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FEDERICA LAZZERINI

ROMULUS' ADYTUM OR ASYLUM? A NEW EXEGETICAL  
PROPOSAL FOR *DE LINGUA LATINA* 5, 8\*

1. *Introduction*

Marcus Terentius Varro, whom Francesco Della Corte (1937, 109) quite appropriately defined “a methodology fanatic” («un fanatico della metodologia»), strived to give his treatise *On the Latin language* a clear and precise structure. Despite the grave loss this work has undergone, only six books (5-10), out of a total of twenty-five, having survived to the present day, we may still appreciate how such structure had been conceived by drawing information from the opening and closing paragraphs of the books we possess. For instance, paragraphs 1-2 from book 5 and 1 from book 8 inform us that the treatise as a whole consisted of three parts: six books (2-7) dedicated to the topic of etymology, six to morphology (8-13), and a final, much larger section dedicated to syntax (books 14-25)<sup>1</sup>. As such, we only possess (and in an incomplete state) the second half of the so-called etymological hexade and the first half of the morphological one.

From 5, 10; 7, 109-110, and 8, 23-24 we also learn that both sections had similar structures. In each section, the author theorized the fundamental principle (respectively, etymology for the origin of words and analogy for their inflection and derivation) in the first three books, ac-

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\*This paper results from a series of ideas I have conceived and reflected upon while preparing my MA thesis, discussed in November 2016. I am profoundly grateful to Prof. Valeria Lomanto, for her ever-precious guidance and suggestions, and to Professors Luciana Repici Cambiano and Davide Ricca, who co-supervised my thesis. I also want to thank the two anonymous reviewers of this article for providing me with a very valuable contribution, and Sebastiano De Angelis for revising the English version of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> However, because this last section has not survived, scholars can only enter into speculation regarding the content of books 14-25. The most widespread theory, that they dealt with syntax, mainly rests on what we read in 8, 1: *Cum oratio natura tripertita esset, ut superioribus libris ostendi, cuius prima pars, quemadmodum vocabula rebus essent imposita, secunda, quo pacto de his declinata in discrimina ierint, tertia, ut ea inter se ratione coniuncta sententiam efferant*. See Collart 1954b, 39-44, Baratin 1989, 202-220, and Blank 2005, 21.

according to the pattern of *disputatio in utramque partem*<sup>2</sup>, and successively illustrated the functioning of said principle. In the second triad of books, the author showed the application of the principle in context, with a great number of examples.

As such, the first triad of the etymological section (now lost) contained a discussion on the utility of etymology as an *ars*, the arguments in favour being exposed in book 2, those against in book 3, and an explanation *de etymologiae forma* in book 4<sup>3</sup>. In the second half – dedicated to “etymology in practice” – we can see Varro applying his etymological method to an impressive amount of words: first, words of everyday use connected to space (book 5), then those connected to time (6), and finally poetic words divided in the same way (book 7)<sup>4</sup>.

By the time Varro decided to undertake his task, the etymological analysis of words was definitely no untrodden territory. On the contrary, the interest for the origin of words and questions concerning the connection between an object or concept and the name denoting it (whether such bond was necessary and “natural” or arbitrary and “conventional”) had been a constant presence in the Greek world, from our earliest literary testimonies of Greek literature (Homer’s and Hesiod’s poems) and all the way through the development of the philosophical speculation and textual criticism. However, etymology did not receive a proper systematization until the advent of Stoicism: the school canonized it as an actual τέχνη and provided it with a more or less rigorous structure, with methodological principles<sup>5</sup> and with a specific place and function<sup>6</sup> within its system of thought. In this regard, the Stoa had to acknowledge a significant debt to Plato, as his *Cratylus* had constituted a milestone and an in-

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<sup>2</sup> This entailed displaying the arguments in favour of a principle and then those against it (or vice versa). On this particular model in *de lingua Latina*, see Ax 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Similarly, books 8-10 (which have survived) present arguments *contra analogian* (8), *pro analogia* (9), and the explanation *de analogiae forma* (10).

<sup>4</sup> On the reasons why the disposition of the subjects in book 7 appears incongruous, see Dahlmann 1932, 44; however, compare with Traglia 1963, 35.

<sup>5</sup> These are known as στοιχεῖα τῆς ἐτυμολογίας and our main source on them is the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Augustine’s treatise *de dialectica*. They consist of a series of processes governed by either phonetic (*similitudo rerum et sonorum*) or semantic derivation (*similitudo rerum ipsarum*), the latter taking place either through contiguity (*per vicinitatem*) or contrariety (*per contrarium*).

<sup>6</sup> A (rather polemic) testimony of the philosopher Diogenianus (fr. 1322 Gercke = Eus. Caes. *Praep. Evang.* 6, 8.2-12) informs us that Chrysippus used to resort to etymology in order to substantiate some of his theories by means of demonstrations.

escapable point of reference for philosophy of language<sup>7</sup>. During the Hellenistic Age, yet another category of savants claimed etymology as their area of expertise: the philologists from Alexandria, who mainly used etymology as an exegetical tool<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, when confronted with such prestigious forerunners, Varro opted for an inclusive solution, developing a method which accounted for both the Stoic approach to the etymological analysis – developed in the wake of Plato's works – and the one employed by the Alexandrians.

In a crucial passage of book 5 of *de lingua Latina*, Varro organizes the *ars etymologica* in four *gradus* ("levels" or "stages" or "steps")<sup>9</sup>, a structure which, to our knowledge, has no precedents<sup>10</sup>. Let us look at how the first three levels are presented:

Varro, *ling.* 5, 7-8<sup>11</sup>

Nunc singulorum verborum origin- es expediam, quorum quattuor explanandi gradus. Infimus [in] quo populus etiam venit: quis	<i>I will now show the origin of each word; such explanation contemplates four levels. The lowest level is that which even the common people can</i>
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<sup>7</sup> Both Plato in his *Cratylus* and the Stoics agreed that names had not arisen spontaneously, but as the result of human imposition (θέσις; see *Crat.* 439c). However, such imposition was not conceived as utterly arbitrary and free of restrictions (as *Cratylus* the naturalist, in Plato's dialogue, would have it), but in accordance with a standard of natural correctness. For Plato, such standard consisted in the utmost affinity with an ideal model of a name-instrument: names must be built so as to best serve their purpose of conveying a reference to a certain thing (*Crat.* 422e-423b); for the Stoics, the standard corresponded to a more generic bond between name and thing (cf. Aug. *dialect.* 6, 11). For a selected bibliography on this, see Sedley 1998 and 2003; Allen 2005; Long 1978 and 2005; Ademollo 2011; Garcea 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Blank 2005, 222-223 provides examples of how both the Stoics and the Alexandrians resorted to etymology «as a criterion for establishing the correct meaning and orthography of Homeric glosses». See also Garcea 2014.

<sup>9</sup> See the thorough discussion in Schröter 1959, 775-777 on how to correctly interpret *gradus*. The scholar comes to the conclusion that both a concrete and an abstract meaning are implied by the term, and furthermore, that «bedeuten hier *gradus* die einzelnen Abschnitte und sind also auch die abstrakten Einheiten einer Teilung». *Contra* Pfaffel 1981, 13, note 2: «Das Bild vom stufenweise Aufstieg ist aber so deutlich und vorherrschend, daß Schröters Komponente b) [i.e. the abstract one] hier nicht vermutet zu werden braucht».

<sup>10</sup> Although, as Piras 1998, 62 rightfully points out, this *argumentum ex silentio* cannot be considered conclusive.

<sup>11</sup> The text presented here, except for the segment marked by expansion, is based on Götz and Schöll's edition. The translation of this passage – as well as that of all the other excerpts quoted in this paper – is mine.

- 5 enim non videt unde ar⟨g⟩e⟨n⟩tofodin⟨a⟩e et viocurus? Secundus quo grammatica descendit antiqua, quae ostendit, quemadmodum quodque poeta
- 10 finxerit verbum, quod⟨que⟩ confinxerit, quod⟨que⟩ declinarit; hic Pacui: rudentum sibilus, hic: incurvicervicum pecus, hic: clamide clupeat b⟨r⟩acchium. Tertius gradus, quo philosophia ascendens
- [8] pervenit atque ea quae in consuetudine communi essent aperire coepit, ut a quo dictum esset oppidum, vicus, via.
- 20
- 25 *Quartus, ubi est aditus et initia regis; quo si non perveniam scientiam, ad opinionem aucupabor*<sup>12</sup>, quod etiam in salute nostra nonnumquam facit quom aegrotamus
- 30 medicus.
- attain – for who does not see where argentofodinae (“silver mines”) and viocurus (“overseer of the roads”) come from? Then there is a second level, reached by the ancient grammatical tradition, which illustrates how a poet has created, forged and derived a word: for example, Pacuvius, when he writes “rudentum sibilus” (“the swish of hawsers”) or “incurvicervicum pecus” (“the herd with bowed necks”)<sup>13</sup> or “clamide clupeat bracchium” (“he shields his arm with the chlamys”)<sup>14</sup>. Then a third level, where philosophy has come up to through its efforts to explain the origins of words of common usage, such as oppidum (“fortified town”), vicus (“village”), via (“road”). The fourth one [...]*
- [8]
- ...which is what our doctor, when dealing with our health, does sometimes, too, if we are sick.*

<sup>12</sup> The section marked by expansion contains the text as transmitted by the fundamental manuscript, F (see below). This transcription interprets the punctuation after *quartus*, *regis*, *scientiam* and *aucupabor* (·) as either light or strong pauses (./:). While the pericope from *quartus* to *regis* (in italic) will be the subject of this paper, the second part of the passage, which is even more challenging to read and interpret correctly, and its problematic editing, will be set aside, out of necessity. This will not affect the exegesis of the pericope at issue. For the sake of completeness, I shall report here the *constitutio textus* adopted by the two most recent editors of the treatise, Kent 1938 and Collart 1954, and their respective translations: *quo si non perveniam <ad> scientiam, at opinionem aucupabor* – Kent: «if I shall not arrive at full knowledge there, at any rate I shall cast about for a conjecture»; Collart: «À ce degré-là, si je ne parviens pas à acquérir la connaissance positive, je resterai du moins à l'affût de l'opinion».

