

ROME BEFORE ROME

Christopher Smith

This essay, prompted by the appearance of four new volumes on early Rome, all associated with the anthropological school of Maurizio Bettini in Siena, seeks to find a space between the current competing methodologies of historians, topographers, archaeologists and anthropologists. The value of a more anthropological approach is to focus on the operation of mythical thinking as a more indirect and symbolic representation of reality. The conditions in which the Roman account of themselves was forged, from the orientaling to the middle Republic, were a period of immense political, social and intellectual change. This essay proposes some reasons why we should focus less on the irrecoverable historicity of the individual kings, and look instead at some ways in which the myth of kingship may have helped Rome navigate a period of enormous transformation.

The kings of Rome have been the prelude to modern accounts of ancient Rome, as they were to the Romans' own versions of their history; but they have more rarely been the main focus of enquiry, and the nature of kingship itself has been even less foregrounded¹. Doubts over the historical reality of the kings persist. Recent interpretations of archaeology from the iron age and archaic period have revived the debate, but also introduced a sharp return to old methodological arguments, with strong claims for the canonical story being a survival of authentic traditions meeting firm arguments for the greater value of an alternative story from early Greek evidence or for the invention in later Roman narratives of regal history. A recent clutch of books has placed the regal period firmly into the ambit of a specific kind of anthropology of Roman values and beliefs, less historical fact and more symbolic representation.

This essay argues that none of these approaches can be sufficient, and that some of their conclusions are ultimately overstated. However, such an outcome leaves early Rome, with all the mass of archaeological and textual evidence that is available and which has been so brilliantly studied, sim-

ply as a case study in methodological aporia. This essay starts to move towards a different option. By arguing simultaneously for the destabilization of the historicity of kingship, for the malleability of the office of kingship, and for the enduring nature of the way kingly discourses functioned and were framed, the essays tries to shift the ground towards a less specific and more contextual account, situated in the contexts of profound intellectual and religious change. Learning from all the scholarship described here (and much that is necessarily passed over), we can see kingship as persistently more important as a topic than the kings themselves. Ultimately this essay seeks to refocus our attention from the kings of myth to the myth of kings.

State of the art

The history of our professional study of early Rome is now well known². Born from a philologi-

¹ Mazzarino 1945 and Coli 1951 are interesting exceptions, and the topic is beginning to be addressed again; see Bianchi, Pelloso 2020.

² Bianchi 2013 is a good introduction, though obviously has been overtaken by the current debates. The broader picture can be found helpfully in Grandazzi 1997. The earlier antiquarian phases are well discussed by Momigliano 1957. The progenitor of the modern narrative enterprise is Niebuhr (see esp. Niebuhr 1844), on whose En-

cal determination to extract history from myth, the oscillation between scepticism and faith was shifted onto new ground by archaeology, commencing with Boni's excavation in the Forum (see now Russo, Paribeni, Altieri 2021). As time progressed, the study of early Rome found different places in different curricula. It could be the foundation of a legal training, the historical site from which, quite literally, power and authority began³. It could be part of a wider concern with the prehistory of Roman imperialism in Italy, and in those countries where Etruscology mattered, early Rome and Latium were part of a continuum of lively debate⁴. Elsewhere, early Rome was the province of the literary scholar, a discourse which was deployed in support of the aesthetic and politicized agenda of writers such as Livy and Vergil⁵.

Critically, there is and always has been a significant issue over the extent to which we are investigating the evidence for the birth of a tradition, or the evidence for historical reality. The rules of these games are different but the wealth of evidence and the requirement to combine is exactly what produces the current methodological challenge.

In English speaking scholarship, a historical approach to early Rome has until fairly recently been rare. Cornell's brilliant account, which remains foundational, and more recently Bradley with a similar methodology, have staked out an approach which hews quite closely to the textual evidence as being 'evidence of something' but not

as literal truth, and draws carefully on recent archaeological finds⁶.

Wiseman has argued for the literary evidence as the product of later invention, but has increasingly looked to the middle Republic as a key period of formation of tradition, and criticized Livy for his omission of prior information⁷. What distinguishes Wiseman's approach is a stronger sense that the unreliable traditional historical or annalistic account often conceals a reality which other especially antiquarian or Greek sources reveal.

Carandini's excavations in the Forum led him and his team to a different and radical position. From walls in the places where (arguably) Rome's first wall was built to houses in the places where kings were said to have lived, Carandini found sites which could be mapped directly onto the literary tradition, and whose dates accorded surprisingly well⁸. This was then elaborated into a wider argument that the literary sources constitute a coherent picture within which early strata could be identified which could themselves be attributed to specific dates, so that ultimately one could identify a tradition about Romulus and Numa which could be dated to the period of Romulus and Numa, and contained some level of authentic historical material about Romulus and Numa. Romulus, on this account, who had largely been assumed to be some sort of mythical invention, suddenly appeared in sight as a nearly real historical figure⁹.

The arguments that followed drew more scholarly attention to early Rome but created significant divisions. It seemed obvious to most that

lightenment background see Reill 1980, and for further consideration of the immediate reception of Niebuhr's ballad theory, that the Romans preserved elements of their early history in *carmina*, or songs, Bridenthal 1972. Yavetz 1976 notes that Rome particularly interested German scholarship because of its institutional aspect, which has left a long shadow. Barber 2022 has many useful observations but largely focuses on the later Republic. See also Ampolo 2013: 235-250.

³ The importance of archaic Rome in the construction of the modern study of Roman law is a topic which merits further study. The study of the Twelve Tables has been fundamental, see now Humbert 2018. For an indication of how Roman legal acumen could be applied to archaic Rome, see the remarkable account in De Francisci 1959.

⁴ Cristofani 1990, Smith 1996, Naso 2004, Della Fina 2010, Riva 2021 give entry points. Increasingly the study of architecture offers an important comparative opportunity, as well as critical information for social and economic structures; see Potts 2015; 2022b with references.

⁵ Some outstanding examples of the genre include Miles 1995; Jaeger 1997; Feldherr 1998; Neel 2015a; Vasaly 2015; Welch 2015; Mineo, Piel 2016.

⁶ Cornell 1995; Bradley 2022; see also Forsythe 2005; Lomas 2018.

⁷ Wiseman 2008. Wiseman 1974 had tended to privilege the later Republic as the most fertile period for this invention.

⁸ Carandini *et alii* 2017 for the reports, and the results are also evident in Carandini, Carafa 2017.

⁹ Carandini 1997, see Wiseman 2000; Carandini, Cappelli 2000 for an exhibition catalogue, see Wiseman 2001; Carandini 2006; Carandini 2011 offered the Anglophone world an entry point. Carandini 2006-2014 gathers the texts and displays most fully the methodological problems, which Frascetti 2007 and Ampolo 2013 explore; Frascetti's article was published after his death and uncorrected, and see Carandini, Carafa, D'Alessio 2008 for a reply. McCaskie 2021 offers an explanation of Carandini's method rooted in his avowed interest in psychoanalysis. For the reality of Romulus, see Carandini 2006-2014: xxxviii-xlvi, esp «magari anche realmente vissuto»: xlii; «Da ciò si ricava che Romolo appare una possibile realtà e una sicura rappresentazione della prima età regia»: xlv; «il valore della leggenda non si reduce dunque alla mera sua storia»: xliii.

Carandini's approach to sources was insecurely grounded in a clear awareness of how texts were constructed. It was too far from an aesthetic appreciation of what authors were able to do to a story in different genres and times – so poets and historians and grammarians of different periods were yoked together to give the impression of a more or less unitary story. It is true that by the time we see a full version of regal Rome it has most of the elements of the basic story, but that is no more than to say that no-one questioned where Fabius Pictor had got to in outline. The problem is how to justify the leap to assume that Fabius has something much older than himself.

A positive alternative model has not fully emerged. With relatively little direct engagement with Carandini's texts, which are admittedly difficult to review or respond to, the progress of studies has largely accepted the archaeology and ignored the textual approach, or reverted to and reinforced existing paradigms, which include a degree of benign neglect of such a tortured field of study¹⁰.

There are some notable exceptions which offer consistent alternative matrices for the source evidence. One possible line is a notion of an invention from (nearly) nothing. Because writers can change things, they could change everything. And the less 'state' there is in archaic Rome, and the more family, the more distortion one may identify¹¹. The motivation will be those standard vices of the powerful – familial self-glorification, vaunting ambition, political advantage. There is very little genuinely archaic or truthful behind any of the stories; just look for the families and you will find the mechanisms of invention¹². Another and not incompatible position is that if there is anything we can rely on, it will be Greek. Romans, in their deep incapacity for originality and profound brilliance at imitation, have buried the Greekness of the whole archaic enterprise¹³. These are some

of the alternative positions within which a new methodology would have to locate itself. So the pursuit of a genuine local tradition about Rome before say the fourth century BCE, whether that be of Roman history or of the emergent Roman self-description requires one to identify that which is a) transmitted via non-historical sources and/or b) carried in Roman memory without significant distortion and/or c) transmitted through non-Roman sources without significant distortion. Either that, or we ask a different question of the evidence.

However, we see all of this solely through fragments, the bits and pieces of unitary works which have been remorselessly separated and destroyed by the ravages of time, the stray clues left by a destruction committed over centuries. In a good modern crime thriller, the interest is not in the culprit, but in the system that created the darkness, so there is often no reveal, no tying up of the loose ends. The easiest answer is to say that 'there is no there there'. Finding even the rules with which to play a game in the middle ground has proven intractable.

It is interesting therefore that the most serious and brilliant attempt to play Sherlock Holmes in the crime scene of early Rome has garnered limited support. When Wiseman declared that, once you realized that the story of Romulus and Remus was not in any plausible sense a unitary and original myth, it became a historical myth, and so it had to start somewhere, he set the scene for a more traditional reveal. There was a moment when there was a reason for twins and one of them had to be a dead twin, and it was the late fourth century, as patricians and plebeians staked out the battleground of the struggle of the orders¹⁴. Purcell's quiet devastation of this («I am not so convinced by his attempt to use the nightmarishly fragmented evidence to prove so specific and exclusive a case») reveals the difficulty inherent in pronouncements of positive rather than negative certainty (Purcell 1997).

¹⁰ A notable exception is Hall (2014: 119-144) who has engaged critically with the Carandini method. See also Ziolkowski 2019 for a combative but important contribution, on which see Wiseman 2020 and Wiseman's reviews of Carandini cited above.

¹¹ The extent to which Rome is a unified state, a fragile state, or no state at all across the archaic period is another battleground; see recent contributions by Armstrong 2016; Terrenato 2019; Stoddart 2020; Cifani 2021; Fulminante 2023.

¹² James Richardson is perhaps the most interesting and effective exponents of this approach; see his collection of essays: Richardson 2020.

¹³ It is indubitable that Greek literature preceded Latin liter-

ature, and that when Latin literature begins it drew heavily on Greek material, but it is extremely hard to take the next steps with sufficient certainty. Bernard 2023 successfully demonstrates that local historical tradition is possible outside the Greek narrative mould. The kind of challenge mounted by Solmsen 1986 and Wiseman 1995a in showing how inauthentic and imported some of the earliest traditions were remains unanswerable in itself.

¹⁴ Wiseman 1995a; cf. Cornell 1975 for a less radical account of similar material. On the twins generally, see Meurant 2000. On the complex issue of visual representations of the twins see Tennant 1995; Massa-Pairault 2011.

The debate has nonetheless had the beneficial outcome of producing, and reminding us of, a huge amount of evidence through a massive increase in archaeological evidence generated by teams led by Carandini and subsequently, and now Terrenato in the Forum Boarium and Gabii¹⁵, and the much more clearly enunciated complexity of the literary sources. It is less and less plausible that the wealth and sophistication of early Rome left no trace on the formation of its own self-awareness. Second, the sheer amount of literary evidence, some well-known, but some highly abstruse and deeply puzzling, requires an explanation.

One question which remains is about the unity (as opposed to the density) of the evidence. Carandini and his team tend to see the evidence as parts of a consistent whole. This is as true of the literary evidence as it is of the archaeological evidence. Take for instance the summative ‘plot’ which the team extracts from the literary account (Carandini 2006-2014, IV: 443-448). This is part of a notion of a system which needs to be seen as a whole, and as we have noted, this system can be thought of as dating back in its earliest parts to the *età romuleo numana*. It includes the birth of the twins and the foundation of Rome and the death of Remus. Similarly, the construction of the atlas of Rome is seen as the presentation of an organic unity; «the monuments are like neurons in an intelligent network.[...] Together these perspectives fuse into one enormous collective mind». (Caran-

dini, Carafa 2017: I, 8). This insistence on finding the pattern arguably overlooks just how much of the original material has gone missing. It also tends to assume that the core motifs, somewhat like Propp’s constant motifs, are not only morphologically significant but also historically true (Propp 1968). It is that last step which has proved so difficult.

No parallel works exactly, but if one took the six or seven hundred years of the accounts of Robin Hood and analysed them for common features, one would not arrive at an original plot, or at any proof of his real existence. In this instance, we see directly the enormous malleability of the record, even within some guardrails which are fairly wide apart. Even what now appear the constant or fixed motifs prove elusive in the earlier stages of the story (see for example Knight 2003). An attentive chronological reading of the surviving accounts for the kings reveals that even once the seven kings had been fairly well established (and we cannot date when that was, but the earliest non-Roman source, the Tomba François, is, alarmingly, at odds with the surviving Roman version)¹⁶, in every generation and genre they are treated slightly differently.

