

APPENDIX I

THE PONTIFICAL CHRONICLE

In an almost complementary relationship to the still prevalent oral mode of communication, there developed in Rome what might almost be called an archival interest in compiling by means of written documents accessible to a restricted group of readers a precise record of past events¹. This is no less than an orientation towards history on the part of Roman culture, not only where family traditions are concerned, but also on the official level of civic chronicles, the composition of which constituted, along with the *Fasti consulares*, one of the institutional tasks of the pontifical college. To begin with at least the registration of the most important facts relating to civil life and to military campaigns was regarded as a sacred and esoteric activity.

In its genesis and in the specificity of its forms and content, however, this pontifical chronicle has represented one of the most arduous problems of archaic Latin culture, around which have developed masses of theories and hypotheses not always supported by evidence. In view of this awkward premise, it would be absurd to formulate further hypotheses or to proceed with a tedious and otiose reexamination of those of others. Instead, we shall rely on the few testimonies available and, by way of critical evaluation, derive information which is certain, even if circumscribed and limited, about the nature and the vicissitudes of the pontifical annals². We do not of course mean to

1. On the documentary archives belonging to the principal Roman families, cf. the statement by Pliny *N. H.* 35, 7: *Tabulina codicibus implebantur et monumentis rerum in magistratu gestarum.*

2. Of the vast literature on the subject, we shall only refer to the studies of major importance which we have used in the course of this chapter: Peter 1914, p. III ff.; Cantarelli 1898, p. 209 ff.; F. Altheim, *Epochen der röm. Gesch.* II,

answer an excessive confidence in mere hypotheses with an equally sterile scepticism which would ultimately prove to be no more than polemical and negative.

We learn from Cicero³ that in a remote epoch history was merely the composition of annals supervised by the Pontifex Maximus. It consisted of a written compilation of every event that occurred year by year from the origins to the pontificate of P. Mucius Scaevola, i.e. until c. 130-114 B.C. This annual record was then transcribed by the Pontifex himself on a tablet publicly exposed in the Regia for everyone to see. This was chronicle-like material which, Cicero tells us, was still *Annales Maximi* in his day. From the rest of his discussion relevant to the comparison between Greek and Roman historiography of the origins, it appears that the information recorded by the Pontifices generally concerned the times, men, places and events, in other words those same elements proper to a historical narrative.

The testimony of Servius⁴ completes the information and fills in certain details: each year the Pontifex Maximus had a white tablet (*tabula dealbata*) on which, after having written the names of the consuls and of the other magistrates, he noted down day by day all that was worthy of being remembered concerning either the internal vicissitudes of the city or military actions. Already in the archaic age this constant and diligent daily work of registration furnished the material for a vast collection in 80 volumes called *Annales Maximi* because they were drawn

Frankfurt a. Main 1935, p. 298 ff.; J. E. A. Crake, *Class. Philol.* 35, 1940, p. 375 ff.; F. Jacoby, *Atthis*, Oxford 1949, p. 60 ff.; De Sanctis 1956, p. 15 ff.; Pareti 1952, p. 13 ff.; Fraccaro 1957, p. 59 ff.; Momigliano 1966, p. 59 ff.; E. Badian, in *Latin Historians*, ed. by T. A. Dorey, London 1966, p. 1 ff.; Mazzarino 1966, II/1 pp. 250 ff.; 261 ff.; Gabba 1966, p. 149 ff.; Musti 1970, pp. 27-29; Peruzzi 1973, pp. 175-208. For a systematic discussion of the various contributions on the problem of the pontifical annals, see A. Alföldi, *Early Rome and the Latins*, Ann Arbor 1963 [1965], and G. Perl, *Forsch. u. Fortschr.* 38, 1964, pp. 185 ff.; 213 ff. For the texts, cf. Peter 1914, pp. III ff.; 3 f.; *F. Gr. Hist.* 840 F 1-5.

3. *De or.* 2, 12, 52 = Peter 1914, p. III f. = *F. Gr. Hist.* 840 F 2a.

4. Serv. Dan. *ad Aen.* 1, 373 = Peter 1914, p. IV = *F. Gr. Hist.* 840 F 2b.

from the work of the Pontifices Maximi.

