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NUMA THE PYTHAGOREAN

Abstract: One of the more puzzling problems in Greco-Roman historiography is the very strong tradition that Numa Pompilius, creator of the Romans' religious system, was a pupil of Pythagoras, who set up his school in south Italy about 530 BC. The idea was denounced by Cicero and Livy as an anachronistic fiction—but how could it have come to be so widely believed? This article draws attention to the very extensive Pythagorean material reproduced in Plutarch's life of Numa, and Plutarch's own reasonable doubts about the accuracy of the received chronology of the Roman kings. The tradition of Numa the Pythagorean evidently predated the creation of the chronology, so why should it be dismissed as unhistorical? An innovating religious legislator at Rome in the late sixth century BC is a hypothesis that deserves to be taken seriously.

Keywords: Numa, Pythagoras, Plutarch, archaic Rome, ancient chronology, *pontifices*

> 'Good Lord! What a gigantic howler! And to think that people have accepted it for so long!'
>
> Niall Rudd translating Cicero impersonating Manius Manilius.[1]

1. Not to be Believed

Book 2 of *De republica* begins with Scipio explaining how the Roman constitution developed towards perfection over a long period, from Romulus to the Twelve Tables law-code. He has just described the thirty-nine-year reign of Numa Pompilius, citing 'our friend Polybius' for the chronology,[2] when Manilius asks a question:[3]

[1] Cic. *Rep.* 2.29 (trans. Rudd (1998) 44): *Di inmortales, inquit Manilius, quantus iste est hominum et quam inueteratus error!* I am very grateful to the anonymous readers, whose suggestions I have tried to take into account; all translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

[2] Cic. *Rep.* 2.27 = Pol. 6.11a.5: *sequamur enim potissimum Polybium nostrum, quo nemo fuit in exquirendis temporibus diligentior.* See Walbank (1957) 665–9 on the chronology: 'All these dates are of course unhistorical' (669).

[3] Cic. *Rep.* 2.28 (trans. Rudd (1998) 43): *uerene, inquit Manilius, hoc memoriae proditum est, Africane, regem istum Numam Pythagorae ipsius discipulum aut certe Pythagoreum fuisse? saepe enim hoc de maioribus natu audiuimus, et ita intellegimus uulgo existimari; neque uero satis id annalium publicorum auctoritate declaratum uidemus.*

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> 'Is it an authentic tradition, Africanus, that King Numa, whom you have just been talking about, was a pupil of Pythagoras, or at least a Pythagorean? This assertion has often been made by our elders, and one gathers that the opinion is widely held. Yet an inspection of the public records shows that it is not properly documented.'

Scipio gives a surprisingly vehement reply:[4]

> 'No, Manilius. The whole thing is quite wrong. It is not only a fabrication, but a clumsy and absurd fabrication too (it is particularly hard to tolerate the kind of falsehood which is not just untrue but patently impossible). Research has established that it was only when Lucius Tarquinius Superbus had been on the throne for over three years that Pythagoras came to Sybaris, Croton, and that part of Italy. The sixty-second Olympiad witnessed both the beginning of Superbus' reign and the arrival of Pythagoras.[5] So when the years of the kings have been added up it follows that Pythagoras first reached Italy about a hundred and forty years after Numa's death. No doubt has ever been cast on this conclusion by the experts in chronological research.'

Twenty years later Livy took an equally uncompromising line, based on Numa's supposed origin from the Sabine town of Cures:[6]

> People wrongly claim Pythagoras of Samos as his teacher, in default of their discovering any other. Yet it is clear that Pythagoras lived during

[4] Cic. *Rep.* 2.28–9 (trans. Rudd (1998) 43): *falsum est enim, Manili, inquit, id totum, neque solum fictum sed etiam imperite absurdeque fictum; ea sunt enim demum non ferenda in mendacio, quae non solum ficta esse sed ne fieri quidem potuisse cernimus. nam quartum iam annum regnante Lucio Tarquinio Superbo Sybarim et Crotonem et in eas Italiae partis Pythagoras uenisse reperitur: olympias enim secunda et sexagesima eadem Superbi regni initium et Pythagorae declarat aduentum. ex quo intellegi regiis annis denumeratis potest anno fere centesimo et quadragesimo post mortem Numae primum Italiam Pythagoram attigisse; neque hoc inter eos qui diligentissime persecuti sunt temporum annales ulla est umquam in dubitatione uersatum.*

[5] Cf. D.H. *AR* 2.59.2–3 for a similar argument from Olympiad dates; the sixty-second Olympiad corresponds to 532–529 BC. See Macris (2018) 774–9 for full bibliography on the chronology of Pythagoras' life.

[6] Livy 1.18.2–4 (trans. T. J. Luce): *auctorem doctrinae eius, quia non exstat alius, falso Samium Pythagoram edunt, quem Seruio Tullio regnante Romae centum amplius post annos in ultima Italiae ora circa Metapontum Heracleamque et Crotonem iuuenum aemulantium studia coetus habuisse constat. ex quibus locis, etsi eiusdem aetatis fuisset, qua fama in Sabinos aut quo linguae commercio quemquam ad cupiditatem discendi exciuisset? quoue praesidio unus per tot gentes dissonas sermone moribuisque peruenisset? suopte igitur ingenio temperatum animum uirtutibus fuisse opinor magis instructumque non tam peregrinis artibus quam disciplina tetrica ac tristi ueterum Sabinorum, quo genere nullum quondam incorruptius fuit.*

> the reign of Servius Tullius over a hundred years later,[7] and that his school of devoted disciples was located far off in south Italy, in and around Metapontum, Heraclea and Croton. Now, even if Numa had been a contemporary, how could Pythagoras' reputation have penetrated to Sabine country from so far away, and in what language could Pythagoras have inspired a neophyte to study with him?[8] And how could a single individual have safely passed through the many intervening peoples, so different from one another in languages and customs? I think it is more likely that Numa's mind and moral principles were due to his own inborn nature, formed not so much by foreign learning as by the strict and severe manners of the old Sabines, the most incorruptible of ancient peoples.

'It is clear' (*constat*); 'research has established' (*reperitur*); the whole idea is simply wrong (*falsum*). It's easy to share Manilius' astonishment at this *inueteratus error*: if it was 'not just untrue but patently impossible', how could so many people have accepted it for so long?

Dionysius of Halicarnassus was equally puzzled. He made a point of using Roman sources, oral as well as written, for his detailed history of early Rome,[9] but he had no answer to the Numa–Pythagoras question. He dated Numa's accession to the third year of the sixteenth Olympiad (714/13 BC), and then had to admit bafflement:[10]

> So far, I have no reason to dispute the published versions of this man's history, but on what follows I just don't know what to say. There are many who have written that Numa was a pupil of Pythagoras, and that

[7] Cf. Livy 1.48.4, 60.3: he evidently dated Servius Tullius' reign to 577–533 or 575–531 BC (depending on the date of Tarquin's expulsion).

[8] Cicero, on the other hand, knew that Pythagoras was famous throughout Italy in his lifetime, and denied Numa's Pythagoreanism solely on chronological grounds (*De or.* 2.154; *Tusc.* 4.2–3); see Macris (2018) 796–8 for full bibliography on Pythagoras and Italy.

[9] D.H. *AR* 1.5.4–6.1 (Greek authors inadequate), 1.6.2 (Q. Fabius and L. Cincius), 1.7.3 (oral and written, citing seven more names from Cato to Aelius Tubero); details at Wiseman (2024b) 1–2.

[10] D.H. *AR* 2.59.1–2: *μέχρι μὲν δὴ τούτων οὐδὲν ἀντειπεῖν ἔχω πρὸς τοὺς ἐκδεδωκότας τὴν περὶ τὸν ἄνδρα τοῦτον ἱστορίαν, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἑξῆς ἀπορῶ τι ποτε χρὴ λέγειν. πολλοὶ μὲν γάρ εἰσιν οἱ γράψαντες ὅτι* Πυθαγόρου *μαθητὴς ὁ* Νόμας *ἐγένετο καὶ καθ' ὃν χρόνον ὑπὸ τῆς* Ῥωμαίων *πόλεως ἀπεδείχθη βασιλεὺς φιλοσοφῶν ἐν* Κρότωνι *διέτριβεν, ὁ δὲ χρόνος τῆς* Πυθαγόρου *ἡλικίας μάχεται πρὸς τὸν λόγον. οὐ γὰρ ὀλίγοις ἔτεσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τέτταρσι γενεαῖς ὅλαις ὕστερος ἐγένετο* Πυθαγόρας Νόμα, *ὡς ἐκ τῶν κοινῶν παρειλήφαμεν ἱστορίων. ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐπὶ τῆς ἑκκαιδεκάτης ὀλυμπιάδος μεσούσης τὴν* Ῥωμαίων *βασιλείαν παρέλαβε,* Πυθαγόρας *δὲ μετὰ τὴν πεντηκοστὴν ὀλυμπιάδα διέτριψεν ἐν* Ἰταλίᾳ.

> he was studying philosophy in Croton at the time when he was designated king by the city of Rome.[11] But the date of Pythagoras' lifetime militates against this account, since he was later than Numa not just by a few years but by four whole generations, as we have accepted from the general histories:[12] Numa succeeded to the Roman kingship in the middle of the sixteenth Olympiad, whereas Pythagoras' time in Italy was after the fiftieth.

Dionysius went on to give a personal opinion, that the early writers must have assumed the connection without doing any chronological research, and then he simply changed the subject, leaving the question unresolved.[13]

Committed as he was to 'the chronology of the imperial city's foundation as stated by my predecessors and accepted by me',[14] Dionysius was in exactly the same position as Cicero and Livy, though he avoided their tone of dogmatic conviction.

2. Not Ruled Out

The prevailing view in modern scholarship is that of Michel Humm, whose influential article of 2004 was confidently titled 'Numa and Pythagoras: the Life and Death of a Myth'.[15] Its most recent restatement runs as follows:[16]

> Probablement depuis la fin du IV^e^ s. av. J.-C., une tradition véhiculée par plusieurs familles de l'aristocratie républicaine romaine et enrichie par Ennius et par Fulvius Nobilior au II^e^ siècle, faisait du roi Numa, qui avait vécu de la fin du VIII^e^ au début du VII^e^ s., un disciple de Pythagore, le philosophe grec qui vécut en Italie du Sud à la fin du VI^e^ et au début du V^e^ s. L'ensemble de ces traditions permettait de présenter Numa comme un nomothète, un faiseur de lois ou de normes à l'origine des principales institutions de la cité, et donc, par conséquent, des normes 'canoniques' qui réglaient la religion publique de l'État romaine.

[11] See for instance D.S. 8.14; Ov. *Met.* 15.1–8, 479–81.

[12] For *κοιναὶ ἱστορίαι* cf. D.S. 1.1.1; D.H. *AR* 1.6.1 (Timaeus an example), 5.17.3 (on early Rome). Timaeus was the first to exploit Olympiads for chronology (Pol. 12.11.1); see Clarke (2008) 110–12.

[13] D.H. *AR* 2.9.4: *εἰ χρὴ δόξαν ἰδίαν ἀποφήνασθαι … ἀλλὰ περὶ μὲν τούτων ἅλις.*

[14] D.H. *AR* 1.75.4: *τὰ μὲν δὴ περὶ τοῦ χρόνου καθ' ὃν ἡ νῦν δυναστεύουσα πόλις ᾠκίσθη τοῖς τε πρὸ ἐμοῦ γενομένοις κἀμοὶ δοκοῦντα τοιάδ' ἐστίν.*

[15] Humm (2004 = 2014); cf. Humm (2005) 547–58.

[16] Humm (2025) 104–5. See section 6 below for Ennius and Fulvius.

The hypothesis would be more persuasive if the proposed 'tradition conveyed by several aristocratic families' could be explained in less abstract terms. As it is, it invites the *obscurum per obscurius* objection: what exactly is meant by 'véhiculer une tradition'? Since Numa's Pythagoreanism was evidently taken for granted both in popular belief and in literary texts,[17] some practical explanation is needed of how such families might 'convey' an unfounded idea not just to the educated few but to the general populace as well. And what would have been the purpose of it?

The radically different solution proposed in this essay starts from the most substantial body of evidence on the subject, Plutarch's life of Numa. In that work, the treatment of the date problem is much more nuanced than those of Cicero, Livy, and Dionysius, because Plutarch understood how disputed and uncertain early chronology was.[18] In his life of Solon he made a particular point of not allowing it to outweigh other historical considerations:[19]

> As for his meeting with Croesus, there have been various attempts to prove on the grounds of chronology that this must have been an invention. However, when a story is so celebrated and is vouched for by so many authorities and, more important still, when it is so much in keeping with Solon's character and bears the stamp of his wisdom and greatness of mind, I cannot agree that it should be rejected because of the so-called rules of chronology, which innumerable authors have continued to revise, without ever being able to this day to reconcile their inconsistencies.

That was why his pairing of the lawgivers Lycurgus and Numa presented them both from the start as historically contested figures involving serious disagreement even about the times in which they lived.

[17] Cic. *Rep.* 2.28 (*ita intellegimus uulgo existimari*); D.H. *AR* 2.59.1 (πολλοὶ μὲν γάρ εἰσιν οἱ γράψαντες).

[18] It is not enough to characterise him merely as 'the most benevolent author towards the legend' (Humm (2014) 36); the point is, he was aware that it might be not legend but fact.

[19] Plut. *Sol.* 27.1 (trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert), referring to the story at Herodotus 1.30–3: τὴν δὲ πρὸς Κροῖσον ἔντευξιν αὐτοῦ δοκοῦσιν ἔνιοι τοῖς χρόνοις ὡς πεπλασμένην ἐλέγχειν. ἐγὼ δὲ λόγον ἔνδοξον οὕτω καὶ τοσούτους μάρτυρας ἔχοντα καί, ὃ μεῖζόν ἐστι, πρέποντα τῷ Σόλωνος ἤθει καὶ τῆς ἐκείνου μεγαλοφροσύνης καὶ σοφίας ἄξιον, οὔ μοι δοκῶ προήσεσθαι χρονικοῖς τισι λεγομένοις κανόσιν, οὓς μυρίοι διορθοῦντες ἄχρι σήμερον εἰς οὐδὲν αὐτοῖς ὁμολογοῦμενον δύνανται καταστῆσαι τὰς ἀντιλογίας.

