* in Roman imperialism and military activity in Sicily.

[54] Five of the eight surviving dedications (from Thespiae, Aulis, Tegea and one each from Thebes and Epidauros) were reinscribed: YARROW 2006: 64–5. On Mummius' practice of reinscription (*metagraphein*) see CADARIO 2014: 88, 94, 97; on memory and history in Mummius' actions see GUÉNETTE 2023: 96–104.

[55] *CIL* I² 622.

[56] Polyb. 18.46.

[57] Polyb. 2.12.8.

[58] On the cult of the Muses at Thespiae, see HÖSCHELE 2014: esp. 173–5. The site was reorganised in the third century and its visitors included Hesiod (Paus. 9.31.10) and Hellenistic monarchs (HÖSCHELE 2014: 174 n. 19). On Romans at Thespiae see PLASSART 1926: 436–58; JONES 1970; HÖSCHELE 2014: 174, 190–1): those featured in statues and dedications include Sulla, L. Caninius Gallus (tribune 56), Caesar and members of the imperial family; though none of these are mentioned by Pausanias.

[59] Cic. *Verr.* 2.2.4. On the Thespiadae as an alternative name for the Muses see Varr. *Ling.* 7.20; Ov. *Met.* 5.310. Cf. Cadario 2014: 89 for the alternative identification of these *Thespiadae* as 'women of Thespiae' daughters of its founder Thespius.

[60] See e.g. Enn. *Ann.* 1.1; Enn. *Ann.* 208–9 Skutsch; Enn. *Ann.* 487 Skutsch; FULKERSON, TATUM 2024: 6–32.

[61] On Thebes in Homer see BARKER, CHRISTENSEN 2020. On Thebes in fragmentary archaic epic see CINGANO 2015a, 2015b, TORRES-GUERRA 2015. On Thebes in tragedy see ZEITLIN 1990.

[62] In her summary of the locations of his dedications, PIETILÄ-CASTRÉN 1991: 118 notes Mummius' 'partiality' to Hercules in passing. On the cult of Hercules at Thespiae see Paus. 9.27.8, LARSON 2021: 456–7; on Hercules and Thebes see LARSON 2021: 454–7; on Hercules and Tegea see Paus. 8.4.8–9.

Saturnian verse.[63] Mummius was not alone in connecting the spheres of literature and conquest via the figure of Hercules. As we have seen, Marcus Fulvius Nobilior had dedicated spoils at the temple of Hercules Musarum, an act prominent in Ennius' *Annales*.[64] Mummius' contemporary and rival, Scipio Aemilianus, likely also built a (now lost) temple to Hercules Victor in the Forum Boarium, a building with literary pedigree of its own since its paintings were executed by the Latin tragedian Pacuvius.[65]

Hercules offered an attractive model for imperial conquest given his extension and reshaping of the boundaries of space, and his efforts to bring 'civilisation' and security by triumphing over beasts and savage rulers.[66] Annalisa Marzano has posited a longstanding connection between Hercules and the celebration of triumphs; she suggests that the links were intensified by Aemilius Paullus when he offered a feast to the hero during his triumph over Macedon in 167.[67] Matthew Loar suggests that Hercules became a 'metonym' for Roman republican triumph in the *Aeneid*.[68] He even argues for an allusion to Mummius and his temple to Hercules in lines 8.201–4, when Hercules is described arriving in Rome with spoils of *tergemini* […] *Geryonae* ('threefold Geryon'). As he admits, his argument 'hinges' on the – controversial – identification of the round temple near the Porta Trigemina as Mummius', evoked via the epithet *tergeminus*.[69] My arguments for the broader Herculean flavour of Mummius' dedications, suggesting that Mummius went further and wider than his contemporaries in constructing a connection to the hero, may add substance to Loar's argument for an allusion between Mummius and Hercules. But regardless, Hercules' triumphing presence in the *Aeneid* underlines the resonances of the Hercules myth and monuments, and their ongoing links to conquest, in Latin poetry.

