

## THE LATE ANTIQUE AFTERLIFE OF ROMAN EXEMPLARITY: THE CASE OF SCIPIO NASICA IN LIVY, *AB VRBE CONDITA* BOOK 29 AND AUGUSTINE, *DE CIVITATE DEI* 1.30–2.5\*

### ABSTRACT

*This article calls for a new understanding of the relationship between classicizing and Christian discourses of exemplarity through a close reading of the figure of Scipio Nasica in Livy, Ab urbe condita Book 29 and Augustine, De ciuitate Dei Books 1–2. Nasica, whose selection as a uir optimus by the Senate in 204 B.C.E. has puzzled modern scholars, was a source of historiographical difficulty for Livy that prompted him to reflect upon exemplarity, mythmaking and the tenuous relationship between past and present. For Augustine, on the other hand, Nasica was a pagan, and thus imperfect, realization of Christian pietas and restraint from luxurious behaviour. Although differing in their interpretations of the Republican exemplum, both Livy and Augustine point to the complexities inherent in invocations of paradigmatic Roman maiores. The close study of Scipio Nasica thus reveals the classicizing precedent lingering behind the supposedly ‘Christian’ rejections of pre-Christian Roman culture in the De ciuitate Dei.*

**Keywords:** Livy; Augustine; Scipio Nasica; Magna Mater; exemplarity

In or around 204 B.C.E.,<sup>1</sup> the Romans sent an expedition to Asia Minor. The ambassadors brought back a stone that had fallen from the sky and was regarded by the Romans as an embodiment of the Magna Mater.<sup>2</sup> The Senate chose Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica (cos. 191) to be the *uir optimus* who was required to welcome the new goddess. At Ostia, Nasica, along with Claudia Quinta, was to receive the Magna Mater before she was installed in her new temple on the Palatine Hill.

Over the last century, the arrival of the Phrygian goddess and her cult has provoked much scholarly interest and debate, primarily focussed on its significance for the religious and political landscapes of third-century Rome.<sup>3</sup> This article, by contrast,

\* This paper originated in a graduate seminar on Livy’s Third Decade taught by Celia Schultz at the University of Michigan. I would like to thank Celia for her comments on the paper, as well as Tobias Reinhardt, Jenny Rallens and Chuck Mathewes, who very generously read drafts of this article. My thoughts have also been sharpened and improved by the comments from the Editor and the anonymous peer reviewers at *CQ*. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Oxford-Yale Postgraduate Workshop on exemplarity and at the Ancient History postgraduate Work-in-Progress Seminar at the Oxford Classics Faculty. I would like to express my gratitude to the organizers and participants, particularly Irene Peirano Garrison, Federico Favi, Rachel Love and Alex Antoniou for very helpful bibliography.

<sup>1</sup> L. Roller, *In Search of God the Mother: The Cult of Anatolian Cybele* (Berkeley, 1999), 263 lists the date as 204 B.C.E.; P.J. Burton, ‘The summoning of the Magna Mater to Rome (205 B.C.)’, *Historia* 45 (1996), 36–63 uses 205 B.C.E. Neither gives a substantial discussion concerning these dates.

<sup>2</sup> See Roller (n. 1), 271 for the difference between the Greek iconography of Cybele and the Roman aniconic Magna Mater.

<sup>3</sup> W.W. Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic: An Introduction to the Study of the Religion of the Romans* (London, 1899), 69–71; H. Graillot, *Le culte de Cybèle, mère des dieux, à Rome et dans l’empire romain* (Paris, 1912), 25–69; J. Vogt, ‘Vorläufer des Optimus Princeps’, *Hermes* 68 (1933), 84–92; T. Köves, ‘Zum Empfang der Magna Mater in Rom’, *Historia* 12

will conduct a literary critical analysis of this episode across different Latin texts, and in particular the meaning ascribed to Scipio Nasica's selection as *uir optimus*.<sup>4</sup> The reason for the Senate's choice of Nasica was unclear even to historians working in antiquity. Instead, Nasica the *uir optimus* came to embody a range of different but related virtues across the Graeco-Roman literary world.

In what follows I shall chart the moments in which the exemplarity of Scipio Nasica undergoes a change in meaning, with particular focus on how these shifts are constructed in the narrative system of Livy's *Ab urbe condita* and Augustine's *De ciuitate Dei*. At *Ab urbe condita* 29.14, Livy uses Scipio Nasica's reception of the Magna Mater to reflect upon exemplarity, contemporary mythmaking and the tenuousness of the relationship between past and present. Augustine likewise produces a reading of Scipio Nasica which calls for re-evaluation of Nasica as an *exemplum* through an extended comparison of Republican and late antique cultural mores.

In so doing, both *Ab urbe condita* and *De ciuitate Dei* foreground their awareness of the fluidity of cultural memory, a Roman self-consciousness which has captured the attention of recent scholarship on *exempla* in the Roman world.<sup>5</sup> The 2018 monograph of Rebecca Langlands in particular has convincingly shown that exemplary discourse from the first century B.C.E to the first century C.E. assigns many different meanings to its moral models and does not consistently portray them as embodiments of contemporary Roman values. To explore in full the pay-off of this approach to Roman *exempla*, however, its chronological scope must be widened. Incorporating the inherent dynamism of exemplarity into our understanding of 'later' Latin texts brings to light important points of resemblance between classical and late antique treatments of exemplary figures. Indeed, close study of Scipio Nasica reveals that Augustine's use of *exempla* to expose a rupture between past and present is not simply the result of Christian repurposing of earlier rhetorical practices, as believed by previous

(1963), 321–47; G. Thomas, 'Magna Mater and Attis', *ANRW* 2.17.3 (1984), 1500–55; E.S. Gruen, *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy* (Leiden, 1990), 5–33; Burton (n. 1); Roller (n. 1); A. Nikoloska, 'The sea voyage of Magna Mater to Rome', *Histria Antiqua* 21 (2012), 365–71; S. Satterfield, 'Intention and exoticism in the Magna Mater's introduction to Rome', *Latomus* 71 (2012), 373–91. In his remarks on the episode, T.P. Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics* (Leicester, 1979), 94–9 lays some preliminary groundwork on the literary critical points of interest in the historiographical tradition.

