ACTA CLASSICA UNIV. SCIENT. DEBRECEN.	LX.	2024.	pp. 27–44.

LUCIUS BRUTUS OF ROME AND CYPSELUS OF CORINTH

by Ádám Rung
Department of Latin, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest
rung.adam@btk.elte.hu
ORCID 0000-0003-0710-7372

Abstract: The story of Lucius Brutus, the founder of the Roman Republic has often been analysed as a historical story, somewhat mythicised, and embellished by literary tropes; and some have also interpreted it as primarily a myth, historicised by a later Roman culture more interested in the exemplary than in the marvelous. Starting out in the latter tradition, this article explores a connection that has been hinted at from antiquity, and has been analysed from the historical and historiographic perspective to some extent, but has not been interpreted in detail as a connection between two *myths:* the numerous parallels that the story of Brutus and the Tarquins, as told by Virgil, Livy and Ovid, has to the saga of the aristocratic Bacchiad and the tyrannical Cypselid families of early Corinth, as told by Herodotus and Aristotle. The newly discovered parallels (and the re-examination of the known ones) between these stories also invite the reader to reflect on the ways they might have evolved, their political and cultural functionality and on the complex interplay between myth and history.
Keywords: Roman myth; Early Rome; Early Corinth; Lucius Brutus; Tarquin dynasty; Bacchiads; Cypselus; Periander; myth and history; Orientalising culture

Much has been written about Rome having *two* foundation stories — but since the golden age of the Romans themselves, it has been remarked now and then[1] that they, in fact, have three. From some points of view, Lucius Brutus, who drove out his own tyrannical maternal kin, the last Tarquin kings, to become the inaugural consul of the Roman Republic, is as much a father figure to the Rome we know now as Aeneas or Romulus. But once we accept his story as an alternative foundation myth of the city instead of an embellished, but basically historical narrative, the ways we may choose to interpret it can also follow that shift, opening up towards comparative cultural and religious studies.[2] In this article, I am re-examining an intertext of the Brutus story as told by Livy, Ovid and Virgil that has already been noted in the framework of historiography, but not as a parallel *myth:* the similarly ancient saga of the two leading families of

1 E. g. Plut. *Publ.* 6,6 and Smith 2007, 285 *ad loc.*

2 Similar experiments so far include Smith 2007, interpreting Brutus' story as an example of the mythic type of the "earthborn founder" and Wiseman 1998, a reflective overview of the foundation myths of the Republic.

ancient Corinth, the old oligarchic Bacchiads and their renegade branch, the tyrannical Cypselids, who drove their kinsmen out of power around the middle of the 7th century BCE. Even though the regime that Cypselus, a misfit scion of the Bacchiad clan founds is remembered as a tyranny, while the similarly embarrassing cousin of the Tarquins, Brutus establishes an (oligarchic) republic in place of a tyranny, many elements in the two men's and their families' stories do seem to correspond. The connection is all the more interesting for paralleling the traditional Roman genealogical connection between the two characters through Demaratus, the Bacchiad refugee father of Roman king Tarquinius Priscus,[3] father or grandfather[4] to both Tarquinia, Brutus' mother and Superbus, the king he overthrows.

The most striking correspondence between the Roman and the Corinthian stories, already pointed out by Dionysius of Halicarnassus,[5] is the appearance of the parable of the high poppies, ears of corn or lilies at the peripheries of both. It is acted out in Livy and Ovid by Tarquin the Proud, that is, Brutus' uncle and foe, as a piece of secret strategical advice to his son Sextus for managing the newly captured Gabii; while in Aristotle's *Politics*, it is the life philosophy of a similarly infamous tyrant, Periander, Cypselus' embarrassment of a son, offered to fellow autocrat Thrasybulus of Miletus (or in Herodotus, *vice versa*).[6] The meaning is clear, identical, and relevant in both historical contexts: the tips of the tallest plants symbolise talented nobles, while the tyrant's staff chopping them off in front of a puzzled observer points to the importance of eliminating possible rivals. From a historiographical point of view, Occam's razor strikes quickly here: the learned historian Livy (or one of his annalistic sources), having read his Herodotus or Aristotle conscientiously, applies the appropriate parable to a situation much like the one he found it in,[7] forgetting or disregarding (as many modern commentators do) that he happens to be talking about a quite close cousin of one of the characters in the model text. [8] From the

3 Livy 1,34,2; Dion. Hal. 3,46,3–5; Murray 1993, 147; Cornell 1995, 124–125; Wiseman 2004, 37–38. Of particular interest to this project is Fausto Zevi's article (Zevi 2014), in which he contextualises the genealogical connection between the Bacchiads and the Tarquins not only from a historical, but also from a religious point of view, if somewhat different from mine.

4 Cornell 1995, 122–123; Zevi 2014, 69–72.

5 Dion. Hal. 4,56,2; Zonar. 7,10; Ogilvie 1965, 205–206 and 208–209; Robinson 2011, 446–453.

6 Periander to Thrasybulus: Arist., *Pol.* 3,1284a,26 and 5,1311a,20–22; Thrasybulos to Periander: Hdt. 5,92ζ,2–η,1 (ears of corn); Tarquinius Superbus to his son, Sextus, governing Gabii for him: Livy 1,54,5–9; Dion. Hal. 4,56,2; Val. Max. 7,4,2; Flor. 1,1,7; Frontin., *Str.* 1,1,4; Plin., *HN* 9, 169; Polyaenus, *Strat.* 8,6; Serv. 6,818; Zonar. 7,10 (poppies) ill. Ov., *Fast.* 2,701–710 (lilies). On the trope in general, see Felton 1998; on Sextus in Gabii, Köves-Zulauf 1987.

