

# The Tribes of Romulus and the Priesthoods of Rome

James H. Richardson  
Massey University<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract:* The early Roman state is widely held to have been organised on the basis of three tribes, the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres. According to some (ancient writers and modern scholars alike), it was from these tribes that various priests were originally recruited. This view, however, is not really supported by the evidence. It is quite clearly an antiquarian reconstruction, and is most likely the work of M. Terentius Varro. Not only is this conclusion in keeping with the argument—sometimes spurned, but largely just ignored—that the Romulean tribes may themselves be an antiquarian reconstruction, but it may also shed some light on Varro’s handling of Rome’s priesthoods in his lost work, the *Human and Divine Antiquities*. An impartial assessment of the evidence also reveals just how little the Romans actually knew about the early history of even their most important priesthoods.

*Keywords:* augurs; pontiffs; Vestal Virgins; Romulean tribes; M. Terentius Varro.

Apart from those who held family priesthoods, sixty priests were appointed in Romulus’ reign to carry out the public rites by tribes and *curiae* on behalf of the city; I am relating what Terentius Varro has written in his *Antiquities*.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus<sup>2</sup>

At some stage (the episode is variously dated), Romulus, Rome’s founder and first king, divided the population of his city into three tribes, or so some ancient authors claimed.<sup>3</sup> These three tribes were called the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres, and they supposedly provided the foundation for various parts of the early Roman state. Romulus was said (again, by some) to have subdivided each of the three tribes into ten, to form the thirty *curiae*.<sup>4</sup> It was from the tribes and *curiae* that Rome’s original army of 3,000 infantrymen and 300 cavalrymen was allegedly recruited.<sup>5</sup> According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, it was by the tribes and *curiae* that Romulus had the first senators chosen.<sup>6</sup> And it was also from the tribes and *curiae* that various priests

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence address: J.H.Richardson@Massey.ac.nz.

<sup>2</sup> *Ant. Rom.* 2.21.2: χωρὶς γὰρ τῶν ἐχόντων τὰς συγγενικὰς ἱερωσύνας οἱ τὰ κοινὰ περὶ τῆς πόλεως ἱερὰ συντελοῦντες κατὰ φυλάς τε καὶ φράτρας ἐξήκοντα κατεστάθησαν ἐπὶ τῆς ἐκείνου ἀρχῆς· λέγω δὲ ἃ Τερέντιος Οὐάρρων ἐν ἀρχαιολογίαις γέγραφεν. (All translations are my own.) Wiseman 2009, 86 n. 26 argues plausibly that Dionysius is referring to the *Human Antiquities* rather than the *Divine Antiquities*.

<sup>3</sup> In the context of Rome’s foundation: Varro *Antiq.* fr. 4.6 Mirsch (= Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.47.4; Dionysius follows Varro, see *Ant. Rom.* 2.7.2). After Romulus’ reconciliation with Titus Tatius and the Sabines: Plut. *Rom.* 20.1–2; this is also usually understood in the etymology for the Tities (viz. *ab Tatío*; see Maltby 1991 s.v. Tities), although note Richardson 2022b. Not everyone agreed: see Livy 1.13.8, 1.36.2, 1.36.7–8, 1.43.9 and *De vir. ill.* 2.11, where the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres are centuries of cavalry instead of tribes (on this very important, but widely missed difference, see below).

<sup>4</sup> Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.7.2; Plut. *Rom.* 20.2; Cass. Dio fr. 5.8.

<sup>5</sup> Infantry: Varro *Ling.* 5.89; Cass. Dio fr. 5.8; cavalry: Varro *Ling.* 5.91; Fest. 484L; from the *curiae*: Paul. Fest. 48L; Serv. *Aen.* 9.368.

<sup>6</sup> Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.12.1–2.

were said to have been appointed, including most notably the augurs and the Vestal Virgins. The pontiffs have since been added to the list.

This system of tribes and *curiae* and recruitment has long been accepted in modern scholarship as genuinely historical,<sup>7</sup> and yet most of it looks distinctly like antiquarian reconstruction. There is even good reason to conclude that the Romulean tribes are themselves an antiquarian reconstruction—in all probability, the work of M. Terentius Varro—and, as such, did not ever actually exist.<sup>8</sup> The evidence for this system is also far less secure and much more diverse and inconsistent than modern scholarship usually allows.<sup>9</sup> To make things fit together, numerous variant traditions have to be explained away, or otherwise just ignored, and many arguments now rely on modern consensus instead of ancient accounts, which in some instances have been left far behind.

The evidence for several of Rome's priesthoods is a case in point. A number of different traditions exist to account for the creation of the augurs, the Vestal Virgins and the pontiffs, but only some of them (and none of them in the case of the pontiffs) actually connect these priesthoods with the Romulean tribes. Even in those accounts that do connect them, the connection is not always maintained, and the evidence is often better explained when the connection is taken to be a later idea, one that has in some cases been imposed onto an existing account of events where it simply does not fit. And yet such connections have quite often been preserved in modern scholarship, and have moreover sometimes even been developed further than they are in the ancient sources.

All this encourages a number of conclusions, about the extent of Roman knowledge about the origins and early history of some of the major priesthoods of Rome, about the Romulean tribes and about the whole system of which those tribes are supposed to have been the central part. It may also be possible to draw some conclusions about Varro's handling of these matters in his lost masterpiece, the *Human and Divine Antiquities*. Much of this looks, after all, to be the product of scholarly reconstruction (not only ancient, however, but modern too).

