

REVIEW–DISCUSSION

VARRO'S BIOGRAPHY OF THE ROMAN PEOPLE

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If ever there was a moment when the writing of history *mattered*, it was during the eighteen months between the murder of Caesar and the announcement of public legal proceedings against the assassins. This was the time when Sallust, retired from politics, was 'reading much and listening to much on the history of the Roman People' (*Cat.* 53.2), and coming to the conclusion that the disastrous events of the previous ninety years had been due to the avarice and arrogance of the *nobilitas*.¹ Meanwhile Cicero, once a scourge of aristocratic corruption, was writing polemical contemporary history to justify his own shift to a hard-line optimate attitude that approved of political assassination.² What was at stake was freedom: that of the Roman People from the domination of an oligarchy,³ or that of the oligarchs themselves from the 'tyranny' of Caesar.⁴ 'We have freedom,' said Cicero after the Ides of March, 'but we don't have the *res publica* ... It's just as dangerous to attack that wicked party now the tyrant's dead as it was when he was alive' (*Att.* 14.4.1, 14.17.6). What he meant was that the consul and the Roman People were demanding that murder be punished,⁵ and eventually they got their way.

It was evidently during this power-struggle for the soul of the republic that Rome's leading historian published his four-volume *De uita populi Romani*.⁶

¹ Sall. *Cat.* 4.2 (retirement); *Cat.* 10.3–4, *Iug.* 5.2 (avarice and arrogance).

² *De consiliis suis* (*FRHist* 39 T 10–14); for the optimate 'ethics of murder', see Wiseman (2009) 176–210.

³ Caes. *BC* 1.22.5 (*ut se et populum Romanum factione paucorum oppressum in libertatem uindicaret*), Sall. *Jug.* 42.1 (*Ti. et C. Gracchus ... uindicare plebem in libertatem et paucorum scelera patefacere coepere*); cf. in the next generation Augustus *Res gestae* 1.1 (*rem publicam a dominatione factionis oppressam in libertatem uindicaui*).

⁴ The abundant Ciceronian evidence is discussed in Wiseman (2009) 191–207.

⁵ See for instance Cic. *Fam.* 12.3.2 on Antony's *contio* in October 44.

⁶ It was presumably a sequel to *De gente populi Romani*, also in four books, which is securely datable to 44–43 BC (Arnob. *Adu. Nat.* 5.8 on the consulship of Hirtius and Pansa). For *de gente* preceding *de uita*, see Suet. *Aug.* 1, *Tib.* 1.1, *Nero* 1.1, *Vesp.* 1.1.

Marcus Varro's *Antiquitates* had been a revelation, 'teaching the Romans who and where they were' (Cic. *Acad.* 1.9); but they were a huge work of forty-one books, and only the learned would read them all. This shorter and more focussed treatment would be more directly useful to his fellow-citizens, an aim that always mattered to him.⁷ A century and a half ago, Gaston Boissier shrewdly distinguished the respective purposes of the two works: 'L'un s'adressait surtout aux érudits, l'autre semble avoir été fait pour le peuple.'⁸

Over 120 fragments survive, almost all of them short de-contextualised citations in Nonius Marcellus' fourth-century dictionary *De compendiosa doctrina*. There have been four collections of the fragments: by Hermann Kettner (1863), Benedetto Riposati (1939, repr. 1972), Marcello Salvatore (2004), and now Antonino Pittà (2015). What makes Pittà's edition the best available is his inclusion of detailed discussion, not only on the establishment of the text but also on the probable context and significance of each fragment. As a textual editor he is cautious and sensible, not tempted by adventurous emendations; his commentary likewise is careful, judicious, and very thorough. Less reader-friendly than Riposati's edition but much more helpful than Salvatore's, the book is excellent value for money, and from now on will be deservedly the standard work on the subject.

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The first book of *De uita populi Romani* dealt with the regal period. There was evidently some narrative—the killing of Mettius Fufetius, the rape of Lucretia—but the great majority of the fragments are from descriptive passages on public and religious institutions and the conditions of private life (costume, houses, domestic utensils, etc). Pittà argues that the religious material formed a digression from Varro's treatment of Numa: 'sulla base della connessione tradizionale fra il secondo re e l'istituzione della religione romana, Varrone avrebbe potuto aprire un'ampia sezione sul culto e sul calendario' (37). But I think it can be shown that in the *Antiquitates* Varro attributed the entire organisation of Rome, including religious cult, to a single act by Romulus;⁹ he certainly believed that new cults were brought in by Titus Tatius and the Sabines,¹⁰ which makes it unlikely that he credited the whole system to Numa.

Fr. 2P (= 5R = 285S), cited by Nonius to illustrate *mixtura et moderatura* (787L), is hopelessly corrupt:

⁷ See for instance *Ant. diu.* fr. 3 Cardauns, *Rust.* 1.1.3.

⁸ Boissier (1861) 190.

⁹ See Wiseman (2009) 81–98; for Romulus' religious legislation see D. Hal. *AR* 2.18–23.

¹⁰ See for instance *Ant. diu.* fr. 36, 219 Cardauns, *Ling.* 5.74.

†sed quod ea et propter talem mixtura immoderata exaquiscent, itaque quod temperatura moderatur in Romuli uita triplicis ciuitates†

Since it seems safe to emend the final word to *ciuitatis*, the question here is what sort of ‘mixture’ might be relevant to a ‘triple citizenship’. Pittà thinks of Polybius’ analysis of the Roman constitution as a combination of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, an idea of constitutional ‘mixture’ that goes back to Thucydides (8.97.2) and Aristotle (*Pol.* 1297a6). He might have cited Cicero *Rep.* 2.42, where a *triplex rerum publicarum genus*, like those of Sparta and Carthage, is attributed to Rome under the kings, with the elements *ita mixta ... ut temperata nullo fuerint modo*.

