

James Luce, December 5th, 1993

Livy's View of the Roman National Character

As early as 1663, Francis Pope named his plantation, in what would

Greeks found nothing strange about the Romans and admitted them freely to, e.g., the Isthmian games, since they saw them as Greek. Early Roman history is a blatant borrowing of Greek history and legend, by Greek writers of the 3rd and 2nd century. Livy has to incorporate these stories, but he rejects the notion of Romans being Greeks. Livy doesn't like Greeks and says they use their tongues more than anything else. We see this attitude in his digression on Alexander the Great in Book 9. Livy's contemporaries had said that Alexander, had he turned westward rather than eastward, would have taken over Italy. Livy says Alexander would have been wiped out.

As to where King Numa got his wisdom, most claimed it came from Pythagoras, but Livy points out that Pythagoras came to Italy about 500 BC and Numa lived about 700 BC, so a meeting is impossible on chronological grounds. Even if that were not so, however, asks Livy, how would Numa have known about Pythagoras, or reached him, or talked to him in a common language. More important, according to Livy, Numa didn't need Pythagoras because Numa was a good solid Sabine; that's where he got his wisdom.

Native virtues, not Greeks, explain, says Livy, Roman success. From the humble origins established by Romulus when he set up Rome as a place of asylum for runaway slaves, Rome evolved little by little by hard work.