

# Clarissimi Viri



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Livy's histories of Horatius Cocles and Gnaeus Marcius  
Coriolanus

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**Department of Classics  
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*Forsan et haec olim meminisse  
iuvabit.*



*Tibi, Domine, qui me potentem facit.*

*Maximas gratias fidelissimae uxori carissimisque liberis, qui  
semper efficiunt me laetum domum redire.*

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## *Care Lector,*

This text has been selected and edited to enrich your reading after the AP Latin course. The stories before you have been chosen because they reflect the warrior tradition which the Romans held so dear. After seeing Aeneas' might of arms in myth and Caesar's triumphs in life, it may be helpful to read about men whose virtues Vergil and Caesar may have desired to model. Before we set out it would be helpful for you to understand that the aims of ancient history are different from modern ones. The goal is not an unbiased reporting of facts verified by primary sources and the archaeological record; rather, it is to provide moral instruction, and ancient historians often include stories and opinions which would be out of place to a modern historian. In the beginning of this reader I have included a translation of Livy's own reasons for taking up this work. Please consider his intentions as we set out.

Titus Livius, Livy to us, came from the city of Patavia (modern Padua). He was born in 59 B.C. and began writing his massive history of the Roman people in 29 B.C.<sup>1</sup> There is no clear connection to a patrician family but is almost certain that his was wealthy, enough so that Livy is never mentioned in the patronage of anyone. His occasional mistakes in technical military descriptions and translations of Greek suggest he was never a soldier and did not study in Athens like other youth from privileged families. Livy's work started "from the city having been founded," which gives the title *Ab urbe condita*, often abbreviated as *AUC*. The Romans used this as an abbreviation in their dating system; what we call 753 B.C., the founding date of Rome, would be 1 *AUC* and 1 B.C. would be 753 *AUC*. He attempted to cover all of the time from then up to his own under the principate of Augustus. Livy was well regarded in his own time and by those who came after him. The rhetorician Quintilian spoke highly of Livy's *lactea ubertas*, a milky richness of prose; to understand the compliment, remember that the ancient world really only had water, wine, and milk to drink. Livy was criticised for a kind of provincialism, *Patavinitas*, which may refer to his style of writing, but more likely his moral outlook shaped by a conservative hometown, where he died in A.D.17. Livy tends towards the nostalgia for what we may call "the good old days." *AUC* is arranged into groups of five books called pentads and then groups of ten called decades. Of the original one hundred and forty two books, only thirty

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<sup>1</sup> "Livy," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2015, Web, 20 Jun. 2015. <<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Livy>>

five have survived intact or nearly so. There are summaries for the lost books and a few quoted fragments but they are otherwise lost to history, a tragedy given that he lived through the Civil Wars under Caesar and Augustus.

The subjects of this unit are two men renowned among the Romans for martial prowess but serving different ends and masters. The first is Horatius Cocles. When the last Etruscan king, Tarquinius Superbus, had been banished from Rome, Lars Porsenna marshaled an Etruscan army to reclaim the throne for his near kin Tarquinius. The tale of Horatius presents traditional heroism, the extraordinary *pietas* of the individual to his duty for the state in the face of overwhelming odds. Holding the bridge is metaphorically resisting the power of kingship as it seeks to avenge itself on the fledgling republic. Horatius' account closes with the hero holding off the enemy until the bridge can be destroyed and casting himself into the Tiber, swimming safely to the other side- a detail even Livy doubts. To Horatius belongs a place in the first order of Roman folk heroes who epitomize the audacity and selflessness of a national hero, and thereby transcend mortality to become an ideal. His actions are the subject of the English historian Thomas Babington Macaulay's ballad "Horatius" from *The Lays of Ancient Rome*, the long poem memorized by our own WCA sixth graders. Macaulay commended this and other stories to his own generation so that, in Livy's words, "you may select for yourself and your country what to imitate, and also what, as being mischievous in its inception and disastrous in its issues, you are to avoid." Not only the actions of his hands but the affections of his heart are on display when he casts his eyes across the Tiber and sees his hearth and the temples of Rome. Macaulay sums his motivations well: "...the ashes of his fathers, and the temples of his gods/ and for the tender mother/who dandled him to rest/ and for the wife who nurses/ his baby at her breast/ and for the holy maidens/who feed the eternal flame." Macaulay's encomium for Horatius persists and is condensed within verse twenty seven for commemorating those who fight in combat; see page 11 for an example. As you read, ask yourself what details are characteristically Roman, what was Livy's intended purpose in telling the tale, and what details may be too much to be believed.

