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### Reading Response 6 - Livy's History of Rome

*Prompt: One of the amazing things about the sheer duration of the ancient Roman civilization, is that the ancient Roman historians themselves often had little idea about the foundation of their own city. In this reading response, you're going to read part of Livy's History of Rome, originally a 142 volume series on the history of Rome written during the time of Rome's first emperor. Spend the first half of your response describing how Livy characterizes Romulus and how that characterization might suggest what it means to be a good and honorable person in ancient Roman society. Then spend the second half of your response giving your thoughts on what Livy thinks about kingship based on the stories of Romulus and his ancestors.*

Livy's portrayal of Romulus in *History of Rome* offers a multifaceted view of the legendary founder of Rome, reflecting the ideals of courage, leadership, and civic duty cherished in ancient Roman society. Romulus is depicted as a formidable warrior and a visionary leader, demonstrating the Roman virtues of *virtus* (courage) and *pietas* (piety). For instance, his initiative in founding Rome and his actions during the city's initial struggles exemplify *virtus* as he confronts and overcomes significant challenges (Livy, *History of Rome*, pg. 22; Livy, *History of Rome*, pg. 26). Additionally, his respect for the gods and the establishment of religious practices showcase his *pietas*, reinforcing the role of divine favor in Rome's destiny (Livy, *History of Rome*, pg. 22).

This characterization suggests that being good and honorable in ancient Rome required a blend of personal courage and public-spiritedness alongside a profound respect for the gods. Romulus's actions, such as the creation of Roman legions and the abduction of the Sabine women, although controversial, are portrayed as necessary for the city's survival and growth, which underscores a Roman ideal that the needs of the state often supersede personal morality (Livy, *History of Rome*, pg. 28).

Livy's reflections on kingship, mainly through the narrative of Romulus and his successors, appear ambivalent. While acknowledging the efficacy of monarchical rule in the foundational years of the city, Livy also hints at the inherent dangers of such concentrated power. The story of Romulus, who is both a king and a god by the end of his life, illustrates the potential for a king to be both a unifying and a divisive figure (Livy, *History of Rome*, pg. 38). His eventual disappearance or apotheosis suggests an ultimate limit to the personal power one should wield, possibly hinting at the Roman preference for a more republican form of governance, which emerges later in Livy's volumes.

Moreover, the subsequent stories of the kings of Rome, like Numa and Tullus Hostilius, further explore this theme by contrasting their different approaches to governance—Numa's peaceful and religious disposition versus Tullus's militaristic tendencies (Livy, *History of Rome*, pg. 33).

In summary, Livy's *History of Rome* recounts the epic beginnings of the Roman Empire and reflects the virtues and vices inherent in its foundational leadership. The complex portrayal of Romulus and his narrative arc reveal the ancient Roman values that define both a good

individual and a leader, while the broader discussion on kingship provides insights into Rome's evolving political philosophy, cautioning against the excesses of autocratic rule.

### Bibliography

Livy. *The Early History of Rome : Books I-V of the History of Rome from Its Foundation*.

Translated by Aubrey De Sincourt, London, The Folio Society, 2006.

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