<sup>7</sup> Not everyone defends every part of the system, although some do; a few, on the other hand, go far beyond the evidence with their claims; see variously Taylor 1960, 4; Momigliano 1963, 108–109, 111–12, 117; De Martino 1972, 112–16; Gjerstad 1973, 112–15, 150–52, 155–56, 268; Heurgon 1973, 120–23; Alföldi 1974, 58–64; Richard 1978, 195–97; Scullard 1980, 67–68, 71–72; Thomsen 1980, 188–93, 198–202, etc.; Wieacker 1988, 201–202, 212–13; Momigliano 1989, 104–105; Cornell 1995, 114–18, 183; Forsythe 2005, 108–109; Rieger 2007, 83–277; Valditaro 2008, 15–16, 34; Capogrossi Colognesi 2014, 9; Fronda 2015, 48; Armstrong 2016, 76, 189–90; Ziółkowski 2019, 24–25, 238–40; Bradley 2020, 105–109; further references can be found below.

<sup>8</sup> See Bormann 1893; Niese 1923, 36–37; Poucet 1967, 333–410; Poucet 1985, 101–103; Richardson 2022a; Richardson 2022b.

<sup>9</sup> A point made by Momigliano (1963, 108–109), but which in the end he chose to ignore; see Momigliano 1963, 111–12, 117; Momigliano 1989, 104–105. And it has generally been ignored ever since.

## I. The Augurs

In his *Republic*, Cicero has Romulus divide Rome's population into three tribes, and he also has Romulus recruit three augurs, one from each of those tribes.<sup>10</sup> Dionysius likewise has Romulus divide the population into three tribes. He has Romulus recruit *haruspices*, also one from each tribe, but it seems likely that Dionysius meant to refer to the augurs. Augurs apparently existed by the time Romulus' successor was appointed, although there is otherwise no mention of their creation in Dionysius' account.<sup>11</sup> The *haruspices*, an Etruscan priesthood, are in any case problematic. Finally, Livy notes in his tenth book that it was agreed among the augurs that their number should be uneven, so that each of the three tribes had its own augur, or if more were needed, that each of the tribes should contribute an equal number.<sup>12</sup> That is to say, the augural college was to have three, six, nine or twelve members, and so on.

When it is presented like this, the case looks consistent and coherent and, it may follow, persuasive. And it is worth noting that, after the Ogulnian bill was passed in 300 BC, there were nine augurs.<sup>13</sup> That number was later increased to fifteen by Sulla, although Julius Caesar decided to raise it to sixteen. It would seem that, when it came to religious matters at least, Julius Caesar just did not know his letters.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, Julius Caesar may not have been the only one to forget his letters. Cicero claims, again in the *Republic*, that Numa Pompilius (of all people) added two new augurs to Romulus' three.<sup>15</sup> That means that there were five augurs in Numa's day. The connection with the three tribes would seem, therefore, to have been lost. Modern scholarship has sometimes sought to re-establish it, with the claim that the king must have been an augur too, but the problem with this solution is obvious. Although it means that there would have been six augurs in Numa's day, it also means that there would have been four in Romulus', and four

<sup>10</sup> Cic. *Rep.* 2.14, 2.16.

<sup>11</sup> Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.7.2 (tribes; see also n. 58), 2.22.3 (*haruspices*), 2.60.3 (augurs at the time of Numa's appointment); note also 2.64.4 on the augurs, which Dionysius clearly assumes existed already (compare 2.64.5 on the Vestal Virgins); see also Vaahtera 1997, 87.

<sup>12</sup> Livy 10.6.7: *inter augures constat imparem numerum debere esse, ut tres antiquae tribus, Ramnes, Titienses, Luceres, suum quaeque augurem habeant aut, si pluribus sit opus, pari inter se numero sacerdotes multiplicent; sicut multiplicati sunt cum ad quattuor quinque adiecti novem numerum, ut terni in singulas essent, expleverunt* ("it is agreed among the augurs that their number should be uneven, so that the three ancient tribes, the Ramnes, Titienses and Luceres, should each have its own augur or, if more are needed, that they should increase the priests in the same proportion; as in fact they were increased, when five were added to the four to bring the number up to nine, so that there were three for each tribe").

<sup>13</sup> Livy 10.6.6, 10.9.2.

<sup>14</sup> Livy *Per.* 89; Cass. Dio 42.51.4. On not knowing the alphabet, see Suet. *Iul.* 77 for Caesar's famous criticism of Sulla (viz. that he did not know his letters, because he laid down his dictatorship). Servilius Rullus had already gone astray, proposing ten augurs for his colony: Cic. *Leg. Agr.* 2.96.

<sup>15</sup> Cic. *Rep.* 2.26.

no more works for a connection with the tribes than five.<sup>16</sup> It could, of course, be supposed that Numa was the first king to be made an augur, but that would have to mean that Numa had actually appointed three augurs (the two Cicero mentions, and also himself). The numbers simply do not work for the idea of a connection with the tribes and they cannot plausibly be made to do so. It is also worth noting that Cicero has Numa appoint pontiffs too, and that they were equally five in number.<sup>17</sup> Numa's reforms meant, therefore, that Rome had five augurs and five pontiffs.

The easiest explanation is that Cicero must have been following a different source when he was dealing with Numa's reign from the one that he had consulted for his account of Romulus' measures. This is supported by Cicero's handling of the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres. In his account of Romulus' reign, the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres are tribes, but later on in his work, they are instead quite clearly equestrian centuries.<sup>18</sup> Modern scholarship has long just assumed that the three centuries of cavalry called the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres must have been recruited from the three Romulean tribes,<sup>19</sup> but this easy solution is incompatible with the evidence, in which the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres are either tribes or centuries but are never both at the same time.<sup>20</sup> There clearly existed two different explanations of what the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres were, and it ought to go without saying that it is a flawed method just to combine them. This proves, in any case, that Cicero must have changed his source after he had dealt with Romulus' reign. The alternative explanation for Cicero's college of five augurs—that Cicero just got things wrong and that his account of Numa's measures therefore needs to be modified somehow or otherwise dismissed—is simply implausible, if not entirely misconceived to begin with.

