

JOHN MALALAS, LICINIUS MACER, AND HISTORY OF ROMULUS¹

Abstract. The history of the reign of Romulus given in the *Chronographia* of John Malalas has preserved a historiographical tradition hostile to Rome's founder, one which appears to have been influenced by the late Republican historian Licinius Macer.

In compiling his collection of the fragments of Licinius Macer Peter chose to omit the two references to Macer in the *Origo Gentis Romanae*. In order not to disturb Peter's numeration I shall refer to these two fragments as 1A and 2A. Fragment 1A (*OGR* 19.5) tells of the rape of Rhea Silvia, giving the variant that it was her uncle, Amulius, who overcame her *in luco Martis*. Fragment 2A (*OGR* 23.5), for our purposes much the more important of the two, follows the story of the augury contest, in which Romulus clearly cheats and Remus becomes aware of the fact later (*OGR* 23.4), and runs as follows:

At vero Licinius Macer libro primo docet contentionis illius perniciosum exitum fuisse; namque ibidem obsistentes Remum et Faustulum interfectos.

Livy introduces the augury story with a similar pessimistic sentiment (1.6.4):

Intervenit deinde his cogitationibus avitum malum, regni cupido, atque inde foedum certamen coortum a satis miti principio.

Since Livy refers to more than one variant of the story (1.7.2), it is theoretically possible that he is using Macer as one of his sources for this part of the narrative. An important element of Livy's account is his description of the outbreak of fighting during which both Romulus and Remus were hailed king by their respective supporters and which led ultimately to bloodshed (1.7.1-2). Implicit in this version of the story is the suggestion that rival factions existed, and that Rome, at its very foundation, suffered from a disastrous civil conflict in which Remus was killed *in turba*. Could this be an aetiological story? Livy does not dwell on the issue but, considering the tone of fragment 2A, it is conceivable that this was the interpretation of Licinius Macer, whom we know to have been concerned with the history of civil

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strife. It is at any rate already clear that at least one version of the foundation story tied the death of Remus to some form of civil conflict. Positive evidence for the suggestion that Macer could have been responsible for this version of the story can, I believe, be found in the work of the Byzantine chronographer John Malalas. Indeed, it is in Malalas (7.180) that we find Peter's second Licinian fragment, concerning Romulus' institution of a curious festival known as the Brumalia. It is unlikely that Malalas, writing over six hundred years after Macer, could have known the latter's work at first hand: more plausibly, the Licinian fragment comes to us through an intermediary. Nevertheless, once we have sifted away the obvious Byzantine aura surrounding Malalas' account, it is, I think, possible to identify areas where Malalas has preserved the essence of Licinius' thought. The fragment comes at the end of a substantial discourse on the reign of Romulus, which we must examine in detail.

Book 7 of the *Chronographia* opens with a variant to the standard foundation story. We are not told of any augury contest, but rather that Romulus and Remus began as joint rulers of the new city. At precisely what point Remus is killed is uncertain, but Malalas makes it clear that it was only during the course of their reign that the brothers became hostile to each other.

The story continues: from the moment of fratricide Rome began to suffer from earthquakes and civil war, the usual manifestations of ritual pollution, prompting Romulus to undertake a journey to Delphi to consult the oracle.

The response was given to him by the Pythia, 'Unless your brother sits with you on the imperial throne, your city of Rome will not stand, and neither the people nor the war will be at rest.' Having made from his brother's picture a likeness of his face, that is, his features, a gold bust, he placed the statue on the throne where he used to sit. He continued thus for the remainder of his reign, with the solid gold likeness of his brother Remus seated beside him. The earthquakes in the city ceased and the rioting among the people died down (7.172).²

Malalas uses this story to provide the precedent for later emperors' employment of the royal pronoun (he tells us that Romulus issued orders and decrees as if they had come from both himself and his brother), evidence of an imperial embellishment added to the story. Important for our purposes, however, is the statement, similar to that of fragment 2A, that the death of Remus involved civil war and unrest.

² All citations from Malalas are taken from the translation of Jeffreys, Jeffreys and Scott, *Australian Assoc. for Byzantine Studies* (Melbourne, 1986).

Malalas then turns to an account of Romulus' building programme. After completion of the city walls, Romulus builds a temple to Mars (to which we shall return) and then the Hippodrome:

He started work again immediately and built the Hippodrome in Rome, wishing to divert the mass of the people of Rome because they were rioting and attacking him because of his brother (7.173).