But it seems to me more likely that Varro was thinking of something quite different, a triple *ciuitas* brought about by Romulus’ ‘mixture’ of Latins, Sabines, and Etruscans. The Sabines came with Titus Tatius,¹¹ and the Etruscans with Caeles Vibenna, whom Varro alone (*Ling.* 5.46) dates to Romulus’ time; Varro’s account of the three original *tribus*, as named after Romulus, Tatius, and ‘Lucumo’ (*Ling.* 5.55) implies the same ethnic combination. According to Plutarch, the whole purpose of the abduction of the Sabine women was to achieve a ‘mixture and blending’ of the two peoples;¹² the same idea occurs in Dionysius, and we know that both he and Plutarch used Varro on early Rome.¹³

It is very striking that Florus too refers to Rome as a mixture of Latins, Sabines, and Etruscans, but in the context of the Social War.¹⁴ Florus certainly used the *De uita populi Romani*: he took from it the phrase *bicipitem ciuitatem facere*, describing C. Gracchus’ jury law,¹⁵ and it is very likely that he owes to Varro’s work his entire conception of the life of the *populus Romanus* as analogous to that of a human being.¹⁶ It is also noticeable that his account of the Social War is the only source to mention the destruction of Ocrinum and Carseoli (3.18.11), neighbouring cities to Varro’s native Reate. Varro was twenty-five or twenty-six when the war broke out. Perhaps that traumatic event helped to form his thinking about Roman citizenship, and made him attribute to the

¹¹ See for instance Varro *Ling.* 6.68: *Quirites a Curensibus; ab his, cum Tatius rege in societatem uenerunt ciuitatis*.

¹² Plut. *Rom.* 9.2 (ἀναμιγνύναι), 14.2 (συγκράσεως καὶ κοινωνίας), 14.6 (συμμιῆσαι καὶ συναγαγεῖν), *Comp. Thes. Rom.* 6.3 (συνέμειξεν ἀλλήλοις καὶ συνέπηξε τὰ γένη).

¹³ D. Hal. *AR* 2.46.3 (συνεκεράσθησαν); for use of Varro, see *AR* 2.21.2, 47.4, 48.4, Plut. *Rom.* 12.3.

¹⁴ Flor. 3.18.1: *cum populus Romanus Etruscos Latinos Sabinosque sibi miscuerit et unum ex omnibus sanguinem ducat, corpus fecit ex membris et ex omnibus unus est*.

¹⁵ Flor. 3.7.13, from fr. 108P = 104R = 425S (see further below); for Florus’ use of *De uita p.R.* see Bessone (2008) 49–66.

¹⁶ Flor. 1.pref.4–8, cf. 1.8.1, 1.22.1 and 3.12.1 on the *aetates populi Romani*.

founder himself the mixture of Italian ethnicities that the allies fought to achieve.

In this context it is worth considering a neglected passage in Sallust's *Catiline*, at the beginning of the digression on the corruption of the *res publica*.¹⁷

The city of Rome, on my understanding, was founded and held initially by the Trojans, who as fugitives under the leadership of Aeneas had been wandering with no fixed abode; and with them were the Aborigines, a rustic race, without laws, without command, free and unrestricted. After they had come together behind a single wall, it is incredible to recall how easily—despite the difference in race, their separate languages and disparate life-styles—they merged: so short was the time in which, owing to harmony, the diverse and wandering multitude had become a community.

The key phrase comes at the end: *concordia ciuitas facta erat*, reminiscent of the *civilis concordia* prized by Varro in the *De uita p.R.* (fr. 106P = 124R = 438S). The Aborigines and the wandering Trojans had certainly featured in Varro's *Antiquitates*,¹⁸ and though Varro of course regarded Romulus and Remus as the founders (*Rust.* 2.1.9), their contribution may be referred to in Sallust's phrase *postquam in una moenia conuenere*.¹⁹

Sallustian parallels may also be significant for other fragments. Fr. 3P (= 10R = 289S) is cited by Nonius on *paupertas* (63L):

pecuniaque erat parua: ab eo paupertas dicta. cuius paupertatis magnum testimonium est ...

The implied derivation is of *pauper* from *parua pecunia*; elsewhere (*Ling.* 5.92), Varro derives it *a paulo lare*, from the smallness of one's dwelling, something that applied to gods as well as mortals. Fr. 8P (= 13R = 293S) is cited by Nonius on the nominative *aedis* for *aedes* (792L):

haec aedis quae nunc est multis annis post facta sit, namque omnia regiis temporibus delubra parua facta.

¹⁷ Sall., *Cat.* 6.1–2, trans. Woodman (2007).

¹⁸ *Ant. Hum.* fr. 2.4–15 Mirsch, cf. Solinus 1.14 with D. Hal. *AR* 1.14.1.

¹⁹ Cf. *Ling.* 5.143 on the wall and *pomerium*. For Varro's account of the foundation, see Wiseman (2015) 93–122.

Varro made a particular point of the contrast between modern *diuitiae* and ancient *paupertates* (fr. 6P = 15R = 295S, cited for the unusual plural by Nonius 239L). So too did Sallust.

The reason Sallust made a study of Roman history was to understand how the Romans had been able to overcome opponents whose resources were much greater, how *diuitias paupertas, multitudinem paucitas superaret* (*Cat.* 53.4); he even made Caesar and Cato refer to this characteristic of the great *maiores*.²⁰ Moreover, the yardstick Sallust used for the contrast of frugality then and luxury now was the same as Varro's—private houses and public temples (*Cat.* 12.3–4). The worst modern offenders were the owners of extravagant villas, whom Sallust did not name but Varro did.²¹ They were L. Lucullus and Q. Hortensius, optimate oligarchs recently flattered in Ciceronian dialogues as cultivated gentlemen with an informed interest in Greek philosophy—an absurdity, as Cicero knew very well.²²

In fact Varro was wrong about the poverty of early Rome. Already in the seventh century BC the Romans were able to undertake major infrastructure projects, like the huge landfill necessary to create what became the Roman Forum, and by the sixth century their city was prosperous enough to attract artists and architects from the Greek world, notably Ionia.²³ His confident assertion that 'in the regal period all temples were small' (fr. 8P = 13R = 293S) is spectacularly disproved by the sixth-century temple of Capitoline Jupiter, of which the foundations alone were 'a sophisticated work of architecture whose immensity saw no parallel anywhere in the region, or even the peninsula'; the dimensions of the building itself were comparable 'to the truly colossal temples of the archaic Mediterranean, found only at Agrigento, Selinunte, Ephesos, Samos, and Athens'.²⁴

That was five hundred years before Varro's time, and of course he could have had no accurate knowledge of what Rome was like under the kings. But he thought he knew, and he was sure that what made it different from the Rome he lived in was the absence of corrupting wealth.

