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Varro and the Two-Headed City

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EN **Abstract.** An in-depth analysis of Varro's sentence (quoted by Nonius) on Gracchus judiciary law having created a two-headed city shows how the polygrapher artfully combined Plato's political considerations on constitutional change with Roman priestly lore (*haruspicina*). Varro's sympathies for the optimates find in this sentence its best expression. Posidonius may have been an intermediate stage in the use of these Platonic ideas to understand Roman political history.
Keywords: Posidonius; *equites*; Plato; civil war; Gracchus; *haruspicina*.

ES Varrón y la ciudad con dos cabezas

ES **Resumen.** Un análisis en profundidad de la frase de Varrón, que cita Nonio, según la cual la ley judiciaria gracana habría creado una ciudad con dos cabezas muestra cómo el polígrafo combinaba con habilidad las reflexiones de Platón sobre el cambio constitucional con el saber sacerdotal tradicional (*haruspicina*). La afinidad de Varrón con los optimates se muestra de modo elocuente en esta frase concreta. Posidonio pudo haber servido como medio de transmisión en el uso de ideas platónicas para interpretar la historia de Roma.
Palabras clave: Posidonio; *equites*; Platón; guerra civil; Graco; *haruspicina*.

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1. Introduction

In this paper,[1] we will attempt to present a new interpretation of a well-known passage in which Varro attributes the origin of civil unrest to the judiciary law of Gracchus. We shall first make a careful study of the brief fragment preserved by Nonius, and then propose a twofold, but convergent interpretation of the passage: Varro's reflection partially proceeds from Plato's explanation of constitutional change, of the decline of the *Kallipolis* (which starts with a split in the guardian class), but, on the other hand, it is expressed by means of a metaphor (bicephaly) taken from the practice of soothsaying. It is clearly a direct attack on the reform of Gracchus, which allows us to place its author in the ideological sphere of the *optimates*, a hypothesis that we can confirm thanks to the coincident criticism preserved in Diodorus Siculus, probably taken in turn from Posidonius. This does not mean, however, that the latter was Varro's source on this point. Although we cannot rule it out entirely, rather than an irresolvable question of paternity, what interests us here is to determine the ideological family to which this type of explanation belongs, which attributes political change to what happens inside the ruling party of the *polis.* "Ideological family" refers to *optimates* and *populares,* considered as such, with distinct language and conceptual framework.[2] For a few years now, what scholarship previously ruled out outright, that is, the existence of a conflict of ideas in the Roman Republic, has slowly begun to be reconsidered.[3]

2. The Two-Headed City

Varro, in book IV of his *De vita populi Romani* (which covers the period from 133 BC until the civil war between Caesar and Pompey),[4] wrote a passage of great importance, which unfortunately has only survived in an irritatingly fragmentary form and only because Nonius wanted to quote it because it used the word "two-headed" in an unusual way:

> Varro, in Book IV of *On the Life of the Roman People*, shows that "two-headed" can also be said of something incorporeal: "he gave them hope that they would not have to pay more than they wanted; the unjust one handed over judgements to the equestrian order and made a two-headed city, the source of civil discord" (Varro, in Book IV of *On the Life of the Roman People*).[5]

The person described so harshly as "the unjust" must logically be Gaius Gracchus, since Varro refers here to his famous *lex iudiciaria* by which the jurors, in cases of *repetundis*, had to be members of the *ordo equester.* The designation as "the unjust" (*iniquus*) also points in the same direction, given that the reforms of Gracchus were based precisely on *aequitas*:[6] Varro turns the very virtue –equity– on which the latter wanted to base his reforms into an accusation against

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1 Our warmest thanks to Santiago Montero Herrero (to whose memory I want to dedicate this article), Claudia Moatti, Irene Leonardis and Cristina Rosillo López for their comments on previous versions of this piece.

2 Arena 2012, 7.

3 "*Optimates* and *populares* once again parade unashamedly across the historical stage" (Morstein-Marx 2022, 392). This is not the place to analyze this topic in depth but in the sense followed here see recently López Barja 2019; Pina Polo 2021; Paleo Paz 2023. Particularly relevant for us is Leonardis i.p., where she studies how *optimates* and *populares* used different bodily metaphors to prescribe different remedies for the political confrontation.

4 On the biography of Varro, see *infra.* On the "Varronian moment" we are now experiencing, see Volk 2020, with a brief overview of recent literature. In particular, two recent works on *de vita populi Romani* are essential: Salvatore 2004, and Pittà 2015. Drummond 2013a, 417, for his part, does not include any passage from *de vita populi Romani* among the fragments of Varro that he collects because he considers them to be more antiquarian than historical in nature.

5 *Bicipitem quod incorporatum est posse dici Varro de vita populi romani lib. IIII aperuit: In spem adducebat non plus soluturos quam vellent; iniquus equestri ordini iudicia tradidit ac bicipitem civitatem fecit, discordiarum civilium fontem* (fr. 108 Pittà = fr. 425 Salvatore = fr. 114 Riposati = Nonius p.728,19L). Stadius proposed adding <*senatui*> before *iniquus*, with the sense of "hostile to the Senate", an addition that Pittà conserves, although placing *senatui* after *iniquus*, not before. This is an interesting, if risky, addition.

6 Flor. 2.1.

the youngest of the Gracchi.[7] Florus himself confirms that it is him, a little further on, taking up the Varronian metaphor, but explicitly mentioning the famous brothers: "by means of a judiciary law, the Gracchi had divided the Roman people and destroyed the unity of the city by giving it two heads".[8] He then makes clear what division he is referring to, pointing to the excessive power of the *equites*, who plunder the *res publica* for their own benefit, in contrast to the impotence of the Senate. Varro presents us with a version of Rome where the tensions between the two *ordines* drain the cohesion and thus damage the endurance of the city.

It is not our intention now to analyse the motives that led Gaius Gracchus to propose this reform, nor what its content or purpose was.[9] What we are interested in is to interpret the theoretical framework in which Varro's reflection on the crisis of the Republic is integrated. A first important fact is the date to which we must ascribe it, but unfortunately, we cannot determine with certainty the time when Varro wrote *De vita populi Romani.* It is usually dated to the decade 49-40 BC, or even, more specifically, to the years after Caesar's assassination, although a date even later than 40 BC cannot be excluded.[10] Writing, in any case, from the experience of those turbulent years –we may remember that he played a decidedly unsuccessful role as commander of the Pompeian forces in *Hispania Ulterior*– in this passage, Varro establishes a direct link between the Gracchan judiciary law and a generic, but lethal civil unrest. In the remainder of Book IV, Varro leads the reader to the war between Caesar and Pompey, thus establishing a direct connection between the luxury and corruption that gripped the Romans on the one hand, and the civil wars and the final collapse on the other.[11] Certainly, Varro's perspective was not historiographic; what interested him was not so much the account of events as the description of the most ancient Roman culture and civilisation, from the antiquarian point of view that is proper to him –there are many references to the calendar in the preserved fragments– with a clear inclination towards etymological explanation, something to be expected in our author.[12] Nevertheless, this brief passage allows us to some extent to trace his ideas about the collapse of the Republic. Although the immediate cause of the civil wars of the 40s BC may lie in the alliance of the three dynasts (Pompey, Caesar, and Crassus), in the 60s –an idea perhaps originally of Cato's, which enjoyed a great deal of popularity[13]– there can be no doubt that Varro located the roots of the problem much

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7 *Iniquus* according to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (s.v. 5b), as a substantival adjective, refers to the enemy or opponent: "a prejudiced or unsympathetic person, ill-wisher".

