Postscript to the Lupercalia: from Caesar to Andromachus

J. A. NORTH AND NEIL MCLYNN

Our two articles on the Lupercalia have examined two moments in the Festival's long history, themselves more than 500 years apart. There can be no question of reconstructing any detailed narrative of developments over the intervening centuries, of tracing the steps by which the Romans travelled from Caesar's Carnival to the one Gelasius so passionately deplored; at best we can survey what little evidence there is and look for differences in different periods. Our own main concern has been to emphasize positive aspects of the Lupercalian tradition — the fun and games of the actual celebrations, the major investment of the Roman élites in their maintenance and meanings, the rich inheritance of history to be explored and exploited in such very different historical circumstances. There is, however, a negative and critical side to ancient comments on the Festival that must also be respected. It is in fact sometimes suggested that it was because the Luperci were such a moral disgrace that Augustus had to implement a fundamental reform.

> 'Vectigalia Juliana Lupercis ademistis.' Lupercorum mentionem facere audet?
>
> 'You took away from the Luperci the Julian funds.' Dares he mention the Luperci?

The first voice is Antony on 19 September 44 B.C.E., evidently complaining that the Senate had effectively withdrawn support from the new group of Luperci, of whom he had been the leader and of whom we never hear again.[1] The second voice is Cicero's later comment suggesting that the final outcome of the events of 15 February was Antony's disgrace, which he would wish to be utterly forgotten. Primarily, of course, Cicero is thinking of the offer of kingship to Caesar, but he takes into the sweep of his rhetoric the nakedness, the drunkenness, even the being a Lupercus. The inference might be drawn that not just Antony, but the Luperci and their Festival were an archaic survival, thoroughly discredited by the late Republic. Is there any substance to this idea?

In summer 46 B.C.E., Cicero's nephew, the son of his brother Quintus, had been chosen as a Lupercus. Cicero was distinctly sniffy about this achievement: 'Quintus ... nihil sapit qui laetetur Luperco filio ...'[2] Two points stand out: first that Quintus regarded the honour as worthy of celebration, even if Marcus did not; secondly, that the appointment involved raising money that Quintus, in financial difficulties, had to try and borrow from Atticus. The likeliest explanation of Marcus' sneer, apart from sibling hostility and the issue of the money, is that Marcus thought that young Quintus should be aiming at more prestigious priesthoods; being an augur was a reason to celebrate, not being a Lupercus. There is also the possibility that the recruitment in 46 B.C.E. was preparing for the new group of Luperci Juliani, in which case Quintus' folly might be seen as political innocence

[1] Cicero, *Philippics* 13.31; see above p. 146. For the only other reference to a third group, see above North, p. 145 and n. 8. The mention here of funds withdrawn by the Senate and of the costs of becoming a Lupercus, in the Cicero letter referred to below n. 2, is not unimportant, in view of our inadequate knowledge of the financing of the priestly colleges under the Republic. See in general, J. Rüpke, *Fasti Sacerdotum*, Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 12 (2005), Teil 3, 1457–71.

[2] 'Quintus ... is a half-wit to be pleased at his son's becoming a Lupercus ...', Cicero, *ad Att.* 12.5.1 = 242.1 (SB).

JRS 98 (2008), pp. 176–181. © *World Copyright Reserved.*
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https://doi.org/10.3815/007543508786239490 Published online by Cambridge University Press

— at least in the view of Marcus.[3] Moral repugnance at naked young men seems to us to be the least likely of many possible explanations.[4]

A passage of Cicero's *pro Caelio*, delivered in 56 B.C.E., has also been thought to support the idea of the Luperci as a discredited and disgraceful organization in these years:

> This *sodalitas* must be some kind of savage society and patently fit only for shepherds and rustics, this of the brotherly Luperci, whose woodland meetings date from before the dawn of civilization and law, if indeed members not only sue one another, but even allege membership of the *sodalitas* as part of an accusation, so they might seem to be nervous that perhaps somebody might not know.[5]

