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Roman Myth and Mythography

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

1987

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Bremmer, J. N., & Horsfall, N. (1987). *Roman Myth and Mythography*. s.n.

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MYTH AND RITUAL IN ANCIENT ROME: THE NONAE CAPRATINAE

The most interesting contemporary analyses of Greek religion often concern the complicated relation of myth and ritual, which has been greatly illuminated from narrative, structuralist and functionalist points of view.¹ These new approaches have been hardly applied to Roman myth and ritual which, although less rich in data, presents similar possibilities as an analysis of the Nonae Capratinae, a festival of the Roman matrons and their handmaidens, may illustrate. Until now this festival has defied the best scholars of Roman religion,² but modern anthropological insights can significantly further our insights as the present investigation hopes to show.

The myth and the ritual of the festival are described by Plutarch in his *Life of Camillus* (c. 29, tr. B. Perrin), whom we shall quote first:

They were not yet done with these pressing tasks when a fresh war broke upon them. The Aequians, Volscians, and Latins burst into their territory all at once, and the Etruscans laid siege to Sutrium, a city allied with Rome. The military tribunes in command of the army, having encamped near Mt. Marcius, were besieged by the Latins, and were in danger of losing their camp. Wherefore they sent to Rome for aid, and Camillus was appointed dictator for the third time. Two stories are told about this war, and I will give the fabulous one first. They say that the Latins, either as a pretext for war, or because they really wished to revive the ancient affinity between the two peoples, sent and demanded from the Romans free-born virgins in marriage. The Romans were in doubt what to do, for they dreaded war in their unsettled and unrestored condition, and yet they suspected that this demand for wives was really a call for hostages disguised under the specious name of intermarriage. In their perplexity, a handmaiden named Tutula, or, as some call her, Philotis, advised the magistrates to send her to the enemy with some of the most attractive and noble looking handmaidens, all arrayed like free-born brides; she would attend to the rest. The magistrates yielded to her persuasions, chose as many handmaidens as she thought meet for her purpose, arrayed them in fine raiment and gold, and handed them over to the Latins, who were encamped near the city. In the night, the rest of the maidens stole away the enemy's swords, while Tutula, or Philotis, climbed a wild fig-tree of great height, and after spreading out her cloak behind her, held out a lighted torch towards Rome, this being the signal agreed upon between her and the magistrates, though no other citizen knew of it. Hence it was that the soldiers sallied out of the city tumultuously, as the magistrates urged them on, calling out one another's names, and with much ado getting into rank and file. They stormed the entrenchments of the enemy, who were fast asleep and expecting nothing of the sort, captured their camp, and slew most of them. This happened on the Nones of what was then called Quintilis, now July, and the festival since held on that day is in remembrance of the exploit. For

¹ It may be sufficient here to refer to the work of Walter Burkert.

² Cf. F. Bömer, *Untersuchungen über die Religion der Sklaven in Griechenland und Rom* III (Wiesbaden, 1961), 187: 'Voraussetzungen und zahlreiche Einzelheiten (of the festival) sind unklar und trotz minutiöser Untersuchungen der besten Fachkennner kaum mehr mit Sicherheit zu deuten.' Bibliography: S. Weinstock, *RE* 17 (1937), 849-859 (with earlier bibliography); V. Basanoff, 'Nonae Caprotinae', *Latomus* 8 (1949), 209-216; W. Bühler, 'Die doppelte Erzählung des Aitions der Nonae Caprotinae bei Plutarch', *Maia* 14 (1962), 271-282; H. Kennen, *Das Phänomen der verkehrten Welt in der griechisch-römischen Antike* (Klagenfurt, 1970); D. Porte, 'Le devin, son bouc et Junon', *REL* 51 (1973), 171-189; G. Dumézil, *Fêtes Romaines d'été et d'automne* (Paris, 1975), 271-283 (incorporating the study by P. Drossart, *KHR* 185, 1974, 119-139); H. Erkell, *Op. Rom.* 13 (1981), 38f; F. Graf, *Nordionische Kulte* (Rome, 1985), 310; N. Robertson, 'The Nones of July and Roman Weather Magic', *MH* 44 (1987), 8-41. Except for Graf, none of these studies is very helpful.

THE NONAE CAPRATINAE

to begin with. they run out of the city gate in throngs. calling out many local and common names. such as Gaius. Marcus. Lucius, and the like. in imitation of the way the soldiers once sallied aloud upon each other in their haste. Next, the handmaidens, in gay attire, run about jesting and joking with the men they meet. They have a mock battle. too. with one another, implying that they once took a hand in the struggle with the Latins. And as they feast they sit in the shade of a fig-tree's branches. The day is called 'Nonae Capratinae'. from the wild fig-tree. as they suppose. from which the maid held forth her torch: this goes by the name of *caprificus*. But others say that most of what is said and done at this festival has reference to the fate of Romulus. For on this same day he vanished from sight. outside the city gates. in sudden darkness and tempest. and. as some think. during an eclipse of the sun. The day. they say. is called the 'Nonae Capratinae' from the spot where he thus vanished. For the she-goat goes by the name of *capra*, and Romulus vanished from sight while harranguing an assembly of the people at the Goat's Marsh. as has been stated in his *Life* (c.27).