8 *Iudiciaria lege Gracchi diviserant populum Romanum et bicipitem ex una fecerant civitatem* (Flor. 2.5.3). The plural Gracchi is to be understood in a generic way because we do not know of any judiciary law of Tiberius Gracchus.

9 In general, but briefly, see Ferrary 2019. For his part, Nicolet 1966, 517-527, relying on Cic. *Rep.* 3.48 and [Sall.] *Ep. ad Caes*. 2.11, argues that Gaius was inspired by the (democratic) constitution of Rhodes in his *lex iudiciaria*.

10 To establish the date of publication we have only a couple of internal references: in fr.429 Salvatore (= 118 Riposati = 112 Pittà = Non. p.368,13) Caesar's plans to start the campaign in Hispania within the war against Pompey are mentioned, which places it after 49 BC, while it must be before Atticus' death in 32 BC, as the work was dedicated to him as we see from fr. 283 Salvatore (=1 Riposati = Char. Gramm. p.161, 1). In fr. 114 Pittà (=431 Salvatore =120 Riposati= Nonio p.301,5) there is a cryptic allusion to the end of a "horrible war", which may perhaps refer to the battle of Munda, in March of 45 BC: *ita huius belli horribilis finis facta*. However, Pittà 2018, 288, n. 97 is of the opinion that it is not possible to know where Varro put the end of the civil war, whether at Thapsus or at Munda. Todisco 2017, 57 places *de vita* around the year 43 BC. Contrary to common opinion, Leonardis 2019 gives good reasons for preferring the year 33 BC as the date of composition. Pittà 2015, 7-10 argues that *de vita* and *de gente populi Romani* are complementary books, because what Varro did was to separate into two works what Dicaearchus (in his *Bios Hellados*) gave in only one: *de gente* spanned from the mythical period to Romulus, and that of *de vita* from Romulus to his own time. This fits in with the distinction between mythical and historical time that Varro accepted (Censorinus *DN* 21.1, cfr. Piras 2017, 13-15). If we accept these premises, and since *de gente* is firmly dated in the consulship of Hirtius and Pansa, the *de vita* must be from 43 BC, or shortly afterwards.

11 The criticism of the luxury of the present, in contrast to the frugality of the past, appears throughout the work, as can be seen in Non. p. 239,14, of Book I, (fr. 15R = 295S = 6P) in which he mentions the statues of Jupiter that are "now" made of ivory, gold, or marble.

12 Calendar: fr. 12-15 Pittà = 297-300 Salvatore = fr.18, 22, 19 and 21 Riposati.

13 Syme 1964: 65 and n. 22. Cfr. Drummond 2013b, 443, n. 84.

further back. Probably adapting the Greek conception of *stasis* to the Roman case, he resorted to the term (*discordiae*) which placed the Gracchan law at an initial point of what we could qualify as an open crisis, if we take into account the gradation given by Cicero according to the intensity and amplitude of the *stasis*: *ex cupiditatibus odia, discidia, discordiae, seditiones, bella nascuuntur*.[14] In this, Varro resembles Sallust, who took the Jugurthine War as his starting point and from there traced a line of increasing tension and severity: *contentio – civilia studia – bellum*.[15]

The first part of Varro's passage in Book IV of the *De vita* has been the subject of a detailed analysis by Nicolet, who saw it as a reference to the *lex frumentaria* of Gaius Gracchus: it gave them the hope of paying whatever they wanted, because they would fix the price of grain by law, understanding this "desire" in the most technical-legislative sense, as it refers to the will of the people (*velitis iubeatis Quirites*), in other words, the *lex frumentaria.*[16] Pittà, on the other hand, believes that it is an unknown law of Gaius Gracchus, but it is related to debt and favourable to debtors; hence "it gave them the hope that they would not pay more than they wanted to", an exaggeration on Varro's part, according to Pittà, since Gaius Gracchus would have limited himself to setting a limit on indebtedness that could be claimed in court.[17] However, for my part, I believe that a different interpretation is possible, which would include both phrases as referring to the same Gracchan law and not to two different ones. In effect, by handing over the juries to the *equites*, Gaius Gracchus gave the latter (more specifically, the publicans) the hope that they would pay the treasury only what they wanted, not the amount they had pledged at the tax auction. The strength they had gained by having the *quaestio de repetundis* in their hands allowed the *equites* to decide in practice how much they would pay, because from that moment on, the promagistrates at the head of the provinces were now exposed to corruption charges that could lead to harsh sentences. The close link between the two aspects (the greed of the publicans and the actions of the juries) was highlighted on several occasions in later years, although undoubtedly the best known episode is that of the condemnation of Rutilius Rufus, who went into exile in the same province he was supposed to have plundered as governor, which was considered the definitive proof that he had actually been condemned precisely because he had protected the provincials from the voracity of the *equites*.[18] Another case in point is the famous scandal of 60 BC when the *publicani* pressured the Senate to obtain a reduction in the amounts they owed to the treasury for taxes from Asia, which was finally granted by Caesar during his consulship.[19] One can truly say that they eventually paid what they wanted to. It is very likely that no one anticipated such consequences at the time Gaius Gracchus introduced the law, but that we are faced with an anachronistic reading by Varro himself, drawn from the experience of what happened later, which implicitly attributes to the tribune of the plebs a promise that he was not in a position to make because the condemnations of the governors came later. Varro's criticism is well understood in the light of these scandalous events and others comparable to them, so that the following shocking censure of Gracchus' law acquires even more strength. Therefore, both sentences of Nonius' fragment refer, not to two different laws, but to a single rule of the younger Gracchus, which granted the *equites* the *quaestiones de repetundis*, and with them gave them a share in the government of the *res publica*.

The second phrase, which mentions the city "with two heads", was the one that caught the attention of Nonius, the grammarian. We will focus on it in what follows and develop our argument in a twofold sense: on the one hand, we will argue that the reference to the social division into the governing part (the "head") has its origin in the knowledge about political regime changes (*civilium commutationum scientia*)[20] and more precisely, in the way Plato conceives constitutional change;

14 Cic. *Fin*. 1.44. Cfr. Moatti 2018, 227 n. 2.
15 Sall. *Iug.* 5.1-2.
16 Nicolet 1979.
17 Pittà 2015, 455-458 following in part the proposal of Brunt 1971, 90.
18 Gelzer 1975, 72: "the most famous example of equestrian class-justice was the condemnation of P. Rutilius Rufus". Cfr. Davenport 2019, 77-78.
19 Cic. *Att.* 1.17.8-9 = SB 17; *Att.* 2.16.2 = SB 36; Suet. *Iul.* 20.3; App. *BCiv.* 2.13 and Cass. Dio 38.7.4.
20 Cic. *Fam*. 5.12.4.

