

## THE COLLEGIA OF NUMA: PROBLEMS OF METHOD AND POLITICAL IDEAS \*

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Chapter Seventeen of Plutarch's *Life of Numa* is well known to students of early Rome for the statement that it was the second king of Rome who created *collegia* for the craftsmen of Rome.<sup>1</sup> Nor is Plutarch alone in his belief: two passages of Pliny's *Natural History* attribute the *collegia* of the bronze workers and brick makers to Numa (xxxiv, 1; xxxv, 159); Pliny indeed seems to refer to an actual list of *collegia* in which these two figured. On the other hand, neither Cicero in the *Republic* nor Livy nor Dionysius displays any knowledge of such an initiative by Numa; an entirely different tradition indeed appears in Florus, according to which it was Servius Tullius who distributed the Roman people between *collegia*, in the general context of his timocratic organization of the census classes (1, 6, 3).

The chapter of Plutarch is complex. The creation of *collegia* forms part of a much more ambitious plan: it was a question of overcoming the continuing opposition between the two different ethnic groups, Roman and Sabine, by assigning them to different crafts, *technai*. By splitting up the two blocks and reorganizing them in small groups linked by a common profession, Numa hoped to fill out the complex of shared gatherings, assemblies and religious ceremonies designed to reinforce the unity and homogeneity of the entire people and suppress its separatist tendencies.

The analysis of this chapter which I wish to present is intended to have above all methodological significance. For it seems to me that such an analysis should aim to evaluate the chapter not in order to reconstruct what actually happened, a hopeless task, but in order to locate the information in the context of the whole of Plutarch's highly complicated presentation of the political activity of Numa. For this is the only way to see this presentation in the cultural and ideological milieu where it belongs. It is necessary to resist the temptation to accept *a priori* and use for any kind of historical reconstruction single pieces of information in isolation; for the apparent plausibility of such a reconstruction would be equalled only by its complete unverifiability. Furthermore, whatever effort one may quite legitimately make to relate the literary tradition to other sources of information, whether archaeological, epigraphic or linguistic, the first necessity is an understanding of a text as a whole, with all its different resonances.

One point is obvious: in any reconstruction of the overall significance of the monarchy at Rome, 'Numa rappresenta il concetto di un re pacifico, opposto ad uno belligero, il creatore delle istituzioni religiose, che tengono dietro alle militari'.<sup>2</sup> It is natural that there gathered around the figure of Numa a whole series of interrelated notices about what he achieved and created. As a result, the religious principles which underlay his career were seen as the principal, perhaps the only way to soften the martial ardour of the Roman people and recall it to peaceful activity. The motif is common to all the sources on Numa, but is especially prominent in Plutarch, with his political and philosophical interests. Chapter Eight of the *Life*, in fact, is devoted to an analysis of the links between the policies of Numa and the philosophy of Pythagoras, recognizing, but not limiting itself to the

\* I should like to thank Michael Crawford for the translation. The Italian version was delivered at the VIIIth Congress of the International Federation of the Societies of Classical Studies in Dublin, 17/8/84-1/9/84.

<sup>1</sup> The text is discussed at length in all the standard treatments of the Roman *collegia*, notably the classic work of J.-P. Waltzing, *Étude historique sur les corporations professionnelles chez les Romains* 1 (1895), 62 ff., and the well-known study of F. M. De Robertis, *Il fenomeno associativo nel mondo romano* (1955, repr. 1981), 21 ff. There is a sensitive synthesis with further bibliography in L. Cracco Ruggini, 'Le associazioni professionali nel mondo romano-bizantino', *Artigianato e tecnica nella società dell'Alto Medio Evo Occidentale* (Settimane Studio Centro Ital. Studi Alto Medio Evo 18) (1971), 65 ff.

