

Rome against Etruria

Julius Evola's study of the various aspects of the Roman tradition is probably the least known part of his entire body of work outside Italy. He published thirty articles or so on this subject, which were collected in the two anthologies : 'La Tradizione di Roma' ('The Roman Tradition', Ar, Padova, 1977) and 'La 'Forza rivoluzionaria' di Roma' ('The 'Revolutionary Force' of Rome', Fondazione Julius Evola, 1984). To quote from the Preface to the latter : "most of the articles collected here were written by Evola during the twenty first years of Fascism, with the sometimes implicit and sometimes explicit intention of criticising and if possible correcting a cult of Romanity which was in the final analysis merely superficial and limited in its forms of expression to the rhetorical cadences of mass production" ; shortcomings which incidentally have provided the basis since the end of World War Two for a sinister parody by certain great worldly powers. As always in Evola's writings, in addition to the critical moment, there is the constructive moment: 'the main aim of Evola is to bring back our attention to a dimension known to our ancestors, often neglected or ignored completely by 'official' historiography, always wavering between misplaced glorification or biased dismissal: the reference to transcendence. Transcendence, as known to the Civis Romanus, is no escape from the contingent, nor is it submissiveness to a God which he refers to only nominally or symbolically as a being per se, but is in reality a point of spiritual force which one reaches, not by prayer, but by will, and which then finds expression upon the existential plane in the form of consequential acts of realisation". As summed up in the introduction to 'La Tradizione di Roma', 'To connect oneself with the Roman tradition means (...) to make live again a world centered on a reality more than human, on a metaphysical force of pure light spreading through the multiplicity of the numina. To this vision of the divine as pure radiant power will then correspond a religio, a pietas, based, not on a fideistic and sentimental abandon, but on a lucid consciousness of the divine presence in nature and in time, on the vigilant attention paid to the divine action within events. Human action will be able to acquire, in this context, its higher sense, that of a continuation, of a manifestation of the divine action ; the rite, as taught by the Roman tradition, is human action which exerts its efficiency on the plane of the invisible reality, on which all visible things depend. In the second place, a re-assumption of the Roman tradition would consist, on the ethical plane, of the attempt to make live again the style of Romanity: virtus and fides, constantia and sapientia, dignitas and gravitas, are the names of some of the aspects of this style'. This human type, already rare at the end of the Roman Empire, even rarer in the Medieval and Renaissance periods, can be considered, a priori, as being nothing other than the 'new man' which both Fascism and Nazism, whose Roman aspects were underlined and analysed in a masterly manner by Evola, for example in 'Il Fascismo visto della Destra' ('Fascism seen from the Right'), intended to create. Those who tried to create this 'New Man' were to be faced, over and above the material aspects of war and the political dimensions of conflict, with an incredible outpouring of infra-human forces of the purposes of which some of the earthly representatives were conscious but most unconscious. On a higher plane of reality, this was a struggle between two antithetical forces, the forces of cosmos on one hand, the forces of chaos on the other, a struggle that repeated that which had taken place in the ancient Roman world: that between the forces of Romanity and the forces of anti-Romanity: Rome and Etruria.

(There are two versions of this article. One can be found in 'La Forza rivoluzionaria di Roma', Corriere Padano, 27-11-1938; the other, in 'La Tradizione di Roma', (undated). Although no reference is given for the latter, there are strong grounds for thinking that it dates from later than the former, because of the various additions it contains. These additions are given below italicised and in brackets ; the few words deleted in what can be considered the second version are given in bold face and in brackets ; variants are given in brackets)

ROME AGAINST ETRURIA

Is the singular, unexplainable violence with which ancient Rome destroyed the centres of Etruscan power, almost so far as to obliterate any trace of the civilisation and of the language of that mysterious people, an accidental fact, or does it conceal a profound meaning? Is it a mere war episode, or does it hide the conflict between two antithetical civilisations, the imperative for one of them to destroy, not only spiritually, also materially, the other [in order to assert itself.]?

This problem is not devoid of interest even outside the narrow field of scholars: it even acquires a special importance in the context of the current racial research. It is well known that, until recently, the continuity of civilisation between Rome and Etruria was a commonplace of the usual stereotyped history. The Romans, as such, were described more or less as barbarians, who owed to the Etruscans many of the rudiments of their civilisation. This is not the way things appear from a less superficial point of view. Firstly, [and for those who have been following our writings it is almost unnecessary to insert this reminder,] the concept of the 'barbarism' of early Romans is to be considered with caution.

