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INTRODUCTION

An English schoolmaster is shipwrecked on the West African coast. Carried inland by slave traders, he makes himself useful to the most powerful chief of Ife. There his old skills as scholar and teacher come to the fore, and, almost by accident, he launches one of the world's great literatures when he translates Paradise Lost *into Yoruba and adapts the plays of Dryden for a local festival.*

Who can imagine such a thing? Prospero did not recast his books in Caliban's language or subject them to Caliban's service. Yet the Romans believed that something nearly this surprising actually happened in Italy in the third century B.C. when an educated Greek named Andronicus came to Rome as a slave, was taken in by the powerful family of the Livii Salinatores, and gave the Romans a literature by translating the *Odyssey* into Saturnian verse and staging the first Latin versions of Greek plays at the *ludi Romani* of 240.[1] This account has been so often repeated, and the conscious use of Greek models is so characteristic a feature of subsequent Latin literature, that even now the full oddity of the story rarely attracts the attention it deserves. Was the Romans' first literature really poetry of such foreign origin, the gift of freedmen like Andronicus and then Terence and of ambitious provincials

[1] Cic. *Brut.* 72, *Tusc.* 1.3, *Sen.* 50. Cf. Liv. 7.2.3–13, V. Max. 2.4.4. *Brut.* 73 acknowledges some controversy over these matters, but Cicero's version of Andronicus' contribution has prevailed. See Gruen 1990: 80–82, Baier 1997: 116–20 (contra Mattingly 1993), and for early Republican attempts at literary history, Fantham 1996: 42–47, Schwindt 2000: 52–121. Andronicus' *Odusia* had become a school text by Horace's time (*Ep.* 2.1.69–72), but there is no evidence for the oft-repeated claim (e.g., von Albrecht 1999: 41–44) that this was his aim in writing it. Whether the epic preceded or followed the plays is unknown. Mariotti 1986: 16–19 provides excellent discussion of these issues.

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like Naevius, Plautus, and Ennius? And, questions of historicity aside, why would Romans be willing to accept and to transmit so peculiar a story of their cultural heritage?

Alternatives should have been possible. The story that seized the Romans' attention emphasizes differences at the expense of equally compelling similarities, and if other choices had been made by the tellers, a somewhat different story might well have developed in its place. In privileging the world of poetry over the world of prose, for example, the traditional account sets the mercenary work of Rome's lower classes apart from the personally engaged products of its elite. The social gap between these two worlds of endeavor was considerable. Though Andronicus may have been a client of the Livii and the beneficiary of senatorial largesse, the first Roman to write a history in prose was himself a Fabius and a senator, and the first to write one in Latin, Cato, was a consul and censor and a public figure for half a century.[2] Nor was history the only prose genre to gain prominence among the elite. The oratory of senate and assembly was increasingly preserved in writing and thus available for that range of uses that, as we shall see, began turning texts into "literature" in the second century. Cicero's *Brutus* itself makes a powerful argument for the literary status of oratory and is thus increasingly appreciated by modern scholars as a serious work of literary history.[3]

Still more significant is the fact that prose and poetry were not as discrete in their practices and in their achievements as an emphasis on social distinctions might suggest and not only because poets and aristocrats sometimes met as patrons and clients. Prose, like poetry, could also be inspired and informed by Greek examples, and its development was closely intertwined with the poets' achievements. The prologues of Terence, to cite one of our less problematic cases, exploit not just the stance but the very language of contemporary oratory, and the complexity of Terence's style in turn prefigures the growing capabilities of Latin prose. Cato's *Origines*, to take a more ideologically charged example, appears to embrace in the 150s an approach to Roman history that

[2] Q. Fabius Pictor, the Senate's emissary to Delphi after the defeat at Cannae in 216, was apparently fluent in Greek and used it for his history (Liv. 22.57.4–5, 23.11.1–6; Plut. *Fab.* 18.3; Appian *Hann.* 27), though his motives for doing so are much debated. See Gruen 1984: 253–55, Momigliano 1990: 88–108, Dillery 2002, with extensive bibliography in Suerbaum 2002: 359–66.

