

The Evolution of Historical Genre in Latin Literature: from Hellenization in Rome to the Historiography of Tacitus

Abstract

The history of the Latin historiography began with the awakening of Roman nationalism against the irreparable movement of the Hellenization which gradually settled in Rome from the 3rd century before our era. That is why, many Roman historians of the first generation of Latin literature, Livius Andronicus, Naevius, Ennius, Fabius Pictor, etc., searched the origin of their traditions, not only to establish a new Roman history, but also to provide wrong the thinking that the Greek people long believed for longtime that Rome was a Hellenic city. However, in Cicero's opinion, he thought that there was no true Roman historian before his age. According to his historical thinking recounted in his two masterpieces *De oratore* and *Brutus*, he required that a historian must write his own history by using an abundance of styles and respect the law of writing history.

On one hand, a historian must penetrate dawn the causality of events and must search for the truth; in the other hand, his principal theory professes also *historia ornata*: write beautifully what is beautiful. As a result, it is from the age of Cicero that Roman historiography reached its peak for the first time. In addition, Roman historiography bloomed gradually thanks to historians coming from the following generations: Sallustius, Titus Livius and Tacitus. They are all famous through their art works, while Roman history became a scientific genre in Latin literature: it is educational and always teaches morals lessons to distinguish the virtues and the vices through the historical examples. We would like to conclusion the writing styles which link humanity and society by two functions: education and romanocentrism.

Key Words: Historiography, Hellenization, Cicero, Sallustius, Titus Livius and Tacitus

Materials & Method

In order to carry out this study of the evolution of Roman historiography, we decide to establish a timeline of mainly historians from the 3rd century before our age to the age of Roman empire. In addition, all of thinking and idea about Roman historiography is concluded directly from ancient books of those Roman historians. As far as the book edition, we would like to chose the edition of Belles-Lettres *a priori*.

Introduction

- A definition of Roman historiography in Latin literature
- A timeline of Roman historiography from 3rd century to 1st century before our age
- A list of mainly Roman historians in this interval
- analysis of their writing styles.



Figure 1

The portrait of Herodotus and Thucydides. They are principal historians which influenced the early Roman historians.



Figure 2

Livius Andronicus, Fabius Pictor and Ennius, they are first generation of Roman historians.