No-one has ever found the smoking gun, or still-quivering bow, that fired the first shot in the Robin Hood story. It seems equally unlikely that we will do so in the case of early Rome, given the immense patchiness of the evidence. Interestingly, and as we have seen, one of the few places where such an approach has been thought feasible is in the collections of accounts of Romulus and Remus, where there was a specific reason for recording the largest number of sources possible. So Plutarch and Festus give us different but recognisably similar lists of ‘founders’ and Wiseman is absolutely correct that what this demonstrates is that the ‘canonical’ story of Romulus and Remus simply is not there in those sources until the late fourth century¹⁷. However, by very virtue of the moment described, a foundation, this part of the story may be driven by different rules, and we will return to this.

¹⁵ Damiani, Parise Presicce 2019 for the most recent exhibition of regal Rome; Fulminante 2013; 2021; Cifani 2021 for excellent overall summaries with extensive bibliographies; more briefly Carafa 2021; Mogetta 2020 for an up to date account of Gabii; Terrenato 2019 gives a broader account of central Italy. Archaeological discoveries are not immune to rethinking, conceptually and in detail. See Fontaine 2004, Cirone, Cristofaro 2018 for doubts around the identification of the Porta Mugonia, and contra Carandini 2006-2014: I, 445-443; controversy continues, see Wiseman 2017 and Ziółkowski 2020; Eichengreen 2023 for an intriguing account of the sixth century evidence for houses in the forum, reinterpreting the evidence as a single structure; Marra *et alii* 2018; Brock, Motta, Terrenato 2021 for a new interpretation of the Tiber which begins also to look at the chronology and understanding of the Velabrum and the forum landfill, cf. Ammermann 1990 (already contested by Carafa 1996: 7-34 at 17), 1998, 2016, 2018; see also Filippi 2021. Ziółkowski 2019 argues for a late 8th century *agger* and further rapid expansion. Hopkins 2016 helpfully stressed continuity across the 6th and 5th centuries. This is not to dismiss the value of the original archaeology, or the insights of the original excavators but to recognise the obvious fact that archaeology is an interpretation as well as a collection of data.

¹⁶ Bernard 2023: 224-233 is the most recent account, stressing the local context which is sometimes overlooked in the debate over the relevance to Roman history.

¹⁷ Plut., *Rom.*: 1-2; Festus 326-9L; Wiseman 1995a. As we have hinted, it is a slightly different question as to whether we can assume some version of the Roman story *did* exist at the time and was not reported by our Greek sources.

It is easier to be critical than to be right in discussions on early Rome, and although this essay takes a view, its debt and obligation to the quality of the preceding research is evident. The labour, ingenuity and determination which characterises the scholarship outlined above is not in doubt. It is natural for us to push the evidence as far as we can; we are tempted by the neat *dénouement* that solves the crime. However, archaeology, history and religious studies have been trying both to describe the crime scene and solve it, separately or in various combinations, for a long time now, and we are at something of an impasse. Four recently published volumes on early Rome reveal that in another part of the scholarly world, a different game is being played and it is the potential of this new attempt which is the core of this essay¹⁸.

The ‘anthropological’ turn

Maurizio Bettini’s lifetime of scholarship in pursuit of an anthropology of the ancient world has occurred to one side of the debates outlined above. The Research Center for the Anthropological Studies of the Ancient Culture (AMA) which he has created in Siena is not closely connected to archaeological research. Much of the earlier work in this field was strongly influenced by the tradition of French studies of the Greek world. It is not part of the grand topographical tradition that is at the heart of the way La Sapienza has dominated early Roman studies. It is not quite philological in the way Pisa is or was. Nor (despite its location) is it fundamentally Etruscological in approach, in the way that scholarship at Bologna and Milan has developed. It is not driven by the very specific mechanics of legal scholarship which has produced such important work in Rome and elsewhere. It feels different, and the four recently published volumes show this.

There is little equivocation about the fact that the work involved in these volumes is not history *strictu sensu*. Lentano starts his book with the question «È possibile scrivere la biografia di un uomo che non è mai esistito?» (Lentano 2021: 9). De Sanctis is fairly consistent in treating the early history of Rome as a sequence of stories about how Romans wanted to be perceived. Bettini starts the promised series on the kings with an essay on cul-

tural memory (see also Bettini 2022b: 8-14, 44-58). His programmatic statement is not one of exceptionality, refreshingly, but rather of complexity: «un inestricabile intreccio fra oralità e scrittura, fra tradizione interna e visione esterna, fra ricordi e creazione letteraria, in cui ciascun filone finisce spesso per ‘nutrirsi’ dell’altro». (Bettini 2022a: 18).

Bettini also gently tweaks the tail of other traditions, in books which are (again refreshingly) notably non-polemical. In a quiet footnote he asserts the significance of memory as it resides in places, against Wiseman, and notes «la mancanza di antropologia, tipica della tradizionale storiografia anglosassone». (Bettini 2022a: 23).

Of course schools and traditions are porous and nothing is as rigid as it looks. Contemporary Anglo-Saxon historiography is shifting, and there is no shortage of studies on memory – so much so that some scholars have taken to worrying about a ‘memory boom’¹⁹. But the simultaneous appearance of four books on early Rome, all connected with the Siena school, and united by a fairly consistent refusal to play either the game of justifying the sources as reliable or seeing them only in terms of their internal logic is striking. What shall we make of it?

Fragments, strata and palimpsests

The reference to memory in Bettini’s introductory chapter is programmatic, and its mirror image is De Sanctis’ Durkheimian emphasis on collective identity (De Sanctis 2021: 211-212). Without suggesting that the Siena school is avowedly Durkheimian (it is not), there is much that they have learnt about the notion of the collective and the importance of institutions.

Insofar as we can find a single methodology, perhaps the place to look is in the volume *The World through Roman Eyes*, where Bettini and Short identify and work through the fundamental importance of language and translation²⁰. There the emphasis is rather more on a philological excavation, starting from a commitment to the ‘emic’ as opposed to the ‘etic’. The results can look quite traditional at first sight (a lot of texts, in other words) but the intent is more radical: «a theoretical apparatus that draws equally on semiotics as

¹⁸ De Sanctis 2021; Lentano 2021; Bettini 2022a; Garofalo 2022.

¹⁹ Van Dyke, Alcock 2003; Berliner 2005; Van Dyke 2019; Galinsky 2014; 2015: 1-42.

²⁰ Bettini, Short 2018 (a translation and rearrangement of an earlier Italian version).

on ethnohistory, cognitive linguistic and archaeological approaches, political anthropology, the anthropology of space, ritual theory, discourse theory, relational pragmatics, and the anthropology of the image. In particular, as discussed above, this group emphasizes the emic approach that privileges ways of knowing and ways of being internal to Roman culture and seeks to understand this culture in the native's own terms, and incorporates a thoroughgoing comparative perspective that does not hesitate to juxtapose forms of culture between Greece and Rome or between ancient and modern experience». (Bettini, Short 2018: 18).

This is easier at a conceptual level, so some highly successful work has been conducted around religious and legal terms for instance²¹, but how does the approach fare when applied to a whole tradition?

The four books represent two rather different approaches. The edited volumes of Bettini and Garofalo fragment the kingly figure and track down specific enquiries. What do the laws around murder or numbers of children tell us about Roman attitudes? How can we understand them within the Roman system? De Sanctis and Lentano take a more unifying approach; taken as a whole Romulus is a lens through which we can read Rome, and it is one of the lenses which Romans themselves used. So holding to the notion of an 'emic' methodology, we are trying to understand what the Romans said about themselves, not how far that matches our view of their prehistory in terms of reliability, nor how we can decode it to answer our own questions about early Rome.

So far so liberating. Decentering the traditional historiography and refocusing on what stories of the kings were for is valuable. This was what Wiseman did in his book on Remus; its originality was precisely that it looked at all the accounts we had forgotten about whilst reading Livy and that it advanced a thesis about why the Romans needed a story about a dead twin.

The difference is the emphasis on institutions and memory, those classic Durkheimian elementary forms of social and religious life. Arguing that there is something profoundly Durkheimian in the anthropological approach to early Rome is really to say something about the kinds of evidence we have. We are forced towards customs, commemorative stories, institutions. It is the memory inherent in the Lapis Niger, or in the senate's story of

itself (told by senatorial historians) as a Romulean construct, or in priestly narratives and rituals that are told or performed by men who were often historians and senators and priests all at the same time, or by their aristocratic female relatives²², and which are said to track back to Numa, first Pontifex Maximus.

There is a tension, not fully worked out, between Bettini's own commitment to the polyvocal and complex nature of tradition and identity and the reliance on markers of stability to carry meaning across time. Without the latter, the project falls into a discourse about contemporary and rootless meaning and bringing texts together across time makes no sense. Put too much emphasis on continuity and we are back to a model of deep conservatism. The game is one of precarious balance.

It is worth reflecting for a moment on the return of a more conservative model. One of the great shifts in Roman history in the later twentieth century was to resist models of familial competition dominating Republican politics, models which had ossified around prosopographical studies and speculative readings of the *Fasti*, with the great work of Friedrich Münzer at the core²³. Roman history became more ideological, more political, more unexpected. Of course it remained a story of aristocracy, but that aristocracy was not so much a fortress as a kaleidoscopic picture of opportunism and temporary alliance. At stake, still today, is the extent of political change that one imagines was possible²⁴.

At the root of this was the simultaneous recognition that Roman religion was profoundly mutable. The traditional notion that the Romans had preserved an unchanging and archaic notion of the gods melted rapidly away and since this was one of the cornerstones of the Roman conservatism thesis, and connected to aristocracy because of the evident linkages between (some) Roman religious practices and (some) Roman aristocratic families, the whole edifice began to shake. Rome was exciting again²⁵.

²¹ Bettini 2022b is a thorough-going instantiation of the method.

²² DiLuzio 2016 for the Vestals; see Richardson 2011 for the Vestals in early historical records.

²³ On Münzer, the *Ridleys'* translation and introduction is very helpful; Münzer 1999; Barber 2022 with more recent bibliography.

²⁴ North 1990a, 1990b (extended version), a revolutionary article which by identifying a 'frozen waste' theory of Roman politics (1990a: 280; 1990b: 7) encouraged a change in thinking.

²⁵ The fundamental text was Beard, North, Price 1998. It is unsurprising that North took on early Rome, part of a

It had however been harder to engage with archaic Rome in the United Kingdom whilst this revolution in understanding the later Republic took place. One way in was through the new edition of Fustel de Coulanges' *The Ancient City*, edited by Sally Humphreys and Arnaldo Momigliano²⁶. There was much that one might disagree with, for example its muddling of sources, its flattening out of difference and distinction, and its abstraction of unchanging ritual from single occurrence. But its mesmeric hold consisted in its focus on the vital forces of religion and family that broke down a history of events into a social history, a form of anthropology.

Fustel de Coulanges and the family are now back along with Friedrich Münzer, in Terrenato's synthesis of central Italian history and archaeology (Terrenato 2019, preceded by Yoffee, Terrenato 2015). The suggestion is that we can see deep familial continuity, and that tracing family origin can unlock some of the dynamics of the Republic and leads us to diminish the role of the state in our thinking. One corollary of a weak state and strong family model of the Republic is to challenge the orthodoxy of growing central authority in the regal period. That orthodoxy has come to rest on three pillars; Ammerman's reconstruction of the work required to fill the Forum and make it usable (Ammerman 1990; cf. Marra *et alii* 2018), Carandini's account of the increasing monumentalization of central space (Carandini, Cappelli 2000), and the evidence of major hydraulic works and fortifications associated with the later kings of Rome²⁷. It is important to note just how much of our account of the strength or otherwise of the archaic Roman state depends on one's view of the coercive power required to produce its infrastructure (Bernard 2017; 2018).

The relationship between the anthropological account and these debates is complex. Durkheim turned Fustel de Coulanges on his head – it was not that religion shaped society but society shaped religion. But both developed theories from institutions and from a belief in collective identities,

though they express that in their own language and with different emphases²⁸. Bettini and colleagues displace the creation of identity to a period much later than the chronological period of kingship, and allow for iconatropy, or the creation of stories to explain monuments or works of art which have slipped from their original moorings. But institutions, law, and story-telling remain crucial. There is little trace of the grand Dumézilian enterprise of discovering a deep structural unity²⁹.

We can identify therefore numerous tendencies which flow in different directions. A strongly centralised state with major building works and a unitary tradition is a very different picture from a fragile state with centrifugal families and fragmented traditions. Deep institutional memory and mutable rituals and interrupted stories seem very different, but we have to assume they co-existed and informed each other, as for instance in the shift from gentilicial to national cults³⁰. The persistent problem is that this emphasis on memory is imprecise without a fair bit of theoretical underpinning³¹. Modern anthropology is equally interested in forgetting and instability³². At the

London tradition of interest which Momigliano led and Crawford and Cornell developed.

²⁶ Fustel de Coulanges, Momigliano, Humphreys 1987. I met the work through Oswyn Murray's inspiring Oxford lectures on early Greece.

