

Livy's account of cincinnatus

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Michael Parsley “ After saluting him they bade him to put on his toga and listen to the commands of the Senate. He was greatly astonished and — asking repeatedly “ if everything was safe? ” - called to his wife Racilia, “ to bring his toga from the hut. ” When he had put it on, and wiped off some of his sweat and dust, he presented himself; and the envoys at once congratulated him and saluted him as dictator; ” An analysis of Livy’s text “ History” book III, chapters 26-29, reveals and exalts the greatest virtue of a Roman whether a citizen, general, or politician; that is nobility, the humility, simplicity, and loyalty of such this quality. During the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire men would rise to seats of power and thrones of rule becoming great in time and through history. Although based on the accounts of written ancient text, in the words of Roman and Greek historians, philosophers, and writers; many great men would become victims to the idea and quest of absolute power and supreme prestige and lose sight of duty and nobility. Composed in the chapters mentioned is Livy’s account of Cincinnatus; his rise to dictatorship, his victory in war against the Aequians, and his willingness to step down as dictator after time served. Cincinnatus was a Roman citizen whom devoted his life to civic service for the greater good of the Roman Republic. Cincinnatus was a consul, farmer, general, and dictator, giving up only the pursuit of personal ambition in politics and self gratification of power; never losing sight of his duty to serve. In order to better realize the reason for Livy’s dramatic and honorable insertion of the story of Cincinnatus into his account of Rome’s history; it’s good to first understand who Cincinnatus was and maybe gain more identifiable insight into why he is described as acting in the manner in which Livy writes. L. Quinctius Cincinnatus was described as politically active; having a firm stand

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opposing plebeian rights and legal status. Cincinnatus had a son named Caeso (Livy. 3 11) who was also politically active and like his father opposed senators and others who supported the plebeians, and according to some sources " often drove the tribunes of the plebeians from the forum, preventing them from reaching a formal decision" Eventually around 461 BC Caeso was arrested (Livy. 3 12) on a capitol charge for doing such things and acting out in the way previously mentioned. Caeso would go on to make bail and flee Rome to the Tuscans (Livy. 3 13), and in his absentia would be condemned to death; leaving Cincinnatus to pay a massive fine and forcing Cincinnatus to sell most of his land and wealth then moving his family onto a small farm. Cincinnatus would later be elected suffect consul alongside Appius Claudius, and once more Cincinnatus would be involved again with opposing plebeian reforms. A more notable act of Cincinnatus' stand for the patrician order is his bold resistance " to the proposal of Terentilius Arsa or Harsa to draw up a code of written laws applicable equally to patricians and plebeians. " Soon after all this in 458BC Cincinnatus would be called upon to act as dictator. Cincinnatus was an influential patrician who found support throughout the senate and with senators. Cincinnatus through the history told by Livy was not merely an innocent farmer but was a powerful man; a noble patrician and " a hammer of the plebs we might say- and a punctilious man for legal precedent and obligation. " " Livy was unique among Roman historians in that he played no part in politics. " Livy wrote this tall tale of Roman civic service closely during the time of Augustus, not so long after the fall of the Roman Republic and the start of the reigning of Caesars. Livy might have been targeting the very virtues and characters of these men seeking power and authority; those who would try to obtain it and those who

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would. Livy told this story in an attempt to uncover the Rome's progressive removal of noble virtue and reveal the disease of fortune and lust for wealth and status that was beginning to corrupt and destroy Rome. " It is worthwhile for those who despise all human interests in comparison with riches, and think that there is no scope for high honours or for virtue except where lavish wealth abounds to listen to this story. " (Livy 3 26) It's my interpretation that Livy is conveying (subliminally) that truly those (Augustus, and the Caesars, businessmen, and those who chase after wealth, riches, and power) should pay close attention to the details of the story of Cincinnatus from the time he saves Rome to the time he lays down his title of dictator; a period of fifteen to sixteen days. Livy is trying to capture the reader to ensure that the true nature of the story (virtue) is absorbed instead of the battle and greatest of winning a war against an enemy. Livy at this point knows the most important trait to be noticed is the trait of self service and the Roman trait of duty to country, leaders and forefathers. This is the point where Livy really starts to pick up with powerful literary words, terms and imagery vocabulary; painting with words a masterpiece of imaginative passion, action and adventure. " 1The one hope of Rome, " (Livy 3 26), Livy begins by exalting Cincinnatus, claiming him the one hope, and describing him as working in his field, wiping the sweat and dirt from his brow as he is hailed dictator and savior of Rome by a crowd of senators. Livy goes on to say how the plebeians did not so much welcome Cincinnatus with open arms but greeted him nonetheless, worried more about his title and power granted than the man himself. This can correlate to the relationship Augustus had with the people of Rome. Augustus was a man somewhat for the people a democratic aristocrat. Who built up the city of Rome, the empire and did