on the other hand, we will argue that the metaphor used by Varro, the two-headed city, is taken from the corpus of prodigies of all kinds that were officially notified to the Senate each year so that, after consulting the various priestly colleges, it could decide which were of divine origin and what measures should be taken to restore the *pax deorum*, a procedure known as *procuratio.*

We will begin with the first of our two arguments, the one that links this powerful image of Varro to Greek political theory. Indeed, some interpretations relate this passage to other references to internal crises or divisions, to a generic social fracture, of the Roman people, without further clarification.[21] For our part, however, we consider that Varro is referring, very precisely, to a division within the ruling class or group, so that it is not the whole city that is fragmented, but only a part, the ruling one, because with Gaius Gracchus, the power to judge passes into the hands of the *equites*, that is, all the power is no longer concentrated in a single class, the senators. The origin of his reflection must be sought –in our opinion– in the Platonism of its author, a hypothesis that requires a somewhat detailed argumentation. Indeed, Plato makes it very clear that constitutional change is not brought about by confrontation between different social groups within the city, but is only set in motion when there is division within the sector or party that holds power:

> Or is this the simple and unvarying rule, that in every form of government revolution takes its start from the ruling class itself, when dissension arises in that, but so long as it is as one with itself, however small it be, innovation is impossible? (trans. P. Shorey LCL).[22]

In other words, it is the confrontation within the part of the constitution exercised by the ruling class, the internal rift, that triggers the constitutional change. Gaius Gracchus introduces with his *lex iudiciaria* the disagreement between *equites* and *senatores*, and furthermore, divides between them the tasks of government, which should be exclusive to the senators, that is, in Platonic terms, to the guardians. This inevitably leads to the decadence and fall of the *Kallipolis*, in this case Rome, due to the internal division in "the ruling class itself", for there is no doubt that the "power to judge" is one of the *archai* in the Greek *polis.*[23] In the ideal Platonic city, degeneration will begin precisely when someone from the lower groups occupies a position among the guardians: "... alleging that there is an oracle that the state shall then be overthrown when the man of iron or brass is its guardian" (trans. P. Shorey, LCL).[24] Varro, in our opinion, was applying this Platonic thesis, on the *metabolé politeias*, of universal scope, to the Roman case, expressing it in a very powerful way, by means of the metaphor of two-headedness. He was relying on Plato's endorsement to situate the origin of civil discord precisely there, and not in any other moment or law that came before or after.

We know that Varro was a follower of the Academy, more specifically, he showed a preference for the ancient Academy, i.e. Plato.[25] Indeed, in the second edition of his *Academica*, Cicero casts Varro as the spokesman of the ancient Academy, in the version of Antiochus, while he, for his part, assumes the role of Philo of Larissa.[26] Varro's character, summarising Antiochus' opinions, emphatically maintains that the difference between the Academics and the Peripatetics is merely nominal, since both have the same origin (Plato) and coincide in their doctrines.[27] Cicero also informs us that Varro had studied with Antiochus in Athens.[28] The influence of Antiochus can also

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21 Mebane 2016, 198 n. 29. In the same sense, Botteri – Raskolnikoff 1983, 79 and 82 associate Varro's passage with the Aristotelian references to the demagogues, who divide the *polis* in two (*Pol.* 1310a4-5).

22 Ἦ τόδε μὲν ἁπλοῦν, ὅτι πᾶσα πολιτεία μεταβάλλει ἐξ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἔχοντος τὰς ἀρχάς, ὅταν ἐν αὐτῷ τούτῳ στάσις ἐγγένηται· ὁμονοοῦντος δέ, κἂν πάνυ ὀλίγον ᾖ, ἀδύνατον κινηθῆναι (Pl. *R.* 545c-d).

23 The control of the courts meant that the *equites* had *magnam partem rei publicae* as recognised by Cic. *Rab. Perd.* 20, referring to the year 100 BC (Cicero exaggerates here, according to Meier 2017, 82 n. 108). Aristotle had defined a citizen precisely as one who "has the right to participate in the deliberative and judiciary function (*arché*)..." (Arist. *Pol.* 1275b18).

24 Ὡς χρησμοῦ ὄντος τότε τὴν πόλιν διαφθαρῆναι, ὅταν αὐτὴν ὁ σιδηροῦς φύλαξ ἢ ὁ χαλκοῦς φυλάξῃ; Pl. *R.* 415c.

25 Dillon 1996, 81.

26 Cic. *Fam.* 9.8.1. Cfr. Cic. *Att.* 13.12.3 (SB 320); 13.16.2 (SB 323) and 13.25.3 (SB 333).

27 Cic *Acad.* 1.17. Tsouni 2018 has insisted on the important role of Antiochus as a promoter of the doctrine of a unified ancient Academy (Plato and Aristotle), associating it with the fact that in those years the esoteric writings of Aristotle, brought by Sulla, could be read in Rome for the first time (Str. 13.1.54).

28 Cic. *Acad.* 1.12.

be seen in Varro's lost treatise *de philosophia*, which we know about thanks to Augustine of Hippo,[29] who concludes his long account of Varro's arguments with a brief but interesting reference:

> That these were the doctrines and teachings of the ancient Academy is attested by Varro, relying on Antiochus, Cicero's teacher and his own, although Cicero wants to make him seem, in many things, more like a Stoic than a member of the ancient Academy.[30]

Augustine is not very clear here, although he associates Varro with Antiochus of Ascalon, who was in favour of a renewed Platonism, which sought convergence in some aspects with Stoicism, which led him into a harsh confrontation with Philo of Larissa, the head of the Academy, defender of the sceptical line of Carneades. Of course, Augustine puts Cicero, who always remained within the framework of academic scepticism, on practically the same plane as him, which makes us doubt the scope of his testimony with respect to Varro: the fact that Antiochus was his teacher does not make him a faithful follower of all his doctrines. In conclusion, while there is no doubt that Varro was a follower of Antiochus, it is much more difficult to determine exactly in which aspects or themes or in which passages we can see his influence.[31]

There are, in fact, very few direct quotations or references to Plato in what has come down to us from Varro.[32] There is no doubt, however, that Varro supported the Platonic idea that established an isomorphism between the City and Man. We can see this in one of his Menippean Satires, entitled *Marcopolis*, in which he reflects ironically on the Platonic *Kallipolis* and criticises the inability of the philosophical schools to agree on the definition of the ideal City. Like Antiochus, Varro also sought an agreement between the different currents, which involved a return to Plato's seminal writings.[33] Here, Varro takes up the isomorphism between the City and Man, although from the preserved fragments it is not possible to determine whether he accepted the notion of the head as the place of government of the City, although it is likely that this was the case.[34] In the treaty we are now addressing, *De vita populi Romani,* Varro remained faithful to this Platonic idea, as can be seen from his use of various bodily metaphors, using physical illness as a way of referring to the corruption of the City: "to make it easier to see how this bloody gangrene of evil has taken hold of all members of the people";[35] he applies this same adjective (bloody), to the "seditions", again attracting the attention of Nonius, who picks it up because he finds it strange that he applies it to something incorporeal, the same reason why he has preserved for us the brief fragment about the two-headed city.[36] The study of ancient traditions, of the origin of words, of rites and laws, Varro hoped, would enable him to heal the ailing city in the same way as a doctor seeks to heal the body of a man afflicted with a disease. The origin of decadence lies in oblivion, so it is only remembrance, i.e. archaic erudition, that can, perhaps, prevent ruin.[37]

None of this excludes other influences, of particular interest to our case, since, as is well known, the *de vita populi Romani* must have been inspired by the *Bios Hellados* of Dicaearchus, a well-known peripatetic, born in Messana, Sicily, in 376 BC, very few fragments of whose work

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29 Aug. *Civ.* 19.1-3.