²⁷ Bianchi 2020, and see the entire volume Bianchi, D'Acunto 2020 for an extraordinarily important summary of a critical aspect of water infrastructure; Cifani 2021 for overall summaries; Ziolkowski 2019 for an account of the debate over Roman fortifications.

²⁸ Finley 1977 for a groundbreaking reconsideration of Fustel; Prendergast 1983 on Durkheim's debt; Heran 1987, 1989 on their differences; cf. Jones 1993.

²⁹ Stuart Elden has begun a study of Dumézil's intellectual biography which will be fascinating; for now see Eribon 2011.

³⁰ See for a good account of religious change, Rüpke 2012.

³¹ Some of this theoretical underpinning can be found in Bettini 2022b: 41-58, with a preference for Hölkeskamp 2006 (cultural memory) over Wiseman 2014 (popular memory). The argument has moved on with Wiseman 2016 arguing for the relevance of oral performance, and now Hölkeskamp 2023, a monumental restatement. What remains a distinguishing feature is the totalizing nature of Hölkeskamp's performative reading, a co-produced cultural system with a grammar and syntax made up of the interaction between buildings, spaces, performances, individuals, which makes a cultural system that is both immensely strong and constantly changing as the internal tensions of society over time require. At the root of this is a question of what is being remembered in cultural memory.

³² Augé 1998; Battaglia 1992; Carsten 1995; Ricoeur 2004; Berliner 2005. Critically as Berliner notes, forgetting can be a way of enhancing memory; «To some degree, forgetting, along with memory, looks as if it is on the side of permanence and retention, and serves also, by its non-presence, to prolong the anthropological project of understanding continuity» (205). Distinguishing between what was forgotten about archaic Rome to create the accounts we have from what is introduced later to destabilize those accounts would be one way of describing the methodological challenge we are addressing.

heart of the entire project of understanding early Rome, precisely because of the absence of reliable sources, and specifically the known gap between events and the first written sources, lies the problem of memory.

Myths and legends

Myth is often our way around the problem of memory³³. Faced with a problem of how to demonstrate consistent transmission of information, we often hope that the relative stability of myth, its repetition over time, its relationships with ritual or place or custom or institution, will give us the fragile and treacherous bridge from somewhere we cannot quite identify to the sources and images we can see.

This use of myth is pervasive, sometimes technical and often colloquial³⁴. It is also an important way past the question of historical verifiability. It is unlikely that Romulus and Remus were suckled by a wolf, but that is unproblematic – it is a myth! Or is it a legend? The tendency to think of legend as somewhat more factual than a myth is an interesting and subtle distinction, not lost on Carandini and his team. A single legend, as opposed to multiple myths, reflects their notion of the unitary nature of the story, one complex tradition from the Bronze Age on. This edges towards the territory of actual memory, maybe even genealogical memory, which has in other contexts proven to be surprisingly robust³⁵.

This feels a long way from the Siena school, and Bettini wrote a superb essay tangentially on this. He noted that «*mythoi* and *fabulae* present themselves as a problem from the moment when the traditional stories – or rather those that are composed according to their model – seem to have been reconsidered from the point of view of their acceptability or credibility, in other words, when the question, ‘Can I too believe in this story as the others do?’ is asked». He goes on to describe

the «strategies that have, over the course of centuries, been put to work to maintain *mythoi* and *fabulae* within the realm of credibility and acceptability» – allegory, euhemerism and rationalism. One might even say that the notion of a legend, the nearly real story, is another such instrument to aid the suspension of disbelief (Bettini 2006).

Myth, legend, memory and history operate across a spectrum of truth claims. To some extent they are constructed around exactly this argument, and that was known in antiquity³⁶. Building on Bettini’s arguments, one might argue that the closer a myth edges towards a historical truth claim, the more deceitful it is. This is a slightly different way of expressing the position taken by Miano in his introduction to a recent volume on myth and Roman historiography. There, Miano uses Ginzburg’s notion of different representations of reality³⁷, but the key issue for the study of early Rome is not about a postmodern slide to the denial of truth as a category, but the extent to which there was a recoverable substrate of non-symbolic truth. As Oakley puts it in that volume, «From our modern perspective, it seems obvious that the ancients had no good evidence for virtually everything that they thought that they knew about Rome’s kings». Oakley is not saying that truth does not exist but that historical truth was not attainable for early Rome; as he explains further «Perhaps a small amount of what is ascribed to the last three kings (Tarquinius Priscus, Servius Tullius and Tarquinius Superbus) is attributed correctly (for example, the building of the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus and the construction of Rome’s famous sewers by the Tarquins or the timocratic organisation ascribed to Servius); but only a very bold scholar would place any credence either in the details of the Roman accounts of these matters or in what is said about the other kings»³⁸. So in the phrase I used above, for

³³ This is a formulation directly inverting Gedi and Elam’s statement «collective memory’ [...] covers the areas previously designated by ‘myth’» (Gedi, Elam 1996). At least one reason for the memory boom in Roman studies is the relatively myth-less nature of Roman religion; see below.

³⁴ Doniger 2011 has useful comments on how we use the word myth. Cf. De Sanctis 2021: 15-27.

³⁵ One classic example is Hawaii; see Kirch 2010. There, extreme insularity may be a limiting factor to its value as a comparandum. General (and somewhat non-specific) accounts are offered by Zerubavel 2003; 2012.

³⁶ Fowler 2011, looking at the Greek context; cf. Miano 2023.

³⁷ Ginzburg 2012: 2: «Against the tendency of postmodern skepticism to blur the borders between fictional and historical narrations, in the name of the constructive element they share, I proposed a view of the relation between the two as a competition for the representation of reality. But rather than trench warfare, I hypothesized a conflict made up of challenges and reciprocal, hybrid borrowings», cited by Miano 2023: 5.

³⁸ Oakley 2023: 206. Oakley’s argument comes in the context of a convincing demonstration that Dionysius derived from Cn. Gellius the precise dating of regal period events, and that this permitted Gellius and others after him to write at length. This fits well with Rich 2018, who notes the likely vagueness of the chronology for the early kings (at least) in Fabius Pictor. Another proposed ‘event

early Rome in Oakley's view, in terms of historical fact, 'there is no there there'; and yet there is a narrative. On Bettini's terms, although he does not quite say this, it is precisely the transformation of myth into something that looked like history that shows the deception which was being performed.

For De Sanctis and Lentano, the use of myth is the key mechanism which permits the development of their theses. De Sanctis sees the story of early Rome as a story of complex mixed identities; Lentano obliquely and De Sanctis directly argue that Romulus is the way into a Roman alternative to cosmogony – 'urbigonia' or the foundation of the city. Taken together they posit a model of the emergence of the city as Rome's cosmological myth (De Sanctis 2012; cf. Bettini 2015a: 21). What orders reality is Rome – Rome is not the product of a wider notion of reality, Rome is the fundamental reality. Romulus has therefore to be in some ways divine, Remus has to die in a moment of sacred and legitimizing violence, nature and artifice have to come together.

This is convincing enough, and in some ways is also not especially new ground. Emma Dench had identified Romulus' asylum as a fundamental myth of Roman citizenship and she was drawing on a rich tradition (Dench 2007). The Roman substitution of history for myth is a theme which Mary Beard drew out some years ago (Beard 1993). The books of De Sanctis and Lentano are well written and intelligent, and make good use of variations of stories to encourage us to see early Rome as an intellectual space where complex ideas are worked through. This is sufficiently distinctive to represent a helpful move away from the methodologies outlined above. It does not treat the stories as reflecting original realities, nor as decodable to generate a single story about another period. And the Siena notion of Rome's foundation as a cosmogony is an exciting way to rethink the entirety of the story, partly because it is such a compelling way of setting the foundation into the complex emergence of notions of empire and time³⁹.

horizon' for the beginnings of historical knowledge is the story of Demaratus of Corinth; the best case for this is put by Zevi 1995 and Ampolo 2017.

³⁹ There are some intriguing similarities with the mythopoeic work of Michel Serres; see Smith 2020b. In addition this forces the question of when Rome was most likely to have worked through the consequences of its foundation in terms of its imperial role. For an account of the relevance of the middle Republic, see Smith 2021.

My personal view is that from this helpful standpoint, neither volume goes quite far enough, either in terms of what the myth is mythicizing or of what myth actually is and does. What makes the Siena school particularly interesting is when it breaks away from the entrenched methodologies, either the disciplinary ones of law, history, archaeology, or the newer 'schools,' and combines disciplines to give a rich and deeply contextualized approach. Turning to a different tradition of scholarship on a different period, one might compare this with the circling, to some degree deliberately repetitive style of Hölkeskamp who piles on interpretation and recursive loops to create a sort of *Gesamtkunstwerk*⁴⁰. The work of multiple reinforcement of messages and imagery described in Hölkeskamp's account of the theatre of power is enacted also in his prose. Something of this nature is offered by the complex amalgams of disciplinary approaches that are on display in Bettini's discussion of memory, word and song at Rome. Bettini imitates the multilayered signification of words through contextualising them in story, law, linguistics, poetics and so forth.

For this to work as a reproducible methodology, or one which is open to scrutiny, the ground rules would need to be clear. It is possible to take a view on the use of evidence by Cornell, Carandini or Wiseman because they are transparent. We may choose to argue about undue confidence in the texts as representing an original reality or undue precision in identifying the point and purpose of creation. To work with early Rome as a myth or web of myths is more complicated both in terms of method and in terms of critique⁴¹. The recognition of this challenge takes us directly to the history of religion.

⁴⁰ Bettini 2022b; Hölkeskamp 2023. For another *Gesamtkunstwerk* type approach, Grandazzi 2008 offers a brilliant geographical, archaeological and historiographic account of Alba Longa, a site and a tradition which almost disappear, are erased, through the overlay of variation. I think this process of erasing the original reality of the subject under question through the analysis of variation may prove, ironically, the most legitimate of all, and it is interesting that Grandazzi prefers 'tradition' to myth.

⁴¹ Brelich 2015a and Bettini 2014 wrestle differently but productively with the notion of polytheism. For an important edited volume which includes comparative Greek material, see Govi 2017. See also Fulminante 2021 who tackles the role of religion in the urban evolution of central Italy and Potts 2022a who uses a model of religion as social capital.

Brelich and the stratigraphy of myth

Myth and religion are not coterminous. Cult is one of the key ways of moving from story to practice, and in polytheism the interactions are intricate. In Rome and central Italy generally we see abundant evidence for ritual and cult in the archaic period, but we lack a clear sense of the evolution of polytheism. Most Roman gods do not appear to have myths which are independent of the Greek world, but cult practice and festivals did exist, as do some figures who are not evidently Greek. This is therefore a possible route to a matrix within which some sort of memory could flow. What kind of information might have been transmitted?

For the Carandini school and others, a point of departure has been the work of Angelo Brelich⁴². At the beginning of *La nascita di Roma* Carandini cites him for a refusal to be persuaded of a single truth but rather a cultural process, and of scholarship as a spiralling approach around an unreachable goal of precision (Carandini 2003: 6). Brelich's notion of inexactitude and his humility in front of the complexity of the material is appealing – he once said, more or less, that in the history of religion one only ever wrote prolegomena (Brelich 1958: ix). But the essay on which much has been built, his account of the pre-Roman kings and on Romulus-Quirinus, is to my mind one of his less convincing works (Brelich 1956). In considering the value of Brelich's work in solving the memory problem at the heart of early Rome, I will look first at his take on the earliest Roman kingly figures, then at calendars, and finally revert to a different way of using his ideas.

Janus, Saturn, Picus and Faunus may share certain features and may also appear to be distinct from Romulus, Numa, Tullus Hostilius and Ancus Marcius, as those kings are distinct from the Tarquinian dynasty. This layering might then seem to give us a kind of structure not only for Roman history but also for the emergence of myth. The argument is something like this: by the sixth century we see historical figures and a clear Etruscan and Greek overlay, so this is truly historical and allows us to write a form of history. The preceding Latin kings are historical but were different and produced myths about themselves which then under-

went later elaboration. This includes, perhaps, the adaptation of previous mythical stories about animistic spirits and figures who represent stock dualities (wilderness and civilization, the bi-dimensionality of past and present) into similarly wise kings. As one goes backwards in time one sees an increase in mythical content but through a greater degree of rationalization. So the Weberian notion of disenchantment, *Entzauberung*, which became through Koch's famous account *Entmythisierung* (Koch 1953), has gradually turned myths which tell us something about historical realities into a version of history, and that process itself describes the behaviour and confirms the existence of subsequent myth-makers in the period of the Latin kings, who are further underpinned in terms of their historicity by the account of their overthrow. The Tarquinian dynasty whose historical existence is confirmed in some ways precisely by their Greekness (they participated in historical behaviours described elsewhere in the Mediterranean) enacted the revolutionary change which reveals the pre-existing reality.

No amount of 'detail' or distancing from the bare bones of this sequence can conceal that this proceeds from a number of questionable assumptions⁴³. The single piece of evidence in the entire account which gives us a historical fix is the reference in the text of Hesiod to Agrios (the wild one) with Latinus ruling the Tyrsenoi (Hesiod, *Th.*: 1013). On the assumption that Agrios is Faunus, we could take this tradition back to the sixth century. To what extent this tells us anything more than that a Greek ethnographic tradition knew that the Tyrsenoi and Latins lived near each other in the Odyssean west and that that was where the *agrios aner* Polyphemus lived is debatable⁴⁴.