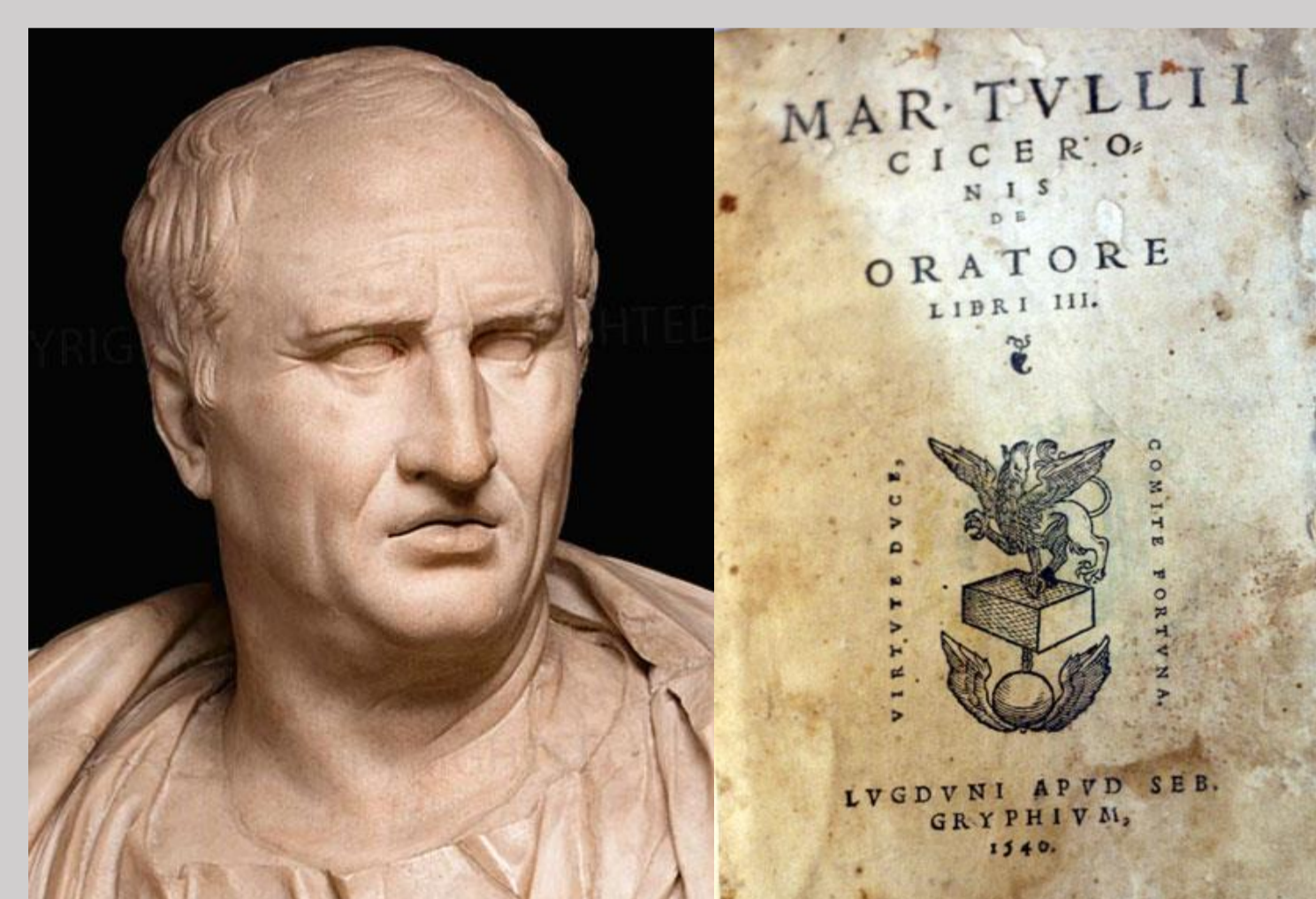


Figure 3

The age of Cicero is considered the begin of Rome historiography. In his *De oratore*, he indicate the important of *historia ornata* which is considered as his mainly historical thinking.



Figure 4

Sallustius, Titus Livius and Tacitus. They are three most famous Roman historians after Cicero's age.

Results

As a result, Latin historiography was not born by chance. As the birth of Latin literature, it had suffered for a longtime a deep influence of Greek historical thinking before reaching to its peak. The influence of the Hellenization shouldn't neither be exaggerated nor be underestimated. On the one hand, the Latin literature fed, from the 3rd century before J.-C., of new Greek literary genres, which was so popular for the Roman people, who enjoyed the Greek comedies and tragedies, as classic for elites like the philhellenes and the "Scripsions"; On the other hand, as it seems like, the Greek thought from longtime that Rome was a city Greek, the first generation of poets who lived in the age of Republic. But, Cicero, in his *De legibus*, denied that there was a true history nor a true historian in the age of Republic before his time. He required that a historian not only have to seek for the historical truth but must search for the causality of events. After him, historical writing became a science which is worthy of Roman people's memory: Sallustius searched a height soul of Roman people by taking the paradoxical example of Catilina; Titus Livius composed his monumental artwork in order to remind, or well restore the old moral; as for Tacitus, he was satisfied to make praise the Roman virtues, he preferred to penetrate in the field of historical matter by observation, in order to offer his lecturers a panoramic vision of "romanocentrism".

Discussion

In conclusion, we can see how the Roman history perfect over time and how Cicero's theory spread in the whole Latin historiography. Historiography – which its aim doesn't consist of searching the true history in our century – takes an important place in Rome. It represents the thinking through an observation of ancient society and always keeps the testimonies of past which was worthy of human memory for that we will not lose in the flow of time.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my two supervisors, Clément CHILLET and Marie-Claire FERRIES, for supporting and encouraging through the time in which I did this research article. Thanks to them, I have been able to solve out those problems in front of my way. I also thank them for supporting me by their precious advices. It was a great honor for me to work with them.

References

- Cicero, *De oratore*, t. 1, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1938.
Cicero, *De legibus*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1968.
Titus Livius, *Histoire romaine*, t. 1, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2012.
Sallustius, *La Conjuration de Catilina. La Guerre de Jugurtha*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1960.
Tacite, *Agricola*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1985.
Tacite, *Annales*, t. 4, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1975.