One fact that emerges from Cicero and Servius is the clear distinction, already observed in the last century by T.H. Dyer and L. Cantarelli⁵, between: a) *commentarii* or notes gathered privately by the Pontifex and preserved in the archives of the Regia; b) *tabula dealbata*, whose purpose was to make public part, if not all, of the notes of the Pontifex; c) *Annales Maximi*, that is the official⁶ and definitive edition in 80 volumes, edited towards the end of the 2nd century B.C. by Mucius Scaevola or by others⁷, of all the chronicle material in the archives of the Pontifices. If we are to believe Cicero the pontifical records began with the history of Rome itself, as we see in the late Roman author of the *Origo gentis Romanae*⁸ who states that the fourth book of the pontifical annals narrated the legends of Alba and the Alban kings. But it is evident that Cicero was basing himself solely on the *Annales Maximi*, which did include a section on the origins. Cicero does not, then, provide independent evidence for determining the epoch in which the recording actually began, and it obviously cannot be traced back to such a remote age.

One point of reference has been recognized in the solar eclipse of c.403 B.C., which, according to the explicit testimony of Cicero⁹, was mentioned in Ennius¹⁰ and in the *Annales Maximi*¹¹

5. Dyer, *The History of the Kings of Rome*, London 1868, p. XXIX f.; Cantarelli 1898, p. 209 ff.

6. Cicero (*De rep.* 2, 15, 28) emphasizes the official character of the *Annales Maximi* qualifying them as *annales publici* (cf. also Diomed. *Gr. Lat.* I, p. 484 Keil = Peter 1914, p. XVII n. 3).

7. According to Cicero (*De or.* 2, 12, 52; cf. n. 3), the custom of registering the most important events year by year and transcribing them on the *tabula* ended with the pontificate of P. Mucius Scaevola; Servius (*loc. cit.* n. 4) affirms that the ancients (*veteres*) had already edited the collection of the pontifical commentaries in 80 volumes. From the combination of the two testimonials it has been deduced that the editor of the *Annales Maximi* was really P. Mucius Scaevola.

8. 17, 3; 5.

9. *De rep.* 1, 16, 25.

10. *Ann.* 153 Skutsch (163 Vahlen).

11. Fr. 3 Peter¹.

and was the starting point for the calculation of the preceding eclipses as far back as the age of Romulus¹². If we were also to use Livy's reference¹³ to the speech of the tribune Canuleius, the *terminus ante quem* for the composition of the commentaries of the Pontifices could be extended to 445 B.C. Canuleius is supposed to have lamented the fact that the plebes were not allowed to consult the *fasti* and the commentaries of the Pontifices lest they advance political claims, basing their requests on a precise knowledge of past events. That Numa Pompilius had become king without being a patrician or a Roman citizen could thus constitute a political precedent for the plebes' claim to the consulate. But Canuleius adds, not without irony, that in spite of the patricians' claim to keeping it secret, certain information was naturally known through oral tradition not only to all the Romans, but also to foreigners. This testimony is of decisive significance for evaluating the effect of oral tradition on the later literary annals and on Greek historiography of the earliest period of Rome. In our opinion, on the other hand, it is not of such importance for fixing the *terminus post quem* of the public exposition of the *tabula dealbata*, as Cantarelli suggested¹⁴: the publication in itself does not seem in total contrast with the secrecy of the commentaries since, as we shall see, it was easy to conceal circumstances and political implications which might compromise the prestige of the upper class.

12. Cf. De Sanctis 1956, p. 19 f. Cicero (*De rep.* 1, 16, 25) affirms that, according to Ennius, the eclipse occurred about the year 350 of the Roman era (*anno quinquagesimo CCC fere post Romam conditam*). Because of this Pareti (1952, p. 14) maintained that the date of the eclipse must have been calculated not from 753 B. C., but from c.880, i.e. from the year of the foundation of Rome according to Ennius' chronology, and thus fixed around 530 B. C. Beloch, on the other hand, who believes that the pontifical annotations started towards the beginning of the 3rd cent. B. C., proposed emending the reading *quinquagesimo CCC*, transmitted by the manuscript of *De republica*, to *quinquagesimo CCCC* and to identify the eclipse with the one that occurred in 288 B. C. (*Hermes* 57, 1922, p. 119 ff.; *Röm. Gesch.*, Berlin-Leipzig 1926, p. 92 f.). On Beloch's hypothesis, cf. Fraccaro 1957, p. 62 and Mazzarino 1966, 11/1 p. 271 ff. who nevertheless defends the transmitted text and declares himself in favour of the traditional interpretation.

13. 4, 3, 9.

14. 1898, p. 214.

But this information, in any case, has a purely orientative value. We cannot really exclude the possibility that the annalistic practice, at least where the composition of commentaries for private use is concerned, goes back to a more remote epoch¹⁵.