If we look more closely at Brelich's argument on those whom he regards as the early kings, we start with the peculiar figure of Picus. Brelich shows that there are links between the animistic Picus and the regal Picus, founder of Laurentum. There is more to the woodpecker than even Brelich gives us; complex stories around wood-

⁴² Carandini, Carafa 2010, esp. 99 noting that Carandini 2006-2014 is «tutto un omaggio a Brelich». This is clearly evident in 2006-2014: I, xxvi-xxxvii on Brelich and xlvi-lxiv for the stratigraphy of myths.

⁴³ Gjerstad's formula of two periods of kingship, the one represented by the first four kings, and the second represented by the last three, offers a vaguer but structurally similar account is more prudent; Gjerstad 1973: 50-72.

⁴⁴ Homer, *Od.*: 9.494; cf. Wiseman 2006, 2008, and 1995b for the connections with the Lupercal, on which see now Vukovic 2023 in detail and with an Indo-Europeanist interpretation. On Greek views of the colonized west, see Malkin 1998; Dougherty 2001; Donnellan, Nizzo, Burgers 2016a-b.

peckers had already surfaced by allusion in Homer and Hesiod through the figure of Keleos, and criss-crossing mis-identifications of green woodpeckers and red bee-eaters refer to both martial activity and the ability to foresee the future. The woodpecker seems more deeply rooted in Italic traditions, especially in augury, but there is a widespread connection to thunder, and twins are involved – both Romulus and Remus, and Picumnus and Pilumnus⁴⁵. It should be added that there is a critical moment in the historiography when a woodpecker sits on Aelius Paetus as praetor as he gives judgement some time before the Battle of Cannae. It is interpreted as a sign that his family would grow at the expense of the commonwealth, and Paetus instantly despatches the bird by biting its head off (other traditions note that the Italians refrain from eating woodpeckers); this looks rather like a story encouraging the avoidance of *adfectatio regni*⁴⁶. Virgil and Ovid play with the myth in interesting ways and Ovid is clearly responding to Virgil; behind them is Aemilius Macer, who included the story in his *Ornithogonia* and his contemporary Varro had also tackled the subject and in particular the genealogies⁴⁷. Since Servius in his commentary on Virgil quotes Varro, and Varro quotes Piso, it is clear that the matter was the subject of acute interest in a period of intense and deeply Greek-influenced mythographical activity (Varro ap. Serv.: A. 10.76, Piso, *FRHist*: 9 F46). So when Brelich concludes that whilst there are aspects of the Picus *qua* bird or divinity story which are independent of regal connections, but no part of the story of Picus *qua* king that is unconnected to the mythological tradition, this may overstate the position. The *rex* that is Picus is an already Hellenized and historicized construct, and the myths are not uniformly old (see Rosivach 1980).

If we turn to Faunus, we have more sources, a good deal of conflation with Picus, and fascinating

details around the relationship between Faunus and *fas*, and *fari*, speaking, especially in the context of prophecy. Was he a *rex*? This seems to me to be much more complex. He was in the list of kings of Laurentum, but that is a construct, and as far as we see it not much older than Varro⁴⁸. The connection which Brelich draws with Silvanus, an altogether complicated figure, with plausible Etruscan connections, does not to my mind make things clearer.

By the time Brelich's third figure Saturn appears in the ancient sources the overlap with the Greek story of Kronos is so strong that we struggle to see through it. The fact that Saturn is worshipped *Graeco ritu*, as is Hercules, is significant of an exercise in comparison but the date is disputable (Scheid 2005). Brelich and subsequently Briquel emphasise that the location of the temple of Saturn in the fifth century BCE cannot be separated from the location of the temple of Jupiter above it, and that they are both related to the hill which was at the core of Rome's early history. That opens the difficult question of when and how Jupiter takes up his position of superiority⁴⁹. At least one very unclear aspect of the Saturnian mythology is whether there was an Etruscan element in the deity Satre, of which we have somewhat lost sight. How Etruscan cosmogonies and hierarchies and Roman ones intersected is opaque.

Brelich does not include Vertumnus, *deus princeps Etruriae*, who has many features in common with Saturn for instance in terms of agricultural connections, is a shapeshifter like Faunus and Picus, has a function of turning as Janus turns the year and like Janus a connection with water, has a romantic tale attached to him, and a statue in the *vicus Tuscus*. The easy answer to Vertumnus is to assume that he arrived in Rome only after the sack of Volsinii, but that is probably the Aventine Vertumnus (Bettini 2015b).

Inevitably, the thread pulls us through the calendar (Lupercalia, Saturnalia) and on to Janus. Janus is a clearly significant figure in Rome and that was clear enough from Holland's account many years ago (Holland 1961). It is clearly the case that Saturn and Janus are much more Ro-

⁴⁵ Thompson 1936: 52; Krappe 1941 with earlier literature, and references to Greek and Indo-European parallels; Mackay 1975 on ornithological misidentifications.

⁴⁶ Varro ap. Non.: 518M P. Aelius Paetus cum esset praetor urbanus et sedens in sella curuli ius diceret populo, picus Martius aduolauit atque in capite eius adsedit; Val. Max. 5.6.4; Plin., *HN*: 10.41. See now Neel 2015b; Roller 2018: 1-31 on exemplarity.

⁴⁷ Hardie 2010 notes the mythological connections to the Muses, the Camenae, and a sort of aetiology of elegy. The Virgilian and Ovidian story (and perhaps more) is bound up with the reimagination of the Circe myth; Bettini, Franco 2010; Simon 2011; Graverini 2019. For Macer see Courtney 2003: 292-299; Hollis 2007: 93-117.

⁴⁸ Aug., *CD*: 2.15, commenting on Virgil. On Laurentum and Lavinium, see now Bernard 2023: 155-160.

⁴⁹ Briquel 1981. It is interesting that the calendar makes the Kalends sacred to Juno and the Ides to Jupiter. This may be very old, or a rethinking to fit the changing priorities of the gods and their priests. See De Francisci 1959: 661 with references.

man in the evolved stories than Picus and Faunus, who seem more Latin, and the existence of attested calendrical cults to the first pair and not the second must be an important differentiation.

Brelich ends «per ultimo resterebbe il problema della loro regalità». Indeed, Brelich states that societies that have kings always connect the notion of founder and civilizing force to a king. His last footnote refers to the divine kingship of the Shilluk, as proof that real kings did exist, although that became and still is a massive anthropological controversy⁵⁰. But at the end of this essay what has Brelich actually shown?

The most obvious question that the essay fails to raise is the extent to which any of these figures can be called a king in a way that would link them in any meaningful way to whatever we decide we mean by the 'historical' kings of Rome. They were in no sense appointed⁵¹. There is no constitution around these kings. They are not even all evidently kings in the same way as each other. There is no real legitimacy derived for the historical kings from these kings. The idea that Picus alongside the wolf succours Romulus and Remus is intriguing, but might refer more to Romulus' augural capacity than his regal capacity (Mignone 2016). Numa wrestles with Faunus and Picus to steal their secrets (contrary to *fas*) but this overthrowing of a previous knowledge system is as easily rendered as an elaborated story of the succession of knowledge systems, influenced heavily by the story of Proteus. The genealogies that lead to Latinus were perhaps prior to the elongated chronology which is forced by the insertion of the Aeneas story and then the Alban Kings, but that would not make them part of the world of the first half of the deeply archaic and there is a good deal of later sorting out to do once the Aeneas story has arrived, as Ennius's short chronology shows (Feeney 2008). Brelich is absolutely right that we can set the four figures he focuses on in the context of a construct of stages of civilization, but their chronological relationship with each other and with the rest of the tradition is messy and the elaboration of the civilization they bring to existence is widely shared (agriculture and seasonality are ubiquitous)

⁵⁰ Graeber, Sahlins 2017: 65-138, esp. 129: «the royal clan itself only appears to have developed, at least in the form in which anthropologists came to know it, after a prolonged struggle over the nature of the emerging political order, the role of women, and the power and jurisdiction of commoner chiefs».

⁵¹ De Francisci 1959: 406-425 for some of the mechanisms of appointment.

and therefore not straightforwardly demonstrable as deeply archaic.

It would be quite wrong to dismiss Brelich's contribution however. He asks a critical question about how it was that Rome appears not to have had myth (in the Greek sense) but still thinks mythologically. He demonstrates albeit implicitly the insufficiently discussed fact that whatever the Roman (and Etruscan) attitude towards their ancestors visible through mortuary behaviour, with the exception of a very small number of 'founders' whose stories are all dependent on later elaboration, central Italy appears to lack the advanced notion of the hero which is so important in Greece⁵². Brelich's focus elsewhere on religion as a communicative system and on the persistent re-elaboration which is the cultural process of myth is entirely pertinent to the development of an account of early Rome. Brelich shows how inadequate the literary sources are to providing an intelligent account of the formative processes of the early Roman tradition, and how unattainable any certainty must be. This puts Brelich interestingly at odds with most of the existing methodologies. Religion is put ahead of historical fact, but continuous re-elaboration reduces the possibility of any genuinely historical kernel of events.

An event-based history is not the only kind of history. The other argument which Brelich can contribute to is in relation to the Roman calendar. We have already seen this at play, and there is a further step. The Roman calendar was lunar not solar originally. According to Varro, it had ten months and Romulus gave the months their names (Varro, *LL*: 6.33; Macr., *Sat.*: 1.12.5; Cens., *DN*: 22.9). This implies a long dead period over the winter. Only later did it become a twelve-month solar calendar with intercalation. The change to a formally solar year was attributed to Numa or the decemvirate in the sources, by Coarelli to the sixth

⁵² One is Tarchon of Tarquinia, and another is Caeculus of Praeneste. Both are clearly subject to subsequent mythographic interventions. See Lycophron, *Alex.*: 1245-1249; cf. Verg., *Aen.*: 8.505-506; Plut., *Rom.*: 2.1 for Tarchon and Tyrsenos as sons of Telephos, a mythologically versatile figure; cf. de Grummond, Simon 2006: 27-34; Bernard 2023: 142-144 with references to the important archaeological evidence. For Caeculus, see Brelich 1956: 9-47; Bremmer, Horsfall 1987. Here conflation with the story of Servius Tullius are evident. See Cornell 1975 generally. It is notable that most Roman family genealogies are connected to Greek antecedents; see Wiseman 1974; Farney 2007. More generally see now Bernard 2023: 32-86 for the reverence for ancestors, which is distinct.

century, and by Rüpke to the fourth century when we know other changes were afoot⁵³.

Here we are faced with a conundrum. It may well be the case that Rome did not have a ten-month calendar, but whatever Varro knew, or thought he knew, about this is buried in another argument as Grafton and Swerdlow showed (Grafton, Swerdlow 1985; argument on eclipses reprised in Grafton 2003). Varro, according to Plutarch, was so interested in the date of the origin of Rome that he asked an astrologer Tarutius to work it out. Even Cicero thought this was peculiar (Plut., *Rom.*: 12; Cic., *De Div.*: 2.98-9 for the horoscope). And Tarutius compounded this error by messing up a calculation of an eclipse supposed to coincide with his conception, and then his birth is the canonical 273 days later, which is ten sidereal months (a little shorter than a lunar month in other words, implying that this was at least a recalculation of a previous lunar version)⁵⁴. So the Censorinus quotation, which includes also reference to Fulvius Nobilior and Junius Gracchanus, two other calendrical specialists, appears to be the tip of a classic Varronian iceberg, and implying that at least in one place, if not in several, Varro used up-to-date speculation and Hellenistic and later Republican traditions of calendrical creativity to get to an understanding of archaic Rome⁵⁵. Now one version of this is that Rome did indeed start with ten months, that Numa fixed this, that the Romans remembered this and that Varro is reporting part of the complex story of the hero founder which goes back to the eighth century or thereabouts. Another is that Rome had a lunar calendar with probably twelve months, that it was fixed to a proper solar calendar some time between the fifth and the fourth centuries, and that the prehistory of the calendar was assumed to be Romulus (as so much else was) in precisely the moments when Ennius, Fulvius Nobilior, Fabius Pictor and others were making Rome historical in specific ways, including calendars, and that Varro in his fashion picks a fight with the excessive specificity of a horoscope of one of the most supremely refashionable Roman festivals, the Parilia (Beard 1987). There are many versions in between, but

no possible certainty, and the role of Romulus, and any historical reality he might be thought to have, does not easily emerge.

That the calendar is a ‘living fossil’ is far easier to assert. When Brelich wrote «pur nella sua grande Antichità il calendario stesso porta le tracce di realtà ancora più antiche» he was surely right. Indeed the calendar is of critical importance for notions of record keeping and authority, and it is tightly connected to the historical *rex sacrorum* (Glinister 2017). This is perhaps another reason for the Romulean association to arise. It is interesting that the calendar in a sense constrains the king as much as it is controlled by the king; it defines for example when it is licit to act and speak, *fas* (Bettini 2022b). The calendar is an interesting test case in control and consent (Coarelli 2010). It is therefore entirely explicable why a king is connected to the calendar, but it will be evident from what has been said that the notion of discernible strata of earlier and later myths is to my mind highly problematic. In the rest of this essay I will try to work out a different way of writing about early Rome which has the effect of erasing the original historical reality in favour of a set of conceptual problems which required to be resolved.