While Livy mentions the Romulean tribes in his tenth book, in his account of the passing of the Ogulnius bill, this is actually the only place in his work where he does so. In his first book, he does discuss the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres but, in

<sup>16</sup> See Hölkeskamp 1988, 57; Oakley 2005, 89–90, with discussion and references to earlier work; Rieger 2007, 104.

<sup>17</sup> *Cic. Rep.* 2.26.

<sup>18</sup> Tribes: *Cic. Rep.* 2.14, 2.16; centuries: *Rep.* 2.36, 2.39; see Poucet 1967, 364, 370.

<sup>19</sup> See Taylor 1960, 4; De Martino 1972, 113, 115–16; Gjerstad 1973, 113, 150–52, 155–56, 160–61; Heurgon 1973, 120–21, 123; Alföldi 1974, 63; Richard 1978, 196, 254; Scullard 1980, 68, 71; Thomsen 1980, 191–93, 197–202, 317; Ampolo 1988a, 221; Ampolo 1988b, 170; Wieacker 1988, 202, 225; Momigliano 1989, 104–105; Fugmann 1990, 135; Cornell 1995, 115, 117; Forsythe 2005, 108–109; Oakley 2005, 94; Richard 2005, 114; Rieger 2007, 90–91; Capogrossi Colognesi 2014, 41; Bradley 2020, 105–106; Rocco 2020, 88.

<sup>20</sup> When the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres are equestrian centuries, there are no Romulean tribes: see the following paragraph (with n. 21). When they are instead tribes, there are no Romulean centuries: see Varro *Ling.* 5.55 for the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres as tribes, and 5.91 for the cavalry organised into *turmae* which were recruited directly from the tribes; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.7.2 for the creation of the tribes by Romulus, and 4.18.1 for the creation of all eighteen centuries of cavalry by Servius Tullius (compare Livy 1.43.8–9); see Richardson 2022a, 471–72.

that book, they are only ever equestrian centuries. In perfect keeping with this, the first tribes to appear in Livy's work are the ones that Servius Tullius was said to have established (and that these are indeed the first tribes is confirmed by the fact that it is at this point in his work that Livy offers an explanation for the word *tribus*).<sup>21</sup> It may also be in keeping with this—viz. that in Livy's first book the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres are equestrian centuries and not tribes—that Livy has Rome's first augur (and only the one, it would seem) appointed by Numa, while a little later on in his work, in his fourth book, he relates the view that there were no augurs or pontiffs in Romulus' day; both priesthoods had been created by Numa. This is obviously incompatible with what Cicero and Dionysius have to say.<sup>22</sup> By Livy's tenth book, therefore, things have clearly changed: the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres are now instead tribes and the augurs are recruited from them, which they can hardly have been in his account of the regal period (centuries of cavalry are, after all, most unlikely to have been a source of augurs). It is reasonable to conclude from this that, for his comment about the augurs in his tenth book, Livy must have been drawing on a different source from the one, or ones, he had been following in his early books.

The idea that what Livy has to say about these various matters is based on material taken from different sources may also help to explain a further discrepancy. While Livy notes in his discussion of the Ogulnian bill that the augurs agreed that their number was to do with the three tribes, he also notes that, at the time the bill was passed, there were four augurs. The only solution that occurred to Livy was to suppose that two augurs might have died, and this suggestion has been accepted by various modern scholars, both explicitly and tacitly.<sup>23</sup> The other obvious solution is that the idea that the augurs were recruited from the Romulean tribes was a later opinion, one that had been introduced—by Livy or his source—into an existing account of events with which it was incompatible. The inevitable result was an inconsistency, which Livy sought to resolve with the suggestion that two augurs might have died.

This second solution is no doubt supported by the fact that, by 300 BC, the Romulean tribes—following the usual reconstruction of events—no longer ex-

<sup>21</sup> Livy 1.43.13; see also n. 3. The same version is found in the anonymous *De viris illustribus*, see 2.11, and also 7.7 for the first appearance of tribes in the work; as Fugmann (1990, 135–38) shows, this evidence is independent of Livy.

<sup>22</sup> Livy 1.18.6, 4.4.2: *pontifices, augures Romulo regnante nulli erant; ab Numa Pompilio creati sunt* ("there were no pontiffs or augurs while Romulus was king; they were created by Numa Pompilius"). Pace Oakley 2005, 89 who argues that, "although this [Livy 4.4.2] reflects a tradition that the augurate... was established by Numa rather than by Romulus, it does not contradict the view that augurs were originally three in number." This argument—if the tally of three is connected with the tribes—overlooks the fact that the first tribes to appear in Livy's work are the Servian. Oakley's argument also requires that the appointment of three augurs can be separated from the story of their creation by Romulus; on this matter, see below.

<sup>23</sup> Latte 1960, 397; Richard 1978, 345; Hölkeskamp 1988, 57–58, 60–65; Koptev 2005, 403; Oakley 2005, 90; Rieger 2007, 104; Rüpke 2007, 225.

isted, and had apparently not done so for more than two hundred years.<sup>24</sup> How would it have been possible to recruit augurs from structures that did not exist anymore? C. Kvium has suggested that the augurs may have later become connected with the four urban tribes that Servius Tullius was said to have established.<sup>25</sup> That would certainly solve the problem of their recruitment, had they indeed been recruited from the tribes. It would also explain a college of four, and potentially even Caesar's college of sixteen. It does, however, require that Livy's evidence for a connection with the Romulean tribes must be rejected in favour of an otherwise unattested connection with the urban tribes. That unattested connection, moreover, must then be promptly abandoned, since it is incompatible with the increase in 300 BC to nine augurs. Nor does it account for Sulla's fifteen. Kvium's solution is, in the end, more problematic than Livy's suggestion that two augurs had died.

