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manziere didascalico, che una lettura sensibile non può, mi sembra, non cogliere immediatamente.

Insomma: la familiarità che Leopardi ebbe col mondo antico fu certo profonda e appassionata, e la sua poesia non è immaginabile senza di essa. La sua informazione, com'è d'altra parte ben noto, rivela a volte lacune che oggi giudicheremmo gravi, determinate dalle circostanze in cui avvenne la sua formazione e dai testi di cui disponeva¹². Bisogna anche considerare che il canone degli autori di prima grandezza e indispensabili che vige al nostro tempo, non coincide sempre con quello della cultura di due secoli fa, tanto più in un ambiente provinciale e arretrato. Non c'è da meravigliarsi se qualche volta le sue vastissime conoscenze non si fondano sulle fonti originali, ma su compilazioni di dubbio affidamento. Stavolta, alle origini della sua ispirazione, non c'era Erodoto né un altro autore antico, ma un'opera contemporanea di non sempre attendibile divulgazione.

SUMMARY

In a passage of his much celebrated *Canzone all'Italia*, the first of his *Canti*, G. Leopardi appears to have committed a gross error on the topography of Thermopylae, in strictly connecting the butt of Leonidas' last stand with the city of Anthela (l. 77: «sul colle d'Antela...»). On the ground, the town and the hill are two good miles away from each other, separated in addition by a little river and a wall. A look in the seventh book of Herodotus (the only Greek author to name Anthela) would have been enough to correct this obvious misplacement.

The paper shows that the source of Leopardi was not Herodotus at all, but a famous 18th-century best seller, the *Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis*, of the French Abbé Barthélemy, where the same error is repeated several times, both in the text and in the accompanying maps.

The same book was very probably the source of inspiration for a whole stanza of the *Canzone all'Italia*.

12. Nella lettera al Giordani del 27.10.1817, il diciannovenne Leopardi chiede all'amico un Senofonte, «che è vergogna che ancora non l'abbia». Una prima comunicazione di queste osservazioni, in forma succinta, ho dato nella mia relazione al quarto «Incontro perugino di storiografia antica», Acquasparta, 30 maggio 1989.

PROPHECIES, RUMORS, AND SILENCE: NOTES ON CAESAR'S LAST INITIATIVE

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1. THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE AND THE MAKING OF KINGS

In another study of Julius Caesar's debut into active political life, I seek to elucidate the extraordinarily skillful ways in which, on the occasion of his aunt's funeral in the year 69 B.C., Caesar made use of ritual forms and mythic discourses to mobilize a large and powerful, but previously latent segment of Roman society, and to establish himself at its head.¹ In the present paper, I propose to pursue similar issues, and will explore certain events of a quarter century later in which that same man, now at the very height of his power, used similar instruments with equal skill, yet managed to produce catastrophic results.

The particular events on which I will focus came toward the end of Caesar's attempts in 44 B.C. to have himself named king.² In interpreting those attempts, I believe it is useful to view Caesar

1. *La politica di mito e rito nel funerale di Giulia: Cesare debutta nella sua carriera*, the paper will be presented at the International Conference on "La Cultura in Cesare", University of Macerata, 30 April-4 May 1990.

2. I am aware of the controversy regarding whether or not Caesar sought the kingship, which is present not only in academic debate, but also in all of the primary sources, and which presumably raged in Roman conversations, public and private, throughout 45 and 44 B.C. (For convenient reviews of the scholarly literature, see D. Felber, *Caesars Streben nach der Königswürde*, in F. Altheim, ed., *Untersuchungen zur römischen Geschichte*, Band I, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1961, pp. 259-273; Z. Yavetz, *Julius Caesar and his Public Image*, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1983, pp. 10-57). At a certain level, I find the "did he or didn't he" question an overly personalized and therefore trivialized way of examining the systemic forces which found expression in the attempts of Caesar and others to consolidate, appropriate, and restructure state power. Yet it remains impossible to study this period without taking some position on this question, even while recogniz-

as having initially sought to produce a plausible replica of the formal procedures which, according to tradition, were instituted when the early Romans chose a successor to Romulus; their first king. For it was through these procedures, which involved acclamation by the people and subsequent ratification by the Senate, that all of the good and properly Roman kings — Numa Pompilius, Tullus Hostilius, and Ancus Marcius — were selected.³ In contrast, these procedures were violated by all subsequent kings, whose legitimacy was therefore always deficient and who led the kingship into disrepute: Tarquinius Priscus, who first campaigned for election among the people, then packed the Senate to secure its ratification; Servius, who appropriated the royal robes, throne, and office; and later sought ratification by the people alone, after having bribed them with a distribution of land; and Tarquinius Superbus,

ing that the position one takes will result not just from interpreting the “facts”, but also involves a dialectic confrontation between one’s own political goals and convictions and those which, being inscribed within the primary sources, inflect their presentation of those elusive “facts”. For my part, I am persuaded — particularly by the skill with which Caesar employed the politics of myth and ritual throughout his career, and the signs of his careful preparation for the initiatives of 44 — that he was waging a very real, very determined, and very shrewd campaign in which he hoped to gain the kingship, but also hoped to preserve “deniability” in the event that that campaign should prove unsuccessful.