The dismembered rex

Although Brelich does not make the point as explicitly in his essays on Rome as he does in for example his account of the Greek heroes (Brelich 1958), it is evident that the analysis of the four figures he picks out works best in the context of the interpenetration of key thematic preoccupations. This is recurrent in studies of Roman religion and religion more generally – how through word, image and action does one understand the world and its abundance and limitations? Whether one approaches this through a structuralist or a different lens, for the most part one is studying systems that create and enact balances and conversations, across seasons and times of life, across social and interpersonal structures, across moral boundaries through an unending discursive practice.

In the context of discourse, the problem and opportunity of Romulus is partly his radical incompleteness. The Rome he founds is clearly insufficient. It cannot be otherwise. No founder does more than light a fuse⁵⁶. We entirely lack the con-

⁵³ Brelich 2015b (originally published 1954-1955) esp. 207-35; Coarelli 2010; Rüpke 2011; Bernard 2023: 167-218.

⁵⁴ Montevecchi 1979; Hanson 1987; Parker 1999, esp. 519, «the Greeks held to the idea that children are born an exact number of days after conception».

⁵⁵ Cens., *DN*: 22.9; On Nobilior, amidst an enormous bibliography, see Rüpke 2006; Feeney 2008: 143-145, 169-170; Marcatili 2021-2022.

⁵⁶ On founders and the manifold problems associated with them see Mac Sweeney 2014.

tinuation of any of the Greek stories about early Rome, and indeed it is quite likely that there was no continuation (Wiseman 1995a: 160-168 for the texts). Romulus gets things going in a state which has arrived at some level of Greek ethnographic awareness, but as Rosalind Thomas has shown in what is (in my view and in an entirely oblique way) the most important recent contribution to our understanding of the story of the Roman foundation, the Greek accounts tended not to get much past the founder and were governed by a logic that had little to do with original research or understanding, but instead were driven by mechanisms of naming, etymology, and variation (Thomas 2019; cf. also Clarke 2008). Proper local history was a local affair; there is no reason to assume that the recovery of the rest of the Greek texts which Plutarch and Festus cite would give us more information. Nor should we be surprised if the evidence we have is entirely etic – a set of variations for the very sake of disagreeing and showing off originality which are not linked to any Roman story at all. It is through this chink that the possibility of some version of an early local version of twin founders might pass through the Wiseman argument, but that is not at all the same as saying that the canonical version we can read in Livy dates back to the Romulean period.

The identity of the singular Roman founder of Greek accounts is just part of the story of what the Romans did with Romulus, and here his incompleteness is even more clear. He is twinned (twice, once with Remus and then again as co-regent with Titus Tatius), and those twins are part of sequences of twins⁵⁷. He is first in a sequence, and a necessary sequence which remakes or remedies the defects of the original settlement. He is finally destroyed and indeed separated into pieces, a fragmentation that imitates the incompleteness of his role as instigator of a communal achievement.

This is important because as far as I can see, the Romans could not at any point conceive of a story that did not multiply the number of kings; one king was not sufficient, and not just chronologically. There is not a single account which jumps from Romulus to the Republic. Whatever mess or muddle of tradition pre-existed Fabius Pictor, the Tarquins have already established a role, and the Tomba François has some notion of Tarquins

at Rome in the fourth century. Numa is probably quite an early entry. If Tullus Hostilius and Ancus Marcius are not archaic figures, then it would be strange for them to be inserted after the middle Republic when their families were prominent. It is possible as Brelich, Wiseman and Carandini have both argued in very different ways that the early stories were wilder than the received story, so that Faunus, Picus, Janus and so on may have played a far more significant role (Carandini 2003; Wiseman 2008). However, the discursive context within which they were operating will have changed and shifted constantly.

The consequence of this is that we should not really ever talk about Romulus alone or about Romulus as a real person. His story is part of a narrative, whose truthfulness lies not in its historicity, but in its role as one of multiple Roman foundations (Flower 2011 for this notion). My suggestion would be that the Romans return repeatedly to a story about kingship, and they do so because it is a story about power. In other words, everything the Romans do with kingship is driven by the need to explain how authority is created, transmitted, sustained, and lost. It is a myth of sovereignty because sovereignty only exists by mythical means⁵⁸.

Myths and monsters

To make sense of this one needs a carefully articulated notion of what a myth is, or of what mythical thinking is for (Doniger 2011). This would require an even longer argument, but my approach here is to look at the critical notion of hybridity to open up a conversation about mythical thinking. The archaic Mediterranean straddles orality and literacy, and yet we cannot ‘hear’ myth (for all that Homer is rooted in oral tradition, what we know as Homer is explicitly the product of a literate culture)⁵⁹.

So my argument here is in three stages:

Rome in the regal period was both oral and literate.

⁵⁷ One promising avenue of research is the relationship between Romulus and Remus and another pair of twins, the Lares Praestites, see Coarelli 2003; Flower 2017.

⁵⁸ For a survey of sovereignty in anthropology, embracing both its ancient and modern frailty, see Blom Hansen, Stepputat 2006, and essays in Smith 2021.

⁵⁹ The study of orality continues apace; for a substantial recent publication of essays see Ercolani, Lulli 2022. For a profound and sophisticated approach to the interfaces between orality and literacy, largely through the Homeric example, see Ready 2019.

While not unusual, this requires us to examine how this might have affected ways of thinking, such as myth.

A genuinely fresh mythical framework would radically challenge our perceptions of what early kingship was about and how it was commemorated.

The first part of the argument needs little demonstration. The singular and rather unexpected graffito on an impasto flask associated with a female cremation (T482) at Osteria dell'Osa has pushed the knowledge of writing back into the early eighth century, though if the word is Greek, as often thought, this may complicate the relationship to the emergence of Latin as a written language (Boffa 2015). By the seventh century, Etruscan is increasingly visible in writing, and by the end of the century so is Latin. What we have is likely to be a tiny proportion of the writing of the time. We lack significant burial grounds from Rome for the seventh and sixth centuries; the archaeology of sanctuaries is scrappy; obviously only non-perishable materials survive, and metal may have been reused. The significant evidence of inscriptions and testimonies of literacy for the sixth and fifth centuries may be problematic in detail, but attests to the existence of a notion that Rome had a culture of record, along with the rest of central Italy⁶⁰.

Now this does not mean of course that we should believe that Romulus and Remus went to Gabii to learn their letters (Plut., *Rom.*: 6.1; *De Fort. Rom.*: 8). But across the regal period, we are in a world where literacy was known, where it was increasingly practiced, and where its limits were being tested. What is clear is that Rome at any rate did not develop literature in the way the Greeks of the later sixth and fifth centuries did (Feeney 2016). Whilst the development of literature should be seen as more unusual than sometimes assumed (Lande, Feeney 2021), because Rome and the Greek world are so close there was a choice to be made (and made again and again until minds changed). Meanwhile, Greek and other eastern ideas flowed into central Italy and were visible from pottery to metalwork to statuary and ritual performances.

The development of writing is not in and of itself a sufficient condition for the development of literature and that is abundantly evident; nor does

the absence of historical literature mean that there are not conceptions of memory and tradition. It is also not true that such memory is necessarily profoundly inaccurate and literary records conversely precise. The modalities of memorialization will affect what is remembered and how, and it is possible that different kinds of truth claims will be made. For Rome, as just noted, there is a reasonable argument to suggest that a culture of record existed for some time alongside an oral culture. The very strong truth claims in Greek historiography, and the profound rationalization which we see there, might leave us unprepared for the kind of tradition that might emerge from the co-existence over a long period of different sorts of record keeping and memorialization. So Rome was very much between – between orality and writing, between influences, and perhaps between modes of myth. Narration and record, story and formula, co-existed.

One topos which illustrates this well and perhaps unusually so is myths of foundation (Mac Sweeney 2013; 2014). We have already discussed the way this was developed by local history. Origins are of perennial interest in many fields, but when we turn from myths of origins to origins of myth, the argument quickly connects with the very emergence of polytheistic thinking and self-conscious reflection on religion. Paul Veyne once wrote «It is with the moderns, from Fontenelle to Cassirer, Bergson, and Levi-Strauss, that the problem of myth becomes that of its genesis» (Veyne 1988: 59). His argument is that is we who are concerned with why myths begin. The more 'literary' or self-consciously aware we make myths, the more quickly the question becomes one of who told the story and why. Another story we could investigate is about the conditions under which one thinks mythically.

For Brelich, one interesting entrance point was the emergence of hero-cult in Greece, and his observation was that heroes were profoundly bound up with a notion of monstrosity. Monstrous portents and exceptional interactions between the world of animals and humans are markers of the complexity of a world which does not stop at the human and where the immanent forces of the world are just a glance away. Hero-cult and polytheism, with all its advantages for narrative, are entwined, and the gods and monsters are inseparable (Brelich 1958).

There are quite a few monsters in the Roman regal stories, though they are a little hidden. The wolf and the woodpecker; Faunus from whom Numa had to extract knowledge; the snake which

⁶⁰ Cornell 1991 sets out the case well. See more recently the catalogue Agostiniani, Arancio, Bruschetti 2015.

terrified Tullus Hostilius; the phallus in the hearth which engendered Servius Tullius. The art of the time also contains monsters; imported and imitation Corinthian pottery, architectural friezes, and statues depicted griffins, sphinxes, lions, and various other creatures.

Monsters, as David Wengrow has shown, are not obligatory or essential features of the human imagination (Wengrow 2013; cf. Paris, Stefani, Giustozzi 2013). The combination or mixture of bodies reflects ‘a realm of divisible subjects, each comprising a multitude of fissionable and recombinable parts.’ This emerges at various times and reflects different modes of image transfer: «Within the transformative mode, status accrues to those groups within society who can establish stable relations with an encroaching outside world. The integrative mode is associated with the tense theatre of courtly diplomacy, with its fragile alliances and fateful transgressions. And the protective mode, shading into the other two, is a direct response to threats against household and person, in which pre-emptive ritual attacks are launched upon demonic carriers of illness and misfortune» (Wengrow 2013: 106).

It has been pointed out that Wengrow’s argument as a whole looks weaker for Iron Age Greece, and by analogy, Italy⁶¹. He places a heavy emphasis on the role of bureaucracy in Mesopotamian society, and one might simply argue that monsters travel without any of their more psychological baggage. Moreover, the Italian world has little of the mechanical reproduction which Wengrow looks for in early states, and which seems in any case an unhelpful element of his thesis. It remains an underexplored challenge as to how to fit Iron Age and archaic societies into these more anthropological models, as we will see briefly much later when considering Sahlins’ theories of immanence. For now, I would note that the model may be a helpful provocation even if it is not entirely applicable; all of the elements Wengrow adduces are visible in the traditions around the kings of Rome. And indeed there is a sense in which, from the perspective of the Republic, a king who is all magistrates and priests in one person is a sort of monster too, which could be broken apart (as Romulus was). Wengrow notes that this way of seeing the many parts is as James Scott

puts it how a state sees (Scott 1998). Moreover, a monster is still a monster, even if it is adopted from somewhere else. What permits the production of the ‘monsters’ that are being created in the orientaling period is a combinatory method for gods, space, civic form, expression and much else besides.

For my purposes, the monstrous stands for unexpected joining, a place in imagination and representation where opposites or alternatives can meet. Clearly this is some distance from any ancient category, and stretches a notion of the kind of monstrosity which is characteristic of a centaur for instance into a modern conceptual world of hybridity. However, *monstrum* in Latin derives from that extraordinarily fertile group of words and concepts around *moneo*, which also gives us *monumentum* and is tightly connected to memory. It also has a wide reference to that which causes fear or wonder, portents and prodigies (Bettini, Short 2018: 4; Bernard 2023: 16-20). Moreover, as Brelich rightly noted (Brelich 1958: 285), one has to argue one’s way between a descriptive phenomenological account and one that looks at deeper significance. Although Brelich focuses on the paramount need to look at the individual data, that is the stories, in the context of a system, this leaves open the need to understand how and why the system or grammar had sufficient purchase to justify repeated retellings and reuse.

Thinking about myths in the context of hybridity and combination is pertinent. Carlo Severi in his book *The Chimera Principle: An Anthropology of Memory and Imagination*, combines the three themes which are preoccupying us here, myth, memory and imagination (Severi 2015). He looks especially at how the image operates to preserve and transmit memory across preliterate societies.

Severi describes his book as a «first step toward a concept of cultural tradition founded no longer on the semiotic means (pure speech, either written or spoken) by which representations of knowledge are expressed, but instead upon the simple but recurrent relations that are established between different means of expression in a particular culture [...]. By following up such an approach, an anthropology of memory can evolve toward an anthropology of the exercise of thought» (Severi 2015: 329).

Semiotics is perhaps not quite the villain that it is made out to be here⁶², but I am interested in

⁶¹ See the debate between Jeremy Tanner and David Wengrow at Comment on David Wengrow’s *The Origins of Monsters* - International Cognition and Culture Institute.