The second literary and mythical narrative that Mummius' dedication sites evoke is the Trojan War.[70] In dedicating at Aulis and Pergamon, he acknowledged the sites that marked the beginning and end of this conflict: the Greek fleet had sailed out from Aulis and Pergamon was in this period trumpeting itself as Troy's successor.[71] Corinth, the site of Mummius' victory, was connected to King Agamemnon; the Homeric Catalogue of Ships describes him leading the men from Corinth.[72] In communicating his victory over Corinth and Achaea at both Aulis

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[63] *ILLRP* 122. There has been controversy over the location of this temple: on the debate see PALOMBI, *LTUR* 3: 23–5; LOAR 2017: 50–2. Most scholars accept the Caelian, the findspot of the inscription, as the more likely location; cf. ZIOLKOWSKI 1988 who identifies Mummius' temple as the round temple near the Porta Trigemina in the Forum Boarium; cf. COARELLI 1988: 164–204 who credits this round temple to M. Octavius Herrenus and dates it later. BURTON 2020: 306–7 gives Mummius' inscription as an example of the language of triumphal prayers echoed in both Livy and Plautus. On the marked Romanness of Saturnian meter see FEENEY 2016: 59.

[64] See n. 41 and 42 above.

[65] Plin. *NH* 35.19. On this temple, and its likely foundation by Scipio Aemilianus, see COARELLI, *LTUR* 3:11–12; BARRY 2021. For a summary of literary evidence associating republican generals with foundations of temples to Hercules, see BARRY 2021: 59 n. 68.

[66] See DANIELS 2022 on Hercules' appeal as a model of Roman *imperium*, combining warfare and civilisation; she mentions the republican background only briefly (her main focus is the Roman emperors). On Hercules' 'mastery' and 'transformation' of the limits of the world, see MOLINA MARÍN 2021. On Hercules' 'civilising' mission over vicious brigands and kings see FELTON 2021.

[67] MARZANO 2009; she suggests that the links were intensified by Aemilius Paullus when he offered a feast to the god during his triumph over Macedon in 167.

[68] LOAR 2017; on Hercules as touchstone for Roman emperors' self-image see LOAR 2021; cf. FOX 1996.

[69] LOAR 2017: 49–52; for the controversy see n. 63.

[70] Hercules might himself provide a link to this second narrative since he was involved in the first sacking of Troy (*Il.* 5.638–42, 648–51; 14.253–7; 20.144–8). On Hercules at Troy see ANDERSON 1997: 92–7.

[71] On the importance of Aulis as the beginning of the Trojan War see NELSON 2022: 89, citing Hes. *Op.* 650–3, *Theog.* 11–14; *Il.* 2.303–30; Luc. 5.236; Stat. *Theb.* 1.7. FERRARY 1988: 558 notes that Aemilius Paullus visited Aulis in memory of the Trojan War. On Pergamon and/as Troy see GRUEN 1990: 5–33, 2000.

[72] *Il.* 2.569–77.

and Pergamon, Mummius made a poetic statement of the ultimate futility of the Greek ruler's efforts in the Trojan War.

The physical evidence of Mummius' dedications complements literary evidence hinting that he himself conceptualised his actions through the framework of the Trojan War. Plutarch tells the story of Mummius being moved to free an enslaved Corinthian child after he recited a verse from Homer's *Odyssey* recalling the destruction of Troy.[73] Recording Mummius' treatment of Greek spoils, Favorinus describes Mummius labelling two statues of ephebes from Pheneus as Nestor and Priam.[74] Favorinus uses this as an example of Mummius' cultural myopia, but it may alternatively have been a deliberate attempt by Mummius to relate his victory to wider literary and mythic narratives of the Trojan War.[75] There is moreover a wider backdrop suggesting that Mummius was attentive to the literary resonances of his actions: Tacitus for instance comments on the innovatively theatrical nature of Mummius' Achaean triumph.[76] Greek literature offered precedent for famous generals, including Xerxes and Alexander, dedicating at Troy.[77]

Mummius also tapped into wider contemporary interest in narratives of the Trojan War, visible in Latin plays and poetry. The Roman stage was flooded with Trojan cycle material during the Middle Republic; Ennius' *Iphigenia*, seemingly based on Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, seems to have been especially influential.[78] The translation projects of epic likewise foregrounded the Trojan War and its aftermath. There is evidence that Rome's destruction of Corinth was understood within the literary and mythical tradition of city-destruction and was, at least later, even interpreted specifically as revenge for the Greeks' destruction of Troy. Nicholas Purcell notes that this interpretation is first 'clearly' attested in the *Aeneid*.[79] Yet the evidence of Mummius' dedications might suggest that this narrative was promoted earlier, in parallel with the flourishing of interest in the Trojan War in contemporary Latin literature.