<sup>4</sup> In placing Scipio Nasica centre stage, I offer analysis of a figure who has not received sustained scholarly attention since the work of Köves (n. 3). Studies tend more often to follow Ovid in their focus on Claudia Quinta as the actor of interest: see e.g. F. Bömer, 'Kybele in Rom: die Geschichte ihres Kults als politisches Phänomen', *MDAI(R)* 71 (1964), 130–51, at 146–51; J. Scheid, 'Claudia the Vestal Virgin', in A. Fraschetti (ed.), L. Lappin (transl.), *Roman Women* (Chicago, 1994), 23–34; C. Torre, 'Ritratti di signora: per un'interpretazione di Ovidio, "Fasti" IV 247–349', in P.F. Moretti, C. Torre, G. Zanetto (edd.), *Debita dona: studi in onore di Isabella Gualandri* (Naples, 2008), 471–503. For the Roman people as the primary focus of Livy's retelling of the Magna Mater episode, see D.S. Levene, *Religion in Livy* (Leiden, 1993), 71–2.

<sup>5</sup> R. Langlands, *Exemplary Ethics in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 2018) and M.B. Roller, *Models from the Past in Roman Culture: A World of Exempla* (Cambridge, 2018), 156–62 discuss the ways in which the literary tradition over time registers change in modes of exemplary discourse. For Livy's self-consciousness about exemplarity, see B.S. Rodgers, 'Great expeditions: Livy on Thucydides', *TAPhA* 116 (1986), 335–52; M.B. Roller, 'The consul(ar) as *exemplum*: Fabius Cunctator's paradoxical glory', in H. Beck, A. Duplá, M. Jehne and F.P. Pol (edd.), *Consuls and Res Publica: Holding High Office in the Roman Republic* (Cambridge, 2011), 182–210. On the transformations *exempla* undergo in different contexts more generally, see S. Goldhill, 'The failure of exemplarity', in I.J.F. de Jong, J.P. Sullivan (edd.), *Modern Critical Theory and Classical Literature* (Leiden, 1994), 51–73, and the bibliography collected by Langlands (this note), 142 n. 3.

scholarship.<sup>6</sup> Instead, my treatment of Nasica illustrates in microcosm a larger phenomenon at work in *De ciuitate Dei*—namely, that Augustine’s supposedly innovative refashioning of classical *exempla* to fit a late antique context suggests continuities with classical exemplary discourse, which likewise highlights the gap between the moral paradigms of the past and present mores. In both Livy and Augustine, thoughts on the problems with Nasica as an *exemplum* accompany the descriptions of his selection as *uir optimus*.

## SECTION 1: THE IDENTITY (ANCIENT AND MODERN) OF SCIPIO NASICA

As with many of the figures who are at the forefront of ancient exemplary discourse, the historical Scipio Nasica is shrouded by legend. Unlike the case of some exemplary actors from the earliest days of the Republic, however, modern scholars can securely identify the name with a historical figure. For a member of the Roman elite, Nasica lived a life of relative obscurity, aside from his selection to help introduce the Magna Mater to Rome.<sup>7</sup>

The ancient authors who discuss Nasica, on the other hand, are less certain about his identity than twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship. The surviving sources on Nasica, eager to attribute to him notable deeds beyond the reception of the Magna Mater, often conflate this Scipio Nasica with his son, Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica Corculum (cos. 162, 155), and with his grandson, Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica Serapio (cos. 138). Some such confluences, namely of Nasica with Nasica Serapio, complicate Nasica’s exemplarity, as they note his selection by the Senate together with Nasica Serapio’s electoral defeat for the aedileship in his youth.<sup>8</sup> This lack of consensus on the exact qualities which secured Nasica the honour of *uir optimus* indicates confusion on the nature of his achievements.<sup>9</sup> Thus, although it is chronologically possible that the prototypical Scipio Nasica and Nasica Corculum

<sup>6</sup> For Augustine’s innovation in this respect, see R. Honstetter, *Exemplum zwischen Rhetorik und Literatur zur gattungsgeschichtlichen Sonderstellung von Valerius Maximus und Augustinus* (Konstanz, 1977), 185–95; D. Trout, ‘Re-textualizing Lucretia: cultural subversion in the *City of God*’, *JECS* 2 (1994), 53–70; C. Conybeare, ‘*Terrarum orbi documentum*: Augustine, Camillus, and learning from history’, in M. Vessey, K. Pollmann, A.D. Fitzgerald (edd.), *History, Apocalypse, and the Secular Imagination: New Essays on Augustine’s City of God* (Bowling Green, 1999), 59–74. B. Harding, ‘The use of Alexander the Great in Augustine’s *City of God*’, *AugStud* 39 (2008), 113–28 is an important exception to this approach, touching upon the classical precedents for Augustine’s critique of Alexander the Great. In taking this approach to Christian *exempla*, I am building upon the work of J. Petitfils, *Mos Christianorum: The Roman Discourse of Exemplarity and the Jewish and Christian Language of Leadership* (Tübingen, 2016), 150–4; Langlands (n. 5), 143–4; and Roller (n. 5 [2018]), 26, who discuss to varying degrees the similarities between exemplarity in early Christian and (roughly) contemporary classical texts, but do not cover Late Antiquity. For the influence of classical models of exemplarity in the collapsing of distance between *exemplum* and emulator in Late Antiquity, see P. Brown, ‘The saint as exemplar in Late Antiquity’, *Representations* 2 (1983), 1–25.

<sup>7</sup> See further ‘Cornelius’ no. 352 in *RE* 4 (1900), 1494–7.

<sup>8</sup> See Plin. *HN* 7.120; Val. Max. 7.5.2, 8.15.3. The meditation on the laudable and less laudable traits of both these Nasicas in Pliny and Valerius Maximus is a typical method of exemplary discourse in ancient literary sources, on which see Langlands (n. 5), 291–335. The date of Nasica Serapio’s unsuccessful candidacy for the aedileship is not known (*RE* 4 [1900], 1502).

<sup>9</sup> His piety, however, features in both Diod. Sic. 34/5.33.3 (εὐσεβεία) and Val. Max. 8.15.3 (*sanctissimus*). I am grateful to Alex Antoniou for his suggestion that Nasica’s youth may have played an important role in Nasica’s selection, as Romans tended to send young men to greet new gods. For a

were the same individual and not father and son, the sources are not consistent enough to allow for such a conclusion.<sup>10</sup> This article will therefore adopt the approach taken by modern historians, and refer to Scipio Nasica and Nasica Corculum as two different men.

