

COLLECTION LATOMUS

Fondée par Marcei RENARD

VOLUME 177

Bruce MacBAIN

**Prodigy and expiation :
a study in religion and politics
in Republican Rome**

Published with the Help of the Boston University



LATOMUS
REVUE D'ÉTUDES LATINES
60, RUE COLONEL CHALTIN
BRUXELLES
1982

LATOMUS

REVUE D'ÉTUDES LATINES

60, rue Colonel Chaltin, B. 1180 Bruxelles

La revue **Latomus**, fondée en 1937 par M.-A. **Kugener**, L. **Herrmann** et M. **Renard** et dirigée actuellement par MM. Léon HERRMANN, Marcel RENARD et Guy CAMBIER, publie des articles, des variétés et discussions, des notes de lecture, des comptes rendus, des notices bibliographiques, des informations pédagogiques ayant trait à tous les domaines de la latinité : textes, littérature, histoire, institutions, archéologie, épigraphie, paléographie, humanisme, etc.

Les quelque **1000 pages** qu'elle comporte actuellement contiennent une riche documentation, souvent **inédite** et abondamment **illustrée**.

Montant de l'abonnement au tome XLI (1982) :

Abonnement ordinaire : 1500 FB.

Port et expédition en sus.

Prix des tomes publiés avant l'année en cours : 2000 FB.

Les quatre fascicules d'un tome ne sont pas vendus séparément.

C.C.P. 000-0752646-23 de la **Société d'études latines de Bruxelles.**

Pour l'achat des tomes I à XXI, s'adresser à :

Johnson Reprint Corporation,
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D/1981/0415/94
ISBN 2-87031-117-6

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I. THE RELIABILITY OF THE PRODIGY LISTS (1)

Prodigies, whose occurrence signified to the Roman mind a rupture of the *pax deorum* which required healing through expiatory rites, have typically been viewed in one of two ways. Roman historians have tended to focus either on those occasions in the later Republic when prodigy reports, like the other apparatus of the state religion, were manipulated cynically in the interests of party politics ; or else they have seen in them evidence simply of the superstitious hysteria of the Roman masses at times of grave crisis to the state. No one will deny some measure of truth to both of these observations. But neither point of view – the cynical or the hysterical – can carry us very far toward an understanding of how the prodigy phenomenon functioned as an important collective experience of the Roman and Italian peoples over several centuries in the history of the Republic. To approach an answer to that question it is necessary to ask ourselves what prodigies and expiations *did* ; what legitimate social and political ends (as well as inner psychological ones) they subserved ? Such a complex phenomenon is not likely to yield to a single, embracing explanation. But it may be suggested that one important end which prodigies and expiations served was communication. Throughout most of the Republican period, at any rate, many of the prodigies can be seen to operate as a kind of signalling system whereby the Roman senate, by accepting as *prodigia publica* those prodigies especially which were reported from the non-Roman towns of Italy, could acknowledge the anxieties and identify with the religious sensibilities of Italians, particularly at times of severe stress upon the whole fabric of the confederacy. The senate could occasionally as well convey warnings or

(1) This study began as a dissertation entitled *The Function of Public Prodigies and their Expiations in Furthering the Aims of Roman Imperialism in Italy Down to the Period of the Social War*, which was submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania in February, 1976. I owe a large debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Robert E. A. Palmer for his encouragement and many helpful suggestions. Whatever errors remain are my own.

other sub-texts through the content of expiatory rites, and, overall, by appropriating the responsibility to expiate non-Roman prodigies at Rome with Roman priests, could assert Roman hegemony over Italy in the religious sphere parallel to its assertion of hegemony in the temporal sphere. In short, the prodigy phenomenon, like many another aspect of Roman religion, is one in which religious and political motives blend insensibly together in the hands of a governing class who were not, for the most part, Ciceronian rationalists, or Polybian cynics, but who possessed the ability to both be religious and use religion, with no twinge of hypocrisy, for political advantage.

Before pursuing this hypothesis, however, it will first be necessary to deal at some length with the disputed question of the reliability of our prodigy reports – which we have chiefly from Livy and the Livian-derived *Liber Prodigiorum* of Julius Obsequens, with a scattering of reports from a number of other authors⁽²⁾. The most serious recent criticism of this material has come from Elizabeth Rawson⁽³⁾. She calls attention to a number of apparent statistical oddities in the distribution of the prodigy data, and argues from these that our lists represent not even a sampling of the presumably archival material but rather a heavily distorted conflation of a number of special epitomes of prodigies from a few locales, or of those in which haruspices took an interest, or simply of wonder tales given a specious date and locale by such late historians as Coelius Antipater and Cornelius Sisenna.

That our lists are incomplete goes without saying. It is also true that there is some (though actually very little) clearly apocryphal material⁽⁴⁾.