<sup>13</sup> It refers to a pod of dolphins. The word is a calque from the Greek κυρτάχην, -ενος (cf. *LSJ*) and the two forms are famously compared by Quintilian in *inst.* 1, 5.70: *Sed res tota magis Graecos decet, nobis minus succedit: nec id fieri natura puto, sed alienis fauemus, ideoque cum κυρτάχην mirati simus, “incuruicervicum” vix a risu defendimus.*

<sup>14</sup> Frr. 241, 238, 134 Schierl = *TRF* Pacuvius vv. 336, 408, 186.

4 infimus *H editores omnes praeter L. Spengelium* : primus *ceteri codices, L. Spengelius in delevit Scioppus* : is *Mueller, Canal* 6 argentofodinae *Canal* : aretofodine *codices* : argentifodinae *L. Spengelius* 8 descendit *F, Goetz et Schoell* : escendit *Scioppus, L. Spengelius, Mueller, Canal, Kent, Collart* : ascendit *coniecit A. Spengelius* | antiqua quae *F, L. Spengelius, Mueller, Canal, Goetz et Schoell, Kent* : atque *Scioppus* : antiqua *seclusit A. Spengelius* 10-11 *Goetz et Schoell* : qđ cfinxerit · qđ declinarit *codices* : quod confinxerit, quod declinarit *Kent, Collart* : *utrumque quod deleverunt L. Spengelius, Mueller, Canal* : quemadmodum confinxerit, quemadmodum declinarit *A. Spengelius* 16 ascendens *F, Mueller, Canal, A. Spengelius, Goetz et Schoell, Kent, Collart* : escendens *Scioppus, L. Spengelius*

On the one hand, such a structure establishes a hierarchy, in ascending order of difficulty, among the different ways an etymologist can operate<sup>15</sup>; on the other, it pays regard to both the Alexandrian and the Stoic methods. Each level, in fact, pertains to a single category of researchers.

The first level seems to entail the basic decomposition of compound nouns with a clear structure, which any speaker can detect (*quo populus etiam venit*)<sup>16</sup>.

The second entails the decomposition of less clear compounds and lexical connections<sup>17</sup>, particularly those coined by the poets: such a task concerns the Alexandrian philologists (*quo grammatica (d)escendit antiqua*)<sup>18</sup>, who resort to the exegesis of poetic texts and to the analysis and

---

<sup>15</sup> This is true despite the fact that, as has been duly noted (Muller 1910, 171-174; Oko 1937, 164-167), the series lacks balance and coherence. As Piras 1998, 70 sums it up, «Nei primi tre [gradi] infatti è diverso il soggetto e l'oggetto dell'indagine (rispettivamente *populus, grammatica, philosophia* da un lato, composti o parole in genere dalla facile etimologia, lingua dei poeti, lingua comune dall'altro). Nel quarto invece non è ben chiaro chi sia il soggetto dell'indagine (si potrebbe pensare all'etimologo, allo specialista), ma soprattutto è oscuro l'oggetto della ricerca».

<sup>16</sup> The fact that both the given examples are compounds should not lead us to think that only this kind of words are the object of the first stage: see Schröter 1959, 778: «Wie das schwierige *incurvicervicum* der zweiten Stufe lehrt, kommt es hier auf die Durschaubarkeit an, nicht auf die Tatsache, daß es Komposita sind».

<sup>17</sup> See Cavazza 1981, 60: «Ciò che distingue il popolo dal *grammaticus* sarà, quanto alla *declinatio*, il fatto che il primo può cogliere una derivazione, mentre il secondo si muove in un campo dove effettivamente può ricostruire tutto e teorizzare, fornendo anche dei principi fonetici». On the second level see further Schröter 1959, 778-885.

<sup>18</sup> The transmitted text, which establishes the couple *grammatica descendit antiqua ~ philosophia ascendens pervenit*, has raised questions in that it seems to indicate a difference in Varro's judgement of the two disciplines. As Traglia 1963, 41 put it, «vuol forse dire Varrone che se c'è una gradazione fra i due diversi tipi etimologici [...], non c'è però gradazione fra le due diverse discipline che li ricercano e li coltivano e che vengono comunque messe press'a poco sullo stesso piano, sicché l'una *descendit* per mostrarci l'esatto significato delle parole e delle espressioni coniate dai poeti, l'altra *ascendit* nel tentativo di *aperire quae in consuetudine communi essent?*». Moreover, as noted by Piras 1998, 74, «la serie dei gradi dell'etimologia sembra avere un ordine crescente di valore e perciò mantenendo *descendit* non emerge la maggiore competenza delle spiegazioni della

comprehension of obscure terms in order to build a set of grammatical rules and inflectional paradigms (*ostendit quemadmodum quodque poeta finxerit verbum, quodque confinxerit, quodque declinarit*)<sup>19</sup>.

The third level<sup>20</sup> consists of retracing the chain of lexical derivations a common word has undergone back to its corresponding primitive (*ea quae in consuetudine communi essent aperire coepit*) by reversing the phonetic transformations words are subjected to in the course of time and through the derivational process; this can be done by means of the operations which Varro had just illustrated (in paragraph 6) – *demptio, additio, traiectio, commutatio* of letters and *productio, correptio, adiectio, detractio* of syllables – and of the “principles of etymology” (στοιχεῖα τῆς ἐτυμολογίας)<sup>21</sup> established by the Stoics. This is the area of expertise of the philosophers (*quo philosophia ascendens pervenit*).

Finally, as mentioned, there is a fourth step; but our understanding of the object of study at this degree of the etymological analysis is significantly challenged by cryptic wording, which makes this section of the text very difficult and obscure. The interpretation of the passage essentially depends on the textual emendations which have been put into effect; but these, in turn, are dictated by how the editor interprets the passage. All of this results in a hermeneutic circle not easily solved.

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*grammatica antiqua* rispetto alle etimologie del primo grado». Based on these considerations, most editors and scholars therefore opted for the emendation first proposed by Scioppus: [d]escendit. On the other hand, one can also find reasons to defend *descendit*, as Götz-Schöll do: the differentiation between the two traditions fits perfectly in Varro’s reflection (see again Piras, *ibid.*), and furthermore, as observed by Deschamps 1990, 594, *descendere* might well convey the sense of «approfondissement de l’étude», which is what is to be expected at the second level of the etymological analysis. The problem is not easily solved; however, since it has no significant repercussions on the issue at the centre of this paper, I shall abstain from taking a position on the matter.

<sup>19</sup> The correct understanding of this series of technical terms (*fingerere confingere declinare*) is no easy task. According to Barwick 1957, 80-82, they go back to a “theory of word coinage” («Neubildungen») developed by the Stoics; by contrast, Schröter (1959, 778-793) leads such theory back to the Peripatetics. On *fingerere*, Schröter 1959, 787 says that «doch kann es auch bei Varro wie Ciceros *facere, novare* und Quintilians *facere, fingerere* jede Art der Wortbildung bedeuten»; Piras 1998, 74 compares various *loci* where Varro seems to use the verb with different nuances (generic linguistic coinage, derivation or inflection, onomatopoeic coinage). The meaning of *declinare* and its repercussions on morphology fall under the discussion of books 8-10 of the treatise. Interpreting *confingere* represents a bigger challenge, not least because Varro hardly ever employs this word, and rather uses *coniungere* and *componere* to express the meaning of “to compose” or “to compound”. However, this matter needs to be set aside as it falls outside the scope of the present paper.

<sup>20</sup> On this level see Pfaffel 1981, 17-30.

<sup>21</sup> See note 5 above.



This paper addresses precisely this central part of paragraph 8, i.e. the passage concerning the *quartus gradus etymologiae*, and specifically the opening expression. In the following sections, I shall first provide an outline of the editing of the passage which has been advanced so far, and then opt for the *constitutio textus* which I find most appropriate: this will result in a more satisfying reading of the content of the passage.

## 2. Textual reconstruction

The fundamental manuscript (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, LI 10)<sup>22</sup>, commonly referred to as F, dates to the 11<sup>th</sup> century and originally comes from the Monte Cassino monastery. It is scattered with errors<sup>23</sup> and presents a few significant gaps and several minor ones, some transpositions, and a conspicuous number of glosses on rare or ancient terms used by Varro. Some of the gaps may be restored with the aid of the collation made by Petrus Victorius in 1526, when the manuscript was still in a better state.

Before we begin the discussion of the passage, it is best to present an essential prospect of the editions which are relevant to it.