Dionysius' source for his account of Romulus' creation of the tribes and the *haruspices* (augurs) was Varro; Varro was, in fact, the source of much of Dionysius' whole account of Romulus' constitution, an account which fills a significant part of his second book. Dionysius identifies the particular work that he had consulted: Varro's *Antiquities*.<sup>26</sup> As his correspondence with Atticus shows, Cicero was trying to get hold of Varro's work when he was composing the *Republic*, and E. Rawson has plausibly suggested that it was the *Antiquities* that Cicero used.<sup>27</sup> What Cicero has to say about the Romulean tribes and Romulus' appointment of augurs from them may, therefore, have likewise come from Varro. What he says later on, however, in his account of Numa's reforms, is inconsistent with the idea that the augurs were recruited from the tribes, but that is most likely because Cicero had changed his source by this stage.

As for Livy's sources, their identity is anyone's guess. Since Varro had Romulus establish three tribes, and had the squadrons of cavalry recruited directly from those tribes, and not from centuries (and Varro's cavalry was not organised into centuries either),<sup>28</sup> he is hardly likely to have been the source of anything that Livy has to say about the Titius, Ramnes and Luceres in his first book. In Livy's first book, the

<sup>24</sup> Since, in historical times, the Romulean tribes did not exist, an explanation for their disappearance was required; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.14.1–2 (the only extant source to address this issue) has the three Romulean tribes replaced by the four urban tribes that Servius Tullius was said to have created; modern scholarship has often adopted the same approach, but usually without acknowledging the debt to Dionysius; see Taylor 1960, 7; Ogilvie 1965, 175; Gjerstad 1973, 160–61; Heurgon 1973, 152–53; Scullard 1980, 71–72; Thomsen 1980, 126, 138, 143, 188; Ampolo 1988a, 221, 229; Ampolo 1988b, 170; Wieacker 1988, 211, 225; Fugmann 1990, 270; Cornell 1995, 173, 185; Richard 2005, 112; Rix 2006, 167; Capogrossi Colognesi 2014, 45–46; Fronda 2015, 48; Armstrong 2016, 76; Ziólkowski 2019, 240; Bradley 2020, 106. This problem does not exist in Livy's account (see nn. 3 and 21).

<sup>25</sup> Kvium 2011, 64–65.

<sup>26</sup> See Wiseman 2009, 81–98; Varro is mentioned by name at *Ant. Rom.* 2.21.2 (the epigraph for this paper), 2.47.4 and 2.48.4 but, as Wiseman shows, Dionysius' use of him elsewhere is easy to spot. See also Richardson 2022a; Richardson 2022b.

<sup>27</sup> Cic. *Att.* 4.14.1; Rawson 1985, 236 (the *Human Antiquities*; but see n. 2).

<sup>28</sup> See n. 20.

Tities, Ramnes and Luceres are centuries of cavalry. In his tenth book, where the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres are instead tribes, Livy refers only to the opinion of the augurs. That could mean any number of things, but it is most unlikely to be a reference to an early source. It is tempting to note that one of the books of Varro's *Divine Antiquities* was devoted to the augurs. Macrobius also mentions a work on the augurs by Varro, although it is possible that he was referring to that same section of the *Antiquities*. In any case, if the Romulean tribes had indeed been invented by Varro, then his work must ultimately be behind Livy's discussion of them, whether directly so or not.<sup>29</sup>

## II. The Pontiffs

It is worth comparing the pontifical college. At the time the Ogulnian bill was passed it too, according to Livy, had just four members. That is, the augural and pontifical colleges were of the same size (as they were also in Cicero's account of Numa's reign, although there were five in each, according to Cicero). The Ogulnian bill proposed that the numbers in both colleges should be increased and, after the bill had passed, both colleges were indeed made bigger. As noted earlier, the augural college was increased to nine, which is a happy number for the thesis of a connection with the three Romulean tribes; the pontifical college, however, was only increased to eight, and that is obviously not a happy number.<sup>30</sup> In the case of the pontiffs, Livy says nothing about any connection with the Romulean tribes and so their numbers (four and eight) are not at all problematic for him. But they are problematic for those modern scholars who believe that such a connection must have existed, despite the lack of any ancient evidence for one, and so they have inevitably been modified, to ensure that they are both appropriately divisible by three.

Livy's college of eight pontiffs has been turned into a college of nine with the argument that, for some reason, the *pontifex maximus* must have been excluded from the tally of the college's members. That solution, however, does not help when it comes to earlier circumstances. Before the Ogulnian law came into effect, the college had had only four members, or five, if the *pontifex maximus* had been left out of that figure too. Some further explanation is clearly needed, if the evidence is to be made to fit with the belief that the pontiffs must have also been supplied by the Romulean tribes. Fortunately enough, Livy had already found a solution to this

<sup>29</sup> August. *De civ. D.* 6.3 (*de auguribus*); Macrobi. *Sat.* 1.16.19. The few fragments from this section of the *Antiquities* (see Cardauns 1976, 41) are unhelpful; for Varro's interest in augural matters, see also *Ling.* 5.33, 5.143, 6.53, 6.64, 6.76, 6.82, 6.95, 7.6–13. Others also wrote on this topic in the first century BC (brief overviews in Rawson 1985, 93; MacRae 2017, 39), but any discussion of the college's origins and early history can hardly have been based on material from early times, see section IV below and n. 51. For the idea that the Romulean tribes were invented by Varro, see n. 8; see also section IV.