[3] Thus in different ways and for somewhat different purposes, Goldberg 1995: 5–9, Hinds 1998: 63–69, Schwindt 2000: 96–121.

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can be traced back to Ennius' *Annales*.[4] The traditional story, however convenient, clearly comes at the expense of significant nuance and detail.

Then again, nobody was ever fully at ease with it. Even Cicero, whose excursions into literary history did most to popularize the traditional account, knew perfectly well that the beginning of the evidence was not necessarily the beginning of the story. Greek poets, as he notes at *Brutus* 71, existed before Homer. The Roman situation was surely no different. There must have been poetry before Andronicus, too, and Cicero's regret over its loss has become important testimony for the fact of its prior existence.

> Atque utinam exstarent illa carmina, quae multis saeculis ante suam aetatem in epulis esse cantitata a singulis convivis de clarorum virorum laudibus in Originibus scriptum reliquit Cato!
>
> If only those songs survived in which, according to Cato in his *Origines*, banqueters many generations before his own time sang in turn the praises of famous men! (*Brut*. 75)

A reference in the *Tusculan Disputations* to the same report implies that Cicero understood these archaic songs to have employed traditional melodies rather than to have been improvised anew for each occasion.[5]

> Gravissimus auctor in Originibus dixit Cato morem apud maiores hunc epularum fuisse, ut deinceps qui accubarent canerent ad tibiam clarorum virorum laudes atque virtutes: ex quo perspicuum est et cantus tum fuisse discriptos vocum sonis et carmina.
>
> That highly esteemed authority Cato said in his *Origines* that it had been the custom among our ancestors for those gathered around the table to sing in turn to the pipe the praises and deeds of famous men. It is thus clear that there were then tunes assigned for the sounds of voices as well as lyrics.

[4] For Terence, Goldberg 1986: 31–60, 170–202, and for Cato's debt to Ennius, Goldberg 2006 and Sciarrino 2006, important even if we do not accept the argument of Cardinali 1988 that Cato's work began with a hexameter echo.

[5] Cic. *Tusc.* 4.3. *Discriptos* is an emendation for *descriptos* in the MSS. (retained by Peruzzi 1998: 139–40). The general point is unaffected, though *descriptos* 'recorded' would make it even clearer. Cf. V. Max. 2.1.10: "maiores natu in conviviis ad tibias egregia superiorum opera carmine comprehensa pangebant . . . " There is, however, no independent support for Cicero's statement. It may simply be an inference from his belief that the archaic *carmina* were epic predecessors.

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Varro, probably also drawing on Cato's testimony, imagines a formal tradition of praise poetry that was performed in the context of banquets.[6]

> <sic aderant etiam> in conviviis pueri modesti ut cantarent carmina antiqua, in quibus laudes erant maiorum, et assa voce et cum tibicine.
>
> Respectable boys <were present> at banquets to sing both unaccompanied and to the pipe ancient songs containing the praises of our ancestors.

These songs, evidently too antique a practice for even Cato's direct experience, are the so-called *carmina convivalia* on which, in the early nineteenth century, the historian B. G. Niebuhr based his famous theory of heroic lays. Niebuhr found in this testimony hints of a lost tradition of ballads, which passed from citizen to citizen, generation to generation as "the common property of the nation" and could help explain the survival of archaic legends in the Roman historical tradition. The *carmina* as he understood them therefore represented a valuable element of popular tradition in a record otherwise dominated by patrician annals.[7]

Niebuhr's theory, controversial from the outset, today finds few supporters. Greek parallels suggest a lyric rather than narrative character for the kind of banquet song Cato recalls, and historians have found more satisfactory ways to explain the survival of Rome's earliest traditions.[8] Yet the *carmina convivalia* remain of interest. Their mere existence has never

[6] Var. ap. Non. 107–8 (*De vita pop. Rom.* fr. 84 Riposati). Peruzzi 1998: 145–46 claims, I think unconvincingly, that *pueri modesti* means specifically "musikalische Knaben." The testimony of Cicero and Varro is now generally read as complementary rather than contradictory. See Riposati 1939: 187–92 and Zorzetti 1990b: 292–93. The context of Cato's remark is unknown. It is commonly assigned to book 7, but his preface is a likely inference from the verbal echo at Cic. *Planc.* 66: "Etenim M. Catonis illud quod in principio scripsit Originum suarum semper magnificum et praeclarum putavi, clarorum hominum atque magnorum non minus otii quam negotii rationem exstare oportere." See Cugusi 1994 for further arguments along this line.