30 *Haec sensisse atque docuisse Academicos veteres Varro adserit, auctore Antiocho, magistro Ciceronis et suo, quem sane Cicero in pluribus fuisse Stoicum quam veterem Academicum vult videri*; Aug. *Civ.* 19.3. Cfr. also Aug. *Civ.* 19.5: *veteres Academici, quorum sectam Varro defendit…*

31 See Tarver 1997 (focusing above all on Varro's mysterious *de philosophia*) and for what there may be of Antiochus in Varronian theology and etymologies, see Blank 2012.

32 One of the few examples is Varro, *Antiquitates Rerum Divinarum* fr. 12 (Aug. *Civ.* 6.4) where, in the opinion of Volk 2016, there is an implicit reference to Plato's *Fifth Letter* (322a-b4), now considered false, but considered authentic in late-Republican Rome.

33 Leonardis 2018.

34 Leonardis 2018, 24.

35 *quo facilius animadvertatur per omnes articulos populi hanc mali gangraenam sanguinulentam permeasse* (Non. p. 168, 17-169, 23L = 123 R = 437S = 117P).

36 *itaque propter amorem imperii magistratus gradatim seditionibus sanguinolentis ad dominatus quo appellerent* (Non. 745L = 122R =435S = 116P).

37 Leonardis 2019a, 158-159. Cfr. Moatti 1997, 109: "l'Antiquaire est un archéologue de la langue".

have survived.[38] Apart from the coincidence in the title (but not in the number of books, as *Bios Hellados* had three as opposed to the four of *de vita populi Romani*), it is likely that Varro also took from Dicaearchus the general idea of dealing with a history of "culture" or "civilisation", Roman in his case, with very varied themes, ranging from the rituals for the declaration of war or the signing of peace to matters of everyday life, such as food, drink or the currency of the ancient Romans. However, we know that Varro obtained much of his information from annalists such as Calpurnius Piso or Valerius Antias[39] and we can also see that his orientation was very different from that of Dicaearchus: while the latter's interest was merely knowledge of the Hellenic past, in Varro we can sense a certain nostalgia, because his ambition is to seek in the customs of the ancient Romans the starting point for a genuine regeneration of Rome.[40] Other influences have also been noted, such as the *Chronica* of Nepos (54 BC) or the *liber annalis* of Atticus (47 BC), without forgetting the *Bios Hellados* attributed to Jason of Nysa (mid-first century BC), perhaps Posidonian in orientation and with the same number of books (four) as that of *de vita.*[41] For the fragment that concerns us, the one on the judiciary reform of Gaius Gracchus, there is no doubt, purely chronologically, that Varro could not have been inspired by Dicaearchus, but we cannot rule out the presence of Posidonius, an important author for our argument, as we will see later on.

Let us now return to Varro's text, to approach it from our second line of interpretation, that is, in the light of the readings that certain priests (especially the haruspices) made of the prodigies. In fact, we have evidence of certain prodigies similar to Varro's metaphorical bicephaly. In particular, the appearance in the victim's liver of a double lobe, in what was technically known as *caput iecoris*, was regarded as an ominous sign heralding internal divisions and power struggles.[42] The interpretation was similar when the heads in question were not those of the liver. As the character Quintus Cicero recalls in the *De divinatione*, the birth of a girl with two heads heralded sedition among the people and adultery in the households.[43] In this case, there is no direct reference to Gracchus and it is possible that the enumeration of prodigies may in fact ultimately come from a Near Eastern source.[44] Closer to Varro's passage is another prodigy from the list preserved for us by Julius Obsequens, who associates the monstrous birth of a calf with two heads with the riots that broke out in Rome when Gaius Gracchus proposed his laws.[45] In this case, the interpretation of the prodigy is less far-reaching than the one suggested by Varro, as it is limited to the disturbances that occurred at the time, without portraying them as the origin of the civil conflicts that were to follow, nor proposing an explanation of the causes of the decline. In any case, the text is clearly hostile to Gaius Gracchus, and is situated in an optimate line, which was shared in a special way by prominent Etruscan haruspices such as Spurinna.[46] Varro, as we shall

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38 118 fragments in Wehrli 1944.

39 In Val. Max. 8.9.1 the plebs that have separated in the Mons Sacer are likened to a headless body, a metaphor that may come from Valerius Antias (so Walters 2020: 13), but Valerius Maximus does not cite his source.

40 Dahlmann 1935, cols. 1243-1246. For this passage on the two-headed city, Nicolet 1966, 476 thought that the source was contemporary anti-Gracchan personalities, both annalists (Calpurnius Piso) and orators (Laelius, Scipio).

41 Ax 2000.

42 Lucan. 1.626 and Sen. *Oed.* 359 with Thulin 1968: II, 31.

43 *Si puella nata bíceps esset, seditionem in populo fore, corruptelam et adulterium domi.* Cic. *Div.* 1.121 with López Barja 2007, 101-102.

44 Jacobs 2010 shows the similarities of some examples mentioned in *De divinatione* (among them, the one that now concerns us of the girl born with two heads) with some passages from the divinatory tablets known as Summa Izbu, written in Akkadian, Ugaritic, Hittite and Hurrian, over a long period of time, from the Paleo-Babylonian period to the Seleucids, which Cicero would have known from an intermediate Greek or Latin source.

45 *Saturae vitulus biceps natus. Tumultus in Urbe fuit, C. Graccho leges ferente* (Obs. 31, 124 BC). Cfr. Engels 2007, 553-554. Obsequens takes his information from Livy, though probably through an intermediate source (Schmidt 1968, 169).

46 Montero, 2000 and 2015. On the other hand, the idea of certain historians who saw the prodigies as a form of repression of the social demands of certain oppressed groups (e.g. Günther 1964, especially p.

see below, took a similar ideological position, in which the rejection of the monarchy and the defence of traditional republican institutions played a central role.[47]

An important fact to confirm the Platonic origin of Varro's metaphor lies in the fact that Varro speaks of "heads", which implies, according to our interpretation, that he located here, in the head, the seat of reason and therefore of government. Plato, in fact, located the seat of man's rational soul, which is immortal, in the head, but the Stoics were not of this opinion, since, in their view, the substance that is the soul was located in the heart.[48] The interpreters of prodigies, on the other hand, do not seem to have had a clear idea about it. As we have seen, bicephaly is a sign of serious internal disturbances (*tumultus, seditio),* but the cause is not explained, i.e. the interpretation is not justified by the fact that the head functions as a metaphor for the government of the city. The Etruscan discipline, however, seems to be more along the lines of the Stoics, although the information we have is barely limited to a famous incident, with Caesar as the protagonist. During the famous Lupercalia of February 44 BC, the sacrifice was not favourable because the heart of the victim, a splendid ox, could not be located. The interpretation of the haruspex Spurinna was convincing: Caesar was in danger of losing both reason and life (*consilium et vita*), as both depended on the heart.[49] Although this is an isolated testimony, it explicitly and directly indicates that, for Spurinna at least and perhaps for the Haruspices as a whole, the rational part of the soul was based in the heart. The Stoics, for their part, including Posidonius, agreed with them on this point. Had he followed this doctrine, the metaphor employed by Varro would have been similar to the very famous one of the poet Ennius, who claimed to have three hearts because he was able to speak three languages: Greek, Oscan and Latin.[50] The city of Gracchus, on the other hand, had a surplus of heads, not hearts.