<sup>30</sup> Livy 10.6.6, 10.9.2.

sort of problem (although it was Procrustes who had first led the way): just as two augurs must have died (see section I above), so too must one of the pontiffs.<sup>31</sup>

With two dead augurs who were yet to be replaced, and with a dead pontiff as well, who likewise had not been replaced, and with the *pontifex maximus* excluded from the very college of which he was the most important member, Livy's account can be made to comply with the view that the augurs and the pontiffs were recruited from the Romulean tribes. It should be recalled as well that, to make Cicero's evidence for the augurs in his *Republic* fit with that same view, it is necessary to make Numa into a member of the augural college but, at the same time, exclude Romulus from it.

The same approach is also required when it comes to Cicero's account of Numa's appointment of the first pontiffs. Numa, Cicero says, appointed five, a figure that has likewise been turned into six, on the grounds that the king must have made himself a member of the college too and that Cicero somehow neglected to say or even imply this (but more than that: if Numa was also a pontiff, then he must in fact have appointed six pontiffs and not five).<sup>32</sup>

In this particular instance, it is also necessary to make a choice first between two different and incompatible accounts, since Livy also relates Numa's establishment of the pontifical college. But Livy says that Numa appointed only the one pontiff (just as he seems also to have had Numa appoint only the one augur),<sup>33</sup> and that naturally makes his version much less attractive. Even with the king added in, the number of pontiffs is just too small, and the argument that others must have died can hardly be used when it comes to the very creation of the college. Livy's account is consequently passed over, while Cicero's is adopted and then modified, although no explanation is offered for why Cicero should have been better informed about regal Rome than Livy (but neither is likely to have known anything of the historical realities of such early times anyway). It is hard not to suspect that Cicero's account is preferred simply because his version can be made to fit with the desired reconstruction, whereas Livy's cannot. If nothing else, all this is certainly evidence of the power of belief. But the contortions that are required are such and so many that they are obviously self-defeating. This is altogether a particularly blatant and rather persistent case of special pleading. No ancient source connects the pontifical college with the tribes, so there is really no reason to start manipulating the evidence in the effort to make it fit with what is, in the end, a wholly modern view.

It is not, however, always necessary to manhandle the evidence. As soon as there is conviction in the thesis, the evidence becomes superfluous. For A. Alföldi it was

<sup>31</sup> See Hölkeskamp 1988, 58–59; Oakley 2005, 90–92, also with various other solutions considered. Note also Richard 1978, 345–47, who argues first for a complete record concerning the pontiffs, and then for an incomplete record, in order to explain away the different problems; Richard also argues for an original college of three.

<sup>32</sup> Cic. *Rep.* 2.26; see Hölkeskamp 1988, 58; Oakley 2005, 91–92; Rieger 2007, 105.

<sup>33</sup> Livy 1.20.5; for the augur, see n. 22.



enough that the head of the pontifical college was called the *pontifex maximus*. A superlative adjective presupposes a college of (at least) three members and the recruitment of the pontiffs from the Romulean tribes apparently follows from that; there was, therefore, no need to consider what the Romans themselves had to say.<sup>34</sup> Comparable approaches can be found when it comes to the Vestal Virgins.

### III. The Vestal Virgins

The Vestal Virgins were six in number, so a connection with the Romulean tribes ought to be straightforward in their case. Better still, there is even ancient evidence for such a connection. According to Festus, there were six Vestals, so that there was one for each part of the Roman people. There were six parts, apparently, because the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres were divided into two sets, the “first” and the “second”.<sup>35</sup>

The idea that the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres were subdivided to form six groups is usually only found when the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres are equestrian centuries. These six centuries formed the *sex suffragia* of the *comitia centuriata*; together with the other twelve centuries that Servius Tullius was said to have created, they made up the eighteen equestrian centuries of that assembly. According to some accounts, it was Tarquinius Priscus who first planned to change the number of centuries, although it was Servius Tullius who actually did so.<sup>36</sup> There was a different version of the story, however, in which Priscus intended to double the number of the tribes, but there is no evidence of any account in which he actually went ahead with those plans. He was stopped by the augur Attus Navius.<sup>37</sup> Nor did Servius Tullius make this change: he established tribes of his own, of which there were at least four.<sup>38</sup> There is consequently no evidence that the Romulean tribes were ever said to have become six in number, or to have consisted of six parts, apart, that is, from Festus’ claims. Festus does not actually use the word *tribus*, and probably with good reason, but the word he does use—*partes*—is used in connection with the tribes in other sources,<sup>39</sup> and Festus’ *partes* were supposedly parts of

<sup>34</sup> Alföldi 1974, 63: “Drei an der Zahl waren auch die Pontifex-Priester, von denen der rangälteste ebenso *maximus* hieß wie der oberste der drei *prae-itores* der zur Legion zusammengefaßten Bataillone am Anfang der Republik.” Presumably Cicero’s and Livy’s accounts are to be either modified accordingly or dismissed.

<sup>35</sup> Fest. 468L: *sex Vestae sacerdotes constitutae sunt, ut populus pro sua quaque parte haberet ministram sacrorum; quia civitas Romana in sex est distributa partis: in primos secundosque Titienses, Ramnes, Luceres* (“six priestesses of Vesta were appointed, so that each part of the people had its own attendant for the rites, since the Roman citizenry was divided into six parts, the first and second Titienses, Ramnes and Luceres”); Paul. Fest. 475L.