- (1) Reference will be made to some of the earliest editions of the complete text of the *de lingua Latina*: the *editio princeps*, by Pomponius Laetus (Rome 1471? The date and place of issue are unspecified); the edition of Antonius Augustinus (Rome 1554, also known as *editio vulgata*), Marcus Vertranus Maurus (Lyon 1563), Adrianus Turnebus (Paris 1566), and Gaspar Scioppus (Inglostadt 1602).
- (2) The first scientific edition was that of Leonhard Spengel (Berlin 1826), who, from the years immediately following its publishing,

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<sup>22</sup> A thorough *conspectus codicum* may be found in the prefaces to the critical editions of L. Spengel (1826, v-xviii), Müller (1933, xi-xxxi), A. Spengel (1885, ii-xxviii) and Götz-Schöll (1910, xi-xxxv). A digital version of the manuscript (encoded as Plut.51.10) may be consulted on the website of the Laurentian Library:

<http://teca.bmlonline.it/TecaRicerca/index.jsp> (last consulted 01/03/2017).

<sup>23</sup> It is characterized by inconsistent spelling and numerous cases of haplography. Two hands can be recognized (F<sup>1</sup> and F<sup>2</sup>) which provided interlinear corrections, plus a third one (F<sup>3</sup>) which corrected in the margin; it is commonly accepted that the correctors act *ope ingenii* and that their emendations are sometimes damaging rather than corrective. See the *prolegomena* of the Götz-Schöll edition, p. XIX, and the relevant section in Reynolds.

declared himself unsatisfied with it<sup>24</sup> and began working on a second edition; this was completed only after his death and was published by his son Andreas (see below).

- (3) Karl O. Müller (Leipzig 1833).
- (4) Pietro Canal (Venice 1854), with facing Italian translation.
- (5) Andreas Spengel's edition (Berlin 1885) contains part of the conjectures conceived by his father throughout the years – some of which had already appeared in his *Emendationum Varronianarum specimen*, published in 1830 – and various contributions from Andreas himself.
- (6) Georg Götz and Friedrich Schöll (Leipzig 1910).
- (7) Roland G. Kent (London 1938), with facing English translation.
- (8) Jean Collart's edition (Paris 1954a), with facing French translation, is partial, as it only redacts book 5.
- (9) Finally, Antonio Traglia's critically reviewed edition (Turin 1974) will be taken into account.

The manuscript transmits the following text:

*Quartus ubi est aditus et initia regis*

The literal translation is, “The fourth (*scil.* level is) where lies the entrance and the origins of the king”. This text is first of all problematic from a lexical point of view: what “entrance” (*aditus*) is Varro talking about, and what does he mean by “the origins of the king” (*initia regis*)? Is the latter a proverbial phrase – as was suggested (on no grounds whatsoever, according to Canal) by Turnebus – or is Varro actually referring to some king from the partly historical, partly mythical past of Rome?

Let us look into both issues.

### 2.1. *aditus*

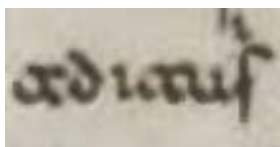
The first two scientific editions, issued by Spengel senior and Müller, retained the transmitted *aditus* in the sense of “entrance”, “access”; in Müller's edition, this choice was combined with the emendation of the

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<sup>24</sup> «Minime ex animi nostri sententia scriptor expolitus; princeps enim quam dicunt est editio illa, quae quot bonis tot abundat malis» (Spengel 1830, 3).

following *et initia* in *ad initia* (see below, § 2.2), subsequently rendering a meaning like “the access to the origins”.

Years later, Andreas Spengel first detected an interlinear correction in this section of the manuscript, similar to the horizontal bar serving as a tachygraphic contraction for nasal syllables, which the copyist regularly uses; such a sign would therefore correct *aditus* in *adytum* (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** *de lingua Latina* 5, 8 (F: 1v, line 4)  
Detail: *aditus* with interlinear correction above the *s*  
Source: bmlonline (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Online), digitalized manuscript.

This discernment endorsed an intuition which had already been voiced, long before, by Scioppus, who had suspected *aditus* might be an erroneous spelling for *adytum* (“sanctuary”). Now, if *aditum* were to be recognized as the intended *recta lectio*, the editor’s intervention would amount to no more than an orthographic correction (*aditum* > *adytum*), which seems all the more plausible in view of how frequently similar mistakes occur in F, especially with words transliterated from Greek<sup>25</sup>.

In truth, Pietro Canal (who, in his edition, had adopted Müller’s text), in his notes to the text, had already suggested correcting *aditus* to *adytus*. Such an idea was not without justifications, as the Latin word is obviously a formal calque from Greek, and the adjective ἄδυτος, -ον is attested, as a noun, both in a masculine (ὁ ἄδυτος) and a neutral (τὸ ἄδυτον) form, but the meaning does not change: «innermost sanctuary or shrine» (*LSJ*), «la parte más interior y sagrada del templo» (*DGE*). Thus, before Spengel junior’s insight allowed the identification of a much more familiar word (and gender) of the Latin tradition (*adytum*), Canal had already inferred that the controversial passage might conceal an allusion to a sanctuary.

On the other hand, a number of scholars have defended *aditus* as the correct *lectio*. Theodor Birt (1928, 41) read it as an equivalent of *vestibulum* (“vestibule”, “entrance”) on account of Cic. *orat.* 50 and Petron. 28:

<sup>25</sup> Examples of the sort are scattered throughout the transmitted text and the exchange between *i* and *y* is especially frequent: for instance, *ethimologicen* (=ἐτυμολογικήν) in 5, 1; *limphe* for *lymphae* in 5, 71; *polypus* and *yppo potamios* for *polypus* and *hippo(s) potamios* in 5, 78. Erroneous spellings also occur in words written in the Greek alphabet: e.g. CTOEBE for στοιβή in 5, 183; ΛΕΤΕ for λήθη in 7, 42.

in his opinion, only this meaning matched the topic of “steps”, which is how Birt specifically interpreted *gradus*, whereas *adytum* would have been “unfitting” («unpassend»).

The same line of thought was shared by Robert Schröter in the setting of the *Entretiens* which took place in Vandœuvres in September 1962 and were published in 1963 (henceforth referred to as “Schröter 1963”). On page 96, Schröter defended Müller’s text (*aditus ad initia*, «Zugang zu den Anfängen» in his translation) and, in response to J.H. Waszink<sup>26</sup>, he countered that, as plausible as the evolution *aditum* (= *adytum*) > *aditus* was, so was the one in the opposite direction; furthermore, he continued, given that, in general, the corrections in the manuscript – both from the first and the second hand – are often pejorative, neither reading (*aditus* or *aditum*) had more credibility than the other.

Also in Vandœuvres, Alain Michel spoke in favour of the preservation of *aditus* (p. 116) and suggested considering it a sort of a double («doublet») of *initia*. This would allow us to perceive an expressional parallelism between the four etymological stages: the wording *quartus, ubi est aditus et initia regis* would be an equivalent of \**quo adit rex*, which, in turn, replicates the wording of the three previous stages:

- (1) *primus, quo populus venit;*
- (2) *secundus, quo grammatica (d)escendit antiqua;*
- (3) *tertius gradus, quo philosophia ascendens pervenit;*
- (4) *quartus, ubi est aditus et initia regis = \*quo adit rex*<sup>27</sup>.

## 2.2. et initia regis

Even more than with the correct reading of *aditus*, scholars have been in dispute with one another about the second part of the pericope, related to “the origins of the king”.

A correction mentioned above – of *et in ad*, resulting in *aditus ad initia* (“the access to the origins”) – was first proposed by the editor of the *vulgata*, Augustinus, and later accepted by Müller and Schröter (1959).

<sup>26</sup> Waszink had objected (Schröter 1963, 113) that *aditus* is clearly corrected in *aditum* in the manuscript, and therefore the point of departure had to be that reading.

<sup>27</sup> One ought to plausibly explain why Varro did not, in fact, use such an expression, but instead broke the *concinntas* of the series. It might be pointed out that, first of all, the series is actually unbalanced in its logical content (see note 15 above), and that the fourth degree already stands out for a number of reasons. Secondly, Varro’s style is quite famous for its indulgence to *variatio*, a fact which, though it constitutes no hard evidence, is probably enough to prevent this kind of variation within a paragraph from raising any eyebrows.

On a palaeographical level, the confusion between & and *ad* is not at all implausible; however, objections related to the phrase's meaning were raised in Vandœuvres (Schröter 1963). Antonio Traglia (p. 112) declared himself reluctant to accept *aditus ad initia* as this would make the fourth level the starting point, rather than the end point, of the etymological knowledge; Hellfried Dahlmann (p. 115), instead, contested the redundancy of such an expression, as the meaning "the origins"/"the beginning of the king" is adequately expressed by *initia* alone. I find both objections persuasive enough.

The correct interpretation and accurate translation of *regis* posed no fewer problems: which "king" is Varro referring to, and why should he hint at a king at all in this context? Götz-Schöll – in conformity with the cautious, conservative approach which typically distinguishes them as editors – placed the *crux desperationis* before *regis*.

Several bolder editors endeavoured to identify the mentioned king. Since in the following paragraph (9) Latinus and Romulus are explicitly named as the embodiment of the origins of the Roman people<sup>28</sup>, many have connected the two passages together and read the *rex* of 8 as an allusion to Latinus. Spengel senior went so far as to propose (in the apparatus) the integration *initia* <*verborum Latini*> *regis*. This proposal was first contested by Franz Skutsch (1897, 96-97), and later by Schröter (1963, 113). The former demurred that the reference to the *verba* would point to an identity with what Varro presents as the object of the former three stages; the latter stated that it would not be legitimate to identify the *rex* of this passage specifically with Latinus, rather than with Romulus or Numa Pompilius (who is mentioned in *ling.* 7, 3), for the three, he argued, are placed on the same footing by Varro as sovereigns of an ancient, remote time.

