

Valéry Raydon on Consuls and a Hypothesis about Early Rome

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Abstract: A recent book by Valéry Raydon shows that diplomatic gifts in Republican Rome constituted a trifunctional set, but that the third-function gifts were often linked specifically with the consul. Since consuls were the normal heads of state, the linkage is paradoxical. In the light of the pentadic theory of Indo-European ideology, it is here proposed that the paired consulship was originally a third-function institution, but that, like some other representatives of that function, the consuls underwent 'promotion'.

Keywords: Consulship; early Rome; myth and history; Indo-European ideology; Struggle of the Orders; hierarchy.

Résumé: Un livre récent de Valéry Raydon démontre que, dans la Rome républicaine, les dons diplomatiques formaient un ensemble trifonctionnel, mais que les dons de troisième fonction étaient souvent liés au consul. Les consuls étant normalement les chefs d'État, il s'agit-là d'une liaison paradoxale. À la lumière de la théorie pentadique de l'idéologie indo-européenne, on propose ici que les consuls étaient d'abord une institution de troisième fonction, mais que, comme d'autres représentants de cette fonction, la paire a été « promue ».

Mots clés : Consuls ; Rome archaïque ; mythe et histoire ; idéologie indo-européenne ; conflit des ordres ; hiérarchie.

In his *Héritages indo-européens dans la Rome républicaine* (2014) Valéry Raydon makes an important contribution to trifunctionalist interpretations of that society. Starting out from the sets of gifts addressed by republican Rome to foreign kings, he explores many other topics, including Roman kingship and the politico-religious calendar; but the following does not attempt to review the book, merely to react to one of its ideas. As Dominique Briquel notes in a lucid preface, the contention in question may appear 'impossible, even scandalous'.

In the Republic it is the consuls who are normally the heads of state, replacing the kings before them, but the diplomatic gifts linked with the consuls fall not

(as might be expected) under the first function or even under the second, but under the third. This is where the evidence points, but what is to be made of the paradox? Raydon offers his own interpretation and Briquel emphasises one aspect of it, but there is more to be said. Perhaps the paradox can be further clarified by bringing to bear the pentadic theory of Indo-European ideology, which I have been trying to develop over the last quarter century.

Pentadic theory essentially accepts the trifunctional schema, but with two provisos. The scheme needs to be expanded at the bottom end of the hierarchy to accommodate enemies, demons, and devalued outsiders, and it needs to be tidied up at the top end. Trifunctionalists, including Raydon, often recognise ‘transfunctional’ entities such as kings, and this idea provides the basis for postulating a category covering other more or less transcendent beings, including creators and founders, who relate to wholes rather than parts. To recognise this additional category implies removing ‘sovereignty’ from the definition of the first function, which continues to focus on wisdom and those who specialise in it – whether they apply it to the administration of the state or to dealings with the divine.

Raydon argues that the classification of gifts reflects the classification of the *insignia* or *ornamenta* associated respectively with priests (F1), triumphing generals (F2), and consuls (F3). Although there is no reason to recognise more than three types of gift the very notion of gift implies a giver and receiver, so the context brings together five entities and might offer scope for pentadic theory. However, this is by the way: my focus here is on the consuls.

Of the various F3 gifts in Raydon’s material the most striking is the ivory curule chair. Although the consuls often lead armies in war, the chair is where they sit when performing one of their important politico-jural peacetime duties, namely when they preside over the assembly of the citizen body in the *comitia curiata*. This consular activity relates to a set of words that have often been regarded as etymological cognates based on the reconstructed form **co-viria* ‘collectivity of men’¹: *curia*, meaning one of the thirty divisions of early Roman society and the places where they meet; Quirites, the citizen body itself; and Quirinus, the F3 deity who protects the Quirites and with whom Romulus merges at his death. Raydon argues that, if the consul is viewed in this context, his association with F3 is not surprising. Briquel, citing Dumézil (1977: 178-180), emphasises that if anything is surprising, it is that the Romans chose as their canonical F3 deity, not a god of fertility or wealth, but a god of

¹For doubts see de Vaan 2008 s.v. *quir s.*

the total social mass organised into its socio-political units. The link between consul and F3 follows from the way in which, at Rome, the representation of F3 has diverged (sc. from the Indo-European norm)².