<sup>36</sup> Livy 1.36.2–8, 1.43.8–9; note also Val. Max. 1.4.1; Flor. 1.5.2. For changes to the centuries, see also Cic. *Rep.* 2.36; Fest. 452L; *De vir. ill.* 6.7.

<sup>37</sup> Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 3.71, 3.72.3; Fest. 168–170L; Zonar. 7.8.

<sup>38</sup> Livy 1.43.13; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.14.1–2, 4.15.1; see n. 24.

<sup>39</sup> Varro *Ling.* 5.55: *ager Romanus primum divisus in partis tris, a quo tribus appellata Titiensium, Ramnium, Lucerum* (“Roman land was first divided into three parts, from which were called the tribe

the whole Roman *civitas*. His account does, therefore, seem to envisage, in effect, the doubling of the Romulean tribes. (The centuries of cavalry, on the other hand, which *were* doubled, are hardly likely to have provided a means to recruit Vestal Virgins.)

What Festus has to say is really quite problematic, and it reads very much like a late and somewhat confused antiquarian reconstruction. It has certainly been treated as such,<sup>40</sup> although the idea of a connection between the Vestals and the tribes has nonetheless been defended. R. Thomsen dismissed Festus' evidence as "a learned fabrication", which is undoubtedly what it is, but despite that, Thomsen still retained the connection between the Vestals and the tribes. Since he had thrown out the only evidence for that connection, Thomsen's position was inevitably one of belief (and, as such, evidence was simply unnecessary).<sup>41</sup> In A. Momigliano's view, the mere fact that the Vestals were six in number was evidently sufficient proof of a connection with the tribes; six is divisible by three, so each tribe must have provided two Vestals.<sup>42</sup> Some have, however, preferred to accept what Festus says (more or less) and have maintained that the six Vestals were indeed supplied by the doubled Tities, Ramnes and Luceres.<sup>43</sup>

A further difficulty with following Festus' claims, even in a modified form, is that doing so requires a selective handling of the evidence, some of which is accept-

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of the Titienses, that of the Ramnes and that of the Luceres"); Serv. *Aen.* 5.560: *nam constat primo tres partes fuisse populi Romani: unam Titiensium...; alteram Ramnetum...; tertiam Lucerum...* ("For it is established that at first there were three parts of the Roman people: one, that of the Titienses...; the second, that of the Ramnetes...; the third, that of the Luceres..."); and see Livy 1.43.13 on the Servian tribes.

<sup>40</sup> Ampolo 1988b, 170: Festus' claims "hanno il carattere di ricostruzione antiquaria e non meritano molto credito"; note also Poucet 1967, 369; Gjerstad 1973, 264.

<sup>41</sup> Thomsen 1980, 258: "it is not advisable to take the juxtaposition of the number of the Vestal Virgins and the six old equestrian centuries [i.e. Festus' evidence] as anything but a learned fabrication. On the other hand, there is no reason to doubt that the classical number of the priestesses was actually correlated to the three gentile tribes, retained for traditional purposes, two of them belonging to each tribe."

<sup>42</sup> Momigliano 1963, 117: "Only the number six served as a reminder of the relation between the Vestals and the three tribes." Earlier in his paper, Momigliano had expressed caution: "If we want to include the six Vestal virgins in this picture of the most archaic Roman State, we must also admit that the connection between the number of the Vestals and the number of the tribes—two Vestals for each tribe—is indicated by only one source, Festus, p. 475L."

<sup>43</sup> Alföldi 1952, 94–95 claims: "die römische Geschichtsschreibung wird schon Recht haben, wenn sie die Erhöhung der Reitercenturien von drei auf sechs mit der Erhöhung der Zahl der Vestalinnen von drei auf sechs verbindet." This is supported with reference not only to Festus' evidence, but also to Dionysius' and Plutarch's claims, which are incompatible with that evidence (see below); the "Reitercenturien" do not appear in association with the Vestals. Alföldi 1974, 63 (again with the claim that the Vestals were originally three in number); Richard 1978, 343–44 (similarly inferring an original college of three, and also drawing on the incompatible claims of Dionysius and Plutarch); Martini 1997, 251–53 (likewise following Dionysius and Plutarch as well as Festus); Rieger 2007, 105 (also inferring the existence of an original three; see n. 46 for Rieger's handling of the evidence of Dionysius and Plutarch); Kvium 2011, 85–86; Schiavone 2012, 54.

ed (or not, in Thomsen's case), but the rest of which must be explained away or ignored. According to Dionysius, the Vestals were first appointed by Numa and were originally four in total. Tarquinius Priscus added two more. He did so, Dionysius says, on account of the number of rituals the Vestals were required to perform.<sup>44</sup> Neither number—two or four—is divisible by three, while Dionysius' explanation for the expansion of the college has nothing to do with the tribes. Plutarch's account, although different again, is nonetheless comparable. Plutarch claims that Numa initially created only two Vestals but afterwards added two more. A further pair was added by Servius Tullius.<sup>45</sup> Again, two and four are not divisible by three.<sup>46</sup>

The Vestals were required to serve Vesta for thirty years. According to both Dionysius and Plutarch, during the first ten years of that time, they learnt their duties; during the second, they performed them; during the third, they taught them.<sup>47</sup> Were it not for the length of time between the addition of the second pair and the last, or just the last in Dionysius' version, this scheme, although it is clearly artificial, could potentially help to explain the staggered way in which the college was supposedly increased in size. But, whatever the explanation, these accounts simply do not work in any way (beyond the final total of six) with the idea of a connection with the Romulean tribes.

