

Multi Perspective Approach on the Burning of Numa's Books



Humanities

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ABSTRACT

A lot of methods and theories have been presented in order for someone to get better results examining a specific story. A general drawback to all these methods is that the researcher is always stacked to his own beliefs, to the way of thinking of his time and to borders due to scientific ethics of the exact age. In the current work an effort to apply the introduced by Aristotle multi-perspective approach in the story of the burn of the books of Numa is presented. Motivation of this work is to retrieve any useful information about the story that is hidden when other methods are applied.

INTRODUCTION

In one of his legendary publications about quantum mechanics, Mermin (1985), based on an earlier publication of Einstein (1935) that talked about spooky actions at a distance, asked the scientific community: "Is the moon there when nobody looks?"; thus focusing on the issue of disputing the existence of the phenomena under investigation. Viewing his question in a less technical way one should say that even graded facts, considered as the absolute truth, have to be disputed not only for their truth but even for their real existence. Of course it is very simple to examine moon's existence by several technical means many times and always conclude in the same result: the moon is there even if we look at it or not. But it is not the same with Romelus or Socrates or Great Alexander. Their actions, thoughts and beliefs are only communicated to us via secondary or even thirdly sources that in many cases lived a lot of centuries later.

Amongst other Livy and Plutarch were interested in the story of burning of the books of Numa. In order to achieve our goal we firstly focus on the Livy's story (Livy XI.29) by a critical historical perspective. After that we examine the same story getting into mind the similar story of Plutarch (Parallel lives: the life of Numa (22.2-5)) and authors' own beliefs. The focus in this step is realigned to identification of information inside the story that could actually be used as information for the fact (isolating thus lies). It is shown that many details of the story could be considering as constructed by the authors or even means of propaganda.

HISTORICAL APPROACH

Focusing on Livy's story by a critical historical perspective (Arvaniti & Spandonidis 2014) leads to several suggestions about the real story. First of all by checking the names involved in the story we conclude that what is described could be done on 180 BC. Furthermore the connection between Pythagoras and Numa seems to be fiction due to the almost two centuries separating the lives of two men. The second important thing is the fact of the burning. It seems that some books involving the name of Numa and Greek philosophy were burned in public. Looking on history (Gruen 1990) of these times we find that some years later (161 BC) a general anti-Greek philosophy feeling that was dominated Roman republic has been recorded that led even to the persecution of Greek philosophers from Roman Empire. This story could be evidence of pre-existence (20 years) of that feeling. A third issue is the emphasis that Livy gives to the fact that the first chest was empty. Working on that, we found no evidence that king Numa was a real person; seem to be more a mythical invention. This makes us believe that Livy's reference about the absence of bones could note that mythical existence (in a rather polite manner) or simply suggest that the grave was built from someone else to bury some pseudepigrapha. Looking again in history we found evidence (eg Gudeman 1894) of existence of similar attends to prove historical existence of some cult based on faked textual evidence. Lastly an important thing arising is the use of papyrus and its freshness that is referred by Livy. It seems that papyrus couldn't be used by Numa (Beard et

al 1998) because it wasn't known by Romans at Numa's age. Additionally it is rather impossible for a papyrus to keep fresh especially underground. This means that the story was constructed by someone for the reasons that already have been referred.

MULTI-PERSPECTIVE APPROACH

Going one step further we cross examine the story of Livy with that of Plutarch. We only focus on their differences in order to gain useful information. The first notice is that Plutarch makes a lot of effort to convince the reader about Numa's and Pythagora's connection, in contrast to Livy who does the exact opposite. This seems something more than strange as even they are based on calendar evidence for their thesis they are not restricted to that, but they give a lot of effort to further prove that these two men were or not friends. The issue would be easier if someone did not mention it at all but now that opposite opinions are involved more investigation is needed. In order to make such an effort the biographies of authors were examined. Two are the most important issues (concerning this case): Plutarch was initiated into the mysteries of the Greek god Apollo and served as one of the two priests at the temple of Apollo at Delphi, the site of the famous Delphic Oracle (Hugh 1864), while Livy was connected with Julius Caesar and was August's close friend (Dorey 1971). Examining the story from this point of view we could conclude that the involvement of Pythagora's name could be an anachronism depicting though folklore stories. Two different efforts seem to have been taken place: the effort to disconnect Pythagora's name from the most profound king of Rome (leaded from the emperor himself) and an effort to establish a historic root of Greek philosophy and maybe mysteries or some kind of religion (were Plutarch was a participant or even leader). This conclusion seems even more possible taking into account the primary sources of the author's. Livy refers to the story given by Varro and Hemina, while a historian named Antias is cited by Plutarch. This means that Plutarch who lived more than a century after Livy, either didn't know about Livy's book, or his references' work or he just ignored them in order to make his own story, based on Antias. On the other hand Livy only refers once to Antias in order to criticize the fact that he made connection between Numa and Pythagora.

A second notice is their difference upon the number of the books (fourteen and twenty four books according to Livy and Plutarch, respectively). Although this difference seems to be not worth mentioning and won't be further investigated by us too, it would be interesting if someone took into account the importance of number twelve for Pythagorism.

Thirdly the fact that Livy gives a short story about the effort of senate to give money to the man who found the books with the parallel absence of that detail from Plutarch's story, makes it plausible to be either a constructed detail or the most important clue. On the first hand if this fact is real it depicts senates suspicion for false texts from the very first time while on the other hand if it is a lie it depicts the try to cheat on the readers by constructing a false truth. This conclusion gets stronger

when the disagreement about the dead body is considering (in contrast to Livy Plutarch makes an effort from the beginning of the story to convince that a body was found).

Lastly (more because of textual limitation and not that this is the last difference) the difference on the reasoning for the burning (against traditional religion and not proper for public read according to Livy and Plutarch, respectively) is worth noticing. Once again the different opinions for a fact that could be easy to prove due to textual references from senate is something that makes even the burn itself to seem implausible. To clarify the previous statement, we do not dispute the fact of burning but we are skeptical about it. In the first case (Livy's story) it seems that Romans do not hesitate to burn the reputation of their beloved king in order to protect traditional religion against something (it is under investigation) and on the other story (Plutarch's) it seems that Romans would make the most important mistake of making a legend someone that they wanted to expel from their tradition (Pythagoras).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the current work an attempt to investigate the story of Numa's books using the multi-perspective method was presented. Firstly, an effort to view Livy's story by a critical historical perspective, made us conclude in useful information about the authenticity of the story. The next step in order retrieve further information from that story was to examine it in parallel with that of Plutarch. The comparison of the two stories noted many details that could be considering as constructed by the authors, thus should be handled very carefully by researchers. Taking into account personal biography of the authors we showed that their stories could serve as propaganda efforts of their age. We did not compare the stories of Livy and Plutarch with the story of Moses in Old Testament in order to investigate the motif of holy books due to word limitation of the current work. Lastly a discussion about the existence of the books and the fact of burning was given, lead to the conclusion that some books were burned but it is doubtful if these books incorporated philosophy or not. Of course lie identification due to translation mistakes (eg paper referred by Plutarch) has to be investigated before any suggestions to be seriously considered.

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