Uncertainty over the identity of Nasica aside, the significance of the Senate's pronouncement in 204 B.C.E. has proven obscure to ancient and modern scholars alike. Scipio Nasica appears to be the only figure to have been named a *uir optimus* by the Senate.<sup>11</sup> The closest parallels for the honour, moreover, reveal an intriguing but vague image of the (self-)presentation of the Scipionic *familia*. The *comparandum* most contemporary with Nasica is the epitaph of Lucius Cornelius Scipio (cos. 259), which offers an encomiastic description of its dedicatee as an *optumo uiro*.<sup>12</sup> In a slightly more sarcastic and chronologically later context, Appian refers to Scipio Nasica Serapio, who has just stormed the Capitol to confront Tiberius Gracchus, as ἄνθρωπος ἄριστος, thereby simultaneously recalling the illustrious repute of Serapio's grandfather as ἄριστος while contrasting Serapio's violence with Nasica's more peaceful reception of the Magna Mater.<sup>13</sup> Whether employed for praise or subtle criticism, the honorary epithet seems to have close ties to the Scipiones and their prominence amongst the aristocracy during the third and second centuries B.C.E.<sup>14</sup> As the epitaph of Lucius Cornelius Scipio suggests, it may originally have played a role in a larger rivalry with Lucius Scipio's contemporary Atilius Caiatinus, whose own funerary inscription claimed him to be *primarius*.<sup>15</sup> Beyond these general outlines, however, it is not possible to draw further connections between the men each of whom was referred to as *uir optimus*.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Livy's account sheds little additional light on this larger family portrait, as the sections discussing Lucius Cornelius Scipio and Scipio Nasica Serapio are lost, and he does not make any further references to a *uir optimus* or an *optimus uir* outside of his discussion of Nasica's selection.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, neither the immediate context of Nasica's selection itself nor the cultural milieu of the earliest attestations of Nasica proves fruitful for gaining further clarity. Although the exhortation to the Romans in 204 B.C.E. to choose a *uir optimus* is usually reported as coming from a Greek source,<sup>18</sup> attempts to understand *uir optimus* as a mere translation of, and thus deriving its meaning from, the Greek ἄριστος ἄνθρωπος have

slightly different reading of the significance of his youth in the choice of Nasica, see Köves (n. 3), 325–35 and Thomas (n. 3), 1505.

<sup>10</sup> See further *RE* 4 (1900), 1494. The entry in *RE* provides a list of the sources on Nasica, to which the passages from Book 1 of *De ciuitate Dei*, discussed below, should be added.

<sup>11</sup> H. Flower, *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture* (Oxford, 1996), 178.

<sup>12</sup> *CIL* 6.1287.

<sup>13</sup> App. *B Ciu.* 1.16–17 and *Hann.* 7.56–7 for Scipio Nasica and Scipio Nasica Serapio as ἄριστος.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas (n. 3), 1505.

<sup>15</sup> Flower (n. 11), 177–9 discusses the relationship with the epitaph of Caiatinus, but notes that its chronology relative to that of Lucius Scipio cannot be determined. She does not comment on the qualities which deemed Caiatinus *primarius*.

<sup>16</sup> Flower (n. 11), 178–9 in particular rejects the suggestion in *RE* 4 (1900), 1495 and in Vogt (n. 3), 89–90 that Lucius Scipio's inscription designated Lucius Scipio an *optimus uir* to extend the honour of the Senate's decision to other members of Nasica's *gens*.

<sup>17</sup> For these discussions, see Livy 29.14.7–10, 36.40.8–9 (studied in further detail at pages 680–2 below). The reference to an *optimus uir* at *Per.* 49 likewise describes the selection of Nasica by the Senate, as the mention of this honour in relation to Corculum results from a conflation of the achievements of Nasica with those of his son Corculum (*RE* 4 [1900], 1494).

<sup>18</sup> Either the oracle of Apollo at Delphi (Livy 29.11.5–7, Val. Max. 8.15.3, Cass. Dio 17.61) or the Sibylline Books (Diod. Sic. 34/5.33.2, Sil. *Pun.* 17.2, App. *Hann.* 7.56, *De uir. ill.* 46.1).

generally been rejected.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the first extant references to Nasica's selection come from the first century B.C.E., a period in which the phrase *uir optimus* had a wide variety of meanings, thereby creating ambiguity as to what meaning it may have had for authors such as Livy and for their audiences. Within the corpus of Cicero alone, *uir optimus* can be a term simply denoting the Roman elite, as it is in a number of his speeches, or a description of the ideal, almost divine ruler, as used in the *De re publica*.<sup>20</sup>

## SECTION 2: LIVY AND NASICA THE UNKNOWN

The mystery surrounding the Senate's choice of Nasica is reflected in *Ab urbe condita* Book 29, where Livy pauses for a series of meta-reflections on *exempla* and on the gap between past and present. At the very outset of the rituals which introduced the Magna Mater to Rome, Livy describes Scipio Nasica's selection as *uir optimus* (29.14.9–10):

P. Scipionem Cn. f. eius, qui in Hispania ceciderat, adulescentem nondum quaestorium, iudicauerunt in tota ciuitate uirum bonorum optimum esse. id quibus uirtutibus inducti ita iudicarint, sicut traditum a proximis memoriae temporum illorum scriptoribus libens posteris traderem, ita meas opiniones coniectando rem uetustate obrutam non interponam.<sup>21</sup>

Livy's confession of uncertainty about the reasons for the Senate's selection constitutes the only commentary on the qualities which may have won Nasica the distinction. Despite two subsequent mentions, one by the authorial persona and one by Nasica himself in indirect discourse, that the selection exceeds any other political honour, neither of these discussions gives a reason for the desirability of Nasica's nomination.<sup>22</sup> Such a refusal to shed light on the motivations for the selection produces significant literary effects. While Livy acknowledges that *exempla* can fade from Roman cultural memory, he admits to the incompleteness of his information in only one other exemplary narrative.<sup>23</sup> When tracing the injustices suffered by the virtuous Verginia,

<sup>19</sup> Thomas (n. 3), 1505.