(2) There are two systematic collections of the prodigies: F. LUTERBACHER, *Der Prodigien Glaube und Prodigienstil der Römer* (Programm Burgdorf, 1880) and L. WÜLKER, *Die geschichtliche Entwicklung des Prodigienwesens bei den Römern* (Diss., Leipzig, 1903).

(3) Elizabeth RAWSON, "The Prodigy Lists and the Use of the *Annales Maximi*", *CQ* 21 (1971), 158-169. Her criticism is directed chiefly at the more optimistic appraisal of J. E. A. CRAKE, "The Annals of the Pontifex Maximus", *CP* 35 (1940), 357-386.

(4) Examples are the rain of flesh in 461 B.C., the apparition of Jupiter to Titus Latinus in 490 B.C., the prodigies of the Lacus Curtius and the Capitoline head, and some elements, at least, of the story of the Alban lake in 398 B.C. The apocryphal prodigies are nearly all early but general arguments about the earliest date at which "archival" material may be considered reliable need not detain us. The great bulk of prodigy reports is not earlier than the third century B.C. and the few earlier instances must be judged each on its own merits. Two of the earliest recorded prodigies, in fact, may be externally verifiable: a prodigious earthquake of 461 B.C. (LIVY 3.10, 5-7; DION. HAL. 10.2, 2-6) is connected with seismic disturbances in Greece, especially the Spartan earthquake of 464 by OGILVIE

There are too, it seems, a small number of erroneous doublets in otherwise distinct lists separated generally by an interval of two to four years. Rawson has argued from this that our lists represent a conflation of a number of separate late collections which used varying A.U.C. chronologies and that, in combining them, duplication arose from the same sort of inadvertance which sometimes led Livy to duplicate portions of his narrative when switching from one source to another. Further, if it is unlikely, as Rawson assumes, that the *Annales Maximi* used any sort of A.U.C. chronology, then a demonstration of confusion in the lists attributable to such a cause will break the link between the *Annales* and the lists⁽⁵⁾. The difficulty with this is that the number of doublets – not more than about twenty at most and probably far fewer than that – is either too many or too few to satisfy her hypothesis⁽⁶⁾. If the prodigy lists which were conflated bore no relationship to any archival source at all, but were entirely the free inventions of historians like Coelius and Sisenna, who, as Rawson suggests, employed the stock portents of hellenistic historiography to dramatize their narratives, then it is not clear why there should be any doublets at all. It is incredible that wholly fabricated lists would by sheer coincidence have assigned the same prodigy to the same locale in the same consular year on even one occasion, let alone on several. On the other hand, if the conflated lists were, in fact, lengthy samplings of genuine archival material, then one would expect many more doublets to be found. Whole segments of prodigy lists should be duplicated as indeed whole narrative episodes are when Livy has switched sources. But this is not the case. We should have expected much more duplication than the few scattered instances that one may point to of doublets imbedded in lists which are otherwise wholly distinct. That there is some degree of error in parts of some lists may be

(*Commentary on Livy, Books I-V* [Oxford, 1965], 415) ; a prodigious plague at Rome in 433 B.C. (LIVY 4.25,3) can perhaps be associated with the plague at Athens in 429.

(5) RAWSON, *art. cit.*, 161.

(6) WÜLKER (*op. cit.*, 23) listed a number of possible doublets to which Rawson has added others (p. 160). At most about two dozen items can be cited of which perhaps five are really striking : 200 B.C. and 198 B.C. – a pig with a human head at Sinuessa ; 177 and 174 – a talking cow/ox in Campania ; 130 and 124 – a rain of milk in *Graecostasi* at Rome ; 183 and 181 – a rain of blood in *area Vulcani et Concordiae* ; 182 and 179 – a storm damaging the Capitol at Rome and a three-footed mule born at Reate. (References to these prodigies and others noted subsequently may be found in the table in Appendix A, pp. 82 ff.

granted. Record keeping in antiquity was never an exact science. Particularly in the case of prodigy lists where very large numbers of similar events were handled and re-handled, it would be surprising indeed if doublets and other forms of confusion did not occasionally occur. But the amount of this duplication which can be detected will not sustain Rawson's hypothesis of massive confusion in the lists due to the conflation of disparate sources, archival or otherwise.

More curious is the disproportionately heavy reporting of some sixteen cities, of which Lanuvium heads the list with fifteen prodigy reports – five times the average number (7); and the odd distribution of half a dozen cities from federate Etruria whose prodigy reports are heavily concentrated in the years from 108 to 91 B.C. and virtually monopolize the reporting from all federate cities together during those years (8). But despite these anomalies I do not believe that Rawson's theory of distortion through special epitomes can be sustained.