[7] Niebuhr 1828: 209–10: "Die Gäste selbst sangen der Reihe nach; also ward erwartet dass die Lieder, als Gemeingut der Nation, keinem freyen Bürger unbekannt wären." A century later, Schanz-Hosius was still fixing Niebuhr's idea in Roman literary history: "Ueber den Inhalt der Lieder sind uns keine genaueren Mitteilungen überliefert. Aber die römische Geschichte bietet uns eine Reihe der schönsten Sagen dar; diese müssen doch einmal von Dichtern geschaffen worden sein. Wir werden nicht irren, wenn wir annehmen, daß sie mit den Tischliedern zusammenhängen" (1927: 23). For the theory's appeal to students of German *Heldensage*, see von See 1971: 61–95.

[8] Decisive refutation from the historiographic side came from Momigliano 1957. Cf. Cornell 2003 on the origins of the Coriolanus legend, one of Niebuhr's own examples. The lyric quality of the *carmina* is acknowledged by Zorzetti 1990b: 298–301.

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been questioned: that poetry preceded history as a record of *res gestae* and that dinner parties provide congenial occasions for poetic performance have been commonplace assumptions since antiquity.[9] The focus of attention, however, has been shifting. An expanding knowledge of early Italy's material culture has returned the *carmina* to prominence by changing the complexion of what was once largely a philological debate over their place in literary history. Some of the evidence being used is incontrovertible. A wine trade, for example, is now well attested for Latium in the seventh century, and imported drinking vessels dated to the later eighth century have been discovered in domestic contexts in Etruria.[10] The significance of this information, however, is not equally clear. Whether such facts mean that early Romans had a specifically "sympotic" culture and that the lost *carmina* were performed at symposia organized in the Greek style remain problematic inferences. Archaeological evidence also seems to confirm that Italians did not initially recline on couches and did not segregate the sexes in the Greek manner.[11] Nor are the social connotations of the Greek symposium entirely clear even in Greek contexts. To claim both that Italians had that same institution and that it meant the same thing to them as it did to the Greeks requires a bolder argument than everyone is prepared to accept.[12]

A significant level of literacy is nevertheless traceable to at least the sixth century B.C., and linguistic evidence has gradually strengthened the case for an oral poetics in archaic times that could have shaped important

[9] Thus Tac. *Ger.* 2: "Celebrant [Germani] carminibus antiquis, quod unum apud illos memoriae et annalium genus est . . . " Cf. Serv. ad *Aen.* 1.641, 7.206. Momigliano 1957: 109–11 thought the *carmina* mentioned by Cato may have survived into the fourth century.

[10] Gras 1985: 367–70, Rathje 1990, and more broadly Cornell 1986: 64–68, Horsfall 1993a: 791–8, and Zorzetti 1991: 312–15. Zaccaria Ruggiu 2003, clearly an important study, appeared too late for consideration here.

[11] Rathje 1990: 284–85, confirming the testimony of Ov. *Fast.* 6.305–6, V. Max. 2.1.2, and Var. *de vit. p. r.* 29–30 (Riposati). Cf. the skepticism of Holloway 1994: 191–92. The picture is further complicated by testimony of early Roman actions to curb drinking by women: V. Max. 2.1.5b, 6.3.9, Plin. *Nat.* 14.89.90, Gell. 10.23.3, with Gras 1985: 386–90.

[12] So, in response to Zorzetti 1991, Phillips 1991: 386: "We know comparatively little about symposia and *mousike* even in Athens and Sparta, while there is even less evidence for those activities in other cities." Contrast the caution of Petersmann on the *carmina convivalia* in Suerbaum 2002: 41–42 with Suerbaum himself on early Rome's "lyrische Kultur" (2002: 49–51). Fisher 2000: 356–69 and Wilkins 2000: 202–11 question the exclusively aristocratic connotations of the Greek symposium. For the benefits and pitfalls of comparing archaic Greek and Roman cultures, see Raaflaub 1986: 29–37.