3. See Livy 1.17.7-11 (Numa), 1.22.1 (Tullus Hostilius), and 1.32.1 (Ancus). The account of how these procedures were established at the time of Numa’s election is quite complex and deserves careful study for the way in which it mystifies the balance of power between Senate and people in the selection of a king. Thus, we are told that during the period of interregnum after Romulus’s death, the people would not accept rule by the Senate, but demanded that a king be named (Livy 1.17.7-11): « Cum sensissent ea moueri patres, offerendum ultro rati quod amissuri erant, *ita gratiam ineunt summa potestate populo permissa ut non plus darent iuris quam detinerent*. Decreuerunt enim ut cum populus regem iussisset, id sic ratum esset si patres auctores fierent. Hodie quoque in legibus magistratibusque rogandis usurpatur idem ius, ut adempta: priusquam populus suffragium ineat, in incertum comitorum euentum patres auctores fiunt. Tum interrex contione aduocata, “Quod bonum, faustum felixque sit”, inquit, “Quirites, regem create: ita patribus uisum est. Patres deinde, si dignum qui secundus ab Romulo numeretur crearit, auctores fient”. Adeo id gratum plebi fuit ut, *ne uicti beneficio uiderentur, id modo sciscerent iuberentque ut senatus decerneret qui Romae regnaret* ». According to this mythic narrative, the Senate thus managed to retain its share of power, while gaining not only the appearance of magnanimity, but also that of legitimacy, for the final word in the election process is represented as if it were given them by the free choice of the people.

who also assumed royal power by donning the purple and occupying the throne, but never bothered to secure acclamation by people, Senate, or anyone else.⁴

Conscious of this and seeking to associate himself with the good kings only, on three separate occasions Caesar tried, with increasing boldness, to produce a situation in which the Roman people would hail him as king. First, there was the incident in which diadems were placed on Caesar's statues, only to be removed by two tribunes of the people, whom Caesar subsequently had removed from office.⁵ Second, within the *ovatio* given Caesar upon his return from the Alban Mount on 26 January following celebration of the *Feriae Latinae*, unnamed operatives hailed him as "King," but when the crowd failed to take up this cry, he passed the affair ing the throne, but never bothered to secure acclamation by people, out at the Luperalia of 15 February, in which Caesar appeared

4. See Livy 1.35.2 and 1.35.6 (Tarquinius Priscus); 1.41.6, 1.46.1-2, and 1.47.10-11 (Servius); 1.47.8 and 1.49.3 (Tarquinius Superbus). While all of the proceedings involved in the accession of these three kings are shown to be improper for one reason or another, there is a clear process of degeneration evident from the first to the third, as is evident in the table below:

	ratification by people	ratification by Senate
Tarquinius Priscus	+	+
Servius	+	—
Tarquinius Superbus	—	—

5. Cassius Dio 44.9.2-3, Appian *Bellum Civile* 2.108, Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 79.1, Plutarch, *Caesar* 61.4-5, *Antony* 12.4, Nicolaus of Damascus, *Vita Augusti* 20.4-10. There is some confusion in the primary sources regarding whether this incident preceded or followed Caesar's return from the Alban Mount, and controversy regarding who was responsible. The sources also differ regarding the precise moment at which Caesar took action against these tribunes. See further S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971, pp. 319-320.

6. Plutarch, *Caesar* 60.2, Cassius Dio 44.10.1, Appian, *Bellum Civile* 2.108, Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 79.1. Regarding the reactions of the crowd, most useful are the testimonies of Plutarch (who describes them as confused, then silent) and Appian (who makes mention of groans). The latter author also tells that Caesar's retort — "My name is not 'King', but Caesar" — was meant as a joke, in which he purported to believe that someone had mistakenly used *Re x*, a cognomen in his father's mother's family (the Marcii Reges), in place of *Caesar*, his proper patrilineal cognomen.

for the first time seated upon a golden throne, wearing royal robes,⁷ and had a diadem repeatedly offered him by Marc Antony, who claimed to act "by order of the people."⁸ Given the unfavorable reaction which this gesture prompted, however — Appian describes "applause from a few, but groans from the majority"⁹ — Caesar was forced to refuse.¹⁰

7. Although Plutarch, *Antony* 12.1 and *Caesar* 61.3, speaks of Caesar's garb as "triumphal" (*thriambikós*), Cassius Dio 44.6.1 and 44.11.2 calls it "royal" (*basilikós*) and Nicolaus of Damascus, *Vita Augusti* 21.4 specifies that his toga was purple. Throne and robes were among the honors granted Caesar by the Senate (cf. Cassius Dio 44.6.1, Appian *Bellum Civile* 2.106, and Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 76.1, the last of whom lists these as honors too great for any human). Livy 1.8.3. describes these as marks of kingship established by Romulus, and as we have seen in the cases of Servius (1.41.6) and Tarquinius Superbus (1.47.8), one could claim the kingship — albeit illegitimately — simply by taking possession of them. It thus would appear that through these props, Caesar presented himself as ready for accession to royal rule, without going so far as to state his case explicitly, thereby preserving some measure of deniability and avoiding the risk of provoking overt resistance.