The consul~F3 connection can be most simply approached via the fact that F3 representatives so often come in pairs. Any reader of Dumézil will recall instances, such as the twin A vin deities in India, but F3 pairs are not always twins: Njörðr and Freyr are father and son, and other modes of linkage appear in Allen and Woodard (2013 [Kubera]) or Allen (2014). Though I have often referred to the F3 *Mab bh rata* marshal alya, I only recently noticed that immediately after Yudhis hira kills the marshal he kills his unnamed younger brother, 'who was his brother's equal in all respects' (Crit. Ed. 9.16.59). It must be important that the consuls are paired. No doubt practical justifications for the pairing need to be recognised, and consuls are not the only magistrates or office-holders supposed to come in pairs, or to have done so originally. But many offices have only one incumbent at a time, for instance *dictator*, *interrex*, *rex sacrorum*, *magister equitum*, *pontifex maximus*.

A second approach to our paradox – or a third, if the **co-viria* complex is included – is via Rome's foundation myths. The Founder par excellence was not only assimilated to F3 Quirinus at his death, but at the start of his life – born a twin, brought up as a humble shepherd – he would fit well under the same function. I have argued elsewhere (2011) that this F3 interpretation (originally made by Dumézil) is confirmed by the place of Romulus and Remus within a pentadic series that starts with Janus and Evander. Furthermore, the city founded by Romulus falls in the F3 position in the sequence of cities that starts with Troy, Lavinium, and Alba Longa (Allen 2010). In view of all this it makes good sense that the Parentalia on 21 April, the *dies natalis* of Rome, celebrates the paired pastoral deities called Pales. The consuls may be joint heads of state, but it is a state that is profoundly rooted in F3.

However, to put together these three approaches is not to resolve the paradox. For further help one can follow up the hint given by the Roman folk-etymology which linked Quirites with Cures, the capital of the Sabines. Whatever the realities of their history may have been, the Sabines played an important role in Rome's origin myths – a role which, as Dumézil showed repeatedly, falls under F3. One thinks of the Rape of the Sabines (which provided the women needed to bear the second generation of Roman citizens),

²« C'est la conséquence logique de l'inflexion qu'avait subie, à Rome, la représentation de la troisième fonction » (Briquel 2014 : 9).

and of the consequent invasion of Rome by the Sabines under the wealthy Titus Tatius. The peaceful resolution of this conflict led to a merging of the two populations, with a doubling of Rome's demographic mass, and to Romulus sharing his rule with Titus Tatius³. In these stories, Dumézil argued, the Sabines represent F3, and their conflict with Rome is paralleled elsewhere in Indo-Europaea by 'Wars of Foundation', in which divine representatives of F3 are integrated into trifunctional pantheons following some sort of struggle with representatives of higher functions. Similarly the annalistic tradition presents Roman society as incomplete until it has incorporated an F3 component.

However, this F3 component belongs to the story of Rome's foundation: it is not suggested that thereafter the Sabines constituted, or gave rise to, a plebeian or F3 component of Roman society. Far from it. Numa, Romulus's successor as king of Rome, was a Sabine from Cures; deeply learned in both divine and human law, he is generally recognised as filling the F1 slot in the king list. Similarly, at some point (the sources vary), another Sabine, who came to be known as Appius Claudius, arrived with his numerous clients and soon became a prominent senator; his line was deeply pro-patrician and anti-plebeian. Putting together Romulus himself, Numa, and Appius Claudius, one sees that birth in a position that represents or previously represented F3 does not prevent individuals rising to high social rank. The point can be expressed in terms of rising, advancement, or promotion within a hierarchy⁴. Romulus, the humble shepherd lad, rises to the rank of king and even god; the F3 A vin deities, whose closeness to mankind excludes them from receiving the *soma* enjoyed by higher gods, are promoted to the rank of *soma*-drinkers when they are helped to win a conflict against Indra.

In thinking about early Rome, before (say) 350, it is worth distinguishing two sorts of limitation on our knowledge. It is notoriously difficult to know which individuals, institutions, or events, if any, are historical in the normal sense of the word; but in addition, the texts are simply silent about much that we should like to know. For instance, when Romulus divided his people into thirty *curiae*, naming them after the Sabine women (Livy 1.13.6), his action presupposes the division into three tribes – Ramnenses, Luceres, Titienses (the last name being associated with Titus Tatius); but the tripartition is never

³In what is arguably the F3 phase of his biography (Allen 2005).

⁴I shall use the term 'promotion' despite the fact that it often implies a static hierarchy. But a person can rise socially at the same time as a hierarchy changes so as to become less rigid or less important.

presented in any detail. Similarly, although under the kings occasional references are made to individual offices, especially religious ones (such as pontifex or fetial), accounts of the origin of most positions of authority appear only after the expulsion of the kings, and are presented piecemeal, not as constituting a system. It is generally accepted (following Livy 3.55.12) that consuls were preceded by praetors, but to gain from the texts a picture of the origin of either office is extremely difficult, as is well illustrated by Momigliano (1969). If the structure of early Roman society is obscure, so is the organisation of leadership roles within that society.