'Nothing can be said about Lycurgus which is not disputed',[20] and the same was true of Numa:[21]

> There is also a vigorous dispute about the time at which King Numa lived, even though the family trees appear to have been traced down accurately to him from the starting-point.[22] But a certain Clodius in his *Critical Enquiry into Chronology* (which is roughly how the book is titled) forcefully maintains that those ancient records were lost in the sack of the city by the Gauls, and that the ones presented nowadays are put together untruthfully by men who wish to gratify certain individuals by thrusting them into the leading families and the most distinguished houses when they have no right to be there.

'Vigorous' is not the only possible translation for *νεανική*. A 'young man's dispute' might also be immature or quarrelsome, as suggested by a comment later in the work, precisely in the context of Numa's Pythagoreanism: 'This matter involves many controversies, and it would be mere adolescent argumentativeness to stir it up at greater length and enforce belief.'[23]

Plutarch evidently disapproved of inappropriate claims to certainty, and he had good reason to do so:[24]

> Precise chronology is hard to achieve, and especially any drawn from the Olympic victor-lists, which they say were published at a late date by Hippias of Elis, on the basis of no compelling authority.

[20] Plut. *Lyc.* 1.1, cf. 1.3 *οὕτως πεπλανημένης τῆς ἱστορίας*.

[21] Plut. *Num.* 1.1 (Paulus Clodius *FRHist* 16 F 1): *ἔστι δὲ καὶ περὶ* Νομᾶ *τοῦ βασιλέως χρόνων, καθ' οὓς γέγονε, νεανικὴ διαφορά, καίπερ ἐξ ἀρχῆς εἰς τοῦτον κατάγεσθαι τῶν στεμμάτων ἀκριβῶς δοκοῦντων. ἀλλὰ* Κλώδιός *τις ἐν ἐλέγχῳ χρόνων (οὕτω γάρ πως ἐπιγέγραπται τὸ βιβλίον) ἰσχυρίζεται τὰς μὲν ἀρχαίας ἐκείνας ἀναγραφὰς ἐν τοῖς* Κελτικοῖς *πάθεσι τῆς πόλεως ἠφανίσθαι, τὰς δὲ νῦν φαινομένας οὐκ ἀληθῶς συγκεῖσθαι δι' ἀνδρῶν χαριζομένων τισὶν εἰς τὰ πρῶτα γένη καὶ τοὺς ἐπιφανεστάτους οἴκους ἐξ οὐ προσηκόντων εἰσβιαζομένοις*. Plutarch makes the same point about the loss of records at *Mor.* 326a (*De fort. Rom.* 13), with a reference to Livy 6.1.2.

[22] The reference is evidently to family trees painted in aristocratic houses (Wiseman (2008) 13–14), where Numa would be the root of the tree at the bottom of the wall; starting from a branch, you would trace your descent *down* to him. Cf. Plut. *Num.* 22.1 for the Pomponii, Pinarii, Calpurnii, and Marcii Reges, all claiming descent from sons of Numa.

[23] Plut. *Num.* 8.10: *ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἀμφισβητήσεις ἔχοντα πολλὰς καὶ το κινεῖν διὰ μακροτέρων καὶ τὸ πιστοῦσθαι* [*πιστεύεσθαι* MSS] *μειρακιώδους ἐστὶ φιλονεικίας*.

[24] Plut. *Num.* 1.4: *τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους ἐξακριβῶσαι χαλεπόν ἐστι, καὶ μάλιστα τοὺς ἐκ τῶν* Ὀλυμπιονικῶν *ἀναγομένους, ὧν τὴν ἀναγραφὴν ὀψέ φασιν* Ἱππίαν *ἐκδοῦναι τὸν* Ἠλεῖον, *ἀπ' οὐδενὸς ὁρμώμενον ἀναγκαίου πρὸς πίστιν*. For Hippias of Elis (*BNJ* 6) see Christesen (2007) 51–160.

One can imagine him taking a fastidious view of the Roman authors' dogmatic belief in a chronological system based on Olympiad dating. We know what he thought about early Roman dates from a comment in his life of Camillus: when the Gauls captured Rome the city had existed for just over 360 years, 'if it's credible to anyone that any accurate chronology survives, when the confusion of that time created disputes even about the dates of later events'.[25] For Plutarch, unlike Cicero, Livy, and Dionysius, the received chronology of the Roman kings was *not* a historical datum.

Plutarch's Numa belonged 'in a historical no-man's land, beyond the reach of verifiable history'.[26] His method for writing the biography was to report 'what we have received about Numa which is worthy of record', and let that speak for itself. [27] Since so much of it consisted of parallels with Pythagorean thinking,[28] Plutarch ignored the orthodoxy and drew his own conclusions: 'The result is to have much sympathy for those who are eager to associate Numa with Pythagoras on the basis of so many similarities.'[29]

3. Plutarch and his Sources

It is generally agreed that the life of Romulus, the life of Numa, the life of Camillus, and the *Roman Questions* were all written at about the same time,[30] variously exploiting the astonishingly wide range of source material about early Rome that Plutarch had been able to discover. Although he had certainly

[25] Plut. *Cam.* 22.1: *εἴ τῳ πιστὸν ἀποσώζεσθαί τινα τῶν χρόνων ἀκρίβειαν, οἷς καὶ περὶ νεωτέρων ἄλλων ἀμφισβήτησιν ἡ σύγχυσις ἐκείνη παρέσχε.* 'The confusion of that time' refers to the Gallic sack itself (n. 21 above).

[26] Stadter (2014) 247; for the metaphor see Plut. *Thes.* 1.1, where map-making illustrates the limits of 'time that can be reached by probable reasoning and provides a basis for factual history'.

[27] Plut. *Num.* 1.4 (*ἃ δὲ παρειλήφαμεν ἡμεῖς ἄξια λόγου περὶ* Νομᾶ *διέξιμεν*), meaning worthy of record for his own purpose of 'grasping the man's nature and character' (n. 33 below); see Duff (1999) 13–51 on Plutarch's constant moral purpose in the *Lives*.

[28] Plut. *Num.* 8.4–10, 14.2–6, 22.3–4.

[29] Plut. *Num.* 22.4: *ὥστε συγγνώμην ἔχειν πολλὴν τοῖς εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ* Πυθαγόρᾳ Νομᾶν *φιλοτιμουμένοις συνάγειν ἐπὶ τοσαύταις ὁμοιότησιν.*

[30] Jones (1966) 66–9, Ampolo (1988) lix–lxi, with Pelling (2002) 1–26 on Plutarch's method of work; for cross-references see Plut. *Thes.* 1.2 (to *Num.*), *Rom.* 15.5 (to *Quaest. Rom.*), 21.1 (to *Num.*), *Num.* 9.8 and 12.7 (to *Cam.*), *Cam.* 19.8 (to *Quaest. Rom.*), 33.7 (to *Rom.*). Cf. Piccirilli (1980) 1760–4, emphasising the relevance of Plutarch's *Apophthegmata Laconica* and *Instituta Laconica* (*Mor.* 208a–240b) to his life of Lycurgus but strangely ignoring that of *Quaest. Rom.* to the Numa life.

read Livy,[31] his treatment of Numa's reign could hardly be less like Livy's, and that must have been deliberate.

How was Plutarch to deal with Rome's most celebrated historian?[32] Perhaps the same way he dealt with Thucydides in the life of Nicias, by not attempting to compete with the classic narrative:[33]

> I have tried instead to collect material that is not well-known, but scattered among other authors, or found on ancient dedications and decrees. Nor is this an accumulation of useless erudition: I am conveying material that is helpful for grasping the man's nature and character.

No ancient dedications or decrees are cited for Numa, but the very first sentence of the life reveals Plutarch looking for evidence in the *atria* of aristocratic houses in Rome.[34]

As for 'material scattered among other authors', the texts provide a tantalising glimpse of a literature almost wholly lost to us: that of Greek authors writing about Rome before Roman historiography began.[35] The life of Romulus and the *Roman Questions* provide most of what we know about seven of them: Promathion, whose ἱστορία Ἰταλική reported Rome's founder as generated by a phallus that rose in the hearth;[36] Diocles of Peparethos, whose tale of the boyhood of Romulus and Remus was used by Fabius Pictor;[37] Antigonus, who made Tarpeia the daughter of Tatius forced into marriage

[31] Cited at *Cam.* 6.2 (Livy 5.22.5), *Quaest. Rom.* 25 (Livy 6.1.11). See Cornell (2013) on Plutarch's use of Roman authors; later books of Livy are cited in the lives of Marcellus, Flamininus, the elder Cato, Lucullus, Sulla, and Caesar.

[32] For Livy's fame in Plutarch's time see for instance Plin. *HN* pref. 16 (*Titum Liuium auctorem celeberrimum*); Plin. *Ep.* 2.3.8 (*Titi Liui nomine gloriaque commotum*).

[33] Plut. *Nic.* 1.5 (trans. Pelling (2002) 117): *τὰ διαφεύγοντα τοὺς πολλούς, ὑφ' ἑτέρων δ' εἰρημένα σποράδην ἢ πρὸς ἀναθήμασιν ἢ ψηφίσμασιν εὑρημένα παλαιοῖς πεπείραμαι συναγαγεῖν, οὐ τὴν ἄχρηστον ἀθροίζων ἱστορίαν, ἀλλὰ τὴν πρὸς κατανόησιν ἤθους καὶ τρόπου παραδιδούς.*

[34] Plut. *Num.* 1.1 (nn. 21–2 above). He was careful not to question the accuracy of the family trees, no doubt because he knew how proud the old families still were of their alleged ancestors (see *Comp. Sol. et Popl.* 1.2, on the patrician Valerii); however, those *stemmata* on the walls were designed to link up ancestral portraits (Plin. *HN* 35.7; Flower (1996) 211–12) of which the written titles might well be fraudulent (see Livy 4.16.4, 8.40.4–5, 22.31.11 on *imaginum tituli*).

[35] See especially Plut. *Rom.* 1–2, where twelve separate foundation stories are presented, all but one unattributed.

[36] Plut. *Rom.* 2.3–6 (*BNJ* 817 F 1), probably to be identified with 'Promathos' of Samos (Aristotle fr. 248 Rose).

[37] Plut. *Rom.* 3.1 and 8.7 (*BNJ* 820 F 1) = *FRHist* 1 F 4b.

with Romulus;[38] Zenodotus of Troizen, who gave the names of Romulus' children;[39] Butas, who wrote 'mythical *aitia* in elegiacs';[40] 'Simylos the poet', who blamed Tarpeia for betraying the Capitol to the Gauls;[41] and Pyrrhon of Lipara, who knew that *triumphatores* were entitled to a symbolic burial within the city.[42]

Though Plutarch was much more sparing with named citations in his life of Numa, it is a reasonable assumption that authors such as these had provided the many details about Numa's reign that are referenced only with *ὡς λέγεται* or some equivalent phrase. At one point, however, he did name his source.

Having listed the Pythagorean aspects of Numa's manner of ruling Rome, Plutarch looked for hard evidence:[43]

> Apart from that, those who associate the two men press their point with other, external proofs. One of them is that the Romans enrolled Pythagoras into their citizenship, as Epicharmus the comic poet reported in a work entitled *To Antenor*—and Epicharmus was a man of those early times who had been part of Pythagoras' school.

Modern scholarship rejects this report. The editors of comic fragments relegate it to the dustbin of 'pseudo-Epicharmus',[44] while historians take it to be an invention by Aristoxenus of Taras in the late fourth century BC.[45] But why should Aristoxenus have invented it? It's worth remembering Walter Burkert's judgement on the biographical tradition about Pythagoras: 'On the whole, the

[38] Plut. *Rom.* 17.5 (*BNJ* 816 F 2), also cited by Festus 328L (on Rhomos son of Zeus as the founder of Rome).

[39] Plut. *Rom.* 14.7 (*BNJ* 821 F 2), also cited by D.H. *AR* 2.49.1 (on Umbrians and Sabines) and Solinus 2.9 (Praeneste founded by a son of Odysseus).

[40] Plut. *Rom.* 21.6 (*BNJ* 840 F 29a), also cited by Arnobius *Aduersus nationes* 5.18 (on the Bona Dea).

[41] Plut. *Rom.* 17.5 (*BNJ* 840 F 28).

[42] Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 79 (*BNJ* 836 F 1).

[43] Plut. *Num.* 8.9: *χωρὶς δὲ τούτων ἑτέροις ἔξωθεν ἐπαγωνίζονται τεκμηρίοις οἱ τὸν ἄνδρα τῷ ἀνδρὶ συνοικειοῦντες. ὧν ἕν μέν ἐστιν ὅτι* Πυθαγόραν *Ῥωμαῖοι τῇ πολιτείᾳ προσέγραψαν, ὡς ἱστόρηκεν* Ἐπίχαρμος *ὁ κωμικὸς ἔν τινι λόγῳ πρὸς* Ἀντήνορα *γεγραμμένῳ, παλαιὸς ἀνὴρ καὶ τῆς* Πυθαγορικῆς *διατριβῆς μετεσχηκώς*. For Epicharmus as a Pythagorean *ἀκροατής* see Iamblichus *Vita Pyth.* 266.

[44] Kaibel (1899) 145 (fr. 295 '*incerti auctoris*'); *PCG* Epicharmus fr. 296; see Centrone (2000) 104–5 for bibliography.

[45] Gabba (1967) 157–9 = (2000) 40–2, cf. Gruen (1990) 160–2. See Volk (2015) 37 for a more open-minded discussion, mentioning this passage in the context of Cic. *Sen.* 78 on Pythagoras and his followers as *incolae paene nostri*.