8. Cicero, *Philippic* 2.87 records the statement which Antony and Caesar, the co-consuls for the year, had installed in the public *Fasti*: « ad Lupercalia C. Caesari, dictatori perpetuo, M. Antonium consulum populi iussu regnum detulisse, Caesarem uti noluisse ». Cf. Cassius Dio 44.11.3.

9. *Bellum Civile* 2.109: κρότου δὲ πρὸς τὴν ἕψιν παρ' ἄλλων γενομένου καὶ στόνου παρὰ τῶν πλειόνων, ὁ Καῖσαρ ἀπέρριψε τὸ διάδημα. Plutarch, *Caesar* 61.5 also describes « applause that was not bright and full, but just the little that comes from prior arrangement » (καὶ γίνεται κρότος οὐ λαμπρὸς, ἀλλ' ἄλλῃος ἐκ παρασκευῆς) and Cicero, *Philippic* 2.85, who was presumably an eyewitness to the scene, but was also the most partisan of those whose reports come down to us, spoke of "a groan from all the forum" (*gemitus toto foro*) and "the lamentations of the people" (*plangore populi*).

10. The scene is most fully described in Cicero, *Philippic* 2.85-87, Appian, *Bellum Civile* 2.109, Plutarch, *Caesar* 61.3-5, *Antony* 12.1-4, Cassius Dio 44.11.1-3, The accounts of Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 79.2 and Velleius Paterculus, 2.56.4 are extremely brief, while that of Nicolaus of Damascus, *Vita Augusti* 21.1-11 deviates significantly and tendentiously from all the others. Much has been written on this set of events. See, inter alia, Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, pp. 331-340; E. Hohl, *Das Angebot des Diadems an Cäsar*, in « *Klio* » 34 (1941), pp. 92-117; U. Bianchi, *Cesare e i Lupercali del 44 A.C.*, in « *Studi Romani* » 6 (1958), pp. 253-259; K. W. Welwei, *Das Angebot des Diadems an Caesar und das Luperkalienproblem*, in « *Historia* » 16 (1967), pp. 44-69; K. Kraft, *Der goldene Kranz Caesar und der Kampf um die Entlarvung des « Tyrannen »*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969; A. Fraschetti, *Cesare e Antonio ai Lupercalia*, in F. M. Fales and C. Grottanelli, eds., *Soprannaturale e potere nel mondo antico e nelle società tradizionali*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1985, pp. 165-186.

Three times Caesar tried, and three times he failed, encountering on each occasion the resistance of the people, a resistance that was devastatingly effective even when it consisted of nothing more than a crowd's refusal to cheer when invited (and expected) to do so. Such a silence hardly represents an absence of signification: a null sign, as it were. Rather, it must be considered as a significant and signifying discourse, that stood in implicit contrast and pointed opposition to the ventriloquistic acclamation which Caesar — like many other rulers before and since — attempted to produce as a means of legitimating and thereby increasing his control over state power.¹¹ Having thus lost the first round, Caesar decided to short-circuit the process and to get elsewhere what the masses denied him: election as king, which he hoped to obtain from the seemingly tractable Senate at a meeting called for the Ides of March, 44 B.C., just before his anticipated departure (18 March) on a military expedition against the Getes and Parthians.

2. MILITARY OPERATIONS AND DISCURSIVE STRATEGY

Preparations for that expedition were extensive, and the venture involved considerable risk. Sixteen legions of infantry and ten thousand cavalry were assigned for a war that was expected to take a full three years and was launched with the explicit intent of avenging Crassus's defeat, capture, and execution by the Parthians just nine years before.¹² Memories of that defeat, the most humiliating in recent history, lay painfully close to the surface, and figured not only in Caesar's military calculations, but also in his

11. The crowd's refusal to cheer at the ceremonial display of Caesar's statue beside that of Venus Victrix in July of 45 was also interpreted as a sign and a means of resistance by Cicero, *Ad Atticum* 13.44.1 and *Pro Rege Deiotaro* 33-34. Cf. Tacitus, *Historiae* 1.40: «non tumultus, non quies, quale magni metus et magnae irae silentium est».