²⁰ Sall. *Cat.* 7.7, 51.43 (Cato), 52.19 (Caesar), 53.3.

²¹ Sall. *Cat.* 13.1–2, cf 20.11–12 (Catiline's speech); Varro *De uita p.R.* fr. 118P = 125bR = 432S, cf. *Rust.* 1.13.7; 3.13.2–3, 17.2.

²² Cic. *Att.* 13.16.1, 13.19.5.

²³ For an excellent synthesis, with full bibliography, see now Hopkins (2016).

²⁴ Hopkins (2016) 99, 119.

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That theme continued in book 2, which covered the republic down to the war with Pyrrhus. Description of public and private institutions again predominates in the fragments, with much emphasis on the virtues of the Romans at that time. Varro referred to their *diligentia* (fr. 72P = 75R = 386S), *abstinentia* (fr. 75P = 64R = 382S), *seueritas* (fr. 77P = 73R = 399S), *modestia* (79P = 84R = 394S), *pudor* and *pudicitia* (fr. 81P = 65R = 298S), and it is clear that the main criterion was still resistance to the temptations of wealth. The *seueritas* was that of the censors, preventing the possession of anything *luxuriosum*, and the proof of *abstinentia* was the fact that no Roman, man or woman, accepted king Pyrrhus' gifts.

Still interested in private houses as an index of domestic morality, Varro focussed this time not on the size of the house but on the absence of slaves: *sic in priuatis domibus pueri liberi et puerae ministrabant* (fr. 78P = 83R = 401S). That was probably the context of fr. 79P (= 84R = 394S), cited by Nonius on *assa uoce*, 'unaccompanied voice' (107L):

in conuiuuiis pueri modesti ut cantarent carmina antiqua, in quibus laudes erant maiorum et assa uoce et cum tibicine.

What makes these *conuiuia* different from those famously described by Cato is that the songs in praise of the men of old are sung not by the guests themselves but by *pueri modesti*, with or without the accompaniment of a pipe-player.²⁵ I think Pittà (330–1) is unnecessarily cautious about their status; they were surely the *pueri liberi* of fr. 78P, their modesty in sharp contrast to the Ganymede slave-boys at the dinner-tables of the wealthy in Varro's own time.²⁶

In this case Varro may have had good information about traditional *mores*. Greek elegiac poetry provides a precise parallel for well-behaved adolescents singing praise songs to a piped accompaniment,²⁷ and the discovery of mixing-bowls and drinking-cups in a seventh-century BC house at Ficana shows that the customs of the *symposion* were familiar in Latium in the archaic period.²⁸ There is no reason to doubt that traditional customs persisted among the Roman aristocracy long enough for a memory of them to be recorded in literary texts.

²⁵ Contrast Cato *FRHist* 5 F 113 (Cic. *Tusc.* 1.3, 4.3, *Brut.* 75).

²⁶ See Cic. *Fin.* 2.23, where the *formosi pueri qui ministrent* are mentioned immediately after an allusive reference to the erotic nature of the entertainment.

²⁷ *Theognidea* 241–3: καί σε σὺν αὐλίσκοισι λιγυφθόγγοις νέοι ἄνδρες | εὐκόσμως ἐρατοὶ καλὰ τε καὶ λιγέα | αἴσονται.

²⁸ Rathje (1983).

The most puzzling, and perhaps the most significant, of the quotations from book 2 are fragments 65–6P (= 66–7R = 395–6S), cited by Nonius on *distrahere* and *focilatur* (443L, 771L):

distractione ciuium elanguescit bonum proprium ciuitatis atque aegrotare incipit et consenescit.

propter secunda²⁹ sublato metu non in commune spectant, sed suum quisque diuersi commodum focilatur.

What could be the context, and why are the verbs in the present tense? Pittà suggests (266–7) that the ‘separation’ of citizens and the danger of selfish rather than communal motivation may refer to the ‘struggle of the orders’; if the passage was a retrospective discussion in the context of the *leges Liciniae Sextiae* of 367 BC, then ‘ovviamente’ the tenses must be historic present. But that seems a bit too easy: why just here and nowhere else? Besides, the suggested context does not explain the *metus hostilis* theme in fr. 66P.³⁰

The quotations are evidently not from a narrative passage. Present tenses and the generalising subject matter clearly suggest either a speech or an authorial intervention. Either of those alternatives would be appropriate at the end of the second book. Since Varro saw Roman history in moral terms,³¹ he may have chosen to mark the acme of Roman virtue, and the perils of failing to preserve it, at this mid point of his work. That context would also explain *sublato metu*, since the final victory over Pyrrhus, at Beneventum in 275 BC, put Rome in undisputed control of Italy.³²

The two authors who make that point explicit—Florus and Plutarch, both readers of Varro—also emphasise the moral excellence of the Roman conduct of the war, and in particular the total incorruptibility of the Roman commanders, C. Fabricius (*cos.* 282, 278 BC) and Manius Curius (*cos.* 290, 275, 274 BC).³³ Those two men also held the censorship, respectively in 275 and 272 BC, and must surely have been in Varro’s mind when he referred to censorial *seueritas* (fr. 77P = 73R = 399S). Fabricius expelled a patrician ex-consul from the Senate for owning ten pounds’ weight of silver, and though the only recorded

²⁹ MSS *propter secundas*, accepted by Salvatore; Riposati prints Popma’s emendation *propter <res> secundas*, which seems preferable.