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elements of what eventually became the Roman literary heritage.[13] Add to this the unambiguous ancient testimony for hymns and dances in ritual contexts, and it becomes clear that verbal art, along with opportunities to perform it and means to preserve it, was deeply rooted in Roman culture for generations before Livius Andronicus.[14] Nevio Zorzetti must be right in claiming that "the old idea of the typical Roman character, practical and unpoetic, is simply inadequate, besides being unhistorical" (1990b: 295).

In truth, though, that "old idea" was never so widely held. Niebuhr, lecturing on Roman literature in the mid-1820s, had already made something much like Zorzetti's claim:[15]

> Let no one imagine that the Romans were barbarians, before they adopted the civilisation of the Greeks: their works of art and their buildings prove the contrary. That people . . . must assuredly have attained to a high degree of intellectual culture, and cannot be conceived to have been without some kind of literature, though, of course, different from that of the Greeks.

What *did* change profoundly in the generations between Niebuhr and Zorzetti were the attitude toward Greek culture's influence on the Romans and the direction of the scholarly gaze. For Niebuhr, deeply influenced by J.G. Herder, the earliest Roman traditions had of necessity to be Italic. Beneath that confident "of course" in the last sentence of Niebuhr's declaration lies Herder's insistence that a viable literature was rooted in the experience of the people. Anything else was necessarily insubstantial (*Luftblase*).[16] To endure, even an aristocratic literature could

[13] On literacy: Cornell 1991: 24–32, Poucet 1989, and more generally Horsfall 1994. For the contributions of historical linguistics to the Romans' literary prehistory, see Costa 2000: 66–79.

[14] So Cic. *Tusc.* 4.3, *de Or.* 3.197, *Lg.* 2.22, though Zorzetti 1991: 312–18 goes too far in adducing "a unified culture of *carmina*" from such evidence and identifying it with Greek influence. The conclusion at *de Or.* 3.197, "maxime autem a Graecia vetere celebrata" implies a significant difference at least of degree between Greek and Roman practice.

[15] Niebuhr 1870: 14. These lectures, delivered from 1826–29, were published posthumously from students' notes. The English edition of Schmitz quoted here is an independent, fuller witness, not a translation of the *Vorträge über römische Geschichte* published by M. Isler in 1848.

[16] So, e.g., Herder's essay of 1777, "Von Ähnlichkeit der mittlern englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst": "Doch bleibt's immer und ewig, daß, wenn wir kein Volk haben, wir kein Publikum, keine Nation, keine Sprache und Dichtkunst haben . . . "

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neither precede nor ignore popular tradition. This was why Niebuhr would go on in his lectures to praise Theocritus – the idylls "grew out of popular song, and hence his poems have a genuineness, truth, and nationality" – while disparaging the *Eclogues* for creating "something which could not prosper in a Roman soil."[17] This is now, to say the least, a very old-fashioned style of argument. Roman literary achievements are no longer thought to stand or fall on their perceived independence from Greek models. Modern scholarship is so much more appreciative of Vergil, not to mention of Plautus and Terence, in part because it is willing to posit a deeper and earlier penetration of Greek culture into Italy than Niebuhr ever envisioned and to accept, even to admire, the consequences of its influence.

Scholarship is also more ready to focus on the actions of Rome's elite and to treat literary activity as an aristocratic phenomenon. Thus the convivial poetry that Niebuhr saw as a manifestation of popular tradition and the "Gemeingut der Nation" becomes for Zorzetti "the direct expression of aristocratic wisdom."[18] The possibility that Roman aristocrats had a rich cultural life from quite early times and were so receptive to Greek influences in the crucial third century because they had *long* been receptive to them is today neither an improbable nor an undesirable idea to contemplate. Whatever Andronicus actually did for the Senate and the Roman people in 240 B.C., it was surely not to create a literature out of nothing.