12. Descriptions of the military preparations are found in Cassius Dio 43.51.1-2 and Appian, *Bellum Civile* 2.110-111. Also significant is a letter of Cicero's to Atticus written in May of 45, in which he states that at that time Caesar had decided against embarking on a Parthian campaign until things had been settled in Rome (*ad Atticum* 13.31). Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 44.3 also suggests a certain amount of caution or hesitation. See further W.C. McDermott, *Caesar's Projected Dacian-Parthian Expedition*, in «Ancient Society» 13-14 (1982-1983), pp. 223-231; J. Malitz, *Caesars Partherkrieg*, in «Historia» 33 (1984), pp. 21-59.

broader political and discursive strategy, for his campaign was directed not only against foreign enemies, but also against the Roman people and Senate, whom he hoped to trap between the memory of a catastrophic past and the expectation of an equally catastrophic future. Allusions to Crassus thus provided one half of a pincer operation, the other side of which was supplied by prophecies of another imminent — but avoidable — military disaster on Parthian soil. Regarding this, we possess a number of sources, which are worth consulting in parallel fashion.¹³

Plutarch, *Caesar* 60.1.

Cassius Dio 44.15.3-4.

Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 79.3.

Those who were recommending this honor [sc. the kingship] for Caesar spread a rumor among the people from the Sibylline Books that it appeared the Parthians could easily be conquered by the Romans if the latter advanced to war under a king, but otherwise they were beyond reach¹⁴.

A rumor — whether true or false — such as people love to fabricate was spreading that the priests called the Quindecimviri were giving out that the Sibyl had said the Parthians would never be conquered except by a king, and they were going to propose that this title be given to Caesar¹⁵.

A variety of rumors circulated... [including] that Lucius Cotta would announce at the next meeting of the Senate the judgment of the Quindecimviri that since it was contained in the books of fate that the Parthians could not be conquered except by a king, Caesar ought be named king¹⁶.

13. Cf. Appian, *Bellum Civile* 2.110 and Cicero, *De Divinatione* 2.110. This episode has been discussed by Felber, pp. 254-258; Weinstock, pp. 340-341; M. Gelzer, *Caesar: Der Politiker und Staatsmann*, Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner, 1960, pp. 298-299; N. Horsfall, *The Ides of March: Some New Problems*, in «Greece and Rome» 21 (1974), pp. 191-199.

14. *καίτοι και λόγον τινά κατέσπειραν εἰς τὸν δῆμον οἱ ταύτην Καίσαρι τὴν τιμὴν προξενούντες, ὡς ἐκ γραμμάτων Σιβυλλείων ἀλώσιμα τὰ Πάρθων φαίνονται Ῥωμαίοις σὺν βασιλεῖ στρατευομένοις ἐπ' αὐτούς, ἄλλως ἀνέφικτ' ὄντα.*

15. *λόγου γάρ τινος, εἴτ' οὖν ἀληθοῦς εἶτε και ψευδοῦς, οἳά που φιλεῖ λογοποιεῖσθαι, διελθόντος ὡς τῶν ἱερέων τῶν πεντεκαίδεκα καλουμένων διαθροούντων ὅτι ἡ Σίβυλλα εἰρηκνῖα εἶη μήποτ' ἂν τοὺς Πάρθους ἄλλως πως πλὴν ὑπὸ βασιλέως ἀλῶναι, και μελλόντων διὰ τοῦτο αὐτῶν τὴν ἐπίκλησιν ταύτην τῷ Καίσαρι δοθῆναι ἐσηγήσεσθαι.*

16. «Quin etiam varia fama... proximo autem senatu Lucium Cottam quindecimvirum sententiam dicturum, ut, quoniam fatalibus libris contineretur, Parthos nisi a rege non posse vinci, Caesar rex appellaretur».

In considering these texts, let us begin by noting a few significant differences among them. First, only Plutarch provides information about the source or the intended audience of the stories he describes, saying it was Caesar's partisans who circulated them among the masses (*tòn démon*). Beyond this, however, Plutarch is considerably less specific than either Cassius Dio or Suetonius, both of whom make explicit something that he merely implies: i.e., it was expected that the prophecy would be accompanied by a concrete proposal to name Caesar king in order to avoid certain defeat at Parthian hands.¹⁷ Moreover, these two authors both specify that the prophecy came from the Quindecemviri, and Suetonius points his finger to one member of this priestly body: a certain Lucius (Aurelius) Cotta.