But study of the passage has been set on a new footing by A. Storch Marino, 'La tradizione plutarca sui "collegia opificum" di Numa', *Annali Istituto Ital. St. Storici* 3 (1971-72), 1-53, with 'Le notizie pliniane sui *collegia opificum* in età arcaica', *Annali Fac. Lettere Napoli* n.s. 4 (1973-74), 19-36, and 'Artigiani e rituali religiosi nella Roma arcaica', *Rend. Acc. Arch. Napoli* 54 (1979), 333-57. Storch Marino has elucidated the philosophical pre-occupations which determine the structure described by Plutarch and in particular their Pythagorean antecedents and has attributed the formation of the tradition to Tarentine Pythagorean circles around 300 B.C. Her interpretation is accepted by A. Mele, 'Il Pitagorismo e le popolazioni anelleniche', *AION (Archeol.)* 3 (1981), 91.

<sup>2</sup> E. Pais, *Storia di Roma* 1, 1 (1898), 283.

chronological problems involved in making Numa a pupil of Pythagoras. Cicero, Livy and Dionysius had all categorically excluded any link and hence any direct influence of the philosopher on the king.<sup>3</sup> But the whole of the *Life* is dominated by Pythagorean ideas and by the concept of political and social harmony, which embraces and explains the entire career of the king.

An element specific to the 'historical' narrative of the reign is the ethnic and political disunity which disturbed the peace of the city immediately after the death of Romulus (2-3); everything Numa did in religious and indeed social terms was designed precisely to eliminate this disunity and its causes. It is in this context that there appears a reference to the poverty of part of the *plebs*, which Numa dealt with by a distribution of land;<sup>4</sup> but it is significant that agrarian problems appear only incidentally in Plutarch, after a mention of a cult of the god Terminus and an associated account of the division and delimitation of the land, involving an allusive reference to Solon. On the other hand, the impulse to cultivate the land is itself a spur to peaceableness. The arrangements of Numa were rounded off by a division of the countryside into *pagi* (16, 6).

It is in this complex of thought that the attribution to Numa of the creation of *collegia* is to be placed as an approach to its understanding. The antiquity and diversity of the *collegia* do not require discussion here: they are obviously early, but how early it is hard to say; equally, each obviously had its own traditions, linked to primitive religious ceremonies. One may reasonably suppose that stories of origins gradually came to centre on Numa (or Servius Tullius).

If this is so, it seems to me in practice impossible and methodologically unsound to attempt to use the nature of the different professions to link the *collegia* with particular social or economic conditions and hence to tie the list in Plutarch to an identifiable historical moment. The fragility of such a procedure is obvious. The list in Plutarch consists of flautists, gold-workers, carpenters, dyers, leather-workers, tanners, bronze-workers and potters, in that order, but Plutarch also knew of the existence of less important trades merged by Numa.<sup>5</sup> Ever since Mommsen, the list and its omissions have been taken to indicate a relatively primitive stage of development.<sup>6</sup> The basic approach is perhaps valid, with numerous qualifications. In the first place, *collegia* are not the same as trades. Furthermore, the *collegia* and trades in question are of course also attested for more recent periods and their supposed antiquity in fact depends on their association with Numa. In any case, it is a fact that the pursuit of the historical period in which these (and only these) trades existed depends on the possibility of a link between the trades recorded by Plutarch and the material conditions of the economy which one can reconstruct, largely on the basis of archaeological evidence, for the different phases of the regal period.

Naturally, there is no agreement on the identification of the phase in question. Some scholars accept the period of Numa.<sup>7</sup> For others the period of Numa is too early, or at any rate on general grounds doubtful; better Rome of the Etruscan kings, indeed the reign of Servius Tullius, if Florus is right. Among those who have argued powerfully for this chronology, I cite only two: in 1930, Federica Tamborini, a pupil of Plinio Fraccaro, published a major article with the title 'The economic life of Rome under the last kings';<sup>8</sup> the information given by Plutarch is located under Servius Tullius (320 and 465), because the material conditions of the moment were such as to permit the existence of an artisan class; in the author's own words, 'Roma fu nell'ultimo periodo dell'età regia città grande e ricca, fornita di una classe organizzata di artigiani, centro di una notevole vita commerciale, che si diffuse nel Lazio, e importò arte, culti, e miti stranieri'. Tamborini's work enjoyed the agreement and approval of her (and my) teacher Plinio Fraccaro, with whose ideas it was wholly in accord. But the best and best-known presentation of this view of the end of the regal period is to be found in the 'Grande Roma dei Tarquinii' of Giorgio Pasquali.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> I refer to my remarks in *Les Origines de la république romaine* (Fondation Hardt, Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique 13) (1967), 154-62.