The only evidence for the Vestals' alleged connection with the tribes is late and almost certainly the product of antiquarian speculation. What Dionysius and Plutarch have to say is no doubt equally unhistorical.<sup>48</sup> But had the connection between the Vestals and the tribes actually been genuine, or even just a well established view, the variation in the evidence and the very nature of Dionysius' and Plutarch's accounts would be difficult to explain. This is the problem with Alföldi's handling of this evidence. Alföldi accepted Festus' account and rejected Dionysius'

<sup>44</sup> Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.67.1, 3.67.2. Note that Dionysius (*Ant. Rom.* 2.65) argues at some length against the view that Romulus had appointed Vestal Virgins; he does not identify any of his sources at this point, and the argument may be his own.

<sup>45</sup> Plut. *Numa* 10.1. Since it does not fit with his own reconstruction, Kvium (2011, 88) is happy simply to declare that Servius "did not change the number of *Vestales*." Cic. *Rep.* 2.26, Livy 1.20.3 and Gell. *NA* 1.12.10 also have Numa appoint the first Vestals; they do not say how many, but the connection with Numa alone may be significant (see below).

<sup>46</sup> Note Rieger 2007, 105–106: "Dionysius und Plutarch schreiben zwar Numa die Einsetzung von vier Vestalinnen zu. Der Grund hierfür ist aber wohl eher darin zu suchen, daß man nach der Analogie des Augurats noch das Vorhandensein einer außerhalb des Kollegiums stehenden Oberpriesterin annahm." Presumably this high priestess is to be included in, or excluded from, the accounts of Dionysius and Plutarch as needed, so that the number of Vestals always fits with the desired reconstruction. Koptev (2005, 395–97) implausibly argues for two tribes, which were divided into three, instead of three tribes divided into two. The incompatible nature of Dionysius' and Plutarch's claims is, however, often just ignored, see n. 43.

<sup>47</sup> Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.67.2; Plut. *Numa* 10.1. Macrobius (*Sat.* 3.13.11) suggests that only two Vestals were needed on duty (at least on the occasion Macrobius is discussing).

<sup>48</sup> Although it was defended by Gjerstad (1973, 264), and entertained by Ogilvie (1965, 98); see n. 43 too.

and Plutarch's claims as "nur gelehrte Kombination",<sup>49</sup> but that is precisely what they cannot be, if what Festus says were actually true.

#### IV

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the preceding discussion. First of all, the Romans of historical times clearly knew nothing about the origins and early history of several of their most important priesthoods, the augurs, the pontiffs and the Vestal Virgins. The earliest reliable evidence for the size of the augural and pontifical colleges is probably to be found in Livy's account of the circumstances following the passing of the *lex Ogulnia*.<sup>50</sup> The idea that the augural college had once consisted of three members may stand on its own, independent of the alleged connection with the tribes, but it is impossible to know; in any case, the figure is clearly only one of a number of different versions.

As for the Vestals, their numbers may, or may not, have changed during the course of Rome's early history. It is quite clear, however, that no one in later times knew why there were six of them, and that alone is an important conclusion. That lack of knowledge may well be evidence of the Vestals' antiquity, but it is certainly also evidence of the extent of the Romans' ignorance about the events of their distant past, even in the case of things that had endured from the past, and even in the case of matters of the utmost importance, as the maintenance of the cult of Vesta was. Needless to say, these circumstances have significant implications for the cherished belief that Rome's historians relied on priestly books—such as, most notably, the pontifical annals—for information about Rome's distant past.<sup>51</sup>

The same no doubt applies to the *curiae*. Like the Vestals they too survived into historical times, and yet their origin and names were evidently mysterious. The prevailing explanation appears to have been that the *curiae* had got their names from thirty of the Sabine women, although some disagreed with that, and understandably so.<sup>52</sup> And the same clearly applies as well to the Tities, Ramnes and Luceres. Not only were their names equally mysterious, but there were variant traditions about their creation, and there were also variant traditions about what they even

<sup>49</sup> Alföldi 1974, 63 n. 75. Rieger (2007, 106 n. 1) quotes Alföldi with approval.

<sup>50</sup> It may well be that the pontifical records commenced at this time; see Beloch 1926, 94; Wiseman 2018, V–VII.

<sup>51</sup> Note as well the lack of evidence for those who held priesthoods under the kings and during the first centuries of the republican period, which points in the same direction; see Richardson 2020, 135–43. The Romans themselves knew that hardly any records (just a few laws and treaties) had survived from early times, although their claims have long proved to be ineffectual against beliefs to the contrary (see Richardson 2020, 148–50 and also 1–11).

<sup>52</sup> Named after Sabine women: Cic. *Rep.* 2.14; Livy 1.13.6–7; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.47.3; Plut. *Rom.* 14.6, 20.2; *De vir. ill.* 2.12; Serv. *Aen.* 8.638; Paul. Fest. 42L. Varro disagreed; he thought the *curiae* were named after districts and leaders (Varro *Antiq. fr.* 4.6 Mirsch [= Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.47.4]; note also Plut. *Rom.* 20.2), a view which is supported by the few names that are still extant, see Momigliano 1963, 110; Cornell 1995, 117.

were.<sup>53</sup> In later times, they were simply equestrian centuries, and that is probably all that they ever had been.