7 Ogilvie 1965, 205; Felton 1998, 50.

8 Felton (1998, 46–47) notices the kinship *within* the story, along with its ironies as to the meaning of the parable, but sees it as freak coincidence as opposed to meaningful.

point of view of *Quellenforschung,* case closed — but much more interesting questions pop up when one looks at the parallelism from the point of view of mythical logic, taking the genealogical connection suggested in the Roman tradition, if not for granted, but to reflect early cultural traffic between the two cities in a more general sense. Tarquin is a representative of the old, tyrannical dynasty, to be overthrown shortly by our hero, Periander is the disappointing heir of the founder of the new regime; and while the two similar characters do share ancestry according to the Roman genealogy, Tarquin hails from the old Bacchiad line through Demaratus and Priscus, as opposed to Periander being the son of the rebel Bacchiad Cypselus. Do such genealogical subtleties make a difference in statesmen then? Is there a true ethical difference between oligarchies and tyrannies? Does power inevitably corrupt character, from however low one has reached it?

In the following, I am arguing that such a parallel reading is far from arbitrary, and the often imperfect and twisted, but presumably quite ancient and undeniably numerous parallels between the two stories point to a possible shared origin beyond borrowing and emulation by historians. That early common context, possibly stretching as far back as the Orientalising era, might also account for the similar social and cultural questions these stories reflect on — the same questions that also make them endure and appear again and again in political discussions of later times. While I am mainly interested in the possible mythological material behind the historiography (be it spoken, theatrical, ritual, or sung), I am not trying to isolate history from myth too rigidly. On the contrary: in antiquity, historiography was part of literature to a much larger extent than today (thus open to myth as much as any other genre), and the events it describes are often articulated by mythic structures. This was bound to begin by the time they were first composed into a story, but it could also start as early as by the historical actors themselves.[9] First, then, let us look at the stories, running in parallel, and see what their other motivic correspondences are, apart from the cruel parable — first without much interpretation of their possible origins.

Runts of the Best Litters

Both main characters of the two stories, Cypselus and Brutus, possess, or, at least, are associated with some sort of disability, be it feigned or real, mental or physical.[10] Cypselus' ambiguous status and markedness within the Corinthian

9 Cf. Assmann 2011, 62–69, with citations, on the concept of *mythomotor*; and Dion. Hal. 4,56,2, suggesting that Tarquin "imitated" Thrasybulus' gesture, as recounted by Herodotus — of the modern readers of the stories, Ure (1922, 255) takes a similar stance.

10 Hdt. 5,92β,1; ill. Livy 1,56,7–9.

elite comes from the undesirability of Labda, his mother, to Bacchiad suitors, caused by some sort of defect of her feet and resolved by her marrying a non-Bacchiad, thus suspending the group's general rule of endogamy. Brutus, much like Shakespeare's Hamlet, pretends to be mentally disturbed, and, thus, harmless, to survive the harvest of "high poppies" by the king, his own uncle, after it got to his father and (in Brutus' case) brother. While in the extant retellings of Brutus' story, the madness is very explicitly stated to be a pretence willingly put on, it is not hard to imagine that other, lost ancient versions did seize the dramatic opportunity of the dangerously thin line between *playing* or *being* a madman: some literary or dramatic Bruti[11] might have slipped over that line at points of the story as much as Shakespeare's reluctant hero does.

Those personal crosses to bear look rather different to each other on first sight, but there are mutual hints in both stories at the disabilities central to the other. Cypselus' mother's "lameness" is quite likely to have been used by himself or his supporters to link him to the legendary founder of his clan, Bacchis, who was also remembered as "lame" by some.[12] While this motif in Bacchis' story can be explained away at least in part as Cypselid propaganda,[13] it is remarkable that his *name* can be interpreted as meaning basically the same thing as the name *Brutus. Bacchis* can refer to the maddening aspect of Dionysiac influence as much as Bacchic inspiration,[14] just as the obvious meaning of the Latin adjective *brutus* can be argued to be complicated by its close etymological connection to positive Latin terms like *gravitas,* or even Sanskrit *guru.*[15] Also, a sort of social "madness" similar to that of Brutus is put on again at a later point in the Corinthian tale, by Cypselus' grandson, Lycophron, who refuses to speak to his father (blaming him for the death of his mother), and later gets to be disowned and then outlawed for it, even ending up sleeping rough for some time.[16] In the Roman story, the most famous manifestation of Brutus' "madness" is his stumbling and falling to the ground deliberately in Delphi in order to fulfil the oracular requirement of "kissing his mother" to gain power at Rome in a more profound way than his cousins, who already started rushing home to see their human mother.[17] That motif is reminiscent of the mythological type of the "lame" hero on two separate levels: apart from the obvious fact of a limping person being more likely to stumble, the rolling gait of these characters is often interpreted as an indication of their close connection to the

11 Cf. Cic., *Div.* 1,22,44–45 and Bradley 2020, 117.
12 Oost 1972, 23, with citations.
13 Oost 1972, *ibid.*
14 Ogden 1997, 87.
15 De Vaan 2008, 76 and 272.
16 Hdt. 3,50γ–52ζ and Vernant 1982, 31–32 *ad loc.*
17 Livy 1,56,10–12 and Smith 2007, 289 *ad loc.*

Earth,[18] and occasionally also to hint at their being illegitimate or of dubious descent on their father's side,[19] highlighting their maternal origin. On that symbolic level, Brutus (whose father we rarely hear anything about) kissing Mother Earth is just as "lame" as Cypselus, or his version of his (their) ancestor Bacchis, who he tries to identify with as strongly as possible.[20]

All this also highlights the fact that both heroes are the outcasts of powerful families. Cypselus is definitely a second-class member of the Bacchiad aristocracy, if a member at all,[21] on account of his mother's physical condition and his father's being a non-Bacchiad or even foreigner.[22] Brutus is similarly only half a member of the Tarquin dynasty as a child of a Tarquin mother and an insignificant father we only hear about from Dionysius, and even there, we only read that he was put out of the way by Tarquin the Proud mercilessly.[23] Their stories articulate this liminal status quite brutally when they barely survive prosecution by their maternal relatives afraid of potential rivals,[24] Cypselus hidden in a box, basket, or beehive as an infant,[25] and Brutus pretending to be mad, hiding in plain sight of his cruel uncle and cousins. Such a marginal position is an especially precarious one in both of their cultural contexts that, among other things, share a tendency to treat aristocratic dynasties *en bloc,*[26] and consequently, to transfer physical attributes, character traits, or even actions from one member of the group to another when telling their stories.

