

**AUTHENTICITY AND SOURCES OF
THE "ORIGO GENTIS ROMANAE":
A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PRINCETON
UNIVERSITY**

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Authenticity and sources of the "Origo gentis romanae": a dissertation presented to the faculty of Princeton University by William T. Semple

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED
TO THE FACULTY OF

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
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(DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS)

BY

WILLIAM T. SEMPLE



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Authenticity and Sources of the
"ORIGO GENTIS ROMANAE."

INTRODUCTION.

The booklet *de Origine Gentis Romanae* deals, as the title indicates, with the beginnings of the Roman people, giving the whole series of myths from Janus and Saturnus, through Picus, Faunus, Euander, the story of Aeneas from the fall of Troy up to the time of his death and deification, of Ascanius and the Alban kings and concludes with Romulus and the founding of Rome. It is handed down to us in the manuscripts as the first of the three parts of a corpus which consists of the *Origo*, *Viri Illustres* and *Caesares*. The author of the last work only is known. The *Caesares* was written by Aurelius Victor, who lived in the second half of the fourth century, and whose history covers the imperial epoch up to his own times. Perhaps soon after this time, in order to have a handy volume, doubtless for reference or for the schools, two other works, whose authors we do not know, were joined to the *Caesares*. It is in this corpus alone that two of these writings have been preserved to our times, namely the *Origo* and the *Caesares*. The *Viri Illustres* is found in various other manuscripts.

The editio princeps of the corpus was edited by Andreas Schott at Antwerp in 1579. The authenticity of the *Viri Illustres* and *Caesares* has never been called into question, nor was the *Origo* doubted till Niebuhr¹ affirmed, but without giving proof, that the book was a forgery composed by some schoolman of the fourteenth or fifteenth century. The weight of his authority was such that this opinion was accepted without question till J. Maehly,² in 1852, demonstrated that this con-

¹In a critical edition of the *Origo*, which I hope to make soon, there will be a full discussion of the only two extant Mss., Oxon., Brux.

²Cf. Vorträge über röm. Geschichte, herausgegeben von Iser I. (Berlin 1846) p. 34.

³Cf. Jahns Jahrb. Suppl. 68 XVIII. (1852) p. 132.

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clusion could not be true, but that the *Origo* must be assigned at least to ancient times. However, he did not define further its date or value. Taking up the investigation at this point, H. Jordan¹ attempted to assign the work more definitely to the fifth or sixth century, concluding that it is a patchwork made up from various ancient authors, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Plutarch, Macrobius, Festus, Diodorus, and especially from the commentators on Vergil, that the authors cited in the *Origo* are quoted falsely and with the intention to deceive, and finally that the contents of the booklet are of absolutely no value. Later Th. Mommsen² showed that the *Origo* was used by Paulus Diaconus, about 800, in enlarging his *Historia Romana*, but that a fuller account was used, of which the present *Origo* is an epitome. However, in passing, he added his condemnation of the book, saying that it was composed chiefly from the scholia to Vergil and that the long list of ancient Latin historians quoted therein might have been fabricated just as well in the fifth century as in the fifteenth. Thus a second time an adverse criticism from a man of the highest authority fell upon the *Origo*.

Although the view of Mommsen was generally accepted, there were some who not only contended for the worth of the book, but also were so convinced of its value and the excellence of its style that they wished to assign it to Verrius Flaccus. The abrupt transitions, which are frequently to be found in it, they explained, as did Mommsen, by assuming that the present *Origo* is an epitome of a greater one now lost.³

All these scholars approached the question from the standpoint of the contents of the different stories and of their agreement with similar accounts preserved by other authors. But J. W. Beck,⁴ thinking that little was to be determined with certainty from an investigation of sources, pursued another course to fix the date of the composition of the book. He made an examination of its Latinity. From a study of the use of words and phrases he concluded that the *Origo* was composed at some time after Apuleius and before Jerome's Latin version of the *Chronicon* of Eusebius.

¹Cf. *Hermes* III. (1869) p. 389.

²Cf. *Hermes* XII. (1877) p. 401.

³This view is held by B. Sepp in his edition of the *Origo*, Muenchen, 1879, Praef. IV., and E. Bachrens, *Fleckeis Jhb.* 135 (1887) p. 769.

⁴Cf. *Mnemosyne* (1894) p. 338.

Thus we see that there have been four questions under discussion, authorship, time of composition, sources, and authenticity. In this dissertation the question of authorship will not be treated, for the arguments which have been brought forward to assign the book to Verrius Flaccus do not seem to be convincing, nor have I found any indications which might settle this question. Further, there is little to add as to the time of composition. It seems to me that the conclusion of Beck, which is accepted by Schanz, that the *Origo* was written about the third century, A. D., is as nearly accurate as the date of the book can be fixed. I agree with Mommsen, Sepp and Baehrens in thinking that the present *Origo* is an epitome of a larger book now lost. For there is very great contrast between the elegance of certain passages and the abrupt, awkward style often found. But it is with the last two questions that the discussion will deal chiefly. They seem to me to be one and the same thing, and if it can be established that *Auctor Originis* used good sources it will follow of necessity that we have in the *Origo* a reliable version of early Roman myths. It will therefore be my chief endeavor to prove that we have in the *Origo* accounts of early heroes, many of which are to be traced back to M. Terentius Varro and Verrius Flaccus. At the same time I shall try to show that it is not possible that the extant scholia to Vergil were used by *Auctor Originis*. Having shown that the extant scholia could not possibly have been the source of the *Origo*, further, that we find in the *Origo* many stories which come ultimately from Varro or Verrius Flaccus, there remains the difficult question whether Varro and Verrius Flaccus were used directly or whether these stories of Varro and Verrius Flaccus were obtained by our author through an intermediate source. With reference to the last point, although each alternative has much good reason for its support, after a careful consideration it seems necessary to conclude that in the *Origo* is found a collection of myths taken from scholia to Vergil which are now lost, and that these scholia, composed in the first centuries of our era were based in part upon narrations of Varro and Verrius Flaccus. The first part of the conclusion follows from the fact that the *Origo* I. 4-9 presents very much the appearance of a commentary to Vergil and that throughout the whole book, there is very great similarity to the extant scholia. The second statement follows from the agreement

of certain narratives in the *Origo* with the same stories found elsewhere which may be traced definitely to Varro or to Verrius Flaccus.