Here, one witnesses the mistake of confusing genuine civilisation with the acquisition of civilised refinements in a urban, literary ['aesthetic' instead of 'literary'], formalistic, sense. A race can be the bearer of a clear, solid and virile style of life and of a direct awareness of spiritual forces (this is what amounts to a true civilisation to us), with or without these exterior forms of refinement, erudition and culture, which are almost always a prelude to decadence.

This is our view of the beginnings of Rome, as well as, besides, of those of Greece and of [any Aryan civilisation, as well as of] Middle Ages themselves.

Certainly, the Roman civilisation resumed various elements of the Etruscan civilisation. However, this does not solve our problem, since we must decide whether these elements constitute within Romanity an integral component or an alien and adulterating [, not to say infecting,] residue. Thus, we arrive at the plane to which the question is to be actually referred: it is not the plane of the exterior and so-called 'positive' testimonies, because these are like the letters of the alphabet : the same ones can be found in sentences which, nevertheless, have different meanings. It is rather the plane of a metaphysic of history, that is to say of a consideration which seeks in the first place to grasp the soul of a civilisation and of a race in order to interpret accordingly each of its aspects.

The thesis of the antiromanity of the Etruscan civilisation, besides, is not new. It was already expressed by a Swiss philologist and archeologist of genius, Bachofen, in 1870 ; [it was posed by Michelet and] it was reassumed by the French Piganiol in 1917 ; it forms the

basis of the recent and much discussed work of Grünwedel and now influences the main interpretations made in Germany, including Alfred Rosenberg's, of our history on a racial basis. ["; in some of its aspects, it reappears also in Italian writers, such as de Sanctis and Mosso, and, curiously, it is rather toyed with today by various reinterpretations of our history which adopt the 'racist' basis. What's more, this thesis seems to act suggestively also outside the technical field, in the literary one. A recent interesting novel of the Austrian writer Franz Spunda, "Romolo", meant to dramatise the - so to speak - inner history of Roman origins, is based precisely on the antithesis between the symbols of the eagle and the wolf peculiar to the forces of the creator of Romanity, and those of the Etruscan world of the Mothers, to which Romulus belonged, but from which he would have separated by asserting a higher principle" instead of "and now influences the main interpretations made in Germany, including Alfred Rosenberg's, of our history on a racial basis".]

What would be, specifically, the terms of the opposition between Rome and Etruria considered as symbols of civilisation?

1. The Etruscan civilisation has a fatalistic tone. It is true that the Etruscans, besides the gods of nature[and earth - to which previous researchers thought to be able to refer on the whole the Etruscan religious horizon], knew a world of celestial divinities, with Tinia as master. These very celestial divinities - dii consentes - do not possess any true autonomy, they are like shadows, from which hangs a loathsome occult power with its steadfast law, that of the dii superiores et involuti. All this is in opposition to the practically heroic conception of life peculiar to Romanity. The Etruscans felt the power of destiny so far as to foresee [gloomily] the end of their own nation. The Romans believed in the eternity of their imperium and in the irresistible fulfillment of everything that they had firmly decided.

[If it can be objected that the Greeks too believed in a destiny to which the Olympians themselves were compelled and that in the Hellenisation of their civilisation Romans espoused similar ideas, with this we only shift the emphasis of the problem. Greek history on the contrary develops through antitheses which are similar to those presented by the Roman history. What the Etruscans represented towards Rome was represented, towards the Dorico-Achaean conquerors and their spirituality, by the substratum of the conceptions and of the cults of pre-Hellenic aborigines, mainly Pelasgians. It is to that substratum that are to be referred elements which appeared in the whole of Greek civilisation, but are not Greek and acted in a sense of alteration on the original, that is to say Dorico-Achaean, Greek spirit]