<sup>20</sup> For the former, see A.M. Stone, 'Optimates: an archaeology', in K.E. Welch, T.W. Hillard, J. Bellemore (edd.), *Roman Crossings: Theory and Practice in the Roman Republic* (Swansea, 2005), 59–94, at 59–67; for the latter, I. Samotta, *Das Vorbild der Vergangenheit: Geschichtsbild und Reformvorschläge bei Cicero und Sallust* (Stuttgart, 2009), 59–97.

<sup>21</sup> 'The Senate judged Publius Cornelius Scipio, son of Gnaeus who had fallen in Spain, a youth not yet a quaestor, to be the best of all the good men in the state. If the virtues by which they were led to decide thus had been handed down by writers close to the memory of those times, I would gladly hand them down to posterity. As it is, I will not insert my own opinions by conjecturing on a matter overwhelmed by its antiquity.' All translations are my own, with reference to F.G. Moore (ed. and transl.), *Livy: History of Rome: Books XXVIII–XXX* (Cambridge, Mass., 1949); the text is from G. Wiessenborn and M. Müller (edd.), *Titi Livi Ab urbe condita libri: Pars III libri XXIV–XXX* (Leipzig, 1909<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>22</sup> Livy 29.14.7–8, 36.40.8–9. The significance of being voted *uir optimus* is also mentioned by Sil. *Pun.* 17.7.

<sup>23</sup> For the forgetting of *exempla*, see Livy 37.1.9–10. In most exemplary anecdotes, Livy enumerates possible versions of the story when he is uncertain about information. See e.g. 2.40.1–2 (on the embassy of Veturia and Volumnia to Coriolanus); 3.26.9 (on Cincinnatus); 4.13.7–8 (on Lucius Minucius who is described as an *exemplum* of bad behaviour at 4.13.1–2); 29.21.1–3 (on Quintus Pleminius who is labelled an *exemplum* at 31.12.2); 30.26.9 (on Fabius Cunctator); 30.45.6–7 (on the *cognomen* of Scipio Africanus). For the multiplicity of interpretations inherent in Livy's *exempla* more generally, see J.D. Chaplin, *Livy's Exemplary History* (Oxford, 2000), 73–136.

the historian explains that he will relate the decision, but not the actual speech, which pronounced her the property of the predatory Appius Claudius owing to the inaccuracy of the written accounts.<sup>24</sup> Livy's aside on Nasica likewise breaks the narrative flow to authenticate the credibility of his project. Livy as historian will not invent reasons in order to provide a continuous narrative, but rather will accurately report the information as handed down by the sources closest to the period on which he reports.<sup>25</sup>

In advertising the caution (and thus authenticity) of his work, Livy implicitly places himself in opposition to other traditions which embellish the tale of Scipio Nasica. Indeed, when read alongside the commentary on Nasica's commendable qualities provided by roughly contemporary authors, Livy's claim that he lacks adequate source material sets his work apart.<sup>26</sup> Whereas Diodorus Siculus notes Nasica's piety and wisdom, Cicero his *dignitas*, Valerius Maximus his holiness, and Silius Italicus his illustrious lineage,<sup>27</sup> Livy lingers on the difficulty of the historiographical tradition and does not provide further explanation for the selection in his later, passing references to Nasica's role in the arrival of the Magna Mater at Rome.<sup>28</sup> His assertion at 29.14.9 that Nasica's exceptional traits have not been handed down *proximis memoriae temporum illorum scriptoribus* twice uses the verb *tradere*, a verb associated with attempts to review the historiographical tradition at large in the *Ab urbe condita*,<sup>29</sup> and thereby hints at later interpolations from which Livy must distinguish historical truth. Moreover, Nasica's story is from the very outset surrounded by authorial scepticism. As Livy recounts, Nasica's selection to welcome the Magna Mater is the product of a more general interest in the arrival of the Magna Mater in order to expiate the prodigies of 204, which Livy believes were engendered by *superstitio*.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Livy 3.47.5. The two passages also resemble each other on the level of language. In particular, both authorial interventions admit to a gap in their source material using the verb *tradere* which, as discussed below, is a verb of programmatic importance in 29.14.

<sup>25</sup> Similarly, W. Wiehemeyer, *Proben historischer Kritik aus Livius XXI–XLV* (Emsdetten, 1938), 5. On the importance of source criticism to Livy's authorial self-fashioning, see Levene (n. 4), 29. Wiehemeyer (this note), 62 and R.T. Ridley, 'Livy the critical historian', *Athenaeum* 102 (2014), 444–74, at 470 note Livy's preference for sources which are closest to events narrated.

<sup>26</sup> See similarly Levene (n. 4), 71 n. 113 on the importance of Livy's explicit acknowledgement of his silence. Livy is not the only author to allude to Nasica as *uir optimus* without detailing his virtues (see Cic. *Har. resp.* 13.27, *Brut.* 29; Vell. Pat. 2.3; Plin. *HN* 7.120; Ampelius, *Liber memorialis* 24), but is the only one to comment upon the absence of such a list.

<sup>27</sup> Diod. Sic. 34/5.33.1–4 (whose description of 'Nasica' opposing Cato the Elder conflates Scipio Nasica with his son, Corculum), Cic. *Fin.* 5.64, Val. Max. 8.15.3, Sil. *Pun.* 17.1–12, all of which are listed at Gruen (n. 3), 25 n. 102.

<sup>28</sup> See Livy 35.10.9, 36.36.3, 34.40.8–9.

<sup>29</sup> J.P. Davies, *Rome's Religious History: Livy, Tacitus, and Ammianus on their Gods* (Cambridge, 2004), 54–6.

<sup>30</sup> Livy 29.14.3–5. My reading of Livy's observations about the prodigies draws inspiration from the argument of Davies (n. 29), 21–85 that Livy's critique of religious practices does not imply a systematic sceptical attitude towards Roman religion *tout court*, but rather constitutes part of a larger network of hermeneutic approaches taken to the corpus of Roman history he inherited; see especially 83 for Davies's analysis of the prodigies listed at Livy 29.14. The association of Magna Mater with *superstitio* also reflects a larger tendency on Livy's part to link non-Roman religious traditions with *superstitio*, on which S.W. Rasmussen, 'Ritual and identity: a sociological perspective on the expiation of public portents in ancient Rome', in A. Rasmussen and S.W. Rasmussen (edd.), *Religion and Society: Resources and Identity in the Ancient Graeco-Roman World: The BOMOS-Conferences 2002–2005* (Rome, 2008), 37–42, at 40.