It seems strange that the two authors, who, we contend, are the chief sources of the *Origo*, are not mentioned in the book, while there is a long and curious list of many of the most ancient Latin¹ chroniclers of early Roman history. However, this list of authors, which has been the chief cause of doubt concerning the authenticity of the *Origo*, does not justify the suspicions as to the book's worth. For in no case has it been proven that any one of these authors is falsely quoted. While it is not probable that the works of these men could have been in use in the third century A.D., it seems not an unreasonable supposition that *Auctor Originis* found those names cited in the intermediate source, which he himself used, as authorities for the myths assigned to them. The fact that two or even three writers are given by *Auctor Originis* as his authority for a single account indicates that not these men themselves were used but rather some intermediate source where they had been thus joined together. Though we may wonder that *Auctor Originis* should prefer consistently to conceal his immediate source and at the same time to enhance the dignity of his narrative with the names of the most ancient authorities, an historian of such a character is by no means improbable in the time in which the *Origo* appears to have been written, and such a method of procedure is certainly no proof that the narratives recounted are fictitious and valueless.

Following is given an outline of the dissertation in which three objects are to be accomplished: first, to prove that much of the *Origo* is to be traced back to Varro; second, to show that Verrius Flaccus is the ultimate source for various parts of the *Origo*.; third, to prove that *Auctor Originis* did not make use of the extant scholia to Vergil. Consequently the dissertation falls into three chapters:

¹We note that all of these are Latin authors, with the possible exception of the uncertain "Alexander Ephesius libro primo belli Marsici" IX. 1, and this paragraph is evidently taken from a Latin, not a Greek source. Cf. p. 23ff.

Chapter I. To prove the use of Varronian material.

- a. *Origo* I. 1-3, II. 4, compared with
 III. 1-7. Tertul. Apol. 10
 ad nat. II. 12
- Janus-Saturnus Min. Fel. Oct. 21
 Lactant. Inst. I. 13, 6-10
 August. C. D. VII., 4, 19
 Servius et al. to Verg. VIII. 319,
 322, 357.
- b. *Origo* IV. 4-6 compared with
 Cicero Brutus, 18, 71; 19, 75
 Orat. 47, 157; 51, 171.
- Faunus Festus p. 325 (edit. Mueller)
 Varro de l. Lat. VII. 36
 Servius et al. to Verg. Georg. I.
 11, Aen. VII. 47, VIII. 314.
- c. *Origo* IX. 1-4 compared with
 Deut. Serv. Aen. II. 636
 Schol. Veron. Aen. II. 717
 Diodorus et al.

Chapter II. To prove the use of material derived from
 Verrius Flaccus.

- a. *Origo* VI. compared with
 Servii Aen. VIII. 190, 203
- Recaranus-Cacus Plutarch Quaes. Rom. 60
- b. *Origo* VIII. compared with
 Servius Aen. VIII. 179, 269,
 270
- Potitii-Pinarii Festus p. 237 (edit. Mueller)
- c. *Origo* XII. 2 compared with
 Servii Aen. II. 166.
 III. 406, 407, 545
- Head covered at sacrifice Plutarch Quaes. Rom. 10
 Dion. Hal. Antiq. R. XII. 22
 Festus p. 322 (edit. Mueller)

Chapter III. To prove that extant scholia to Vergil could not have been the source of the *Origo*.

In this chapter will be considered other passages of the *Origo* than those already discussed, which show similarity to the extant scholia to Vergil. It will be shown that *Auctor Originis* did not use these scholia; but since the agreement is very close, it is necessary to conclude that the source of the scholia is the source also of the *Origo*, i.e. that scholia to Vergil now lost were a common source to both *Auctor Originis* and to the Servii et al. In proving this the following passages will be examined:¹

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| a. <i>Origo</i> I. 4-9 | compared with |
| Use of "primus" by Vergil | Servii Aen. I. 1, 24
II, 263, VIII. 319 |
| b. <i>Origo</i> IX. 4-X. 4 | compared with |
| Wanderings of Aeneas | Servii Aen. III. praef.
III. 48, 80
VI. 233, VII. 1, IX. 707, 712,
X. 36 Schol. Ver. Aen. II. 313 |

c. From this point, chap. X. 5, the landing in Latium of Aeneas, to the end of chap. XXIII., the argument will not be given in detail since it would involve simply a repetition of the method of reasoning used in (a) and (b). But full references will be given in order that the general conclusion may readily be tested.

Lastly, the discussion will close with an excursus on the relationship existing between the *Origo* and Vergil's Aeneid. Although the Aeneid can not be considered as a source for the *Origo*, yet, since the influence of Vergil is very evident and since some parts of *Origo* make the impression of being simply a commentary upon the Aeneid, it seems wise to investigate how far this relationship extends.

¹We know that there were many scholars in the first three centuries who commented upon Vergil, whose works are now lost. It is assumed that the writings of these men formed the basis of what we know as the scholia to Vergil, composed by Servius, Deutero-Servius and others.