2. The Romans had a clear and aristocratic vision of the beyond, very closely akin to the spirituality of the 'Olympian' type, common to the cycle of all the great Indo-European civilisations[among which the best known is precisely the Dorico-Achaean one of the Homeric and pre-Homeric period]. They did not fear death. They imagined, for the great and the heroes, the privilege of a divinised and bright immortality[conception of the dei semoni], and, for others, of the mute but not painful [and fearful] passing in the larval existence of Hades ['Erebus' instead of 'Hades'] [or in the mystical impersonal forces of the life of a given stock (lares, penates)]. They had a clear system of rites, which in a virile manner regulated the relations between men and gods [, once again, without terrors or slavish prostrations]. On the contrary, among the Etruscans, it is the sense of the demonic which prevails - "The terror of the underworld is expressed in figurations imitating the terrible demons of the ghoulish imaginations of the Middle Ages, such as the horrible

monster Tuchulcha". [the puteal (1) of the consus altar (2), conceived of as a dreadful opening point of subterranean forces, within which a Telluric demon waited for the blood shed in the Circus games, reminds us often of the Etruscan altar].

3. Here there was an opposition between the Roman rituals and the Etruscans', between Roman augurs and Etruscan aurspices. We cannot elaborate on this point, because we would have to enter too technical a field. [what is already significant is the legend according to which the Etruscan discipline, that is the science of aurspices, far from having 'celestial' origins, had been revealed by a demon of the earth, Tages. Besides, this discipline, whose books, according to a Roman testimony, filled with "horror and fear", shows the strictest analogy with Chaldean sacerdotal science, itself more or less fatalistic and lunar-mathematical, far from the solar and heroic form of spirituality that Egypt itself presented]. On the whole, in this respect, the Etruscan type would be opposed to the Roman type, just as the exorcist priest is to the sacred patrician, to the warrior or spiritualised pater familias. [the Etruscan princes themselves, the Lucumoni, claimed to be 'Sons of the earth'.]

4. A further opposition is the preponderant part that the woman had among Etruscans, sometimes amounting to a true primacy. There are Etruscan remnants of matriarchal customs, designations of the son with the name of the mother rather than with the name of the father [or, in the first place, with the name of the mother], according to the use of the Pelasgians, the Mediterraneo[-Asian] pre-Hellenic and pre-Aryan populations, which have also in common with the Etruscans a placing in the woman of religious authority (Mosso) [and a special dignification of the woman.]. In sharp contrast with this, there is the rigid Roman system of the paternal right, of the patria potestas. The dignity and the influence which the 'matrona' had in Rome would according to this view be not so much an authentically Roman character as a mark of a previous and different civilisation [to which is also peculiar the legend of Tanaquil, an Etruscan legend whose deepest meaning is that the royal dignity itself is mediated by a feminine principle.]

5. Finally, [to some people] the new symbol of the West would have incarnated in Rome, whereas the Etruscans, along with other [Italic pre-Roman] races, would have been dominated by the symbol of Asia. [this thesis, however, is doubtful or, to put it in a better way, one-sided.] There is no doubt that there were affinities between aspects of the Asiatico-Mediterranean, Pelasgian and Hittite civilisations. The most wide-spread tradition of the imperial era is precisely the one which ascribes to the Etruscans an Asiatic origin, summed up in Seneca's word : Tuscos Asia Sibi Indicat. [But, here, 'Asia' remains a vague designation, and, as we know, from the ethnic and philological point of view, the problem of Etruscan origins remains, despite so many researches, wrapped in mystery. What is on the contrary possible is to speak of a whole cycle of Mediterraneo-Meridional civilisations, spreading from the ancient Columns of Hercules to Syria, resuming the ancient Iberic civilisations, a part of the Italic ones, the pre-Hellenic-Pelasgian ones, and so on ; and to oppose to this group new civilisations, bearers of the specifically Indo-European spirit, to which Rome and Greece belonged.]

