

2003

## Beneficia Romanorum: Cultural Identity in Livy

Michael Fronda  
*Denison University*

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### Recommended Citation

Fronda, Michael (2003) "Beneficia Romanorum: Cultural Identity in Livy," *Ephemeris*: Vol. 3 , Article 13.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/ephemeris/vol3/iss1/13>

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### *Beneficia Romanorum: Cultural Identity in Livy*

By Michael Fronda

Books 6 through 30 of Livy's *ab Urbe Condita* narrate the critical years for the formation and the development of the so-called Roman alliance system. However, despite Livy's keen interest in analyzing "the motives, preoccupations, or reactions of men" faced with momentous decisions (Walsh 1963), he rarely gives detailed accounts of why, besides Roman conquest, states joined the Roman alliance system. Nor, except for a few lengthy discussions (such as the revolt of Capua, 23.2-10), does Livy describe in detail the attitude of the allies toward Rome. Rather, allied motivation is often collapsed into stylized dichotomies of the formula *magis quia...quam...* or a similar *variatio*. Historians often have accepted without much notice the historicity of these abbreviated explanations of allied motivation (for example, see Oakley 1997). However, their stylized nature suggests that Livy is using them for literary purpose and calls into question their value as historical evidence.

Habinek (1998) proposed that the ambiguous and even contradictory representations in Horace's poetry of the relationship between Rome and Italy, oscillating between the image of the Italians as conquered subjects of Rome and the ideal of *Tota Italia*, reflect the shifting balance of power between Rome and the Italians in the first century BCE and mirror in particular Augustus' involvement in the Italian problem. I argue that Livy in like fashion imposed the contemporary debate about cultural identity, about Roman versus Italian, on his historical narrative. Livy's "*magis quia...quam...*" dichotomies tend to pit the benefits of Roman rule against local or personal concerns. A comprehensive list is impractical for this abstract, but a few

examples will provide sufficient illustration. In 320 BC Rome forged an alliance with the Daunian city Arpi against the Samnites; according to Livy, the Arpini were so inclined *Samnitium magis iniuriis et odio quam beneficio ullo populi Romani* (9.13.6). In 340 BC, the Campanians broke their alliance with Rome and attacked the Samnites, then Roman allies, because *iniuriae Samnitium quam beneficii Romanorum memoria presentior erat* (8.2.7-8). Finally, during the Second Punic War, the people of Thurii decided to open their gates to Hannibal, but first allowed the Roman garrison commander Atinius to escape; the Thurians reached their decision because of personal amity toward Atinius, rather than because of consideration toward Rome: *magis quia ipsi ob imperium in semite ac iustum consultum volebant quam respectu Romanorum* (25.15.17). In all cases Livy has reduced what must have complicated debates about foreign policy to a clear choice on the part of the Italians between two opposing paths – toward Roman-Italian harmony or toward particularism. Livy's dichotomous explanations, therefore, represent his participation in the ongoing contemporary debate over Roman and Italian cultural identity.