If we should entertain the possibility that these few cities are heavily over-represented in our sources because of the intrusion of special collections of their prodigies into the annalistic record at the expense of a

(7) The average number is three; that is, 292 prodigy reports divided by 96 named cities, regions, or *populi*. The sixteen cities which have double or more the average number are:

Lanuvium	15	Cumae	7
Tarracina	11	Praeneste	7
Capua	10	Frusino	7
Reate	10	Veii	7
Caere	9	Formiae	7
Anagnia	8	Privernum	6
Amiternum	8	Aricia	6
Arretium	7	(Cures) Sabini	6

These sixteen cities, which represent about sixteen per cent of all prodigy reporting cities or regions, account for 131 prodigy reports – or 44 per cent of the total number for Italian cities exclusive of Rome. It will be noticed that all of these are located in the 'heartland' region of prodigy reporting – the contiguous area of Latium, Campania, Sabineland, and Etruria (see Appendix C, pp. 114 ff.) A curious phenomenon is the extent to which some high-scoring cities from the same region tend to be mutually exclusive in their reporting years. Thus, Capua and Cumae, with a total of seventeen reporting years share only one year (208 B.C.); Reate and Amiternum with a total of eighteen reporting years, share no year; Caere and Veii, with a total of sixteen reporting years, share only one year (174 B.C.). The two highest scoring cities of Latium (exclusive of Rome), Lanuvium and Tarracina, with a total of twenty-six reporting years, share three years (204, 166, and 147 B.C.).

(8) Below, n. 29.

more representative sampling, then it would seem that the most likely place to look for evidence of such epitomes might be among the antiquarians of the late Republic who could be suspected of having made collections of the prodigies of their hometowns, culled either from Roman or local archives. This, of course, presupposes that an antiquarian of even the most enthusiastic local patriotism would have found such a collection edifying, or that any local audience would have – assumptions which are far from certain.

It is, at first sight, striking that the three great antiquarians of the late Republic and early Principate – Aelius Stilo, Terentius Varro, and Verrius Flaccus – are all connected with towns that are heavily represented in our lists : Lanuvium, Reate, and Praeneste. Is there any likelihood that these three men might have been responsible for collections of local prodigies ? There is no evidence for any such collection among the known works of either Aelius Stilo or Verrius Flaccus, although certainly both men were interested in religious antiquities, and Verrius, we know, had read the *Annales Maximi* ⁽⁹⁾. In the case of Varro (who was born in Reate) we have a good deal more evidence to go on. Among the sixteen books of his *Antiquitates Rerum Diuinarum*, whose titles are listed for us by Augustine ⁽¹⁰⁾, were the *De Pontificibus* and the *De Quindecimviris* ; the latter work, at least, must necessarily have dealt with prodigies. Münzer suggested that a collection of prodigies made by Varro was the direct source for the prodigies in Pliny's *Natural History*, and that Varro's sources, in turn, were Coelius, Sisenna, and Sulla ⁽¹¹⁾. Assuming for the moment that Münzer was correct, if we survey all the Plinian prodigies to see what kind of prodigy collection Varro had provided, we find that, whatever other organizing principle it may have followed, it was not a regional selection ⁽¹²⁾. Pliny gives few locales for his prodigies but those that he does give are Mutina, Rome, Pompeii, Ameria and Tuder, Tuscus

(9) On Stilo, see M. SCHANZ-C. HOSIUS, *Geschichte der Römischen Literatur* i⁴ (Munich, 1927), 232 ff. On Verrius, SCHANZ-HOSIUS, *op. cit.*, ii⁴, 361 ff. ; SUET., *Gramm.* 17 ; GELLIUS, *NA* 4.5.1.

(10) *CD* 6.4. On Varro, SCHANZ-HOSIUS, *op. cit.*, 555 ff.

(11) F. MÜNZER, *Quellenkritik der Naturgeschichte des Plinius* (1897), 239 ff., 248.

(12) Pliny retails altogether some twenty-seven prodigies plus five allusions to what are probably expiations for prodigies. They range in date from 217 B.C. to A.D. 43, most falling in the later second century down to the 40's B.C. They are : 2.92, 96, 98-100, 137, 144, 147, 148, 199, 200, 203, 238 ; 3. 123 ; 7. 34, 36, 120 ; 8.221 ; 10.35, 36, 50 ; 16. 132 ; 17. 243, 244 ; 18. 166, 286 ; 28. 12 ; 36. 135.