On this basis, the thesis of anti-Etruscan Rome has the right to appear among the hypotheses which can best lead to a suggestive reconstruction of the inner, spiritual side of Roman history. [This history appears as everything but linear]. This history ["Rome" instead of "This history"] expresses a new principle [embodies - we could say - a revolutionary force], which, to assert itself, had to

gradually eradicate an antithetical civilisation. The story of the Monarchic period is that of a seesawing struggle between warlike Roman aristocracy and the hegemonistic attempts of Etruscan and sacerdotal elements or similar forces. Externally destroyed, the Etruscan element crept into the inner life of Rome. [Basically, it is Etruria which is at work behind the Sybilline Books which are responsible for the most serious alterations of Roman spirituality.] Basically, it is a type of Etruscan priest who, in the moment of panic of the punic wars, opens the doors of Rome to the first exotic [Asian] cult, [characteristically topped by a feminine figure] : the cult of Cybele. [Also Etruscans are the Tarquins, significantly connected with feminine figures and themselves the anti-aristocratic partisans of the plebs]. Also Etruscans are the Aruspices who, out of hatred for Rome, want the statue of Horace Cochlite to be buried ; but when it is, on the contrary, placed in the highest honor, fortunate events follow for Rome, contrary to the predictions of the Aruspices, who, accused of treason, confess their malign intent and are executed. More examples could be adduced, which lead us to think that the heterogeneous and hostile anti-Aryan element weakened the true Roman civilisation more than it strengthened it.

Profound and dramatic forces struggled in silence behind the facade of these external vicissitudes and gradually gave shape to our ancient greatness and to Rome as the essential symbol of the virile civilisation of the West. ["To conclude these notes, necessarily brief, we would like to point out that considerations of this kind do not form part of a dead historical science. If today the symbols of Rome once again live and gather power, too few care to specify the contents of these symbols by means of a dynamic conception of their development, which is to say by means of a conception which, leaving behind the usual two-dimensional, pseudo-positivistic views, acknowledges the diversity of the formative components of the symbols and accounts distinctly for the appearance, ascendancy, decline, and disappearance into what is above and beyond history of those who bore the Roman virtues in their pure state, who formed the royal bloodstream of Romanity in such a way that it would persist for ever as an inheritance with a distinct physiognomy throughout the centuries" instead of "Profound and dramatic forces struggled in silence behind the facade of these external vicissitudes and gradually gave shape to our ancient greatness and to Rome as the essential symbol of the virile civilisation of the West"]

Julius EVOLA

1) PU'TEAL properly means the enclosure surrounding the opening of a well, to protect persons from falling into it. It was either round or square, and seems usually to have been of the height of three or four feet from the ground. There is a round one in the British Museum, made of marble, which was found among the ruins of one of Tiberius's villas in Capreae; it exhibits five groups of fauns and bacchanalian nymphs; and around the edge at the top may be seen the marks of the ropes used in drawing up water from the well. Such putealia seem to have been common in the Roman villas: the putealia signata, which Cicero (ad Att. 1.10) wanted for his Tusculan villa, must have been of the same kind as the one in the British Museum; the signata refers to its being adorned with figures. It was the practice in some cases to surround a sacred place with an enclosure open at the top, and such enclosures from the great similarity they bore to Putealia were called by this name. There was a Puteal of this kind at Rome, called Puteal Scribonianum or Puteal Libonis, which is often exhibited on coins of the Scribonia gens, and of which a specimen is given below. The puteal is on the reverse of the coin adorned with garlands and two lyres. It is generally stated that there were two putealia in the Roman forum; but C. F. Hermann, who has carefully examined all the

passages in the ancient writers relating to this matter (Ind. Lect. Marburg. 1840), comes to the conclusion that there was only one such puteal at Rome. It was in the forum, near the Arcus Fabianus, and was dedicated in very ancient times either on account of the whetstone of the Augur Navius (cf. Liv. i.36), or because the spot had been struck by lightning. It was subsequently repaired and re-dedicated by Scribonius Libo, who had been commanded to examine the state of the sacred places (Festus, s.v. Scribonianum). Libo erected in its neighbourhood a tribunal for the praetor, in consequence of which the place was, of course, frequented by persons who had law-suits, such as money-lenders and the like (cf. Hor. Sat. ii.6.35, Epist. i.19.8; Ov. Remed. Amor. 561; Cic. pro Sex. 8; C.F. Hermann, l.c.). (William Smith, D.C.L., LL.D.: A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities, John Murray, London, 1875)

(2) In Roman mythology, the god Consus oversaw the storing of grain underneath the ground. His altar was also placed beneath the ground near the Circus Maximus in Rome. The altar was unearthed only during the Consualia, his festival which took place on August 21 and December 15. Mule races were the main event of the festival because the mule was his sacred animal. He also became a god associated with secret conferences. (www.nationmaster.co)