"later" tradition seems to be not so much the result of unscrupulous falsification as of simple-minded, naïve compilation and transmission of whatever could be found, contradictions and all.'[46]

It was Aristoxenus, for instance, who transmitted the precious information that Romans too came to study at Pythagoras' school.[47] There is no reason to doubt it. The old idea that Rome in the late sixth century BC had no contact with the Greek world is demonstrably false,[48] and there is even archaeological evidence (the use of satyr-mask antefixes in Greek Sicily and in Rome and Latium) that suggests a common culture precisely in Epicharmus' area of interest.[49] It is entirely credible that after the expulsion of the Tarquins the Romans should have honoured Pythagoras with citizenship as a champion of political freedom.[50] When such an honour is reported by a highly intelligent, prodigiously well-read author making a particular point about contemporary evidence ('Epicharmus was a man of those early times'), one would need better arguments to convict him of error than have yet been offered.

It was in the near-contemporary life of Camillus that Plutarch expressed his doubts about the orthodox chronology of early Rome.[51] In the life of Numa he flagged up the dating question in the first sentence, as a young man's argument he wasn't going to get into;[52] the philosophical biographer's priority was to search out material 'helpful for grasping the man's nature and character'.[53] He found plenty of that for Numa, and much of it was from authors now lost who were evidently writing before the orthodox chronology of Rome had been created.

[46] Burkert (1972) 105; cf. Macris (2018) 694–5 on 'la question pythagoricienne'.

[47] Aristoxenus fr. 17 Wehrli (Porphyry *Vita Pyth.* 21); Iamblichus *Vita Pyth.* 34.241; Diog. Laert. 8.14.

[48] See the synthesis at Bradley (2020) 47–80 for a necessary corrective; for the material culture of Rome in Pythagoras' time see for instance Cristofani (1990), Winter (2009), Hopkins (2016).

[49] See Wiseman (2024a) 14–16, (2025) 11–16; for Epicharmus and satyric drama see *Anthologia Palatina* 7.82 (Δωρίδος ἐκ Μούσης κεκορυθμένον ἀνέρα Βάκχῳ | καὶ σατύροις Σικελὸν τῇδ' Ἐπίχαρμον ἔχω), with Shaw (2014) 56–77.

[50] For Pythagoras and the *φρόνημα ἐλευθέριον* see Porphyry *Vita Pyth.* 21, Iamblichus *Vita Pyth.* 7.33; full bibliography at Macris (2018) 798–9.

[51] Plut. *Cam.* 22.1 (n. 25 above).

[52] Plut. *Num.* 1.1, cf. 1.4, 8.10 (nn. 23–4 above).

[53] Plut. *Nic.* 1.5 (n. 33 above); cf. *Alex.* 1, explaining and justifying his method.

4. A Recoverable Context

In the late fourth century BC, prompted by Delphi to honour the wisest of the Greeks, the Romans set up a statue of Pythagoras in the Comitium.[54] At just that time the *carmina* of Appius Claudius, censor in 312 BC and the earliest attested poet in Latin, were providing them with moral instruction on Pythagorean lines.[55]

At festivals in Italy the prevailing style of dramatic performance was 'Italian comedy', also known as *phlyax* ('foolery').[56] We know the Romans were familiar with it, because *fabula Rhinthonica*, named after Rhinthon of Taras, the acknowledged master of the genre, was a recognised type of Roman comedy.[57] And a neglected late source adds a startling new dimension to our understanding of these comic dramatists:[58]

> We know that Rhinthon, Skiras, Blaisos and the other Pythagoreans were educators of no minor teachings in Magna Graecia, and especially Rhinthon, who was the first to write comedy in hexameters. Taking his start from him, the Roman Lucilius was the first to produce comedy in heroic verse.

So wrote John Lydus, a learned bureaucrat in Justinian's Contantinople, unexpectedly digressing from the account of the censorship in his treatise on the Roman magistracies.[59]

[54] Plut. *Numa* 8.10; Plin. *HN* 34.26 (at the time of the Samnite wars); Volk (2015) 40 calls it 'baffling', but see Humm (2005) 541–600 for a thorough exploration of the contemporary cultural background.

[55] Cic. *Tusc.* 4.4 (*carmen* … *Pythagoreum uidetur*); for the extant fragments see [Sall.] *Epist.* 1.1.2; Festus 418L; Priscian in *Gramm. Lat.* 2.384 Keil; for bibliography see Ducos 1994.

[56] *Suda* R 171 = 4.295 Adler (Ῥίνθων, Ταραντῖνος κωμικός, ἀρχηγὸς τῆς καλουμένης ἱλαροτραγῳδίας, ὃ ἐστὶ φλυακογραφία); Steph. Byz. 603.1 (Ῥίνθων, Ταραντῖνος φλύαξ, τὰ τραγικὰ μεταρρυθμίζων ἐς τὸ γελοῖον); Athenaeus *Deipn.* 9.402b (τῆς Ἰταλικῆς καλουμένης κωμῳδίας), 14.621d; fragments and discussion in Favi (2017).

[57] Evanthius *De fabula* 4.1 (Kaibel (1899) 66); Donatus *De comoedia* 6.1 (Kaibel (1899) 68); Lydus *Mag.* 1.40. For the historical context see Wiseman (2024a) 20–8 and (2025) 30–2.

[58] Lydus *Mag.* 1.41: Ῥίνθωνα καὶ Σκίραν καὶ Βλαῖσον καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους τῶν Πυθαγορείων ἴσμεν οὐ μικρῶν διδαγμάτων ἐπὶ τῆς μεγάλης Ἑλλάδος γενέσθαι καθηγητάς, καὶ διαφερόντως τὸν Ῥίνθωνα, ὃς ἑξαμέτροις ἔγραψε πρῶτος κωμῳδίαν· ἐξ οὗ πρῶτος λάβων τὰς ἀφορμὰς Λουκίλιος ὁ Ῥωμαῖος ἡρωικοῖς ἔπεσιν ἐκωμῴδησεν.

[59] For Lydus' *De magistratibus* see most recently Begass (2025) 12–20, with Wiseman (2025) 84–93 and 113–17 on his treatment of sources and the likely context here: the ultimate source at this point was probably Suetonius, who wrote a two-volume treatise on Roman festivals (*Suda* T 895 = 4.581 Adler, περὶ τῶν παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις θεωριῶν καὶ ἀγώνων).

We know next to nothing of Skiras, but Blaisos of Capreae wrote a *Satournos*,[60] which ought to imply performance in a Latin-speaking context; the *Saturnalia* was one of Rome's ancient festivals.[61] It seems likely that Blaisos' bilingual cultural milieu was that of the hugely expanded Roman citizen body, which after 338 BC included the thoroughly Hellenised communities of northern Campania,[62] just across the bay from his native island.

It is not at all paradoxical that Lydus saw the *phlyax* authors as educators and their plays as teachings: poets at festivals were expected to instruct the citizens as well as entertain them.[63] Nor should it be surprising if a Greek playwright did so in Rome, since we know from much better-attested periods that the *Graeca scaena* was a regular feature at Roman festivals.[64] The material Plutarch was able to find in his unnamed sources about Numa the Pythagorean will have originated in just such a polyglot cultural and educational milieu. With that in mind, it's worth looking more closely at how he chose to begin his account of what Numa did for Rome.

Numa's purpose was to temper the city like iron in the forge, turning its rigid concern for war into a more malleable concern for justice.[65] It wasn't an easy task:[66]

[60] Athenaeus *Deipn.* 11.487c (Βλαῖσος ἐν Σατούρνῳ); Steph. Byz. 357.1 (Βλαῖσος σπουδογελοίων ποιητὴς Καπριάτης). 'Blaesus' was a Roman *cognomen*, first attested in 253 BC (*fasti consulares* and *triumphales*, Degrassi (1947) 42–3, 76–7); Saturnus was the god who gave Latium its name (Virg. *Aen.* 8.321–3; Ov. *Fast.* 1.238) and Latin poetry its metre (Porph. on Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.157).

[61] D.H. *AR* 6.1.4 (δημοτελεῖς ἀναδειχθῆναι τῷ θεῷ καθ' ἕκαστον ἐνιαυτὸν ἑορτάς τε καὶ θυσίας); the dedication of the temple and institution of the festival are dated to 501 or 497 BC (Livy 2.21.1–2; Macrob. *Sat.* 1.8.1).

[62] Livy 8.14.10–11 (*ciuitas sine suffragio*), including Cumae, home of the Sibyl (Hyperochus *BNJ* 576 F 2), and Capua, named after the Trojan Capys (Hecataeus *BNJ* 1 F 62).

[63] For a fine example from Sicily in the fifth century BC see Empedocles fr. 112 DK = Diog. Laert. 8.62. The principle applied equally at Rome: see for instance Cic. *Rab. Post.* 69 (*ut discamus*), *Leg.* 1.47 (*scaena* as source of information); Varro *Ling.* 6.18 (*docuit populum*); Ov. *Fast.* 4.326 (*scaena testificata*). What the poets taught the people wasn't always true: Cic. *Tusc.* 1.36–7 (*errores quos auxerunt poetae*); D.H. *AR* 9.22.1–6 (πλάσμασιν ἔοικε θεατρικοῖς); Paus. 1.3.3 (ὁπόσα ἤκουον ἔν τε χοροῖς καὶ τραγῳδίαις).

[64] *CIL* 6.10096 = *ILLRP* 803 (*Graeca in scaena prima populo apparui*); Plut. *Mar.* 2.1 (101 BC); Cic. *Fam.* 7.1.3, *Att.* 16.5.1 (55 and 44 BC); Nic. Dam. *BNJ* F 127.9.19 (46 BC); *CIL* 6.32323.156–7 (17 BC).

[65] Plut. *Num.* 8.1: ἐπεχείρει τὴν πόλιν, ὥσπερ σίδηρον, ἐκ σκληρᾶς καὶ πολεμικῆς μαλακωτέραν ποιῆσαι καὶ δικαιοτέραν.

[66] Plut. *Num.* 8.2–4: ἐπηγάγετο τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν θεῶν βοήθειαν, τὰ μὲν πολλὰ θυσίαις καὶ πομπαῖς καὶ χορείαις, ἃς αὐτὸς ὠργίασε καὶ κατέστησεν, ἅμα σεμνότητι διαγωγὴν ἐπίχαριν καὶ φιλάνθρωπον ἡδονὴν ἐχούσαις, δημαγωγῶν καὶ τιθασεύων τὸ θυμοειδὲς καὶ φιλοπόλεμον· ἔστι δ' ὅτε καὶ φόβους τινὰς ἀπαγγέλλων παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ φάσματα δαιμόνων ἀλλόκοτα καὶ

> He enlisted the gods' help, mainly by sacrifices and processions and choral dances at which he officiated in person as master of ceremonies. The solemnity of these occasions provided graceful and civilised entertainment, attracting the populace and taming its fierce and warlike nature. Sometimes too he would bring fearsome divine messages, strange apparitions of supernatural beings and unfriendly voices, to subdue and humble their thoughts with fear of the gods. This above all was why his wisdom and teaching were said to be due to intimacy with Pythagoras.

At Numa's festivals the message was delivered by dramatic performance:[67]

> Numa's drama was the love of a certain goddess or mountain nymph and her secret intercourse with him, and his familiar conversations with the Muses, to whom he ascribed most of his oracular sayings. …
>
> As a result of such instruction about the divine world, the city became so manageable and so much in awe of Numa's power that it accepted what he said, strange and myth-like as it was, and believed that nothing was incredible or impossible if he wished it to be so.

Perhaps 'Numa's drama' was a play within a play, part of the Pythagorean teachings of 'Italian comedy' playwrights like Rhinthon and Blaisos.

5. Creating a Chronology

So many texts have been lost, and so much information lost with them. But at least there are a few Hellenistic authors from whose work enough fragments survive to enable reasonably secure inferences to be made. The three most helpful in this context, all from the third century BC, are the historian Timaeus of Tauromenium, working in Athens;[68] the poet and dramatist Gnaeus

φωνὰς οὐκ εὐμενεῖς, ἐδούλου καὶ ταπεινὴν ἐποίει τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτῶν ὑπὸ δεισιδαιμονίας. ἐξ ὧν καὶ μάλιστα λόγον ἔσχεν ἡ σοφία καὶ παίδευσις τοῦ ἀνδρός, ὡς Πυθαγόρᾳ *συγγεγονότος.*

[67] Plut. *Num.* 8.6, 15.1: *τῷ δὲ* Νομᾷ *δρᾶμα θεᾶς τινος ἢ νύμφης ὀρείας ἔρως ἦν καὶ συνουσία πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀπόρρητος, ὥσπερ εἴρηται, καὶ κοιναὶ μετὰ* Μουσῶν *διατριβαί. τὰ γὰρ πλεῖστα τῶν μαντευμάτων εἰς* Μούσας *ἀνῆγε. … ἐκ δὲ τῆς τοιαύτης παιδαγωγίας πρὸς τὸ θεῖον οὕτως ἡ πόλις ἐγεγόνει χειροήθης καὶ κατατεθαμβημένη τὴν τοῦ* Νομᾶ *δύναμιν, ὥστε μύθοις ἐοικότας τὴν ἀτοπίαν λόγους παραδέχεσθαι, καὶ νομίζειν μηδὲν ἄπιστον εἶναι μηδὲ ἀμήχανον ἐκείνου βουληθέντος.*

[68] *BNJ* 566: resident in Athens for fifty years, Timaeus brought his history of Sicily and the west down to about 264 BC (Pol. 1.5.1; 12.25d.1; 39.8.4). For Timaeus on Rome see Baron (2013) 43–52.