The Snakes, Lions and Rolling Stones of Justice

The predicament of both protagonists starts to change when their accession is announced from above through animal imagery, either in answers provided or portents interpreted by Apollo's oracle in Delphi.[27] Before his birth, Cypselus' father, Eetion asks the oracle for advice on how to secure an heir and gets a positive response — predicting that a "rolling stone" would be born to him that would mow down the powerful. When word gets to the Bacchiads of this, they are reminded of an older oracle in which an "eagle" is supposed to have a "lion" as his son, one that would destroy many in Corinth, provoking their cruel

18 Vernant 1982, 19, quoting Lévi-Strauss' famous analysis of the Oedipus myth.
19 Vernant 1982, 22.
20 Oost 1972, 23.
21 Oost 1972, 12–13.
22 Hdt. 5,92β–ε; Andrewes 1949, 77–78; Murray 1993, 148.
23 Dion. Hal. 4,68,2 and Smith 2007, 290–291.
24 Hdt. 5,92β–ε; ill. Livy 1,56,7–8.
25 Vernant 1982, 29; Ogden 1997, 88–89.
26 In the case of the Roman *gens,* this goes without saying; for Corinth, see Oost 1972, 12 on how Herodotus treats the Bacchiads "corporately" throughout Cypselus' story.
27 Hdt. 5,92β,3; ill. Livy 1,56,4–5 and Ov., *Fast.* 2,711–713.

decision to have the newborn son of Labda and Eetion (whose name means 'eagle') killed on sight. In Rome, Brutus' ominous journey to Delphi with his scornful cousins, the Tarquin princes, is set off by the portent of a snake crawling out of an altar and (in other versions) seizing the sacrificial meat on it and (in yet another, more obscure version) starting to bark as a dog while doing it.[28] This is hard to interpret in any other way, in retrospect, than pointing to Brutus' ascent, with the snake symbolising his inscrutability and power to shed his skin,[29] and the canine voice highlighting his sorry situation at the time of the omen.[30]

It might also be argued that the fulfilment of the Delphic prophecy, that is, the overthrow of the ruling dynasty by its own underdog, is triggered in both cases by the death of a beautiful young aristocratic figure at the hands of the powerful. This hardly needs arguing in the case of Brutus: the story of prince Sextus Tarquinius forcing himself on his (and Brutus') kinswoman, Lucretia, and this resulting in her public suicide and Brutus' pledge to avenge her not only on Sextus, but on Roman royalty in general is well known.[31] This element of the story is missing in the "standard" versions of Cypselus' story in Herodotus and Aristotle, but it seems, there indeed were versions that included it. Multiple authors tell a Corinthian story in which a beautiful youth (somewhat ominously) called Actaeon is torn apart by his Bacchiad admirers, and this results in the suicide of his father, Melissus, who uses his own death as something of a sealing sacrifice to his curse on the murderers of his son[32] — a scenario recalling Lucretia's fate very strongly in both of its movements.[33] This story is usually inserted into Corinthian history as the *aition* of sending out colonists to Syracuse, but there is some ancient textual evidence that links it to the final ousting of all the Bacchiads instead of the banishment of some of them to Sicily.[34] We know who did *that,* even without being explicitly told.

The final important clue that links the Roman and the Corinthian tales together is the motif of sons disappointing their fathers, to the point of open conflict or prosecution. Again, Brutus' execution of his own sons who took part in a plot to restore the kingship of their Tarquin cousins in Rome, is universally

28 Wiseman 2004, 53–54 and 316, with citations.

29 Smith 2007, 287–289.

30 Wiseman 2004, ibid.

31 Livy 1,57,4–59,3.

32 Andrewes 1949, esp. 70–71 and 77–78 — cf. the tragedy of Chrysippus perishing because of the sexual obsession of Oedipus' father, Laius with him and his father's curse on the Labdacids (Vernant 1982, 22–23) — the fact that Vernant does quote this part of the Oedipus myth in his article comparing it to the Cypselids' saga with great success, but does not seem to cite the Actaeon story as a parallel between the two is a strong testimony to both the meaningfulness of his comparison and the place of Actaeon's demise in Cypselus' story.

33 Before Brutus, Lucretia also calls for justice herself in her final speech in Livy (1,58,7).

34 Andrewes 1949, ibid.

known, be it as a cautionary tale or a tragedy.[35] But, even though not known for them as much, the story of the Cypselids (arguably less recognisable to modern readers in general) also takes no less than three similar turns, of variable proximity to Brutus' tragic predicament, but arguably all related to it. In temporal order, the first one is the first deceptively mild, but later obscenely cruel reign of Cypselus' son Periander and its striking contrast to his father's domination, which, irregular as it may have been, was widely accepted and even lauded by many Corinthians:[36] unlike other tyrants, Cypselus did not need a bodyguard when walking around in the city.[37] Then, there is the very dramatic souring of the relationship between Periander and his son Lycophron (already referred to above in passing), resulting in first the outlawing of the latter, then his exile to the Corinthian colony on Corcyra, and then (indirectly) to his violent death there.[38] Finally, a more distantly related motif: in retaliation for the killing of Lycophron on the island, Periander planned (in vain) to have 300 noble youths from Corcyra castrated[39] — true, those were not his sons in particular, but their peril and sterility would still have been a blow to Periander's own kin, as most (if not all) of the Corcyran elite is likely to have been Bacchiad.[40]

The parallels probably do not end here — but even this much poses two very interesting questions. One: how does one account for such a wide-ranging correspondence between two family sagas written down in very different contexts, near as their timeframes might have been to each other? And two: what to do with the almost paradigmatic-looking "scrambling" of the shared motifs, displacing them to different points of the two stories, to the point of endangering their detection, numerous as they are?