3. RUMOR AND PROPHECY

All three of the sources we have cited discreetly reserve judgment as to whether or not such a prophecy actually existed, saying only that there were "rumors," "reports," or "talk" (Gk. *lógos*, Lt. *fama*) of such a prophecy.¹⁸ This juxtaposition of rumor and prophecy is both striking and significant, as becomes obvious when we consider the differences between the two genres. For prophecy — like myth — is a discourse that by virtue of its source, form, and manner of transmission successfully claims an authoritative status,

17. It is certainly conceivable that such a prophecy might have existed (as Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, pp. 340-341 argues), or that it was fabricated for the occasion. In either event, it represents a pointed inversion of a common theme that runs throughout the Sibylline books: the king who comes out of Asia in fulfillment of nationalist hopes to overthrow Roman hegemony. On this, see further H. Windisch, *Die Orakel des Hystaspes*, in «Verhandelingen der koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam», (Afdeling Letterkunde), Nieuwe Reeks 28/3 (1929); G. Amiotti, *Gli oracoli sibillini e il motivo del re d'Asia nella lotta contro Roma*, in «Contributi dell'Istituto di Storia Antica dell'Università del Sacro Cuore» (Milano), 8 (1982), pp. 18-26; D. Breglia Pulci, *Oracoli Sibillini tra Rituali e Propaganda. Studi su Flegonte di Tralles*, Napoli, Liguori, 1983.

18. Cicero alone asserts unambiguously that the rumor was false (*De Divinatione* 2.110: *falsa... fama*). Yet he is the only one to have characterized it thus, and he had strategic reasons for doing so, among which was his desire to protect the reputation of Cotta, to whom he was deeply indebted. On the nature of their relations, see below.

thereby exerting strong demands on its hearers for attention, credence, and action.¹⁹ Sibylline prophecy in specific represents itself as embodying the very words of a god, transmitted through the medium of a sibyl, but prophecy of any sort may be understood as that discourse through which the future most powerfully enters into and reorganizes the world of the present.

Rumor, on the other hand, is a decidedly more scurrilous and less authoritative discourse, which operates in the large and shady area between certainty and ignorance, making few actual demands upon its hearers, but titillating them with the possibility that for all it may be utterly false, it is also capable of revealing hidden indiscretions and unexpected secrets. Where prophecy represents itself as speaking with a voice that transcends the human, rumor makes no such claims and aspires to no such status. Its voice is not that of the gods, but the anonymous, collective voice of the streets. And where prophetic speech commands attention and compliance, rumor is content to insinuate slyly, arousing the interest and suspicion of the hearer.²⁰

The conjunction of rumor and prophecy in a *rumored prophecy* it thus something of an intermediate form, in which an authoritative discourse is encapsulated within another discourse that carries no such authority, leaving those who hear it free to place greater or lesser credence in what they have heard. Yet should they choose not to accept what they are told in the rumor, they face the possibility that the prophecy may well emerge from its encapsulation, at which point it will exert powerful demands on them and on others. And if they wish to escape those demands, the only way in which they can be sure to do so is to act as if the rumor were true, and to take preemptive steps so that the prophecy can never be straight-

19. In this, it stands in contrast to such genres as prediction, surmise, conjecture, and hypothesis, all of which make reference to the future without the same kinds of truth-claims that attend prophetic discourse. For a similar analysis of myth and other related genres, see B. Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989.

20. On the place of rumor in Roman politics, with direct reference to some of the events we are considering, see Z. Yavetz, *Existimatio, Fama, and the Ides of March*, in «Harvard Studies in Classical Philology» 78 (1974), pp. 35-65. Among primary sources, Vergil, *Aeneid* 4.173-197 and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 12.39-63 hold particular interest.

forwardly spoken. It is this which certain Romans did, as the previously cited passages from Cassius Dio and Suetonius make clear in their continuation.

Cassius Dio 44.15.3-4.

A rumor — whether true or false — such as people love to fabricate, was spreading that the priests called the Quindecemviri were giving out that the Sibyl had said the Parthians would never be conquered except by a king, and they were going to propose that this title be given to Caesar. Believing this to be true, and given that a vote would be required of the magistrates, including Brutus and Cassius, on so important a resolution, and neither daring to oppose it nor wishing to remain silent, they hastened the plot along before anything whatever could be decided about this²¹.

Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 79.3-80.1.

Moreover, a variety of rumors circulated [...including] that at the next meeting of the Senate Lucius Cotta would announce the judgment of the Quindecemviri that since it was contained in the books of fate that the Parthians could not be conquered except by a king, Caesar ought be named king. This was the reason that the conspirators brought the business on which they were resolved to fruition, so that it would not be necessary to give their assent to this proposal...²².