Naevius, working in Rome;[69] and the polymath scholar Eratosthenes of Cyrene, working in Alexandria.[70]

Timaeus was well informed about the Romans. His history of Sicily included an account of Rome's early development,[71] though unfortunately only one item survives from it.[72] He had been to Rome himself and learned that the city had a connection with Troy, commemorated each year with the sacrifice of the 'October horse'.[73] But although he wrote in detail about Pyrrhus of Epirus, a descendant of Achilles who saw his conflict with Rome as a war on Trojan colonists,[74] Timaeus offered no foundation narrative to explain how Rome's Trojan connection had come about.[75]

It now seems clear that the main stories about Romulus as founder and first king were progressively developed over a period of two generations, between 338 and 268 BC.[76] No agreed version had yet emerged when Timaeus was writing, and even Romulus' parentage was disputed: was he the son of Latinus,[77] or of Aeneas,[78] or of Ascanius,[79] or of Aeneas' daughter by an unknown father?[80] Timaeus evidently felt no need to commit himself. He did, however, believe that the foundation of Rome was contemporary with that of Carthage.

[69] Probably Campanian (Gell. *NA* 1.24.2), Naevius fought in the First Punic War and first produced plays at Rome in 235 BC (Gell. *NA* 17.21.45).

[70] *BNJ* 241: Eratosthenes was librarian at Alexandria under three successive Ptolemies (Suda E 2898 Adler), c. 240–200 BC.

[71] D.H. *AR* 1.6.1 (*τὰ μὲν ἀρχαῖα τῶν ἱστοριῶν*); Gell. *NA* 11.1.1 (*Timaeus in historiis quae oratione Graeca de rebus populi Romani composuit*).

[72] *BNJ* 566 F 61 = Plin. *HN* 33.42–3, with Crawford (1974) 35–7: he knew that the Roman *classis* system, grading citizens' status by their financial resources, had been set up by Servius Tullius on the basis of standardised bronze ingots, and that the Romans had begun to use coined silver only in his own time.

[73] *BNJ* 566 F 36 = Pol. 12.4b.1, cf. Festus 190L. See also F 59 = D.H. *AR* 1.67.4 on Trojan ceramics among the *sacra* in the sanctuary at Lavinium.

[74] *BNJ* 566 F 36 = Pol. 12.4b.1 (*ἐν τοῖς περὶ Πύρρου*); Paus. 1.12.1 (*στρατεύειν γὰρ ἐπὶ Τρώων ἀποίκους Ἀχιλλέως ὢν ἀπόγονος*).

[75] As is shown by his absence from the doxographies of Dionysius (*AR* 1.72–3), Plutarch (*Rom.* 1–2), Festus (326–9L) and Servius *auctus* (on Virg. *Aen.* 1.273).

[76] See most recently Wiseman (2024b) 15–21.

[77] Kallias *BNJ* 564 F 5a = D.H. *AR* 1.72.5; cf. Plut. *Rom.* 2.3.

[78] Alkimos *BNJ* 564 F 56 = Festus 329L; *BNJ* 840 F 40a = D.H. *AR* 1.73.1–2, citing unnamed Roman authors; cf. Plut. *Rom.* 2.2–3.

[79] Eratosthenes *BNJ* 241 F 45 = Serv. Dan. on Virg. *Aen.* 1.273: *Eratosthenes Ascanii Aeneae filii <filium> Romulum parentem urbis refert.*

[80] Diocles of Peparethos *BNJ* 820 F 1 = Plut. *Rom.* 3.3, 4.2; *BNJ* 840 F 40a = D.H. *AR* 1.73.2, citing unnamed Roman authors; cf. D.S. 7.5.1.

Timaeus took chronology seriously,[81] and was proud of having exploited Tyrian documents that enabled him to date the foundation of Carthage by Theiosso, sister of Pygmalion.[82] The date he worked out was the thirty-eighth year before the first Olympiad (814/13 BC), so that was also his date for Rome. Dionysius, who gives us this information, had no idea what dating criterion he used.[83]

Thirty or forty years later Gnaeus Naevius was composing his *Bellum Punicum*, the first great Latin epic. He too was concerned to link the origins of Rome and Carthage, and he did so by having a storm drive Aeneas and his fellow-refugees to Carthage as they sailed west after the fall of Troy; from there he brought the Trojans on to Italy, where Aeneas' daughter gave birth to Romulus, founder of Rome.[84] As in Virgil two centuries later,[85] the ill-fated meeting of Aeneas with Dido, founder of Carthage, was what caused the historic enmity between the two cities.

The narrative of the *Bellum Punicum* seems to have gone seamlessly from the foundation of the city to the outbreak of the war; what, if anything, Naevius said about Romulus is not known. He did, however, write a play about Romulus (perhaps more than one),[86] which evidently featured the she-wolf story;[87] it certainly featured Amulius, king of Alba, but since it presented him in dialogue with an otherwise unknown Vibe(?) of Veii,[88] the plot cannot be reconstructed. Naevius' Romulus seems to belong in the same 'historical no-man's land' as Plutarch's Numa.[89]

[81] D.S. 5.1.3 (*μεγίστην πρόνοιαν πεποιημένος τῆς τῶν χρόνων ἀκριβείας*); Baron (2013) 23–8. His date for the Trojan War was 1194/3 BC (*BNJ* 566 F 125 = Censorinus *De die natali* 21.2).

[82] Timaeus *BNJ* 566 F 7 = Pol. 12.28a.3; cf. Menander of Ephesus *BNJ* 783 F 1.125 (Joseph. *Ap.* 1.107–8) for the regnal dates of Tyre's rulers. For Timaeus' narrative of Theiosso see *BNJ* 566 F 82 = Anon. *De mulieribus* 6 p. 215 West (Gera (1997) 7–8).

[83] Timaeus *BNJ* 566 F 60 = D.H. *AR* 1.74.1: *οὐκ οἶδ' ὅτῳ κανόνι χρησάμενος*.

[84] Naevius *Bellum Punicum* fr. 27 FPL = Serv. Dan. on Virg. *Aen.* 1.273: *Naeuius et Ennius Aeneae ex filia nepotem Romulum conditorem urbis tradunt.* Presumably, as in Ennius later, the daughter was Ilia ('lady of Troy') and Romulus' father was Mars.

[85] For Virgil's extensive use of Naevius in *Aeneid* 1 and 4, see Serv. Dan. on Virg. *Aen.* 1.198 and 4.9; Macrob. *Sat.* 6.2.30.

[86] Full discussion in Manuwald (2001) 141–61.

[87] There was a fictional tale that a real she-wolf came into the theatre while it was being played (Donatus on Ter. *Ad.* 537).

[88] Festus 334L: †*uel*† *Veiens regem sal*<*u*>*ta*[*n*]*t Vib*[*a*]*e Albanum* <*A*>*mulium comiter senem sapientem.* Amulius was Ilia's wicked uncle in Diocles of Peparethos' narrative (*BNJ* 820 F 1 = Plut. *Rom.* 3.22–4).

[89] Above, n. 26.

The Romans knew when the last of their kings was expelled: it was in the year of the dedication of the temple of Capitoline Jupiter, which was known to have taken place 204 years before the aedileship of Cn. Flavius in 304 BC.[90] But they had no way of counting back to the foundation, which for Naevius was two generations after the fall of Troy. That became possible only with the work of Eratosthenes, head of the Alexandrian library, who was able to construct a chronology more comprehensive than that of Timaeus; for the first time ever, it became possible to count years from the fall of Troy, now fixed as 1184/3 BC, to events that were reliably datable.[91]

Like Timaeus and Naevius, Eratosthenes was interested in Rome and Carthage. He noted them as two non-Greek cities that were admirably governed,[92] but he didn't share Timaeus' view about their simultaneous foundations; he believed that Rome's founder was Romulus, a grandson of Aeneas (but in the male line),[93] and that would make Rome about three centuries older than Carthage. He may well have known that one of Rome's kings was a son of the Bacchiad Demaratus who left Corinth at the time of Cypselus' coup (about 657 BC),[94] but he can hardly have known a fixed canon of only seven reigns, as in the later Roman tradition: more than six hundred years, eighteen notional generations, separate the implied date of his Romulus (c. 1120 BC) from the expulsion of the last king (c. 508 BC).

If the seven-king sequence post-dates Eratosthenes, it must have been created by the Roman historians who immediately used his criteria to date the foundation of Rome to 748/7 or 729/8 BC.[95] Fabius Pictor and Cincius Alimentus evidently achieved those dates by first interposing a fifteen-generation dynasty of Alban kings between Aeneas and Romulus, and then extending the list of known Roman kings (the two Tarquins and Servius Tullius?) into a sequence of seven that quickly became canonical.[96]

[90] Plin. *HN* 33.19–20, with Purcell (2003) 27–9; the date was probably established by counting the annual nails hammered into the Jupiter temple (Livy 7.3.5–8).

[91] Eratosthenes *BNJ* 241 F 1; Clarke (2008) 64–70.

[92] As cited by Strabo 1.4.9 C66 (*οὕτω θαυμαστῶς πολιτευομένους*).

[93] As son of Ascanius (n. 79 above).

[94] Pol. 6.11a.10; D.H. *AR* 3.46.3–5; Strabo 5.2.2 C219–20; 8.6.20 C378; see Wiseman (2024b) 10–11, (2025) 6–10.

[95] Respectively Fabius Pictor *FRHist* 1 F 5 and Cincius Alimentus *FRHist* 2 F 2 = D.H. *AR* 1.74.1; Solinus 1.27. Cf. D.H. *AR* 1.74.2 on the *κανόνες οἷς* Ἐρατοσθένης *κέχρηται* (contrast n. 83 above).

[96] See Cornell (2014) 251–2. For the Alban king-list see D.S. 7.5.3–12; Livy 1.3.6–10; D.H. *AR* 1.70–1; Ov. *Met.* 14.609–21; *Fast.* 4.39–54; *Origo gentis Romanae* 17–19. *Pace* Feeney (2007) 96, there is no reason to attribute it to Diocles of Peparethos: Plutarch's reference to it at *Rom.* 3.2 is surely his own explanation, not part of Diocles' narrative.

Necessarily, Romulus was the first, but his successor was named as the lawgiver and moral reformer Numa Pompilius.[97]

Since Pythagoras set up his school in Croton about 530 BC, that meant that Numa the Pythagorean was now a chronological impossibility.

6. What the Muses Said

Fabius and Cincius were writing in Greek, explaining Rome to non-Romans.[98] The Romans themselves learned the early history of their city from the poets and story-tellers they heard at the festivals, the greatest of whom, active in the two decades following the second Punic War, was a Greek and a Pythagorean,[99] like the *phlyax* playwrights a century earlier. Eventually a Roman citizen with a Roman *praenomen*,[100] Quintus Ennius told the long story of Rome in the language of his adopted city and the metre of Homer.

How he structured the *Annales* is a mystery. For Ennius, as for Naevius, Romulus was the son of Aeneas' daughter, and a surviving reference to the foundation 'about seven hundred years ago' may well come from Camillus' speech in 396 BC.[101] He certainly dealt with Numa, as the religious innovator inspired by Egeria,[102] but there is no reason to suppose that he made him Romulus' successor; more probably, like Ovid later,[103] he simply ignored the chronological contradiction and made him a pupil of Pythagoras.

[97] For Numa as himself a founder see Livy 1.19.1 (*urbem … iure … legibusque ac moribus de integro condere parat*); Virg. *Aen.* 6.810–11 (*primam qui legibus urbem | fundabit*); Humm (2025) 90–2.

[98] D.H. *AR* 1.6.2; cf. 7.70.1–73.5 (*FRHist* 1 F 15) for Fabius' implied target audience. There was also a Latin version of Fabius (*FRHist* 1 F 4d–e, 29, 31), date unknown.

[99] Festus 374L (*utpote Graecus Graeco more usus*); cf. Suet. *Gram.* 1.2 (*semigraecus*); his home was Rudiae, a Greek city (Strabo 6.3.5 C281) in the heel of Italy. Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.52 (*somnia Pythagorea*) and Pers. 6.11 (*pauone ex Pythagoreo*) describe Ennius' self-presentation as the reincarnation of Homer, and the Pythagorean Epicharmus was one of the Greek authors he impersonated in Latin (Wiseman (2015) 68–9, cf. n. 43 above).

[100] No doubt chosen to honour his sponsor for the citizenship, Q. Fulvius M.f. Nobilior (Cic. *Brut.* 79), evidently in 184 BC.

[101] Serv. Dan. on Virg. *Aen.* 1.273 (n. 79 above); Ennius *Annales* 154–5 FRL = Varro *Rust.* 3.1.2.

[102] Ennius *Annales* 113–18 FRL = Varro *Ling.* 7.42–5.

[103] Ov. *Met.* 15.1–8 and 479–81, cf. *Fast.* 3.153–4, *Pont.* 3.3.44.

Like Ovid later, Ennius gave Egeria a speaking role.[104] The context of it is provided by Plutarch, whose unnamed sources had told him about the festivals Numa introduced:[105]

> Numa's drama was the love of a certain goddess or mountain nymph and her secret intercourse with him, and his familiar conversations with the Muses, to whom he ascribed most of his oracular sayings.

It cannot be accidental that the first thing Pythagoras had done on arrival in Italy was persuade the people of Croton to set up a cult of the Muses, in order to preserve harmony in their community.[106] Pythagorean Numa, with the same aim in mind, met the goddesses at the grove of the Camenae just outside the Porta Capena.[107] Ennius, who also was taught by the Muses,[108] clearly made Numa's meeting with them a significant event: 'Learn that we *Camenae* are those whom they call *Musae*.'[109]

In 189 BC Ennius accompanied the consul M. Fulvius Nobilior on a campaign in Aetolia (north-west Greece).[110] When the city of Ambracia, once the royal residence of Pyrrhus, surrendered after a long siege, Fulvius removed all the paintings and bronze and marble statues—among them statues of the nine Muses with Hercules—and carried them off to Rome as booty, to be displayed in his triumph and thereafter at his house.[111] The triumph, a very

[104] Ennius *Annales* 113 FRL = Varro *Ling.* 7.42 (*olli respondit suauis sonus Egeriai*); cf. Ov. *Fast.* 3.289–94; 4.669–70.

[105] Plut. *Num.* 8.6 (n. 67 above), cf. 13.1 on what he learned 'from Egeria and the Muses'.

[106] Iamblichus *Vita Pyth.* 45, 50.

[107] Livy 1.21.3; Ov. *Met.* 15.481–4; *Fast.* 4.669; Juv. 3.12–18; Plut. *Numa* 13.2.

