

# Where did early Roman history come from?

## investigations under the gooseberry bush

or: *Whose history is it, anyway?*

‘The Greeks adopted all foreign history; and supposed it to have been of their own country’

Jacob Bryant, *A New System, or, An Analysis of Ancient Mythology*

(London 1774–6) 1.175

All academic papers, whether scientific or humanistic, not excluding this one, if it may count as such, are about pattern-making, constructing schemas which are designed to match what is taken to be the relevant data better than previous models. This one is recursive, in the sense that it is also *about* the process of pattern-making by historians, about their irresistible tendency to simplify the overwhelming complexity, or generalise the wretched inadequacy, of their material according to the shapes that they discern in it. Scientists are certainly not immune from this pressure. Grigor Mendel tarted up his data to make it conform *exactly*, far more than it could possibly have done in reality, with the laws of genetic inheritance that he just knew had to be true. That distinguished former member of my own college, Sir Cyril Burt, systematically faked the IQ statistics of identical twins who had been separated early in life so that they might confirm his belief that intelligence was a fixed, unalterable human characteristic.<sup>1</sup> We all, arts and humanities folk as well, have a responsibility to our colleagues and to posterity to eschew data massage of this kind, even when we know for sure that we are right.

This responsibility may perhaps, however, be regarded as applying less rigorously to those who are patently ignorant of the area they choose to meddle in; they are unlikely to mislead the professionals. I know next to nothing about the elaborate structures of inference which have been erected on the evidence for early Roman history (though I do know that that evidence is thin, and that its value is hotly disputed); it is not my bailiwick, and what I offer here must be clearly understood (and will be clearly recognised) as the contribution of someone operating way outside his jurisdiction. If I were more familiar with the literature I would know whether the outline scheme I shall be putting forward is old hat, long ago proposed and refuted, or whether it is the sort of thing that just cannot, for one reason or another, be correct. But since I have not seen it referred to in what I *have* read, I present it here, with all due trepidation. What I wish to suggest is that the backbone, and a good deal of the overlying flesh, of Roman

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<sup>1</sup>See P Medawar, *The Strange Case of the Spotted Mice* (Oxford 1996) 158f.

historical traditions dealing with the late regal period and the early republic have been created by borrowing from the sequence of contemporary events in Greece.

## 1 The Problem

Livy, Dionysios of Halikarnassos, Plutarch and others have a great deal to tell us about the late sixth and early fifth centuries in central Italy. Where did they get it from? Much of it (there is no dispute about this) is the kind of freely-imagined detail which the ancient historiographical rules allowed and encouraged, composed to suit the predilections of the writer's audience. The raw material they got from earlier historians: Varro, Q. Aelius Tubero, Valerius Antias, C. Licinius Macer, Cn. Gellius, Cato, Q. Fabius Pictor and others whose exiguous fragments Peter raked together. But where did *they* find *their* raw material, and how much icing had they in their turn previously added to the cake?<sup>2</sup> To develop the metaphor: if one were able to chip away the glossy coating, layer by sugary layer, how big a cake, or how small a bun, would be left at the bottom?

Optimists, among whom one would number e. g. J Heurgon,<sup>3</sup> A Momigliano,<sup>4</sup> and T J Cornell,<sup>5</sup> put their trust in lost ancient archives, *Annales*, *fasti* or inscriptions, in the results of recent excavations in Rome and Latium, or in research which emphasises the durability of oral tradition, at least in some cultures. I cite a few statements from Tim Cornell: 'Admittedly the story of the origins of the city has the character of legend, but the narrative takes on a *truly historical appearance* [my italics] with the arrival of the dynasty of the Tarquins, towards the end of the seventh century BC according to the traditional chronology' (1986a.67); 'To my mind there is not the slightest doubt that the Romans of the last two centuries of the Republic were able to dispose of a great deal of authentic historical information, preserved and transmitted from the remote past *in ways that we are not now able to reconstruct with any precision*' [my italics] (1986a.83 = 1986b.73, exactly repeated); 'We should never lose sight of the fact that the Romans of the later Republic thought they knew a great deal about their own history, a claim that would be very hard to understand if there were not some sound basis for it. It is difficult to imagine that

<sup>2</sup>Livy, who cites Valerius Antias 35 times, accuses him at least once (30.19.11) of shamelessly inventing a body-count for a Hannibalic battle where no other source could cite a figure.