The idea that the augurs and Vestal Virgins had originally been recruited from the three Romulean tribes is clearly incompatible with a number of ancient accounts, and yet it was on occasion still imposed on them, and indeed continues to be so. Cicero, who evidently drew on different sources, does not appear to have been concerned about adhering to the idea that the augurs were supplied by the tribes. Livy, in contrast, sought to accommodate the incompatible claims. Modern scholars have readily accepted Livy's solution and have sometimes also employed the same sort of approach themselves, to make the evidence (along with some of their own assumptions) fit together. But had the augurs and Vestal Virgins (and the pontiffs) really been recruited from the tribes, or had it even just long been believed that they were so recruited, the inconsistencies in the evidence ought only to have been about whether there were three, six, nine or twelve (and so on) members of these colleges. Stories involving one, two, four or five members ought not to have been invented; the odd such claim may be excusable, perhaps, but such claims are in fact quite numerous. For all these reasons, the idea of a connection between the Romulean tribes and the various priesthoods of Rome is best viewed as a late and entirely artificial invention. And this conclusion, although it does not prove the case, is certainly in accordance with the argument that the Romulean tribes are themselves a late invention, the work, in all likelihood, of Varro.<sup>54</sup>

The precise status of the Romulean tribes aside, the connection between them and the augurs, which Varro quite clearly did make, may shed some light on a much more famous comment about his *Antiquities* than the one which forms the epigraph for the present discussion. According to Cicero, in his work Varro revealed to the Romans the age of their homeland, the divisions of its times, its discipline at home and at war, the site of its districts and places, and so on. He also revealed to the Romans the laws of their rites and their priests (*tu sacrorum iura, tu sacerdotum... aperuisti*).<sup>55</sup> It is quite conceivable that one of the laws that Varro had "revealed" was the old connection—now "lost"—between the ancient tribes of Romulus and some of the oldest and most important priests of Rome.<sup>56</sup>

That connection, however, was not just with the tribes of Romulus. It clearly also involved Romulus himself, and this may explain an important difference in

<sup>53</sup> For the various explanations of their names, see Maltby 1991 s.v. Luceres, Ramnes and Tities.

<sup>54</sup> See the works listed in n. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Cic. *Acad.* 1.9. The content has been slightly reordered in the text above; the original reads: *tu aetatem patriae, tu descriptiones temporum, tu sacrorum iura, tu sacerdotum, tu domesticam, tu bellicam disciplinam, tu sedem regionum locorum, tu omnium divinarum humanarumque rerum nomina, genera, officia, causas aperuisti* ("you have revealed the age of our homeland, the divisions of its times, the laws of its rites and its priests, its discipline at home and at war, the site of its districts and places, the names, types, duties and origins of all things, divine and human").

<sup>56</sup> On antiquarians and "rupture" with the past, see Wallace-Hadrill 2008, esp. 231–37. On these laws, see MacRae 2017.

the handling of Romulus and Numa Pompilius that can be found in the works of Livy and Dionysius. In Livy's account of Rome's regal period—as has been seen already—there are no tribes until Servius Tullius' day, and the major priestly colleges are established by Numa, whom Livy presents as the founder of Rome's religion.<sup>57</sup> In Dionysius' account of Romulus' measures, in which there are tribes, in which Romulus establishes various priesthoods (as well as temples, altars, cults and rituals), and for which Varro's *Antiquities* was the primary source,<sup>58</sup> Numa's status is downgraded. According to Dionysius, it was Romulus who established the foundations of Rome's religion, while Numa is placed alongside Tullus Hostilius and all the other kings as someone who merely added further religious institutions.<sup>59</sup>

No doubt such adjustments were necessary, if Romulus was to be credited—as he is in Dionysius' account and clearly was also in Varro's *Antiquities*—with the establishment of a fully formed state, one with a full set of political, military, legal, social and religious systems and institutions.<sup>60</sup> Livy however conceived of Rome's origins quite differently: his Romulus does comparatively little when he founds Rome, and Livy claims that all of Rome's kings (Tarquinius Superbus aside) were founders of at least some part of the city.<sup>61</sup> Livy's Romans therefore had to wait, for Numa Pompilius to give them their first priests, and then for Servius Tullius to give them their first tribes. And naturally Numa's priests cannot have been recruited from Servius' tribes.

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<sup>57</sup> On the absence of the Romulean tribes from Livy's account: see nn. 3, 20, 21 and also 24; for Numa's religious measures, see Livy 1.19–21, 1.32.5 and n. 22; for Numa as a founder, see 1.19.1, 1.42.4.

<sup>58</sup> For the tribes, see Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.7.2, 2.12.1–2, 2.14.4, 2.21.2, 2.22.3; for Romulus' religious measures, *Ant. Rom.* 2.18.2–3, 2.21–23; for Dionysius' source, see n. 26. Dionysius is also here in places pursuing his own agenda, of demonstrating that the Romans were descended from Greeks.

<sup>59</sup> Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.23.6; note also 2.63.2.

<sup>60</sup> See Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.7–29, and again n. 26 for his source.

<sup>61</sup> For Romulus' foundation of Rome, see Livy 1.7.3 (the construction of walls around the Palatine) and 1.8.1–2 (the passing of laws and Romulus' adoption of insignia); further measures come later, during the course of Romulus' reign, but even with these included, Livy's Romulus still does considerably less than Dionysius': 1.8.4 (the expansion of the city), 1.8.5–6 (the establishment of an asylum), 1.8.7 (the creation of the Senate), 1.10.5–7 (the foundation of the temple of Jupiter Feretrius), 1.13.6–7 (the creation of the 30 *curiae*), 1.13.8 (the enrolment of three centuries of cavalry), 1.15.8 (the formation of a bodyguard). For the kings as founders, see Livy 2.1.2. This conception of Rome's origins may have been conventional, see Polyb. 6.10.12–14 and Cato *FRHist* 5 F131 (= Cic. *Rep.* 2.1–3).

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