The connection between Nasica's honour and prodigies of questionable credibility further supports the presence of an underlying critical attitude towards Nasica's narrative. In short, the possibility emerges that Livy is responding to Late Republican and Early Imperial literary treatments of the events of 204 B.C.E.<sup>31</sup>

This possibility is further strengthened by verbal echoes of the wording of the Preface. At the opening of his work, Livy is dismissive of new attempts to write history, claiming that 'clever attempts to compete' with antiquity, *uetustas*, are the very reason his topic has been vulgarized.<sup>32</sup> In Book 29 the authorial persona likewise sets himself in contrast to the practice of modifying *uetustas*. This reaffirmation of Livy's approach to *uetustas* marks the aside in Book 29 as part of a larger project of authorial self-positioning within the historiographical and literary traditions.<sup>33</sup>

When he includes Scipio Nasica's selection as *uir optimus*, Livy invokes a nexus of concepts laden with paradigms for moral behaviour.<sup>34</sup> The *exemplum* of Nasica, however, is redirected to launch a unique, self-conscious criticism of contemporary mythmaking. In the whole of the *Ab urbe condita*, the selection of Scipio Nasica is the only exemplary narrative to highlight the distance between the content of Livy's history and Livy's present day through an emphasis on the unattainability of knowledge about the subject at hand.<sup>35</sup> While the circulation of Scipio Nasica's deeds in forms other than Livy's history may have mitigated the apparent remoteness of this episode for a contemporary audience,<sup>36</sup> Livy's description places the virtues of Scipio Nasica in a past that is irrecoverable within his Augustan present.

<sup>31</sup> Which types of literary works were particularly interested in the mythologizing of Scipio Nasica is an area needing further research, beyond the scope of this paper; see the preliminary overviews at Wiseman (n. 3), 95–8 (who has a particular interest in the possibility of staged versions of the tale of the arrival of the Magna Mater) and J.N. Bremmer, 'Slow Cybele's arrival', in J.N. Bremmer, N. Horsfall (edd.), *Roman Myth and Mythography* (London, 1987), 105–11, at 106. For an older theory on the mythical nature of the entire narrative of the acceptance of the Magna Mater into Rome, see E. Schmidt, *Kultübertragungen* (Giessen, 1909), 1–30.

<sup>32</sup> *Praef.* 9. I am grateful to Irene Peirano Garrison for pointing out the similarities between the Preface and Book 29.

<sup>33</sup> Livy's respect for *uetustas* likewise arises at 2.21.4 and 4.23.3, where he leaves undecided historical details which have been obscured by antiquity. Livy's citation of other writers in a meditation on the nature of good historiography is another example of his use of citation to engage critically and competitively with his predecessors, for which see A.L. Haimson, 'Intertextuality and source criticism in the Scipionic trials', in W. Polleichtner (ed.), *Livy and Intertextuality* (Trier, 2010), 93–133 and A.L. Haimson, 'Citation and the dynamics of tradition in Livy's *AVC*', *Histos* 7 (2013), 21–47. Furthermore, as I. Peirano Garrison, 'Beyond emulation' [unpublished paper delivered at the 'Oxford–Yale Postgraduate Workshop: Exemplarity' in 2019] notes, *interponere* carries metaliterary weight across Early Imperial literature, referring to an author's interventions in and innovations imposed upon the existing tradition. In this context, Livy's use of the verb *interponere* explicitly marks this statement as programmatic. For further discussion of Livy's relationship to his predecessors in the Preface, see J.L. Moles, 'Livy's preface', *CCJ* 39 (1994), 141–68, especially at 141–55.

<sup>34</sup> On Nasica as an *exemplum*, see I. Calabi, 'Le fonti della storia Romana nel *De civitate Dei* di Sant'Agostino', *PP* 43 (1955), 274–94, at 285.

<sup>35</sup> For a slightly different technique to foreground the gap between past and present in Livy, see Chaplin (n. 23), 121–36, who argues that the preference for *exempla* from more recent history in the speeches of Publius Sempronius Sophos at 9.33.3–34.26, Fabius Cunctator at 28.40.1–42.22, Scipio Africanus at 28.43.1–44.18, and Marcus Servilius Geminus at 45.37.1–39.20 underscores this sense of distance from earlier epochs.

<sup>36</sup> T.P. Wiseman, 'Ovid and the stage', in G. Herbert-Brown (ed.), *Ovid's Fasti: Historical Readings at its Bimillennium* (Oxford, 2002), 275–99, at 275 specifically mentions the possibility of a staged version of this episode.

## SECTION 3: AUGUSTINE'S REPUBLICAN EXEGESIS

In contrast to many of the authors referring to Scipio Nasica, who tend to mention him only very briefly, Augustine shares with Livy this deeper interest in and engagement with the significance of Nasica and his reception of the Magna Mater at Rome. Like many classical *exempla* in *De ciuitate Dei*, Augustine thinks critically about Nasica across the course of several chapters (from the end of Book 1 to the beginning of Book 2), examining him from a variety of different, even slightly conflicting, angles.<sup>37</sup> In each of his appearances, Nasica is moulded by Augustine in the image of his own concerns about historical change, luxury and spectacle.