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<sup>28</sup> *Volui praeterire eos, qui poetarum modo verba cum sint ficta expediunt. Non enim videbatur consentaneum quae(re)re me in eo verbo quod finxisset Ennius causam, negligere quod ante rex Latinus finxisset, cum poeticis multis verbis magis delecter quam utar, antiquis magis utar quam delecter. An non potius mea verba illa quae hereditate a Romulo rege venerunt quam quae a poeta Livio relicta? – «I wanted to go beyond those who so much as explain how the words of poetic registry have been forged. It seemed unreasonable that I would look into the origin of a word coined by Ennius, but overlook another coined by king Latinus way before – all the more so as I gain more pleasure than usefulness from the poetic words, more usefulness than pleasure from the ancient ones. Or perhaps the words I have inherited from king Romulus are not even more mine than those bequeathed by the poet Livius (scil. Andronicus)?».*

By contrast, Spengel junior's suggestion was bound to gain widespread appreciation: he gave up all attempts to single out a particular king and read *rex* as a more generic allusion – as he clarified in his critical apparatus – to the *rex sacrorum*, a figure central to the religious and political system of archaic Rome and, as such, a chronological reference not unlike the one conveyed by king Latinus or Romulus. Both Kent and Collart accepted this interpretation, as we can tell from their translations («the high-priest» and «le *rex* (roi <des sacrifices>)), respectively).

While all the scholars mentioned so far endeavoured to maintain the transmitted *regis*, others came up with various emendations. Augustinus printed *ad initia rei* (“to the origins of the thing”), where *res* is likely to mean “nature”, and Vertranus similarly corrected the text into *et initia rerum*; the latter was taken on by Müller in his edition. However, both hypotheses of confusion (*rei* and *rerum* for *regis*) rest on very thin palaeographical evidence. Birt rather suggested emending it as *initia regia*, under the assumption that the expression alluded to “the age of the kings” and that the genitive *regis* could not convey this meaning with satisfying perspicuity.

Other conjectures abide by a certain trend of interpretation of this passage which will be discussed further on (§ 3.1); for the time being, let us just bear in mind that such interpretation presumes that the *quartus gradus etymologiae* ought to concern the study of a sort of *arcana scientia*<sup>29</sup>, within a religious and mystic context. Thus, for example, Canal followed Müller in printing *rerum*<sup>30</sup>, but suggested (aside from the aforementioned correction *aditus* > *adytus*) altering *regis* into *<Ce>reris*, which would stand as an emblematic reference to divinity<sup>31</sup>. Refer to § 3.1 for a discussion of this proposal.

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<sup>29</sup> See Oko 1937, 167-168: «Post *adytum* vocabulum *initia* exstat, quod ex graeco τελεταί in latinum sermonem conversum est et in certa quadam verborum constructione arcana sacra sive mysteria significare potest. [...] Quae cum ita sint, constructionem duorum vocabulorum *adytus et initia* locum inaccessum et arcanum, i. e. vocabulorum explanandorum rationem in quarto gradu significare affirmari potest». See also Schröter 1963, 108-111.

<sup>30</sup> The acceptance of a text as reconstructed by a previous editor (often Müller, as in this specific case), but with a certain reluctance, voiced in the notes, stands as a distinguishing feature of Canal's editing approach.

<sup>31</sup> «È da notare che alla filosofia si assegna il terzo gradino; onde il quarto dee riservarsi a cose più alte, cioè alla scienza arcana; e Varrone vi entra in fatto, spiegando i nomi *caelum, terra, ignis, Venus*, ec. Onde non è improbabile che debba leggersi *adytus* (non *aditus*) *et initia [Ce]reris*».

Emil Vetter (1958, 272) distanced himself from the interpretation related to the *rex sacrorum* (dismissing Kent's translation as "naïve") and rather connected, like Canal, this alleged mystic content to a specific cult – this time, the one of the Samothracians and the Cabeiri. Relying on a number of passages where Varro mentions this cult<sup>32</sup>, he conjectures *regis* to be a *falsa lectio* for *-reces* and a word, *intima*, to have been lost due to quasi-haplography, thus reconstructing: *initia* <*intima Samoth*>*reces* ("the secret initiations of the Samothracian cult"). Of all the single elements which build up this hypothesis – the loss of *intima* after *initia*, the loss of *Samot-* (probably with no *h*, often missing in F) after *intima*, and the corruption of *regis* for *reces* – not all are plausible *per se*. But the hypothesis is utterly weak as a whole, first of all because none of these elements is sound if the others are not<sup>33</sup>. The second problem is that, although it is true that elsewhere Varro uses the Ionic form *Samothreces*<sup>34</sup> (as Vetter duly notes), that only constitutes one out of five occurrences of the name in the treatise, and the other four are all the Attic form<sup>35</sup>.

Skutsch explicitly emphasized the religious character he detected in the passage by suggesting that *regis* may be a *falsa lectio* for *religionis*; but this conjecture is weak, again, on the grounds of palaeography<sup>36</sup>. As for the emendation proposed by Fritz Walter (1918), <*eg*>*regi*<*is*>, it serves an interpretation of the passage akin to that of Skutsch and Spengel junior: in his opinion, the *egregius* is he who stands out of the "herd" (*grex*) of the erudite who only get to the second and third levels<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. *ling.* 5, 58: *Terra enim et Caelum, ut* <*Sa*>*mothracum* (add. Laetus) *initia docent, sunt dei magni.*

<sup>33</sup> The loss of *Samot(h)-* can only be conceived if we accept the previous existence of *intima*, which results, itself, from an editorial intervention. At the same time, there is no point in correcting *regis* into *reces* unless it is to be attached to *Samot(h)-*.

<sup>34</sup> 7, 34: *Casmilus nominatur Samothreces mysteriis diis quidam amminister diis Magnis.*

<sup>35</sup> These are all in the same passage (*ling.* 5, 58-59): <*Sa*>*mothracum initia*; <*Sa*>*mo*<*th*>*racia* (corr. Laetus ex *ābracia*); *hi Samot*<*h*>*ra*<*ces*> *dii*; *quod Samot*<*h*>*ra*<*ces*> *θεοὶ δυνάτοί.* As none of the emendations affect the ending of the words, we can appreciate that the name is never in the Ionic form in this passage.

<sup>36</sup> In fact, the *Lexicon abbreviatarum* edited by Cappelli does attest a striking similarity between the tachygraphic abbreviation for *regis* and the one for *religiosis* (not *religionis*), which are only differentiated by the syllable *-li-*; however, these abbreviations occur in much later manuscripts (dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries).

<sup>37</sup> «Varro unterscheidet also zwischen dem *populus*, dem *grex* der Gebildeten und den *egregii*». The five occurrences of the adjective *egregius* in Varro (*ling.* 5, 32; 9, 12; *rust.* 1, 2; 1, 16; *ARH* 1, 1) show no similarity to the sense, implied by Skutsch's conjecture, of a distinct figure with special perks: there, *egregius* only bears the qualitative connotation of a moral/aesthetic judgement.

C. Brakman (1932: 1-2) postulated an error due to palaeographical confusion and advocated the emendation of *regis* in *rep(er)is*, rendering the sense: “The fourth (*scil.* level is) where lies the sanctuary [*adytum*] and where you shall find the origins”. Two separate objections to Brakman’s conjecture may be raised. One rests, again, on palaeography<sup>38</sup>: even if we admit that the syllable *-per-* was abbreviated (which, to be fair, is not unusual in Lombardic scripts like the one of our manuscript), we would still need to answer for a very unlikely confusion between a *g* and a *p*. The former, in this class of scripts, always exhibits a very round, backwards-curved stroke, while the stem of the latter is always drawn with a neat, vertical stroke. The second objection addresses the tone that the phrase would assume with this emendation: a verb in the second person (even if it was meant as an impersonal potential) sounds out of place in this passage, where Varro’s exposition of the etymological method has much of a didactic, abstract nuance, and little of the practical tone that the second person would suggest.

Finally, during the discussion in Vandœuvres, Dahlmann proposed *et initia regni* (p. 108), an emendation criticized by Schröter (p. 112), who maintained that the word *regnum* was too abstract (compared to a reference to a *rex*) and, as such, distorted the “concrete” nature of the fourth level<sup>39</sup>. Actually, Dahlmann’s proposed emendation does not seem out of place when one considers that “the kingdom” corresponds to a very specific and circumstantiated phase of Roman history, enough not to “strip *regnum* of all notions of time or space”. If anything, one could rather agree with Traglia, who, too, objected to Dahlmann’s proposal (p. 108) as unnecessary, pointing out that the transmitted *regis* could easily serve the purpose of an allusion to the monarchy of the archaic time. The phrase, then, ought to be rendered as “the fourth level is where lies the sanctuary and the beginning of the kingdom”.

All these single conjectures, in spite of their higher or lower plausibility with regards to textual criticism, may be otherwise supported or discredited in light of different aspects. Let us then take our analysis to the next level.

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<sup>38</sup> My considerations are mainly based on Cappelli and Maunde Thompson 1912, 348-355.

<sup>39</sup> «Die von Herr Dahlmann auch weiterhin erwogene Konjektur *regni* erweckt deshalb Bedenken, weil *regnum* ohne nähere Bestimmung rein begrifflich “Königsherrschaft” als Institution bedeutet, also von aller zeitlicher (oder räumlicher) Vorstellung entleert ist. Dadurch würde der tatsächliche Sinn der vierten Stufe verfälscht».