<sup>3</sup>*The Rise of Rome to 264 BC* (London 1973).

<sup>4</sup>See his reviews of Alföldi 1965 in *JRS* 57 (1967) 211–16, reprinted in *Quarto Contributo* 487–99, and *New York Review of Books* for 16 September 1965, reprinted in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Oxford 1977) 99–105.

<sup>5</sup>Most recently, *The Beginnings of Rome* (London 1995); earlier, 'The formation of the historical tradition of early Rome', in I S Moxon et al., *Past Perspectives. Studies in Greek and Roman Historical Writing* (Cambridge 1986) 67–86, here 'Cornell 1986a'; 'The Value of the Literary Tradition Concerning Archaic Rome', in Kurt A. Raaflaub (ed.), *Social Struggles in Archaic Rome. New Perspectives on the Conflict of the Orders* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1986) 52–76, here 'Cornell 1986b'.

the Romans were entirely mistaken about something to which they obviously attached great importance' (1986b.63).

Let us leave aside the question of the relationship between subjectively perceived importance and historical truth, remarking in passing only that this principle would constitute powerful evidence for the historicity of Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, and turn to the sceptical camp, among whom, let it be said at once, I should have to count myself. Here the battle-lines were set out by Gjerstad<sup>6</sup> and, particularly, by A Alföldi,<sup>7</sup> E Badian<sup>8</sup> and T P Wiseman<sup>9</sup> have also taken a minimalist approach to the authenticity of archaic history. Badian, in characterising the activities of the early historians, coined the phrase 'the expansion of the past' (1966.11–13). And here is Wiseman: 'For the first Roman historians, then, there was simply nothing to go on – except for a haphazard collection of traditional stories, only roughly dateable at best – until they reached a period about which reliable information was available from their older contemporaries, remembering what their fathers had done and said' (1979.9f.). Summing up this tendency from an unsympathetic viewpoint, Cornell wrote in 1986: 'These writers [the first century annalists, and earlier historians, alike] are alleged to have perpetrated lies and distortions on a large scale [...] On this view, the surviving accounts of early Roman history represent a bogus tradition, consisting largely of mendacious annalistic fabrications' (1986b.55). All this material exists, and we have a sacred duty, before Mommsen, to determine what it is worth. If we are to take a stand with one or the other of these two opposing armies, or to defend an uncomfortable position somewhere in no-man's-land, we will have to base our decision at least partly on the type and quality of the historical traditions on offer.

## 2 The Nature of the Material

Anyone wishing to evaluate the story of, say, Coriolanus, might start by looking around hopefully for independent, and preferably near-contemporary, documentary corroboration. After all, the Greeks were incorrigible scribblers and inscribers, and they were curious about their neighbours. In the absence of such corroboration,<sup>10</sup> one might place one's faith in the honesty and reliability of communal memory;<sup>11</sup> or, if not disposed to trust it, one might ask where,

<sup>6</sup>*Early Rome* (Lund 1953–73).

<sup>7</sup>*Early Rome and the Latins* (1965).

<sup>8</sup>'The Early Historians', in T A Dorey (ed.), *Latin Historians* (London 1966), 1–38.

<sup>9</sup>*Clio's Cosmetics. Three Studies in Greco-Roman Literature* (Leicester 1979); 'What do we know about early Rome?', *JRA* 9 (1996) 310–5, a review of Cornell 1995; and many papers in between.

<sup>10</sup>The tale of Demaratos the Corinthian has been regarded as a just such a precious scrap (Musti 1987, Ridgway 1979 and 1994); but I am sceptical.