4. PROPHETIC DISCOURSE AND BUREAUCRATIC CONTROL

Behind rumors and prophecy alike, the conspirators were probably right to discern Caesar's hand. Both genres he deployed with devastating effect against Pompey during the Civil War.²³ Speaking of the way in which Caesar twisted omens and prophecies to

21. λόγου γάρ τινος, εἴτ' οὖν ἀληθοῦς εἶτε καὶ ψευδοῦς, οἷά που φιλεῖ λογοποιεῖσθαι, διελθόντος ὡς τῶν ἱερέων τῶν πεντεκαίδεκα καλουμένων διαθροούντων ὅτι ἡ Σίβυλλα εἰρηκυῖα εἴη μήποτ' ἂν τοὺς Πάρθους ἄλλως πως πλὴν ὑπὸ βασιλέως ἀλῶναι, καὶ μελλόντων διὰ τοῦτο αὐτῶν τὴν ἐπίκλησιν ταύτην τῷ Καίσαρι δοθῆναι ἐσηγήσεσθαι, τοῦτό τε πιστεύσαντες ἀληθὲς εἶναι, καὶ ὅτι καὶ τοῖς ἄρχουσιν, ὦνπερ καὶ ὁ Βρούτος καὶ ὁ Κάσιος ἦν, ἡ ψῆφος ἄτε καὶ ὑπὲρ τηλικούτου βουλευμάτος ἐπαχθήσοιτο, καὶ οὐτ' ἀντειπεῖν τολμῶντες οὔτε σιωπῆσαι ὑπομένοντες, ἐπέσπευσαν τὴν ἐπιβουλήν πρὶν καὶ ὅτιοῦν περὶ αὐτοῦ χρηματισθῆναι.

22. « Quin etiam varia fama percrebruit... proximo autem senatu Lucium Cottam quindecimvirum sententiam dicturum, ut, quoniam fatalibus libris contineretur, Parthos nisi a rege non posse vinci, Caesar rex appellaretur. Quae causa coniuratis maturandi fuit destinata negotia, ne assentiri necesse esset... ».

23. On rumor, see Plutarch, *Caesar* 29.4-5; on prophecy, Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 59.1.

his own advantage, Suetonius tells us: "He never was frightened away from any undertaking, or even slowed down by any religious concern."²⁴ Roman politicians, moreover, were well aware that Sibylline prophecies might serve as instruments of political struggle. Both Cicero and Vergil stressed the disordered and ambiguous nature of the Sibylline texts, which features — in combination with the authority they enjoyed by virtue of their claim to divine inspiration — made it both possible and attractive to appropriate, falsify, or even to fabricate select verses.²⁵ Catiline, for example, is said to have circulated "forged oracles in verse, purportedly from the Sibylline books"²⁶ to advance his cause, and it was to guard against such eventualities that there existed a college of fifteen priests — the *Quindecemviri Sibyllini* or *Quindecemviri sacris faciundis* — who were specifically charged with collecting, preserving, presenting, and interpreting the Sibylline utterances.

Election to this group was a high honor and a grave responsibility usually reserved for leading members of leading families: men with long experience in public life, whose judgment and integrity could be trusted. This was essential, for it was their *imprimatur* which marked discourses relating to the future as authoritative, and to control the *Quindecemviri* would be, in effect, to exercise control over prophecy. It is thus of the utmost interest that Caesar, shortly after his defeat of Pompey in the Civil War, expanded the membership of this priestly body from fifteen to sixteen, a "reform" which permitted him to introduce a new member to its ranks.²⁷

24. *Divus Iulius* 59.1: «Ne religione quidem ulla a quidem ulla a quoquam incepto absterritus umquam vel retardatus est». Cf. Plutarch, *Caesar* 52.2-3.

25. Cicero, *De Divinatione* 2.110-112, Vergil, *Aeneid* 3.441-452.

26. Plutarch, *Cicero* 17.4: πεπλασμένα και χρησιμους αδδόντες, ως εκ των Σιβυλλείων. Cf. Cicero, *In Catilinam* 3.9.

27. Cassius Dio 42.51.4 and 43.51.9. Note that Caesar similarly expanded another priestly college, the *Luperci*, so that he could place a key operative in a position of leadership: Marc Antony, who as *magister* of the *Luperci Julii* tried to crown Caesar king at the *Lupercalia*. For creation of the *Luperci Julii*, see Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 76.1, Cassius Dio 44.6.2; for Antony as their leader, Nicolaus Damascenus, *Life of Augustus* 21.4, Cassius Dio 45.30.2, and 46.5.2. Also relevant is Caesar's longstanding practice of placing those whom he appointed to office under personal obligation to him, as reported in Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 23.2.