³⁰ Cf. Sall. *Hist.* 1.11M (*dum metus a Tarquinio et bellum graue cum Etruria positum est*) for application of the theme to the early republic and the first secession of the *plebs*.

³¹ As did Livy (*praef.* 9, *quae uita, quae mores fuerint ... labante deinde paulatim disciplina ... deinde ut magis magisque lapsi sint*), who may well have been influenced by Varro.

³² Flor. 1.19.1, 25.9; 2.1.1; Plut. *Pyrrh.* 25.5.

³³ Flor. 1.18.15–23; Plut. *Pyrrh.* 20–1, cf. *Cat. Mai.* 2.1–2. Readers of Varro: nn. 13–15 above.

event of Manius Curius' censorship is the completion of the Anio aqueduct, Varro evidently regarded him as one of the great censors.³⁴

Manius Curius deserves more serious attention than he usually gets. The elder Pliny, immediately after citing Varro on the economics of early Roman agriculture, goes on to report a well-known saying:³⁵

At any rate there is a famous utterance of Manius Curius, who after celebrating triumphs and making a vast addition of territory to the empire, said that a man not satisfied with seven acres must be deemed a dangerous citizen; for that was the acreage assigned for commoners after the expulsion of the kings.

Other sources quote Manius differently: 'A citizen not satisfied with what everyone is given is not fit for a *res publica*;³⁶ 'May no Roman ever regard as too small what gives him enough to live on.'³⁷ But in all versions he exemplifies the ethos of virtuous frugality praised by Varro in book 2 of *De uita p.R.*

As a member of the *tribus Quirina*,³⁸ Varro had a particular interest in the man whose conquest of the highland Sabines in 290 had provided the land to be divided up and distributed in those seven-*iugera* lots. The new tribe was created for the settlers in 241 BC, with Reate as the administrative centre,³⁹ so presumably Varro's own ancestors had been among the recipients. By incorporating the Sabines into the Roman state, and thereby redefining the citizen

³⁴ Fabricius: Livy *Per.* 14, D. Hal. *AR* 20.13. M'. Curius: Varro *Sat. Men.* 195–6 Astbury (*hoc est magnum censorem esse*); for the aqueduct, paid for *ex manubiis* from Curius' own triumph, see Front. *Aq.* 6.1, auct. *De uir. ill.* 33.9.

³⁵ Pliny *HN* 18.17 (*M. Varro auctor est ...*), 18.18 (trans. Rackham (1950)): *Manii quidem Curii post triumphos immensumque terrarum adiectum imperio nota dictio est perniciosum intelligi ciuem cui septem iugera non essent satis; haec enim mensura plebei post exactos reges adsignata est.* Cf. also Colum. 1.pref.14 on Fabricius, M'. Curius and the *septem iugera*, immediately followed by a reference to Varro (*Rust.* 2.pref.3).

³⁶ Val. Max. 4.3.5b (*parum idoneum rei publicae ciuem existimans*); cf. Front. *Strat.* 4.3.12 (*malum ciuem dicens*), auct. *De uir. ill.* 33.6.

³⁷ Plut. *Mor.* 194c, cf. *Crass.* 2.8 (with Ziegler's emendation of the name).

³⁸ *Rust.* 3.2.1 (Q. Axius a *tribulis* of the author); *IG* 7.413.12 (Κόιντος Ἀξίος Μαάρκου υἱὸς Κυρίνα).

³⁹ Vell. 1.14.6–7 on 290 and 268 BC: *M'. Curio et Rufino Cornelio consulibus Sabinis sine suffragio data ciuitas ... Sempronio Sopho et Appio Caeci filio consulibus ... suffragii ferendi ius Sabinis datum.* Livy *Per.* 19 on 241 BC: *duas tribus adiectae sunt, Velina et Quirina.* Reate as *praefectura*: Cic. *N.D.* 2.6. Archaeological evidence for the *ager Reatinus* and its centuriation: De Santis (2009) 31–76.

body as *Quirites*,⁴⁰ the Romans effectively merged the two peoples, just as Romulus and Titus Tatius had supposedly done at the very beginning of Rome. (Indeed, that historical reality may well have given rise to the Tatius story in the first place;⁴¹ it is surely indicative that one version of the legend made Romulus give Tatius' Sabines the same *ciuitas sine suffragio* that the real Sabines received in 290 BC.⁴²) One can easily see why the idea of a primeval 'mixture of peoples' was attractive to Varro.

Fifteen years after his triumph *de Sabinis* in his first consulship, Manius Curcius triumphed *de Samnitibus et rege Pyrrho* in his second.⁴³ As Florus notes (perhaps using Varro), it was a very different kind of show:⁴⁴

Up to that time the only spoils which you could have seen were the cattle of the Volscians, the flocks of the Sabines, the wagons of the Gauls, the broken arms of the Samnites; now if you looked at captives, they were Molossians, Thessalians, Macedonians, Bruttians, Apulians and Lucanians; if you looked upon the procession, you saw gold, purple, statues, pictures and all the luxury of Tarentum.

The commander himself swore on oath that he had taken nothing for himself but a wooden vessel for pouring libations.⁴⁵ It was 275 BC, and his frugal friend C. Fabricius was censor.

I think fragments 65–6P are best understood as Varro marking the half-way point of his narrative with the quasi-oracular effect of direct speech—either the censor or the *triumphator* warning the Roman People of the dangers inherent in military dominance and the advent of riches. It would be oddly placed as a warning in his own voice to the Romans of his own times.

⁴⁰ For the inter-related etymologies of Cures, Quirinus, Quirites etc, see Wiseman (2009) 42–4.

⁴¹ As suggested by Mommsen (1886). It is an unfashionable idea (see for instance Cornell (1995) 75–7), but the current preference for an archaic synoecism of the Quirinal with the Palatine depends on an archaeologically unsupported assumption, that there were Sabines at the site of Rome in the eighth or seventh century BC.