3. Varro and the *optimates*

The truth is that the information we have on the political positions that Varro adopted at the various turning points in the history of Rome during his long life is very scarce, only amounting to a few incidents and certain inferences that historians are quick to draw with more or less justification. Traditionally, he has been considered a moderate conservative, close to the positions of the *optimates*, although without going too deeply into the question.[51] We owe the most detailed analysis of this issue to Della Corte, who underlined the fact that in his youth Varro had as his rhetorical teacher L. Aelius Stilo, considered an outspoken advocate of the *optimates*.[52] Later, the friendship with Pompey, begun during the war against Sertorius, determined the rest of his career until Pharsalus, which implies, in his view, that the mysterious *Tricaranos* had to be a defence, not a criticism, of the pact between the dynasts. For the following years, after Pompey's death, which are of particular interest to us, Della Corte places Varro quite close to Caesar, as we know that

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236) does not seem to be admissible. The conflicts over religion between *optimates* and *populares* were violent, as demonstrated, for the second century B.C. by Rawson 1974.

47 Cichorius (1922, 199) suggests that Varro belonged to the college of the *XVuir sacris f.*, charged with the custody and interpretation of the Sibylline books, but we cannot be sure. Also, if we take Tertullian's testimony as valid, he would have rejected the *vis popularium* in favour of the cults of Serapis, Isis, etc. in the Capitol in 58 BC, but it is risky to draw conclusions from a sentence that perhaps only censured the disorders (Tert. *Ad nat.* 1.10 = *Ant. Rer.diuin.* fr. 46a-b Cardauns with Rolle 2017).

48 Pl. *Ti.* 69c. Galen. *De Foet.* 4.698,2-9 (*SVF* 2,761 = Long & Sedley, 1987, 53D), referring to Peripatetics and Stoics in general, and Galen. *Plac.* 2.5.9-13 (= SVF 3 Diogenes 29 = Long & Sedley 1987, 53U) on Diogenes of Babylon. Posidonius shared the general opinion on this point (cfr. Pohlenz, 1967: 233).

49 Cic. *Div.* 1.119. The reference to the *consilium et vita* also appears in Val. Max. 1.6.13, but not in the other versions of the anecdote (Plin. *HN.* 11.186; App. *BCiv.* 2.112 and Plu. *Caes.* 63.4). Schultz 2014: *ad loc.* does not comment on this. On Caesar's attitude to prodigies, cfr. Santangelo 2013, 108-110.

50 Gell. 17.17, *Quintus Ennius tria corda habere sese dicebat, quod loqui Graece, Osce et Latine sciret*. In general, see Onaians 1988, 40-1, 62 and 124-5.

51 Cichorius 1922, 202 (the Marianists as "die Gegenpartei"). For Dahlmann 1935, col. 1172-1277, Pompey guaranteed that the ancient Republic would be maintained as Varro loved it (col. 1175).

52 *Optimatium fautor* in Suet. *Gramm.* 3. We know that he was Varro's teacher from Gell. 16.8.2 and Cic. *Brut.* 265.

the latter entrusted him with the creation of the first public library in Rome and that Varro, in turn, dedicated to him his *Antiquitates rerum divinarum*.[53] After the tyrannicide, Della Corte places him in the orbit of the triumvirs: although it is true that he was initially on the list of the banished, it was not for a political reason, but exclusively because of his wealth, which is pure conjecture;[54] he even sees him as close to Antony, which is difficult to believe, given that the latter took over the villa of Varro in Cassinum and caused the destruction of the library that our polygrapher had there.[55] On this point, it is preferable to follow Taylor's opinion, who argued that Varro wrote *De gente populi Romani* in the year 43 as an act of propaganda in favour of Octavian: the various references in the work to deified kings and heroes from Greek and Roman history helped to reinforce Octavian's position after the appearance of the famous comet in July of the year 44 BC, which favoured the deification of Caesar and was not exactly to Antony's liking.[56] It is striking, however, in the brief enumeration of deified men given by Varro, namely Aesculapius, Hercules, Castor and Pollux, to note the absence of Romulus-Quirinus, which is surprising given the very important role played in this legend by Julius Proculus and, therefore, by the *gens Iulia* as a whole. Perhaps Varro did not want to make an argument that might be too overtly pro-Caesar, or perhaps he simply disregarded it because it was a late invention of Sulla's or Caesar's own making.[57]

Recently, however, some doubts have been expressed. Todisco sees in Varro a supporter of the *ciuitas popularis*, that is, of a political system in which the *populus* occupies a central place. In support of this idea is the fact that he chose the Roman people as his protagonist, both in *De gente* and *De vita*, as well as the links that, after Pharsalus, united him to Caesar, as we have just seen.[58] Todisco continues the line opened by Wiseman, who, after a detailed analysis of Ciceronian correspondence concerning Varro, concludes that the two were in different camps; Wiseman argues the relevance of some passages in which Varro recognises the right of a citizen to bring certain categories of magistrates before the courts or grants *potestas* to the people with regard to linguistic correctness. This series of arguments would include his use of such unusual and striking expressions as "the senate of the Roman people", although in the latter case, the attribution to Varro is purely conjectural and should be dismissed.[59]

However, in my opinion, Varro's position, in the moments before and after the civil war, seems clearly far removed from that of the *populares*. The recognition of the importance of the Roman people is not incompatible with such clearly optimate views as those of Cato, who exalted the collective work of the Roman people in his *Origines*, or of Cicero himself, who defined the *res publica* precisely as *res populi* and did use the expression "senator of the Roman people" several times, which certainly does not make him a *popularis*.[60] Even if we accept that Varro merely followed Pompey's guidance, since he served under him in Hispania during the Sertorian war, the changing of sides by the latter in the years following 52 BC must have implied a rapprochement of his loyal follower to the positions of the *optimates.* It is true that Varro was part of the commission that distributed the *ager Campanus*, in the year 59 BC, in accordance with Caesar's law, but this fits in with his Pompeian allegiance, as one of its objectives was to distribute land among Pompey's veterans.[61] The mysterious *Tricaranos* or 'Triple Head' is best understood, however, as a critique