Whereas Plutarch evidently considered the myth of the festival important. modern handbooks of Roman religion do not pay much attention to it: neither is their description of the festival very complete.' Understandably, they all mention the sacrifice; they also give the sham fights. Regarding the other details, however. their information leaves much to be desired. as the following enumeration of their omissions may demonstrate: Wissowa: the begging and the change of clothes: Latte: the feasting and the joking with the males: Dumézil: the feasting, the begging, the change of clothes and the joking with the males. In addition. none discusses or even mentions the problem of the exact name of the festival. Plutarch and a first century inscription (CIL IV. 1555) call the festival Nonae Caprotinae; Capratinus (not: Caprotinus) is also a popular cognomen in imperial times. On the other hand. the manuscripts of Macrobius and his probable source Varro write Nonae Caprotinae. Since Varro is also the only author who mentions the sacrifice to Iuno Caprotina. the inference seems not unlikely that he adapted the name of the festival slightly to suit its connection with the goddess. A close parallel is the name of the Roman foundation festival (cf. below). Whereas all inscriptions and part of the literary evidence have the name Parilia, Varro, and the tradition dependent on him. uses the form Pa/ilia which. as he explains. is derived from the god Pales to whom the festival was dedicated. As has long been seen, the form Pa/ilia is most likely due to Varro's harmonising the name of the god and his festival.' Despite this incomplete report of the evidence, the handbooks felt no difficulty in explaining the festival. Taking his cue from the fig-tree. Wissowa concluded: 'da die Feige eine ausgeprägt obscöne Bedeutung hat und das allbekannte Abbild des weiblichen Geschlechtsteiles ist. so liegt die Beziehung des festes zum Frauenleben völlig klar.' According to Latte. the close connection of Iuno with the fig-tree pointed to fertility, since the tree is 'Symbol der Fruchtbarkeit.' Although Dumézil is in general less receptive to the fertility paradigm, which dominated the study of Greek and Roman ritual during the first half of this century. than most of his contemporaries, he nevertheless also states: 'Figuier, bouc: l'animal comme le végétal fournissent beaucoup à la symbolique de l'In sexualité.' All these explanations overlook the fact that wild fig-trees do not bear fruit and thus hardly can be symbols of fertility; in addition, they leave most of the ritual totally unexplained.⁵ We shall therefore look in a different direction.

³ All texts: Varro *LL* 6. 18; Ovid *AA* 2. 257f; Plut. *Cam.* 33. *Rom.* 29. *Mot.* 313; Polyaeus *S.* 30; Aus. *Fer.* 24. 16; Macr. *Sat.* 1 I. 11. 35-40; Querolus p. 42; Silvius (CIL I. 1). p. 269.

⁴ Capratinus: M. Lejeune, *REL* 45 (1967). 197. Lejeune's explanation of the alternation Caprotina/Capratina, *ibid.* 194-202, is evidently speculative. Parilia/Palilia: E. Gjerstad. 'Pales. Palilia, Parilia', in K. Ascani *et al.* (edd.), *Studia Romana in honorem Petri Krarup septuagenarii* (Odense, 1976) 1-5.

⁵ Wissowa, RKR. 184; Latte, RGG. 106f.; Dumézil, RRA. 301f. Fig-tree: Pliny NN 15. 79. *caprificus* . . . *numquam maturescens*.

One of the most striking aspects of the festival was the dressing up by the maidens in their mistresses' clothes (§ 1). This reversal strongly suggests that the Nonae Capratinae belong to the so-called 'rites of reversal', a category of rites which has often been discussed since anthropologists focused their attention on it in the 1950s.⁶ In these rites actors assume a role which is usually in straight opposition to the roles they play in normal life: women behave like men, pupils like masters, priests like bishops and slaves like masters (below).⁷ It seems evident that the Nonae Capratinae belong to this category of rituals: on one day in the year the handmaidens were permitted to wear their mistresses' outfits; the next day it was the same old clothes. In this chapter, then, the Nonae Capratinae will be analysed as a Roman rite of reversal. We will examine first the ritual, then the myth, thirdly the place of the festival in the Roman calendar, and, finally, the social significance of the festival.

1. The ritual

We do not know how the festival began. It seems not unlikely that mistresses and handmaidens left the city together in procession, in this way dramatizing the leaving of the houses in which they normally lived their various lives. The exit from the city must have been a striking spectacle, since the handmaidens were dressed in the outfits of their mistresses. Clothes were a most important index of social position in antiquity. For example, the Spartan Helots, like other peoples subjected by the Greeks, were obliged to wear animal skins.⁸ An Athenian treatise from the second half of the fifth century, reactionary but intelligent and wrongly ascribed to Xenophon, actually complains that as regards clothes slaves can hardly be distinguished any more from free men — which suggests that such a distinction was once possible." In Rome, Cato prescribed a minimum of clothing for slaves; in addition, old clothes had to be taken back to be made into new ones. However, according to Artemidorus, who wrote in the second century AD, the difference between free men and slaves as regards clothing was hardly recognizable. This is confirmed by Seneca who relates an anecdote that it was once proposed in the senate to have slaves wear a distinctive dress. When it dawned upon the senators what great dangers would threaten them if slaves were able to count them, the proposal was withdrawn. Yet, however small the difference may have become, it may never have disappeared completely, and at the Saturnalia, the rite of reversal for Roman male slaves, slaves put on the clothes of their masters. Artemidorus' observation is probably only valid for the house servants of the rich, since Nero still disguised himself on his drinking bouts by donning a slave's outfit." Similarly, in the American South, a great difference existed between the field hands and the house slaves about whom, as an English traveller noted, the masters 'feel as natural a pride in having their personal attendants to look well in person and in dress, when slaves, as they do when their servants are free'. But still in 1740 the slave code of South

⁶ For a full bibliography see Bremner, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton, 1983), 122 n. 143. See now also W. Rösler, 'Michail Bachtin und die Karnevalskultur im antiken Griechenland', *QUCC* ns 73 (1986), 25-44.