What really happened in the third century is not, however, the focus of this book, nor will it add to the stock of conjecture about Rome's preliterary culture. Ancient truths may yet be recovered as new archaeological evidence and new theoretical perspectives join with philological rigor in pursuit of that distant past, but their progress is not likely to be quick. Consider Livy's famous digression on the origin of the *ludi scaenici*, which may stand as a sobering example of the difficulties such

(Herder 1982: 286). For the concepts of *Volk* and *Nation* in Herder, see Barnard 1965: 73–76.

[17] Niebuhr 1870: 661. Cf. Lessing 1962 (1766) 96–97, contrasting the artificiality of Aeneas' shield ("ein fremdes Bächlein") and the naturalness of Achilles' ("Zuwachs des eigenen fruchtbaren Bodens"). Then again, Horace too had some hesitation about the *Eclogues* or at least about the preciosity they might encourage. See Zetzel 2002.

[18] Zorzetti 1990b: 294. Habinek 1998: 54 reads early Roman literature as "an agent of aristocratic acculturation." For Niebuhr's view of the *carmina* as the voice of the plebs, see Momigliano 1957: 107–9.

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inquiries face. Livy's account undoubtedly contains important evidence for the history of Roman drama, but it has defied a century and more of intense scrutiny.[19] Nothing about the passage is clear. Its association of the early *ludi* with an outbreak of plague in 364 B.C. is unusual, perhaps unhistorical, and almost certainly colored by Livy's own antitheatrical bias.[20] The central role he assigns the Roman *iuventus* for motivating change is vague and problematic, while the story of Andronicus miming *cantica* when his voice failed is scarcely credible.[21] New finds from Etruria or Latium may someday cast light on the Etruscan *ludiones* at the center of these developments, and a better understanding of what Livy called musical medleys ("impletae modis saturae") may yet help us explain how Andronicus could find actors in third-century Rome equal to the task of performing his new Latin scripts, but good luck and great effort will be needed to produce what may even then be only a small gain in knowledge.

More yielding to immediate inquiry, and equally relevant to the problem of Rome's literary origins, is the reception of archaic traditions by the later Romans who first constructed a literary history – and indeed, defined a literature – out of the earlier remains. Because the literary history of the Republic as we tell it today is largely a first-century story, it is worth paying more attention than is customary to how and why first-century Romans told it as they did. This means understanding Romans of the late Republic as both users and shapers of their literary heritage. That is itself a complex task since the textual evidence of early times inevitably comes wrapped in the arguments of later ones, and not every source of later distortion is as easily recognized as Livy's bias against the *ludi* ("ab sano initio . . . in hanc vix opulentis regnis tolerabilem insaniam"). We work with secondhand and synthetic evidence and must constantly be aware that the more we build upon it, the more likely we are to magnify

[19] Liv. 7.2.3–13. Important recent discussions include Bernstein 1998: 119–29, Feldherr 1998: 178–87, and Oakley 1998: 40–58, with extensive bibliography provided by Suerbaum 2002: 51–57.

[20] Liv. 7.2.3 says only "dicuntur," followed a little later by "dicitur." Feldherr 1998: 183–85 notes the inefficacy of the *ludi* as a response to plague. Livy's source is widely, though not universally, thought to be Varro, an uncertainty that makes his integration of the antiquarian excursus and historical narrative especially problematic.

[21] Jory 1981: 152–55 suspects, not without reason, the influence of pantomime in fostering this idea. The tradition that Andronicus was himself an actor is much less incredible. Leo 1913: 56–57 remains basic. For the problematic *iuventus* of Livy's story, see Morel 1969.

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its inherent distortions.[22] The resulting dilemma is well known to sociologists, as Pierre Bourdieu observes (1990b: 102):

> However far one goes back in a scholarly tradition, there is nothing that can be treated as a pure document for ethnology . . . It's well known that the corpus which the ethnologist constitutes, merely by virtue of the fact that it is systematically recorded, totalized and synchronized . . . is already, in itself, an artefact: no native masters as such the complete system of relations that the interpreter has to constitute for the purposes of decipherment. But that is even truer of the recording carried out by the story told in a literate culture, not to mention those sociologically monstrous corpora that are constituted by drawing on works from altogether different periods. The temporal gap is not the only thing at stake: indeed, one may have to deal, in one and the same work, with semantic strata from different ages and levels, which the text synchronizes even though they correspond to different generations and different usages of the original material.