<sup>4</sup> The same themes recur in a much more complex form in Dionysius II, 62, 3-4 and 74, 2-4: E. Gabba, 'Per la tradizione dell'heredium romuleo', *Rend. Ist. Lomb.* 112 (1978), 255-6.

<sup>5</sup> Thus creating a single organization for all the *technai*: this is the meaning of the phrase in Plutarch,

as Storchi Marino, loc. cit. (n. 1), 10, has shown.

<sup>6</sup> *De collegiis et sodaliciis* (1843), 27.

<sup>7</sup> e.g. S. Tondo, *Leges Regiae e paricidas* (1973), 201; E. Peruzzi, *Origini di Roma II* (1973), 65.

<sup>8</sup> *Ath.* 8 (1930), 299-328 and 452-87.

<sup>9</sup> *Nuova Antologia*, 6 Agosto 1936, 405-16 = G. Pasquali, *Pagine Stravaganti II* (1968), 5-21; the article by Tamborini is cited in n. 6.

Everyone knows that this presentation has had and continues to have its supporters and disciples, as well as its critics. I do not propose here to consider the entire picture, even if I am substantially in agreement with it. It is necessary, however, to observe that the use of the list in Plutarch as an argument is entirely circular: the archaeological evidence is used to interpret the list and attribute it to the age of Servius, but once this has been done the list is itself used to prove the basic hypothesis.

A Servian attribution has now also been adopted by Jean-Claude Richard,<sup>10</sup> also making use of the passage in Florus, or rather taking it as a starting-point for his reconstruction; he supposes that some features of the archaic centuriate organization may be compared with the structure of the *collegia* attributed to Numa and hence confirm their Servian dating. But the role which one *collegium* or another *may* have played in the military or artistic history of Rome, involving the use of the technical skills of its members, does not seem to be an argument for dating the list as a whole; and I see no conceptual link whatever between the timocratic centuriate organization and the structure of the *collegia* as described and portrayed by Plutarch.

Let us return to the text. Plutarch asserts that among all the institutions of Numa the most remarkable was the division of the people, the *plethos*, by trade (17, 1). This opening remark, let alone what follows, makes it quite clear that by the term *plethos* Plutarch means the entire citizen body, composed of Romans and Sabines. The attempt to refer the aim and execution of the creation of the *collegia* to the population of the city alone is no more than an expedient to avoid the embarrassing oddity of a Rome perceived as composed solely of artisans and tradesmen, without farmers, an expedient which has been adopted from Schwegler onwards.<sup>11</sup> Such a perception of Rome is not only in flagrant contradiction with the traditional (and fundamentally correct) view of archaic (and indeed later) Rome, but also in disagreement with what Plutarch himself has just said about the development of agriculture for which Numa was responsible, even if it is true that the two tendencies converge in the propensity of Numa to foster peace and tranquillity. But one does not solve the problems of the text by evading its difficulties and I hope in a moment to be able to explain the contradiction, which derives from the juxtaposition of two different sources. One point may be made immediately, namely that it is precisely the implausibility of the tradition reported by Plutarch which explains its absence from the historical sources, none of which, as we have seen, attributes the creation of the *collegia* to Numa, let alone the interpretation which Plutarch gives. There are other examples of a similar difference of approach: for instance, no historical source talks of the *heredium* established by Romulus, which appears only in technical and antiquarian literature.

In any case, the tradition which appears in Plutarch of a city virtually without territory and consisting solely of the urban centre is not his invention. It belongs with a tradition recorded by Dionysius (IV, 14) apropos of Servius Tullius, according to which he divided the city into four regions, which in practice coincided with the four urban tribes; these four territorial tribes, however, are not seen in a wider context in which there figure also the rural tribes; rather, the new urban tribes for all practical purposes replaced the previous system of three gentilicial tribes and therefore also contained the entire citizen body. The account in Livy I, 43, 13, is similar.