⁴² Serv. *ad Aen.* 7.709: *recepti in urbem Sabini sunt, sed hac lege, ut in omnibus essent ciues Romani excepta suffragii latatione; nam magistratus non creabant.* Cf. Vell. 1.14.6 (n. 39 above) on 290 BC.

⁴³ *Fasti Capitolini: Inscr. Ital.* 13.1.74–5.

⁴⁴ Flor. 1.18.27 (trans. Forster (1929)); cf. n. 15 above for Florus' use of the *De uita p.R.*

⁴⁵ Auct. *De uir. ill.* 33.8

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According to Florus, the third age of the Roman People began in 264 BC,⁴⁶ the year of Rome's first overseas expedition and the start of the Punic Wars. It is very likely that that date comes from Varro, though Florus, with his longer chronology, had to extend the *tertia aetas* down to Augustus. The latest datable event in Varro's third book is Attalus' bequest of Asia to the Roman People (fr. 102P = 112R = 415S), whereas C. Gracchus' judiciary law comes in book 4 (fr. 108P = 114R = 425S).

More than half of the twenty-three fragments from book 3 are of a military nature, appropriate to the period of the Punic Wars and the great overseas conquests of the second century BC. It may seem more surprising that several fragments deal with funerary customs;⁴⁷ but in fact the two subjects may be linked by Varro's continuing theme of frugality and luxury. Extravagant expense at funerals was forbidden by the Twelve Tables but common in Varro's own time;⁴⁸ since the jurists of the second century BC were already interpreting the ancient law as a ban on lavish funerary monuments,⁴⁹ it may be that Varro identified the origin of this particular form of extravagance within the time-frame of book 3.

Extravagance was made possible by military success. Livy dated the introduction of 'foreign luxury' to 187 BC, the triumph of Cn. Manlius Volso from Asia,⁵⁰ and reported the well-informed accusation that Volso had made war on his own account for mercenary reasons, ignoring the traditional requirements of the *ius fetiale*.⁵¹ In book 2 Varro had made much of the role of the *fetiales* in ensuring that the Romans waged only just wars (fr. 72P = 75R = 386S); in book 3 he repeatedly noted the import of precious metals and luxury goods as a result of imperial expansion,⁵² and we can hardly doubt that he

⁴⁶ Flor. 1.pref.6 (n. 16 above); for the consuls Ap. Claudius and Q. Fulvius (whom the *fasti Capitolini* call M. Fulvius), cf. Val. Max. 2.4.7, Eutr. 2.18.2.

⁴⁷ Frr. 91–3P = 104–6R = 410–12S. Cf. also fr. 124P (= 110R = 442S), which seems to belong in the same context but is twice cited by Nonius (93L, 212L) from book 4; in the first of those passages, however, it is attributed to book 3 by *F*³, a corrector 'who had access to a manuscript containing variants and supplements not known from any other source and clearly right' (Reynolds (1982) 251).

⁴⁸ Cic. *Leg.* 2.58–61 (Twelve Tables), 62 (current *sumptus*), 66 (*funerum sepulchrorumque magnificentia*); at *Leg.* 2.62 Cicero refers to the *nenia* described by Varro at fr. 124P.

⁴⁹ Cic. *Leg.* 2.62 (*nostrae legis interpretes*), named at 2.59 as Sex. Aelius (*cos.* 198 BC), L. Acilius and L. Aelius; cf. Cic. *Brut.* 205. Gell. 16.8.2 on Aelius as Varro's *magister*.

⁵⁰ Livy 39.6.7–9 (*luxuriae enim peregrinae origo ab exercitu Asiatico inuecta in urbem est*); cf. Piso *FRHist* 9 F 36, Flor. 3.12.7 (*Syria prima nos uicta corrupit*).

⁵¹ Livy 38.45.9 (*mercennarius consul*), 46.12 (*uultis ... tolli fetialia iura, nullos esse fetiales?*).

⁵² Frr. 94P = 103R = 424S (*nam lateres argentei atque aurei primum conflati atque in aerarium conditi sunt*), 101P = 102R = 423S (*itaque rettulit auri pondo mille octingentum septuaginta quinque*),

linked it to a decline in Roman moral standards. The clearest indication comes in fr. 89 P (= 92R = 418S), cited by Nonius for the plural usage *paces* (217L):

animaduertendum primum, quibus de causis et quemadmodum constituerint paces; secundum, qua fide et iustitia eas coluerint.

Whether the reference was to virtuous traditional commanders or deplorable recent ones, the emphatic ‘It’s worth noticing’ surely implies a change in standards of behaviour.

In 168 BC the victorious Aemilius Paullus confiscated the Macedonian royal treasure, and in his triumphal procession the following year it took three days to parade it all.⁵³ He observed old-fashioned propriety in making sure it all went to the public treasury, and as a result the Romans abolished the traditional property tax on Roman citizens (*tributum*).⁵⁴ It would be interesting to know how Varro regarded that innovation, which broke the direct link between the citizen body and the resources of the *res publica*.

When everyone pays the same proportion, the richer you are the more you pay, and the more you resent it. This familiar phenomenon was acutely in evidence in Varro’s own time, when Cicero defined it as the statesman’s foremost duty to prevent any public demand on private property,⁵⁵ in particular, he must make sure that no levy of *tributum* should ever be necessary, as it had been in the past when the treasury could not pay for the republic’s wars.⁵⁶ It was a good example of what Varro, or his spokesman, had warned against in book 2: prosperity causing people to think of their own interests before those of the community (fr. 66P = 67R = 396S), a *distractio ciuium*—what we might call economic inequality—that damaged the *bonum proprium ciuitatis* (fr. 65P = 66R = 395S).

102P = 112R = 415S (*quot ex hereditate Attalica aulaea, clamides, pallae, plagae, uasa aurea*), 103P = 113R = 416S (*ad Sybaritanam praedam, in qua sunt tripodes, creterrae, anancaea, opera nobilium toreutiarum*); cf. Juv. *Sat.* 6.292–300 on the corruption of Roman *paupertas* by *luxuria*, with Sybaris mentioned at 296.