[108] Varro *Sat. Men.* 356 Astbury = Nonius 125L: *discipulus … Ennius Musarum.* For the nature of their teaching see Hardie (2004), esp. 35–6 on their relevance to Pythagorean thinking.

[109] Ennius *Annales* 487 FRL = Varro *Ling.* 7.26; the translation is that of Hinds (1998) 59, though he accepts the unnecessary emendation *nosces* ('You will learn…'). See Jackson and Tomasco (2009) 157–64 for a full doxography of interpretations: editors put the line in Book 1 (the Muses addressing the poet), or in Book 7 (polemic against Naevius), or in Book 15 (the Muses addressing Fulvius Nobilior), but it seems to me that the obvious place is in Book 2, immediately after line 113 (n. 104 above, Egeria addressing Numa). There was certainly someone in the literary tradition who made Egeria herself one of the Camenae/Muses (D.H. *AR* 2.60.5, *ἕτεροι δὲ οὐ νύμφην ἀλλὰ τῶν Μουσῶν μίαν*): so why not Ennius?

[110] Cic. *Arch.* 27; *Tusc.* 1.3; Walther (2016) 60–82.

[111] Livy 38.9.13, 43.6, 43.11 (*spolia eius urbis ante currum laturus et fixurus in postibus suis*); cf. Cic. *Arch.* 27 for the Muses.

lavish affair, took place at the end of 187 BC;[112] subsequently, we must assume, the Muses adorned Fulvius' forecourt, where Ennius and other well-wishers would await admission for the morning *salutatio*.[113]

Such conspicuous ostentation was opposed by Marcus Cato, whose combative censorship in 184 aimed at restoring traditionally austere values against the Roman aristocracy's growing taste for luxury.[114] He may have blamed the current trend on Greek influence, of which he certainly disapproved. A passage happens to survive from his book of advice to his son:[115]

> I shall speak about those Greeks in their proper place, Marcus my son, as to what I know as a result of my inquiries at Athens, and I shall demonstrate what benefit there is in looking into their literature, but not in studying it thoroughly. Theirs is an utterly vile and unruly race; and consider that this is said by a prophet: when that race gives us its literature it will corrupt everything.

Presumably that included Pythagoras and Pythagoreans.

Every censorship set the moral tone for five years, the *lustrum* period before the next census. In 181 BC, while Cato's uncompromising standards were still in force, the tomb of Numa Pompilius was discovered below the Janiculum. It contained carefully preserved texts of Pythagorean lore.[116] Some people read them, and when word got out the urban praetor consulted the Senate and had the books burnt in public 'because they were philosophical writings', 'and it was not appropriate that they should be read and preserved'.[117]

[112] Livy 39.5.13–17; Degrassi (1947) 554 (*a.d. X k. Ian.*). For the notorious expense of his votive games, held over a ten-day period the following year, see Livy 39.5.7–10, 22.1–2; 40.44.10.

[113] Livy 38.43.11 (*in postibus suis*); for triumphal *spolia* in the *uestibulum* see Virg. *Aen.* 7.177–86; Plin. *HN* 35.7; Suet. *Nero* 38.2; Wiseman (2008) 283–4.

[114] See Cato *Orat.* fr. 98 ORF (Priscian *Inst.* 2.367 Keil), deploring the use of divine statues taken as booty being used as domestic furniture; also Cic. *De or.* 2.256 and *Tusc.* 1.3 for his criticism of Nobilior.

[115] Plin. *HN* 29.14 (trans. Astin (1978) 171).

[116] Varro *De cultu deorum* fr. 3 Cardauns = Augustine *De ciu. D.* 7.34.2; Livy 40.29.3–14; Val. Max. 1.1.12; Plin. *HN* 13.84–7 (citing *FRHist* 6 F 35, 9 F 14, 10 F 3, 25 F 9a and 58); Plut. *Numa* 22.4–5 (citing *FRHist* 25 F 9b); Festus 178L; Lactantius *Diu. inst.* 1.22.5–6; *De vir. ill.* 3.2; Augustine *De ciu. D.* 7.34.3–4. The most reliable source is likely to be Cassius Hemina (*FRHist* 6 F 35), writing only about thirty years after the events; for thorough discussion see Pailler (1988) 623–67, Gruen (1990) 158–70, Briscoe (2013) 177–80; Pontiggia (2023) 128–31 provides full bibliography.

[117] Cassius Hemina *FRHist* 5 F 35 = Plin. *HN* 13.86 (*eosque combustos a Q. Petillio praetore quia philosophiae scripta essent*); Livy 40.29.12 (*legi seruarique non oportere*).

At the next *lustrum* (179 BC), Ennius' patron Fulvius was himself one of the censors. His activity in that office was recorded with approval centuries later for its encouragement of literary education:[118]

> The famous Fulvius Nobilior used his censorial funding to create a temple to 'Hercules of the Muses' in the Circus Flaminius. What led him to it was not just his own literary culture and the friendship of a great poet, but the fact that when in command in Greece he had learned that Herakles was a Μουσαγέτης, which means comrade and leader of the Muses. Fulvius was the first to consecrate the nine Muses' statues, taken from Ambracia, under the protection of the strongest of divinities, as is the case now. He did it because they needed to be helped and honoured by each other's resources—the peace of the Muses by the protection of Hercules, the bravery of Hercules by the voice of the Muses.

Ten years after their removal, the looted statues were now more properly dedicated in a public temple, and the anti-Catonian message was clear enough: Greek culture, civilising Rome, was safe under Roman protection.

But the Muses were also the Camenae, who taught Numa. Fulvius made a point of that, deliberately associating his new temple with their ancient cult site outside the Porta Capena:[119]

> Numa had made a small bronze shrine for them, which later was struck by lightning and placed in the [nearby] temple of Honos and Virtus. Fulvius Nobilior transferred it to the temple of Hercules, which is why it is called the temple of Hercules and the Muses.

What they taught Numa, the reasons for all his religious innovations, had been documented in the Pythagorean volumes recovered from his coffin two years

[118] Eumenius *Pro instaurandis scholis* (= *Pan. Lat.* 9) 7.3: *aedem Herculis Musarum in circo Flaminio Fuluius ille Nobilior ex pecunia censoria fecit, non id modo secutus, quod ipse litteris et summi poetae amicitia duceretur, sed quod in Graecia cum esset imperator acceperat Heraclem Musagetem esse, id est comitem ducemque Musarum, idemque primus nouem signa Camenarum ex Ambraciensi oppido translata sub tutela fortissimi numinis consecrauit, ut res est, quia mutuis opibus et praemiis iuuari ornarique deberent: Musarum quies defensione Herculis et uirtus Herculis uoce Musarum.* Full details and discussion in Walther (2016) 208–47.

[119] Serv. Dan. on Virg. *Aen.* 1.8: *his Numa aediculam aeneam breuem fecerat, quam postea de caelo tactam et in aede Honoris et Virtutis conlocatam Fuluius Nobilior in aedem Herculis transtulit, unde aedes Herculis et Musarum appellatur.* The Honos and Virtus temple was *ad portam Capenam* (Livy 25.40.3; 29.11.13), next to the sacred spring of the Camenae (Symmachus *Ep.* 1.29.1).

earlier.[120] The Senate had decided that they should not be made public, but that didn't stop Fulvius from quoting from them.

7. Goodbye Pythagoras

Evidence that he did so comes from John Lydus in sixth-century Constantinople, defending himself against criticism for his use of pagan authors:[121]

> To be engaged with the study of the stars is not incompatible with religious piety. On the contrary, one may contemplate through his works themselves the all-wise providence of the ineffable father of all things, and marvel that the human soul, following god's lead as far as it can, is able to discuss the subject of the heavens. That is what Fulvius says, quoting from the works of Numa.

Of course Lydus had not read Fulvius at first hand, but that is no reason for dismissing what he says.[122] He was quite capable of garbling what he found in his sources, especially when they were citing sources of their own, but he did not invent material out of nothing.[123] And this defence of astronomy is entirely relevant: it was a subject taught by the Muses,[124] and necessary for Numa, who introduced the twelve-month lunisolar system on which the Roman calendar

[120] Varro *De cultu deorum* fr. 3 Cardauns = Augustine *De ciu. D.* 7.34.2 (*ubi sacrorum institutorum scriptae erant causae … cur quidque in sacris fuerit institutum*); cf. also Piso *FRHist* 9 F 14 = Plin. *HN* 13.87 (*libros septem iuris pontificii, totidem Pythagoricos*).

[121] Lydus *De ostentis* 16 Wachsmuth: *οὐδὲ ⟨τὸ⟩ περὶ τὴν τ⟨ῶν ἀστέρων θεωρίαν ἀ⟩πασχολοῦν ⟨ἔξω θεοσεβ⟩είας ⟨ποι⟩εῖ· ἀλλ' ἔτι μᾶλλον τῆν ⟨πάνσο⟩φον ἔστι διὰ ⟨τῶν ἔργ⟩ων αὐτῶν θεωρῆσαι πρόνοιαν τ⟨οῦ πάντ⟩ων ἀρρήτου ⟨πατρ⟩ὸς, ⟨καὶ θ⟩αυμάσ⟨αι τὴν ψυ⟩χὴν ἀνθρώπου δύνασθαι ἡγουμένου θεο⟨ῦ καὶ⟩ περὶ τὼν οὐρανίων, ὡς δυνατόν, διαλέγ⟨εσθαι. ταῦ⟩τα μὲν οὖν* **Φ***ούλβιός φ⟨ησιν, ἐκ τ⟩ῶν τοῦ* **Ν***ουμᾶ ἱ⟨στορήσας.⟩*

[122] As does Rüpke (2006) 505 = (2012) 165–6 ('we can be sure that the inserted quotation of Numa is apocryphal, and the attribution to Fulvius must be regarded as pseudepigraphical'); contrast Boyancé (1955) = (1972) 227–52, carefully exploring the intellectual world it presupposes.

[123] For Lydus' method of work see Wiseman (2025) 88–93. He used Varro extensively in his *De mensibus* (references in Maas (1992) 137), and Varro used Iunius Gracchanus, who in turn used Fulvius (n. 127 below). See Rüpke (2012) 156: 'The simplest explanation is to assume that Varro consulted only Iunius Gracchanus' treatise (*De potestatibus*?), and Iunius quoted Fulvius for his etymologies.'

[124] See for instance Aratus *Phaen.* 16–18; Virg. *Geo.* 2.475–8; Manilius 3.1–3.

was based.[125] Fulvius now made that system a conspicuous feature of his temple.

What we know is that he 'set up a calendar in the temple of Hercules of the Muses',[126] and that it contained the following information:[127]

(1) Rome's original calendar was of ten months;
(2) Romulus named the first two months *Martius* and *Aprilis* after his father Mars and his mother's ancestress Venus, who is Ap(h)rodite;[128]
(3) Romulus named the third and fourth months after the elder and younger citizens, *maiores* and *iuniores*, who defended the state respectively by good counsel and warlike vigour;
(4) Romulus named the remaining months numerically from fifth to tenth;
(5) Numa changed the calendar to twelve months (355 days), adding *Ianuarius* and *Februarius*, named from the first god and the gods of the underworld, respectively;[129]
(6) intercalation was introduced by the consul Manius Acilius 'in the 562nd year from the foundation, at the start of the Aetolian war'.[130]

The Aetolian war, as finished by Fulvius himself, was what had brought the Muses and Hercules together in the temple that now housed Numa's calendar.

It is unnecessary to suppose that what happens to be cited from Fulvius' text is all there ever was,[131] and it has long been recognised that the best

[125] As stated by Fulvius (Censorinus *De die natali* 20.4); see also Livy 1.19.5–6 (taught by Egeria); Ov. *Fast.* 3.151–4 (taught by Pythagoras or Egeria); Macrob. *Sat.* 1.13.1 (taught by Greeks).

[126] Macrob. *Sat.* 1.12.16: *Fuluius Nobilior in fastis quos in aede Herculis Musarum posuit*. Despite what is sometimes assumed, there is no reason to suppose that *fasti* here meant a magistrate list (*fasti consulares*): the primary sense of the word was a list of the *dies fasti* and *nefasti* in the Roman year.

[127] Fulvius' fragments are collected and discussed by Rüpke (2006) 494–506 = (2012) 156–66: Varro *Ling.* 6.33–4 (*ut Fuluius scribit et Iunius … ut idem dicunt scriptores*); Censorinus *De die natali* 20.2 (*magis Iunio Gracchano et Fuluio et Varroni et Suetonio aliisque credendum*), 20.4 (*siue a Numa, ut ait Fuluius, siue ut Iunius a Tarquinio*), 22.9 (*Fuluius et Iunius auctores sunt*); Macrob. *Sat.* 1.12.16 (n. 126 above), 1.13.20–1 (*Fuluius autem … sed hoc arguit Varro*).

[128] In Fulvius' time the goddess's name would not be aspirated in Latin: compare for instance *CIL* I².581 = *ILLRP* 511 (the *SC de Bacanalibus* of 186 BC).

[129] Varro *Ling.* 6.34 (*a principe deo … ab diis inferis*); cf. Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.67 (*principem in sacrificando Ianum esse uoluerant*); Ov. *Fast.* 1.43 (*at Numa nec Ianum nec auitas praeterit umbras*).

[130] Macrob. *Sat.* 1.13.21: *ab urbe condita anno quingentesimo sexagesimo secundo, inito mox bello Aetolico*.

[131] As assumed by Rüpke (2006) 507–8 = (2012) 166–7 ('There is no trace of a proper commentary'); but an argument from silence can hardly apply to such very fragmentary evidence.

parallel for it is the elaborate annotated calendar that Verrius Flaccus put up in Praeneste two centuries later.[132] But it was not cut into stone like the *fasti Praenestini*: before Verrius' time the norm was for calendars to be painted on a wall.[133] Gradually fading pigment would explain why the Roman antiquarian tradition seems to have known Fulvius' text only from what Iunius 'Gracchanus' said about it in the late second century BC.[134] No doubt it was illegible by the time Varro was writing.