⁶² This would be particularly challenging to Bettini’s approach, for example.

Severi's establishment of a parallelism of expression, one narrational and linear, the other more repetitious and formulaic – iconic, hymnic. Between the first, reflecting order, and the second, offering salience, the one who constructs memory becomes chimeric – a hybrid. In the specific case of Rome, one can think of the contrast between the assumed narratives, the records which are chronological (even if by that we mean no more than the nails in the temple of Capitoline Jupiter) and the hymns whose traces we can distantly track, or perhaps the signs of legal or admonitory texts⁶³. And if we think back to Wengrow's account, we can see all sorts of ways in which the chimeric transformations of inside and outside, court and palace, public and private could be brought to bear in relation to the stories of the kings.

Romulus and Remus enact insider and outsider stories repeatedly – Alba Longa and Rome, wilderness and city, transgression and violent defence. The Alba Longa story continues under Tullus Hostilius. Numa manages knowledge through his negotiation of wildness and order. The court looms large in the stories of Tullus Hostilius and Ancus Marcius and of course the Tarquins. The shocking violence of Tullia in driving over her father or of Sextus Tarquinius in raping Lucretia presage disaster. Plague and conflict abound.

So the combination of ideas I am exploring here is that a notion of parallelism – narrative and salient repetition – may have been contemporary with the emergence of an iconography of monsters and chimeras, with both speaking to the transformations attendant on the emergence of a city-state. At the heart of this is a truly chimeric figure, the king or *rex*, who again straddles the civilizations of heroic memory and the bureaucratic and commercial city. This is not to compare Rome to a Mesopotamian state, but to emphasise the necessarily self-aware management of the polity as it grew. It is also an attempt to draw more attention to the disparate kinds of leaders and kings we see. If it is really the case that a woodpecker, a son of a god and a Greek style tyrant can all be treated as a *rex*, then we could allow for the concept simply to be baggy and imprecise, or maybe we could allow that the concept is being precisely used and

reused over time as a hybrid figuration of the ambiguities of power and its origins. As highlighted at the outset, we need to move from the kings of myth to the myth of kings.

Now all this may or may not be considered as plausible, but the step that is so difficult and at which we all stumble is how one imagines the bridge from the early period to the highly wrought productions of our surviving tradition. For Carandini, the bridge is fairly direct and strong. For Wiseman, most of what I have described is firmly on the nearer side, and the older side is nature myths or Greek. For the Siena school, the bridge is a more transformative and indirect one, through memory.

But 'memory of what?' is the question.

It remains entirely possible that there is barely any link at all between any of the stories told in narrational style about Romulus and Numa and stories which may have existed in the archaic period and even less to those that have emerged into historiography. In that, I can side with Anglo-Saxon scepticism. What I derive from the iconography and the complexity of society we see for Rome in the later eighth and seventh century is the emergence of a chimeric imagination. And we then need to focus, in Marshall Sahlins' brilliant phrase, not on what happened, but on what it was that happened (Graeber, Sahlins 2017: 17).

There is a thin strand of continuity to which we can hold. There is an iconography of power, amongst which the spear and bilobate shield are constant from the 10th century at Santa Palomba right through a famous eighth century burial in Veii (Casale del Fosso T871) to the rite of the Salii associated with Numa and the decoration of the Regia (De Santis 2011; Colonna 1991). This is one of the more remarkable constants that would indeed take us from the late Bronze Age right through to the historical period, and through the Salii it is absolutely connected to the iconography of kingship. Romulus is known for his spear or *hasta*. Interestingly, as De Francisci argued long ago, what we do not see in the stories of the kings is any notion of inheritance (De Francisci 1959). This was a power that had to be earned, and that indeed may be why the story places these signs of kingship in the Regia; they are kept in a physical space into which the one on whom power is conferred must enter, rather than passing with the inheritor of power. The admittedly late story of the proliferation of locations or houses for the kings distributes them away from the Regia (Solinus 1.22).

What it was that happened, I suggest, was a constant series of radical and dramatic transfor-

⁶³ Livy 7.3.1-9 and Purcell 2003 on Capitoline time; on records the bibliography is enormous but much can be gleaned from the introduction to *FRHist*. Notably most record keeping is attributed to the Republican period, but that leaves open questions over family records (Walter 2004), but the calendar and the hymns are thought to be older (Norden 1939; Rüpke 2011).

mations of the way a society could be imagined, and certainly by the end of the period, the figure around which that circulated was the *rex*, a figure which was capable of accretion and complexity and indeed dissolution. So we know that at some point the Romans create the notion of a *rex sacrorum* and we have constructed a plausible story that this figure picks up some of the religious privileges and constraints that may have been associated with earlier kings, leaving the later kings more free to act, and the Romans more free to remove them (Glinister 2017). This combination underpins my account of kingship; the iconography and ritualization of power existed alongside the malleability of the term *rex*, so that power could be displaced and reframed repeatedly.

Around such tenuous threads we can build an account of the parallelism of narrative drive and salient repetition. For all its haziness, our version of this, both the one that we laboriously extract from the sources and the narrative we construct, will still be neater than any historical reality. However the combination of recurrent formulaic behaviour in prayer, calendrical ritual and repetition with the forward narrative drive of military conquest and political change could be a way of showing how Roman kingship instantiates and exemplifies the chimeric imagination. This imagination, which can play with and rearrange the fragments of semiotics, places real and imagined, and bits of memory is, on my reading, both what permits political change, and the process which is being remembered within the narrative that survives to us. What we cannot and should not do is to assume that we are touching on any factual *histoire événementielle*. That assumes a literalness of memory that takes us back to all the deep-rooted problems of Durkheim's collective approach, which paid too little attention to social division, heterarchic organization, and the fragility of the early state. We need a notion of myth that maps onto institutional instability and it is for that reason, again, that I argue for the erasure of the historical account of the kings in favour of a myth of kingship which is fundamentally a story of change and transformation.

This reading, admittedly speculative, is distinctive from the more literal reading of Carandini. For the later kings it is possible that we come closer to a more natural fit between remembered events and topography. For the earlier period, what we can say (and here we are at the sort of approach that De Sanctis and Lentano might be seen as embracing) is that the memory of the salient fact of walls, with all that comes with that in terms of the

sense of foundation and the unity of the settlement, at some point is associated with *reges*, and that these figures crystallize into the narrative we have. The relationship between the narrative we have and any narrative that may have existed is, it seems to me, not recoverable with any certainty and the concentration on that factual continuity will only serve to sustain the current impasse. The erasure of the historical narrative as an account of a factual succession of kings, and its reinterpretation as part of an imaginative enterprise of thinking through the affordances and consequences of power is an alternative strategy.

This needs to be unpacked further. The nature of gates in walls as *sacer*, the creation of an ongoing awareness of the ritual of creating a city through building a wall, which was aided by the development of colonial foundations, and the celebration of the day of the founding of Rome are salient; the emergence of a specific story of what happened on 'Day One' is narrational⁶⁴. The marshy, nature bound Rome, a place of augury and pastoralism, meets the construction of fixity and boundedness, and that is an origin story which one can find in various guises. From a comparative point of view, this is another chimeric process – nature to civilization, but not as a total shift from one state to another but a process of seeing the world in different ways simultaneously. It is striking that the Roman augural practice looked from Rome across the campagna to a sacred mountain where, famously, civilization, in the shape of Alba Longa, was destroyed, and by a Roman king (Grandazzi 2008).

This is also related to but vaguer than the reading which Wiseman has come to espouse, that we can look to Greek sources (Hesiod's reference to Agrios, narratives of colonization and migration, Stesichorus' *Geryoneis*, itself a story about a notable chimera) to inform us as to the story the Romans had of their origins (Wiseman 2018). There are problems with the extraction of Roman identity from the descriptions of others, at most, the story of Herakles and the cattle of Geryon is a story which at some point perhaps fitted with Roman self-awareness⁶⁵. More challenging is the accuracy

⁶⁴ On gates, see Tassi Scandone, Smith 2013.

⁶⁵ On Stesichorus and the *Geryoneis*, see Curtis 2011; Nousia-Fantuzzi 2013; Davies, Finglass 2014; Riva 2021. It remains the case that the fragmentary nature of the Stesichorean poem does not permit us to say with certainty that he ever mentioned Rome in his account of the return of Herakles with Geryon's cattle, or that he was the origin or key mover in the story of Cacus. My own view

of the translation that sits at the heart of this. The Greek stories we see are the stories of a colonial experience. Were they the only stories? Were they uniformly adopted? Through what filters did different Greeks perceive and translate Roman or central Italian identity? There is no doubt that the artistic repertoire which Greek imports brought allowed for novelty in local story telling but they may not have been wholly determinative.

My reading would extract the notions of wandering, monsters and wilderness and set them against the demonstrable creation of borders, a city, agricultural exploitation, all of which have early ritual speech acts in the Roman calendar, augury and prayers. In other words, we have a plausible parallelism between forms of narrative and salient memory. Moreover, the ‘monstrosities’ of the Greek stories can be turned from an etic condescension to a possible emic version in which the monstrous is overcome or absorbed, encompassed. It may be that this comes through the intervention of outside knowledge but that knowledge has to be mediated and controlled, which is the special province of the elite and in the distilled version we have, of a king.

Fire and the sovereign figure

Can we give a more concrete example of how all this might work? Nearly forty years ago, Coarelli argued that the Lapis Niger was also the site of the Volcanal (Coarelli 1983: 161-178). There have

is that this has become too firm a fixed point. It is worth stating briefly what is at stake here. On Wiseman’s reading, the sixth century story the Greeks had about Rome involved Herakles, Evander, Arcadians and monsters. It did not involve kings, and it relates to an earlier stratum of the Rome story. This is adduced to support the argument that the story of Romulus and Remus belonged to a later period of mythogenesis. There is no strong reason I feel to exclude the possibility that at the time of the *Geryoneis*, Rome was ruled by some sort of monarchy (though that might not have been coterminous with the office of the *rex*), that that monarchy and the society in which it operated drew on and was actively creating a variety of traditions, some of which were of use in one poet’s story and some of which were not, and some of which were more prominent at some points in time and in some parts of Rome than others. So one could imagine that at the time that Stesichorus was writing there was something at Rome which would become through now unrecoverable mechanisms the Romulus and Remus story, but it was not the story that the poet wanted or needed. It is also very important to note that there simply is no evidence that Rome was in Stesichorus’ mental or poetic geography.

been few dissenters. This highly charged space, a true *lieu de mémoire*, was thought to be a resting place for Romulus (or a contemporary figure) and also contained an altar, a statue group with lions (possibly) and a votive deposit including a Gorgon’s head, architectural frieze element with a mounted warrior and fragments of weaponry. It housed an inscription which refers both to a king and to the *calator*, the official who summoned the assembly. It also included a black figure krater with a depiction of Hephaistos returning to Mount Olympus on a donkey (Coarelli 1983: 177).

The story of Hephaistos is complex and the relationship between Hephaistos and Vulcanus also hard to work through. The most thorough attempt was made by Gerard Capdeville and he traces connections with Cretan Velchanos (or Zeus Velchanos), the Cyprian Valchanos, and the Etruscan Velchans and Sethlans, so that Vulcanus is not just a god of fire, or craftsmanship, but also of fertility (Capdeville 1995). Whilst the book was criticized for its tenuous connections, it seems highly likely that we are caught in a nexus of ideas and links as intricate as the web in which Hephaistos was said to have caught Aphrodite and Ares. And indeed there are yet further threads to follow; as Linderski noted in his review, Alföldi in his extraordinarily inventive book *Die Struktur des voretruskischen Römerstaates* noted the tradition of smith kings running back into Bronze Age Caucasus, through the Celtic smith gods and into Chinese and Turkish traditions. The advance of technology moved blacksmith gods ahead of animal deities⁶⁶.

Rome had a twin focus on hearth and fire through Vulcanus and Vesta. Both are associated with regal areas, the Volcanal and the Regia which was next to and ritually connected to the temple of Vesta, where the deity Ops Consiva was also worshipped⁶⁷. Fertility and purification are key to both shrines, in the case of Vulcanus in the Tubilustrium or purification of the musical instruments which summoned the Romans to war. In the third century BCE there was a cluster of activity around this theme, with temples to Consus, Tellus, Vortumnus, Pales, Janus and probably Vulcanus (among others) (Ziółkowski 1992; Davies 1997: 6-38 for a useful overview).

⁶⁶ Linderski 1996; Alföldi 1974: 181-219. It is worth noting in this context the complex relationship between woodpeckers, thunder gods and blacksmiths which Krappe 1941 sketches, even if it is as tenuous as Capdeville’s connections.

⁶⁷ On Ops see Miano 2015; on Vesta, Koch 1958; Carandini *et alii* 2017.

There are a number of stories about phalluses in hearths and births, at Alba Longa, Rome and Praeneste⁶⁸. These are late and non-canonical and one should not derive antiquity from strangeness. But there is something here perhaps about one form of the origins of kingliness. A point of connection is the figure of the Lar, the tutelary deity of the Roman house. The Lares Praestites are of particular interest; they were twins, depicted on a coin of L. Caesius c. 112 BCE, associated with hunting dogs, and appearing with Vulcan (represented by tongs; it is a good guess to imagine that Vulcanus and Maia may have been a version of their parents). The resemblances between the Lares Praestites and the eventual Romulus and Remus pairing have been noted (Flower 2017: 108-112).