⁵³ Plut. *Aem.* 32.4–33.4; cf. Flor. 2.12.12 (*inter pulcherrimos hunc quoque populus Romanus de Macedonia duxit et uidit triumphum*).

⁵⁴ Propriety: Cic. *Off.* 2.76 (nothing for himself), Plut. *Aem.* 30.4 (soldiers discontented). End of *tributum*: Cic. *Off.* 2.76, Pliny *HN* 38.56.

⁵⁵ Cic. *Off.* 2.73: *in primis uidendum est ei qui rem publicam administrabit ut suum quisque teneat neque de bonis priuatorum publice deminutio fiat*.

⁵⁶ Cic. *Off.* 2.74: *danda etiam opera est ne, quod apud maiores nostros saepe fiebat propter aerarii tenuitatem assiduitatemque bellorum, tributum sit conferendum*. The corollary, that wars should now pay for themselves, was a far cry from the traditional *ius fetiale* admired by Varro (fr. 72P = 75R = 386S).

In that context, it is worth looking at Plutarch's account of the innovation of 167 BC, which comes not in the description of the great triumph but a few pages later, where the biographer's subject is Paullus' character and reputation.⁵⁷

The great popular favour shown to Aemilius by the multitude is attributed to his success in Macedonia, since so much money was brought into the treasury by him that the People no longer needed to pay tax until the time of Hirtius and Pansa, who were consuls during the first war between Antony and Caesar.

A consular date is something unusual in Plutarch, and this one is paradoxical anyway. The reference is to the war of Mutina (April 43 BC), in which both the consuls were killed;⁵⁸ to pursue the war against Antony the Senate organised contributions from the rich, but in June that year no general *tributum* had yet been imposed.⁵⁹ So why does Plutarch refer to the consuls?

I suggest he was using a source in which *A. Hirtio C. Pansa consulibus* meant 'the time of writing'; that was certainly true of Varro's *De gente populi Romani*,⁶⁰ and probably of *De uita p.R.* as well. Use of Varro, who cared so much about *civilis concordia* (fr. 106P = 124R = 438S), might also explain why Plutarch goes on to note that although Paullus was an optimiate (*ἀριστοκρατικός*), he was loved and honoured by the Roman People.⁶¹

Book 3 probably ended with the Numantine war (140–133 BC). Florus reports it as thoroughly discreditable to Rome,⁶² and then goes on to mark it as a turning-point in the life of the Roman People.⁶³ That idea evidently comes not from Florus himself, whose structure extended the *tertia aetas* for another hundred years, but from his source, who can be quite precisely dated by the

⁵⁷ Plut. *Aem.* 38.1: ταῖς δὲ Μακεδονικαῖς πράξεσι τοῦ Αἰμιλίου δημοτικωτάτην προσγράφουσι χάριν ὑπὲρ τῶν πολλῶν, ὡς τοσούτων εἰς τὸ δημόσιον τότε χρημάτων ὑπ' αὐτοῦ τεθέντων ὥστε μηκέτι δεῖσαι τὸν δῆμον εἰσενεγκεῖν ἄχρι τῶν Ἰρτίου καὶ Πάνσα χρόνων, οἱ περὶ τὸν πρῶτον Ἀντωνίου καὶ Καίσαρος πόλεμον ὑπάτευσαν.

⁵⁸ The decisive action was fought on 14 April: Cic. *Fam.* 10.30.1 (Ser. Galba), *Inscr. Ital.* 13.1.279 (*Feriale Cumanum*), Ovid *Fasti* 4.627–8.

⁵⁹ Contributions: Cic. *ad Brut.* 1.18.5, Dio 46.31.3. June: Cic. *Fam.* 13.20.4 (*quod quidem fieri sine tributo posse non arbitror*).

⁶⁰ Arnob. *Adu. Nat.* 5.8 (n. 6 above).

⁶¹ Plut. *Aem.* 38.2 and 6; for *optimates* as *ἄριστοι*, see Cic. *Sest.* 96, cf. *Att.* 1.14.2 (Pompey in 61 BC), 2.3.4 (views expressed in his own epic poem).

⁶² Flor. 2.18.2 (*pudendis foederibus*), 3 (*non temere, si fateri licet, ullius causa belli iniustior*), 7 (*ignominia, dedecus*), 16 (praise for the conquered, not the conqueror).

⁶³ Flor. 2.19.1: *hactenus populus Romanus pulcher egregius pius sanctus atque magnificus ...*

reference to Pompey and Caesar as the most recent of Rome's civil wars.⁶⁴ That was how it seemed to Varro, writing perhaps in the early months of 43 BC.

* * *

Nothing survives from Varro's account of Tiberius Gracchus, whose agrarian law must have exemplified his theme of *distractio ciuium*: what was at stake was whether the interests of the rich or the poor should prevail,⁶⁵ whether public land should remain public for the benefit of the community or be privatised for the benefit of the wealthy.⁶⁶ Gracchus, like Manius Curius, believed that 'it was a harmful custom that anyone should possess a greater area of land than could be cultivated by the possessor himself'.⁶⁷ We might expect Varro to approve, especially as he had served on the commission that distributed the *ager Campanus* in 59 BC, under the terms of Caesar's agrarian legislation.⁶⁸ But it may not have been as simple as that.

Fundamental for the understanding of book 4 is fr. 108P (= 114R = 425S), cited by Nonius on the adjective *biceps* (728L):

in spem adducebat non plus soluturos quam uellent; iniquus <senatui> equestri ordini iudicia tradidit ac bicipitem ciuitatem fecit, discordiarum ciuiliū fontem.

Even without the name it is obvious that the subject of the verbs was Gaius Gracchus. His subsidised grain ration 'led people to hope they would pay no more than they wanted', and his judiciary law made the state 'two-headed' by giving authority, as judges in the *quaestio* courts, to men who had never held public office and were qualified only by wealth.