That member, in all likelihood, was Lucius Aurelius Cotta.²⁸ The youngest of three brothers, all of whom served as consul in the 70s and 60s, Cotta was a moderate in Roman political affairs and enjoyed considerable respect. He was a close friend of Cicero's,²⁹ but also a close matrilineal relative of Caesar's, although

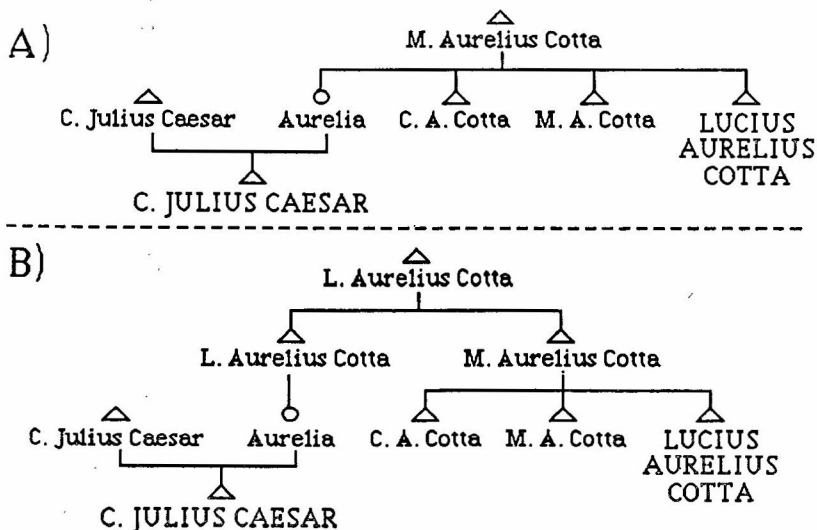


Figure one: Caesar's matrilineage and his relation to Lucius Aurelius Cotta, according to Stephen Halpern (A) and Friedrich Münzer (B)

28. Thus also S. Halpern, in an extremely interesting and important (if occasionally overstated) dissertation, *Caesar and the Aurelii Cottae*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Dept. of Ancient History, 1964, p. 98 n. 95. Cotta's membership in the Quindecemviri is first explicitly mentioned with reference to the events of 44, and may be implied by his involvement in the Ludi Apollinares of July 45. It is possible, however — if less likely — that he was appointed some time earlier. See further R. S. Broughton, *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic*, 3 vols., New York, American Philological Society, 1951-1986, vol. 2, p. 333 and p. 536; G. J. Szemler, *The Priests of the Roman Republic*, Brussels, Collection Latomus, 1972, p. 166.

29. It was Cotta who obtained a supplicatio for Cicero upon the latter's suppression of Catiline, an honor that Cicero acknowledged as unprecedented (*Philippic* 2.13, cf. 14.24), and he was also instrumental in gaining Cicero's return from exile in 57 (Cicero, *Oratio de domo sua* 84). Cicero considered Cotta a friend and held him in high regard (see *Ad Familiares* 12.2.3, *Philippic* 2.13), for all that he was annoyed by the latter's support for Caesar (*Ad Atticum* 13.44.1).

views differ on the precise nature of their relation (see figure one).³⁰

On the strength of this kinship tie, both Cotta and his brothers gave invaluable assistance to Caesar over the entire course of his career. Thus in 81 B.C. Gaius, the eldest of the Aurelii Cottae, saved Caesar's life when Sulla had sought his execution,³¹ and it was Lucius, the youngest of these brothers, who won control of the Roman treasury for Caesar in 49 at a critical point in the Civil War when a tribune of the people tried to withhold these resources from him.³² Later, in July of 45, Lucius helped to transform the Ludi Apollinares into a celebration of Caesar's victory in the Civil War, by arranging to have Caesar's statue paraded alongside that of Venus Victrix.³³ It was this man, now named to the Quindecemviri, who — as rumor would have it — intended to report a prophecy, on the strength of which he would call on the Senate to name Caesar king.

This, of course, never happened. Before the Senate could begin its business in the fateful session on the Ides of March, Brutus, Cassius, and their co-conspirators drew daggers from their togas and with twenty-three blows rendered moot any initiative that

30. *Divus Iulius* 1.2 names him as one of Caesar's *propinquos... adfines*. For differing arguments on the precise nature of their relation, see F. Münzer, *Römische Adelsparteien und Adelsfamilien*, Stuttgart, 1920, p. 324 ff.; S. Halpern, *Caesar and the Aurelii Cottae*, pp. 18-22. For the fullest discussion of his dealings with Caesar, see Halpern, pp. 71-106.

31. Suetonius, *Divus Iulius*, 1.2. On the relations of the two elder Aurelii Cottae to Caesar early in his career, see S. Halpern, *Caesar and the Aurelii Cottae*, pp. 40-70.

32. Lucan, *Bellum Civile* 3.114-168. See the discussion of Halpern, *Caesar and the Aurelii Cottae*, pp. 97-98. J. L. Ferrary, *A Roman Non-entity: Aurelius Cotta, tribun de la plèbe en 49 av. J.-C.*, in *L'Italie préromaine et la Rome républicaine: Mélanges offerts à Jacques Heurgon* (Collection de l'École Française de Rome, vol. 27 [1976]), pp. 285-292, has argued that Cotta did not actually supply this help, but was described as doing so by Lucan in order to reduce the shame of the tribune (Lucius Metellus) having capitulated to Caesar's force. I am not inclined to accept such an argument, but even were it so, it would establish that Cotta was so thoroughly associated with Caesar's cause that it was he whom Lucan settled upon for this stock role.