Etrusco-Corinthian… Mythology?

The short answer to question number one is that the two stories quite clearly share an origin; and the short answer to the second one is that this shared origin is likely to be an old one — presumably quite a while older than not only the Latin literary world of Livy and his annalistic sources, but also the Greek one of Herodotus and Aristotle. The "scrambled", nonlinear correspondences between the two stories' common motifs point to a history of contact between

35 Virgil hints at both, or something in between, in the heroes' parade of his *Aeneid* (6, 817–823).

36 Hdt. 5,92ζ,1; Arist., *Pol*. 5,1310b; Oost 1972, passim; Murray 1993, 148–149; Ogden 1997, 147.

37 Arist., *Pol*. 5,1315b

38 Hdt. 3,50γ–53η.

39 Hdt. 3,48β–49β.

40 Murray 1993, 153.

them that mainly happened within the oral domain.[41] This model could account not only for their shared points (for that, the traditional "historiographical" answers will do perfectly), but also for the drift of some of these away from each other, to the point that their kinship managed to be hidden from not only most ancient readers of the historians transmitting them, but also most modern ones so far.

Positing that the two stories share origins as *myth* (as opposed to written literary text) also pushes back the cultural context of their kinship in time, as far as into the Archaic and Orientalising eras of Graeco-Roman cultural history, instead of the Classical and Hellenistic worlds. Most of the time, such an interpretive strategy would *weaken* our position in accounting for anything, in direct proportion to our distance from the safety of the times more extensively documented by texts. In this particular case, though, one just has to risk a quick look outside the world of written evidence to find a well-documented shared context between the Greek and Phoenician city-states with early activity in the West and the Etruscan and Latin towns of Central Italy. The pan-Mediterranean Orientalising cultural horizon, very soundly established in archaeological terms as more than a temporally limited wave of fashion,[42] happens to be flourishing right around the time of Cypselus, Brutus and the first storytellers, dramatists, or singers to formulate their stories. While it is by now commonplace that the story of the Bacchiad Demaratus moving to Tarquinii with his retinue is, even if not literally true, a more or less faithful reflection of historical circumstances,[43] *and* the early history of Corinth has also been interpreted with the city's material cultural indebtedness to the Near East as a clue,[44] it might still seem somewhat far-fetched to use the archaeologically irrefutable material connection between Central Italy and Corinth around the same time to interpret their respective mythologies and historical memories. Nevertheless, I will now attempt something along precisely those lines: in the remaining part of this paper, I am trying to make sense of the similarities between the myths of Brutus against the Tarquins and the Cypselids against the Bacchiads, listed above, as being rooted in the Etrusco-Corinthian and, in general, Orientalising culture of the eight to early fifth centuries BCE.

Before going through all of them, though, there are two problems that I will have to get out of the way. First, as the archaeological term "Etrusco-Corinthian" I have just used suggests, there is a lingering, at least implicit presupposition in the secondary literature that the Etruscan communities of Italy were the ones that were *truly* receptive to Phoenician and Greek influences as

41 Cf. Wiseman 1998, 23.

42 López-Ruiz 2021, 65–66 with citations.

43 Ogilvie 1965, 141, with cit.; Szilágyi 1975; Murray 1993, 150–152; Cornell 1995, 124–125; Wiseman 2004, 39.

44 Murray 1993, 149.

opposed to Italic-speaking ones that retained more of their ancestral customs up to the Hellenistic era. While the reception of one particular Eastern influence or another might have been different in various communities,[45] the general characterisation of the Etruscans as *more* and the Latins as *less* receptive is not as well-founded as our Republican sources — all about old Roman austerity and the corrupting influence of the wealth of the Etruscans and later, the East[46] — make it seem. From the point of view of out Greek sources, those that come from before the widespread recognition of Rome as a powerful rival quite routinely seem to include Latins under the umbrella term "Tyrrhēnos", that is, 'Etruscan';[47] between themselves, as multiple source types suggest, the Etruscan and Italic communities of the area seem to have experienced a good deal of population exchange from quite early on;[48] and some archaeological sites of Latium like Osteria dell' Osa (ancient Gabii) or Palestrina (Praeneste) are no less resplendent with Oriental and Orientalising pieces of art, often made of precious metals, than those of Etruria.[49] There are also some 7th-century BCE finds of Corinthian pottery in Rome itself, in the most ancient cemeteries salvaged from under the modern metropolis, those on the Forum and the Esquiline;[50] but the terracotta architectural decoration of an early 6th-century temple in Rome, closely related to the near-contemporary stone embellishments of the temple of Artemis in Corcyra,[51] a Corinthian colony, might be an even more convincing archaeological link — polychrome architectural terracotta art flourishes for a much longer time in Italy than in its place of origin.[52] In light of all

45 E. g. the surprisingly late adoption of coinage in Rome — which, nevertheless, does not reflect a "particularly unsophisticated" economy (Bradley 2020, 209–210), or an unwillingness to engage in trade, as exemplified by the so-called *Rome-Veii-Velitrae series* of terracotta plaques, found all over Central Italy, quite likely made in Rome, and depicting, among other things, the supposedly "Tyrrhenian" custom of women attending a formal meal as guests (as opposed to servants or entertainers) — Bradley 2020, 162, 199 and 224–225 with citations.

46 E. g. Livy 5,1,3–7 and 5,20–25 passim on the wealth of Veii — see Bittarello 2009 on the Roman assimilation of the "Lydian" Etruscans into the literary type of the Eastern Barbarian.

47 Bradley 2020, 206–207.

48 Cornell 1995, 157–158; Bradley 2020, 119 and 231–236; cf. Cornell 1995, 224–225 (in my opinion, rightly) dismissing the notion that the expulsion of the Roman kings had any ethnic motivation. It is very telling that the foundational text of the line of research questioning the relevance, or even the very concept, in the modern sense, of ethnicity for early Italian history is widely seen to have been an article on Demaratus by Carmine Ampolo (Bradley 2020, 231).