Naturally, Dionysius IV, 15 also contains a different account of the Servian system, which is based by way of contrast on the countryside.<sup>12</sup> The importance of Dionysius for our purposes is that he presents a version of early Roman history in which the population of regal Rome was concentrated in the city and evidently isolated from its surroundings, whereas the normal view of Rome was of a city with an agricultural base, where the possession of landed property underlay the social hierarchy.

This contradictory set of traditions and learned reconstructions allows us to form an idea of the complexity of the interpretations which developed around individual moments

<sup>10</sup> ' Sur les prétendues corporations numaïques : a propos de Plutarque, Numa 17, 3', *Klio* 60 (1978), 423-8, reprinted in *Les origines de la plèbe romaine. Essai sur la formation du dualisme patricio-plébèien* (1978), 266-70. P. M. Martin, *L'idée de la royauté*

à Rome I (1982), 241, lapses into fantasy when he talks of a political exploitation of Numa by the Etruscan kings.

<sup>11</sup> A. Schwegler, *Röm. Geschichte* I, 2 (1853), 547.

<sup>12</sup> E. Gabba, *Ath.* 39 (1961), 102-3.

or aspects of early Roman history, and of the extreme difficulty of establishing the value of isolated pieces of information, let alone of using them for our own historical purposes.<sup>13</sup>

As we have seen, the division of the Roman people by trade aimed to overcome the ethnic and political opposition between the Roman and Sabine elements of the population. Plutarch offers us a part philosophical, part scientific explanation of the need to break up entities which are hard and hence miscible only with difficulty, in order to achieve precisely the homogeneity which is the necessary prelude to a different kind of subdivision. In the case under consideration, the new divisions are the *collegia* of the different trades. It may well be that Plutarch's theoretical analysis draws on Pythagorean influences. Certainly it recalls the important similar reasoning in Aristotle on the reforms of Cleisthenes and his restructuring of the Athenian citizen body, reforms which were analysed and interpreted in terms of the breaking of earlier forms of association and the unification of the citizens by the creation of new, smaller and more numerous, groupings (*Pol.* 1319 b; *Ath. Pol.* 21).<sup>14</sup>

When faced with reflections of this kind, we are not faced with abstract political theorizations or the analysis, however acute, of a philosopher. For there is an actual historical example of a process the underlying concepts of which are similar to those attributed to Numa, in which the reconciliation of opposing factions in a *polis* was achieved (or at least one hopes it was) by means of a complicated system of assignation and sortition, as a result of which the two opposing factions and some neutral citizens, and then the entire citizen body, were placed in groups of five people, in such a way as to include elements of the different parties, with a view to complete reconciliation in a spirit of friendship and justice. I refer to the decree of Nacona, one of the phantom inscriptions from Entella, on which David Asheri has already commented.<sup>15</sup> The inscription shows that it was actually possible to think of fusing and amalgamating hostile groups and to put such thoughts into practice.

The problem of why the trades were involved in the restructuring of the Roman citizen body seems to allow of a solution both on the level of political philosophy and on the level of the verbal analysis of Plutarch's text. The Platonic conception of the city as a community of citizens based on a division of tasks (*Rep.* II, 369b–372b) naturally underlies the structure described by Plutarch. But the most important, indeed decisive comparison is with Chapter 22 of the *Life of Solon* of Plutarch himself.<sup>16</sup> The action taken by Solon is described as designed to incline his fellow-citizens towards the *technai*; he is said to have gone so far as to lay down that a son was to be relieved of the obligation to maintain an elderly father, if he had not taught him a trade. Such a policy is related to a precise line of reasoning on social and economic policy: the soil of Attica was poor and unproductive and could not support all the inhabitants of Attica; the import of food involved the export of other products; Solon therefore privileged the trades and commerce and turned the attention of the citizens in this direction. Much of the legislation of Solon on the family is rightly related, directly or indirectly, to this perspective on economic policy. The account in Plutarch clearly depends on a vision of an Athens where craft and commercial activity were fundamental and indeed indispensable for the survival of Athens, whereas agriculture was entirely marginal to her economy. It is a simple, but basically true vision of Athens at the turn of the seventh and sixth centuries.<sup>17</sup>