Sinus, the Aeolian Islands, Casinum, Lanuvium, Ariminum, Nuceria, and Cumae. None is from Sabineland. Despite the fact that Varro discusses the mule breeding industry at Reate, none of the remarkable series of Reatine mule prodigies comes from either Pliny or the *De Re Rustica* (13). Given Varro's sabinophile inclinations, as attested in numerous passages of the *De Lingua Latina*, it is, in fact, a little surprising that none of the prodigies in Pliny, if they do actually derive from a Varronian collection, is located in Sabineland. The only prodigy material which comes directly from an extant work of Varro's are the three versions of the Lacus Curtius legend in *LL* 5.148. There is, in short, no evidence for a collection of Reatine prodigies emanating from Varro. Even if we keep open the possibility that our three antiquarians did collect the prodigies of their *patriae*, we have still accounted for only three of the sixteen 'high-scoring' cities. More important is the difficulty in seeing how such epitomes, by whomever compiled, found their way into the annalistic tradition. Livy, from what we know of his working methods, is not likely to have exerted himself to seek out such material (14). A more likely possibility would be Valerius Antias. But the fact that Antium itself presents only three prodigies (precisely the average number) speaks against this. It seems most unlikely that if Antias were induced to trouble himself to consult and incorporate prodigy collections from other people's *patriae* he would have so neglected his own, given his obvious local patriotism and his unabashed willingness to enhance the importance of the objects of his favor (15).

For most of these high-scoring cities, on the other hand, we can find credible reasons why they may, in fact, have experienced more than their fair share of uncanny events. They include, for example, a number of prestigious pan-Italian cult centers and other places whose major local industry was religion. Such are Lanuvium, the home of Juno Sospita (16) ;

(13) VARRO, *RR* 2.8, 3-6 ; cf. STRABO 5.3.1. On Reate and the mule prodigies, all of which come from Livy or Obsequens, see below, page 14.

(14) On Livy's working methods, see P. G. WALSH, *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods* (Cambridge, 1961), chapter 6 ; on his avoidance of antiquarian sources in general and Varro in particular, see OGILVIE, *Comm.*, 6-7.

(15) OGILVIE, *Comm.*, 16. The three Antiate prodigies occurred in 217, 206, and 203 B.C.

(16) On Lanuvium and the cult of Juno Sospita see A. E. GORDON, *The Cults of Lanuvium*, Univ. of California Publications in Classical Archaeology, II, 2 (1935), 21-58 ; WISSOWA, *RKR*² (1912), 188-189 ; R. E. A. PALMER, *Roman Religion and Roman Empire* (Phila., 1974), 30-32. She was probably the most famous Juno in Latium. CICERO (*Fin.* 2.20, 3) emphasizes Lanuvium's importance as a religious center and local priesthoods are

Praeneste, the home of Fortuna Primigenia⁽¹⁷⁾; Aricia, the home of Diana and the famous *rex nemorensis*⁽¹⁸⁾; Cumae, the ancient home of the Sibyl and her patron, Apollo – figures of particular importance to the Roman priesthood of the *Decemviri sacris faciundis* who kept the sibylline books⁽¹⁹⁾; Tarracina, a major center for the cult of the widely popular Etrusco-Italic goddess Feronia⁽²⁰⁾; and little Anagnia which, for

better attested there than from any other city in the empire outside of Rome itself. Of Lanuvium's fifteen recorded prodigies, seven directly involve Juno (218, 215, 214, 200, 181, and 99 B.C.).

(17) On Praeneste and Fortuna Primigenia, see G. RADKE in *RE* 22.2 (1954); WISSOWA, *RKR*², 259 ff.; CICERO, *Diu.* 2. 85-86; and A. S. PEASE, *Commentary on Cicero's "De Divinatione"*, Univ. of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, vols. vi and viii (1920, 1923; repr. Darmstadt, 1963), *ad loc.* The Praenestine oracle, which involved the typical Italic practice of shaking out wooden lots, was immensely popular, and it is interesting to note that at some point the haruspices had attempted to associate themselves with the foundation legend of the cult (Cic., *Diu.* 2.85-86). While none of the seven recorded prodigies directly involves Fortuna, it is likely, as with the case of Lanuvium and Aricia, that the mere presence of a major cult will have reinforced a predisposition toward religiosity among the inhabitants, to say nothing of the throngs of visitors who were there for the purpose of consulting the oracle. It may also be reasonably suggested that Verrius' dedication of his antiquarian *fasti* there was in response to a genuine interest among the inhabitants in religious antiquities.

(18) On Aricia, see A. E. GORDON, *The Cults of Aricia*, Univ. of California Publications in Classical Archaeology, II, 1 (1934), 1-19. Aricia was the center of an early religious league (CATO, frag. 58). Although none of the six recorded Arician prodigies involves Diana, the town clearly had an ambience in which prodigious things might be expected to occur, and its interest for Romans would assure that a majority of its prodigies be retained by the annalists.