<sup>11</sup>'It seems reasonable to assume that if a certain piece of evidence is not inherently improbable and was believed by the Romans themselves to be the truth, the burden of proof must lie with those who wish to disbelieve it' (Cornell 1986b.64). I would argue, to the contrary, that while (of course) there are genuine nuggets of Roman

when, why, by whom and from what (for *nihil ex nihilo fit*) it had been created.<sup>12</sup>

Fortunately there is no dispute about the source of much of the superficial narrative detail we find in Livy and Dionysios: it is cast in the *lingua franca* of Greek historiography from Herodotos to Timaios, and exploits the typologies of character and action which had become conventional. Nor is there argument about the motivation for this process, or over the circles who were directly or indirectly responsible for it. When the Romans emerged as big players on the Mediterranean stage, they needed credibility on the cultural front to match their military clout. The message went out: ‘*We need more history, and we need it fast!*’ It had to be imported.<sup>13</sup> Identifying exactly *when* the main inflation-phase occurred, and who the writer(s) mainly responsible for it were, is a much more difficult issue to resolve (see below, Conclusion).

A few examples at random:

- ❑ Sextus Tarquinius at Gabii (Livy 1.53f.). Ogilvie writes:<sup>14</sup> ‘The details of the fall of Gabii are entirely imaginary. They are a conflation of two episodes from Herodotus... the insertion of two such episodes from Greek history into Roman annals to provide flesh and blood to an otherwise emaciated fact must belong to the earliest (third-century) generation of historians.’
- ❑ Mettius Curtius’s ride into the chasm (Livy 7.6). Recalls that of Amphiaraos, as Plutarch noted (*Parallel Stories* 5f.).
- ❑ Collatinus’ ride home, with drunken friends, to test their wives’ fidelity (Livy 1.57). Compare Parthenios *Sufferings of Love* 24. Even better, Xen. *Symp.* 9.7 (the final paragraph): after witnessing an erotic dance featuring Dionysos and Ariadne, ‘those of the partygoers who were married mounted their horses and rode off to their wives.’ Drink ⇒ sex is a natural progression; the fidelity-test is an elaboration.
- ❑ Amulios (or Allodius), the Alban king who made thunder and lightning and was (appropriately) swept away on a storm-flood (Dionysios 1.71.3). He is a Roman counterpart of Salmeoneus; of whose name I suspect the Latin variants may be a simply a corrupted, or

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lore embedded in the historians, the tradition has become so saturated with Greek elements that the onus is on the ‘optimists’ to demonstrate the presence of distinctively Roman features which are hard to explain on the importation hypothesis.

<sup>12</sup>A further option would be to follow G Dumézil in tracing stories which pass themselves off as Roman history back to Indo-European myth, and to explain the one-eyed Cocles and the one-handed Scaeuola by aligning them with Odin/Wotan and Tyr/Thor, each of whom was similarly defective, in the Nordic *Eddas*. I shall not explore this route here, though I think it offers interesting possibilities.

<sup>13</sup>Irad Malkin was also talking about the relationship between early Rome and Greece when he remarked, at a recent colloquium (Institute of Classical Studies, 13 June 1998), that ‘snobbery’ was a grossly underrated factor in history – ‘a superior culture persuades an inferior that to be significant its past must be interdependent with its own’.

<sup>14</sup>*A Commentary on Livy Books I–V* (Oxford 1965) p. 205

anagrammed, form (M ~ ΛΛ).

- ❑ Lars Tolumnius' casual response to the delegation from Fidenae (Livy 4.17). Cf. Hdt. 3.121 (Polykrates), Plut. *Lysander* 6 (the younger Kyros) for the political consequences of a contemptuous or offhand reply.