⁷ Women: N. Z. Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (London, 1975), 124-151 ('Women on top'), repr. in B. A. Babcock (ed.), *The Reversible World* (London, 1978), 147-190; A. Jacobson-Schutt, 'Trionfo delle donne: tematiche di rovesciamento dei ruoli nella Firenze rinascimentale', *Quaderni Storici* no. 44 (1980), 474-488. Pupils: K. Thomas, *Rule and Misrule in the Schools of Early Modern England* (Reading, 1976). Priests: J. Heers, *Fêtes des fous et carnivals* (Paris, 1984).

⁸ Myron *FGrH* 106 F 2, cf. J. Ducat, 'Le mépris des hilotes', *Annales ESC* 29 (1974), 1452-64.

⁹ Ps. Xen. *Athen. Pol.* 1. 10. For similar complaints about slaves in eighteenth-century America, see W. D. Jordan, *White over Black. American Attitudes towards the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968), 130.

¹⁰ Rome: Cato *Agr.* 2. 3, 10. 5. 59; Artemidorus 2. 3; Sen. *Clem.* 1. 24. 1; Tac. *Ann.* 13. 25 (Nero); Dio Cassius 60. 19. 3 (Saturnalia). On Cato's attitude towards his slaves see A. Astin, *Cato the Censor* (Oxford, 1978), 262-266, 349f (too positive).

Carolina obliged slaves to wear rough clothes and in the whole of the South the slaves' clothing allowance was extremely poor."

Mystra, the mistress of Seleucus the Younger, once escaped the rage of the Galatians by exchanging her royal garments for the rags of a handmaiden. The precise nature of the dress of the Roman handmaidens, the *vestis ancillaris*, is unknown, but we may safely assume that, similarly, it will not have followed the latest fashion. We are better informed about the clothing of the Roman *matronae*. For many centuries they wore the same dress, the *tunica* or *stola*; the material changed, the style did not — in the later Republic purple interwoven with gold was very popular. The debate on the repeal of the Oppian law well indicates the splendour of the appearance of the *matronae*.¹² It is important to note, however, that we nowhere read that the matrons had dressed themselves in the clothes of their handmaidens, or that masters assumed their slaves' clothes on the Saturnalia. This can hardly be chance. Even if the festival contained many elements of reversal, the reality of everyday life had to remain visible enough for the slaves not to get ideas which might lead to a permanent reversal of the social order.

When the women had arrived at the location of the celebration, the Goat Marsh on the Campus Martius, they constructed huts from the branches of fig-trees, in which they dined together while the handmaidens were waited upon by the matrons (or the males — the texts are not completely clear at this point), just as in the British army at Christmas privates are waited upon at dinner by officers and N.C.O.s. and, around the same time, the former Dutch queen Juliana used to pour out hot chocolate for her staff.¹³

In antiquity, the feasting slaves, often combined with serving masters, constitute a recurring element of rites of reversal in which the relationship of slaves and masters is the focus of the ritual. During the Athenian Kronia, the slaves dined together with the masters, but during the Cretan Hermaea the slaves dined while the masters assisted in menial duties. In Troizen, slaves were feasted by the masters at a festival which was celebrated during the transition from winter to spring, and a similar reversal of roles took place at the Thessalian Peloria.¹⁴ In Rome, slaves dined together with, or even ahead of, their masters at the Roman Saturnalia, when even the frugal Cato prescribed an increase of rations for field hands. At the Saturnalia, the masters apparently sometimes also waited upon their slaves, just as, rather surprisingly, the Roman matrons did on March 1. A nice example of the combination of feasting and status reversal also occurred during the German peasant revolt in 1525. When the peasants had occupied the house of the Teutonic Order at Heilbronn, they feasted themselves while the knights were forced to stand by the table, hat in hand.¹⁵

This preoccupation with food recurs in the myth of Kronos' Golden Age which was very popular in Old Comedy. With the exaggeration which is so typical of myth, it was imagined

¹¹ For the clothes of American slaves, see E. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (New York, 1974), 550-561; P. Escott, *Slavery Remembered* (Chapel Hill, 1979), 39f.

¹² Mystrn: Phylarchus *FGrH* XI F 30. *Vestis ancillaris*: Dip. 47. 10. 15 § 15. *Matronae*: J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Roman Women* (London, 1962), 252-254. Oppian law: P. Descleri, 'Catone e le donne (Il dibattito liviano sull' abrogazione della *Lex Oppia*)', *Opus* 3 (1984), 63-74.

¹³ English army: V. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth, 1974), 160.

¹⁴ Kronia: H. S. Versnel, 'Greek Myth and Ritual: The Case of Kronos', in Bremmer (ed.), *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (London, 1987), 121-152, to which I am indebted for various references. Crete and Troizen: Carystius *ap.* Athenaeus 14, 639bc. Peloria: Baton *FGrH* 268 F 5, cf. Bremmer, *Soul*, 122f.