In specifying that as the origin of civil discord, Varro was going against the common view that the ἀρχὴ κακῶν was 133 BC, either in what Tiberius Gracchus did or in what was done to him (the respective optimate and *popularis*

⁶⁴ Flor. 2.19.4 (*nouissime Pompei et Caesaris manibus*), cf. 3.12.3 (where *secutumque hos, de quo dicemus, Augustum* is an obvious addition) and 3.12.13 (Pompey and Caesar as the end of the story).

⁶⁵ πλούσιοι and πένητες: App. BC 1.7.29–31, 10.38–40, 11.46–7, 15.63–5, 27.121–2; Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 8.1–3, 9.2–4, 10.7, 11.1, 12.2, 18.2.

⁶⁶ App. BC 1.10.40 (ἐῖ τῶν κοινῶν ἀποστερήσονται), 1.11.44 (ἐῖ δίκαιον τὰ κοινὰ κοινῇ διανέμεσθαι); Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 8.2, 9.3 (πλεονεξία of the rich).

⁶⁷ Quoted in Sículus Flaccus *De condicionibus agrorum* 102 Campbell (trans. Campbell (2000) 103).

⁶⁸ Varro *Rust.* 1.2.10, Pliny *HN* 7.176.

versions).⁶⁹ The only other author to name Gaius Gracchus as the party responsible is Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in a passage clearly dependent on Varro.⁷⁰

So strong was the harmony between the Romans which originated from the customs set up by Romulus that they never went so far as bloodshed and mutual killing for 630 years, even though many great disputes about public policy arose between the People and those in office, as is liable to happen in cities, large and small alike. By mutual persuasion and instruction, by conceding some things and gaining others from those who conceded, they achieved political solutions to their complaints. But from the time when Gaius Gracchus, in the exercise of his tribunician power, destroyed the harmony of the constitution, they have never yet ceased from killing each other and driving each other out of the city, not refraining from any irreparable act in the pursuit of victory.

Dionysius' emphasis on the *tribunicia potestas*, coupled with Florus' demonstrable use of Varro at this point,⁷¹ should direct our attention to Florus' own account of what caused the Romans' civil strife:⁷²

The original cause of all the revolutions was the tribunician power, which, under the pretence of protecting the common people, for whose aid it was originally established, but in reality aiming at domination for itself, courted popular support and favour by legislation for the distribution of lands and corn and the disposal of judicial power.

The aims of the tribunes' legislation seemed admirable,⁷³ but the effects were disastrous for the republic.⁷⁴ As for Tiberius Gracchus, his motives may have been excellent,⁷⁵ but the deposition of his fellow-tribune Octavius was illegal,

⁶⁹ Cic. *Rep.* 1.31: *mors Tiberii Gracchi et iam ante tota illius ratio tribunatus diuisit populum in duas partes*. For the murder as fateful and unprecedented see Sall. *Hist.* 1.17M (Aug. *Ciu. Dei* 2.21.2), Vell. 2.3.3, Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 20.1, App. *BC* 1.2.4, 17.71–2.

⁷⁰ D. Hal. *AR* 2.11.2–3 (ἐξ οὗ δὲ Γάιος Γράκχος ἐπὶ τῆς δημαρχικῆς ἐξουσίας γενόμενος διέφθειρε τὴν τοῦ πολιτεύματος ἁρμονίαν); for his use of Varro cf. 2.21.2, 47.4, 48.4.

⁷¹ See n. 15 above on Flor. 3.7.13.

⁷² Flor. 3.13.1 (trans. Forster (1929)): *seditionum omnium causas tribunicia potestas excitauit, quae specie quidem plebis tuendae, cuius in auxilium comparata est, re autem dominationem sibi acquirens, stadium populi ac fauorem agrariis frumentariis iudiciariis legibus aucupabatur*.

⁷³ Flor. 3.13.1–4: *inerat omnibus species aequitatis. quid tam iustum enim ... quid tam aequum ... quid ad ius libertatis aequandae magis efficax ...?*

⁷⁴ Flor. 3.13.5: *sed haec ipsa in perniciem redibant, et misera res publica in exitium sui merces erat*.

⁷⁵ Flor. 3.14.3: *sive aequo et bono ductus, quia depulsam agris suis plebem miseratus est*.

and Scipio Nasica's 'suppression' of him was justified.⁷⁶ That ambivalent judgement may explain why Varro chose not to use 133 BC as the pivotal date.

For Florus, the successive *seditiones* were caused by tribunes seeking *dominatio*.⁷⁷ That the terminology was Varro's is suggested by fr. 116P (= 122R = 435S), cited by Nonius on *sanguinolentus* (745L):

itaque propter amorem imperii magistratus gradatim seditionibus sanguinolentis ad dominatus quo appellerent.

The final phrase is obscure and evidently corrupt, but the general sense is clear. However, Varro was evidently referring here not just to tribunes—and certainly not to the Gracchi or Saturninus or Livius Drusus,⁷⁸ who never got the chance to pursue their ambitions *gradatim*. He was thinking of men who aimed to achieve the highest offices and the military commands (*imperium*) that came with them.

Editors naturally juxtapose fr. 115P (= 121R = 434S), cited by Nonius on the use of dative instead of accusative (802L):

tanta porro inuasit cupiditas honorum plerisque ut uel caelum ruere, dummodo magistratum adipiscantur, exoptent.

The key word here is *plerisque*. Varro was not referring to particular individuals, but to the behaviour of a whole category of Roman politicians, who would be happy for the sky to fall, just as long as they got their magistracies. Yet again, Florus may help us to detect the course of Varro's argument.

At his point of transition from the narrative of Rome's external conquests to that of her civil wars, Florus offers a chapter (3.12) headed ἀνακεφαλαιώσεις, 'recapitulation'.⁷⁹ The moral integrity of 'the old pastoral way of life' was preserved by the fear of Carthage (3.12.2);⁸⁰ internal strife began with the destruction of Carthage, Corinth, and Numantia (3.12.3); 'what corrupted us was first the defeat of Syria [Volso's triumph], and then the king of Pergamum's Asiatic bequest' (3.12.7). Wealth ruined morality, and caused all the disasters of the

⁷⁶ Flor. 3.14.5 and 7: *contra fas collegii, ius potestatis ... duce Scipione Nasica concitato in arma populo, quasi iure oppressus est*.