Both Cicero's friend M. Caelius Rufus, whom he was defending, and one of the prosecutors, L. Herennius Balbus, were, as Balbus had evidently pointed out, fellow-members of the Luperci.[6] The prosecutor's purpose will surely have been to show how ungracious, ungentlemanly and treacherous a young man Caelius was. Cicero's response is first, to suggest that both men, not just Caelius, are, in being opponents at law, behaving in ways that good *sodales* should not; and secondly, to turn the smear directed at his client into a witty rebuke against both men. If fellow-members go about suing one another like this, then (says Cicero) the *sodalitas* must be just as wild as one might expect, considering that it was created before the dawn of law and order. The evocation of the violent mythical past is surely to be understood as an elegant joke and cannot in itself be used to tell us anything at all about the standing of the Luperci at this date. One might in fact make three inferences from the passage: first, that the Luperci still included very aristocratic young members at this date; secondly, that Cicero himself knew a good deal about the character of the Lupercan tradition;[7] thirdly, that Cicero can imply that the prosecutor is being naive to mention Caelius' membership, presumably because the membership of the *sodalitas* would be known to everybody already.

Such shifting sands of Ciceronian rhetoric cannot provide any foundation for the theory that Augustus reformed the Luperci, tamed their wild ways, and made them a respectable fellowship, acceptable to bourgeois standards of behaviour. We do know of some alleged changes in the early Empire: according to Suetonius in his infamous summary of the so-called 'Augustan revival', they were recreated after a period of oblivion and given a new rule, that the run should not include *imberbes* (beardless young men).[8] The former suggestion seems to be virtually fiction;[9] the latter is no doubt true and presumably set an effective age limit on the young men blooded in the Lupercal each year. But did Augustus go further than this?

[3] Cicero seems, on the obvious interpretation of his words, to refer to the selection of three new members, including young Quintus; this might reflect recruitment for the new Juliani, but if they ran for the first time in February 44 B.C.E., the summer of 46 B.C.E. seems rather early for this to be happening. For the three recruits: J. Scheid and M. G. Granino Cecere, 'Les sacerdoces équestres', in S. Demougin and M. Th. Raepsaet-Charlier (eds), *L'ordre equestre: histoire d'une aristocratie* (1999), 129: Luperci C (Quintus Cicero), D (Statius), and E (Philotimus); in Rüpke, op. cit. (n. 1), Teil 2: Biographien, Cicero is no. 3292 (p. 1329); Statius is no. 3145 (p. 1299); Philotimus is no. 2705 (p. 1208).

[4] Shackleton Bailey thinks of snobbery because *liberti* were acceptable as members: *Letters to Atticus* (1966), no. 242, p. 303.

[5] Cicero, *pro Caelio* 26: 'Fera quaedam sodalitas et plane pastoricia atque agrestis germanorum Lupercorum, quorum coitio illa siluestris ante est instituta quam humanitas atque leges, siquidem non modo nomina deferunt inter se sodales, sed etiam commemorant sodalitatem in accusando, ut ne quis id forte nesciat timere uideantur.'

[6] For the membership of the Luperci: see Scheid and Granino Cecere, op. cit. (n. 3), 84–5; 129–34; 145–6. Caelius is Lupercus A (p. 129); Herennius B (p. 129); in Rüpke, op. cit. (n. 1), Teil 2: Biographien, Caelius is no. 1007 (p. 837); Balbus is no. 1887 (p. 1030).

[7] On which see T. P. Wiseman, *Remus: a Roman Myth* (1995), 84–5.

[8] Suet., *Augustus* 31.4: 'Lupercalibus vetuit currere imberbes.'

[9] Though A. W. J. Holleman, *Pope Gelasius and the Lupercalia* (1974), 14–15, took it literally, inferring that the whole Festival was abolished in 44 B.C.E. and revived by the Augustan reforms.

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Valerius Maximus makes an explicit connection between the youth of the *equestris ordo* and the two annual festivals in which they paraded through the streets of Rome: the Lupercalia on 15 February and the *transvectio equitum* on the Ides of July.[10] Early imperial representations of young *equites*, as Paul Veyne argued as long ago as 1960,[11] confirm that these two rituals and participation in them had become in some sense the initiation of the *eques*. So for instance, Claudius Liberalis, whose death was recorded by his parents in a monument from Tibur, is displayed on opposite faces of the monument, once on horseback and once half-naked and carrying a whip (Pl. III).[12] His age at death is given in the inscription as sixteen years, five months, and twenty-one days. The word Lupercus does not in fact occur in the inscription, but Liberalis is described as *sodalis desiderantissimus*, which may quite possibly be a reference to the *sodalitas* of the Luperci;[13] or perhaps he had been nominated as a member, but not yet made his first run.

