

## Sources for Early Roman History (Ogilvie and Drummond)

### *Literary Sources*

Four major historical strands – Roman, Greek, Etruscan, Carthaginian. Carthaginian may have been used second hand by Polybius, but otherwise nothing survives and can be discounted. Etruscan works were certainly known (Lyon Speech) but nothing from the fourth or fifth century.

Greeks knew about Rome, Aristotle mentions the sack of 390. Dionysius had access, either to Timaeus or a local historian, with close knowledge of the defeat of Lars Porsenna by Aristodemus of Cumae. Timaeus was certainly an important source.

The four other Greek historians – Polybius, who relied on Fabius Pictor and the Greek Philinus for much of his account. Probably consulted other historians too. Out of forty books only six survive intact, with lots of fragments. Cicero relied on Polybius's account for the *De Re Publica* in part.

Diodorus of Sicily. Preserved in full only for 486-302, and his source is unclear. Dionysius of Halicarnassus – wrote 20 books on Roman Antiquities, 11 survive, plus large fragments. Used similar sources as Livy, but also some additional Greek authors. Was a moralizing rhetorician, and obsessed with politics and political conflict.

Plutarch – wrote *Parallel lives*, had access to many authors no longer extant and so has lots of vital details, even if he reshapes things to fit his own moralizing. His Roman questions contain much information on early Roman religion.

Earliest Roman historical work was an epic poem on the first Punic war by Naevius, followed by the epic of Ennius (187). Ennius shows that some of the major episodes were already well developed. More concerned with regal and military history.

Ennius probably had access to Fabius Pictor's annalistic history. Pictor wrote in Greek in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century. He tried to establish Rome to the Greeks as a great nation. Focused on the founding legends and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, doesn't seem to have known much about 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. Has been condemned (Alfoldi) for wide spread fabrication, but the fragments neither confirm nor deny this. Was followed by Cincius Alimentus, who also wrote in Greek, although nothing is known of his work.

Porcius Cato abandoned the annalistic method. His *Origines* dealt with the origins of Rome and the Punic Wars, it is not clear how he managed the fourth and fifth centuries.

Roman historians of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century don't seem to have added much. Scaevola, the PM, ended the practice of putting up a listing of events such as

triumphs and festivals, and it was long thought that he published them. But Calpurnius Piso Frugi doesn't seem to have used them. Perhaps these records were actually published yearly, and the publication assigned to Scaevola actually an antiquarian work of the first century.

In the first half of the first century history explodes. Four major names – Q. Claudius Quadrigarius, C. Licinius Macer, Valerius Antias, and Q. Aelius Tubero. Their works were much longer than earlier ones. Macer is the most famous – a popular tribune, he wrote a popular history, but also an antiquarian who unearthed old treaties. Valerius Antias is problematical, and liked to invent casualty figures, but an important source for Livy. Tubero wrote annalistically, in the forties BC.

Livy's history survives in part. He knew little Greek, didn't do much research, but was a literary genius and had lots of patriotic fervor. He is less interested in constitutional developments than Dionysius, more interested in moral qualities and internal harmony.

### *Antiquarian Writers*

Under Hellenistic influence, a large number of antiquarian writers, often dealing with religion or institutions, sprang up. M. Terentius Varro was the greatest, although his extant works on language and farming are less important to history. He established the dates of early Roman events. He was thorough and systematic.

Verrius Flaccus was a freedman, liked by Augustus, who wrote a huge book on etymology that was abridged by Festus. The abridgement survives and contains lots of interesting historical details. Strabo's geography also contains some precious facts.

### *Inscriptions*

Although writing came to Italy early, there are very few inscriptions before 250. What does survive is meager and controversial. There are also wall paintings, such as those of Mastarna and the Vibenna brothers from Vulci. Historians and antiquarians preserve other inscriptions, some of which are forgeries or updated. However the fragments of the Twelve Tables, the treaties with Carthage, some religious rules, and various other things do seem to ultimately be genuine..

### *Archaeological*

Archaeology reveals heavy Etruscan and Greek influence throughout central Italy. It is impossible to dig in Rome itself except in a few places. Definitely an Etruscan influx in 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, but fourth and third haven't yielded much evidence, at least not until Pyrrhus and the advent of the annalists.

## **The Creation of Early Roman History**

### *The Available Data*

Documentation before fourth century was very sparse. Greek documentation doesn't become plentiful until the fourth century. Theophrastus was the first to pay serious attention to Rome. Timaeus was the first important historian, and probably relied on local traditions.

Little documentary evidence, except possibly the Fasti. These survive in the historians and in copies from the Augustan period. They seem to derive from a common tradition. But even if the Fasti are, on the whole, authentic, they don't show much other than the fortunes of a few aristocratic families.

There were also triumphal fasti. These have clearly undergone some reworking, although they may have drawn on pontifical records. This goes back to the board outside of Scaevola's house. But these boards provided only notices, no details, and it is really impossible to trace anything back to them. Other priestly documents are equally problematic. But old temples were certainly an important reminder of the past to late republicans.

Other documentary evidence was largely ignored, legal and social history wasn't of interest to early historians.

Oral traditions have not been evaluated, but must have been an important source for early guys like Timaeus. Oral history in general is very unreliable. Ditto funerary stuff.

### *Techniques of Reconstruction*

Early historians had such limited information that they could only deal with things in a summary fashion. Late second/early first century a much more extensive narrative came out. Under Hellenistic influence, history became a didactic and moralizing thing. Motives and personalities had to be invented. Later republican experiences colored things greatly. Accounts of the distant past came to reflect the political views of their authors. Literary effect became very important. Livy for instance believes that a lack of external threat leads to internal discord and so has the whole plebs/patricians spat over the consulate. Noble families like the Fabii all had their own claims to make. The Valerii were particularly notorious in this. The Claudii are frequently disparaged though.