Whoever interpreted the Rome of Numa as a Rome organized according to its crafts clearly did so by following the model of the Athens of Solon, ignoring the vast difference in social and economic conditions. Plutarch certainly found his material, and perhaps already the comparison between Solon and Numa, in one of his sources, which I shall try in a moment to place in time. The textual proof of this statement lies in the phrase which follows immediately on the description of the system of the *collegia* (17, 5): Plutarch here records the law attributed to Numa, which allowed a father to sell his son up to three times, apart from a married son. The same subject is fully discussed by Dionysius in the context

<sup>13</sup> On the different levels of the tradition on Numa see the splendid article of K. W. Nitzsch, *RE* v (1848), 724–6.

<sup>14</sup> Storch Marino, loc. cit. (n. 1), 34.

<sup>15</sup> *ASNP* 13 (1982), 776–7 (text), 1033–45 (comment).

<sup>16</sup> Elements of this interpretation appear already in U. Coli, *Collegia e sodalitates* (1913), now in *Scritti di diritto romano* 1 (1973), 15–18.

<sup>17</sup> E. Will, 'La Grèce arcaïque' in *Second Intern. Congress of Econ. History* (Aix-en-Provence, 1962) (1965), 77 ff.

of the legislation of Romulus on *patria potestas* (II, 26–7), with references to the Twelve Tables, Numa and the milder laws of Solon (26, 3). But in the text of the *Life of Numa* the record is wholly unrelated to what precedes and to what follows: its presence here is determined by the wish of Plutarch, or his source, to continue the parallel presentation of Numa and Solon, even if in the case of Numa there were no logical or historical links between the two points.

Everything encourages us to suppose that we are faced with a complex and erudite reconstruction, based on comparisons with the Greek world and full of philosophical reflections, notably Pythagorean, which were of course accentuated by Plutarch. Since the tradition of the links between Numa and Pythagoras probably originated and developed in Tarentine circles at the end of the fourth century, Storchi Marino, in the course of a careful analysis of the relevant chapter of Plutarch, was inclined to hold that the tradition of a structuring of the Roman people on the basis of *collegia* of craftsmen originated in the same place and at the same time. This seems to me unlikely.

However much may have been known in Tarentum in the second half of the fourth century of craft production at Rome, it is hard to suppose that one could seriously present Rome as a city given over to trade and devoid of agriculture. It is one thing to hypothesize cultural influence or dependence in the distant past, with a fictitious chronology to boot, it is an altogether different thing to falsify an objective contemporary reality, which could be studied and checked. If the problem can be resolved at all, it must be resolved in the context of the elaboration of early Roman history, carried out by blending such traditional information as had been preserved by one means or another with motifs from Greek political and philosophical analysis; as is well known, the process involved the reconstruction of early Roman political history along the lines familiar from the political development and the ideological battles of a later age, as well as the attribution to the kings as legislators of the origins of Roman juridical, political and religious institutions.

The pseudo-historical reconstruction of the political measures of Numa is very late; the process was only completed by the historians and jurists of the first century; this indeed probably only occurred after Cicero.<sup>18</sup> Dionysius himself records (II, 59, 1) 'those who have publicized the history of this man', who reappear as Roman historians of patchy accuracy (II, 61, 3; 64, 5) and who had already introduced comparisons with Greek lawgivers. Further on, Dionysius claims to have selected which of the many rules and institutions attributed to Numa to talk about, in order not to offer an account which would be too long for a history written in Greek, for Greeks (II, 63, 1). One may suppose that among the material eliminated by Dionysius there figured the structuring of the citizen body by trade, which will have appeared in flagrant contradiction with the vulgate tradition.