Valerius Maximus was writing in the early years of Tiberius' reign, and the implication has been drawn that as part of Augustus' reforms, the Luperci were down-graded in their level of recruitment, and restrained from the disreputable ways that characterized them in the late Republic.[14] The outward sign of this alleged reform would be their change of costume from a goatish loin-cloth to the full clothing of their lower body and legs, and also from the whip made of strips of skin from the sacrificed goat to a properly made up whip. It certainly seems quite clear that Liberalis' monument and others like it[15] imply some new element in the role of the *sodalitas* in Roman society; but whether we need to postulate a radical reform by Augustus is far more disputable.

It is not always recognized how radical the reform would have needed to be, if this view should be taken at face value. The republican runners, it is universally believed, ran dressed only in a loin-cloth made from the skin of a freshly sacrificed goat and carrying a whip consisting of strips cut from the skin of the victim, both derived from the sacrifice at the Lupercal in the first half of the ritual.[16] If the monument of Liberalis in fact shows him as a runner ready for his run, then we have to accept that there has been a complete severance of the runners from the sacrificial ritual. Gone is the goatskin loin-cloth; gone is the whip cut from the skin of the victim; gone is the nakedness of the runners. Worse still, if the reform belongs to the period of Augustus' main reforms and is supposedly reflected in the passage of Valerius Maximus, written in the reign of Tiberius, then we must accept the implication that all the early imperial sources — Ovid and Valerius Maximus writing in the early decades of the first century and Plutarch late in the first or early in the second century[17] — are writing after this radical reform had taken place. It is, however, precisely these authors who provide us with the crucial information — the sacrifice of the goats, the use of the freshly killed skins as clothing and for the whip, the nakedness of the runners.

[10] Valerius Maximus 2.2.9.

[11] P. Veyne, 'Iconographie de la "transvectio equitum" et des Lupercales', *REA* 62 1960, 100–12.

[12] For Liberalis, see Scheid and Granino, op. cit. (n. 3), Lupercus 11, p. 131; in Rüpke, op. cit. (n. 1), he is no. 1202 (p. 883).

[13] The text is:

TI. CLAUDIO LIBERALI
PRAEF.FABR. EQVO
PUBLICO FILIO OPTIMO
PIISSIMO DULCISSIMO
SODALI DESIDERANTISSIM
VIXIT . ANNIS . XVI
MENSIBVS.V.DIEBUS.XXI
PARENTES INFELICISSIMI

(*Inscr.Ital.* 4.1 (Tibur), no. 155 = *CIL* VI.3512.)

[14] See, e.g. Holleman, op. cit. (n. 9), 14–22; P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (1988), 129.

[15] Veyne, op. cit. (n. 11), 102–6; H. Wrede, '*Statuae Lupercorum habitu*', *MDAI(RA)* 90 (1983), 185–200, with Taf. 64–6; 68–72.

[16] Above North, pp. 147–8.

[17] Ovid, *Fasti* 2.267–380; Plutarch, *Romulus* 21.4–10; Valerius Maximus, op. cit. below (n. 18).

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Valerius, for instance, is telling his story of the original creation of the run by Romulus and Remus:

> ... when they had performed a sacrifice by killing goats, and, spurred on by the gaiety of the banquet and by large quantities of wine, they split the herdsmen into two groups, and <dressed only in loincloths> struck at the bystanders with the skins of the victims they had sacrificed. The memory of this fun and games is renewed by the annual circuit of the festival.[18]

He could hardly tell us more clearly that in his time, after Augustus' death, the ritual in the Lupercal, complete with goats, skins, makeshift whips and hilarity, was still being carried out as it always had been.

