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**Laughter in Livy**

P.G. Walsh (*AJPh* 76 (1955): 369-83) has criticized Livy for presenting a distorted picture of distinguished Romans by not including instances of laughter in his narrative which he found in his sources. Walsh argues that Livy's "suppression of all jocular elements" is grounded in his "insistence on *dignitas* and *gravitas*," but he does not address the larger question of the nature and role of laughter in the *Ab Urbe Condita*. This paper, therefore, will argue that Livy did not exclude laughter in order to create humorless, serious Romans, but that in Livy's history, laughter functions predominately as mockery or ridicule.

The instances of laughter are relatively few in Livy but not lacking altogether (as they are in Sallust and Caesar; there are two occurrences in Nepos). Excluding (30+) occurrences of *irridere/inridere*, *irrisus/inrisus*, and *ludibrium* (which always have negative connotations), there are fifteen occurrences of the neutral words *ridere* and *risus* within ten episodes. Of these, only one--at 7.2.11 Livy discusses the origin of dramatic plots and states that the plots developed *ab risu et soluto ioco*--remains neutral.

The other nine contexts of laughter offer a glimpse of the nature and function of laughter in Livy. Of these nine, two (21.2.6 and 30-44.5-6) present laughter as a reaction to pain, physical or emotional. The remaining occasions of laughter all involve reproach: The tribunes (4.35.10) warn that the plebs have been a source of laughter for the patricians (*risui patribus fuisse*) by refusing to elect plebeians as military tribunes. Fabia Minor is upset by the laughter (6.34.6-7) of her older sister when she jumps in fright at the rap of the lictor on the front door. When the Romans ask the Gauls not to assist the Carthaginians (21.20.3), the Gauls meet their request with laughter at the Romans' foolish belief that the Gauls might help them after being so mistreated. That laughter entails reproach is further evident from Cato's displeasure (34.4.5) with the Romans' deriding (*ridentes*) the terracotta antefixes on the gods' temples. Likewise "a great laughter (*magno risu*, 40.47.5) arose from those standing around at the people so uncultured and ignorant of all custom" when the Celtiberians demand one drink and then another from the praetor. Laughter is also the reaction when an old soldier accidentally exposes his groin when displaying his wounds to the crowd (45.39.18-19). In each of these instances the laughter is aimed at someone or something and is presented by Livy as inappropriate.

Philip's sense of humor (32.34.3) too comes at another's expense: when the Aetolian Phaeneas--who has impaired vision, as Livy tells us--tells Philip he must conquer or submit, Philip responds that even a blind man can see that. As Walsh points out, but seemingly dismisses as unimportant, to have Titus Quinctius Flaminius laugh and respond with a joke (as Polybius does and Livy does not) would have entailed "an unfriendly attitude towards his own allies."

The remaining episode of laughter stands in stark contrast to Walsh's statement that "nowhere in the *Ab Urbe Condita* is a distinguished Roman depicted as laughing aloud."

When Scipio and Hannibal meet at Ephesus, Scipio asks who in Hannibal's opinion were the three greatest generals. When Hannibal responds Alexander, Pyrrhus, and himself, Scipio bursts out in laughter (*risum obortum Scipioni*, 35.14.10). The Latin is unambiguous as to Scipio's reaction, but whether Scipio is merely amused or there is a hint of mockery at Hannibal's answer is unclear.

What is clear from this survey, however, is that to Livy, laughter was not a matter of having a sense of humor. Laughter is a means to reproach or mock and is, therefore, inappropriate behavior not only in times of serious political discussion, but even between sisters or just at another's misfortune. And despite Walsh's statements to the contrary, Livy does depict distinguished Romans and non-Romans laughing. It is therefore the nature of laughter primarily as reproach that governs Livy's use of it in his history.