Gnaeus Marcius is much more difficult to categorize and understand. Marcius was an exceptional and brash officer of senatorial rank. He distinguished himself first in the war with the

Etruscans, earning the *corona civica*, and again in the siege of Corioli in 493 B.C.,<sup>2</sup> when the Romans were at war with the Volscians, after which he was granted the cognomen Coriolanus. Surprised by Volscian legions to the rear, the Romans were set upon when the besieged townsfolk burst out to press the attack. Marcius, taking advantage of the open gates, dashed inside, slew the first men he met, and proceeded to set ablaze the buildings from the wall. So fast was his action and so devastating the fire he started that the townsfolk raised up wailing which fooled the Volscians into thinking the city had already been captured. The city surrendered and the Volscian army withdrew. After the wars, Rome was afflicted by a scarcity of grain in 491 B.C. Coriolanus demanded that the plebes give up their tribunes as a condition of receiving an emergency shipment of grain from Sicily. Condemned and exiled for this offense, he joined the Volscians and came back with an army bent on avenging both himself and the Volscian commander Attius Tullius. An envoy of women, led by his mother Veturia (Plutarch records her as Volumnia), succeeded where arms were doomed to fail; begging for him to remember their state and his own former patriotism, Marcius yielded and turned his army away. For my own part, the ending was always a mystery to me; why did the Romans memorialize a man who was a traitor and in the end succumbed to tears instead of iron? Why would the Volscians have obeyed his command to withdraw?<sup>3</sup> Shouldn't he be seen as a Benedict Arnold? We can be reasonably sure that the Volscians attacked the Romans, but it is more than plausible that much of Coriolanus' personal story is fictional<sup>4</sup>. It would make the most sense that a Volscian army was led by its own commander who was from the city of Corioles, but, as you will see, that is not the story which you will read. It is far easier for Roman pride to be assuaged by defeat at the hands of one of her own than by a foreigner. Coriolanus' story provides the Romans both a superior soldier to laud and an excuse for a humiliating defeat. While reading Coriolanus' story, consider how his mother Veturia is portrayed. Her interposition between the Volsci and Rome not only saves the city but gives her symbolic status as Rome itself.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "Gnaeus Marcius Coriolanus," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2015, Web, 20 Jun. 2015 <<http://www.britannica.com/topic/Gnaeus-Marcius-Coriolanus>>

<sup>3</sup> Joshua Mandell, "Coriolanus, Camillus, and Roman Identity," *The Helicon*, Fall (2013): *The Helicon*, 15 February 2015. <[www.thehelicon.com/2013/roman-identity/](http://www.thehelicon.com/2013/roman-identity/)>

<sup>4</sup> Gary Forsythe, *A Critical History of Early Rome: From Prehistory to the First Punic War* (Berkeley: U of California, 2005) 191.

<sup>5</sup> Bradley Buszard, "The Speech of Greek and Roman Women in Plutarch's Lives," *Classical Philology* 105.1 (2010): 83-115. *JSTOR*. 9 May 2015. <[www.jstor.org/search](http://www.jstor.org/search)>

It is my hope that you will find merit to Livy's observations and a challenge to your own skills as a reader and translator. The work is noble and therefore worth the effort. William Shakespeare wrote his *Coriolanus* in 1608,<sup>6</sup> his last political tragedy, believing the character and story from Plutarch were suitable for the tensions of his own day. *Coriolanus*' character is opaque and offers no soliloquy revealing his motivations. You will watch the 2011 film adaptation, directed by and starring Ralph Fiennes, as the last activity of our unit. As you read, I have glossed the text in such a way that students familiar with Vergil and Caesar should be able to employ vocabulary which they already know while finding help for uncommon words, odd grammar, and difficult sentence structure. Expect the generous use of indirect statements, first person discourse, the subjunctive mood, and clauses within clauses. Italicized words have bulleted notes that pertain to history, grammar, or translation; **bold words** are meant to draw your attention to **correlative pairs**, the next important words in a clause, or tricky **ablative constructions**; underlined words, sometimes with subscript<sub>1</sub>, are to emphasize a relationship<sub>1</sub> in the text, such as to set off difficult indirect statements with the accusative subject and infinitive verb or a distant subject and main verb; words with footnotes have a dictionary entry in the lower margin<sup>7</sup> or provide bibliographical information. Not all such examples are marked out, only those where it seemed you may need help. The Latin text is borrowed with thanks from The Latin Library website, and English translations are from the Rev. Canon Roberts's translation of 1912.