### 3. Interpretation and proposal

When facing this particular pericope of *ling.* 5, 8, there being no *variae lectiones* to choose between, but only very ambiguous wording, it is inevitable that different editors and scholars shape the given text so as to serve their own conception of what the final and most difficult stage of the etymological analysis should consist of. Moreover, because this *quartus gradus* seems to be an original innovation of Varro, one cannot seek aid in the comparison with other contributions to the subject of *ars etymologica*, for these only account for Varro's 1-3 levels. Therefore, perhaps in this case more than ever, all hypotheses are bound to remain such. However, not all of them are equally plausible with regards to the context at issue.

#### 3.1. The arcana scientia, the mysteries and the rex sacrorum

As has been mentioned, according to some of the editors (Canal, Andreas Spengel, Kent, Collart) and to many scholars, the object of study of the fourth stage is supposed to be some kind of *arcana scientia* that even transcends philosophy (which pertains, as has been argued, to the third stage): something elusive, escaping the majority of those who venture the etymological analysis and even Varro himself, as he explicitly admits<sup>40</sup>. From Spengel junior on, as we have seen, great favour was given to the assumption that this *arcana scientia* is somehow related to the religious cult of archaic Rome, which was centred on figures such as the *pontifices maximi*, the *reges sacrorum* (or *sacrificuli*) and the *augures*, to the point that Skutsch even wanted to emend *regis* to *religionis*.

Collart went even further than that in suggesting that the *arcana scientia* at issue had a Pythagorean connotation: in his edition of book 5 of *de lingua Latina*, in the notes to the text, he postulated that reaching the fourth etymological level would result in disclosing the mystic, religious, and philosophical truths encapsulated in the words, which, in the Pythagorean view, were endowed with an evocative, almost magic power.

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<sup>40</sup> 5, 9: *Quodsi summum gradum non attigero, tamen secundum praeteribo, quod non solum ad Aristophanis lucernam, sed etiam ad Cleant(h)is lucubravi* – «In fact, even if I cannot reach the highest level, nonetheless I shall go beyond the second one, for I have spent whole nights studying not only Aristophanes, but also Cleanthes». Aristophanes of Byzantium and Cleanthes of Assos are mentioned here as the most prestigious spokespersons for, respectively, the Alexandrian philologists (whose prerogative is the second level) and the Stoic philosophers (whose prerogative is the third one).

The very fact that Varro proves so reticent, not to say laconic, when defining the fourth level would corroborate this interpretation, for the exoteric character of the Pythagorean cult, and its exclusivity for “initiates”, is well known<sup>41</sup>. A similar line of thought was shared by Franco Cavazza in his monography (1981, 60 ff) and even Michel, in his work which appeared shortly after the *Entretiens* of Vandœuvres (1965), reiterated this position – although within a general acceptance of Schröter’s theory, as we shall see.

While it is true that, as Collart, Michel and others have observed, Pythagoras is explicitly mentioned just a little below in the text (paragraph 11), one must point out that that mention pertains a different topic: a bipolar classification of the principles of reality<sup>42</sup>. Given that this issue has nothing to do strictly with etymology, the naming of Pythagoras in that context offers inconclusive evidence for our passage.

By contrast, there seems to be more soundness to the emendation proposed by Canal (*initia* <Ce>*reris*), who, as briefly mentioned above, identified the *arcana scientia* («scienza arcana» in his own words) with the cult of Ceres. The loss of *Ce-* from quasi-haplography is, indeed, acceptable, especially since the confusion between *c* and *r* is listed among the typical errors of F<sup>43</sup>; and then one might conjecture an interpolation to have taken place, intended to amend *reris*, which does not fit in this context. The palaeographical argument is thus not strong, but not inadmissible. Furthermore, although Varro does not give more space to the etymology of Ceres’ name than to others in the *de lingua Latina*, nor does he stress a particular prominence among deities, *initia Cereris* is, indeed, a documented expression, and in one particular passage of the *Res rusticae* Varro himself explains its meaning “the mysteries of Ceres”<sup>44</sup>. This connection to Ceres was also taken on by Jan Oko (1937, 168).

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<sup>41</sup> This idea, and the recognition of a Pythagorean influence widespread in the whole *de lingua Latina*, was taken up again by Collart, later in the same year, in his monography (Collart 1954b). For the section concerning the four *gradus etymologiae*, see p. 275.

<sup>42</sup> *Pythagoras Samius ait omnium rerum initia esse bina ut finitum et infinitum, bonum et malum, vitam et mortem, diem et noctem*. However, see Blank’s persuasive argument (2008, 59 ff) about the distinction between the bipartition, which is actually ascribed to Pythagoras, and the quadripartition called upon in the next paragraph, which should rather be connected to a Stoic matrix.

<sup>43</sup> See the *prolegomena* in Götz-Schöll’s edition, p. xxvi. Examples of the sort are *farcimina*, a scribal correction from *faccimina* in 5, 111; *ferundum* for *fecundum* (corr. Franciscus Rholandellus) in 6, 9; *role rolis role* for *cole colis cole* (corr. Müller) in 9, 75.

<sup>44</sup> *Rust.* 3, 1.5: *Nec sine causa terram eandem appellabant matrem et Cererem, et qui eam colerent, piam et utilem agere vitam credebant atque eos solos reliquos esse ex stirpe*

At any rate, the common ground shared by all these explanations is the assumption that the reason why the *quartus gradus* is so obscure, and often beyond the understanding of the etymologist, is that it is connected to a higher and more mysterious discipline than philosophy (an *arcana scientia*, precisely) – be it a cult of Oriental provenance (the Pythagorean, the Samothracian<sup>45</sup>, or the cult of Ceres) or the archaic Roman religion which pivoted around institutional roles such as the *rex sacrorum*.

Let us now review in detail this line of interpretation, starting by providing a brief account of Schröter's *exposé* in *Vandœuvres*. Through an analysis of our sources on the matter<sup>46</sup>, the scholar showed that the concept of a mystery only accessible to initiates was well known in antiquity and was also seized by the Stoics<sup>47</sup>. Therefore, he argued, it is not unlikely that Varro had drawn this idea from that tradition and introduced it in his treatise. Nevertheless, this motif of mystery and initiation cannot fit, as it does in the fragments of the Stoics, in a philosophical frame, because philosophy already has its privileged domain at the third stage (p. 91). However, the same «Mysterienvergleich» (*sic* Schröter) also occurs in other contexts, such as the domain of grammar conceived, as it was by the Alexandrian philologists, as a τέχνη (*ars*)<sup>48</sup>; that is what Varro means – according to Schröter – when he talks about *adytum et initia*.

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*Saturni regis. Cui consentaneum est, quod initia vocantur potissimum ea quae Cereri fiunt sacra* – «And it was not without a reason that they (*scil.* our ancestors) called the same earth “Mother” and “Ceres”, and that those who cultivated it believed they were leading a pious and profitable life and that they were the only legacy left from King Saturnus' offspring. Thus, it stands to reason that especially the rites consecrated to Ceres are called “initiations”». The same expression can be found in 2, 4.9 (but one should bear in mind that here the word *Cereri* is the result of textual editing); see also Liv. 31, 47.2.

<sup>45</sup> Vetter's suggestion (see above, § 2.2) was accepted by Piras (1998, 65), who also read *initia* as an equivalent of *mysteria*, or τελεταί.

<sup>46</sup> Schröter quoted Epiph. *adv. haeres.* 3, 2.9 (SVF 1, 538): καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς μυστικὰ σχήματα ἔλεγεν εἶναι καὶ κλήσεις ἱεράς, καὶ δαδούχον ἔφασκεν εἶναι τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ τὸν κόσμον μυστήριον καὶ τοὺς κατόχους τῶν θείων τελεστὰς ἔλεγε; EM 750.16 (SVF 2, 1008): Χρῦσιππος δὲ ἦρσι, τοὺς περὶ τῶν θείων λόγους εἰκότως καλεῖσθαι τελετάς; Sen. *epist.* 95.64: *Sicut sanctorum tantum initiati sciunt, ita in philosophia arcana illa admissis receptisque in sacra ostenduntur, at praecepta et alia eiusmodi profanis quoque nota sunt; nat. 7, 30.6: Eleusin servat quod ostendat revisentibus; rerum natura sacra sua non semel tradit nos credimus, in vestibulo eius haeremus. Illa arcana non promiscue nec omnibus patent; reducta et interiore sacrario clausa sunt, ex quibus aliud haec aetas, aliud quae post nos subibit aspiciet.*

<sup>47</sup> However, this concept was certainly not exclusive to the Stoics, as seems to be implied by the author.