⁷⁷ Flor. 3.13.1 (n. 72 above), cf. 3.16.3 (*seditiones* of the two Gracchi and Saturninus), 3.16.3 (Saturninus' *dominatio*), 3.17.3 (Livius Drusus' 'Gracchan' laws), 3.18.3 (Livius Drusus' *dominatio*).

⁷⁸ For Cicero, *seditio(sus)* referred specifically to *populares*: see for instance Cic. *Corn. II* fr. 5 Crawford (Asc. 80C), *Sest. 77, Part. 105, Acad. 2.13*.

⁷⁹ The same rare word occurs at D. Hal. *AR* 1.90.2, summing up a book that covered much the same territory as Varro's *De gente p.R.*

⁸⁰ It mattered to Varro that the founders of Rome were *pastores* (*Rust. 2.pref.4, 2.1.9*).

late republic: the only reason the Roman People demanded land and grain from their tribunes was the scarcity caused by luxury (3.12.8); greed was the cause of the conflict over the jury-courts, as the *equites* wanted to profit from public revenues (3.12.9); even the war of Spartacus was due to extravagant expenditure on gladiators (3.12.10).

Not only that, but excessive wealth drove the whole competitive strife of late-republican politics:⁸¹

Was ambition for honours not stirred up by those same riches? That was certainly what caused the storm of Marius and Sulla.⁸² Elaborate magnificence of banquets and lavish expenditure on bribery derived from an opulence that would soon produce bankruptcy. That was what drove Catiline against his country.⁸³ Finally, where did that lust for supremacy and domination come from, if not from excessive wealth? That was certainly what armed Caesar and Pompey with the hellish fires that destroyed the republic.⁸⁴

And that is where Florus' analysis ends. His concept of the war of Pompey and Caesar as the culminating disaster, as if there were no worse things to come, clearly implies a source writing before the proscription edict of November 43 BC. Both date and subject matter make Varro's *De uita p.R.* the overwhelmingly likely candidate, with Florus' *ambitus honorum* (3.12.11) a close match for *cupiditas honorum* at fr. 115P.

Pittà's arrangement of the fragments of book 4 depends on his argument (441–2) that at the end of his narrative Varro added a digression on luxury and political corruption, considering in retrospect the whole course of Roman history. It seems to me much more likely that Varro's views on luxury and corruption were an integral part of the narrative itself, even its main motivating element. The *Antiquitates* had been published probably in the fifties BC.⁸⁵ By the time he came to write *De uita populi Romani*, what his fellow-citizens needed from him was not a mere popular synopsis of 41 learned volumes, but an explanation of what had happened to the republic in the meantime.

⁸¹ Flor. 3.12.11–13 (*ut speciosiora uitia tangamus ...*); cf. Sall. *Cat.* 11.1–2 on the moral ambiguity of ambition, about which Sallust himself had a bad conscience (*Cat.* 3.5 on his *honoris cupido*).

⁸² Cf. 3.21.6 on Marius' *inexplebilis honorum fames* as the cause of the civil war of 88 BC.

⁸³ Cf. 4.1.1 on Catiline driven by *luxuria primum*.

⁸⁴ Cf. 4.2.8: *causa tantae calamitatis eadem quae omnium, nimia felicitas*.

⁸⁵ Cf. Cic. *Att.* 4.14.1 (May 54 BC) for *libri Varronis* that Cicero wanted to consult for his *De republica*; Rawson (1985) 236 very plausibly suggests that they were part of the *Antiquitates humanae*.

In a time of political extremism, that might be dangerous. No doubt Varro was in the Senate on 4 February 43 BC to hear Cicero eloquently expressing the view that some Roman citizens did not deserve to live, and should therefore not enjoy the protection of the laws (*Phil.* 8.13–16). But Varro had a serious point to make, and a challenge for those who didn't like it. Fr. 106P (= 124R = 438S) is cited by Nonius for *differre* meaning 'to defame' (438L):

si modo ciuilis concordiae exsequi rationem parent, rumore famam differant licebit nosque carpant.

He would only listen to criticism from people who valued civic concord as much as he did.

Varro always spoke his mind, and not everyone appreciated his frankness.⁸⁶ It would be good to know how publicly he delivered his historical analysis of the corruption of the republic: was Boissier right to suppose that it was 'for the People'? Certainly historians did present their work at public festivals,⁸⁷ and it was taken for granted that history was something you could hear as well as read.⁸⁸ We need not suppose that the author of the *Menippean Satires* would be reluctant to take his message to the Roman People directly.⁸⁹ The only evidence is circumstantial: at the end of the year Varro's name appeared on the proscription lists, and according to Appian it was because he was 'a philosopher and historian hostile to autocratic rule'.⁹⁰

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⁸⁶ Cic. *Att.* 13.25.3, quoting Hom. *Il.* 11.654 (Patroclus to Nestor): *sed est, ut scis, δεινὸς ἀνὴρ· τάχα κεν καὶ ἀναίτιον αἰτιόωτο.*

⁸⁷ Hor. *Sat.* 1.3.89 (*historias ... audit*) with ps.Acro *ad loc.* (*in spectaculo*) = *FRHist* 48 T 1.

⁸⁸ For *res gestas audire aut legere*, see Cic. *Fam.* 8.15.1, *Fin.* 5.52, *Sen.* 20, Sall. *Cat.* 53.2, *Iug.* 85.13.

⁸⁹ For the satires as public performance (*modus scaenatis*, fr. 304 Astbury), see Wiseman (2009) 131–43.

⁹⁰ App. *BC* 4.47.203: *φιλόσοφος τε καὶ ἱστορίας συγγραφεὺς ... ἐχθρὸς μοναρχίας.*

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