The temple was restored, and surrounded by a new portico at a higher level, by L. Marcius Philippus after his triumph in 33 BC.[135] The unique layout of the building, detectable from fragments of the Severan marble plan,[136] offers further evidence about the size and scope of Fulvius' calendar (Fig. 1).

The podium on which the temple stood projected a long way in front of the pronaos and access steps, in the form of two long 'arms' enclosing a sort of courtyard.[137] The overall length of the podium was about forty-eight metres, but each side of it was punctuated by six deep rectangular niches, each about four metres wide, and there were four niches of the same size along each side of the 'courtyard' between the projecting arms. The best explanation is that

[132] Already noted by Boyancé (1955) 174 n. 1 = (1972) 229 n. 3; for the *fasti Praenestini* see Degrassi (1963) 107–45.

[133] Rüpke (2006) 492–3 = (2012) 155: e.g., the *fasti Antiates maiores* of c. 70 BC (Degrassi (1963) 1–28).

[134] See n. 127 above; Iunius' date is inferred from Plin. *HN* 33.36 (friend of C. Gracchus) and Cic. *Leg.* 3.49 (contemporary with Atticus' father). There would be less reason to keep the temple in good order after the sudden end of the family's political influence: 'M. Fulvius Flaccus (*cos.* 125 BC) and his two sons perished with the younger Gracchus; and no Fulvius ever afterwards was consul at Rome' (Syme (2016) 182).

[135] Suet. *Aug.* 29.5; cf. Ov. *Fast.* 6.799–804. For full details and discussion of the material and textual evidence see Coarelli (1997) 452–84, De Stefano (2014a and b), Heslin (2015) 197–254.

[136] *FUR* frr. 31bb–gg, whence Heslin (2015) 200–1 fig. 75.

[137] For a plausible explanation see Heslin (2015) 214: 'The arms stretch out in front of the temple, where the statues of the Muses in all likelihood originally stood. There are four places on each side where the arms widen and where a statue could have been placed. This would account for eight Muses, and the ninth would have been placed on the circular podium in the middle' (249 n. 83 for Calliope as the likely recipient of special treatment). A smaller extension behind the temple featured a semicircular exedra, apparently with a corridor allowing direct access from within the circular *cella* (*FUR* fr. 31ee; Heslin (2015) 212); this seating area would be appropriate to a *Mousaion* (Coarelli (1997) 484). *Pace* Heslin (2015) 213–14, the podium is unlikely to be an innovation by Philippus: the temple that stood on it was evidently Fulvian, to judge by the surviving blocks of *cappellaccio* in its circular wall.

the twelve outer niches, directly accessible to the public, housed Fulvius' calendar for the twelve months of the year (Fig. 2).[138]

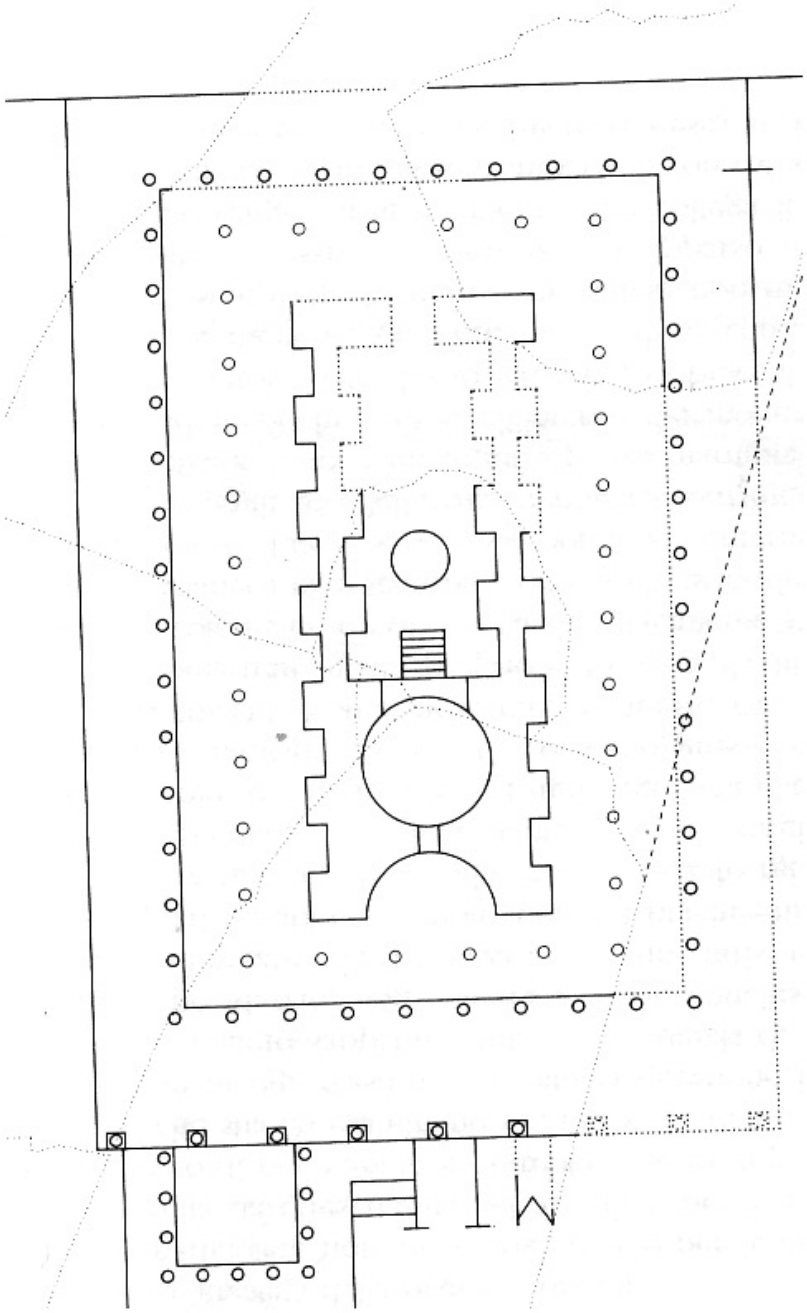

Fig. 1. Plan of the temple of Hercules Musarum,
as reconstructed from the fragments of the Severan marble plan
(Coarelli (1997) 477 fig. 112) © Edizioni Quasar di Severino Tognon s.r.l.

[138] Coarelli (1997) 480–2; cf. Heslin (2015) 214. The niches would have needed wooden covers to protect the painted text; or perhaps there was an external portico, as suggested by Heslin (2015) 216–17.

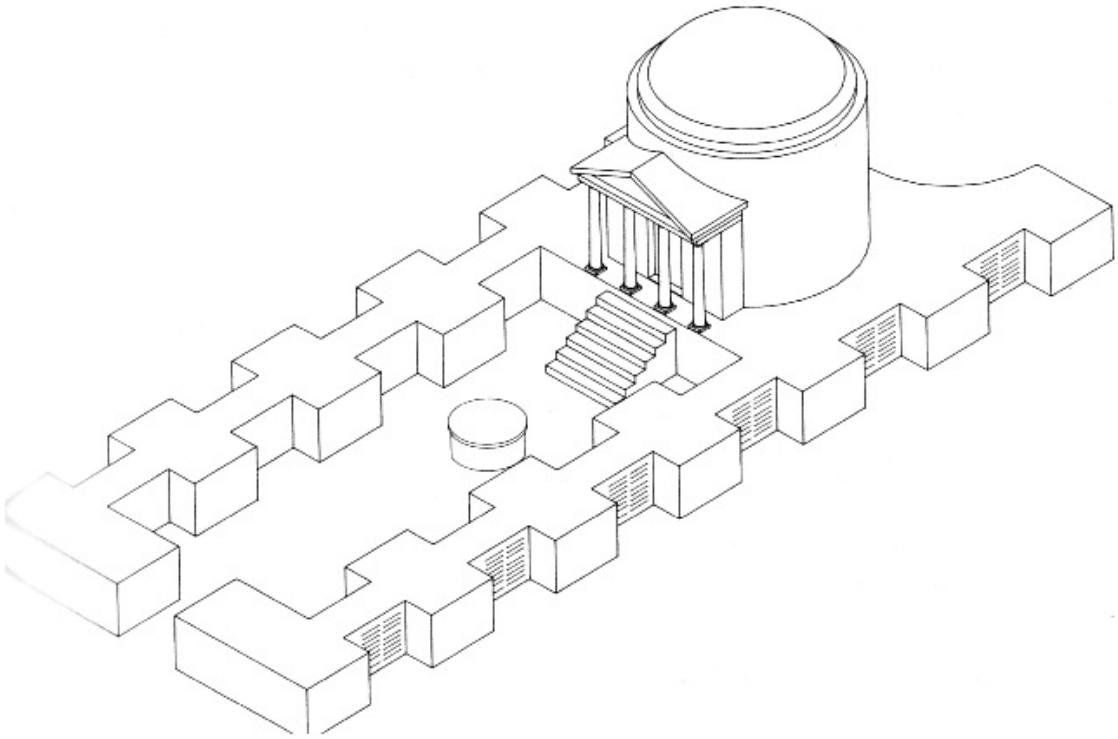

Fig. 2. Suggested layout of Fulvius' calendar *fasti*
(Coarelli (1997) 479 fig. 113) © Edizioni Quasar di Severino Tognon s.r.l.

The other eight niches, in an enclosed space around the altar, perhaps contained more esoteric information. According to Dionysius, Numa 'committed the whole of his religious legislation to writing, and divided it into eight parts for the eight categories of divine service'.[139] That legislation was written in the books burnt by the urban praetor in 181 BC,[140] and if they also contained the reasons for Numa's innovations, as Varro believed,[141] the forecourt of Fulvius' temple would be an appropriate place to record his consultations with the Camenae, whose ancient *aedicula* was preserved within.[142]

[139] D.H. *AR* 2.63.4: *περιλαβὼν δὲ ἅπασαν τὴν περὶ τὰ θεῖα νομοθεσίαν γραφαῖς διεῖλεν εἰς ὀκτὼ μοίρας, ὅσαι τῶν ἱερῶν ἦσαν αἱ συμμορίαι*. Dionysius lists the eight categories as the *curiones*, the *flamines*, the *celeres*, the augurs, the Vestal virgins, the *Salii*, the *fetiales*, and the *pontifices* (*AR* 2.64–73).

[140] The books contained *Numae decreta* (Tuditanus *FRHist* 10 F 3, and probably also Varro *Antiquitates humanae* fr. 6.3 Mirsch); see Plin. *HN* 13.87, with Richardson (forthcoming) for the necessary emendation *<idem> ipse Varro*.

[141] Varro *De cultu deorum* fr. 3 Cardauns = Augustine *De ciu. D.* 7.34.2 (n. 120 above). His information may have come from Fulvius via Iunius Gracchanus (n. 123 above).

[142] Serv. Dan. on Virg. *Aen.* 1.8 (n. 119 above); Hardie (2002) 199.

Those twenty niches, about eighty metres' width of wall, could have contained a substantial amount of material—not surprisingly for a commentary on the Roman calendar, which must already have been evolving for over three hundred years when Fulvius was writing.[143] And when Fulvius was writing, that long expanse of time had just been measured. He evidently used *ab urbe condita* dating,[144] which presupposed the sequence of seven monarchs and a king Numa who must have reigned long before Pythagoras came to Italy.[145] Fulvius certainly cited Numa's books,[146] and Numa's books were certainly Pythagorean, but the chronology of Pythagoras was a complication Fulvius didn't need; like his friend Ennius, he probably just ignored it.

It was not only the fading pigment that caused Fulvius' work to be forgotten. Cato's *Origines* soon provided Rome with an authoritative account of its early history in a pointedly Italian context, no doubt intended to counter the influence of Hellenising aristocrats like Fulvius Nobilior.[147] Cato dated the foundation to 753/2 BC;[148] his younger contemporary Polybius put it a year later.[149] The seven-king sequence was now a historical datum, so the work of Numa could not have been Pythagorean. The evidence that made them so had been destroyed in 181 BC, on Cato's own censorial watch.

8. Historical Nevertheless?

Cato and Polybius were Cicero's main sources for the second book of *De republica*,[150] and Scipio's tribute to Polybius' careful chronology is precisely the context of Manilius' question about Pythagoras.[151] Polybius had evidently noted the tradition of Numa as a Pythagorean, and shown how the chronology

[143] He may, for instance, have noted the annual *dies natalis* of each temple and cult-site, as suggested by Rüpke (2011) 99–102.

[144] Macrob. *Sat.* 1.13.21 (n. 130 above); since M'. Acilius Glabrio was consul in 191 BC, Fulvius evidently assumed a foundation date of 754 BC.

[145] See above, nn. 95–6.

[146] Lydus *De ostentis* 16 Wachsmuth (n. 121 above).

[147] His first book was on the *res gestae* of the Roman kings, the second and third on the origins of other Italian cities, whence the title of the work (Nep. *Cato* 3.2).

[148] Cato *FRHist* 5 F 13a = D.H. *AR* 1.74.2: '432 years after the Trojan War,' dated by Dionysius, using Eratosthenes' system, to the first year of the seventh Olympiad. Cf. F 8 = Servius on Virg. *Aen.* 6.760 (*postea Albani omnes reges Siluii dicti sunt*), confirmation that he regarded the Alban king-list as historical.

[149] Pol. 6.11a.2 (D.H. *AR* 1.74.3), cf. Cic. *Rep.* 2.18 (*id quod Graecorum inuestigatur annalibus*).

[150] Cic. *Rep.* 2.1–3 (*Catonis hoc senis est … ut ille solebat, ita nunc mea repetet oratio populi Romani originem*), 2.27 (*sequamur enim potissimum Polybium nostrum*); cf. also 4.3 for Polybius.