*Tibi placeat.*

JLSR

❖ *Italicized words* will remind you if you should recognize the subjunctive mood, some unique form of grammar, or face some other kind of linguistic challenge moving from Latin to English.

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<sup>6</sup> "Coriolanus," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2015, Web. 20 Jun. 2015 <<http://www.britannica.com/topic/Coriolanus-by-Shakespeare>>

<sup>7</sup> A blank space on the left or right edge, or at the top or bottom, of a written or printed page.



### **Livy's Preface to *Ab urbe condita***

Whether the task I have undertaken of writing a complete history of the Roman people from the very commencement of its existence will reward me for the labour spent on it, I neither know for certain, nor if I did know would I venture to say. For I see that this is an old-established and a common practice, each fresh writer being invariably persuaded that he will either attain greater certainty in the materials of his narrative, or surpass the rudeness of antiquity in the excellence of his style. However this may be, it will still be a great satisfaction to me to have taken my part, too, in investing, to the utmost of my abilities, the annals of the foremost nation in the world with a deeper interest; and if in such a crowd of writers my own reputation is thrown into the shade, I would console myself with the renown and greatness of those who eclipse my fame. The subject, moreover, is one that demands immense labour. It goes back beyond 700 years and, after starting from small and humble beginnings, has grown to such dimensions that it begins to be overburdened by its greatness. I have very little doubt, too, that for the majority of my readers the earliest times and those immediately succeeding, will possess little attraction; they will hurry on to these modern days in which the might of a long paramount nation is wasting by internal decay. I, on the other hand, shall look for a further reward of my labours in being able to close my eyes to the evils which our generation has witnessed for so many years; so long, at least, as I am devoting all my thoughts to retracing those pristine records, free from all the anxiety which can disturb the historian of his own times even if it cannot warp him from the truth.

The traditions of what happened prior to the foundation of the City or whilst it was being built, are more fitted to adorn the creations of the poet than the authentic records of the historian, and I have no intention of establishing either their truth or their falsehood. This much licence is conceded to the ancients, that by intermingling human actions with divine they may confer a more august dignity on the origins of states. Now, if any nation ought to be allowed to claim a sacred origin and point back to a divine paternity that nation is Rome. For such is her renown in war that when she chooses to represent Mars as her own and her founder's father, the nations of the world accept the statement with the same equanimity with which they accept her dominion. But whatever opinions may be formed or criticisms passed upon these and similar traditions, I regard them as of small importance. The subjects to which I would ask each of my readers to devote his earnest attention are these - the life and morals of the community; the men and the qualities by which through domestic policy and foreign war dominion was won and extended.