Personally, I doubt whether the tradition on the *collegia* goes back to Varro, as is often asserted. It is methodologically unsound to deal with the text of Plutarch by detaching the attribution of the *collegia* to Numa from the aim which their creation is supposed to have had; the two elements are inextricably linked. It is much easier to suppose that the attribution of the *collegia* to Numa was asserted in the course of the political struggles revolving around the abolition of the *collegia* in the course of the first century, on the grounds that they disturbed public order. Some of the *collegia* were allowed to survive on the grounds of their great antiquity,<sup>19</sup> and it may be on one of these occasions that a list of acceptable *collegia* was drawn up. It may also be that on one of these occasions someone attempted to assert that the *collegia* had originally been peaceable institutions which did not disturb public order and indeed that they had actually been a useful means to bring about the unity of different elements within the citizen body; such an approach will have been able to draw on well-known Greek theory and practice and will have fitted an already existing image of Numa.

In this context, another element in the tradition on Numa requires brief mention, that which deals with his selection as king. The question is notoriously complicated because

<sup>18</sup> See my remarks in *Ath.* 38 (1960), 200–7.

<sup>19</sup> Ascon. in Cornel. 59, 16 ff. Stangl: 'prop-terquod postea collegia et S.C. et pluribus legibus sublata praeter pauca et certa quae utilitas civitatis desiderasset, qualia sunt fabrorum lictorumque' (62 B.C.); Suet., *Caes.* 42, 4: 'cuncta collegia

praeter antiquitus constituta distraxit' (46 B.C.); Suet., *Aug.* 32, 3: 'collegia praeter antiqua et legitima dissolvit' (22 B.C.); in general see S. Accame, 'La legislazione romana intorno ai collegi nel I sec. a.C.', *Bull. Museo Impero Rom.* 13 (1942), 13–48.

it is related to the history of the institution of the *interregnum*, a history which was certainly constructed on the basis of the cases in the historical period, but which in Dionysius contains information on the structure of the archaic senate which is hard to make sense of. In II, 57–8, Dionysius offers an account of the selection of Numa which substantially agrees with that of Plutarch, though it is somewhat simplified. We are in the period of *interregnum*, after the death of Romulus; the senators, divided into two opposing groups, one senior, one junior, wish to re-establish the monarchy; their opposition is resolved by an agreement that one of the two factions shall choose the new king, but not from among its own members; the senior senators are entrusted with the choice and select an outsider, who is therefore also not a member of either faction, the Sabine Numa Pompilius.

In Plutarch's *Life of Numa* 2, 5, the conflict in the senate, composed of patricians, arises from the different ethnic origins of its members: Roman senators appointed by Romulus against Sabine senators appointed by Titus Tatius. The resort to an *interregnum* is only a temporary expedient, which in any case arouses the suspicions of the people, who are favourable to the re-establishment of monarchy. The two factions in the senate in the end agree on a curious procedure: <sup>20</sup> each must choose its candidate for the throne from the opposite faction (3, 2); and since the Sabines refuse to choose, the Roman senators choose the Sabine Numa Pompilius, who, however, did not belong to the group of Sabines established at Rome and was thus not a member of the Senate (3, 3).

The way in which the choice was made is certainly a device to explain how it was that the Roman senators, who were in the majority, chose a Sabine; on the other hand, no explanation is offered of why the Sabine senators refused to put forward a Roman candidate.<sup>21</sup> The fundamental element in Dionysius and in Plutarch seems to me to be the defence of the right of the senate to choose the king, a process which was only later subjected to popular confirmation.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, this senatorial right and the co-operation between the two factions are placed in the context of a historical narrative in which the roles of senate and king are different, but both have the same aim, namely the reconciliation of different elements of the citizen body and their eventual fusion. The idea of a structuring of the people by trade has the same purpose. Both episodes in the career of Numa are clearly an idealization of the past as an avenue to the interpretation of the present, dominated as it was by factional strife, if not by civil war, and by the perspective of radical constitutional change.

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<sup>20</sup> *Staseis* are seen as factions of the people by Flacelière, *Plutarque, Vies* I (1957), 182 and n. 2, but the comparison with Dionysius seems to exclude this interpretation.

<sup>21</sup> It is remarkable that in the inscription from

Nacona the two opposing factions each designate thirty names, choosing them from the other group, as a prelude to reconciliation.

<sup>22</sup> Cic., *de re pub.* II, 43; cf. with caution Martin, *op. cit.* (n. 10), 45 ff.