There is therefore a sharp contrast between the implications of the literary texts and the picture presented by the monuments of the imperial period, not least the image of Liberalis. There are two main differences: first, the apparently changed dress of the Lupercus and the nature of the whip he carries; secondly, the seeming increase in drama, as shown particularly in a sarcophagus scene from the Catacomb of St Praetexta (Pl. IV)[19] and in a mosaic from Thysdrus,[20] in both of which there seems to be a deliberate beating, not just the passing flick we have been arguing for in the earlier period. The sarcophagus, which on artistic grounds should belong to the last decade of the third century C.E., was found in a Christian context, with an inscription in memory of Aelia Afanacia which is dated to the middle of the fourth century.[21] The inscription must have been added when the sarcophagus was used or re-used. The panel in question used to be thought to show the torturing of a martyr;[22] but it is now beyond doubt that the scene shows a Lupercus in the act of using his whip. It follows that the family of Aelia Afanacia, when they chose or adapted her monument, must have been close to the thinking that must have influenced Andromachus as well, viz. that the Lupercalia was a Roman street tradition, not a pagan challenge to Christianity.

It is tempting to try to go further than this, to extract more meaning from these scenes, and so to infer their religious impact through the interactions of the figures depicted; at the same time, it is hard to be other than sceptical about such efforts, when two distinguished commentators have found in the same set of images, respectively, 'cold-blooded formality'[23] and exactly the opposite.[24] It nevertheless seems significant that in both these third-century representations of the ritual, the Lupercus shares the spotlight with the victim hoisted up in front of him, her buttocks conspicuously exposed. Whatever else this might be, it is presented as a spectacle.

[18] '... facto sacrificio caesisque capris epularum hilaritate ac uino largiore prouecti, diuisa pastorali turba, cinct<ut>i obuios pellibus immolatarum hostiarum iocantes petiuerunt. cuius hilaritatis memoria annuo circuitu feriarum repetitur' (Val. Max. 2.2.9). The MS reading ... *cincti obuios* ... does not make sense as it is: the rare but precisely relevant *cinctuti* (dressed in loincloths) seems to us almost certain (see Ovid, *Fasti* 5.101; Horace, *Ars* 50); other possibilities include moving the word *obuios*: i.e. '... cincti pellibus immolatarum hostiarum <obuios> iocantes petiuerunt', as suggested by Briscoe, Teubner edition (1998), 97; or postulating a lacuna after *cincti*: i.e. '... cincti <...> obuios pellibus etc.'

[19] W. N. Schumacher, 'Antikes und Christliches zur Auspeitschung der Aelia Afanacia', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 11–12 (1968-9), 65–75; H. Solin and H. Brandenberg, 'Paganer Fruchbarkeitsritus oder Martyriumsdarstellung? Zum Grabrelief der Elia Afanacia in Museum der Prätextat-Katakombe zu Rom', *DAI: Arch.Anzeig.* 1980, 271–84.

[20] February mosaic, from the Maison des Mois in Thysdrus (El Djem). See H. Stern, 'Un calendrier romain illustré de Thysdrus (Tunisie)', *AttAccNazLinc* NS 5 (1963), 30–52 (pl. 32.4). Schumacher, op .cit. (n. 19), 67–8; D. Parrish, *Season Mosaics of Roman North Africa* (1984), 156–60; cat. no. 29, pls 42 and 43.

[21] Solin and Brandenberg, op. cit. (n. 19), 271–5.

[22] Solin and Brandenberg, op. cit. (n. 19), 271; 275–84.

[23] T. P. Wiseman, 'The god of the Lupercal', *JRS* 85 (1995), 16: 'The high spirits have disappeared'.

[24] K. Hopkins, 'From blessing to violence', in A. Molho *et al.* (eds), *City States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy* (1991), 481–2 and n. 9: 'Romans were dangerously different' (p. 482).

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We have two suggestions to reconcile the literary with the artistic evidence. The memorials of *equites*, we suggest, show a Lupercus, not poised and ready for the Lupercalia run, but rather wearing a dress uniform, marking his membership with reference to his 'nakedness' and to the ritual gear, but not attempting to represent the reality that was, on this view, only to be seen on 15 February itself. We have no opinion as to whether this should be seen as an artifice of presentation in the reliefs, or whether this was how the Luperci did in fact dress when holding meetings on other days than 15 February. Either seems possible; both would restore the credibility of Plutarch's (seemingly eye-witness) testimony.