As regards the content of these pontifical chronicles, the earliest testimony we have, that of Cato, has generally appeared in marked contrast to the statements of Cicero and Servius. In the fourth book of the *Origines* Cato declares that he does not like to dwell in his historical narrative on facts registered in the tablet of the Pontifex Maximus (*quod in tabula apud pontificem maximum est*), like the price of grain and the eclipses of the moon or of the sun, topics of such futility as not to be worth his attention¹⁶. From these explicit and polemical words of Cato we might infer that the pontifical tablets were limited to information of practical interest concerning the requirements of commercial and agricultural life, and that they neglected all other news about the major events in political life and military campaigns. But this presumed discrepancy is a mere hypothesis, supported by neither of the two possible interpretations of Cato's text. Either Cato intended to refer polemically only to some of the information furnished by the pontifical tablets, that is, to

15. The information given by Livy (1, 60, 3) about commentaries written by Servius Tullius is problematic. Still less credible is the other piece of information, also by Livy (1, 32, 2), about commentaries by King Numa, from which Ancus Marcius would have ordered the Pontifex to extract the norms concerning the sacred law (*sacra publica*) and expose them on a tablet. On the other hand we cannot confirm this testimony with the discovery, in 181 B. C., of the presumed sepulchre of Numa containing an ark with legal-wisdom writings on papyrus, some in Latin, others in Greek, on the true nature of which the sources disagree. The writings were explicitly attributed to Numa himself by an inscription placed on the ark. For the perplexities and doubts about the authenticity of these writings, see the lucid analyses by W. Speyer, *Bücherfunde in der Glaubenswerbung der Antike*, Göttingen 1970, pp. 51-55 (with bibliography); *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum*, München 1971, pp. 67 f.; 89 f.; 141 f. and by F. Della Corte, 'Numa e le streghe', *Maia* 26, 1974, pp. 3-20. Ready to acknowledge authenticity is Peruzzi 1973, pp. 15 f.; 107-144.

16. *Ap. Gell.* 2, 28, 6 = fr. 77 Peter².

those elements he considered futile and lacking historical interest¹⁷, or else even if the matters he mentioned were all that was registered on the tablets, this limitation may well have applied only to the *tabula dealbata* and not to the *commentarii* of which the *tabula* contained a shorter version destined to bring to public notice exclusively the events of practical and immediate interest¹⁸. If, as we have sought to show, this presumed discrepancy does not exist, we must give up the hypothesis of a reelaboration of the annals in the epoch in which they were published — a reelaboration made to complete the annalistic chronical with political and military information. It was a hypothesis which served only to explain how Cicero and Servius could allude to topics that do not appear in Cato¹⁹.

If the critical line we have followed is correct, the greater part of the material used in the *Annales Maximi* must have consisted of the commentaries of the Pontifices which probably represented an ampler and more particularized version than the *tabulae*²⁰. If there really was a reelaboration, it should probably be placed, as Pareti has rightly realized²¹, during the period im-

17. The mixture of political-military information and information about prodigies and eclipses could be confirmed by the comparison used by Peter (1914, p. XXV ff.) with the chronicle annotations of the *tabulae paschales*, written in the Middle Ages and preserved in churches and monasteries.

18. Even if many details of the compilation of the commentaries and the *tabulae* can obviously not be checked, the reconstruction proposed by Cantarelli (1898, p. 209 ff.) appears probable. The annotations were probably registered first in the commentaries in a more ample form, and then, in a more condensed form, on the *tabula*. This had to be exposed at the *Regia* not at the end, but at the beginning of the year, in such a way that the most important facts were noted by the Pontifex as they occurred for the purpose of furnishing the citizens with immediate information. Once they had been withdrawn at the end of the year, the tablets were not preserved in the *Regia*. The contrary hypothesis, maintained by Pareti (1952, p. 13), does not seem likely if only for reasons of space (cf. Fraccaro 1957, p. 61). Moreover if the commentaries were preserved in the archive, there would have been no point in preserving the tablets.

19. Cf. most recently Momigliano 1966, p. 59 f.

20. On the writing surface on the *tabula* and on the extent of the text it contained, see the convincing observations of Peruzzi (1973, p. 187 f.).

21. 1952, p. 14 f.

mediately after the Gallic Fire (c. 390 B.C.). In this connection, Livy's precise and circumstantial discussion²² of documentation available to him for the composition of the first five books of his *Histories* is of supreme importance. Livy remarks that his narrative of the events of the earliest age of Rome from the origins up to the Gallic Fire lacks documentary bases as solid as those for the later period. He provides various reasons: in the first place the distance in time, which makes the facts of a distant past appear more obscure; in the second place the rarity of writing in remote antiquity and the consequent necessity for the historian to trust in oral traditions; and finally — and this is the point of greatest interest to us — the disappearance of the larger part of the pontifical commentaries and other documents from public and private archives which were destroyed in the Gallic Fire of Rome²³. Livy's attitude is more confident when narrating later events, as if he were setting out to write the history of Rome starting from a second foundation of the city²⁴.