<sup>48</sup> Schröter quoted Quint. *inst.* 1, 4.6: *Ne quis igitur tamquam parva fastidiat grammatices elementa, non quia magnae sit operae consonantes a vocalibus discernere ipsasque eas in semivocalium numerum mutarumque partiri, sed quia interiora velut sacri huius adenti-*

Thus, with the addition of Michel's suggestion, which has been referred above (§ 2.1), to consider *aditus* (not *adytum*) as a double of *initia* in its sense of "origin"<sup>49</sup>, it seems that the debate in Vandœuvres alone offers at least three different readings of the phrase as a whole:

- |   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | <i>adytum</i> "sanctuary"<br><i>initia</i> "initiations" | } | reference to the mysteries                              |
| 2 | <i>aditus</i> "entrance"<br><i>initia</i> "origins"      | } | chronological reference                                 |
| 3 | <i>adytum</i> "sanctuary"<br><i>initia</i> "origins"     | → | reference to the mysteries<br>→ chronological reference |

After ensuring that the reading of *adytum et initia* as a *Mysterienvergleich*, possibly associated with a chronological indication, is, indeed, possible (by means of the analysis of the sources we have seen), Schröter addressed the issue of explaining how this motif of mystery could be connected to the *rex* evoked immediately thereafter. Harking back to Latte's work on religious figures and institutions of ancient Rome (1960, 395), the scholar asserted that the tendency to consider *rex* an allusion to the *rex sacrorum* (Spengel junior, Kent, Collart) is not supported by what we know of Roman history, as this role in archaic Rome had nothing to do with the mysteries (p. 93).

Therefore, Schröter deemed more plausible the alternative explanation – often brought forward by the editors, from Leonhard Spengel on – that *rex* indicates just a monarch; however, not specifically Latinus nor any other, because, in his opinion, we are given no clue to single out one person in particular; the expression *initia regis* would then convey a

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*bus apparebit multa rerum subtilitas, quae non modo acuere ingenia puerilia sed exercere altissimam quoque eruditionem possit.*

<sup>49</sup> For what specifically concerns *initia*, yet another reading had been brought forward by Richard A. Reitzenstein 1897, 184: according to him, the word should be considered an equivalent of the Greek ἀρχαί, which denotes the monosyllabic roots of words; Varro's use of this concept would reflect an influence from Philoxenus. Reitzenstein's proposal was rejected by Götz-Schöll, who rather favoured the connection of *initia* to the *mysteria* (see p. 246 of their edition), and by Muller 1910, 171-174. Dahlmann 1932, 15 remarked that «diese στοιχεῖα sind bei Varro von gar keiner Bedeutung und passen auch nicht in die Reihe der drei anderen Klassen». Oko added further arguments against this proposal (pp. 160-162). In addition, one might observe that Varro rather uses *principia* to refer to lexical roots (as we can appreciate in *ling.* 6, 36-39).

general reference to the most ancient time in Roman history, precisely the age of the kings<sup>50</sup>. Even the fact that *regis* is a singular genitive, not plural, could be explained (p. 96): because the number of the Roman kings is quite low, the singular could be used with a collective sense, as a sort of synecdoche<sup>51</sup>.

This ancient king, then, would have played the role of a “maker of language” («Wortbildner»). This idea was reinforced by Michel<sup>52</sup>, who referred to Plato’s *Cratylus* and ascribed to the *rex* of the passage (be he identified with “one *rex latinus* or the other”) the role of the ancient law-giver who was also a name-giver<sup>53</sup>.

### 3.2. *Romulus’ asylum*

I would now try to add my own contribution to the complex mosaic of interpretations of the passage. Some plausible arguments can be advanced in favour of reading the phrase *ubi est aditus/adytum et initia regis* as an allusion to the so-called Romulus’ asylum, an episode from Roman history perhaps less renowned than the Rape of the Sabine women but, like the latter, connected to the idea of the Roman people having originated from a mixture of various peoples. This association – which, to my knowledge, has never been suggested before – was inspired from the reading of Emma Dench’s monography (2005) on the origins and development of Roman identity with an ethnic and linguistic characterization.

According to our sources<sup>54</sup>, Romulus founded a “sanctuary” (*asylum*) in a glade between two woods on the Capitoline Hill; it consisted of a temple consecrated to a deity and was intended as a shelter for the suppliants coming from all peoples and all social statuses. The conspicuous number of beseechers who flowed there later merged in the recently

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<sup>50</sup> By contrast, Piras 1998, 66-67, while agreeing with Schröter in his rejection of the interpretation related to the *rex sacrificulus*, then distanced himself from him in advocating the identification of the *rex* with Latinus or Romulus.

<sup>51</sup> Schröter also brought forward a *locus similis* for this use of *rex* as a collective singular: *de vita populi Romani* fr. 13 Riposati: *quia omnia regis delubra parva facta*. In light of this consideration, one also understands why Traglia rejected Dahlmann’s proposal (to emend *regis* to *regni*) as unnecessary (see above, § 2.2).

<sup>52</sup> As mentioned above, Michel had found Schröter’s argument very persuasive: he speaks of a mystery which has finally been thrown light on (p. 70).

<sup>53</sup> See *Crat.* 388e-389d, where the idea is expressed that the νομοθέτης (“law-giver”) was also ὀνομάτων θέτης (“name-giver”). Michel’s stance was later endorsed by Piras (1998, 67-68).

<sup>54</sup> Liv. 1, 8.6; Plut. *Rom.* 9; Flor. 1, 1.9; Vell. 1, 8.5-6; D. H. 2, 15.

founded city of Rome, increasing its yet exiguous population and thus contributing to the building of its first core of citizens.

Is it possible that the obscure wording of the *quartus gradus etymologiae* conceals an allusion to this particular episode?

First of all, a reflection on the lexicon is imperative. Both *adytum* and *asylum* are Hellenisms. Something has already been said above (§ 2.1) about ἄδυτος/ἄδυτον, which has prevalent occurrences in the poetic and philosophical literature. For the adjective ἄσυλος, -ον, instead, only a substantivization into a masculine form (ὁ ἄσυλος) is attested, meaning «refuge», «sanctuary» (*LSJ*), «refugio, asilo inviolable» (*DGE*), and, given its juridical colour, it fits right into historiography as well.

As for the Latin language, few occurrences of the adjective *adytos*, -on (inflected as a Greek noun) can be counted, all of which date to after the time when Varro wrote<sup>55</sup>. As has been briefly mentioned above, the substantivization of the adjective produced both a masculine and a neuter form; however, *adytus* in the masculine occurs only once in the whole Latin literature: as a 4<sup>th</sup> declension noun, in Accius' *Telephus*<sup>56</sup>. A voice of poetic register seems inadequate for the present context<sup>57</sup>. By contrast, the neuter substantive *adytum* (the form accepted in the majority of the recent editions of *de lingua Latina*) is much more frequent. Its meaning – perfectly congruent with the Greek original – is «the innermost part of a temple, the sanctuary, which none but priests could enter, and from which oracles were delivered» (*L&S; OLD*)<sup>58</sup>; the use of the term referred to the cella of temples counts numerous attestations among the poets of the Augustan age<sup>59</sup> and later authors.

The meaning of *asylum*, too, is akin to its Greek parallel: «a place of refuge, a sanctuary, an asylum» (*L&S; OLD*). In fact, it is noteworthy that the earliest attestation of *asylum* is precisely in one of Varro's fragmen-

<sup>55</sup> The earliest one is Verg. *Aen.* 2, 297: *adytis effert penetralibus ignem*.

<sup>56</sup> v. 32 ed. Dangel = *TRF Attius* v. 624: *Pro certo arbitror sortis, oracla, adytus, augura*.

<sup>57</sup> Perhaps such a thought, together with Spengel junior's detection of the interlinear correction in the manuscript (see above), induced all the editors who succeeded Canal (Götz-Schöll in 1910, Kent in 1938, and Collart in 1954) to choose to print *adytum*.

<sup>58</sup> See e.g. Caes. *civ.* 3, 105: *in occultis ac reconditis templi, quo praeter sacerdotes adire fas non est, quae Graeci adytā appellant*.

<sup>59</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 2, 351; 404; 764; 3, 92; 5, 84; 6, 98; 7, 269; Hor. *carm.* 1, 16.5; Ov. *met.* 15, 635.

tary works, the *de vita populi Romani* – where Varro talks about the Porta Pandana<sup>60</sup> and traces its etymology back to the verb *pandere*:

Fr. 4 Riposati = GRF fr. 201<sup>61</sup>

<p>hanc deam Aelius putat esse Cererem; sed quod in a s y l u m qui confugisset, panis daretur<sup>62</sup>, esse nomen fictum a pane dando pandere, quod est aperire.</p>	<p><i>Aelius (scil. Stilo) believes this goddess<sup>63</sup> to be Ceres, and that, because those who had fled to the asylum were given bread, the expression panem dare ("to give bread") led to the coinage of the word pandere, which means "to open".</i></p>
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Robert Maltby (2001, 203) marked this as the first use of this word of Greek origin in a Latin text – although Aelius Stilo might have used it before, as at least a part of this passage is explicitly marked as a quotation from the latter (GRF fr. 27).

A survey of the other attestations of *asylum* is enlightening in that, aside from when it occurs with reference to the episode of Romulus' asylum<sup>64</sup>, it also shows up associated with temples and places of worship<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> «A gate in the fortifications of the Capitoline, supposed originally to have been called Porta Saturnia» (Richardson 1992, 305-306). On the Porta Pandana and this excerpt, see Scarsi 1980 and Marcattili 2014. See also Steinby 1993-2000.

<sup>61</sup> The passage is quoted by Nonius (fr. 44 M): *Pandere Varro existimat ea causa dici, quod qui ope indigerent et ad asylum Cereris confugissent panis daretur. Pandere ergo quasi panem dare, et quod numquam fanum talibus clauderetur* – «Varro thinks that the word *pandere* has its origins in the fact that those who were poor and had fled to Ceres' asylum were given bread. Thus *pandere* equals to *panem dare*, because such people were never hindered from the sanctuary». When comparing Nonius' context with Varro's own words, one has the impression that Nonius had somehow misunderstood Varro's meaning. In fact, it is well established that the Porta Pandana on one side of the Capitoline, and the Porta Carmentalis on the other, permitted the access to the asylum which had been founded by Romulus; therefore, the refugees did not quite flee "to Ceres' asylum", as we read in Nonius, but rather passed through the door consecrated to Ceres to flee to Romulus' asylum.