49 Holloway 1994, 103–113 and 156–160, respectively; the most interesting piece from Palestrina may be the late 8th- to early 7th-century BCE Egyptianising Phoenician silver bowl with concentric zones of figurative friezes (López-Ruiz 2021, 157–158), just like Achilles' shield in the Iliad (Burkert 1992, 16; López-Ruiz 2021, 88–89), some of which are thought to depict scenes from early Greek epic (Burkert 1992, 104–105, with citations) or an otherwise lost Phoenician myth (West 1997, 99–101).

50 Holloway 1994, 20–36.

51 Holloway 1994, 76.

52 Murray 1993, 152.

that, I am following the ancient Greeks and take the "Tyrrhenian" (and by extension, the Etrusco-Corinthian) cultural zone to include Rome one for now, and the differences in the language of particular communities as trivial as they might have been to someone like Brutus — a 6th-century BCE Roman of mixed Greek, Etruscan and local heritage, presumably bi- or maybe even trilingual.

The second problem to be addressed before drawing any conclusions is the fact, undeniable in our sources, that while Cypselus establishes a tyranny, Brutus ousts one. But that might not be as important as it looks at first sight: on the one hand, the idea that the people known as "kings" from later Roman sources might have been "kings" in various ways is becoming a more or less commonly accepted one these days: for the last three of the traditional list, Lucius Tarquinius Priscus, Servius Tullius, and Lucius Tarquinius Superbus (and a few apocryphal ones, like Mastarna, the Vibenna brothers or Porsenna), it makes much sense to imagine a power structure along the lines of contemporary Greek tyrannies, as opposed to the more traditionally sanctioned rulers before.[53] The other side of the same coin is that the people we know as the early magistrates of the Republic may have exercised power in markedly different ways to their counterparts in our sources' time[54] to the point that, different though a, say, 3rd-century BC consul's rule was to an early king's reign, Brutus' dominance might not have departed as radically from that of his Tarquin cousins right away.[55] Taking these clues into account makes the shift between the two political systems less of a watershed and more of a gradual transition.[56] Similarly, why and how exactly the Bacchiads went from kingship for life to taking yearly turns[57] and what the precise office and jurisdiction of a year's ruling Bacchiad was in this second system are not easy questions to answer either: some sources call these yearly magistrates "kings", some use the word *prytanis,*[58] and some talk about the Bacchiads as "monarchic" or even "tyrannical" men.[59] In fact, the idea that Cypselus could be seen a *restorer* of a previous legality[60] is no less out of the question than the similar understanding of Brutus' revolution as a restoration of a (slightly) wider elite's control over executive power that had been curtailed by the Tarquin dynasty.[61] Hence, I am reading the seemingly op-

53 Cornell 1995, 141–150; Bradley 2020, 125–126.

54 Cornell 1995, 145: "Others, such as Valerius Publicola and Appius Claudius were remembered as republican leaders rather than kings, though the difference may not be as clear-cut as the annalists liked to think".

55 Cornell 1995, 217; Bradley 2020, 126 and 132; cf. Wiseman 2004, 54.

56 See Cornell 1995, 226 –239 and Bradley 2020, 131–137 for a summaries and evaluations of such theories.

57 Oost 1972, 10–11.

58 Oost 1972, ibid.

59 Hdt. 5,92β,2 and Strabo 7,378, respectively; Oost 1972, ibid.

60 Oost 1972, 24.

61 Cornell 1995, 148 and 215.

posite political "polarities" of the two stories as incidental and not directly relevant to my purposes here: what matters here is the shift between two different forms of legality and legitimacy that has to be explained and conceptualised when the story is told, be it from a sympathetic or a subversive point of view.[62] Now, let us return to the stories with all that in mind.

In both their birth narratives and their personal attributes, Brutus and Cypselus can be argued to be representatives of widespread mythical types. The former, with its combination of "high" and "low birth" stories, is very decisively argued by Oswyn Murray, in the Corinthian case, to be a pro-Cypselid narrative, maybe even a part of their propaganda, immortalised in myth, which tried to balance a new sort of legitimacy by personal achievement, popular support, and divine favour with a more traditional one by descent.[63] This use of such a story makes as much sense in an early Roman context as in the Corinthian one, as demonstrated by Gary Miles' similar interpretation of the Romulus myth in his monograph on Livy's early books[64] — there is no reason why it would not be available for Brutus and the authors of early versions of his story, especially if a similar story *had* been used for a similar purpose earlier in the same region. Murray also highlights the Middle Eastern origins of the of the "rags to riches" myth of the hero, comparing it, among others, to an ancient biography of Sargon of Akkad[65] — and such an influence is not out of the question for Archaic Central Italy either. In fact, another passage of this version of Sargon's story, referring to the very personal favour of the goddess Ishtar is not only echoed by the traditional story of a Roman king (Servius Tullius and Fortuna), but also by a passage in the famous Pyrgi inscription, where the late 6th-century king[66] of Caere, Thefarie Velianas attributes his political success to the help of Uni-Astarte.[67]

Another (related) shared condition of Cypselus and Brutus is having a father of no consequence or even of dubious identity: in their stories, Sargon's mysterious father is paralleled by the low or foreign (definitely not Bacchiad) birth of Eetion, and Brutus' utterly featureless father in the Roman stories, whose only function seems to be the provision of a well-known Roman name and to start his son's ordeal by being murdered on cue. Surprisingly for such male-centred

62 The popularity of the Tarquin protégé Servius Tullius in Roman memory or the aforementioned wide popular support for the Corinthian tyrants (especially Cypselus) might also be relevant here.

63 Murray 1993, 148.

64 Miles 1995, 137178; cf. Cornell 1995, 133, on Servius Tullius and his parallels.

65 Murray 1993, 149.

66 That he is called a *zilath* in the Etruscan version, a term usually translated as *praetor* into Latin, and *melek* 'king' in the Phoenician one (Cornell 1995, 232), is another argument for feeling free to compare pro- and anti-monarchic myths to each other if they do share other common traits.