Stories like these were the common coin of Greek history. The world was full of wandering motifs in search of a new home, a receptor site compatible with their narrative hooks on to which they could lock and establish themselves. The transmissional route might be either oral or textual. This phenomenon does not in any way threaten the confidence of those who believe in the fundamental soundness of early Roman tradition, because they regard them as mere surface decoration, trivial monuments to the art of the *patissier* whose cake was introduced earlier. Thus Cornell, in discussing the use of 'relatively harmless' literary devices (speeches, vivid moments from the battles, etc.), writes (1986b.54): 'However, the convention was acceptable only as long as the rhetorical elaboration did not do violence to the traditional facts. [...] It would be quite wrong to assert that literary convention gave the Roman annalists license<sup>15</sup> to manufacture evidence or to tell lies'.<sup>16</sup>

### 3 The Test Case: Rome Round About 500

But what if we were to find, beyond and besides these scattered details, an entire stretch of historical narrative which matched a Greek model more or less point-for-point? A stretch where a series of correspondences were clustered in a coherent sequence? That would surely give the Optimists pause for thought.

#### 3.1 The Great Invasion

As everyone knows, at the beginning of the fifth century, shortly after the foundation of the republic, Rome was invaded from the north by an Etruscan army led by Lars Porsenna. After spectacularly heroic deeds by Horatius Cocles, who kept the bridge, and C. Mucius Scaeuola, who put his hand in the fire, Porsenna abandoned his assault and withdrew.

The narratives of these events exhibit the usual signs of influence by the Greek tradition. Scaeuola's story, for example, recalls two famous cases of derring-do:

1. Odysseus and Diomedes creeping into Troy

<sup>15</sup>This was an American publication, remember.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. 1986b.73: 'A fundamental distinction must be drawn between the traditional data and the interpretations of those data in our sources. In other words we should be careful to separate the structural facts on which the tradition is based from the narrative superstructure within which the facts are recounted, interpreted and explained.'

According to Livy's account (2.12) the lone assassin Scaeuola, on reaching his goal in the camp of the Etruscan invaders, could not tell which of the two identically-dressed men on the podium was his intended target.<sup>17</sup> Odysseus and Diomedes also undertook a dangerous commando mission into enemy territory, in order to steal the Palladion, the talismanic statue of Athena which guaranteed the security of Troy; but they were confused by the discovery of two or more identical Palladia. Indistinguishable clones had been constructed by the Trojans, precisely to fool potential thieves.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. Zopyros the Persian mole inside Babylon

Like Scaeuola, Zopyros' story (Hdt. 3.150-end) centres around a siege – though here the roles are reversed, for Zopyros is a general in the Persian army investing Babylon. He also commits self-mutilation for the patriotic cause. He too consulted the supreme authority before departing on his mission (Z. with his king, Dareios, as Scaeuola with the Senate). Z. pretends to be a deserter; Scaeuola is scared of being thought one.<sup>19</sup> Each story features the amazed and horrified reaction of a king, who leaps to his feet; Zopyros' own king, Scaeuola's *enemy* king. Both heroes are granted public reward after their success.

All this is just 'icing': routine elaboration by the imaginative application of standard Greek story-types, which we have seen to be normal. But consider the following:

*Put together (a) Horatius Cocles and his two companions who bravely held the Tiber bridge against the whole Etruscan army, and (b) Mucius Scaeuola who claimed to have three hundred companions ready to die in defence of their country, and we have a situation which strongly resembles (c) the defence of Greece in 480 by Leonidas, who with his three hundred Spartans held up Xerxes' Persians at the narrow pass of Thermopylai before selling their lives dearly.*

This raises the possibility that a Roman historian, early enough and of sufficient authority to influence the whole subsequent tradition, was here pursuing a more focused agenda: to present his compatriots as being in some sense western counterparts of and successors to the Spartans.

<sup>17</sup>Dion. 5.28 has only one 'impressive-looking man' on the stage, whom S. takes for the king.

<sup>18</sup>The motif probably entered Roman historiography via a closer source: the story of Alexander's encounter with the Persian Royal Family on the day after the victory of the Issos. According to Arrian (2.12; cf. Diod. 17.37, Curtius Rufus 3.12, Val. Max. 4.7) 'Alexander entered the tent accompanied only by Hephaestion, and Dareios' mother, in doubt, owing to the similarity of their dress [cf. *simili ornatu* in Livy], which of the two was the King, prostrated herself before Hephaestion, because he was taller than his companion'. Arrian cites no source, beyond saying he had not got it from Ptolemy or Aristoboulos. A fine Veronese in the National Gallery illustrates the scene.