<sup>62</sup> This passage might well be taken as a fitting example of Varro's famously loose syntax, often indulging in anacolutha. According to Laughton 1960, 2-3, this is not due to neglect, but rather to the fact that «for Varro it is the content of his work which matters, and he is not prepared to spend time over the form».

<sup>63</sup> Whom the Porta Pandana was consecrated to.

<sup>64</sup> Apart from our aforementioned sources on the episode itself, see also Verg. *Aen.* 8, 342-343: *hinc lucum ingentem, quem Romulus acer asylum | rettulit*; Lucan. 1, 97: *dominos commisit asylum*; Sil. 15, 91: *minanti impar Fidenae contentaque crescere asylo*; Serv. *Aen.* 8, 635: *cum turbam civium non haberet, asylum condidit*; and later authors. See furtherly TLL 2.0.990.55-75.

A combined search of «adytum» + «asylum», as well as «aditus» + «asylum» and «adytum» + «Romulus», in the *PHI* and *TLL* databases proved inconclusive.

In light of this, we cannot quite talk about actual synonymy between *adytum* and *asylum*, and to be fair, *asylum* does appear to be a sort of a technical term used in reference to Romulus' refuge, as all of our sources on this episode resort to it, and not to any variant. The use of *adytum* for this particular meaning would constitute a *hapax* and this is a problem which cannot be neglected. Nevertheless, if we can agree that the semantic spectrum of *asylum* is broad enough to include some of the nuances more frequently conveyed by *adytum*, we may not find it so unthinkable that the reverse can happen, as well.

Bringing the matter to a different level, one could reasonably object that all complete accounts of Romulus' asylum postdate Varro: the earliest (Virgil, Livy) date to the Augustan age. However, as Dench argues (pp. 14 ff), both this myth and that of the Rape of the Sabine women must have existed before the end of the Republic. We have evidence<sup>66</sup> that «the story of the rape of the Sabine women was given great prominence in the Roman culture of the second century BC», whereas, in relation to the legend of Romulus' asylum, a few works prior to the Republic<sup>67</sup> so much as convey «the general idea of the presence of immigrants or foreigners on the site of Rome. There is, however, no mention of a deliberate action of Romulus, or of any special time or place when and where these people were gathered» (p. 15). Nevertheless, the earliest texts where we can find at least a reference to the episode at issue – in a very polemic, not to say contemptuous tone, for that matter – are Cicero's<sup>68</sup>; and that is more than enough for us to substantiate the specula-

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<sup>65</sup> For example, Liv. 35, 51.2: *ubi (scil. Euboeae) et in fano lucoque ea religione et eo iure sancto quo sunt templa quae asyla Graeci appellant*; Mela 1, 117: *itaque habentur, adeoque ipsos nemo de tam feris gentibus violat, ut aliis quoque ad eos confugisse pro asylo sit*; Hist. Aug., Heliogab. 2, 3: *hic fertur templum dei Heliogabali confugisse, velut in asylo*.

<sup>66</sup> Mainly fragments transmitted indirectly: we know that Ennius wrote a play entitled *Sabinae* (Vahlen *Scaenica* 37-41) and that the topic was treated by Fabius Pictor as well (fr. F7 Peter (FRH 1 F6) = Plut. *Rom.* 14).

<sup>67</sup> Cato, orig. p. 20 Peter = Gell. 18, 12.7; Calp. fr. 4 Peter (FRH 9 F6) = Serv. *Aen.* 2, 761.

<sup>68</sup> *De orat.* 1, 37: *An vero tibi Romulus ille aut pastores et convenas congregasse aut Sabinorum conubia coniunxisse aut finitimorum vim repressisse eloquentia videtur, non consilio et sapientia singulari? Att. 2, 1.8: *Catonem nostrum non tu amas plus quam ego; sed tamen ille optimo animo utens et summa fide nocet interdum rei publicae; dicit enim tamquam in Platonis πολιτεία, non tamquam in Romuli faece, sententiam.**



tion that Varro, a contemporary and friend of Cicero, might have known that theme and hinted at it in one of his works.

But why *would* Varro have any interest in making such an allusion?

Because Romulus' sanctuary is the mythic transposition of one of what Dench presents as constants in the history of Roman thought, i.e. the perception of the ethnic identity of the Roman people as «a particular kind of plurality, based on both the incorporation and transformation of other peoples and cultures» (p. 4). On the account of the legendary/historical narratives, Rome had been founded (or inhabited in its early age) by «indigenous Aborigines, indigenous and/or Lacedaemonian Sabines, Latins descended from Saturn, Trojan exiles, twins fathered by Mars and nursed by a she-wolf, Arcadian exiles, Herakles, Trojan exiles and Etruscan kings» (p. 63). To preserve the tradition of such composite origins, and yet, at the same time, to circumscribe and develop a strictly defined and distinctively characterized Roman identity was no easy task. Moreover, this issue branched out into linguistic subjects as well: it can be perceived that, especially in debates between the Republican and Imperial age, «questions of language are closely linked to questions of the ethnic origins of the Roman people, the essential nature of what it is to be Roman» (p. 303).

And, indeed, Varro had this mission at heart, being a sort of an outsider himself – at least compared to the core inhabitants of Rome, some of whom looked askance at other Italic peoples such as the Sabines<sup>69</sup>. Varro is well known for his dedication to the uncovering of various aspects of the Roman people and its culture<sup>70</sup>, and his determination in pointing out how such culture rested on heterogeneous foundations and resulted from the contribution of diverse layers (both chronological and ethnical).

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<sup>69</sup> See Farney 2007 for a survey of this subject.

<sup>70</sup> Probably the most eloquent (and renowned) acknowledgment and praise for Varro's efforts in that matter is Cic. *ac.* 1, 9: *Tum ego "Sunt" inquam "ista Varro. Nam nos in nostra urbe peregrinantis errantisque tamquam hospites tui libri quasi domum deduxerunt, ut possemus aliquando qui et ubi essemus agnoscere. Tu aetatem patriae tu descriptiones temporum, tu sacrorum iura tu sacerdotum, tu domesticam tu bellicam disciplinam, tu sedum regionum locorum tu omnium divinarum humanarumque rerum nomina genera officia causas aperuisti; plurimum quidem poetis nostris omninoque Latinis et litteris luminis et verbis attulisti atque ipse varium et elegans omni fere numero poema fecisti, philosophiamque multis locis inchoasti, ad impellendum satis, ad edocendum parum.*

This conception applied to all the branches of the Roman culture, including language. As we learn from some passages of the treatise<sup>71</sup>, Varro perceived the Latin language as the outcome of the blending of different idioms, though on the basis of a broad autochthonous substrate. He acknowledges a significant debt of the Latin language to Greek (especially the Aeolic dialect)<sup>72</sup>, but also to Etruscan<sup>73</sup>, the Gaulish and Iberian languages, Armenian, Syrian and Punic<sup>74</sup>. He especially emphasized the importance of the Sabellic contribution, not only to the Latin language, but even to the foundations of Roman history<sup>75</sup>.

In light of these considerations, it seems reasonable to assume that Varro would regard quite favourably an episode such as that of Romulus' asylum. Such an anecdote not only endorsed his conception of a multi-layered Roman identity, but also suggested that such a blended composition had characterized the very original nucleus of the Roman

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<sup>71</sup> 5, 3: *neque omnis origo est nostrae linguae e vernaculis verbis* – «Not all the words of our language stem from the vernacular stock»; 10, 69: *genera (scil. vocorum) sunt tria: unum vernaculum ac domi natum, alterum adventitium, tertium nothum ex peregrino hic natum* – «There are three types of words: one of vernacular, indigenous words; one of foreign words; one of hybrid words, coined here but based on a foreign model»; 5, 10: *in haec sunt tripartita verba, quae sunt aut nostra aut aliena aut obliuia* – «Words are divided into three classes: the indigenous, the foreign, and the forgotten ones».

<sup>72</sup> According to Cupaiuolo 1925, tradition traced back to a Greek origin two elements of the Roman identity: ethnicity (with the idea that the Roman people had stemmed from the Greeks) and language (the Latin language having stemmed from the Greek language: D. H. 1, 90.1; Hysicrates, *GRF* fr. 2 = Gell. 16, 12.5-6; and others). Varro bound these ideas together, and specifically singled out the Aeolian dialect as the closest one to Latin: *GRF* fr. 295 and 296 = *Lyd. mag.* 1, 5 and 2, 13 (see Collart 1954b, 210-228, Gabba 1963 and De Paolis 2016). And one can appreciate, among Varro's etymologies, a number of Latin words which are traced back to an Aeolian origin (e.g. *ling.* 5, 25; 101; 102).

<sup>73</sup> Varro perceptively recognized an Etruscan contribution to some of the founding elements of the Roman traditional culture. See Collart 1954b, 243-246: «Il reconnaît [...] que les noms des trois tribus primitives, *Titienses*, *Ramnes* et *Luceres*, sont des mots étrusques [*ling.* 5, 55], et la philologie moderne lui donne raison. Elle approuve aussi l'hypothèse qui lui fait pressentir un mot étrusque derrière le nome du Tibre (*Tiberis*) [*ling.* 5, 29-30]». See also Ernout 1930.