The interaction with Nasica begins at *De ciu. D.* 1.30, in a diatribe which criticizes the luxury of Augustine's contemporary non-Christians with language of decline borrowed from Sallust's depiction of Rome at the end of the Third Punic War (1.30):<sup>38</sup>

si Nasica ille Scipio uester quondam pontifex uiueret, quem sub terrore belli Punici in suscipiendis Phrygiis sacris, cum uir optimus quaereretur, uniuersus senatus elegit, cuius os fortasse non auderetis aspicere, ipse uos ab hac inpuidentia cohiberet. cur enim adflicti rebus aduersis de temporibus querimini Christianis, nisi quia uestram luxuriam cupitis habere securam et perditissimis moribus remota omni molestiarum asperitate diffluere? neque enim propterea cupitis habere pacem et omni genere copiarum abundare, ut his bonis honeste utamini, hoc est modeste sobrie, temperanter pie, sed ut infinita uarietas uoluptatum insanis effusionibus exquiratur, secundisque rebus ea mala oriantur in moribus quae saeuientibus peiora sunt hostibus. at ille Scipio pontifex maximus uester, ille iudicio totius senatus uir optimus, istam uobis metuens calamitatem nolebat aemulam tunc imperii Romani Carthaginem dirui et decernenti ut dirueretur contradicebat Catoni, timens infirmis animis hostem securitatem et tamquam pupillis ciuibus idoneum tutorem necessarium uidens esse terrorem.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> For this treatment of classical *exempla* in *De ciuitate Dei*, see J. Herdt, 'The theater of virtues: Augustine's critique of pagan mimesis', in J. Wetzel (ed.), *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, 2012), 111–29, at 123–7. Augustine's approach to biblical *exempla* is slightly different, in that he both places more emphasis on their similarities with his theological project rather than on the distance between exemplary past and his contemporary present (see e.g. I. Bochet, 'La figure de Moïse dans la *Cité de Dieu*', *Studia Patristica* 43 [2006], 9–14 on the significance of Moses in *De ciuitate Dei*) and also admits to the human imperfection even of the most revered Christian *exempla*, including martyrs and saints (on which, see R. Dodaro, 'Augustine's revision of the heroic ideal', *AugStud* 36 [2005], 141–57).

<sup>38</sup> H. Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics* (Göteborg, 1967), 642; G. Bonamente, 'Il *metus punicus* e la decadenza di Roma in Sallustio, Agostino, ed Orosio', *GIP* 27 (1975), 137–69; A. Schindler, 'Augustine and the history of the Roman empire', *Studia Patristica* 22 (1989), 326–36, at 329–31; G. O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford, 1999), 79–81, 242; B. Harding, *Augustine and Roman Virtue* (London, 2008), 91–2.

<sup>39</sup> 'If that Scipio Nasica, once your *pontifex maximus*, were living—the man whom the whole Senate elected to receive the Phrygian cult objects in the terror of the Punic War, when the best man was sought, and whose face perhaps you would not dare to look upon—he would restrain you from this shamelessness. Why do you, when afflicted with adverse affairs, complain about the Christian era, if not because you desire to have your luxury secure and to abandon yourselves to the most ruinous ways once every harshness of troubles has been removed? Nor indeed do you desire to have peace and to abound in every type of prosperity so that you may use these goods honourably (that is, in a moderately sober, temperately pious way), but so that an infinite variety of pleasures may be sought in mad excess, and so that in pleasing times evil customs arise which are worse than raging enemies. And that Scipio, your *pontifex maximus*, the best man at the judgement of the whole Senate, fearing this calamity would befall you, did not want Carthage, then the rival of Roman power, to be destroyed. He spoke against Cato, who decreed that it ought to be destroyed, afraid that security was an enemy for weak souls, and seeing that terror was a necessary fit guardian for the, as it were, orphaned citizens.' All translations are my own, with reference to G.E. McCracken (ed. and transl.).



Augustine uses a slightly different strand of the tradition than does Livy, attributing the achievements of Scipio Nasica Corculum and Scipio Nasica to the same Nasica.<sup>40</sup> Like Diodorus Siculus, Augustine gives Nasica's rebuttal against Cato's efforts to destroy Carthage as a reason for his selection as *uir optimus*.<sup>41</sup> Augustine thus inscribes Nasica within a discourse of exemplarity familiar to pre-Christian Roman literature, while painting a picture of Scipio Nasica in which his status as *uir optimus* is consistently juxtaposed with, and thereby linked to, what Augustine believes were *his* views on moderation and restraint.

This opening of Augustine's engagement with Nasica is suffused with multiple layers of significance. The emphasis on Nasica's involvement with the Magna Mater at the very start of *De ciu. D.* 1.30 follows upon a vivid description of the worldliness, and hence inferiority, of traditional Roman gods.<sup>42</sup> Augustine's notional Nasica therefore illustrates the severity of the Roman decline into luxury—even a critic whose interaction with the Magna Mater involved him with an inherently problematic polytheistic theology would recognize the shamefulness of the behaviour in fifth-century Rome. Using Nasica to critique Roman immorality, however, also sheds light on a series of similarities between late antique and Republican moralists.<sup>43</sup> Like Nasica, Augustine too fears for the integrity of Roman moderation in the face of the luxurious inclinations of his contemporaries.

The two chapters which follow present more correspondences between the rhetoric of the two men. At *De ciu. D.* 1.32, Augustine is spurred to a diatribe against the popularity of theatrical spectacle which both echoes in sentiment and improves upon the rejection of dramatic performance by Nasica. As we shall see in more detail later, Augustine establishes important differences between his own views on the theatre and Nasica's.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, the description of the Republican senator's wise concern for his fatherland (*hac providentissima patriae caritate*) and of his distinguished speech (*oratione grauissima*) against building a permanent theatre in Rome also reveals an admiration for Nasica's arguments.<sup>45</sup>

The ethical standards of Augustine and Nasica converge even further at the beginning of Book 2, where Nasica is resurrected in a manner almost recalling prosopopoeia (*De ciu. D.* 2.5):

*Augustine: City of God: Books 1–3* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957); the text is B. Dombart and A. Kalb (ed.), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Episcopi De ciuitate Dei libri XXII* (Stuttgart, 1981).

<sup>40</sup> It is important to note here that both S. Angus, *The Sources of the First Ten Books of Augustine's De Ciuitate Dei* (Princeton, 1906), 28 and Hagendahl (n. 38), 658–9 believe that Augustine's source for Scipio Nasica is Livy. The limitations of such attempts to pinpoint a source for Augustine's knowledge of Nasica are noted explicitly by Wiseman (n. 3), 97 n. 140, who argues that the language used to describe Nasica's selection is similar across all the literary sources. This *caueat* is reinforced by Langlands (n. 5), 166–86 and Roller (n. 5 [2018]), who explain that *exempla* are generally part of a larger cultural memory which transcends literary texts. See also Calabi (n. 34), 285, who believes, for different reasons, that Augustine's knowledge of Nasica is informed by late antique culture more broadly.