33. Cicero, *Ad Atticum* 13.44.1. Cf. Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 76.1, Cicero *Pro Rege Deiotaro* 33-34.

either Caesar or Cotta might have contemplated. The second round, like the first, ended in silence, but a silence of a very different sort, as the speech of the gods, sibyls, priests, prophets, dictators-for-life, and would-be kings was violently wrested from them.

5. EPILOGUE

Caesar, of course, was not the only Roman who skillfully waged a politics of discourse. And just as he used such instruments as myth, ritual, prophecy, and rumor in his quest for the kingship, so also his rivals deployed like instruments against him.³⁴ Indeed, even the assassination — which cut short the senate's meeting for the Ides of March and preempted any presentation that Cotta might have made — was itself a discursive as well as a physical act, which drew on myths of Brutus, Tarquin, and the end of Roman kingship; other myths of Romulus's dismemberment by the first senators when they came to perceive him as a tyrant; and also on practices of sacrificial ritual.³⁵

In the wake of the assassination, a shattered Cotta withdrew from public life, and Cicero states that in this, Cotta was "yielding to a sort of irresistible despair, as he puts it."³⁶ Cicero's own reaction, of course, was quite different, and he believed — wrongly, as it turned out — that with Caesar dead the senatorial oligarchy would recover its control of the Roman state and the chief instruments of political action. Writing just before or just after the Ides of March, he proclaimed:

"Let us have Sibylline things set apart and kept secret, according to what has been handed down from our ances-

34. Anti-Caesar omens and prophecies are reported at Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 81.1-3, Cicero, *De Divinatione* 1.119, Plutarch, *Caesar* 63.1-2, Cassius Dio 43.2.1 and 43.21.1; gossip and rumors at Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 49.1-52.3, 54.1-3 and 75.5, Cassius Dio 43.20.2-4, 43.24.1-3, and 43.27.3; mythic references (in the form of graffiti alluding to Lucius Brutus's overthrow of Tarquin the Proud) at Plutarch, *Caesar* 62.4, Cassius Dio 44.12.1-4, and Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 80.3.

35. See further W. Burkert, *Caesar and Romulus-Quirinus*, in «*Historia*» 11 (1962), pp. 356-376.

36. *Ad Familiares*, 12.2.3: «*fatali quadam desperatione, ut ait, minus in senatum venit*». This letter was written in September of 44.

tors, so that these books are not read against the will of the Senate and so that they should help to dispell rather than to sustain superstitions. And let us push the priests so that they bring forth from those books anything rather than a king, which is something that henceforth neither the gods nor the men of Rome will endure.”³⁷

If rounds one and two ended with differing forms of silence, which for all their differences spoke equally the defiance of state power, round three thus began with the attempt of those who had inherited state power to silence an authoritative discourse, the potentially subversive possibilities of which they had come to recognize. For having seen Caesar's attempted use of Sibylline prophecy to force changes in the nature of society and the state, Cicero urged that these texts be “set apart and kept secret,” so that they might never be read “against the will of the Senate,” although it would have been less disingenuous for him to have said “against senatorial interests.” Yet in the months and years that followed, the Senate could no more establish control over prophetic discourse than it could reestablish itself as the leading institution of the Roman state. Rather, such control was established as a fairly late step in Augustus's consolidation of power, when — as his very first act upon assuming the office of Pontifex Maximus in 13 B.C. — he collected and burned all extant prophetic writings (more than two thousand texts in all!) save only a portion of the Sibylline Books, which he locked away within two gilded cases under the pedestal of the Palatine Apollo, where they could be safely guarded.³⁸

37. *De Divinatione* 2.112: « Quam ob rem Sibyllam quidem sepositam et conditam habeamus, ut, id quod proditum est a maioribus, iniussu senatus ne legantur quidem libri valeantque ad deponendas potius quam ad suscipiendas religiones; cum antistitibus agamus, ut quidvis potius ex illis libris quam regem proferant, quem Romae posthac nec di nec homines esse patientur ». See further J. Linderski, *Cicero and Roman Divination*, in « Parola del Passato » 37 (1982), pp. 12-38.

38. Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 31.1: « Postquam vero pontificatum maximum... quidquid fatidicorum librorum Graeci Latiniq[ue] generis nullis vel parum idoneis auctoribus vulgo ferebatur, supra duo milia contracta undique cremavit ac solos retinuit Sibyllinos, hos quoque dilectu habito; condiditque duobus forulis auratis sub Palatini Apollinis basi ».

SUMMARY

Caesar's use of ritual forms and mythic discourses to mobilize large but latent segments of Roman society is here explored. The particular events under examination come toward the end of Caesar's attempts in 44 B.C. to have himself named king.