The cultic significance of Vulcanus/Vesta is early at Rome. They do significant work symbolically at the heart of the city and are closely associated with the sites of power and sovereignty. They function strongly in salience. And to focus on Vulcanus, the nexus of ideas around moving from nature to artifice, and the relevance of armour to metallurgy, warfare and sovereignty, are very close to concerns of our early kings. So Romulus was known as Quirinus because he always carried a *curis*, which was the Sabine for spear or *hasta* (Ov., *F*: 2.477). It was Alföldi again who emphasised the critical and pervasive role of the *hasta* as a symbol of sovereignty⁶⁹, and we have already mentioned the bilobate shield which is associated with Numa through the rites of the Salii. We tend to think of Numa as peaceable, but the Salii also functioned to awaken Mars, beating their shields with a spear, and there is a very mangled reference for another origin of the Salii across to <Ma>morrius king of the Veientes, through smithing⁷⁰.

A representation of Hephaistos in the Volcanal, returning from Lemnos to Olympus, is a thin reed. But we should not forget that Lemnos has a special relationship to the Tyrrhenians, or that the famous Lemnos stele, obscure as it is, shows a man with a shield and a spear (De Simone, Chiaï 2001). And once we start to turn attention from

the individuals to the objects we enter a new and rather intriguing world.

Sovereign Assemblages

Here I want to introduce another methodological framework, that of Adam T. Smith in discussing how assemblages of material can construct political and social development (Smith 2015). Smith's work is aligned to that of Severi through the intermediation of the scholarship of David Wengrow (already mentioned) and the late David Graeber. Graeber introduces Severi's book with his focus on the importance of objects, alongside Severi's iconographic approach (Severi 2015: xi-xxiv). Wengrow is similarly focused on the role of objects in stimulating imagination, as we have seen. Graeber worked with Marshall Sahlins to construct a volume on kingship and sovereignty, and with Wengrow on the powerful synthesis *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*, which uses some of the work that Smith and others have done in the Caucasus (Graeber, Sahlins 2017; Graeber, Wengrow 2021).

The Bronze Age Caucasus is a critical locus for understanding the development of metallurgy and also of the iconography of sovereignty. Connections to Urartu and to the Colchian region place the Caucasus in a critical interstitial position between the near East and the central European traditions. Dumézil and Alföldi were among those who played with the significance of this part of the world to central Italy (Geroulanos, Phillips 2018; Alföldi 1974). I mention this to insist that I am not making the same argument here. I do think the connections between these geographies is interesting (Smith 1999), but here I am just interested in Smith's argument about assemblages, about how objects are intrinsic to a claim of sovereignty.

To take regalia, Smith notes both their physicality as part of the political work they do. He adds «the efficacy of these assemblages clearly also lies in their sensible portability that enables them to shape social relationships across 'inter-subjective spacetime', [...] their sensual aesthetics that allow pomp to bedazzle [...], and their sentimental representation, always more than their manifest form» (Smith 2015: 88). This combination of sensibility or physicality, sensuality or the rhetoric of form and the combination of the two in our repeated appreciation stands alongside Severi's narrative and salient memory. Objects exist, and weave around us the repeated impact

⁶⁸ Plut., *Rom.*: 2.4; D.Hal.: 4.2.1-3, Ov., *F.*: 6.627-34; Pliny, *NH.*: 36.204; Plut., *De fort. Rom.*: 10.323b; The case of Caeculus at Praeneste is rationalized as a spark from the hearth, Serv., *Aen.*: 7.678; Schol. Ver., *Aen.*: 7.678; Mart., *Cap.*: 6.642; see also Brelich 1956.

⁶⁹ Alföldi 1959. The Regia contained a collection of spears, whose movement was prodigious and who could be thought of as personifications of deities.

⁷⁰ D. Hal.: 2,71; Ov., *F.*: 3.383-392; Plut., *Numa.*: 13; Min., *Fel.*: 24.11; Fest.: 117.13L.

of association and salience and insert themselves into our stories of ourselves. Traditionally we might say that we admire them and tell stories about and through them. More radically, objects bring us to certain states of mind and in parallel they narrate us.

Smith uses this framework to develop his account of the material conditions that make sovereignty possible. He writes:

'An object-aware account of the political suggests that sovereign authority demand the reproduction of (at least) three key conditions:

1. A coherent public defined by relations of inclusion and exclusion that are materially marked and regulated;
2. The figure of a sovereign, cut away from the community by an apparatus of social and martial violence;
3. An apparatus capable of formalizing governance by transforming the polity itself into an object of desire, of care, and of devotion. (Smith 2015: 92-93).

The stories that surround Romulus and Numa, the myth and legend which De Sanctis and Lentano discuss, and the collective memory to which Bettini refers, in many ways describe precisely the reproduction of these core conditions.

Romulus creates the body politic and he constructs the wall that is the boundary between inside and outside; he defends it with the attributes of his sovereignty. That defence is a moment of extraordinary violence against his own twin. He will lose his own life for the city (either in its defence or removed because he becomes a threat to his own foundation). He leaves behind a senate and a community which indeed both constitute Rome and are identified with it through the deepest of ties. Numa similarly makes the community one of worship and he too is separated, less by violence perhaps than by the power of exceptional knowledge, and his work of regulation is pervasive. However he does make one highly relevant contribution by creating the replica shields that protect the sacred shield that fell from the sky. There is just a hint that there may be another connection too. Numa is said to have placated an angry Jupiter with fish and onions instead of human sacrifice, and at the Volcanal, little fish were offered *pro animis humanis* (Festus 276L).

These are narratives of sovereignty, and they can be variously contextualized. Some are undoubtedly the products of historiographical evolution in the late Republic. A good deal of this belongs to the specific conditions of the later fourth and early third century, when the Romans

exert their control over the Latins, Sabines and Samnites. The Latin-Sabine dualism which we see repeated traces of may have deep roots, but the significance of the conquest was surely huge (Poucet 1967; Dench 1995). We may well see faint traces of stories which have become so tangled and turned around as to be barely recognisable.

But there is another narrative of sovereignty here and it is around the material and intellectual affordances of power. The movement back and forth across the threshold of wildness and civilization (or maybe the negotiation of the meaning of those terms, as we see in boundary markers, areas of exclusivity as the Forum seems to have become), the absorption of iconographies and mechanisms of hunting and fighting, drinking and feasting, display from life and across the boundary into death, and the monumentalization of the city, are all archaic and material expressions of sovereignty.

So if we return to the Volcanal, associations with metallurgy, fertility, war, guardianship, perhaps twins, animals, liminality and maybe even monstrosity, are all swirling in the visible salient iconography and dimly discernible as repetitive ritual. What narratives were told then, so that Romulus and Remus could emerge, or Titus Tatius and Numa, or the other kings, has been the mainstream concern, but in a methodology driven by the importance of the assemblage and of the politics of the historical production of the machinery of sovereignty, it becomes of secondary significance. To focus on whether or how far the story is true, or which story came first, may be a case of looking at a finger, when it is pointing at the moon. What we should really look at is the density of conditions that permitted the Romans, in their way, to think mythologically.

This becomes relevant when we try to understand the consequences of the more detailed studies in the two edited volumes on Romulus and Numa. In this section I have tried to indicate that De Sanctis and Lentano have pointed us towards an intermediate way of understanding the legendary narratives by insisting on their more symbolic heft. Using a variety of borrowed frameworks I have tried to push further the erasure of the historical account and tried to offer a more complex account of memory and narration. In offering these different approaches, I have encouraged a far more radical distancing from the texts towards an object-driven approach to the conditions within which parallel memorializations of sovereignty may have emerged. Let us turn to how the Bettini school deal with the smaller details.

Antiquarians in the field

The two edited volumes on Romulus and Numa take a different approach by looking at more specific details (Bettini 2022a; Garofalo 2022). Particular emphasis is paid to regulations – over childbirth (Romulus’ peculiar one female child rule), murder and its punishment, boundaries and ritual. The individual studies repay attention. This is classic scholarship of a certain kind; parallels are adduced, texts analysed, the authors follow the twists and turns of the argument, the conclusions are less about a firm discovery than a general statement of the broader context. There are significant parallels with other technical fields and the most obvious is legal scholarship, especially continental. Indeed the upturn in scholarship on the *leges regiae* and the Twelve Tables means that there are quite a few new studies of why a *paelex* may not touch the sanctuary of Juno, or why the *nurus* or daughter in law who mistreated her parents in law was *sacer* (Laurendi 2018; Tassi Scandone 2018). The work represented by this scholarship is very different from that of the broader account but that this does not come simply from a different methodological approach. In other words, it is not just the result of looking through the microscope rather than the telescope.

This is not the place for a lengthy discussion of how genres of writing operated in antiquity, but there is a significant difference between the story of regulations and the story of war and politics. This is not perfect – Livy was capable of discussing regulations and regulations were seen in historical context. But there are three critical points; first there was never a single narrative which pulled all this together and from which the individual pieces of information were extracted. That is clear from the study of the fragments of historians, lawyers and antiquarians.

Second, neither account is intrinsically more reliable than the other. It is no more likely that Romulus was suckled by a wolf than that he passed legislation on the number of children Romans might have, and that such legislation survived. From the point of view of ‘what happened,’ neither account is plausible. Rather we see another form of parallelism; the memory through narrative and the memory through repetitive figurations of behaviours. These different sorts of stories have then undergone massive transformations across time.

Third, Romans were as capable as we are of illustrating regulation by a story or extracting a regulation from a story. One of the ways of ex-

plaining law is to offer a narrative, one way to reconstruct a norm is to find it with a text which was innocent of such intent. Too much modern legal reconstruction fails to recognise that this is not sound method for the reconstruction of an archaic legal framework⁷¹, but it is important that again this offers us a form of parallelism – narrative and salient memory, the story or the supposedly stable norm.

There are major obstacles to our understanding of the antiquarian approach⁷². First, it is very hard to understand the tradition as it began. We have few antiquarian texts preserved as well as Livy is, which could have allowed us to imagine what other complete narratives might have looked like; the most substantial texts are purely grammatical (Varro’s *de lingua Latina*, Verrius Flaccus via epitomators) or late (Aulus Gellius, Macrobius and John Lydus are the obvious examples). Second, the tendency is even greater to occlude the fact that one is not actually talking about evidence that belongs to the eighth or seventh century BCE. Partly this is because we are dealing with apparently timeless facts about Rome. So it is quite likely that being a horrid daughter-in-law was always frowned on, but the moment at which it was written down in a specific way remains unclear.

When dealing with archaic Rome, it has been a regrettable tendency of legal and antiquarian scholarship to take the texts at face value. Alongside the slightly more explicable belief that information about places is relatively stable, this has appeared to increase the amount of actual information. The fallacy is close to the problem which we noted with Fustel de Coulanges and Durkheim earlier; it is the fallacy that studying institutions or rituals has some higher authority in terms of reliable and stable facts.

My argument is that this is also a very Roman approach. Romans also tended to retroject institutional history. An obvious example is the determination to locate the senate in the time of Romulus, which no-one believes. The combination of what has been called Romulisation (the persistent attribution to Romulus), and the desire to fix and legitimate the Roman *res publica* as existing almost from its first day and certainly from its first king, was very strong⁷³.

⁷¹ A point made insistently by De Francisci 1959.

⁷² The whole corpus is being re-examined in an important project led by Valentina Arena.

⁷³ Poucet 2001, for example has explored this notion; see also Ver Eecke 2008.

Yet institutional history is profoundly mythicizing. It is not just a Foucauldian realization that power and discourse go hand in hand. There is a good case to be made for the entire Roman historiographical enterprise as being about the demonstration of Rome's success through its institutions – the annual cycle of domestic politics and external warfare is not without its vicissitudes, but Rome wins through time and again through elections, compromises and discipline (Haimson Lushkov 2015). No surprise then that every part of that can be traced back to the kings, or to the way the power of the kings was dismembered and reconstituted.

To some extent therefore there was a requirement to fill the period before the mid-fifth century Twelve Tables with legislation to show the antiquity of the legal profession. If senators, priests, and the army were all regal inventions, lawyers would have to be included too. This is not to say that there was no normative legal framework before the Republic, and indeed I have argued that there must have been (Smith 2020a), but again we have to distance the textual evidence from a claim for reliable archaic information.

Why is there such a focus on homicide in the accounts⁷⁴? And on exclusion from the community, as represented by the notion of becoming *sacer*⁷⁵? Could the answer lie in the way other communities of knowledge claimed a part of the foundation myth? The prohibitions against reducing the citizen body and the permissions required to sanction citizens are part of the story of creating a citizen body in the first place. The historical account of the Romulean *res publica* is augmented by legal and religious accounts which both reinforce their existence as relevant, powerful, authoritative and originating discourses, and which narrate in different ways the notion of community foundation and maintenance. Whether the specific homicide regulations belonged to archaic period or later is perhaps unknowable, but they spring from the conditions created by the existence of a state, however weak.

This step is somehow missing in the volumes under consideration, and indeed perhaps their authors would disagree, but for me they leave us on the edge of the next step which is to argue not about specific paths which can be constructed through the dense set of connections and corre-

lations but about what that density itself tells us about Rome.