53 Library: Suet. *Iul.* 46. Dedicated: Aug. *De Civ. D.* 7.35 and Lact. *Inst.* 1.6.7.
54 Della Corte 1970, 48, 199-201 and 205.
55 Cic. *Phil.* 2. 102-105; Gell. 3.10.17.
56 Taylor 1934, 221-229.
57 Varro *apud* Aug. *Civ.* 4.27. Cfr. Eecke 2008, 384 n. 138.
58 Todisco 2017, 57. However, Marshall 2017, 73-75, believes that Varro's collaboration with Cesar may have been forced by circumstances.
59 Wiseman 2009, 115 n. 44 and 119 with quotes from Gell. 13.13.4; *Lat.* 9.6. However, we must exclude Gell. 17.21.48 (*senatum populi Romani*), a passage that Funaioli (1907, frag. 58) attributes to Varro simply because Gellius has mentioned him shortly before (in 17.21.45). Wiseman 2016 reaffirms his arguments, focusing on the *de vita*.
60 Cic. *Rep.* 1.39 (*res populi); Dom.* 37; *Pis.* 70; *Verr.* 2.1.156.
61 Varro *Rust.* 1.2.10, Plin. *HN* 7.176. This was not the only objective, for Caesar also had the poor of the city of Rome in mind as beneficiaries (Morstein-Marx 2021, 232).

of the alliance of the dynasts (Pompey, Caesar and Crassus), formulated in defence of traditional aristocratic rule.[62]

In any case, not surprisingly, Varro took sides in 49 BC for Pompey, that is, for the cause of the Senate, and he did so twice, for after being defeated and pardoned by Caesar in Hispania Ulterior, he joined the *optimates* in Greece, in Dyrrachium, to continue the struggle.[63] Although his relationship with Cicero had not been close and trusting in the past, their common experience of war had increased Cicero's esteem for him.[64] The letters Cicero wrote to him (eight have survived, written in 46, except for the last one, from 45, Cic. *Fam*. 9.1-8) reveal not only an uncomfortable shared situation, exposed as they were to cross criticism from both sides, but also common political opinions: while at one point he specifies that the two shared the same education and life style, (*nobis... eundem cultum eundem victum esse),* in another he recalls that they both served the same cause (... *victoriam quam quidem ego etiam illorum timebam ad quos veneramus)* and in a third, that in ancient times Fortune smiled on the cause of the republic, that is to say, that of the *optimates*.[65] It is possible, however, that Cicero was not entirely honest on this point and, unfortunately, none of the letters written to him by Varro have survived. As is well known, Varro dedicated a part of his *De Lingua Latina* to him and Cicero responded to the gift by writing a heartfelt eulogy and a leading role in the second edition of his *Academica*.[66] What we need is to hear our scholar's own voice, but unfortunately, we have not a direct route to his overtly political views, although we do have some indirect ones and all of them point in the same direction. We have already mentioned the curious omission of Romulus-Quirinus from the list of deified men. To this we may add the eulogy which, as Cicero also did, he wrote in honour of Porcia, the wife of Domitius Ahenobarbus, Cato's sister, when she died in 45 BC.[67] Although probably cautious given the circumstances, the gesture can be understood as a public stance, coinciding with the vindication of Cato's figure by Brutus or Cicero. The third clue is equally indirect. These are the somewhat disturbing mentions of the dictatorship in *De lingua Latina*, which twice stresses that the dictator has to be "said" (i.e. appointed) by the consul.[68] This was a very sensitive issue at the time (around 45 BC), when Caesar had disregarded such niceties and had become dictator without being appointed by the consul. In the *fasti Capitolini*, the consuls precede the dictator and the *magister equitum* each year, except in Caesar's period, when the order is reversed; we do not know the reason for the change, but perhaps it is because it was usually the consuls who

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62 App. *BC* 2.9: "This coalition the Roman writer Varro treated of in a book entitled Tricaranus" (trans. H. White LCL). The phrase tells us nothing about the content of the book. Several authors deny that it was an attack on the dynasts because of Varro's friendship with Pompey. Thus, among others, Della Corte 1970, 76-77; Rawson 1985, 216 n.; Fantham 2003, 111-112. All we know is that Varro took the title from a writing of the Promacedonian Anaximenes of Lampsacus, in which he attacked Sparta, Athens and Thebes for hindering the creation of a united Greece (Zuchelli 1976). Certainly, if we follow the parallelism, the three Roman heads (Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus) must have been the object of Varro's attack just as the three Greek cities were the object of Anaximenes' attack. On the other hand, friendship with Pompey did not prevent Cicero from launching harsh criticisms against the dynasts in public (Cic. *Flacc.* 94-105) and in private (e.g. *Att.* 2.8.1; 2.9.1; 2.12.1; 2.17.1; 2.21.1, etc.), in letters to Atticus, it is true, but it should be remembered that letters were not then private in the sense we give to them. It is tempting to see an echo of Tricaranos in the phrase of Velleius Paterculus, when he points out that at Pharsalus the two heads of the Republic were in conflict with each other (Vell. 2.52.3).

63 Cic. *Div.* 1.68 and 2.114; Plu. *Caes.* 36.

64 Cic. *Fam.* 9.1, end of 47 with Cardauns 2001, 11.

65 Respectively *Fam.* 9.3.1; 9.6.3 and 9.8.2.

66 Cic. *Acad.* 1.2-3 and 1.9, with *Fam.* 6.8.1 and *Att.* 13.25.3 = SB 333. Years earlier, Cicero had considered the possibility of mentioning him in one of the prologues to *de Re publica*, although it seems that he did not do so (*Att.* 4.16.2 = SB 89).

67 Cic. *Att.* 13.48.2 = SB 345, of August 45 BC. Shackleton-Bailey believes that death and *laudatio* had taken place sometime earlier).

68 Varro *Lat.* 5.82 (*dictator quod a consule dicebatur)* and 6.61. Cfr- Livy 22.9.5-6 who explains the exceptional circumstances which, in 217 BC, for the first time forced the people and not the consuls to appoint the dictator in the person of Fabius Maximus. Recently, Arena (2021) has shown how the etymology that Varro defends for consul in *De Lingua Latina* 5.80 may be a response to Caesar's abuse of this magistracy.

appointed the dictators, although no longer under Caesar.[69] Nevertheless, it is possible that during these years Varro made some approach to Caesar, which earned him the commission to organise the first public library in Rome, but he did not succeed in carrying it out.[70] After Caesar's death, we know little, except that Varro did not like the openly pro-Caesar attitude of a newly arrived Octavian; we also know that he was subsequently placed on the list of outlaws because of his openly anti-monarchist political views, which in this context must be understood as anti-Caesarian.[71] Our fourth clue is Varro's conception of *lex* as that which is brought before the people for them to observe; here, the emphasis lays on the magistrate who commands the people to obey his proposal, a far cry from the definition of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, where law is "what is sanctioned by the will of the people".[72] Whatever political views Varro may have had along his life, when he was writing *De vita populi Romani* his sympathies clearly were not on the side of the *populares.* His harsh condemnation of Gaius Gracchus, attributing to him the accumulation of evils that devastated the republic, fits well with this *optimate* stance. The contrast with the fiery defence of the Gracchus brothers found in Sallust (*Bellum Iugurthinum* 42.1), who presents them as defenders of the liberty of the plebs, is eloquent.