¹⁵ Saturnalia: Cato, *Agr.* 57: Accius fr. 3M: Sen. *Ep.* 47. 14: *Star. Silv.* 1. 6. 43: Just. 43. 1; *Hist. Aug. Ver.* 7. 5: *Servius Aen.* 8. 319; *Macr. Sat.* 1. 11. 1 (eating together); *Macr. Sat.* 1. 24. 23 (slaves ahead of masters); *Luc. Cron.* 18; *Aus. Fer.* 16: *Macr. Sat.* 1. 12. 71; *Lyd. Mens.* 3. 22. 4. 42 (masters waiting upon slaves). March 1: *Solin.* 1. 35; *Macr. Sat.* 1. 12. 7; *Lyd. Mens.* 3. 22. 4. 42. Heilbronn: H. W. Bensen, *Geschichte des Bauernkriegs in Ostfranken* (Erlangen, 1840), 158.

that in Kronos' time crops grew automatically and that food presented itself to be eaten." A similar combination of myth and ritual can still be found in medieval and early modern carnivals where an emphasis on eating and drinking went hand in hand with representations of the imaginary Land of Cockaigne. In pre-modern societies, where the threat of hunger was an ever present possibility, the theme of abundance evidently fascinated the imagination, but it was only at specific and restricted moments of time that people could give in to these fantasies and indulge themselves in an *orgia alimentare*, as these meals have been called (below)."

The most important Greek and Roman rites of reversal, the Kronia and Saturnalia, were dedicated to gods, Kronos and Saturnus, who were considered to belong to a primeval era when the present ruler gods, Zeus and Iuppiter, were not yet in power. According to the ancients, then, the transition from an old to a new period — from scarcity to plenty (Kronia) or from the shortening to the lengthening of the days (Saturnalia) — was marked by a dissolution of the normal social order and a regression into primeval time. Such a regression could be acted out very seriously. During the Syracusan Thesmophoria, as Diodorus Siculus (5. 4. 7) reports, women 'by their outfit imitated primeval life (*ton archaion bion*)'. Unfortunately, it remains obscure how we have to imagine this primitive outfit (animal skins?), but we are better informed about other cities. In Eretria, women dried meat in the sun — thus imitating the lack of fire in primitive times — and in Athens women squatted on the ground during the festival and lived in huts. Living in huts during a festival, then, could signify a temporary return to primeval times.¹⁸ Did the huts of the Nonae Capratinae perhaps signify a similar return to primeval times when the distinction between freedom and slavery did not yet exist? We cannot be completely certain about this question, but it does not seem improbable when we look at some other Roman festivals in which huts play a role. On the first full moon of the year in the old calendar (the Ides of March), the Romans celebrated the festival of Anna Perenna. The name of the goddess most fittingly suggests a connection with the beginning (*annare*) and the end (*perennare*) of the year. Ovid tells that the festival was the scene of singing, dancing, heavy drinking and the making of huts. Girls sang ribald songs which suggests a reversal of the normal social order, in particular the sexual order: Ovid's somewhat scabrous allusion of the festival in his *Fasti* points in the same direction." Similar scenes took place on April 21, when the Romans celebrated the festival of the Parilia. During this festival, the shepherds purified their herds but also themselves by jumping through a fire: the prominence of shepherds demonstrates the antiquity of the festival. The same day the Romans celebrated the birthday of their city: Caligula even ordered that the day on which he began to reign should be called

¹⁶ Cf. W. Fauth, 'Kulinarisches und Utopisches in der griechischen Komödie', *WS* 7 (1973), 39-62; H. J. de Jonge, 'BOTRYC BOHCEI. The Age of Kronos and the Millennium in Papias of Hierapolis', in M. J. Vermaseren (ed.), *Studies in Hellenistic Religions* (Leiden, 1979), 36-49; Versnel (above, n. 14); Kassel/Austin on Crates PCG IV F 17. 7 and Cratinus F 172.

¹⁷ P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978), 186-190 (with earlier bibliography); F. Delpech, 'Aspects des pays de Cocagne: programme pour une recherche', in J. Lafond and A. Redondo (edd.), *L'Image du monde renversé* (Paris, 1979), 35-48; G. Demerson, 'Cocagne, utopie populaire?', *Rev. Belg. Phil. Hist.* 59 (1981), 529-553; J.-Ch. Paylen, 'Fubliaux et Cocagne', in G. Bianciotto and M. Salvat (edd.), *Épopée animale, fable, fabliau* (Paris, 1984), 435-448; W. Biesterfeld and M. H. Haase, 'The Land of Cockayne', *Fabula* 25 (1984), 76-83.

¹⁸ Kronos: Nisbet and Hubbard on Hor. *Otl.* 2. 12. 9; Versnel (above n. 14). Saturnus: A. Brelich, *Tre variazioni romane sul tema delle origini*, 2nd ed. (Rome, 1976), 83-95. Thesmophoria and the symbolic return to primeval times: F. Graf, *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung Athens in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin/New York, 1974), 178f.

¹⁹ Ov. F. 3. 523ff; Mart. 4. 64. 16f; Macr. *Sat.* 1. 12. 6; Lyd. *Mens.* 4. 49; D. Porte, 'Anna Perenna. "Bonne et heureuse année"?' *RPh* 45 (1971), 282-291; N. Horsfall, 'The Ides of March: Some New Problems', *G&R* 21 (1974), 191-98, 196f.