67 Cornell 1995, 147 and 232 (with citations).

societies, leaving the door open for a divine (co-)father, or for having been born of the larger-than-life procreative power of a goddess-like or totemic female figure does seem to be able to invalidate the stigma of illegitimacy.[68] While the extant versions of our pair of stories seem to hint at the former possibility only (if either), the Labdas and Tarquinias of earlier versions could just as easily look the latter part — bodily strangeness and being a child of uncontrolled desire are *very* commonly conflated in ancient literatures.[69]

The physical deformity or madness of a founding, re-founding, or otherwise important hero is also far from being unheard of, and the related stories of the stuttering, illegitimate Battus of Cyrene, the stupendously ugly, snake-footed Erichthonius of Athens, or the limping, incestuous, and later blind Oedipus of Thebes have all been interpreted in various ways themselves. The combination of royal descent and having to cope with bodily deformity or chronic illness can also be interpreted as a double source of legitimacy along the lines of what I argued in the case of the birth stories following Murray and Miles ("he is not *no one,* but did not have it *too* easy either"); and the "chthonic" understanding of such stories, referred to above, has already been applied to interpreting both the Cypselids' and Brutus' stories in the secondary literature (without connecting the two specifically).[70] A third way to interpret such attributes is proposed by Daniel Ogden in his book on *The Crooked Kings of Ancient Greece,* in which he relates the recurring literary motif of early colonists and tyrants often being physically marked as related to the (to him, likewise interrelated) concepts of the exposed child, either illegitimate or sickly, and the scapegoat, exiled for the sins of others[71] — with the connection between them being the paradoxical, but widespread connection of pitiable or comic human bodies to the royal and the sacred in archaic religious systems of thought.[72]

The breaking of regular father–son, or in general, family–member relationships within the elite is obviously an issue when any political change occurs, either in the direction of tyranny or of something more egalitarian. This hardly needs to be argued in the exuberant cases of Greek tyrants,[73] and Brutus is not very different from this point of view either: he is something of a traitor to one side of his family and, as Smith argues, his identification with the Earth instead of his particular mother may be, at least in part, a shortcut solution to that prob-

68 Cf. Bremmer—Horsfall 1987, 32, on heroes descended from "unchaste" women.

69 Vernant 1982, 22.

70 Vernant 1982 and Smith 2007, respectively.

71 Ogden 1997.

72 Vernant 1982, 20–21; Ogden 1997, 116; from that point of view, it might point to something more than parental concern that one of the cults gaining popularity after the fall of the monarchy might have been of a goddess *(Carna)* responsible for *averting* "birth malformations" (Zevi 2014, 74, with citations).

73 Vernant 1982, 33–34.

lem.[74] The "lawgiver's law bouncing back at his family" motif,[75] explicit in the tragedy of Brutus' sons and approximated by Lycophron being too tall a poppy for Periander, can also be read, apart from being a moralising cautionary tale, as a sympathetic one to the new leaders. It underlines the unshakable validity of the new legality and when going to the extremes that Brutus' case does, it also drives home that the new constitution (along with the personal power of its representative) might not only transcend the old one, but also rules thought of as universal before. Of course, the facts that in the Cypselids' case, we are talking about a tyranny long ousted, and that in Brutus' case, the story of the Republic is ongoing (at least in name), but the family that claimed him as ancestor later was probably a latecomer to the Roman elite,[76] are in themselves convenient explanations for the intergenerational conflicts in the stories — but still deeper-set religious concerns might lurk in the background. It could even make sense to see the copious shedding of young, preciously noble blood, from Actaeon of Corinth and Lucretia to Brutus' sons, Lycophron and maybe even the three hundred Corcyran youths (saved in the last minute, but in grave danger beforehand), as a trace of the age-old, and more or less universal mythologem of the foundation sacrifice, widely attested philologically and even archaeologically in the Iron Age Mediterranean.[77] Such a heinous deed, that nevertheless shows enormous confidence in one's being in the right, might be useful in establishing either the legitimacy of a new power structure or the extraordinary nature of a story's protagonist.

The presence in such comparisons of obviously non- or, at most, prehistorical figures like Oedipus also points at a very important thing about the relationship between these stories and history: Jean-Pierre Vernant, when drawing his wisely concise conclusions from comparing the mythology of the Theban kings to stories about the Cypselids in detail, suggests that the mythologem of "lameness" might have been part of the "toolkits" of both Herodotus, articulating narratives of early tyranny, *and* of the early tyrants themselves, articulating who *they* were as both leading figures of and outsiders to the polis.[78] The same dual pattern might safely be supposed about both the early reorganisers of the Roman state and the composers of the earliest narratives of their lives and deeds, if complicated into a triple one by the well-known propensity on the part of later

74 Smith 2007, 291.

75 Ogden 1997, 124; Osborne 2009, 177.

76 That is, their origin story had to include both a legendary forefather as precedent for their success and a family tragedy to account for the obscurity of their more recent ancestors — Wiseman 1995, 108–110.

77 E. g. Wiseman 1995, 117–125, with citations; cf. Bonghi Jovino 2010, 165–166 on child sacrifice in early Tarquinia.

78 Vernant 1982, 33–34 again, with citations

Roman historians for de-mythicising traditional stories.[79] This trend, not exclusive to,[80] but extraordinarily typical to Roman authors, often re-historicises accounts of real-life events that were construed as mythical right after they happened or even already *while* they were happening — but almost as often ends up not knowing how much and what exactly to "peel off" of whatever happened in the "reality" of an earlier age that was itself steeped in mythical thinking. For example, the feigned "madness" of Brutus might be, at least in part, an "embellishment" on his story by earlier storytellers to link him to other weird heroes, but the rationalising zeal of later authors could also have gone too far in explaining it as mere precaution against being seen as a rival by the Tarquins: the historical Brutus, if he existed, could just as easily cultivate a strangeness of demeanour based on these mythical heroes as part of his political branding, to suggest divine inspiration or independence from societal norms.