4. Posidonius

Therefore, we have a harsh criticism of Gaius Gracchus made by Varro and partly inspired by Platonism: by opening access to office (in this case, access to the power to judge) to the equestrian order, Gaius Gracchus brought about a division, a *stasis*, among those who exerted *arkhai* in Rome*.* As is well known, a criticism with a similar background has come down to us, formulated by Diodorus Siculus, who wrote his *Library of History* at about the same time as Varro wrote *de vita populi Romani*:

> By taking away from the senators the right to serve in the courts and designating the knights as jurors, he made the inferior element in the state supreme over their betters; by disrupting the existing harmony of senate and knights he rendered the common people hostile towards both (trans F.R. Walton, LCL).[73]

The similarities between this passage from Diodorus Siculus and the one from Varro we saw earlier are clear, as they both convey the same idea: Gracchus' law on judges opened a division between both, *equites* and senators, with serious consequences. However, beyond the coincidence in substance, some relevant differences can be observed, since Diodorus censures the inversion of a social hierarchy: "the inferior dominates the superior". It is not clear what we are to understand here by "the inferior", whether it is the plebs, whose power grows in the face of the weakness of the "superior part of the constitution", damaged by the internal division caused by Gracchus' law, or only a part of it, i.e. the *equites*.[74] It is also important that Diodorus (not Varro) mentions the breaking of the "agreement" (*súmpnoia*) between the senators and the *equites*, using a term that suggests that Diodorus may have used Posidonius as a source, which does not necessarily mean that we have to accept Busolt's radical thesis, which has dominated

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69 Zevi 2016, 295-296.

70 Suet. *Iul.* 44,2. Rosillo-López 2020 shows that Varro maintained some political activity under Caesar's dictatorship, albeit of an "extra-institutional" nature.

71 Cic. *Att.* 16.9 = SB 419: *Varroni displicet consilium pueri*, App. *B Civ.* 4.47: Οὐάρρων δὲ ἦν φιλόσοφός τε καὶ ἱστορίας συγγραφεύς, ἐστρατευμένος τε καλῶς καὶ ἐστρατηγηκώς, καὶ ἴσως διὰ ταῦτα ὡς ἐχθρὸς μοναρχίας προυγράφη.

72 Varro *Lat.* 6.66; *Rhet Her.*2.19.

73 Τῶν μὲν γὰρ συγκλητικῶν τὸ δικάζειν ἀφελόμενος καὶ ἀποδείξας τοὺς ἱππεῖς κριτάς, τὸ χεῖρον τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ κρείττονος κύριον ἐποίησε, καὶ τὴν προϋπάρχουσαν τῷ συνεδρίῳ πρὸς τοὺς ἱππεῖς σύμπνοιαν διαστήσας βαρὺν τὸν ὅχλον κατ´ ἀμφοτέρων κατεσκεύασε (D.S. 35 fr.10.1 Goukowski = 34/35. 25.1 Walton = Jacoby *FGrH* A 87 F 11b = F 165 Theiler).

74 Busolt 1890, 406 considers that τὸ χεῖρον refers to an inferior element: given the eternal animosity between the senate and the plebs in the history of Rome, the order of the knights lost its own denomination, joining the group opposed to that of the senators, i.e. the plebs, τὸ δημοτικόν, which encompasses both knights and plebs; in the same sense, Botteri – Raskolnikoff 1983, 65.

historiography for more than a century. In Busolt's opinion, from the moment Polybius ends, Diodorus used Posidonius as his sole source (except for some marginal references to suicide which he believes are taken from a minor source), both for the internal history of Italy and for the external wars. Busolt's arguments are not decisive because he relies on a coincidence of ideas that were in fact topical in late Republican Rome (the decadence of manners), and on Diodorus' favourable treatment of those whom Busolt believes were Posidonius' informants, namely Rutilius Rufus, Metellus Numidicus and the democrat C. Norbanus.[75]

Without going into this "Posidonian question" in depth, we must point out that even Goukowski, who considers the supposed dependence on Posidonius as nothing more than "a Germanic myth", admits it for this passage, at least as probable, due to the presence of the term *sumpnoia*, which does not reappear in the entire *Biblioteca historica*.[76] Curiously, Busolt does not mention this fact, but merely notes that Diodorus' vision is *optimate*, critical of Gaius Gracchus, whom he accuses of aspiring to tyranny, and therefore Posidonian.[77] Botteri and Raskolnikoff, however, reject the Posidonian inspiration outright in favour of a purely Roman source and suggest that *sumpnoia* could translate a Latin *conspiratio*.[78] In this sense, to the sources indicated by both as support for this proposal, it is interesting to add that in Livy's *Periochae* we find a similar expression, the use of the verb *consentire* in reference to the agreement then existing between the Senate and the *ordo equester*, destroyed by a law of Gracchus (perhaps a mere *rogatio*) by which 600 *equites* were to be incorporated into the Senate: *tertiam, qua equestrem ordinem tunc cum senatu consentientem corrumperet, ut sescenti ex equite in curiam sublegerentur*.[79] It is impossible to know whether the summary of Livy's text is reliable at this point, but the verbal coincidence between Diodorus (Posidonius) and the *Periochae* is remarkable, since both affirm that Gaius Gracchus came to break the *sumpnoia-consensio* of the *ordo equester* with the Senate. Varro used the same argument, but he expressed it in a different and more elegant mode, using a metaphor taken from the priestly lore.

The passage from Diodorus Siculus is perfectly congruent with the Platonic theory of the soul, where there must be a "harmony" or "an agreement" between the various parts, but since this dominion is not absolute –for reason does rule uncontestably, as Chrysippus thought– it may be that the lower part ends up imposing itself on the higher part. Whether or not a coincidence with Posidonius can be seen here is more difficult to determine, although we have a strong argument, in principle, in this sense. Galen, discussing the cause of the emotions and what is a happy life, tells us that Posidonius considered the answer of Chrysippus unsatisfactory and preferred Plato's answer:

> In this passage, Posidonius clearly taught us the magnitude of the Chrysippean mistake not only in their reasoning about the emotions, but also with regard to the end *(telos*). For

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75 Busolt 1890. A summary of the conclusions is given at the end, pp. 436-437. On the other hand, Botteri – Raskolnikoff 1979 point to a Latin source, but their opinions have not been widely echoed by specialists, with some exceptions. They follow Busolt's line, among others, Malitz 1983, 41-2 and 368 n. 73 (where he rejects the postulates of Botteri and Raskolnikoff), Desideri 2001 or Ambaglio 2008, 67-68. However, Goukowski 2014, X-XX provides a quick historiographical review of the "Posidonian question" from Busolt onwards, concluding: "de verité dogmatique qu'elle était, la présence sous-jacent de Posidonios est devenue au fils des années une 'chose pensable', bref une hypothèse quelque peu en l'air" (p. XX). In contrast, Sacks 1994, 221 follows a more nuanced approach: Diodorus is not merely a copyist, but from book 32 until the end of the work (book 40), he closely follows Polybius, first, and then Posidonius. Piantanida 2021 also agrees with Sacks, stressing the role of Diodorus as an author.

76 *Sumpnoia* belongs to the Stoic vocabulary (Chrysippus spoke of *sumpnoia* between celestial and terrestrial things *SVF* 2,172). Despite his rejection of Busolt's hypothesis, Goukowski 2014, 336, for this passage admits that it may underlie the presence of Posidonius or perhaps Rutilius Rufus (although, we would add, the presence of Rutilius Rufus is even more ghostly than that of Posidonius). For Yarrow 2006, 214, even if the source on Gaius Gracchus was Posidonius, the interpretation of the facts is purely Diodorean.