To give a last example. Bettini discusses the strange claim that Romulus created the norm that all male children should be raised but only one female child (Bettini 2022a: 63-84). Now this comes from Dionysius of Halicarnassus 2.15.1, and Bettini is surely right to connect some other commentary on Romulus and divorce in Plutarch *Romulus* 22. Dionysius also refers to regulations about children deformed at birth and this is part of the Twelve Tables too (IV.1 Crawford). So it looks as if there is some interplay between commentaries on the early provisions around marriage, divorce and childbirth, and historical accounts which attributed them to Romulus. Bettini does not make the mistake of assuming that Romulus did indeed pass such legislation (although his early disclaimer could have encouraged him and colleagues to be slightly more circumspect at language which implies otherwise; Bettini 2022a: 63, but cf. 84). What he does do is to build on an excellent article by Moreau and note that there is something in here about exogamy (Moreau 1988). The constraint on marriageable women at Rome forced Roman men to look outside. This he then connects to the *ius conubii*.

This provokes for me three reflections.

First, the *ius conubii* was of particular relevance in the development of relationships with the Latins (Roselaar 2013). We have mentioned earlier that the fourth and early third century were critical moments in the development of aspects of the tradition (see now Cifarelli, Gatti, Palombi 2019; D'Alessio *et alii* 2021). Whilst there may have been some mechanism for permitting external marriages in the archaic period, which would fit with Ampolo's brilliant notion of social mobility (Ampolo 1976), if the fourth century was a moment of rethinking then that might also have been a moment of finding older precedents. However, there appears to have been an earlier principle of exogamy in the Roman *gens* (Smith 2006: 30-32). This is an odd principle to have invented since it was not the case later on.

Second, a strong principle of exogamy which can then produce all sorts of real or invented issues such as a narrowing of the number of eligible women takes us back to issues around the family. Exogamy is an interesting phenomenon and one which requires a notion of alliance and collaboration. In the context of the aristocratic polity which Terrenato posits, this could be seen as the grand bargain of the elite, solidifying their position against others (Terrenato 2019). At the same time,

⁷⁴ McClintock 2022.

⁷⁵ Fiori 1996 is the most extensive study.

the expectation of exogamy and of admittance to outsiders suggests (rather as De Sanctis argues in his book) that there was a drive against concentration of power and towards inclusion.

This leads me to the third observation that this complex story of state interest in exogamy and child-rearing ultimately clearly refers to the importance of the family within community, and perhaps that is what we should take away from this passage. We learn, most probably, nothing about Romulus or the eighth century BCE, but something about the way that Romans insisted across time upon the public nature and import of family relationships.

This is a theme of perennial interest of course but the different ways in which the Romans treat this support an argument for the different ways in which the regal period was remembered. The exogamous principle could be imagined through an event such as the rape of the Sabine women, or it could be enshrined in quasi-legal provision. Romulus can be seen to create a community through narrative and performative events such as the creation of the asylum or the construction of a boundary, or through descriptive and constitutive events such as the creation of tribes, or through normative and regulatory prescriptions such as those around murder and exclusion. These are different kinds of memorialization, though none of them are actually a memory of the eighth century. And it is precisely here that we confront the problem of believing that our knowledge of the regal period was the outcome of collective memory.

Anthropology in a new light

Anthropology is a broad and expansive discipline (or set of disciplines) which continues to undergo a profound sense of internal crisis⁷⁶. The scientific demands of rigour and reproducibility clash with ethical and philosophical concerns in all sorts of ways, and then intersect with wider debates over reproducibility itself. But if this is a challenge in the anthropology of contemporary culture, it becomes even more of a problem when dealing with anthropology from the earlier twentieth century, and then the notion of anthropology of a period where there can be no direct

access to the subjects is even more complex. Yet the ancient world has been hugely influential in the construction of modern anthropology. Frazer's *Golden Bough* is the obvious starting point and there are many more ways in which the two disciplines developed in parallel in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but the dialogue continued and that around structuralism in particular is of significance. Dumézil, Vernant and Vidal-Naquet for instance were contributing directly to anthropological thinking (Leonard 2005 is excellent; see recently Stocking 2020).

So what sort of anthropology of the classical past can we construct? Clearly 'ethnography in the past' is an impossibility, but as we increasingly revert to reading the early ethnographers against their own grain, as Sahlins does with Firth for instance (Sahlins 2022: 12-13; cf. Sahlins 2012), perhaps our classical methodologies of reading past writers who reflect on societies we can now no longer recover may become more relevant.

Bettini and Short characterise the gap which opened up between earlier studies and the twentieth century on the part of classics as a move away from comparativism, partly because the comparative method of Frazer seemed so unreliable, though also from a degree of isolationism (Short, Bettini 2018). It is also true that anthropology moved away from the structuralist approach which had proved a useful point of engagement in one form or another for the French classicists we just referred to. Although they had different accounts of their debt to Lévi-Strauss, and sometimes denied it, the decoding of deep patterns is a shared interpretative goal. The apparent collapse of the Lévi-Straussian world-view into a looser and less binary discussion of discourse forced texts back into themselves, and encouraged the infinite interplay of signification which has been seen as a postmodern method⁷⁷.

Bettini and his school in a way revert to a rather 'antiquarian' method:

«when we say that cultural or linguistic oddities should be the basis for comparative study, by 'oddities' we mean cultural configurations that are normal and predictable – institutions, conceptions, and behaviours (including or especially

⁷⁶ One interesting and relevant take is Candea 2018's analysis of the challenge of comparison in anthropology, which goes to the heart of many debates, including some raised here.

⁷⁷ See Derrida's classic quote, «[...] the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification ad infinitum». See Derrida 1970: 249.

linguistic behaviours) – but that in Roman society take on forms that are, for us, unexpected»⁷⁸.

Language and linguistic studies is a key method, thus reverting partly to the Saussurean roots of structuralism but also staying firmly in the classical camp. There is little Indo-Europeanism in Bettini. In other words this is a specifically Mediterranean and pretty much Graeco-Roman system, and it is not clear that one could necessarily draw out conclusions for some deep past or another cultural system. The Roman world has enough strangeness of its own. This is a good basis for the sort of detailed studies of supposedly kingly institutions, their strangeness or specificity offering a point of departure for an exploration of the corners of the Roman thoughtworld that reveal their disconcerting differences and distinctiveness.

There is some value in keeping the hermeneutic circle fairly tight. It is discomfiting for some classicists to find themselves wandering in the Amazon. However if anthropology and antiquarianism become too conflated, what might be lost? Or, put another way, what is the offer of other kinds of anthropology to the problem in hand?

The reliance on a form of antiquarianism is defensible and productive but it inevitably remains within the circle of the available textual evidence. That evidence defines, as it were, the frame of the conversation, and that is inevitable, but it is limiting. Throughout this essay we have been touching on the need to recognise the complexity of the relationship between the sources and the reality they seek to describe or explain. At a very simple level one can see that there was an attraction in asserting continuity from the archaic period, specifically the founder kings, for certain Roman practices which were regarded as fundamental. This tells us that kings were useful but it does not tell us that any specific king existed or that the innovation attributed to him had any value. This is an anthropology of ancient values more than anything else.

The Roman myth of kings precluded alternative stories. It forced the Romans to manage an account of origins which was exclusively driven by monarchy in some form. The centre of the Roman story was the *rex* and everything had to be accommodated to that story. As time went on the lineaments of that story became more and more fixed but that does not mean of course that

the story became any more true, in the historical sense. Rather, the story had to bend to be consistent with other contemporary realities. Every age would use the story for its own purposes, the most consistent feature being a negotiation of power. Since Rome had no story that was not about power, at some level, Rome could have no beginning without powerful kings, and any notion of a kingless society was pushed back to an entirely mythical Saturnian prehistory.

The antiquarian approach which developed in antiquity was conducive to the argument that kingship is the basis on which the divine social structure is created. This was the standard line; the gods were built to imitate humans. Antiquarianism shares an intellectual stage with that sort of philosophical positioning; as Xenophanes put it, «If cattle and horses and lions had hands they would depict gods like cattle and horses» whilst Euhemerus argued that myth was simply exaggerated history⁷⁹. As a genre which tended to emphasise alternatives, antiquarianism appears to offer a sceptical view of the gods, since one can never be sure of the truth. So the whole basis of our discourse on kings, and its interactions with gods, monsters and the miraculous reverts to a series of inventions and rationalizations.

In this way we can see that it is more legitimate to read the sources as evidence for their own preoccupations than it is to emphasise their reliability or to try to read them as a code behind which lies the truth. Rather than arguing over the kind of historical sequence we can extract from the sources, we could allow the challenging conditions of their production to encourage us to erase the historical account we have altogether. At that point, we are liberated to look afresh.

Unearthly Powers, Enchanted Universes

There is another approach in a new anthropological turn for the ancient world, led by the late David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins (Graeber, Sahlins 2017). We have met their work briefly before, and I want to focus more sharply on what one might call the immanentist turn. In essence, the argument is that we should pay far more attention to the immanent presence of the gods in early thought, and be less inclined to take a transcendental view that the gods are distant and invented

⁷⁸ Short, Bettini 2018: 372. We usually come to antiquarianism through Momigliano, but for a brilliant set of essays which take the argument further forward see Miller 2007.

⁷⁹ Xenophanes fr. B 15 (D-K); Winiarczyk 2013. See also Ar., *Pol.*: 1252b.

on the basis of human society. Rather, humans usurp the pre-existing powers of the immanent forces around us, and that this is a late and incomplete process. The gods, in other words, come first.

Sahlins' last posthumously published work gives the argument in fullest form, but also leaves open the challenge of the transition points (Sahlins 2022). At some points, he seems to place the immanentist moment as early in human development and at other times he suggests that it is still part of medieval western thought. I suspect we need a more nuanced account of the conflict between the two views, and that is true too of the complementary work which Strathern has led (Strathern 2019; Azfar Moin, Strathern 2022). It is tightly related to the issue over how we characterise the sophistication of archaic Rome, where the transition points, which we raised above, and which bears further focused investigation. However, this is not a convincing challenge to the overall argument, and it may be that a better integration of careful archaeological investigation into the material correlates of power and social complexity would help us.

The overall thrust of the challenge offered by this kind of anthropology, it seems to me, is to make the likely origins and nature of kingship at Rome much stranger than the traditional historical account and any rationalization of it. This is why Graeber and Sahlins' emphasis on dying kings and stranger kings is so pertinent. Throughout *On Kings*, they revert to the importance of these motifs (Graeber, Sahlins 2017). Kings come from outside, or are constrained from within; they are not powerful as we perhaps perceive them but depend on or channel the gods and are held within social bounds through various prohibitions. This is very close to the Roman model – Remus is killed by Romulus, Romulus by the senate, Tarquinius Priscus by a rival family, Servius Tullius by his son-in-law. Numa and the Tarquins are foreigners. Romulus and Servius Tullius are born miraculously. Instead of seeing these as the assimulations of Roman history to a fictitious divine sphere, the immanentist approach would I think argue that these are reflections of how kingship grew from and depended on the gods. Now clearly we know very little of eighth and seventh century Roman religion and so the risk of a circular argument based on two points of ignorance, religious and political.

I think the greater risk is that we mistake the plausibility of rationalizations for the shadow of real history. If therefore we were to abandon the notion that our question is 'what happened,' but

rather 'what it is that happened,' the logic of an immanentist world might be that we see increasing but still partial attempts to usurp the powers of the gods, ringed around with significant community efforts to control for this behaviour. Narrative and salient accounts speak to a notion of kingship as potent, dangerous, and fragile, and of community as threatened but normative. In the context of the growing and increasingly complex social, economic and political entity which Rome can be seen to be, this balance of forces was undoubtedly unstable and constantly shifting, but Rome could not have grown as it did if it was not also at some level functional⁸⁰.

This reading lies betwixt and between the intellectual traditions we outlined at the outset; it is only sketched here and is intended more as a suggestion for future work than a definitive answer to the methodological questions raised by the study of archaic Rome. An object-oriented approach and one attentive to the social and political context which we can derive from archaeology will rest on persistent re-examination of the material conditions of Rome, knowledge of which has been immensely increased by recent excavation. Being open to the non-traditional readings, and the semi-otic and institutional traces of the past, as Bettini and his colleagues, and Wiseman in his way are, will reveal connections and possibilities that lie behind the historiographical fictions. The whole of this however can be read in the context of the huge social and intellectual change which was driven by the combination of demographic growth, settlement complexity, exogenous influences and the metamorphoses of religious behaviour.

In this light, what survives in our sources has to be read through a kind of double refraction; not solely the long run of individual versions and rewritings with which we are familiar, and which permits us to write the account of what the Romans made of kingship, but also the much less visible transformation of the process whereby humans began to usurp the powers of the immanent gods. They are not replacing the gods and not yet creating a transcendental realm, but starting a journey in which the games of political power and sovereignty become part of the temporal world and its contingencies. It is this refraction which gives us the myth of the kings as the machinery of transformation of society. What is being re-

⁸⁰ For a strong account of the administrative consequences in terms of food of Roman expansion see Fulminante 2013.

membered is a change in the enchantment of the world.

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