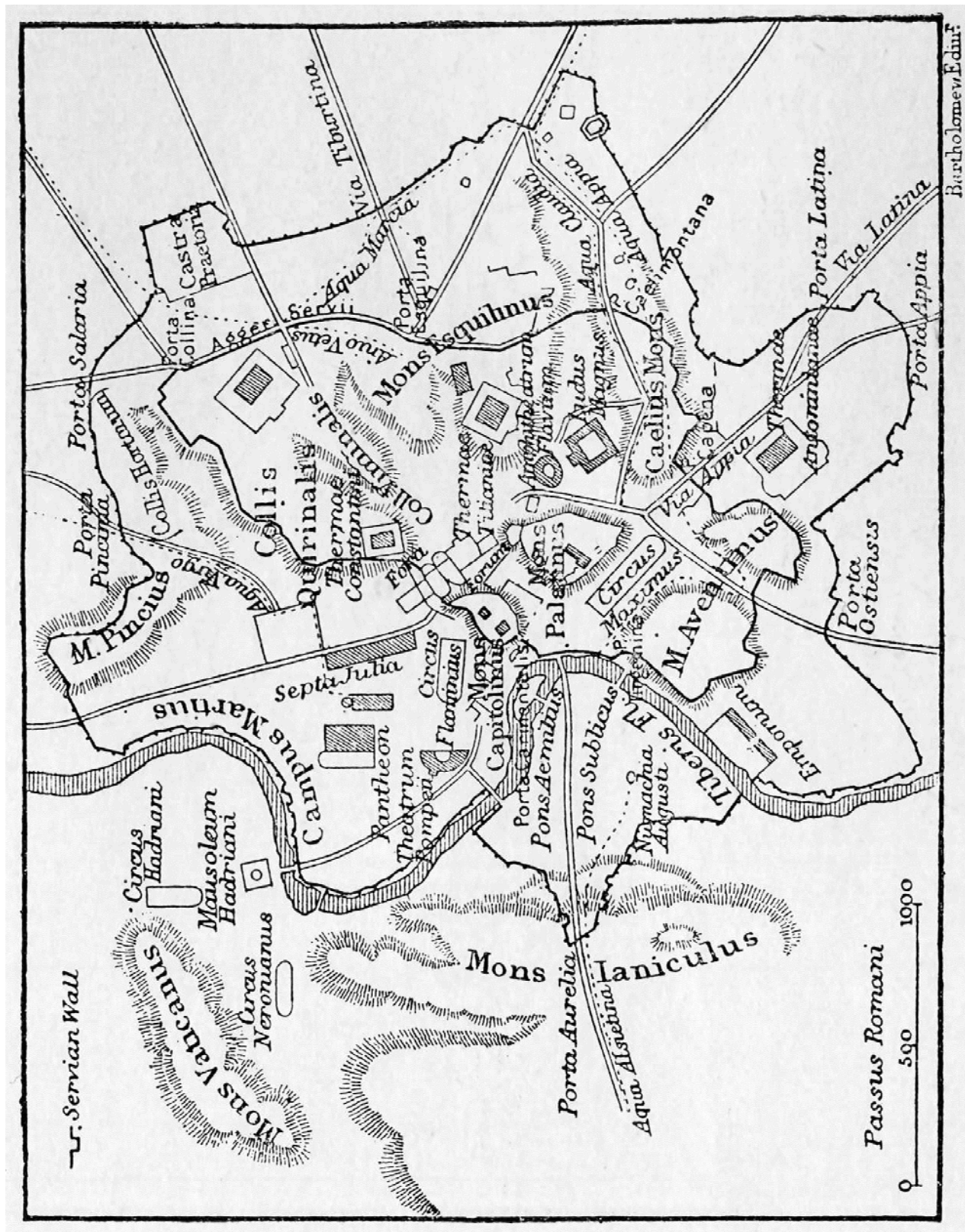
Then as the standard of morality gradually lowers, let him follow the decay of the national character, observing how at first it slowly sinks, then slips downward more and more rapidly, and finally begins to plunge into headlong ruin, until he reaches these days, in which we can bear neither our diseases nor their remedies.

There is this exceptionally beneficial and fruitful advantage to be derived from the study of the past, that you see, set in the clear light of historical truth, examples of every possible type. From these you may select for yourself and your country what to imitate, and also what, as being mischievous in its inception and disastrous in its issues, you are to avoid. Unless, however, I am misled by affection for my undertaking, there has never existed any commonwealth greater in power, with a purer morality, or more fertile in good examples; or any state in which avarice and luxury have been so late in making their inroads, or poverty and frugality so highly and continuously honoured, showing so clearly that the less wealth men possessed the less they coveted. In these latter years wealth has brought avarice in its train, and the unlimited command of pleasure has created in men a passion for ruining themselves and everything else through self-indulgence and licentiousness. But criticisms which will be unwelcome, even when perhaps necessary, must not appear in the commencement at all events of this extensive work. We should much prefer to start with favourable omens, and if we could have adopted the poets' custom, it would have been much pleasanter to commence with prayers and supplications to gods and goddesses that they would grant a favourable and successful issue to the great task before us.

- Livy<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Translation by the Reverend Canon Roberts



Ancient City of Rome in the Early Principate