(19) On the Cumaean Sibyl and her grotto, see G. K. GALINSKY, *Aeneas, Sicily, and Rome* (Princeton, 1969), 65 ff. Whatever may have been the original function of the extensive subterranean cavern under the west side of the Cumaean acropolis, the Romans had no doubt that it was the Sibyl's grotto. Two of Cumae's seven prodigies involve Apollo (169, 130 B.C.).

(20) On Feronia, see L. R. TAYLOR, *Local Cults in Etruria*, Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome, 2 (1923), 40-55; Paul AEBISCHER, "Le culte de Feronia et la gentilice Feronius", *Rev. Belge de Philol. et d'Hist.*, 13 (1934), 5-23; Elizabeth C. EVANS, *The Cults of the Sabine Territory*, Papers and Monographs of the American Acad. in Rome, 11 (1939), 155-59; J. HEURGON, "Un Ver sacrum etrusque? Les origines du Lucus Feroniae", In *Trois études sur le "Ver sacrum"*, *Coll. Latomus* 26 (1957), 11-19; G. D. B. JONES, "Capena and the Ager Capenas", *PBSR* 30 (1962), 116 ff. In addition, Tarracina's strategic importance in wartime (guarding the Lautulae pass) and large transient population at all times as a convenient stopping place for travellers on their way to or from Capua and the South (HORACE, *Sat.* I 5, 25-29) may also very well be factors which would tend to generate a greater than average number of reported supernatural sightings.

reasons wholly unknown, appears to have remained a virtual museum of religious antiquities into the Antonine period ⁽²¹⁾.

For three other high-scoring cities, we may suggest other reasons for their heavy reporting. Cures Sabini ⁽²²⁾, had strong historic and symbolic associations for Romans as the home of Tadius and Numa, and, as was generally believed, the source of the title "Quirites". We cannot explain why the Sabini experience numerous prodigies, but we can readily understand why the Romans took careful note of them ; and, perhaps, the second factor has something to do with the first. Capua records ten prodigies ⁽²³⁾ – half of them during the Second Punic War when that city was one of the most politically and militarily troubled places in Italy. If, as will be argued below, prodigies have any relation at all to the level of anxiety in or concerning a city, then these Capuan prodigies find their explanation. The post-war prodigies are not so easily explained, but Capua was a *praefectura* from 211 on, which may have facilitated the reporting of its prodigies to Rome. Capua always loomed large in Roman consciousness and it is likely that its prodigies would have had sufficient interest for Romans such that a fair number of them will have been retained in the annalistic tradition. Reate, which reports ten prodigies, is the only city represented in our lists a majority of whose prodigies can be associated with a well-known feature of the area – namely, the mule breeding industry ⁽²⁴⁾. Six of the ten Reatine prodigies concern mules and one concerns a horse ⁽²⁵⁾. Only three Reatine prodigies are not animal *monstra*. Luterbacher suggested that this was the clearest case (in fact the

(21) As observed by Marcus Aurelius in a letter to Fronto (*Ep.* 4.4).

(22) I make the assumption (following L. R. TAYLOR, *Voting District of the Roman Republic* [Rome, 1960], 60 ff.) that six prodigies recorded as occurring "in Sabinis" should be referred to the town (or rather, village) of Cures. Other towns in Sabineland (Amiternum, Reate, Eretum, and Trebula Mutuesca) are given separate mention in prodigy reports and so presumably are not to be included under the general term, Sabini. The absence of Cures from the lists would be puzzling unless we assume that *Sabini* denotes it.

(23) 217, 209, 208, 207, 203, 198, 193, 179, 177, and 163 B.C.

(24) VARRO, *RR* 2.8, 3-6 ; STRABO 5.3.1.

(25) A mule gave birth in 211 and 190 B.C. ; three-footed mules were reported in 182, 179, and 162 B.C. ; a five-footed mule in 130 B.C. ; and a five-footed horse in 203 B.C. Such prodigies were not confined to Reate. Mules giving birth were also reported from Apulia in 93, in an unspecified place in 83 and in 42 B.C. A three-footed ass was reported from Calatia in 172, and five-footed horses from Rome in 137 and from Bruttium in 199 B.C.

only clear case) of an “örtliche Spezialprodigium” and, despite Rawson’s arguments to the contrary, that is still the best explanation⁽²⁶⁾. The existence of a non-archival epitome of these prodigies is scarcely plausible. Anyone who wishes to argue for a special collection of Reatine mule prodigies ought first to demonstrate why anyone would plausibly make one. One could, perhaps, conceive of some curious naturalist compiling a list of all mule prodigies (though Pliny is the likeliest to have preserved it and he did not). Also conceivable might be a collection of all Reatine prodigies (though Varro, the likeliest one to have done that, did not). But an epitome of all *Reatine* mule prodigies is really rather difficult to believe in. It is an entirely more economical and sensible explanation that this large number of prodigies is a realistic sampling from the archival data. A large population of mules and horses will produce a correspondingly large number of abnormal births, and people whose business it is to breed mules will certainly give keen attention to these. So we may well believe that they were reported with regularity to Rome.