In his dedications, Mummius brought sites of Roman conquest and Greek myth and literature into dynamic interaction. In particular, he reified the connections between himself and the imperial hero Hercules and between Rome's Achaean victory and the Trojan War. He both acknowledged – and himself reinforced – the literary geography that underpinned Rome's new empire. It is not essential to choose between the literary, agonistic and religious significance of Mummius' dedication sites; indeed, the multiplicity of these sites' associations may have been attractive. But the literary associations of the sites prompt two particular conclusions. First, they provide further evidence to demonstrate Mummius' own literary and cultural awareness and to challenge ancient sources' depiction of him as an ignorant philistine.[80] This view of Mummius is especially influenced by a passage of Velleius Paterculus in which he unfavourably compares Mummius' and Scipio Aemilianus' cultural competence.[81] However, the evidence discussed here suggests that *both* commanders cast their actions through the literary prisms of Hercules and the Trojan War. If anything, Mummius did this on a grander scale than Scipio in the contemporary landscape, though Scipio's legacy won out in the assessment of later Roman writers.

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[73] Plut. *Mor*. 737a; the line recited is Hom. *Od*. 5.306.

[74] Dio Chrys. *Or*. 37.42.

[75] For this interpretation see CADARIO 2014: 87; cf. GRUEN 1992: 123–5.

[76] Tac. *Ann*. 14.21.

[77] Arr. *Anab*. 1.11; Hdt. 7.43. My thanks to Bruno Currie for this point.

[78] On Ennius' *Iphigenia* and its relationship to Euripides see FALLER 2000: at 225–7 he discusses its particular popularity in mid-republican Rome.

[79] PURCELL 1995: 138; he also notes its appearance in the 'unfortunately undateable' poet Polystratus (*Anth. Pal*. 7.297).

[80] For existing challenges see especially PIETILÄ-CASTRÉN 1978, 1991; GRUEN 1992: 123–9; YARROW 2006.

[81] Vell. Pat. 1.13.3–4.

Second, Mummius' actions offer insight into Roman conceptions and constructions of empire. Biggs has suggested that ancient authors viewed empire through a 'mythic lens', 'rendering Roman history understandable through literary forms'.[82] Mummius' dedications suggest that literary and mythic geographies were not just admired through the comfort of literary texts but were actively used to build and communicate empire. Precisely what image of empire Mummius communicated by his actions is ambiguous, and perhaps deliberately so; here, the multiplicity of associations of the sites and monuments with which Mummius engaged may have been useful, especially in managing both a Greek and Roman audience. On the one hand, his deployment of literary sites and allusions – combined with his respect for the gods – could be argued to show knowledge and respect for Greek culture and customs.[83] The sleight-of-hand by which Mummius transferred 'the Muses' from Thespiae whilst leaving the sacred statues intact suggests a canny ability to construct literary narratives for consumption at Rome specifically. Yet on the other hand, Mummius simultaneously deployed Greek language and myth to broadcast the new power dynamics across the Mediterranean. He made a statement that the Romans now commanded not only the political landscape of Greece but the literary and mythical one too.

The moves Mummius made – the appropriation of geographies, narratives and spoils – are echoed in the earliest Latin literature, as we saw in sections 1 and 2. The myths of Hercules and the Trojan War through which he constructed his narrative of conquest were precisely those being staged and rewritten for a contemporary Roman audience. Mummius' actions underline the material and thematic links between these literary texts and the circumstances of their production. They illustrate how literature could frame and enable empire-building in both the textual and physical landscape.

By way of conclusion, I want to speculate briefly on what this might tell us about the nature of the early Roman empire itself. My argument about the role of literature has depended in part upon a reading of early Roman imperialism as experimental and exploratory. And all this experimentation might cause us to ask where the Romans obtained their models for empire.[84] They could look to various contemporary Mediterranean powers as sources of inspiration, though there is debate about how much knowledge they had of these.[85] I have argued here that both poets and politicians turned to Greek literary landscapes to articulate and conceptualise the incipient empire. Crucially, this turn to old, familiar literary geographies had the effect of concealing the originality of the Roman imperial project. Feeney has rightly articulated the radicalness of the new Latin literary medium.[86] This innovative medium enabled the communication and conceptualisation of a radically new imperial experiment – in a way that felt both novel and reassuringly familiar.

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[82] BIGGS 2018: 382, 390, focusing on the significance of Homeric geography in Polybius. Cf. WIATER 2022 who likewise argues that Polybius conceptualised Roman empire through wider literary discourses.
[83] On Mummius' religious sensibilities see GRUEN 1992: 125–6.
[84] I thank Denis Feeney and Adrian Kelly for making me reflect upon this question.
[85] On Roman models for empire see PURCELL 1994: 402–3, QUINN 2017.
[86] FEENEY 2016. Cf. GILDENHARD 2003 on Ennius' originality.

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