77 Busolt 1890, 337. For Malitz 1983, 373, this *sumpnoia* refers to the mention of *concordia* in Nasica's speech (D.S. 34/35.33.5: *homonoein*) and even to the Ciceronian *concordia ordinum*, if indeed Posidonius had heard of it (cfr. Malitz 1983, 367 n. 59).

78 Botteri – Raskolnikoff 1983, 66 based on Cic. *Fam*. 12.15.3; *Dom.* 28 and *Phil.* 11.2.

79 Livy *Per.* 60.

> "to live in harmony with nature" is not how they describe it, but as Plato taught us: since we have in us a better part and a worse part of the soul, he who follows the better part could be said to live in harmony with nature, while he who follows the worse part rather in discord (*anomologias)*; the latter lives by emotion, the former by reason.[80]

Galen attributes to Posidonius (erroneously, according to EK), the term "part of the soul", which opens the way to the possibility of a perhaps somewhat simplifying interpretation by Diodorus of a difficult and highly technical terminology, whose subtleties he did not need to respect. Galen's version of Posidonian ideas coincides very precisely with Diodorus' criticism of Gaius Gracchus: with his judiciary law, he made the lower part of the city rule over the upper part, which is contrary to nature and a source of discord.

Both Diodorus and Varro used Platonic doctrines to explain the crisis of the Republic, which ultimately refer to the well-known isomorphism between Man and the City and both focused on the open opposition between senators and equites, considering this fragmentation of the ruling party the main cause of the disaster. This coincidence allows us to think that we are dealing with an argument that was not exclusive to Varro but rather belonged to the baggage of what has been called the "ideological family" of the *optimates.*

We must now turn to a third passage. At the beginning of his *Ancient History of Rome*, Dionysius of Halicarnassus states that from the remote times of Romulus the Romans were able to preserve harmony between the patricians and the plebs until a time came when it was broken forever:

> But from the time that Gaius Gracchus, while holding the tribunician power, destroyed the harmony of the government, they have been perpetually slaying and banishing one another from the city and refraining from no irreparable acts in order to gain the upper hand (trans. E. Cary LCL).[81]

Dionisius of Halicarnassus, who was writing from the perspective of the Augustan peace, is not so blunt in blaming Gaius Gracchus for the division and disaster that followed, but the fact is that he situates it precisely in his tribunate (and not in that of his brother Tiberius) the beginning of this prolonged and devastating stasis, something that coincides with Varro's view. Indeed, Dionysius of Halicarnassus does not mention the judiciary law, but he does refer to the end of a long period of harmony. He does not use the striking term *sumpnoia*, perhaps because he considers it too rare or too stoic; instead, he prefers a more neutral term: *harmonia*. Where Posidonius-Diodorus spoke of the death of the *sumpnoia* between senators and gentlemen, we now find the destruction of the harmony of the ruling party, for that is precisely *politeuma*, equivalent to the party exercising the *arkhai* in the text of Plato's *Republic* we saw earlier.[82]

We therefore find three texts that present notable points of coincidence in their negative judgement of the youngest of the Gracchus brothers: Varro, Diodorus Siculus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus; can Posidonius be considered a common source for all three?[83] There are certainly alternatives, such as the obscure *Annales* of Calpurnius Piso, the enemy of the Gracchi, a work that Varro repeatedly cites, but it is also true that it is possible to trace the presence of

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80 Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, 5.469-476 = Posidonius F 187, 13-21 (translated by Edeldstein, L., Kidd, I.G. [1994-2004]). As Edelstein and Kidd point out in their commentary (E-K 2, 678), Galen here uses a Platonic term ("parts of the soul"), which Posidonius rejected, for he preferred to speak of "faculties" (*dynameis*) of a single substance with its base in the heart (E-K F 146). Also Clement of Alexandria (Strom. 2.21.129,1-5 = E-K F 186) attributes the same term ("parts") to Posidonius. As Edelstein and Kidd point out, "Posidonius himself on occasion may have been careless". See also Reinhardt 1953, col. 636.

81 Ἐξ οὗ δὲ Γάιος Γράκχος ἐπὶ τῆς δημαρχικῆς ἐξουσίας γενόμενος διέφθειρε τὴν τοῦ πολιτεύματος ἁρμονίαν, οὐκέτι πέπαυνται σφάττοντες ἀλλήλους καὶ φυγάδας ἐλαύνοντες ἐκ τῆς πόλεως καὶ οὐδενὸς τῶν ἀνηκέστων ἀπεχόμενοι παρὰ τὸ νικᾶν. D.H. 2.11.3.

82 "Now a constitution is the ordering of a state in respect of its various magistracies, and especially the magistracy that is supreme over all matters. For the government (*politeuma*) is everywhere supreme over the state and the constitution is the government" (Arist. *Pol.* 1278b9-12; trans. H. Rackham).

83 We know of other cases in which some ideas attributed to Posidonius, we do not know whether they were taken from him or from Plato, cf. Nock 1959, who focuses mainly on the problem of Posidonian mysticism.

Posidonius in both the *de gente populi Romani* and the *de vita populi Romani*, particularly in Varro's interest in Greek literature (peripatetic, above all), *peri heurematon*. Posidonius' idea that what characterised the Romans was not that they had invented many things, but that they had adapted foreign inventions to their needs seems to have met with Varro's approval.[84] However, what is important for us now is not so much to determine whether or not Posidonius was the common source for these three passages, but to note that, at the end of the Republic, an interpretation of the civil wars was circulating in certain spheres that attributed them to the internal division of the "office-holding" class. The origin of this interpretation is Platonic, although we cannot determine in detail the whole chain of transmission, and its ideological orientation is clearly *optimate*.

5. Epilogue

In the letter he wrote to Aulus Caecina, giving him hope of an early pardon from Caesar that would allow him to regain his senatorial dignity (October 46 BC), Cicero recalls how the predictions based on Etruscan discipline (which Caecina was familiar with, having inherited it from his father) had been right in announcing his glorious return from exile in 57 BC. He cannot now turn to this discipline, to know whether Caesar's response will be favourable, but to a different mode of *divinatio*, based on the doctrine of the wise and long political experience.[85] Varro, on the other hand, sees no opposition between the two ways of unravelling the course of events, using both Platonic political science and the signs that the gods send to men in various forms, which the priests and the Senate interpret.[86] For him, *divinatio* is deeply embedded in philosophy. Both unequivocally heralded the decadence and civil wars that were to damage Rome, and which Varro documents in Book IV of *de vita populi Romani*, in which he clearly points out their cause: the judiciary law of Gaius Gracchus, which split the ruling class in two. Platonic teaching enabled him to see that this was where the root of evil lay, in the two-headed city.

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84 Wendling 1893.
85 Cic. *Fam.* 6.6. Santangelo 2013, 49-53.
86 A few years earlier, in *De Divinatione*, Cicero had made possible a Roman discourse on religion that took Greek philosophical reflections as its starting point: Beard 1986.

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