<sup>41</sup> Diod. Sic. 34/5.33.3.

<sup>42</sup> *De ciu. D.* 1.29.

<sup>43</sup> On the link between past and present in *De ciuitate Dei* more generally, see G. Clark, 'Fragile brilliance: Augustine, decadence, and the "other antiquity"', in M. Formisano and T. Fuhrer (ed.), *Decadence: "Decline and Fall" or "Other Antiquity"?* (Heidelberg, 2014), 35–52, at 51.

<sup>44</sup> See pages 685–6 below.

<sup>45</sup> *De ciu. D.* 1.31. For *exempla* providing an 'ethical continuity' between past and present, see M.B. Roller, 'Exemplarity in Roman culture: the cases of Horatius Cocles and Cloelia', *CPh* 99 (2004), 1–56, at 32–7, with the important modifications of Langlands (n. 5), 226–57. For the parallel between Augustine and Nasica, see Conybeare (n. 6), 66 n. 25 and Harding (n. 38), 86, 92. Finally, it is important to note that Augustine's moralizing tone in this passage does not imply a general narrative of decline; see further Clark (n. 43).

nequaquam istos, qui flagitiosissimae consuetudinis uitiiis oblectari magis quam oblectari student, sed illum ipsum Nasicum Scipionem, qui uir optimus a senatu electus est, cuius manibus eiusdem daemonis simulacrum susceptum est in Urbemque peruectum, habere de hac re iudicem uellem. diceret nobis, utrum matrem suam tam optime de re publica uellet mereri, ut ei diuini honores decernerentur; sicut et Graecos et Romanos aliasque gentes constat quibusdam decreuisse mortalibus, quorum erga se beneficia magnipenderant, eosque immortales factos atque in deorum numerum receptos esse crediderant. profecto ille tantam felicitatem suae matri, si fieri posset, optaret. porro si ab illo deinde quaereremus, utrum inter eius diuinos honores uellet illa turpia celebrari: nonne se malle clamaret, ut sua mater sine ullo sensu mortua iaceret, quam ad hoc dea uiueret, ut illa libenter audiret?<sup>46</sup>

Augustine renders Nasica the judge over the worship of the Magna Mater and suggests posing him questions. Scipio Nasica, in turn, ‘responds’ to Augustine’s queries, in indirect speech, *diceret nobis*. The ventriloquism of Nasica’s opinion on religious spectacle highlights the relevance of the Republican moralist and his values to late antique theological debates. Scipio Nasica sets a classical precedent for Augustine’s critique of theatrical luxury, thereby placing Augustine’s newer, Christian moral code in continuity with the principles of the Republican *maiores*.<sup>47</sup>

Augustine’s imagined Nasica offers more than a model of rhetoric on restraint. When Augustine mentions Scipio Nasica’s conveyance of the Magna Mater to Rome, he cites an event in which accepting a new god into Rome is tied to Roman victory after traumatic attacks on Italian soil.<sup>48</sup> Including the Magna Mater episode in Nasica’s accomplishments allows Augustine to underscore the central thesis of Books 1 and 2—namely, that the introduction of new gods does not incur political disasters and hardship at Rome. As a result, the Republican past both surfaces as a parallel for Augustine’s interpretation of his (to us, late antique) present, and subtly furthers the argument for a lack of causality between the Roman adoption of Christianity and the invasion of Rome by the Goths.

However, Augustine does not forge connections between Nasica’s exemplary behaviour and his own conservative rhetoric without qualification. After praising him in 1.30, Augustine’s tone changes in the next paragraph, where he lays out in detail what he sees as the Republican youth’s principal shortcoming (*De ciu. D.* 1.31):

quanto studio iste ab urbe Roma ludos ipsos scaenicos abstulisset, si auctoritati eorum, quos deos putabat, resistere auderet, quos esse noxios daemones non intellegebat aut, si intellegebat, placandos etiam ipse potius quam contemnendos existimabat! nondum enim fuerat declarata

<sup>46</sup> ‘I would not want by any means, as a judge in this matter, those men who strive to be diverted by, rather than oppose, the vices of very licentious customs. Instead, I would have that Scipio Nasica, who was elected “best man” by the Senate, and by whose hands the image of a demon was received and carried into the city. He would tell us whether he wanted his own mother to deserve so well from the Republic that divine honours be decreed for her, as it is agreed that the Greeks, Romans and other Gentiles decreed honours to certain mortals whose public service they deemed of great worth, and that they believed these individuals were made immortal and received amongst the number of the gods. Surely, Nasica would choose so great a good fortune for his mother, if it were able to happen. Furthermore, if we were to ask him then whether he wished those base rites to be celebrated amongst her divine honours, would he not cry out that he would prefer that his own mother lay dead, completely senseless, than that she live on as a goddess for the sake of gladly hearing these things?’

<sup>47</sup> Although not explicitly noted by the text, Augustine’s emphasis on the religious positions held by Nasica (namely the *pontifex maximus*) when introducing his views on luxury and the gods establishes another parallel between Nasica and Augustine, whose critiques are launched from and because of his religious position.

<sup>48</sup> Roller (n. 1), 267; see also Sil. *Pun.* 17.1–4. For the continued association of the Magna Mater with the defence of Italy into Late Antiquity, see Graillot (n. 3), 32 n. 2.

gentibus superna doctrina, quae fide cor mundans ad caelestia uel supercaelestia capessenda humili pietate humanum mutaret affectum et a dominatu superborum daemonum liberaret.<sup>49</sup>

According to Augustine, Nاسica's imperfections result from the inherently partial metaphysical view afforded by traditional Roman religion. The inability to remove dramatic performance altogether is depicted as a pagan failing, from which Christians are freed through their knowledge that theatrical spectacle is nothing but honour rendered to *superbi daemones*. As an incomplete shadow of Christian virtue, Nاسica cannot be an unquestionable exemplar, but rather serves as an admirable yet flawed foil to the superior set of Christian ethics advocated by *De ciuitate Dei*.<sup>50</sup>