The fact that the closest near-contemporary parallel of the "mad prince" movement of the Brutus story (much closer than anything in the Cypselid saga) seems to be a passage from the first book of Samuel (21, 14) where the future king David feigns madness in the court of king Achish of Gath,[81] brings us over to the last question to be posed: is the spread of this family of myths (or a version of it) connected, as we have been suspecting, to the international Orientalising culture of the lifetime and immediate past of their protagonists? This mighty cultural wave is now often thought to have been fuelled, in the first place, by the demand for prestige goods on the part of the local elites of Mesopotamia and the Central and Western Mediterranean,[82] met by the supply of primarily Levantine and, later, to a smaller extent, Greek merchants:

> "this orientalizing kit involved a set of favorite Levantine symbolic and decorative motifs; new technologies of pottery and metalwork; oriental-style monumental sculpture; industries of terracotta figures; ivory work; masonry techniques and architectural innovations; new burial forms and rituals; industrial developments (metallurgy, fishing, salting); farming innovations; banqueting culture (sometimes viticulture itself); the technology of alphabetic writing; and religious-mythological motifs."[83]

Newer definitions of the process like this one draw attention to two very important facts. First, they show that the word "Orientalising" is something of a misnomer, as the key region of the phenomenon is not the easternmost one that takes part in it (Mesopotamia), but the Levant, especially Phoenicia: Egyptian-

79 E. g. Cornell 1995, 77–79 or Wiseman 2004, 10–12 and 279.

80 Hawes 2014.

81 Soós 2022 — this paper shows that there are also some threefold matches, that is, elements of David's story present in both myths studied here (for example, the role of strange and strained family connections or of prophets/oracles).

82 López-Ruiz 2021, 77–84.

83 López-Ruiz 2021, 82.

ising Phoenician ivories amassed in imperial Assyria are just as exotic there as in Greece or Italy,[84] and they are, paradoxically, from the point of view of Art History, *Orientalising* objects that arrived *from the West.* This also puts to rest, to a large extent, the unease caused by the term's similarity to "Orientalism" in the modern, critical sense of the word:[85] attentive study of the era is bound to show us a period of *interaction* between related cultures, if often somewhat asymmetrical, instead of either old-fashioned "East against West" narratives or even older-fashioned, but similarly simplistic *ex oriente lux*-type stories. When zooming in on Greece and Italy, even though most of the cultural traffic of the time does seem to have gone from East to West, a few Italian stories and religious concepts could still sneak back to Greece against the grain, just as we know that Etruscan bucchero vases were not only imported to Greece (including Corinth, specifically),[86] but their shapes also seem to have been adopted by some Attic potters;[87] and just as the "New World" values of their own colonies could have an effect on mainland Greek cities' political systems.[88]

That brings us to the other, and, to this project, even more important aspect of newer conceptualisations of the Orientalising era: its effects are now rarely seen as restricted to the *material* arts of the Graeco-Roman world. As Walter Burkert has argued in his seminal book *The Orientalizing Revolution,*[89] and as numerous other scholarly comparisons of ancient Eastern and Western literary texts have shown since,[90] the "Orientalising kit" that European (and Mesopotamian) elites domesticated into their communities' cultures around this time could include stories, religious concepts, and political ideas too. Even in the case of the objects themselves, strictly speaking, it is now clear that their understanding and symbolical value was an intrinsic part of their popularity with the receiving cultures as shown by the example of the winged sphinx, not only adopted by Graeco-Roman culture from the Phoenicians as a decorative motif for objects, but along with its full significance as a symbol of royal power, as the story of Oedipus gives it away.[91] That is not only a good example of elements of not-only-exactly-material culture changing hands in the era, but also points to how much of that exchange was somehow connected to power: the 8th to 5th centuries were a time not only of commerce and (re)building, but also of much social change, where questions about different political systems and the nature of power had as much relevance as in better-documented times

84 López-Ruiz 2021, 71–72; 84–86; 295–296.
85 This is discussed in much more depth by López-Ruiz 2021 passim, but esp. 65–67.
86 Murray 1993, 150–151.
87 Osborne 2009, 235–236.
88 Murray 1993, 123.
89 Burkert 1992.
90 Those in West 1997 alone are a rather respectable chunk of secondary literature.
91 López-Ruiz 2021, 219–225.

of turmoil like the Roman Civil Wars, and thus, stories reflecting on these issues also had just as much value.[92]

It is, then, not at all unfounded to reconstruct a wider Orientalising cultural context as the world in which the stories of Brutus and Cypselus originate, along with a more tightly defined Etrusco-Corinthian context within it, more likely to have contributed specific elements to them than the larger system. Similarly, as with space, the temporal frames of the stories' emergence in connection to each other can take varied forms: sure, any person on whom the Roman historians' Brutus is (at least partly) based could "imitate" either the tyrants of Corinth, no doubt well known to him, in particular (as Dionysius' Sextus "imitates" Thrasybulus), or the mythical heroes and historical leaders of the past in general, but the behavioural patterns in question could have been part of his community's culture for decades or even a century by the time he entered the scene. They could have been adopted by the later, "Etruscan" kings of Rome, for example — and that would not be the only way Brutus was related to them, as we know it quite well by now. Along the same logic, the stories he, his avid or reluctant[93] followers, his enemies, or his early chroniclers told about his life could be based on either the Corinthian stories specifically, or converged into something similar to them because they were formed from the same Mediterranean "language" and even the same "Etrusco-Corinthian "dialect" of mythical thinking. On the other extreme, if no Roman historical personality was similar enough to the Brutus we know to permit the statement "Brutus existed", then the aetiological story of the Republic could be built, again, from either the Cypselids' deeds as known at the time, or from building blocks widely known in the narrower or wider cultural contexts encompassing both communities. In this temporarily extended and spatially two-tiered model of possible interaction between the two stories, one is not compelled to prove things about this or that story, or this or that motif moving between Corinth and Rome at this or that specific point in time (that would seem close to impossible and, to me, somewhat pointless), but it also seems likely that the close and well-documented interaction between Corinth and Central Italy has done comparatively more in giving us this fascinating pair of stories than their wider Mediterranean context. Combining the more widespread mythical framework of the outsider hero with the motif of a reforming of the state being triggered by the senseless death of a beautiful young person definitely seems to be more at home in this tighter-knit Etrusco-Corinthian world, along with the specific meaning of the plant parable that we see in both of our stories: both deal with questions about the nature of power and its effect on human behaviour, particu-