We are next told that Romulus instituted chariot races in honour of the sun and the four elements and then, after a long digression, how the colours blue, green, red and white came to be associated with each racing faction. At this point it will be useful to set out the whole text:

Then the inhabitants of Rome were divided into the factions and no longer agreed among themselves, because thereafter they desired their own side's victory and supported their own faction as if it were a religion. There was a great division in Rome, and the factions were very hostile towards each other in Rome from the time when Romus devised the spectacle of chariot racing for them. When Romus saw members of any of the factions supporting the populace or senators who were disaffected and opposed him because of the death of his brother, or for any reason whatsoever, he would decide to support the other faction, and so secured their favour and their opposition to the aim of his enemies. From that time the emperors of Rome after him followed the same principle (7.176-77).

This picture of Romulus using the newly instituted chariot races to check the political ambitions of his enemies falls just short of openly accusing him of deliberately setting the *populus* against itself. While it is important to recognize the imperial flavour pervading this story, the allusion to factionalism, civil unrest and political dissent is clear, and once again attributed in no small part to the death of Remus.

Malalas then turns his attention to recounting the rape of the Sabine women, set yet again in an atmosphere of civil war. Romulus' army, described as foreign wild men desiring 'the pleasures of life', set upon Roman women in the market place, causing widespread rioting and civil war. Romulus decrees that his men are to take virgins, curiously termed Brutides (daughters of Brutus), in marriage. We are told, however, that no Roman wished to betroth his daughter to them 'saying that they had no hope of survival from day to day because of the wars, but the fathers all married their daughters to men from the city' (7.177). After another consultation with the

oracle, which tells him to hold chariot races watched by women, the rape proceeds.³

What distinguishes Malalas' story from those given by Livy, Dionysius and Plutarch (Liv. 1.9.1-14; D.H. 2.30-31; Plut. *Rom.* 14) is the initial rioting within Rome itself. That Romulus had opened Rome's doors to all comers is the common account of the city's increase and the subsequent need for women, but none of the other accounts creates an atmosphere of tension in the city, tantamount to a description of Rome at the mercy of an occupying army. Malalas also specifically states that the problem of finding brides for these men only arose because the Romans themselves refused to betroth their daughters, a detail which gives full force to the atmosphere of hostility and tension. That neighbouring communities also refused to give their daughters to Romulus' troops, which is the main focus in Livy, Dionysius and Plutarch, is in Malalas only a secondary consideration.

It may be possible to draw a Sullan parallel here. We know that Sulla's occupation of Rome and the placing of garrisons in many Italian communities provoked fear and was the cause of much unrest (cf. e.g. App. *BC* 1.95-6). That this would have provoked comment from contemporary writers such as Licinius Macer is in the circumstances a reasonable assumption. We also have a reference in a speech Sallust gives to the consul M. Lepidus where he complains that Sulla has usurped the liberty and laws of the Roman people 'as if wrested from foreigners' and mockingly dubs him a caricature of Romulus (Sall. *Hist.* 1.78.5) Sallust, a near contemporary of Macer, was certainly familiar with his work, so it is conceivable that Malalas' description of Rome suffering riots and civil strife owing to a predominance of 'foreign troops' brought into the city by an unpopular Romulus originated with Licinius.⁴

After telling the story of the Sabine women, Malalas turns back the clock to recount the story of the twins:

³ This is therefore the second reference to chariot races in Malalas' text. It can hardly be coincidental that in his description of the augury contest Ennius uses the simile of a chariot race: *Expectant veluti consul quom mittere signum / volt, omnes avido spectant ad carceris oras / quam mox emittat pictos e faucibus currus / sic expectabat populus atque ore timebat / rebus utri magni victoria sit data regni* (1.79ff. Skutsch). Presumably the association of chariot races with the reign of Romulus was taken from Ennius and incorporated into the tradition, by Macer or another, and thus found its way into Malalas. See above and n. 9 on the games associated with the dedication of the temple of Ares.

⁴ For discussion of the influence of Sullan-era sources on the history of Romulus see Gabba, *Athenaeum* 38 (1960) 175-225; Classen, *Philologus* 106 (1962) 174-204 at 183-4; Balsdon, *JRS* 61 (1971) 18-27 at 27.

They relate that the brothers, Romus and Remus, were suckled by Lykaina, since the emperor Amulius, their grandfather, ordered them to be abandoned in the forest as they were born out of wedlock. Their mother Ilia, who was a priestess of Ares, had been seduced, and committed adultery with a soldier, and so they say in the form of a myth that Ares made her pregnant. She gave birth to twins and that was why their grandfather cast them out in the forest. A country-woman found them while she was grazing sheep. She took pity on them, for they were beautiful children, and picked them up and nursed them with her own milk. In that country to this day they call the country-women who graze sheep *lykainai* (she-wolves) because they spend their whole life among wolves. Because of this Romus instituted the Brumalia ... (7.179).