Of the following four cities too little is known of their history or cults which might provide a clue to the causes of their heavy reporting : Amiternum, eight prodigies from 218 to 106 B.C. ⁽²⁷⁾ ; Frusino, seven prodigies from 207 to 147 B.C. ; Formiae, seven prodiges from 269 to 163 B.C. ⁽²⁸⁾ ; and Privernum, six prodiges from 209 to 113 B.C.

The remaining three of the heavily reporting cities – Caere, Veii, and Arretium – must be considered separately in connection with the Etruscan prodigies generally. As has often been noticed, the heavy incidence of prodigy reports from the federate Etruscan cities of Arretium, Perugia, Volsinii, Tarquinii, Faesulae, Volaterrae, and Clusium after 108

(26) RAWSON, *art. cit.*, 164.

(27) On what little is known of Amiternum and its cults, see EVANS, *op. cit.*, 103 ff. I can only suggest that the Sabines in general seem to have had a predilection for experiencing prodigies. Three of the sixteen heaviest reporting cities including Amiternum, are Sabine, and Sabineland altogether, with a total of thirty-three prodigy reports, is one of the heaviest reporting areas. Perhaps this is, in part, an aspect of that pristine culture for which the Sabines ultimately became a by-word.

(28) The total of seven prodigies from Formiae includes two which actually occurred at Caieta in 213 and 182 B.C. Caieta was located in the territory of Formiae, and we gather from Livy (40.2, 4 for 182 B.C.) that a prodigy occurring at Caieta would have been reported via the authorities at Formiae.

B.C. is striking (29). Not only do these cities account for nearly all Etruscan prodigies during the period 108 to 91 B.C. (that is, only Caere among the

(29) The following table displays the pattern of distribution :

S. Etruria	Federate Etruria	Roman Colonies in Etruria
218 – Caere		
217 – Caere, Capena, Falerii		
216 – Caere		
210 – Capena	210 – Tarquinii	
208 – Caere	208 – Volsinii	
207 – Veii		
206 – Caere		
198 – Veii	198 – Arretium	
197 – Fregenae		
196 – Capena		
	192 – Arretium	
		176 – Graviscae
174 – Caere, Veii		
173 – Veii		
		172 – Saturnia
169 – Veii		
166 – Veii		
163 – Caere		
147 – Caere		
		142 – Luna
		133 – Luna
125 – Veii		
		124 – Saturnia
		117 – Saturnia
	108 – Arretium	
	106 – Perugia	
	104 – Volsinii, Tarquinii	
	(102 – Clusium?)*	
	100 – Tarquinii	
	96 – Faesulae, Arretium	
95 – Caere		
	94 – Faesulae, Volsinii	
	93 – Arretium, Volsinii	
	92 – Volaterrae, Arretium, Faesulae	
	91 – Arretium	
	83 – Clusium	

*Obs. 44 for 102 B.C. reads, in part : *aedes Iouis Clusa fulmine icta* ... For *clusa*, which is not otherwise used by Obsequens as a variant of *clausa*, Heinsius suggested Clusii.

non-federate Etruscan cities reports a prodigy during this period), they also form a very high percentage of all prodigy reports from Italy. They account for somewhat more than 50 percent of all prodigy reports from Italian federates over the whole period of reporting, and nearly 80 percent of all federate prodigy reports in the period 108 to 91 B.C. Their percentage of the prodigy reports from cities of every status, including Rome for the period 108 to 91 is 21 percent, still a strikingly large figure⁽³⁰⁾.

It is this unusual statistical behavior which led Rawson to posit here also the intrusion of special prodigy collections into the stream of archival transmission in such a way as to distort the data to the point of rendering its meaningless⁽³¹⁾.

It is, at the very least, highly likely that our data are incomplete, so that the sharp discontinuity between the romanized and federate Etruscan cities may be more apparent than real. It is certainly impossible to see why, on any theory of the origin of the lists, some special significance should attach to the year 108 B.C. Nevertheless, we are obliged to pursue Rawson's suggestion in detail (which she unfortunately does not) and attempt to satisfy ourselves as best we can on the basis of the existing relevant evidence as to the likelihood that epitomes emphasizing the prodigies from Etruscan cities have distorted our data.

It should be pointed out first that, in addition to the high frequency of reporting from Etruscan cities, other indicators too point to a growing Etruscan component in the total picture of Roman "Prodigienwesen" from the later part of the second century B.C. A tabulation of the frequency of prodigy reports decade by decade over the whole reporting period compared to a tabulation of the relative frequencies of expiations definitely assignable to either haruspices or *decemviri s.f.* reveals that the period of the 130s through the 90s witnesses simultaneously a sharp rise in overall numbers of prodigy reports comparable to the levels reached during the Second Punic War⁽³²⁾ and, for the first time, a preponderance

(30) These calculations can be derived from the data presented in Appendix B, pp. 107 ff.