After the Gallic Fire had destroyed a large part of the archival material, says Livy²⁵, it was felt necessary to locate the surviving texts of laws and treaties and to rewrite the irremediably lost documents, as the annalist Clodius attests for the genealogical tablets²⁶: the new version contains forgeries reflecting the interests of whoever wanted to join the nobility. We may well

22. 6, 1.

23. De Sanctis' scepticism (1956, p. 4 f.) about the ancient testimonials of the destruction of public and private documents in the Gallic fire appears unjustified. We do not see why a piece of information on which the sources agree need be an "etiological myth" destined to explain the scarcity of ancient documents still accessible toward the end of the republican era. Recently Peruzzi (1973, p. 202 f.) has supposed that the *volumina* containing the commentaries of the Pontifices had in some way been saved, as happened to other sacred objects of public interest, which, according to Livy, were partly hidden underground and partly transferred to Caere before the Gauls entered Rome (5, 40, 7-10; cf. also 5, 39, 9-11; 5, 50, 3; 7, 20, 7). A large part of the documents may indeed have been saved, but what we wish to emphasize is that not *all* the documents could have been.

24. 6, 1, 3: *clariora deinceps certioraque ab secunda origine velut ab stirpibus laetius feraciusque renatae urbis gesta domi militiaeque exponentur.*

25. 6, 1, 10.

26. *Ap. Plut. Numa* 1, 2 = fr. 1 Peter².

assume that, just when the compilation of the annual chronicle began again, much the same thing happened to the commentaries of the Pontifices which had, as we saw, been largely destroyed in the fire²⁷. The ways and means by which the Pontifices elaborated this new version are easy to imagine. Besides turning to their mnemonic repertory and to the oral traditions which constituted one of the fundamental historical sources for the reconstruction of the past in that period, they must also have used every other surviving document, public or private. To that occasion, then, just when the pontifical chronicle seemed to revive together with the city of Rome itself, we may attribute the writing of that part of the commentaries relating to the period of the origins which was then included in the first books of the *Annales Maximi*²⁸.

The reelaboration of the pontifical chronicle, like that of the

27. The hypothesis appears obvious, nor can the argument *ex silentio* adopted by Fraccaro (1957, p. 62) against it be decisive. He insists, as against Pareti, on the lack of testimonials concerning the reconstitution of "historical works" after the fire of Rome.

28. Though slight modifications and manipulations at the time of the publication of the *Annales Maximi* cannot be excluded, it is nevertheless impossible to believe that entire books on the origins and the regal age were added when these topics had already been treated in the literary annals. Besides, the purpose of the publication was obviously to make known in a definitive edition the age-old activity of the Pontifices once the custom of the annual commentaries had ended. In this connection the statement of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (I, 74, 3) could have a decisive value; according to him, Polybius (6, 11a, 2) must have relied for the date of the foundation of Rome on the unique testimony of the pontifical tablet. Even if the chronology of the composition of the works of Polybius is very problematic, in particular that of book VI (cf. A. Lesky, *Gesch. gr. Lit.*, Bern 1971³, p. 866 f., with bibliography), we can nevertheless presume with almost absolute certainty that it was written before the publication of the *Annales Maximi*. It would thus prove that, before the edition of the *Annales Maximi*, part of the pontifical documents was on the period of the origins. It stands to reason that if the testimony of Dionysius be thus understood, the expression ἐπι τοῦ παρὰ τοῖς ἀρχιερεῦσι κεμένου πίνακος must, because of the above considerations, be interpreted as a general reference to the pontifical archives. If, on the other hand, Polybius found the date *ab urbe condita* on the tablet that was still exposed in his day from year to year outside the *Regia* (cf. Peruzzi 1973, p. 200), Dionysius' testimony would be of no use for dating the part of the *Annales Maximi* about the origins.

genealogical tables, was not, of course, free of tendentious alterations inspired by the financial and political interests of the Pontifices or even by those same ambitions of the nobility which Cicero had already denounced as a cause of historical falsification in the *laudationes funebres*²⁹.

29. *Brut.* 16, 62. Mazzarino (1966, II/1 p. 250) observes rightly: "Pontifices belonging to a particular political group of noblemen can have added convenient information to complete other information which did not satisfy them". A relevant example of such a procedure is noted by Mazzarino in the juxtaposition of the episode of the plebeian Lucius Albinus, the sacred saviour of Rome at the time of the Gallic catastrophe, and the two other aristocratic versions which present Camillus and M. Manlius Capitolinus as the military and political saviours of Rome.

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