Parilia, as if Rome had been founded for a second time.?" The combination of purification and new beginning baffled older scholars — Latte does not even mention the new beginning! — but more recent investigations into Greek and Roman ritual have noted the appropriateness of the combination: no new beginning before a complete *katharsis* of the old situation."

During the festival, the goddess Pales received sacrifices of milk and cakes.?" These gifts are in straight opposition to regular Roman sacrifices which consisted of meat and wine. Researches into Greek ritual have shown that bloodless sacrifices and libations of milk (and/or water and honey) are meant to signify marginal phases and transitions during the ritual but are also typical signs of *Urzeit* and *Endzeit*. At the same time, it should be noted that Roman authors also point out that milk, honey and bloodless sacrifices were typical of early Rome when wine and bloody sacrifices were not yet invented; evidently, republican Roman and classical Greek sacrificial systems were closely related.?" Such a sacrifice as Pales received, then, may well signify a return to the primeval state when Rome was founded. The existence of huts in this festival fully fits in with such a temporary return to a primeval state. Finally, the Parilia displayed extensive eating and drinking, and contacts between the sexes were also not neglected. An orgy of food and sex is everywhere in the world a normal part of *la grande festa*, as the Italian ethnologist Lanternari has called these festivals of renewal."

We also find the huts in another festival of purification and renewal which resembles the Parilia in more than one way. After the shepherds, the farmers purified the fields on the Ambarvalia (May 29). The festival was marked by fires — everywhere in the world a sign of festivals of purification and renewal. On this day, the home-bred slaves were free to play and, as the delightful picture by Tibullus shows, the day was passed in eating, drinking and making contact with the opposite sex. The festival contains clear elements of the dissolution of the social order and the customary orgies of food and sex of the festivals of renewal, although we do not explicitly hear of a return to primeval times. It is not impossible that the huts of the Ambarvalia were part of a ritual scenario more or less similar to that of the festival of Anna Perenna, the Parilia and the Nona Capratinae.²⁵ Huts are also mentioned for the Volcanalia, if only in late antiquity, and for the Neptunalia, but there is insufficient evidence available to determine the precise function of the huts in these festivals.?"

²⁰ For the Parilia see Wissowa, RKR, 199-201; Latte, RRG, 87; Dumézil, RRA, 385-9; J. H. Vangaard, 'On Parilia', *Temenos* 7 (1971), 91-103; S. Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford, 1971), 184-86; p.77 above. Huts: Tib. 2. 5. 941f.; Ov. F. 4. 80ff. cf. G. Piccaluga, *Elementi spettacolari nei rituali festivi romani* (Rome, 1965), 63. Caligula: Suet. *Cal.* 16. cf. Weinstock, 191. Note also that Numa, in many ways a second founder of Rome, was believed to be born on the Parilia: Plut. *Numa* 3. 4.

²¹ H. S. Versnel, *Med. Ned. Inst. Rome* 37 (1975), 4-8; R. Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford, 1983), 231f; Bremmer, *HSCP* 87 (1983), 318f.

²² Tib. I. 1. 36, 2. 5. 27f (sprinkling of Pales' statue with milk); Ov. F. 4. 743-6; Plut. *Rom.* 12; Solin. I. 19; Probus on Verg. G. 3. 1.

²³ Greek ritual: F. Graf, 'Milch, Honig und Wein', in G. Piccaluga (ed.), *Peremmitas. Studi in onore di Angelo Brelich* (Rome, 1980), 209-221; A. Henrichs, *HSCP* 87 (1983), 93-100, and *Atti XVII Congr. Intern. Papyr.* II (Naples, 1984), 257-261; Graf, *Nordionische Kulte*, 26-9. Roman ritual: Plut. *Rom.* 12 (bloodless sacrifices on the Parilia), *Numa* 8. 16; Plin. *NH* 14. 88, 18. 7; G. Piccaluga, *Terminus* (Rome, 1974), 317 (on honey which 'tende comunque ad interrompere il divenire e ad uscire dalla normalità dell' 'esistenza').

²⁴ Orgies: V. Lanternari, *Ltr grande festa*, 2nd ed. (Rome/Bari, 1976).

²⁵ Ambarvalia: Tib. 2. 1; Warde Fowler, RF, 124-8; P. Postgens, *Tibulls Ambarvalgedicht (2. 1)* (Kiel, 19-10); H. Kosmala, 'Agros lustrare'. *Ann. Swed. Theol. Inst.* 2 (1963), 111-114; U. Scholz, *Studien zum altitalischen und altrömischen Marskult und Marsmythos* (Heidelberg, 1970), 64-76. Huts: Tib. 2. 1. 24. Fire and purification festivals: J. Frazer, *Balder the Beautiful I* (London, 1913), 101-346.

²⁶ Volcanalia: Paul. Nola *Carm.* 32. 137ff, cf. I. Opelt, 'Die Volcanalia in der Spätantike', *Vig. Christ.* 24 (1970), 59-65. Neptunalia: Festus p. 377L.