The intensifying drama, on the other hand, is in fact referred to in the literary record, once by Pope Gelasius himself:[25] '... matronae nudato corpore vapulabant.' Gelasius is of course talking about the past, implying that the stripping and flogging of respectable matrons on the streets was part of the ancient lost tradition that his opponents ought now to be reviving — if they were being serious. He is not claiming direct knowledge of this; all the same what he says is supported by the lady with her buttocks bared on the panel of the sarcophagus (Pl. IV) and by the mosaic from Thysdrus. We suggest that in this case the Pope's claim is true, but only for the period after the introduction of actors. We would therefore connect the increasing realism of the performance to the period when actors had taken it over from the Luperci.[26] As the Lupercalia itself became traditional street theatre rather than traditional religious ritual, it would not be surprising to find this tendency towards increasing dramatization of the action.

We believe we can detect one more observer of this phase of the ritual's history, supporting the evidence of the Pope and the sarcophagus panel, and also reflecting the passing of the old order. Juvenal, in his second *Satire*, mentions the whipping ritual in its traditional form:

> ... nec prodest agili palmas praebere Luperco.
>
> ... and theres no point in holding your hands out to the nimble Lupercus.

'... no point ...', of course, because it was a gay couple, doomed to childlessness, on whom he was commenting so acerbically. The mid-fifth-century scholiast on this line evidently had difficulty understanding the holding out of hands:

> 'Palmas' ideo dicit aut quia catomus leuabantur aut quia a manibus uapula<ba>nt, <ut> conciperent statim.[27]
>
> He uses the word 'palmas' either because they used to be raised up on the shoulders, or because they were thoroughly beaten on the hands, in order to conceive at once.[28]

The first theory, that the women were hauled up on the shoulders of bystanders to be flogged by the Lupercus, could not possibly be inferred from anything in Juvenal's line. It can only reflect what the commentator had himself experienced on the streets of Rome, not so long before Gelasius' time; he must have witnessed something very like the scene on the panel of Aelia Afanacia's sarcophagus. If *a manibus uapulabant* means, as we suppose, that they were beaten on their hands, then his second theory has it right; but evidently, he

[25] Gelasius 17.7–8.

[26] See above McLynn, p. 170; it is possible that the use of actors began before the Luperci ceased to operate as a priestly group; for the last we know of them, see above, McLynn, p. 169.

[27] For *catomus* (meaning κατ'ωμούς) see *TLL* 3. col. 620, *s.v.* catomus: cf. Victor of Vita 2.28: 'venerabilem senem catomos ceciderunt' ('they flogged the venerable old man, hoist up on the shoulders').

[28] We take the phrase *a manibus* as meaning 'on their hands'; it can hardly mean 'by hands'. The choice of the word *uapulabant*, which normally implies a thorough beating, in itself suggests that he has a more violent scene in mind than would be suggested by Juvenal.

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is still speculating about a past practice, knowing only the practice of his own day, which had become more extreme.[29]

This text, then, provides us with a further addition to our parade of witnesses to the Lupercalia — not just Cicero in 44 B.C.E., but Plutarch, Augustine, the scholiast on Juvenal — all of whom allow us to glimpse the extent to which the festival was constructed from the imaginations of its spectators. The 'sour fashion' of Shakespeare's Casca doubtless informed much commentary upon the Lupercalia centuries before Gelasius' strident sarcasm; but throughout the period we are discussing it remained just one note, never the dominant one, among many.

University College London (J.A.N.)
Corpus Christi College, Oxford (N.M.)

[29] The imperfects here only imply that he is arguing about what Juvenal had been, in time past, referring to. For an important discussion of the significance of such tense variations in general, and on the Juvenal scholia in particular, we are most grateful to have seen a draft version of Alan Cameron's forthcoming *The Last Pagans of Rome*, ch. 16.4: see also his 'The date of the *Scholia Vetustiora* on Juvenal' in CQ 2008.

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