It is here that Indo-European comparison can hope to contribute. Most classicists, even when they refer to Dumézil or to comparativism, do not try to formulate their ideas in terms of the three functions (let alone the five categories of pentadic theory). Consider the Struggle of the Orders, the apparently long-continued political conflict that pitted the traditional elite of patricians and senate against the plebeians (Raaflaub 2005). No doubt there are difficulties of all sorts in definition of terms and in interpretation of sources, and it would make historical sense if the struggle changed its character over the centuries as Rome expanded. But what a comparativist can add, with some confidence, is that in its account of the early period the annalistic tradition was profoundly moulded by the Indo-European tradition (see, e.g., the copious work of Briquel, or Allen 2003, 2009), and to ignore this is to deprive oneself of an essential supplement to what we are told by the Latin and Greek texts. These texts may not tell us much about the three Romulean tribes (or the four Servian ones), but it would be odd if a society whose narratives and religion were so deeply marked by Indo-European ideology did not use that ideology when thinking about its own structure; and it would be equally odd if this articulation had no bearing on the Struggle – or to be more precise, on the stories told about it.

In brief, I hypothesise that Roman traditions of the past implicitly envisaged their society in terms of the pentadic ideology. The three classical functions were represented as follows. The patricians, monopolising or dominating priestly activity, and expected to employ their wisdom in deliberating on public affairs, represented F1. F2 was represented by the *equites*, who were conscripted by Romulus (into three centuries, whose names suggest that they were drawn from the three tribes). Finally, and ranked lowest in the triad, the F3 plebs were the labouring poor, often oppressed. The bottom of the hierarchy consisted of serious enemies (so *not* the F3 Sabines of Rome's first or

foundational war), together with slaves captured from serious enemies or descendants of those slaves. The top of the hierarchy consisted of royalty until they were expelled, and thereafter of dictators when they were needed – which was usually during military emergencies. As for peacetime, the texts emphasise the continuity from *rex* to *rex sacrorum*, but the statement needs to be nuanced. The *rex sacrorum* is the highest ranking in the five-member *ordo sacerdotum* recorded by Festus (Dumézil 1969: 160, Allen 1996: 17), and the *ordo* as a whole is a pentadic structure nested within F1.

If the hypothesis is on the right tracks, one would expect situations to arise, in ritual or elsewhere, where components of the social structure were represented by individuals⁵. We have met the king/dictator and the *rex sacrorum*, and for F2 we can add the *magister equitum*, who was appointed by the dictator when he assumed office. But what about the plebs? Here we come back to Raydon's link between consuls and F3. Of course, according to the texts, the first official representatives of the plebs, the *tribuni plebis*, were elected in '493' after the First Secession of the Plebs. But we do not have to believe that, up until a particular moment, the F3 component of society lacked institutionalised spokesmen or representatives. 'The original number of tribunes was two,' says Ogilvie confidently (1965: 311)⁶, and before the role was filled by paired tribunes it could have been filled by paired figures under other names, including 'consul'.

I phrase this proposal cautiously since, as we noted, the nomenclature of the early magistrates is problematic. However, we do not need here to delve into the relation between consuls and praetors, since the hypothesis requires no more than that at *some* point the term 'consul' was linked with the F3 component of society. The problem is to connect this linkage with the fact that consuls later came to represent the society as a whole.

The solution offered here lies in the notion of the 'promotion' of F3 representatives, as discussed above. In the Hindu pantheon the F3 A *vins* are promoted to the status of full deities; in Roman pseudohistory, the F3 Sabine outsiders of the War of Foundation are promoted to the rank of full Roman citizens. Consuls are promoted from the F3 plebeian associations that linger on in the context of diplomatic gifts so as to become the normal heads of state. The process involved is essentially the same as applies on a much

⁵Compare royal inaugurations in Vedic ritual, where representatives of the four estates (*varnas*), stationed at the cardinal points, anoint the king in the centre (Allen 1999: 248).

⁶It may be significant that the plebeian tribunes were assisted by two plebeian aediles.

broader scale to the Struggle of the Orders: the F3 plebeians are originally ineligible for priestly and other offices, and are promoted so as to become eligible. But the ancient Indo-European pentadic classification loses vitality as the centuries pass, and it is not necessary to allot the consul to a single function after the fourth century.

The hypothesis will be easier to accept for those who envisage the classical texts about early Rome as modified myth/epic, reflecting or incorporating bits and pieces of real history, than for those who see them as basically historical writing, incorporating bits and pieces from myth/epic. My hope is that others will judge it worth filling out and relating to other hypotheses in the literature. Raydon's finding seems to me even more interesting than as he presents it.

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