The communal sacrifice of matrons and handmaidens is another sign of reversal since the matrons normally had their own cults and festivals, such as the *Matronalia* or the festival of the *Bona Dea*.²⁷ The sacrifice itself, which consisted of the juice of the fig-tree, was in contrast with normal animal sacrifices just as was the case with the sacrifices to Kronos and Pales. The fig-tree itself fully fits in with this pattern of abnormality and reversal. Roman religion distinguished strictly between trees which were fertile, the *arbor felix*, and those which were sterile, the *arbor infelix*.²⁸ Vesta's fire was always lighted with wood from an *arbor felix*, but criminals were executed on wood of an *arbor infelix*. The wild fig-tree was such an *arbor infelix*, since its fruit did not mature (above, n. 5): its inauspicious character was symbolic for the dissolution of the social order which marked the festival.

There are a few more details which have hardly ever received any attention. During the festival, the handmaidens mocked passers-by and they divided themselves into groups for a good fight. Verbal aggression, sham fights and competitions were also an integral and important part of carnival in early modern Europe when people mocked deviant behaviour, attacked authorities, and enjoyed foot-races, games or egg-throwing. These competitive activities derive most likely from a long tradition, since ritualized fights already took place during Greek and Roman festivals, sometimes combined with purifications. The coincidence of aggression and purification suggests that the violence helped the participants in the festival to let off steam — thus clearing the way for the new beginning symbolised by the purification. The mocking and fighting of the handmaidens, then, was part of the safety-valve character of the festival which we shall analyse below." The recipient of the sacrifice — Iuno Caprotina according to Varro (above) — is a shadowy figure about whom nothing of substance is known. In Greece, rites of reversal were connected with a number of gods such as Dionysos, Hermes and Poseidon — evidently the gods were a variable element in these rites: Rome will not have been different.?"

Besides mocking passers-by, the handmaidens also asked them for money. Ritual begging is still widespread in modern folklore. We only need to remember carol singers or the children who go from door to door at St. Martin's Day (November 11). Similar practices also occurred among the Greeks; some of the songs children sang when asking for their rewards are even preserved." Discussions of the custom have not been very illuminating so far. Karl Meuli's suggestion that the singers personified the souls of the dead is rather absurd, nor is there any truth in a statement in the most recent discussion that 'it is agreed by all that the begging was once a more responsible affair, a true *heilige Handlung* mediating supernatural power'.'? Even

²⁷ On women's cults in Rome see the often too speculative study by J. Gagé, *Matronalia* (Brussels, 1963).

²⁸ See Bremmer, *HSCP* 87 (1983), 308f (with recent bibliography)

²⁹ Carnival: Burke, *Popular Culture*, 178-204 *passim*. Greece, Rome and ethnological evidence: H. Usener, *Kleine Schriften IV* (Leipzig, 1913), 435-447 (not without serious misinterpretations); H. J. Rose, 'A suggested explanation of ritual combats', *Folk-Lore* 36 (1925), 322-31; A. Lesky, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Bern and Munich, 1966), 310-17.

³⁰ Variable gods: Versnel (above, n. 14). Iuno Caprotina: Wissowa, *RKR*, 184; G. Radke, *Die Götter Altitaliens*, 2nd ed. (Munster, 1979), 80f.

³¹ Ancient begging: A. Dieterich, *Kleine Schriften* (Leipzig, 1911), 324-352; L. Radermacher, *Beiträge zur Volkskunde aus dem Gebiet der Antike*, *SB Wien* 187, 3 (1918), 114-126; W. R. Halliday, *Folklore Studies, Ancient and Modern* (London, 1924), 116-131; M. P. Nilsson, *Opuscula Selecta* 3 (Lund, 1960), 286-291; O. Schonberger, *Griechische Heischelieder* (München, 1980). Modern begging: I. and P. Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (Oxford, 1959), *passim*; W. Burkert, in W. Siegmund (ed.), *Antiker Mythos in unseren Märchen* (Kassel, 1984), 121f; D. Baudy, 'Heischegang und Segenzweig', *Saeculum* 37 (1986), 212-27.

³² Cf. K. Meuli, *Gesammelte Schriften I* (Basel, 1975), 33-68; N. Robertson, 'Greek Ritual Begging in Aid of Women's Fertility and Childbirth', *TAPA* 113 (1983), 143-169.

though we have very little information about the actual begging and the response of the givers, there are still some observations to be made.

Ritual begging often takes place during marginal periods of the calendar such as Guy Fawkes, the ancient German Old Year (St. Martin) or Christmas (carol singers) — that is to say in periods characterised by all kinds of reversal. The beggars are usually the more marginal groups of society such as women, children, youths or shepherds who often utter strong threats against the potential givers should they refuse to give but also, as a kind of counter-gift, wish them all the best for the coming new year. Threats from such marginal groups as women, children or shepherds would be totally out of place in normal circumstances. The custom can therefore best be explained as one of the ways in which marginal groups of society try to profit from the temporary dissolution of the social order and the good spirit which this dissolution often entails. Going round the neighbourhood and approaching the opposite sex also has solidarising effects fitting in well with the letting off steam and other ways of releasing tension during festivals of reversal (§ 4). In the case of the Nonae Capratinae, begging handmaidens undoubtedly will have approached males — social contacts which may well have led to sexual contacts.

2. The Myth

Having looked in detail at the ritual we now turn our attention to the myth. It is abundantly clear that the Roman tradition knew of far fewer myths than the Greeks; some scholars have even argued that Rome consciously tried to eliminate from its tradition all mythological stories." On the other hand, if we define myth as a traditional tale which is relevant to society we can still speak of Roman myths — even if to a much lesser extent than for Greece.'³³ Following this definition we may also consider the story of the handmaidens' victory a myth, since the diversity of the tradition and the fact that the story was the subject of a play during the Ludi Apollinares (§ 3) suggests that the story was popular and of an older, if uncertain, date."