After a brief discussion of the festival Malalas continues:

Romus did this because he wished to blot out his shame, because the Romans, who were hostile to him and hated and reviled him, used to say that they ought not to be ruled by one who had been degraded, since the two brothers had been fed by strangers until they had become full grown and began to reign; they meant by this that they had been brought up by Faustus, the farmer, and his wife Lykaina, eating the food of strangers, as mentioned above. For it was a disgrace among the Romans and all ancient peoples for anyone ever to be fed by strangers. This is why at the banquets known as *philika* (friendly gatherings) each participant brings his own food and drink with him to the banquet and everything is then served in common; in their eating they preserve to the present day the ancient custom of not being called ‘eaters of other men’s food’. Romus devised this custom with the intention of mitigating his own shame, naming the meal Brumalium in the Roman language, as the most learned Licinius, the Roman chronicler, has related (7.179-80; this is Peter’s second Licinian fragment).

The Brumalium is mentioned only by Byzantine writers and it seems doubtful that Macer himself was indeed responsible for this piece of information.⁵ What we do have, however, is yet another allusion to the people’s hatred of Romulus, though this time it is on account of his ‘bastard’ upbringing.

There are three important factors to be considered here. First, there is the rationalized interpretation of the legend which Malalas has chosen to present, which is similar to that of fragment 1A and fragment 1 from Mac-

⁵ *TLL* 2.2210, 11 *dies festi describunt scriptores aetatis Byzantinae, ut Malalas*

robustus⁶ in rejecting both the myth of Rhea's rape by Mars and the she-wolf story. Second is the assertion that it was the woman Lykaina (or Acca Larentia) and not Faustulus at all who actually discovered the abandoned twins. We know from fragment 1 that Larentia had an important role in Macer's narrative, so it is already conceivable that this version of the story originated with him. Finally we have a significant variant in the name Malalas gives to Romulus' nurse, Lykaina, when all our other sources, including the Licinian fragment in Macrobius, call her Acca Larentia. With the she-wolf story discounted, our other rationalized accounts, like that given in Livy (1.4.7, cf. D.H. 1.84.4; Plut. *Rom.* 4.3), hold that Larentia was in fact a prostitute nicknamed Lupa (Wolf) by local shepherds. Acca Larentia herself is the subject of many stories, no doubt owing to the festival of the Larentalia, including some that have no connection with Faustulus the shepherd, which are too complex to be dealt with here.⁷ Important for present purposes is simply the nickname Wolf/Lupa/Lykaina.

What I propose is that Malalas, in calling the woman Lykaina, may well have been influenced by a tradition originating with Licinius Macer. It is certainly feasible that in his rationalized version of the story Macer gave Larentia the nickname Lykaina, the Greek equivalent of Lupa, in an attempt to capitalise on the aetiological similarity with his own name. For the Licinian *gens* may well have derived its name from the Greek *lykaina*,⁸ and Macer's known tendency to glorify his own family (Liv. 7.9.3) surely points to him as the author both of the name and of the variant that it was Lykaina herself who discovered the twins. It will be useful at this point to pause and summarize the evidence. We have a Licinian fragment in Malalas that betrays a certain hostility to Romulus. We have the two fragments from the *Origo Gentis Romanae*, one of which tells of strife and civil dissent in Rome at the time of Remus' death. As we have seen, this theme also pervades Malalas' narrative. It would seem, then, that Macer's history (even at second hand) was a significant influence on Malalas for the regal period, but before we conclude, there is one more argument to make, and to do it we need to take a closer look at the remaining Licinian fragments concerned with period.

⁶ Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.10.17 *Macer historiarum libro primo Faustuli coniugem Accam Larentiam Romuli et Remi nutricem fuisse confirmat. Hanc regnante Romulo Tarutius cuidam, Tusco diviti, denuptam auctamque hereditate viri, quam post Romulo, quem educasset, reliquit, et ab eo parentalia diemque festum causa pietatis statutum.*

⁷ There is for example the 'bride of Hercules' story (Plut. *Rom.* 5; *Mor.* 272f-273b) and Gellius' account of the *fratres Arvales* (7.7.5-8). For discussion of the legend of Larentia see especially Mommsen, *RF* 2.3-7; Otto, *Wiener Studien* 35 (1913) 62-74; Momigliano, *Quarto contributo alla storia degli classici e del mondo antico* (1969) 471-79.