L. Bonfante (*Etruscan* [London 1990] p. 25) writes: 'Porsenna's secretary, who was seated writing next to the king, was dressed so elegantly that Scaeuola mistook him for Porsenna: *evidently the secretary played an important role in Etruscan society*. Yet there was nothing like a 'scribal' caste or group' [my italics]. On such foundations is history erected.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. also Dionysios 5.29.3 ὡς τῶν αὐτομόλων τις.

Both Horatius and Scaeuola seem to refract the image of the heroic Leonidas (see [Chart 1](#) at end).<sup>20</sup> And if Lars Porsenna's invasion is a candidate for consideration as a replica of those of Dareios and Xerxes, we may recall that just as Porsenna's aim, according to Livy (2.8f.), was to put Tarquinius Superbus back on the throne of Rome, so Dareios' expedition aimed to restore Hippias as tyrant of Athens, and Xerxes would have installed Demaratos in the Spartan kingship from which he had been deposed.

This hypothetical scenario becomes all the more possible because of the ancient fascination with supposed temporal correspondences, to which we may now turn.

### 3.2 Synchronisms

Greeks loved symmetry and balance, from μέν and δέ upwards. If the Danube tracked north from its mouth and then turned abruptly west, so too, for Herodotos, the Nile should show a bend in the same direction (2.33). So too with history. Herodotos thought that the battles of Salamis (Greeks v. Persians) and Himera (Syracusans v. Carthaginians) were fought on same day (7.165);<sup>21</sup> that Thermopylai was fought on same day as the sea-battle at Artemision (8.15); and Plataiai and Mykale likewise (9.90 init.; 100f.). The tendency continues in Hellenistic historiography: Timaios was a notorious practitioner of the art, making the day of Euripides' birth coincide with the battle of Salamis and killing him off on the day when Dionysios I came to power (F105), placing the foundations of Rome and Carthage together in 814/3 (F60), and so on. Nor is it simply a question of parallel columns of events. Characters, too, were held to correspond. The three hundred Fabii, wiped out at the Cremera in the war against Veii, were generally seen as the Roman equivalent of Leonidas and the Spartans at Thermopylai, and their story adjusted to correspond; fighting in defence of a forward fortification, they die when outflanked by the treacherous betrayal of a hill-path (Livy 2.50). The entire *raison d'être* of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, of *synkriseis* between leaders, depends on this idea; and it has deep roots.

I am here arguing, however, for a rather wider match; not just parallel lives but parallel nations. We have seen the Romans masquerading as Spartans; let us now go a little further back in time.

<sup>20</sup>The Persian Wars had already been recycled at least once for the purpose of confecting more pseudo-history: Plato's Atlantis story is constructed as a mirror of the Xerxes invasion, with East transposed to West. See P. Vidal-Naquet, 'Athens and Atlantis: structure and meaning of a Platonic myth', in *The Black Hunter* (Baltimore and London 1986) 263–84. If the authorities who have funded so many quixotic expeditions in search of the 'lost continent' had read V-N, they could have saved their money.

<sup>21</sup>This may be combined with a belief that the Persians and Carthaginians were acting in concert. But cf. Ar. *poet.* §23 (1459a): 'Just as two events may take place at the same time, e. g. the sea-fight off Salamis and the battle with the Carthaginians in Sicily, without converging to the same end...'

### 3.3 The End of the Kingship

If there is any question of a perceived synchronism between events in Greece and Italy at this time, it must surely hinge on the constitutional revolutions which took place ‘simultaneously’ in Athens (Peisistratids ejected, shortly followed by Kleisthenes’ introduction of democracy) and Rome (expulsion of the Tarquins, establishment of the Republic, with Brutus as first consul) in 509/8. Roman history, just seen as emulating the Spartan model, now looks as if it is structured on an Athenian template.