The *carmina convivalia* become precisely such a "sociologically monstrous corpus" when their reconstruction fails to distinguish sufficiently between the content and the context of the testimony used and to consider how the context influences its content. The methodological issue is important and worth a closer look, since no evidence of Rome's early cultural heritage comes to us independent of later filters. A famous scrap of testimony illustrates the point quite well. It comes, as so often in matters of early literary history, from Cicero.

First-century Romans accepted as a matter of fact that the Greeks' literary achievement had long outstripped their own. That concession followed comfortably, as Cicero says in his introduction to the *Tusculan Disputations*, from the belief that early Romans, with so many other achievements to their credit, had never tried to rival the Greeks in this area.[23] There was therefore no serious poetry at Rome until the time of

[22] Contrast the quality of the evidence available to Zorzetti 1990b with what is available to Ford 2002: 24–45 in discussing the Greek symposium and its cultural impact. A Roman equivalent to Ford's kind of analysis thus seems beyond our capabilities.

[23] Cic. *Tusc.* 1.3: "Doctrina Graecia nos et omni litterarum genere superabat, in quo erat facile vincere non repugnantes." The catalogue includes an ample range of endeavors in which Roman efforts more than equaled the Greeks. Cf. the famously enigmatic injunction of *Aen.* 6.847–53, from which any *litterarum genus* is conspicuously absent. The idea that literary culture came late to the Romans is attested first for Porcius Licinus (Courtney 1993: 82–86), echoed famously by Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.156–9, as well as Liv. 7.2.3 and eventually Suet. *Gram.* 1.1.

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Andronicus, and even then it was not valued highly, as Cato is once more called upon to witness:

> Sero igitur a nostris poetae vel cogniti vel recepti. quamquam est in *Originibus* solitos esse in epulis canere convivas ad tibicinem de clarorum hominum virtutibus, honorem tamen huic generi non fuisse declarat oratio Catonis, in qua obiecit ut probrum M. Nobiliori, quod is in provinciam poetas duxisset; duxerat autem consul ille in Aetoliam, ut scimus, Ennium. quo minus igitur honoris erat poetis, eo minora studia fuerunt, nec tamen, si qui magnis ingeniis in eo genere exstiterunt, non satis Graecorum gloriae responderunt.
>
> Poets thus received late recognition or welcome from our countrymen. Although we find in the *Origines* that guests around the table were accustomed to sing to the pipe about the deeds of famous men, Cato's speech in which he criticized M. Nobilior for taking poets to his province (the consul had in fact, as we know, taken Ennius to Aetolia) nevertheless declares that there was no honor in this sort of activity. And so the less poets were honored, the less attention was paid to them, although those whose great talent enabled them to stand out in that activity nevertheless matched the glory of the Greeks. (*Tusc.* 1.3)

Although ostensibly straightforward, Cicero's argument here – and it is an argument, not an exposition – actually conflates and distorts three distinct levels of witness. There is the state of poetry in early Rome, what Cato in the second century said in his *Origines* about banquet songs and what he said in a speech attacking Fulvius Nobilior, and finally there is Cicero's combination of Cato's statements for his own purpose a century and more after their original articulation. Though some of the words in the passage are certainly Cato's, the association of ideas is Cicero's, which means that these relics of second-century polemic are preserved in a matrix of first-century argument. They are all too well integrated into that argument, which means that as evidence of earlier times, Cicero's account is seriously jumbled and unhistorical. This becomes obvious as soon as we begin separating its levels of testimony.

Cicero himself certainly has Ennius' *Annales* in mind when thinking here about poetry: the activity in question seems to embrace both the archaic *carmina* and the epic. It was a natural association for Cicero.[24] The

[24] And perhaps for Cato. J. E. G. Zetzel points out to me that *Tusc.* 1.3 could be taken to mean that Cato found no honor in performing the archaic *carmina* either. His approval of them, though widely assumed in modern scholarship, is not explicitly attested in any ancient source.

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