Nاسica's participation in Roman religious ritual likewise becomes the primary object of Augustine's criticism in Book 2. He writes (*De ciu. D.* 2.5):

proinde talis mater deum, qualem habere matrem puderet quemlibet etiam pessimum uirum, Romanas occupatura mentes quaesuit optimum uirum, non quem monendo et adiuuando faceret, sed quem fallendo deciperet, ei similis de qua scriptum est: *mulier autem uirorum pretiosas animas captat*, ut ille magnae indolis animus hoc uelut diuino testimonio sublimatus et uere se optimum existimans ueram pietatem religionemque non quaereret, sine qua omne quamuis laudabile ingenium superbia uanescit et decedit.<sup>51</sup>

Augustine's shift in emphasis from Nاسica's attitude towards luxury to his religious scruples qualifies his earlier praise of Nاسica's exemplarity. Instead of the *uir optimus*, who is praiseworthy for his ascetic tendencies, and possibly even acts as a forerunner for Augustine's own religious project, Nاسica becomes the *uir optimus* whose involvement with the Magna Mater prevents him from attaining true virtue. Despite his laudable qualities, he does not practise *pietas* or *religio* and thus perishes as a result of his own pride.<sup>52</sup>

In inserting the Republican moralist into this Christian teleology, Augustine also grounds his diatribe in a discourse familiar to classical exemplarity—namely, that of examining an *exemplum* from many different, including critical, angles. His distinction between his own theology and that of Nاسica brings to light the problems in using Nاسica as a model.

<sup>49</sup> 'With what zeal would he have removed the theatrical spectacles themselves from Rome if he dared to resist the authority of those whom he thought gods! He did not understand them to be harmful demons, or, if he did, even he deemed them more worthy of placation than condemnation! The celestial doctrine had not yet been declared to the Gentiles, which, cleaning the heart with faith, turned human minds with humble piety to the comprehension of matters in and beyond the heavens.'

<sup>50</sup> The replacement of Nاسica's worldview with that advocated by Augustine recalls an approach taken to exemplarity in the *Confessions*, in which Monica is portrayed as an *exemplum* which Augustine must eventually replace (E. Chan, 'Monica's exemplarity: exploring the rhetorical unity of *Confessions*' [unpublished paper delivered at the 'Oxford–Yale Postgraduate Workshop: Exemplarity' in 2019]). On the use of the same *exemplum* for different rhetorical purposes in Augustine, see Honstetter (n. 6), 189–90. Linger just underneath the surface of Augustine's concerns about Nاسica are his views of the problematic nature of the theatre; for an analysis of the intersection between spectacle, religion and exemplarity in *De ciuitate Dei*, see Herdt (n. 37).

<sup>51</sup> 'Thence, the Mother of the gods, a mother of such a sort that even the very basest man you could think of would be ashamed of having her as a mother, sought the best man when she wanted to occupy Roman minds. She did not choose him to make him the best by advising and helping him, but so that she might ensnare him by deceiving him—in a like manner to her about whom they write, "a woman, moreover, captures the precious souls of men"—in order that this soul, of great natural virtue, elevated in this testimony as though divine, and deeming himself truly the best, would not seek that true piety and religiosity without which all human nature, although praiseworthy, fades through pride and deteriorates.'

<sup>52</sup> This critique of Nاسica is an example of the general assumption of T.H. Irwin, 'Splendid vices? Augustine for and against pagan virtues', *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999), 105–27 that, for Augustine, pagans lack true virtue because they are activated by incorrect aims and motives.

Like Livy, Augustine uses Nasica's introduction of the Magna Mater to Rome to indicate a disjuncture between two eras, in his case the classical past and the Christian present.

The connections between Augustine's rhetoric and classical paradigms of exemplarity come into even sharper focus in Book 5 of *De ciuitate Dei*. In his effort to represent pre-Christian Rome as the earthly (but imperfect) counterpart of the Christian city in heaven, Augustine argues that even Virgil saw Roman *exempla* as more complex than mere models of virtue, since the poet referred in *Aeneid* Book 6 to the pain and loss suffered by Brutus after murdering his children.<sup>53</sup> Although Augustine is careful to note that Virgil's description of Brutus provides a justification for his actions—love of the *patria* and glory—an argument to which Augustine's portrayal will not subscribe, his invocation of Virgil's Brutus nevertheless serves as proof for the argument of the *De ciuitate Dei* itself about the problematic nature of traditional Roman heroes. In so doing, *De ciu. D.* 5.18 points to the precedent for its reading of classical *exempla* as imperfect and complicated.

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

To conclude, both Augustine and Livy introduce a Scipio Nasica whom they present as a possible moral *exemplum*. Livy's description of Scipio Nasica's selection as *uir optimus* suggests that Nasica may have been a model of virtue. Livy, however, refuses to expatiate on the notional exemplary qualities of Scipio Nasica, highlighting instead his own caution towards relying upon sources that are at a chronological distance from the events they narrate.

Augustine's *De ciuitate Dei* engages in more profound ways with exemplary discourse than does *Ab urbe condita* Book 29. He elucidates the Senate's preference for Scipio Nasica by pointing to the invective against luxury and security traditionally attributed to his son Corculum. Although this Scipio Nasica affords a series of compelling parallels between Augustine's imagined Roman Republican past and his own (late antique) Roman present, Augustine complicates his portrayal of Nasica by denouncing Nasica's belief in the 'wrong' gods. Just as in *Ab urbe condita*, *De ciuitate Dei* uses the character of Scipio Nasica to reveal an unbridgeable gap between past and present.

The tale of Scipio Nasica in Livy and Augustine demonstrates a continued interest in thinking with and about the difficulties of applying classical models of exemplarity from the Early Empire to Late Antiquity. Such continuities between Augustine's and Livy's thought and narrative strategies tell only one side of a multifaceted story, for the projects of Augustine and Livy differ in significant ways. Livy's concerns focus primarily on the historical veracity (or lack thereof) of exemplary discourse and the narratives it generates, whereas Augustine's engagement with Nasica is rooted in a series of ethical concerns about the moral weight of virtue in a non-Christian world. By highlighting the similarities in approach and outlook on the relationship between past and present in Livy and Augustine, I hope to have laid the foundations for charting a more nuanced understanding of those aspects of late antique exemplary rhetoric, which appreciates in full the fraught classical heritage of its portraits of pre-Christian figures.

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<sup>53</sup> *De ciu. D.* 5.18. For the Virgilian treatment of Brutus, see Verg. *Aen.* 6.820–3.