Two details which might support this schema:

- ❑ Kleisthenes, as an exiled Alkmaionid, owed his eventual success partly to the influence of the Delphic oracle (Hdt. 5.63, 66); so did Brutus (Livy 1.56).
- ❑ The downfall of the Peisistratids was triggered by a sexual insult, Hipparchos’ attempted seduction of Aristogeiton’s boyfriend Harmodios (Thuk. 6.54ff.); the Tarquins were driven out by popular revulsion at Sextus’ rape of Lucretia (Livy 1.58ff.).

These may not be particularly convincing in themselves, but tend to reinforce the argument because *they fit the sequence of events*. In the following section, however, I offer a detail which not only belongs to the coherent pattern, but is remarkably precise.

### 3.4 Tarquinius Collatinus

At the time of the *regifugium*, the consuls were Iunius Brutus and, supposedly, a Tarquin: Tarquin of Collatia. What followed is told by Livy at 2.2. ‘His sole offence was the fact that his name was universally detested’. A groundswell of suspicion rises against him. He is a nice guy – he had himself been instrumental in expelling Superbus and the others tainted by tyranny – but that cannot save him. Brutus is apologetic, but asks him to help the nascent Republic by going into exile; he may keep all his possessions. Macaulay, reading Livy’s account of his exile – or rather, ‘going abroad without loss of rights’ – wrote in the margin ‘Ostracism exactly’.

And that is just what it is; Ogilvie<sup>22</sup> noted that Macaulay would have been even more impressed by the match if he had known the *Ath. Pol.* There (22.4) we find an account of the first use of ostracism, directed at Hipparchos son of Charmos: ‘It was against him in particular that Kleisthenes had enacted the law, since he wanted to drive Hipparchos out. The Athenians, with the tolerance normally shown by the people, had allowed those friends of the tyrants who had not joined in their crimes during the disturbances to continue living in the city, and Hipparchos was the leader and champion of these’.<sup>23</sup>

So both in Athens and in Rome an inoffensive politician is sent into exile merely from dislike

<sup>22</sup> *Commentary* 238f.

<sup>23</sup> Tr. P J Rhodes.

of his family connections with the recently-expelled dictators. It is not just a correspondence but, again, a correspondence *in sequence*. And here's the clincher: this unfortunate, innocent Tarquinius came from 'Collatia'; the native deme of Hipparchos son of Charmos was Κολλυτός. Here is the bloody fingerprint which convicts at least *this* fragment of 'Roman history' of being a rip-off; and it surely convicts, along with itself, the whole section into which it is fitted.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4 Conclusion

I have tried to establish that the skeleton of historical events around the turn of the fifth century which Livy and Dionysios of Halikarnassos inherited from their predecessors had been constructed on a matrix borrowed from contemporary Greek history; not just because the stories use themes which were commonplace in Herodotos, Timaios and others, but because they match up, like the two strands of a DNA molecule.<sup>25</sup> The sequence runs: *tyrant's opponent gets support from Delphi – tyrant thrown out for sexual insult – innocent member of tyrant's family sent into exile – tyrant tries to return with aid of foreign power – heroic defence of narrow pass/bridge + 300 prepared to die for their country*;<sup>26</sup> and to seek confirmation in the tiny, giveaway detail of the home addresses of Hipparchos son of Charmos and his counterpart Tarquin, which seems to me hard to explain on any basis other than that of a consciously-contrived Athenian model. If this is along the right lines, it suggests that much of early Roman tradition will have been bootstrapped into existence when it was needed for reasons of cultural prestige: which is likely to be the second century BC. Not from nothing, for all the aristocratic families will have had their own tendentious (and conflicting) versions of the glorious roles their ancestors had played in creating the state; but by a process of *bricolage* which exploited this confused but venerable material as far as possible and laid it out onto an internationally acceptable Greek framework. Since Greeks came in different flavours, and the Romans were ambitious, they sought to identify themselves with the best features of both Athens (hatred of tyranny) and Sparta (military prowess).<sup>27</sup>

'They' – but who, precisely? This pattern must have been imposed by a single author. *Cui bono?* A Roman, not a Greek. Tim Cornell has argued, reasonably enough, that by the time we get