[151] Cic. *Rep.* 2.27 (n. 2 above).

disproved it. How he dealt with the question may be inferred from what Scipio says in Book 5:[152]

> ['… there was no function so] proper for a king as the administration of justice. That embraced the interpretation of law, because private citizens used to ask the kings to rule on legal questions. … In my view Numa, among the Romans, adhered most closely to this ancient system, which was that of the kings of Greece. The others, though they did perform this function too, nevertheless spent a large part of their time waging war and dealing with the legal problems involved; whereas the long peace which this city enjoyed under Numa gave birth to its laws and religion. For he drafted the laws which, as you know, are still in force.'

That is, Numa did learn from Greece,[153] but from its ancient kings, not from any specific philosopher.

We hear about the admirable rule of kings (before the inevitable slide into tyranny) in Polybius' digression on types of constitution.[154] But the tradition on Numa did not present him as a familiar type, the wise king dispensing justice. On the contrary: he was a one-off, a religious innovator, a holy man who talked with goddesses, perhaps even a magician.[155] The tradition was clear and coherent in its own terms. Only the chronology refuted it—and as we have seen (section 5 above), the chronology was an artificial system created only two generations before Polybius' time.

So there is, after all, a possible answer to the question that so puzzled Manilius in *De republica* Book 2. Yes, Numa Pompilius was a pupil of Pythagoras and the Romans' religious lawgiver; but he was not a king.

What happened when the Tarquins were expelled and the kingship abolished? Since the king had been responsible for religious cults,[156] the newly

[152] Cic. *Rep.* 5.3 (trans. Rudd (1998) 81–2): *<nihil esse tam> regale quam explanationem aequitatis, in qua iuris erat interpretatio, quod ius priuati petere solebant a regibus … et mihi quidem uidetur Numa noster maxime tenuisse hunc morem ueterem Graeciae regum. nam ceteri, etsi hoc quoque munere fungebantur, magnam tamen partem bella gesserunt et eorum iura coluerunt; illa tamen diuturna pax Numae mater huic urbi iuris et religionis fuit, qui legum etiam scriptor fuisset, quas scitis extare.*

[153] That was not the line Cicero took in Book 2: there, he made Manilius express himself pleased that Roman culture came 'not by importing foreign expertise but through our own native qualities' (Cic. *Rep.* 2.29, trans. Rudd (1998) 44); cf. *Tusc.* 4.4 (*ne ea quae repperisse ipsi putamur aliunde didicisse uideamur*).

[154] Pol. 6.6.6–7.5, cf. 6.5.1 ('based on Plato and some other philosophers').

[155] Plut. *Num.* 15.2–5, cf. 8.5 (quoting Timon) on Pythagorean *γοητεία*; Wiseman (2008) 155–66.

[156] D.H. *AR* 2.13.1; 4.74.4; Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 15.4. Hence the creation of the *rex sacrorum* to carry out basic formalities (D.H. *AR* 5.1.4); he was first in the ceremonial *ordo sacerdotum*

emancipated city had to make sure that the goodwill of the gods was preserved. The great Capitoline temple to Jupiter, Juno and Minerva was dedicated in the year of the expulsion, not by a king but by a *pontifex*.[157] New temples were built, to Saturn at the foot of the Capitol,[158] to Mercury at the turning-point of the Circus Maximus,[159] to Ceres, Liber and Libera just above the starting-gates of the Circus,[160] to Castor and Pollux in the Forum,[161] perhaps also to Matuta and Fortuna at the river harbour.[162] And along with the new cults, annual festivals were instituted at great expense.[163]

In that context, the tradition on Numa as a disciple of Pythagoras makes perfect sense:[164]

> He designated many precincts to divinities previously not honoured, setting up many altars and temples; he assigned festivals to each of them, appointed priests to take charge of their ceremonies and rituals, and

(Festus 198–200L; Serv. Dan. on Virg. *Aen.* 2.2), but forbidden to hold office or address the People (Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 63).

[157] M. Horatius Pulvillus (Cic. *Dom.* 139; Val. Max. 5.10.1; Seneca *Cons. Marc.* 13.1); Cicero's evidence, addressed to the *pontifices* themselves, clearly outweighs the mutually contradictory stories that made Horatius a consul (Pol. 3.22.1, colleague of L. Brutus; Livy 2.4.6–8, colleague of P. Valerius; D.H. *AR* 5.35.3 and Tac. *Hist.* 3.72.2, *iterum consul*).

[158] Dedicated c. 497 BC (D.H. *AR* 6.1.4: other sources give slightly different dates); the archaeological evidence is compatible with an early fifth-century context (Hopkins (2016) 143).

[159] Dedicated in 495 BC (Livy 2.21.7, 27.5–6); for the site see Ov. *Fast.* 5.669; Apuleius *Met.* 1.8.2.

[160] Dedicated in 493 BC (D.H. *AR* 6.94.3); cf. Vitruvius 3.3.5 ('Etruscan' style, terracotta sculpture), Plin. *HN* 35.154 (archaic inscription naming terracotta artists Damophilos and Gorgasos), Cic. *Balb.* 55 (*sacra … adsumpta de Graecia*, with Greek priestesses).

[161] Dedicated in 484 BC (Livy 2.20.12, 42.5); for the ample archaeological evidence see Hopkins (2016) 137–46.

[162] The twin temples are dated to the early fifth century BC (e.g., Hopkins (2016) 146–52), so in this case the material evidence does not fit well with the literary tradition: they were supposedly founded by Servius Tullius (D.H. *AR* 4.27.7; Ov. *Fast.* 6.479–80 and 569) and rebuilt by Camillus (Livy 5.19.6, 23.7).

[163] As repeatedly noted by Dionysius: see *AR* 5.36.4 (*θυσίας ἀπέδοσαν τοῖς θεοῖς ἀπὸ χρημάτων πολλῶν*, 506 BC), 6.1.4 (*δημοτελεῖς ἀναδειχθῆναι … ἑορτάς τε καὶ θυσίας*, 497 BC), 6.10.1 (*θυσίας τε μεγάλας ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἐπιτελέσειν χρημάτων καὶ ἀγῶνας καταστήσεσθαι πολυτελεῖς*, 496 BC), 6.13.4 (*θυσίαι τε πολυτελεῖς*, 496 BC), 6.17.2 (*ἀγῶνάς τε καὶ θυσίας τοῖς θεοῖς ἀπὸ τετταράκοντα ταλάντων*, 496 BC). Those mentioned include the *Liberalia* (17 March), *Cerialia* (19 April) and *Saturnalia* (17 December).

[164] D.H. *AR* 2.63.2: *πολλὰ μὲν ἀποδεικνὺς τεμένη τοῖς μήπω τιμῶν τυγχάνουσι θεοῖς, πολλοὺς δὲ ἑορτάς τε ἑκάστῳ αὐτῶν ἀπονέμων καὶ τοὺς ἐπιμελησομένους αὐτῶν ἱερεῖς καθιστὰς ἁγνείας τε καὶ θρησκείας καὶ καθαρμοὺς καὶ τὰς ἄλλας θεραπείας καὶ τιμὰς πάνυ πολλὰς νομοθετῶν*.

enacted numerous laws about purifications and other honorific observances.

A hypothetical late-sixth-century Numa, legislating for a free republic, would have to take account of social tensions within the citizen body.[165] New priesthoods would give honour and authority to the baronial *gentes* that had presumably organised the coup against Tarquin; for the common people, on the other hand, changing the relationship with the gods might have appeared more dangerous than reassuring. They needed divine authority, which could be obtained from Egeria and the Muses; and to make sure the message got through, the legislator could take personal control of the new festivals and the tales that were told there.[166]

The early material Plutarch was able to find on Numa as a Pythagorean was at least as appropriate to a lawgiver of the new republic as it was to a king who succeeded the city's original founder. The latter scenario was the one Plutarch had to use, because the sequence of seven kings, with Numa as the second, was now set in stone. To his credit, he knew the chronology was unreliable,[167] but no alternative now existed. Nor had it existed even for Cicero and Livy, who dogmatically rejected the idea of a Pythagorean Numa, or for Dionysius, who didn't know what to say about it.[168]

The modern investigator is in no such bind. Once it is recognised that the sequence of seven kings is as fictional as the Alban dynasty (indeed, created for the same purpose), a late-sixth-century Numa becomes more easily imaginable, and more easily recognisable in the sources' notion of him as the 'founder of a city based on laws'.[169]

Fabius Pictor was a man fluent in Greek (the Senate's choice as Rome's envoy to Delphi),[170] and will certainly have read, or heard, the authors whose views on Numa the Pythagorean were still accessible to Plutarch three centuries later. Like every Roman of his time, he knew Pythagoras as the wisest of the Greeks.[171] But did he know when exactly Pythagoras lived? Whether it was ignorance or carelessness, his choice of Rome's great lawgiver as the

[165] Such as those that soon led to the 'first secession'; there was even a tradition that dated the institution of plebeian tribunes to immediately after Tarquin's expulsion (Columella 1.3.10; Pomponius in *Digest* 1.2.2.3).

[166] Plut. *Num.* 8.2 and 6 (nn. 65 and 67 above): *ἐπηγάγετο τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν θεῶν βοήθειαν, τὰ μὲν πολλὰ θυσίαις καὶ πομπαῖς καὶ χορείαις, ἃς αὐτὸς ὠργίασε καὶ κατέστησεν. … τῷ δὲ Νομᾷ δρᾶμα θεᾶς τινος ἢ νύμφης ὀρείας ἔρως ἦν … καὶ κοιναὶ μετὰ Μουσῶν διατριβαί.*

[167] Plut. *Num.* 1.1, 1.4, *Cam.* 22.1 (nn. 21, 24, and 25 above).

[168] Cic. *Rep.* 2.28–9; Livy 1.18.2–4; D.H. *AR* 2.59.1 (nn. 4, 6, and 10 above).

[169] Livy 1.19.1; Virg. *Aen.* 6.810–11; n. 97 above.

[170] Livy 22.57.5, 23.11.1 (216 BC).

[171] Plin. *HN* 34.26; Plut. *Numa* 8.10 (the statue in the Comitium).

successor to Romulus as king created the chronological dilemma that later authors had to deal with.

We shall never know exactly how or why the books of Numa came to light in 181 BC,[172] just as we shall never know exactly what it was about them that made the urban praetor decide they should be destroyed.[173] The Senate trusted the praetor's judgement,[174] but did not condemn the books as forgeries; on the contrary, the issue was whether or not Numa would have wanted them made public.[175] If Numa was a late-sixth-century lawgiver and not a late-eighth-century monarch, the books may even have been genuine, his own commentaries on the legislation. Certainly Fulvius Nobilior treated them as genuine when he planned his great temple of the Muses two years later, and even if, following the new orthodoxy,[176] he took the author of the books to be Numa 'who reigned at Rome', he had no reason to specify a date.[177]

9. Numa *pontifex*

Among the early Roman material Plutarch was able to find in his sources (section 3 above) was otherwise unattested information about the Geganii, a very prominent patrician family that disappeared after the mid-fourth century BC:[178] Gegania the wife of Servius Tullius is mentioned only in Plutarch's essay on the fortune of the Romans;[179] Gegania the mother of a Pinarius under the last Tarquin is mentioned only in his *synkrisis* of Lycurgus and Numa.[180]

[172] Varro *De cultu deorum* fr. 3 Cardauns = Augustine *De ciu. D.* 7.34.2; Livy 40.29.3–10 (contradictory accounts of their discovery).

[173] Livy 40.29.11: *cum animum aduertisset pleraque dissoluendarum religionum esse.* Cf. Gruen (1990) 170: 'Burning of the books represents renunciation not of Numa but of Numa's Hellenism'.

[174] Livy 40.29.13: *senatus censuit satis habendum quod praetor iusiurandum polliceretur.*

[175] Varro *De cultu deorum* fr. 3 Cardauns = Augustine *De ciu. D.* 7.34.2: *Numae mortuo senatus adsensus est.*

[176] As implied by the *a.u.c.* date at Macrob. *Sat.* 1.13.21 (n. 130 above).

[177] Plin. *HN* 13.84 (*Numa qui Romae regnauit*), quoting Cassius Hemina *FRHist* 6 F 35.

[178] Supposedly one of the Alban *gentes* admitted by Tullus Hostilius (Livy 1.30.2; D.H. *AR* 3.29.7); Münzer (1920) 134 = (1999) 413. Geganii are named as consuls in 492, 447, 443, 440, and 437 BC, and as 'consular tribunes' in 378 and 367 BC; nothing thereafter.

[179] Plut. *Mor.* 323c–d = *De fort. Rom.* 10 (Valerius Antias *FRHist* 25 F 12); cf. D.H. *AR* 4.7.4 for a tradition that made Tarquinius Priscus' wife not Tanaquil but Gegania.

[180] Plut. *Comp. Lycurgus and Numa* 3.7.

More importantly for this enquiry, only Plutarch's life of Numa names the original Vestal Virgins:[181]

> They say that those consecrated by Numa were firstly Gegania and Berenia, secondly Canuleia and Tarpeia, and that Servius [Tullius] established the present-day total by adding two more to the number.

The name 'Berenia' is unparalleled;[182] the Tarpeii, like the Geganii, were a family prominent in the fifth century BC that subsequently died out;[183] and Roman readers would have expected three pairs rather than two, whence the *ad hoc* explanation. So it seems unlikely that the list of names was a late invention. Indeed, if Numa's innovation dates to the late sixth century, replacing the private cult at the king's hearth with a new public responsibility,[184] it could even be an authentic record. The Vestal Virgins were always selected by the *pontifex maximus*,[185] and Numa himself was said to be the first *pontifex*.[186] But if he wasn't a king, on whose authority was he acting?

John Lydus in the sixth century AD may suggest an answer. We know he had read someone (Varro?) who had read someone (Iunius Gracchanus?) who had read Fulvius quoting Numa.[187] And he began his treatise on the Roman magistracies with a very striking assertion: 'That the governing magistrates of the Roman state were originally priests is a fact known to everyone.'[188]

[181] Plut. *Numa* 10.1: *πρῶτον μὲν οὖν ὑπὸ* Νομᾶ *καθιερωθῆναι λέγουσι* Γεγανίαν *καὶ* Βερηνίαν, *δεύτερον δὲ* Κανουληίαν *καὶ* Ταρπηίαν· *ὕστερον δὲ* Σερβίου *δύο προσθέντος ἄλλας τῷ ἀριθμῷ διατηρεῖσθαι μέχρι τῶν χρόνων τούτων τὸ πλῆθος.*

[182] The closest parallels are much later Berieni at Venafrum and Spoletium (*CIL* 10.4929, 11.4797 and 4938).