92 Cf. e. g. Murray 1993, 175 and Bradley 2020, 137.

93 See Osborne 2009, 184–185. on the tradition of "the good tyrant" as a form of collective self-justification for putting up with tyrannical regimes after the fact.

larly relevant to political changes in both cities at the time. The successful attribution of such an early and complex shared background to these two stories can also broaden the possible horizons of understanding Graeco-Roman myth and historiography in a more general sense: it shows that it is not only the contact between Classical to Hellenistic Greek and Republican to Early Imperial Roman literary cultures which could move stories between the two linguistic-territorial spheres. Of course, the well-read historians did contribute to such intertextual connections, but that was also easier to do when they only had to notice, highlight, and expand parallels between stories that had already come into contact while emerging in the political speeches, aristocratic banquet halls, public spectacles, or marketplace chatter of the Orientalising and Archaic eras.[94]

Bibliography

Andrewes 1949 = Andrewes, A.: The Corinthian Actaeon and Pheidon of Argos. *CQ* 43.1/2, 70–78.

Assmann 2011 = Assmann, J: *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination.* Cambridge.

Bittarello 2009 = Bittarello, M.: The construction of Etruscan 'Otherness' in Latin Literature. *G&R* 56.2, 211–233.

Bonghi Jovino 2010 = Bonghi Jovino, M.: The Tarquinia Project: A Summary of 25 Years of Excavation. *AJA* 114.1, 161–180.

Bradley 2020 = Bradley, G.: *Early Rome to 290 BC: The Beginnings of the City and the Rise of the Republic.* Edinburgh.

Bremmer—Horsfall 1987 = Bremmer, J. N. – Horsfall, N.: *Roman Myth and Mythography* (Bulletin Supplement 52). London.

Burkert 1992 = Burkert, W.: *The orientalizing revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age.* transl. M. E. Pinder and the author. Cambridge MA – London.

Cornell 1995 = Cornell, T. J.: *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars, c. 1000–264 BC.* Routledge History of The Ancient World. London, New York.

de Vaan 2008 = de Vaan, M. A. C.: *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the Other Italic Languages.* Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series 7. Leiden.

Felton 1998 = Felton, D.: Advice to Tyrants: The Motif of "Enigmatic Counsel" in Greek and Roman Texts. *Phoenix* 52.1/2, 42–54.

Hawes 2014 = Hawes, G.: *Rationalizing Myth in Antiquity.* Oxford.

Holloway 1994 = Holloway, R. R. *The Archaeology of Early Rome and Latium.* London, New York.

Köves-Zulauf 1987 = Köves-Zulauf, Th.: Die Eroberung von Gabii und die literarische Moral der römischen Annalistik. *WJA* 13, 121–147.

López-Ruiz 2021 = López-Ruiz, C.: *Phoenicians and the making of the Mediterranean.* Cambridge, MA.

Miles 1995 = Miles, G. B. *Livy. Reconstructing Early Rome*. Ithaca, London.

Murray 1993 = Murray, O.: *Early Greece. Second Edition.* Fontana History of The Ancient World. London.

94 Cf. Köves-Zulauf 1987, 147.

Ogden 1997 = Ogden, D.: *The crooked kings of ancient Greece.* London.
Ogilvie 1965 = Ogilvie, R. M. *A Commentary On Livy: Books 1–5.* Oxford.
Osborne 2009 = Osborne, R.: *Greece in the Making. Second Edition.* Routledge History of the Ancient World. London, New York.
Oost 1972 = Oost, S. I.: Cypselus the Bacchiad. *CPh* 67.1, 10–30.
Robinson 2011 = Robinson, M.: *A Commentary on Ovid's Fasti, Book 2.* Oxford, New York.
Smith 2007 = Smith, S. C.: Brutus as an Earthborn Founder of Rome (Livy 1.56). *Mnemosyne* 60.2, 285–293.
Soós 2022 = Soós B.: *Két őrült a királyi udvarban: Dávid király és Lucius Brutus összehasonlítása.* Classics BA Term Paper, Latin Department, ELTE (supervisor: Rung Á.)
Szilágyi 1975 = Szilágyi J. Gy.: *Etruszko-korinthosi vázafestészet.* Apollo Könyvtár 6. Budapest.
Vernant 1982 = Vernant, J.-P.: From Oedipus to Periander: Lameness, Tyranny, Incest in Legend and History. transl. Page duBois. *Arethusa* 15.1, 31–33.
Ure 1922 = Ure, P. N.: *The Origin of Tyranny.* Cambridge.
West 1997 = West, M. L.: *The East Face of Helicon.* Oxford, New York.
Wiseman 1995 = Wiseman, T. P.: *Remus: A Roman Myth.* Cambridge.
— 1998 = Wiseman, T. P.: Roman Republic, Year One. *Greece & Rome* 45.1, 19–26.
— 2004 = Wiseman, T. P.: *The Myths of Rome.* Exeter.
Zevi 2014 = Zevi, F.: Demaratus and the 'Corinthian' Kings of Rome. In: Richardson, J. H. – Santangelo, F. (edd.): *The Roman Historical Tradition. Regal and Republican Rome.* Oxford Readings in Classical Studies. Oxford, 53–82.

DOI 10.22315/ACD/2024/3
ISSN 0418-453X (print)
ISSN 2732-3390 (online)