(31) RAWSON, *art. cit.*, 164.

(32) Refer to Appendix A, "Summary", p. 106. There is no entirely satisfactory explanation for the overall variation in frequency of prodigy reports for the whole period. One may suggest that the heightened activity of the relevant priesthoods during the Second Punic War generated an institutional momentum which prompted continuing high levels of prodigy reports during subsequent decades down through the 160's - a

of haruspical over decemviral activity⁽³³⁾. At the same time the bulk of androgynous births and other types of prodigies which can be shown to highly or exclusively appropriate to involvement of haruspices falls in this period⁽³⁴⁾. Do these several categories of data combine to produce an accurate reflection of a real situation (whatever may be its cause), or are they, rather, evidence of a deep source bias which has skewed the true distribution of reporting locales and haruspical activity out of all recognition ?

Whereas in our consideration of the sixteen heavily reporting cities we found no evidence for the kind of local epitomes which would be required to produce an overrepresentation of them in the prodigy lists, the situation with respect to the Etruscan cities and haruspices generally might appear different. Here we know that Etruscan *ostentaria* and thunder calendars

period which was, generally speaking expansive, successful, and untroubled. The decline in reporting in the 150's and 140's may then be ascribed to a gradual loss of this momentum in the face of continuing success and prosperity, and, perhaps, to a degree, in the face of growing rationalism among the upper classes (although this factor is often exaggerated in discussions of Roman religion). Note that the fall-off after the 160's is not simply attributable to the loss of Livy after 167. The 160's themselves area fairly heavily reported decade and half of these reports come from Obsequens after the point where Livy breaks off. Obsequens is our primary source both for the sparsely reported 150's and 140's and for the much more heavily reported period of the 130's through the 90's when the declining interest in prodigies appears to reverse itself.

(33) Refer to Appendix A, "Summary", p. 106.

(34) Refer to Appendix E for a summary of the known instances of androgyne prodigies. Note that the observed rise in activity of haruspices is contingent, in part, on the frequency of androgynes during this period, but not entirely so. Androgyne expiations involved haruspices and *decemviri* jointly ; outside this category of prodigy haruspices appear on from ten to eighteen occasions compared with five to nine occasions for *decemviri* during the same period (refer to Appendix A).

A prodigy is considered, empirically, to be characteristic of haruspices if they expiate it on most of the occasions for which we are clearly told who the expiating or consulting priesthood was -- which is by no means true of all, or even most instances of any prodigy. Our empirical evidence is, however, consonant with what we are told in the sources about the kinds of things that haruspices usually do (refer to Appendix D). Of the several kinds of prodigies which appear to be particularly "haruspical" most have a majority of their instances in the period from the 130's on. Specifically : talking infants, four of six ; *fremitus*, seven of seven ; swarms of bees, six of nine ; flames from the earth, three of four ; statues struck by lightning, seven of twelve ; monstrous human births (other than androgynes), thirteen of twenty-six.

Note, finally, that the rise in reports from Etruscan cities and the rise in haruspical activity in this period are complementary, not tautological, data since haruspices cannot, in fact, be shown to have consulted on more than a few of those Etruscan prodigies (cf. Obs. 27, 43, 44, and 53 for the possible instances, some less certain than others).

circulated in Rome in the last century B.C. – the products of a number of enthusiastic students of the *Etrusca disciplina* who translated and adapted them for a Roman audience. The few surviving fragments of this literature, however, indicate collections of *types* of prodigies which, whenever they occur, or if they occur on a certain day of the year, portend some specific outcome. They are not collections of specific prodigies noted as having actually occurred on particular occasions. And it would seem that it can only be collections such as this – bringing together large batches of prodigies for which haruspices had been consulted on particular occasions, and perhaps (though by no means necessarily) emphasizing prodigies from Etruscan cities more than from elsewhere – which might be suspected of constituting a source of distortion in the lists⁽³⁵⁾.