<sup>24</sup>Unlike Macaulay, Ogilvie did have access to the *Ath. Pol.*, but failed to note the significance of the deme-name; the same applies to W Eder, 'Political Self-confidence and Resistance: the role of the demos and plebs after the expulsion of the tyrant in Athens and the king in Rome', in T Yuge & M Doi, *Forms of Control and Subordination in Antiquity* (Leiden 1988) 465–75, and W Schubert, 'Herodot, Livius und die Gestalt des Collatinus in der Lucretia-Geschichte', *RhM* 134 (1991) 80–95.

<sup>25</sup>OK, I know the whole point there is that the bases are *complementary*, not identical.

<sup>26</sup>See [Chart 2](#) at end.

<sup>27</sup>Thomas Thompson, *The Early History of the Israelite People* (Leiden 1993) has recently claimed that Hebrew history was substantially 'created', in much the same way as I have suggested, under the Persian empire in the fifth c. BC.

to the ‘expansionists’ (Gellius, Valerius Antias, etc., in the first century) it was too late to make substantial changes. That seems to me to mean that the invention of archaic Roman history must go back to Fabius Pictor.

History repeats itself, first as tragedy then as plagiarism. Play it again, Klio ...

Alan Griffiths, UCL

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## Chart 1

## ROMANS AS SPARTANS, c. 480 BC

In Greece, Leonidas and his 299 companions hold the narrow pass of Thermopylai against an overwhelming force of Persians, resigning themselves to inevitable death

Meanwhile, in central Italy ...

Livy 2.10:

Horatius Cocles and his two companions hold the narrow Tiber bridge against the superior forces of Lars Porsena

add: Spartans endure self-inflicted pain; as in story of fox-cub-under-the-overcoat (and cf. the Arkadian who cuts off his own foot to escape from the Spartan gaol)

and: Spartan ephebes are trained to assassinate during the *krupteia*

Livy 2.12:

Mucius Scaeuola the *adulescens* assassin claims he has 300 companions, and burns off his right hand to prove his (and 'their') determination to meet death if necessary

In the construction of these (directly abutting) episodes of early republican 'history', the image of Leonidas has been transmitted through a historical prism, producing a double Roman refraction. The Spartan King has been split down the middle, as it were, into two characters. (Is that why Cocles has only one eye, and Scaeuola has only one arm?)

**Chart 2**

## GREECE AS MODEL FOR EARLY ROMAN HISTORY

The dearth of hard evidence about early Rome led to the use of sixth and fifth century Greek history as a template around which to arrange the scattered Roman traditions. Apart from the fact that Athens and Sparta were so obviously the equivalent Greek successful states, there was indeed a *prima facie* correspondence in the way the Athenians threw off tyranny at about the same time. Once this match, fixed as a synchronism at 509, was established, the rest follows; and of course the warrior Romans assimilate themselves to Sparta as well. They aim to embody the virtues of both Greek states.

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**ATHENS, then SPARTA**
**ROME**
**(1) the great internal political transformation:***tyrant Hippias*Kleisthenes gets support  
from Delphic oracle*sex scandal:*Hipparchos tries to  
seduce Harmodios*tyrant exiled**tyrant Tarquin*Brutus gets support  
from Delphic oracle*sex scandal:*Tarquin rapes  
Lucretia*tyrant exiled*

DEMOCRACY

509

REPUBLIC

**(2) the great external threat repulsed:**

PERSIANS

Persians invade with  
Hippias in tow (then  
Demaratos)

motifs in common:

(1) Leonidas and the three  
hundred hold the narrow  
pass against superior forces,  
resigning themselves to death.(2) heralds nobly pardoned  
by Xerxes

ETRUSCANS

Lars Porsenna invades  
with Tarquin in tow(a) Horatius' trio hold the  
bridge against superior forces.(b) Scaeuola and 'the 300'  
take kamikaze oath to kill

Lars Porsenna.

Cloelia and hostages nobly  
returned by Lars Porsenna