⁸ Wiseman, *LCM* 16 (1991) 115-124 at 118.

The first eight fragments in Peter belong to the regal period, to which I believe can be added a ninth (fr. 24). Of these, three are unplaceable (3, 6 and 7), and one (8) concerns the arrival of Tarquinius Priscus in Rome. The rest (1, 2, 4, 5 and 24) belong to the reign of Romulus.

Fragments 3 and 4 provide further evidence that Malalas bears the hallmarks of Macer's influence. Both deal with the calendar. Fragment 3 tells us that Macer believed Rome's calendar to have included twelve months *ab initio*. Fragment 4 attributes the first amendments to Romulus. At this point we need to return to Malalas' account of the construction of the temple of Mars:

After the emperor Romus had completed the walls and adorned the city, he built a temple to Ares. In that month he held a great festival of sacrifice to Ares, calling that month, which had formerly been known as Primus, March (Martios), which means 'of Ares'. All the Romans celebrate this festival annually to the present day calling the day of the festival 'On the field of Mars' (Campus Martius) (7.172-173).⁹

I think it is only reasonable to suggest a relationship between this item and fragments 3 and 4 of Macer.

Fragment 5 comes from Dionysius of Halicarnassus (2.52.3) and concerns the death of Tattius. Here again, it seems that Macer is responsible for a variant in the story. He recounts how Tattius had journeyed to Lavinium to appease the wrath of the Lavinians who were angry that the men guilty of the murder of their envoys, kinsmen of Tattius, had not been handed over to them 'as had been decided by Romulus and the Senate.' This version is far removed from the prevailing story given by Plutarch and Livy, who clearly finger Tattius for the blame.¹⁰ By contrast, Macer seems to be going out of his way to portray Tattius as a peacemaker, while implying that Romulus had failed to carry out his promise to hand the guilty men over.¹¹ Malalas does

⁹ Again we have an intriguing parallel with Ennius: *Romulus cum aedificasset templum Iovi Feretrio, pelles unctas stravit et sic ludos edidit ut caestibus dimicarent et cursu contenderent, quam rem Ennius in Annalibus testatur* (1.li Skutsch = Grammat. Brevis Expos. Verg. Georg., ad II 384).

¹⁰ Plut. *Rom.* 23.2 relates that Tattius 'tried to put off and turn aside the course of justice'; Liv. 1.14.1 states that he 'yielded to his partiality for his relations'.

¹¹ Liv. 1.14.3 records a variant to the effect that Romulus was said to have felt less sorrow at Tattius' death than was proper.

not give us a version of this story; nevertheless it adds weight to the argument that Licinius recorded a tradition hostile to Romulus.¹²

To conclude. We know that Malalas was aware of Licinius' history, probably through an intermediary. From fragment 2A we have evidence that Licinius' account of Romulus' reign contained at the very least references to strife and civil war associated with the death of Remus. We have in Malalas three direct references to civil war or rioting because of the death of Remus: 1) at the moment of fratricide (7.172), 2) concerning the institution of chariot races (7.173), and 3) in discussion of race factions (7.176-77). We also have a fourth reference to civil war in the story of the Sabine women (7.177), a reference which, as I have suggested, could bear the overtones of the Sullan era. There is also the possibility that Malalas' version of the Acca Larentia/Lykaina story (7.179) shows evidence of Macer's influence, given the similarity of the two rationalized accounts on the birth of the twins and the emphasis on the role of Lykaina/Larentia herself in finding the twins (Macrob. *Sat.* 1.10.17). There is further evidence for Macer's influence on Malalas in the latter's account of Romulus' amendments to the calendar (7.172-73), which bears a relationship to the relevant Licinian fragments. Finally, there is the implication of fragment 5 that Macer recorded a tradition hostile to Romulus. If, then, all this is taken into consideration, it appears that a strong case can be made for the hypothesis that Malalas has here preserved much of the essence of Macer's account of the reign of Romulus, an account which placed great emphasis on the civil discord that arose as a result of the death of Remus.

University of Exeter

MICHAEL HODGKINSON

¹² Other fragments of this tradition are preserved in Cic. *Rep.* 2.20, on which see J. E. G. Zetzel, *Cicero: De Re Publica Selections* (1995) 177, and in Plut. *Pomp.* 25.9, on which see Classen (n. 4) 183-85.