[183] For Sp. Tarpeius M.f. M.n. Montan(us) Capitolin(us), consul in 454 and supposedly co-opted as *tribunus plebis* in 448, see Degrassi 1947: 24–5 (*Fasti Capitolini*) and Livy 3.65.1; with A. Aternius Varus Fontinalis he fixed the bronze-weight equivalents of fines expressed in oxen and sheep (Cic. *Rep.* 2.60; Festus 270L [*lex Tarpeia*]; Gell. *NA* 11.1.2 [*lex Aternia*]; Ogilvie (1965) 447–8). See also Simylos *BNJ* 840 F 28 (Plut. *Rom.* 17.5, n. 41 above) for a Tarpeia who lived on the Capitol and betrayed it to the Gauls, a story evidently predating that of Romulus' war with Tatius' Sabines.

[184] For the significance of the hearth-goddess in the story-telling of the time, see Promathion *BNJ* 817 F 1 (Plut. *Rom.* 2.5, n. 36 above): she appeared to 'king Tarchetios of Alba' in a dream to prevent him killing the mother of the destined founder of Rome.

[185] Gell. *NA* 1.12.10–14, citing Ateius Capito, an expert on pontificial law (Macrob. *Sat.* 7.13.11).

[186] Plut. *Num.* 9.1 (*καί φασιν αὐτὸν ἕνα τούτων τὸν πρῶτον γεγονέναι*); Zos. 4.36.3.

[187] See above, nn. 123 and 127.

[188] Lydus *Mag.* pref.1: *ἱερέας γενέσθαι τὸ πρὶν τοὺς ὕστερον ἄρχοντας τοῦ* Ῥωμαίων *πολιτεύματος οὐδενὶ τῶν πάντων ἠγνόηται*. He went on to discuss sources, including Varro,

Whatever could have given him that idea? Perhaps an authoritative reference to legislation by Numa in his capacity as *pontifex*.[189]

Such a tradition may also be implied by the subsequent invention of a different Numa, not Pompilius but Marcius, as the first *pontifex*:[190] 'king Numa' would have acted in his own royal capacity, so any reference to a *Numa pontifex* had to be to someone else of the same name. If that was indeed the argument, its premise was false, because 'king Numa' was himself a fictional construct. A better explanation of *Numa pontifex* is therefore available: he was a real historical figure, the pupil of Pythagoras who created the religious structure of the Roman republic.

Why did he call his college of priests *pontifices*? Varro (and Plutarch) knew two explanations, the first of which derived *pontifex* from *potens facere*, 'having executive power'; although implausible etymologically, it seems to imply priests as quasi-magistrates.[191] As for the second, preferred by Varro,[192] Plutarch regarded it as absurd:[193]

> But most authors endorse the quite laughable meaning, that the men were called 'bridge-builders' from the very solemn and ancient rites performed at the bridge, because the Latin for 'bridge' is *pons*.

He then went on to explain that the priests were responsible for the maintenance of the *pons Sublicius*, that demolition of it without permission was sacrilegious, and that its wooden-dowel construction without the use of metal

Sallust's *Historiae* and in particular the lost works of Iunius Gracchanus (nn. 127 and 134 above).

[189] According to Piso *FRHist* 9 F 14 (Plin. *HN* 13.87, n. 120 above), seven of the books of Numa discovered in 181 BC were of *ius pontificium*.

[190] Livy 1.20.5 (*pontificem deinde Numam Marcium Marci filium ex patribus legit eique sacra omnia exscripta exsignataque attribuit*); cf. Tac. *Ann.* 6.11.1 (Numa Marcius as Tullus Hostilius' *praefectus urbi*) with Wiseman (2024a) 29–30 on Tullius Hostilius as a probable late creation. See Plut. *Num.* 5.2, 6.1, 21.3–4 for the supposed kinship of the Marcii with Numa.

[191] Varro *Ling.* 5.83 (*Scaeuola Quintus pontufex maximus dicebat a posse et facere, ut potifices*); Plut. *Numa* 9.1 (ὁ γὰρ δυνατὸς ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων ὀνομάζεται πότηνς); cf. D.H. *AR* 2.73.1 (ἐξουσίαν ἔχοντες … τῶν μεγίστων πραγμάτων κύριοι). Q. Scaevola's opinion was presumably authoritative, drawn from the *ius pontificium*.

[192] Varro *Ling.* 5.83 (*ego a ponte arbitror; nam ab his Sublicius est factus primum*); cf. Serv. Dan. on Virg. *Aen.* 2.166 (*quidam pontifices a ponte Sublicio qui primus Tybri impositus est appellatos tradunt*).

[193] Plut. *Numa* 9.2: οἱ δὲ πλεῖστοι μάλιστα καὶ τὸ γελώμενον τῶν ὀνομάτων δοκιμάζουσιν, ὡς οὐδέν ἀλλ' ἢ γεφυροποιοὺς τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐπικληθέντας ἀπὸ τῶν ποιουμένων περὶ τὴν γέφυραν ἱερῶν, ἁγιωτάτων καὶ παλαιοτάτων ὄντων· πόντεμ γὰρ οἱ Λατῖνοι τὴν γέφυραν ὀνομάζουσιν.

was according to divine instruction.[194] Nevertheless, 'they say that the wooden bridge does not belong in Numa's times'.[195]

There is now important new information about the chronology. A major geoarchaeological coring programme in the Forum Boarium area and on the Tiber island has demonstrated that '[o]ver the course of the sixth century [BC], Rome's fluvial system became unstable, and the river valley began a significant transformation'. Previously, the Tiber bank between the Capitol and the Palatine had been about 100m east of the present line. Then, perhaps as a result of deforestation and consequent erosion in the Tiber's upper catchment area, there was a very fast process of sedimentation: 'nearly 6 m of sediment was deposited beside the older riverbank over the course of the sixth century', resulting in a narrower channel and a faster flow.[196]

At the supposed time of 'king' Numa's reign the Tiber was comparatively wide, slow, and shallow, very probably fordable at dry times of the year.[197] Not so in the time of Pythagorean Numa: 'the conditions that had once facilitated a natural harbour and ford at Rome's shore would have disappeared by the beginning of the republican period'.[198] A passage of Dionysius describes the new situation:[199]

> The Tiber is about four *plethra* [c. 120m] wide and deep enough for large vessels to navigate, and its current is as swift as any and forms large whirlpools. It cannot be crossed on foot except by a bridge, and at that time [463 BC] there was only one, made of timber, which they dismantled in times of war.

It is not hard to imagine why so sudden a change in the nature of Rome's river might require the expertise of one who knew the will of the gods. If that was

[194] Plut. *Numa* 9.3 (*κατὰ δή τι λόγιον*); from Egeria, perhaps?

[195] Plut. *Numa* 9.4 (*οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ξυλίνην τῶν* Νομᾶ *χρόνων ἀπολείπεσθαι λέγουσιν*), whence its attribution to Ancus Marcius (so too Livy 1.33.6)—but king Ancus himself is probably unhistorical (Wiseman 2024a: 29–30).

[196] Brock–Motta–Terrenato (2021) 12–24 (quotations from 17 and 19).

[197] Brock–Motta–Terrenato (2021) 15, cf. 7–8 for earlier arguments.

[198] Brock–Motta–Terrenato (2021) 19–22 ('acutely perceptible to local inhabitants').

[199] D.H. *AR* 9.68.2 (on the city's defences against a combined attack by the Aequi and Volsci): *τὰ δ' ὑπὸ τοῦ* Τεβέριος *τετειχισμένα ποταμοῦ, οὗ τὸ μὲν εὖρός τεττάρων πλέθρων μάλιστα, βάθος δ'οἷόν τε ναυσὶ πλεῖσθαι μεγάλαις, τὸ δὲ ῥεῦμα εἴπερ τι καὶ ἄλλο ὀξύ καὶ δίνας ἐργαζόμενον μεγάλας· ὃν οὐκ ἔνεστι πεζοῖς διελθεῖν εἰ μὴ κατὰ γέφυραν, ἣ ἦν ἐν τῷ τότε χρόνῳ μία ξυλόφρακτος, ἣν ἔλυον ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις*. Since Dionysius' source is unknown, so too is the date to which the present-tense *ἐστι* and *ἔνεστι* could refer.

the reason for Numa's bridge-building *pontifices*,[200] it offers further circumstantial evidence for the hypothesis that Numa the Pythagorean was Rome's religious innovator in the late sixth century BC.

10. The Default Position

I know that some readers will reject this proposal out of hand,[201] and one reason for that may be the sheer inertia of the seven-kings narrative.

In 1989 the *Cambridge Ancient History* presented Momigliano's masterly assessment of the evidence for the Roman kings:[202]

> We do not yet know how the Roman tradition about the monarchic period took shape. This is why we cannot be sure about anything the tradition tells us of the first three successors of Romulus (Numa Pompilius, Tullus Hostilius, Ancus Marcius). We also have great difficulty making up our minds about the events of the last (?) three kings (the two Tarquinii and, between them, Servius Tullius) who, being nearer to the foundation of the Republic, had a better chance of being remembered correctly.

And yet the chronological table at the end of the volume gave the regnal dates of all seven kings as if they were meaningful data.[203] In 2017 the *Atlas of Ancient Rome* did the same in its diachronical treatment of the Forum and Palatine.[204] There are serious historians who even accept the mid-eighth-century date for the foundation (however defined) on which the whole 'seven kings' narrative sequence depends.[205]

[200] Varro *Ling.* 5.83 (n. 192 above): 'the *pons Sublicius* was first built by them'.

[201] 'Fanciful, not to say arbitrary' was a peer-reviewer's verdict when an earlier version of this article was submitted to another journal.

[202] Momigliano (1989) 87–96, quotation from 90.

[203] Walbank et al. (1989) 647–50. Few readers consulting the chronology will notice the brief introductory warning at 645: 'The Table for the most part reproduces the data of the literary tradition for non-archaeological items. In consequence, the authenticity and/or date of many such items are controversial.' In 1957 Walbank had been more forthright: 'All these dates are of course unhistorical' (n. 2 above).

[204] Carandini and Carafa (2017) 150–6 and 219–23, distinguishing between the 'early kingdom (circa 775/750–616 BC)' and the 'late kingdom (616–509 BC)'; cf. Carandini and Cappelli (2000) for the assumptions on which their chronology depends.

[205] E.g., Grandazzi (1991 = 1997), Ziółkowski (2019). Cf. Bradley (2020) 111: 'If we accept that the reign dates are inauthentic, … it shows that the tradition has been severely corrupted somewhere along the line'—but there is no evidence of any 'tradition' before Fabius Pictor created one.

Fabius' continuous narrative of Rome 'from the foundation' was the first to be made permanent in written form, and it seems that its authority was immediately accepted; of course later authors would differ on details, but the sequence of seven kings, with those names and in that order, was never challenged until Louis de Beaufort did so in 1738. The reason for the challenge was (and is) the gap of 300–550 years between the supposed events and the first narrative of them shortly before 200 BC.

Some comparisons may be helpful. The earliest narrative Herodotus was prepared to guarantee was about 120 years before his own time; for Polybius, narrating anything before the time of his readers' grandparents would be just 'writing hearsay after hearsay'; a contemporary Africanist puts the limit of accurate oral tradition at four or five generations at the most.[206] Self-evidently, therefore, the default position should be that the seven-kings narrative is very unlikely to be authentic, and that the burden of proof is on whoever wants to justify it. But that is not how the question is usually approached.

A recent synthesis of the archaeological and literary evidence for the regal period puts it like this: 'If the modern historian is unable to trace the ways of memory of the ancient Romans, this is his problem and not the proof that their writings are all a pack of lies and inventions.'[207] But what 'ways of memory' *might* there have been? As Momigliano pointed out, with nothing yet to bridge the huge chronological gap between events and narrative, the real facts are still beyond recovery. If the received narrative is to be accepted, it's the believer who has to show why.

In the case of Numa Pompilius, his role as Rome's religious lawgiver is undisputed. The historical issue is whether he was (*a*) the second in the seven-king sequence, as in the post-Fabian historical tradition, therefore ruling about 712–674 BC,[208] or (*b*) a student of Pythagoras called from the school at Croton, as in the poetic and biographical tradition, therefore active at Rome some time in the last quarter of the sixth century BC. Despite its long history as the received version, there is no need to privilege the first alternative (just the opposite, in fact),[209] and this essay has explored reasons for taking the second one seriously.

In particular, it has identified possible 'ways of memory': the lost Greek sources used by Plutarch on Roman origins (section 3 above) and the lost

[206] Herodotus 1.5.3 (Croesus of Lydia); Polybius 4.2.3 (*ἀκοὴν ἐξ ἀκοῆς γράφειν*); Henige (2009) 201 ('a generous maximum period').

[207] Ziółkowski (2019) 19–20; cf. Wiseman (2020) for critical discussion. 'Lies' are irrelevant: Fabius Pictor didn't know what the facts were, and so couldn't lie about them; what he did was create a rationally imagined reconstruction.

[208] To use the Polybian dates as reconstructed by Walbank (1957) 666–8.

[209] A lawgiver known by *praenomen* and *gentilicium* would be very unexpected in the eighth century BC.

Greek playwrights who brought Pythagoras to the Roman festivals (section 4 above). It is of course easy to dismiss an argument that depends on lost or fragmentary sources. Nevertheless, I maintain that the demonstrable existence of such sources, most if not all pre-dating Fabius Pictor and his chronology, now makes it necessary to regard the historicity of Pythagorean Numa as the default position, with the burden of proof on whoever wants to deny it.

T. P. WISEMAN
University of Exeter T.P.Wiseman@exeter.ac.uk

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