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many notable and great things for the plebeians. Livy was trying to capture the relationship between the two in the times of the Roman Republic. Most importantly Livy was trying to communicate a significant point that money is not everything and riches cannot bring true glory and true nobility. For instance: “ 27. The following morning the Dictator went, before daylight, into the Forum and named as his Master of the Horse, L. Tarquinius, a member of a patrician house, but owing to his poverty he had served in the infantry, where he was considered by far the finest of the Roman soldiers. ” (Livy 3 27) Cincinnatus in the story appoints an impoverished man who was born a patrician of noble blood but had no money. Even so L. Tarquinius would go on to have great nobility with his talents and virtues. Livy then tells how Cincinnatus declared all stores and businesses to close and stop transactions of any sort, leading to another example of virtue and nobility before money and business. ‘ He told the Aequi he did not require their blood, they were at liberty to depart; but, as an open admission of the defeat and subjugation of their nation, they would have to pass under the yoke.’ (Livy 3 28) After the battle ensued and was won Cincinnatus would go on to exemplify more dignity and virtue by sparing the Aequian commander. Although out of sure defeat and sure surrender Cincinnatus had the commander walk under a yoke. ‘ Addressing the consul and his army in a tone of severe rebuke, ‘ You, soldiers,’ he said, ‘ will go without your share of the spoil, for you all but fell a spoil yourselves to the enemy from whom it was taken; and you, L. Minucius, will command these legions as a staff officer, until you begin to show the spirit of a consul... Minucius laid down his consulship and remained with the army under the Dictator's orders. ’ (Livy 3 29) After this the grand finale would present itself and mold the true nobility

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and virtue Livy was trying to create and capture for the public of his time. It was after the battle that Cincinnatus would rebuke the consul Minucius causing Minucius to resign his consulship and take rank as a lieutenant in the army and then Cincinnatus' glorious triumphant entrance through the streets of Rome. Soon after the parade and glorious march in the city, Cincinnatus would give up his dictatorship only after sixteen days. Livy was trying to signify that no manner of prestige, honor or glorification should get in the way of duty and nobility of the good of service to country. An analysis of Livy's text "History" book III, chapters 26-29, reveals and exalts the greatest virtue of a Roman whether a citizen, general, or politician; that is nobility, the humility, simplicity, and loyalty of such this quality. Livy is using the character and story of Cincinnatus to illustrate that 'wealth and virtue are not the same thing' In such a way this story was critiquing certain situations that were existing in the highest seats of political power being the senate during his time. Livy was trying to use this story and the purity of the virtuous content it possessed to reach the senate of his time whom had lost sight of what was real wealth, being internal not external, instead the senate and powerful men of his day were set on luxury and business. "Cincinnatus's point is Livy's: forget money, the real determinant of the ability to command is ancient nobility and stern disciplined morality. The two run together and Livy is using the character of Cincinnatus to provide to modern times an example- a model- to behave like. This is a portrait with a contemporary relevance- Livy is speaking directly to the Augustan senators of Rome- Cincinnatus's words for Minucius are meant to come down the century as an injunction to senators who lived hundreds of years later, and to make them reflect on the moral decline that has slain the Republic and left an Empire in

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its place. " (Gracchi) I do believe that Livy's message is clear and Cincinnatus is the perfect pawn for Livy to move on the chessboard of storytelling.

Unfortunately nothing could stop the machine of corruption and moral decay that was becoming Rome. Livy was not trying to recreate a Roman Republic through this tale nor imply the reconstruction, rebirth, or renewal, I believe Livy was using the story and the character of Cincinnatus to send a message that nobility, virtues, and the role of duty to country, people, and as a Roman citizen was becoming a thing of the Roman Republic and money and wealth was now the standard of the new Roman Empire. It's my interpretation that through this story and through the character, Livy was also trying to remind Romans of the virtues and nobility that brought Rome from ashes to greatness, and maybe was even demanding revival of these which possibly in Livy's opinion could have saved Rome from complete corruptive destruction.