When we now compare the myth with the ritual we can easily see that in various details the myth reflects the ritual. The striking position of the handmaidens in the ritual reflects itself in the prominent position of the girls in the story. For once, it is not the Roman males who save the country but the very lowest on the social scale. Needless to say, the very idea of a handmaiden advising the senate was an absurdity in the daily reality of Roman life. Both the change of clothes (which, *nota bene*, is not even mentioned by Wissowa and Dumézil) and the fig-tree also figure prominently in the ritual and the myth. And it will hardly be chance that of all the elements of the ritual it is the change of clothes which receives the most attention in the myth. This change of clothes will have been the most striking part of the festival for the spectators.

The tradition of the story contains some variants which are worth mentioning. The name of the enemy is obviously variable, but it is not important for the story whether they are Etruscans, Gauls or Latins. However, it is rather striking that the *Schwindelautor* Aristeides the Milesian actually gives the king of the Gauls a real Celtic name: Atepomarus or 'Owner of great horses'.³⁶ Some sources even turn the story into a kind of reversed rape of the Sabine women.

³³ On this characteristic of Roman religion see most recently E. Gabba, 'Dionigi, Varrone e la religione senza miti', *Riv. Stor. It.* 96 (1984), 855-870.

³⁴ See Bremmer (ed.), *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (London, 1987), 1-9: Horsfall, above, Ch. 1.

³⁵ Play: Varro LL 6. 19. cf. P. Drossart, 'Le théâtre aux Nones Caprotines', *RPh* 48 (1974), 54-64.

³⁶ Atepomarus: Aristeides *FGrH* 286 F 1 (= Ps. Plut. *Mor.* 313A), cf. D. E. Evans, *Gaulish Personal Names* (Oxford, 1967), 52f; add 0. Masson, *Épigr. Anat.*, no. 7 (1986), 1f, on the name Ateporis.

In Plutarch's version the women are requested for sex but in all other versions for marriage. The civilised Plutarch naturally passed lightly over the sexual orgy between the handmaidens and the enemy which, just as naturally, is stressed by Pseudo-Plutarch's version. Finally, some versions call the leading handmaiden Philotis, others Tutula, Tutela, or even Rhetana, a name which has until now defied explanation. The name Tutela, 'Protection', is a clear normalisation of Tutula, which Jacoby and others explained as a pun on a term for penis. This seems needlessly imaginative. A connection with Tutulina, the goddess protecting the corn, also hardly fits the story. The most convincing explanation suggests a connection with the *tutulus*, the conical hairstyle of the Roman matrons. After clothes, hairstyle was perhaps the second most important status marker in antiquity, and it seems highly likely that the handmaidens wore their hair on the festival just like the matrons used to do."

The myth, then, concentrated not on the whole of the ritual but on its most striking elements. Strange statues, role reversals and uncommon ritual elements intrigue the public and inspire the poets, as Fritz Graf has recently demonstrated in the case of Greek myths.³⁸ The Roman mythopoeic imagination evidently also concentrated on the uncommon elements of the ritual. Finally, we may perhaps ask whether the myth does not suggest an aspect of the ritual which is not mentioned by any of our sources for the ritual. Sex, also indicated by the name Philotis or 'She who loves', plays an important role in the story: the enemies did not fall asleep from drink alone. The male presence during the festival makes us wonder strongly whether sex was not a prominent element in the festival. Were the handmaidens an easy prey, just like their Victorian counterparts, or was the stress on sex wishful male thinking? Our sources give no answer.

3. The Nonae Capratinae in the calendar

Can we perhaps reach a deeper understanding of the Nonae Capratinae when we analyse its place in the Roman calendar? The festival was traditionally closely connected with the Poplifugia which was celebrated on July 5. Both festivals are the only ones which are located before or on the monthly Nonae (the 5th or 7th of the month). The anomie character of the festival, then, is reflected by its place in the calendar." The meaning of the Poplifugia was already obscure in antiquity, but the name was clearly interpreted as a flight of the male population. This flight was acted out by a communal leaving of the city and the shouting of all kinds of names such as Marcus and Lucius. The calling out of the names has been persuasively explained as an example of the *quiritatio*, the Roman custom of loudly calling upon each other in times of crisis. The connection with the Nonae Capratinae looks obvious: victory through women corresponds to male flight. It also seems important to note that the murder of Romulus was situated on the day of the Poplifugia or the Nonae Capratinae. The choice of day cannot be chance. The murder of the founder of Rome had to take place on a day of dissolution and reversal; we may compare the death of king Erechtheus during the Skira, an Athenian festival of reversal, and the disappearance of the Lemnian king Thoas in the myth of the murderous Lemnian women, which was connected with a New Year festival. On July 8, however, the

³⁷ Philotis: Plut. *Cam.* 33; Polyaeus 8. 38; Macr. *Sat.* 1. 38; Silvius. Tutula: Plut. *Cam.* 33 and *Rom.* 29. Tutela: Macr. *Sat.* 1. 38. Tutulina as corn goddess: Th. Köves-Zulauf, *Reden und Schweigen* (Munich, 1972), 80-86. Connection with penis: Jacoby on Aristeides *FGH* 286 F 1 (following Büchler). Connection with *tutulus*: N. Zorzetti, 'La sintassi della crescita'. *Classense* (published in Ravenna) 15 (1984), 40-58 (whose initiatory interpretation of the festival I cannot follow).

