

Howard University Studies in History

Volume 3
Issue 1 *The Question of the Origin of the Roman
Satire*

Article 7

3-1-1923

Introduction

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Recommended Citation

Lightfoot, George Morton (1923) "Introduction," *Howard University Studies in History*. Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 7.

Available at: <https://dh.howard.edu/hush/vol3/iss1/7>

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THE QUESTION OF THE ORIGIN OF THE ROMAN SATIRE.

I INTRODUCTION.

For more than fifty years, there has existed in the minds of many critics of Roman literary history grave doubt as to the validity of the claim made by the ancient Romans themselves regarding the native origin of the Roman satire. The student of Latin literature does not proceed very far in the prosecution of his studies before he discovers in the Roman classics numerous references, both direct and indirect, to this particular type of literary expression as an original Italian or Roman product.

Over the long stretch of centuries following the cessation of Roman civilization as such, the claim and boast of the Romans that satire was a creation of Italian genius was practically unquestioned until about the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century. Though there were intimations of dissatisfaction from a few German scholars regarding the ascription of the origin of the satire to Italian soil prior to the appearance of Otto Jahn's paper¹ in 1867, nevertheless an active and definite skepticism regarding the tradition did not develop until that time.

The positive doubt expressed by Jahn met the indorsement of A. Kiessling,² B. Grubel³ and O. Keller⁴ before it was extended and strengthened by F. Leo.⁵ Since Leo's first paper (1889) there has followed what may be styled an almost ceaseless discussion among American and European scholars for and against the claim of the Romans for originality in the department of satirical literature. These controversies have expressed themselves in the form of notes in editions of classical authors, in articles in magazines devoted to classical research, and in histories and other works dealing with Roman life and literature. Since the appearance in 1894 of H. L. Hendrickson's paper⁶ making an assault upon the tradition, the disputants have aligned themselves into what may be termed two more or less distinct groups, viz., those who support the claim of the Romans and those who are skeptical of the tradition.

It is my purpose in this essay, (1) to set forth, so far as possible, the chief sources of the evidence upon which the Romans based their claim,

¹ *Hermes* II (1867), 225-251, *Satura*.

² Horace's *Sermones*, 1886, Einleitung VII, notes on *Sermones* 1.4. 1-6, and on *Epistles* 2.1. 139-156.

³ *De Satirae Romanae origine et progressu* (a program of Posen, 1883).

⁴ *Philologus* 45 (1886), 389-392, *Über das wort satira*.

⁵ *Hermes* 24 (1889). 67-84, *Varro und die satire*.

⁶ *American Journal of Philology* 15 (1894), 1-30, *The Dramatic Satira and The Old Comedy at Rome*.

(2) to discuss the evidence, (3) to exhibit the theories for and against the tradition, (4) to arrive at some conclusion in the light of modern investigation, and (5) to group the bibliography with reference to handy use.

II. THE EVIDENCE.

The impulse imparted by Jahn to the incipient skepticism concerning the origin of Roman satire has within the last half century gained such headway as to cause serious scholars of Roman literature to be grouped as skeptics or as defenders of the tradition. The former have denied the existence of any such production as the dramatic *satura*, ascribing the origin of the satire to Greek influence imported into Italy through the medium of the Satyr-play⁷ and of the old Greek Comedy, while they limit the existence of the dramatic *satura* to the minds⁸ of historians and critics. The latter generally accept the age-old belief that the literary satire of the Romans is an evolution from the so-called dramatic *satura* which they regard as the native drama of Italy.

The supporters of the tradition find their evidence for the existence of the dramatic *satura* in passages from Livy, 7, 2; Horace, *Epistles*, 2, 1, 139-156; Vergil, *Georgics*, 2, 380-389; Valerius Maximus, 2, 4, 4; Diomedes, in Keil's *Grammatici Latini* 1, 482-492. There are besides other ancient sources containing partial accounts of the beginning of the early Roman drama. The origin and history of the word *satura* is also of vital importance as contributing evidence regarding the validity of the Roman claim. A third ground in defense of the tradition is found in the nature and treatment of the literary satire in such satirists as Lucilius, Horace, Juvenal, and Persius.

The starting point in consideration of the ancient evidence is the second chapter of the seventh book of Livy's history. This is the earliest extant adequate account of the origin of the native Italian drama and is the one which has furnished the stamping ground, so to speak, of both the proponents and opponents of the tradition. The other accounts either parallel or only partially cover the ground of the one found in Livy.

LIVY.

BOOK VII, 2.

BEGINNING OF THE DRAMA.

Et hoc et insequentis anno C. Sulpicio Peticō, C. Licinio Stolone consulibus pestilentia fuit. Eo nihil dignum memoria actum, nisi quod pacis deum exposcendæ causa tertio tum pest conditam urbem lectisternium fuit. Et cum vis morbi nec humanis

⁷ Keller, *Philologus* 45 (1886), 391.

⁸ A. Kiessling, *Horace's Sermones* (1886), Einleitung VII.