Two sources, however, Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* and a passage in Cicero's *De Divinatione*, may be thought to reveal the existence of this sort of prodigy collection. Pliny does, at least, claim to have read all of the late Republican haruspicial antiquarians who could conceivably have transmitted the kind of collection with which we are concerned, and his long digression on haruspicial lightning lore (*NH* 2.138-144) certainly comes ultimately from one of these writers. But of all Pliny's prodigies only four show much likelihood of deriving from a haruspicial source: 2.199 for 91 B.C., an earth-quake in the Ager Mutiniensis of which Pliny says, *Etruscae disciplinae uoluminibus inuenio* (his only use of such a

(35) Reference is to the *Ephemeris Brontoscopia* of Nigidius Figulus, preserved in Johannes LYDUS, *de Ost.* c. 27-28 W. (on which see A. PIGANIOL, "Sur le calendrier brontoscopique de Nigidius Figulus", in *Studies in Roman Social and Economic History in Honor of Alan Chester Johnson* [1951], 79-87 and W. V. HARRIS, *Rome in Etruria and Umbria* [Oxford, 1971], 5 ff.); and to similar calendars also in LYDUS (*Ost.* 88, 13; 99, 17) which may be attributable to Nigidius and to C. Fonteius Capito (as argued by WEINSTOCK in *PBSR* 18 [1950], 44-49 and 19 [1951], 139-140). Tarquitiu Priscus, who was perhaps the chief propagator of the *disciplina* at Rome translated *ostentaria* cited by MACROBIUS (*Sat.* 3.7,2 and 20,3) and is one of those listed by Pliny in the tables of contents to Books ii and xi of the *Naturalis Historia*. On Tarquitiu see, J. HEURGON in *Latomus* 12 (1953), 402-417. Aulus Caecina of Volaterrae is the source for sections on lightning lore in SENECA (*Quaest. Nat.* 29-56) and PLINY (2. 137-148), and may also be the source for haruspicial lore contained in the *De Divinatione* of his friend, Cicero. The possible contents of other putative Etruscan archives, such as the *Tuscae Historiae* mentioned by VARRO (*ap* CENSORINUS, 17,6), remain a mystery despite the conjectures of HEURGON (*Daily Life of the Etruscans* [New York, 1964], 247 ff.). This is not to say that I wish to argue in principle against the existence of extensive lists of documented prodigies (cf. T. J. CORNELL, "Etruscan Historiography", *Annali di Pisa*, ser. III, 6 [1976], 432 ff.).

phrase); 2.144 for 115 B.C., lightning striking the temple of Juno in Rome which is mentioned at the end of the long discussion of fulgural lore; 7.36 for 171 B.C., a girl changed into a boy at Casinum who was by order of the haruspices deported to a desert island (of this prodigy Pliny says, *inuenio in annalibus*); 8.221 for 91/90 B.C., mice foretelling the war with the Marsians by gnawing the silver shields at Lanuvium (here Pliny gives no indication of the expiation but this prodigy certainly matches one found in Cicero, *Diu.* 1.99, and attributed there to the history of Cornelius Sisenna according to whom it was viewed by the haruspices as *tristissimum*).

The existence of a haruspicial source for a handful of prodigies in Pliny, even if we could be certain of it⁽³⁶⁾, is in itself of no importance for any conclusions which are derived mainly from the major, continuous and presumably archival source represented by Livy/Obsequens unless Pliny's source can be detected behind Livy/Obsequens as well. In fact, none of the four prodigies just noted can be found in Livy/Obsequens except possibly the first if that finds an echo in Obs. 54 for 91 B.C., *circa Regium terrae motu pars urbis murique diruta*, on the supposition that Regium is not the Greek city in Bruttium but Regium Lepidi in Aemilia not many miles from Mutina. We should have, then, two quite different versions of the same prodigy (a widespread seismic event in the region of Aemilia effecting several towns at once?), but if a haruspicial account is thought to be the source of Pliny's version then it cannot also be the source of Pliny's variant⁽³⁷⁾.

(36) The influence of a decemviral epitome on Pliny is, in fact, more demonstrable than that of a haruspicial one, despite the prominence of Etruscan authors in his tables of sources. Five Plinian passages (3.123; 7.120; 17.243; 18.286; and 28.12) make specific references to Sibylline pronouncements or decemviral ceremonies, and perhaps derive from VARRO'S *De Quindecenuiris*.

(37) To throw our net as wide as possible, we may add two less likely items. In 16.132, dated to *Cimbricis bellis*, Pliny cites, as an example of a tree falling down without a storm or other natural cause, an *ostentum* which occurred at Nuceria in the grove of Juno when an elm tree fell over. Its branches were lopped off but it then righted itself and flowered, *a quo deinde tempore maiestas populi Romani resurrexit quae ante uastata cladibus fuerat*. This equals Obs. 43 for 104 B.C.: *Nuceriae ulmus uento euersa sua sponte erecta in radicem conualuit*. Clearly it is the same prodigy but with noticeable differences in detail between the two versions. Pliny implies that the tree was not blown down by the wind, where Obsequens says that it was. Pliny speaks of it flowering again, Obsequens of its taking root. The favorable interpretation placed upon the prodigy with respect to the *maiestas* of the Roman people, might well reflect an interpretation given at the time, and, in that case, most likely by haruspices – favorable interpretations being characteristic of