³⁸ F. Graf, *Griechische Mythologie* (Munich and Zurich, 1985), 98-116.

"Position in calendar: Dumézil, *RRA*, 534. For the connection between Poplifugia and NC see Schlegel, *RG*, 532-6; Weinstock (above n. 2).

pontifex made a happy sacrifice, *vitulatio*, thus indicating that the days of anomy were over. The order, then, of the various festivals in the beginning of July shows a clear structure."⁴¹

Why did these festivals take place in the beginning of July — the more striking a position in the calendar, since the Poplifugia and the Nonae Capratinae are the only Roman festivals in the period between June 12 and July 19? We know also that on July 7 the gods Consus, the protector of the stored corn, and Pales, who promoted the growth and health of the cattle, received a sacrifice." Apparently, the beginning of July was a time at which the Roman community was concerned for its wellbeing, agricultural as well as pastoral. This worry was well founded, since the beginning of July was the time just before the corn harvest when an abundant crop could guarantee once again the maintenance of the social order. It may well be that just as the Kronia was celebrated in a quiet period before the harvest, the Nonae Capratinae also marked the period before the new crop. It seems a matter of religious economy that it was the women who celebrated their festival at this period: masters and slaves had celebrated the Saturnalia in winter. On the other hand, rituals of reversal were still used in early modern times to stress an important incision in the calendar. In many villages of Western Europe, Ash Wednesday, the transition into Lent, was marked by a temporary rule or prominent position of the women.⁴²

4. The Function and Significance of the Festival

In the last section of this chapter we will look once again at the NC as a festival of reversal. Unfortunately we do not possess any information about the festival from the female participants. Yet a comparison with other rites of reversal may help us to give at least an indication of the direction in which we have to look. Recent studies of similar festivals have all pointed to the 'safety-valve' aspect of the reversals. In fact the Roman masters had already observed that these festivals served as a means to corroborate social control. It is interesting to note that Frederick Douglass, one of the most famous ex-slaves from the American South, wrote already in 1855:

These holidays serve the purpose of keeping the minds of the slaves occupied with prospective pleasure, within the limits of slavery. The young man can go wooing; the married man can visit his wife; the father and mother can see their children; the industrious and money loving can make a few dollars; the great wrestler can win laurels; the young people can meet, and enjoy each other's society; the drunken man can get plenty of whisky; and the religious man can hold prayer meetings, preach, pray and exhort during the holidays. Before the holidays, they become pleasures of memory, and they serve to keep out thoughts and wishes of a more dangerous character. Were slaveholders at once to abandon the practice of allowing their slaves these liberties, periodically, and to keep them, the year round, closely confined to the narrow circle of their homes, I doubt not that the south would blaze with insurrections. These holidays are conductors or safety valves to carry off the explosive elements inseparable from the human mind, when reduced to the condition of slavery. But for these, the rigors of bondage would become too severe for endurance, and the slave would be forced up to dangerous desperation.

⁴¹For the problems surrounding the interpretation of the Poplifugia, see Chapter 3. 7. Skira: W. Burkert, *Homo necans* (Berkeley etc., 1983), 143-49; R. Parker, in Brummett (ed.), *Interpretations*, 204. Lemnian women: Burkert, *Homo necans*, 190-96 (I owe the Greek parallels to André Lardinois). *Vitulatio*: Macr. *Sat.* 3. 2. 14.

⁴¹ Consus: Tert. *Spect.* 5. 8, cf. Köves-Zulauf (above n. 32), 82. Pales: Fasti Antiates, cf. Dumézil, *RRA*, 386f.

⁴² Kronia not a harvest festival: Graf, *Nordionische Kulte*, 93. Women on top: A. Becher, *Frauenrechtliches in Brauch und Sitte* (Progr. Zweibrücken, 1913).

Saturnalia and Kronia shows that in times of abundance or freedom allowed by slave masters virtually identical rituals can originate, conditioned undoubtedly by the same conditions of life."

One final observation. During the Principate children took over from masters at the Saturnalia; it also looks unlikely that the *matronae* still showed themselves on the NC. In the course of the Empire the distance between the elite and the *humiliores* had become too wide for masters to celebrate festivals alongside their slaves.⁵⁰ The corollary must be that rituals of reversal presuppose a society in which high and low still feel a certain tie. On the other hand, the distance between high and low must not become too small. When Queen Juliana abdicated in 1980, her successor Beatrix immediately abolished the royal pouring of chocolate at Christmas. Modern egalitarian society can no longer tolerate reversals of social roles since the hierarchy of the roles itself has become unacceptable. The Nonae Capratinae and similar rituals firmly belong to the 'world we have lost'.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Carolina: K. Stampp. *The Peculiar Institution* (New York. 1956). 368. England: H. Bourne. *Antiquitates Vulgares* (Newcastle. 1725). 229.

⁵⁰ Saturnalia: Athenaeus 14. 639b. Empire: P. Garnsey. *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford. 1970).

⁵¹ For information and comments I am most grateful to Fritz Graf and Nicholas Horsfall.