<sup>74</sup> Varro points to a series of foreign words which had become part of the Latin lexicon: clothing items such as *sagum* ("mantle") and *reno* ("reindeer-skin") from Gaulish (*ling.* 5, 167); names of exotic animals such as *tigris* ("tiger") from Armenian and *camelus* ("camel") from Syrian (5, 100); items of trade such as *purpura* ("purple cloth") from Punic (5, 113). See Collart 1954b, 247-248.

<sup>75</sup> On Varro's "Sabinism", see again Collart 1954b, 229-243 (who speaks about «une sorte de chauvinisme philologique»). Varro correctly points to numerous Sabinisms in the Latin language, pertaining to the domains of rural, religious, and everyday life (*ling.* 5 *passim*).

people<sup>76</sup>. And given all that, perhaps it is not out of line to presume that Varro would deem it appropriate to invoke that tradition when dealing with the most difficult words to etymologize: those which lie on the last and deepest level of the analysis.

### 3.3. Asylum et initia

In fact, one could make even bolder a claim with regards to the text itself. It is not unreasonable to conjecture that the very word *adytum* might be, itself, the result of a corruption from the original reading, *asylum*.

As all the editors who advocated the choice of *adytum* over *aditus* have maintained, it is very reasonable to admit that a misplacement of *i* and *y* may have occurred in this context, given the large amount of erroneous spellings which can be counted in F<sup>77</sup>; as such, we can easily envisage the corruption *asylum* > *asilum*. Apart from this, it is not difficult to accept that a mechanical error has taken place, probably at the early stage of a majuscule script, whereby *L* and *T* are very easily confused. Now, this particular confusion does not seem to be abundant in our manuscript, or at least not nearly as much as others: in fact, none of the prefaces to the critical editions highlight it. However, I have found at least three sound examples of *falsae lectiones* – acknowledged as such by the majority of editors – due to *L* and *T* mix-ups:

- (1) *ling.* 5, 46: *Latinum* for *Tatium*. The emendation (which goes back to Franciscus Puccius)<sup>78</sup> has been accepted by all the editors from Müller on, and it is sound because Puccius had put it into effect on the grounds of a *locus similis*<sup>79</sup>.
- (2) 6, 36: *admitte* for *ad mille*. This reading had already been corrected by Victorius in his collation of the manuscript and has

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<sup>76</sup> In fact, it does not seem out of place to speculate that Varro might have even perceived the establishment of the asylum as the founding event of the Latin language: the moment when different peoples and different idioms first began to blend together, and from this mixture, the original stock of the Latin language was moulded. I owe this suggestion (a very compelling one indeed, and one can only regret the lack of irrefutable evidence for it) to one of the reviewers of this paper.

<sup>77</sup> See above, § 2.1 and especially note 23.

<sup>78</sup> A pupil of Angelus Politianus who had left annotations to the manuscript. Cf. L. Spengel's edition, p. IX: «Ante Victorium hunc codicem [F] excusserant Ang. Politianus et Fr. Puccius».

<sup>79</sup> Serv. *Aen.* 5, 560: *Varro tamen dicit, Romulum dimicantem contra Titum Tatium a Lucumonibus, hoc est Tuscis, auxilia postulasse.*

been accepted by all the editors, as it is the only expression which makes sense in its context<sup>80</sup>.

- (3) 7, 57: *libi* for *tibi*. This emendation has been established since the very first editions of the text, because the corrupted word is embedded in a well-known quotation from Plautus<sup>81</sup>.

Other examples can be found, but they are more controversial<sup>82</sup>. At any rate, while the cases brought forward here may not be sufficient to promote the *L* and *T* confusion to a “typical” feature of *F*, they are certainly enough to substantiate the hypothesis that an original *asylum/asilum* may have been transcribed erroneously as *asitum*. From here, a well-imaginable attempt at normalization may have produced *adytum/aditus*.

In sum, it may be argued that the original text read *Quartus, ubi est asylum et initia regis*<sup>83</sup>.

### 3.4. *The antiqua, prisca verba*

One last dot remains to be connected in this argumentation. If, as we have ascertained, the fourth and last stage of the etymological research is where the origins of the Latin language lie, what kind of words are

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<sup>80</sup> In 6, 35-39 Varro distinguishes between *primigenia* (“primitive”) and *declinata verba* (“derived/inflected words”), comparing the infinite amount of the latter to the limited number of the former: specifically, “up to one thousand”.

<sup>81</sup> *Trin.* 455-456: *nam illum tibi / ferentarium esse amicum inventum intellego*.

<sup>82</sup> For instance, in 10, 55 Canal suggested that *amplius* may be a false reading for *ap(er)tius*, but only Kent accepted it, while the other editors maintained the transmitted word, as it does not create that much friction in the context. The same goes for *in illum* in 10, 62: corrected into *id illum* by Augustinus and retained as such by Vertranius, Scoppus, Spengel senior and Müller, the word was recognized to actually read *initium* by Groth after he collated the manuscript; however, while Spengel junior and Kent accepted the new reading, Götz-Schöll still preferred *id illum*.

<sup>83</sup> In light of this, we might go back to the passage from the *de vita populi Romani* (see above, § 3.2) where the word *asylum* occurs, with unquestionable reference to Romulus’ sanctuary (see, again, Scarsi 1980 and Marcattili 2014), together with an explicit mention of Ceres. This brings to mind the emendation proposed by Canal for *ling.* 5, 8 (*regis* > <Ce>*reris*). The editor had actually evoked Ceres as an emblem for the mysteries, and it seems very unlikely that he even took into consideration the excerpt from the *de vita populi Romani*, since he makes no mention whatsoever to it. However, one would be tempted to adopt his suggestion with a whole new interpretation, obtaining a double reference to Romulus’ asylum (*quartus, ubi est asylum et initia Cere-ris*). But, aside from the palaeographical problems already discussed above (§ 2.2), another hindrance in the way of such a possibility is that, as we have seen, the expression *initia Cereris* is closely linked to the initiations to the mysteries – too much so, perhaps, to think that the average erudite Roman would have read it, contrary to common usage, as an allusion to Romulus’ refuge.

analysed on this stage? Not the ones connected to mystic/religious truths, not those of an *arcana scientia* restricted to initiates but, simply enough, the most ancient words of the Latin lexicon: the ones which Schröter (1963) called the *antiqua, prisca verba*<sup>84</sup>.

Shortly above (paragraphs 3-6), Varro had dealt with the limitations of the etymological analysis, i.e. the reasons why the survey of the origin of words is “quite obscure” (*obscurior*); most of these implicate the concept of *vetustas*<sup>85</sup>, the passage of time, which deletes some things, and consumes and distorts some others. It constitutes “the greatest challenge for the etymologist” (Schröter p. 86) and the so-called *antiqua, prisca verba* are but one example of those things the *vetustas* has transfigured, to the point of making them slippery and unrecognizable: it is the etymologist’s task to recover, recognize, and restore them. That is the reason why such words pertain to the last, deepest, and most difficult level of the etymological survey: they are elusive not because they are somewhat occult and magic, but because they are primordial and *old*.

This view had been, in a certain way, anticipated by Oko (pp. 166 ff), who narrowed the “old words”, subjected to the study of the fourth level, down to, specifically, the *oblivia verba* mentioned by Varro shortly thereafter<sup>86</sup>. Years later, Pfaffel (p. 238) brought forward “a not insignificant addition” (by his own words) to Schröter’s interpretation: in his view, the fourth degree of etymology not only serves the purpose of studying the ancient words which are no longer used, but have not changed in the course of time, but also “the ancient phonetic form” («die alte Lautformen») of the words which are still in use, but have undergone substantial alterations.

According to the suggestion advanced here, it follows that the phrase *adytum* (or rather *asylum*) *et initia* does not imply any *Mysterienvergleich* nor any allusion to an *arcana scientia*, but merely a chronological indica-

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<sup>84</sup> In truth, such phrase never occurs in the *de lingua Latina*, nor anywhere else in the Latin literature. I have only found one appearance of *antiqua verba* in *ling.* 5, 9 and one of *prisca vocabula* in 7, 26. However, two attestations in Cicero seem quite significant: *de oratore* 1, 193 (*Nam, sive quem haec Aeliana studia delectant, plurima est et in omni iure civili et in pontificum libris et in XII tabulis antiquitatis effigies, quod et verborum vetustas prisca cognoscitur et actionum genera quaedam maiorum consuetudinem vitamque declarat*); *Brutus* 83 (*Et, cum sint in dicendo variae voluntates, delectari mihi magis antiquitate videtur et lubenter verbis etiam uti paulo magis priscis Laelius*).

<sup>85</sup> See Schröter 1963.

<sup>86</sup> *ling.* 5, 10 (quoted and translated above, note 71).

tion, expressed by means of reference to a mythical/historical episode of the Roman tradition. If we read *asylum/adytum et initia* as a hendiadys, equivalent in sense to *\*asylum/adytum initiale*, we will be able to obtain a rather fluid expression such as “the original” or “primary sanctuary of the king (*scil.* Romulus)”.

A potentially controversial aspect of this proposal is that it necessarily entails that the *rex* of the passage be read as an allusion specifically to Romulus, and to no other early king. One of the most often raised objections, against those (starting with Spengel senior) who suggested identifying one particular king with the mentioned *rex*, is that we are not justified to single one out and exclude all the others. The acceptance of the proposed *asylum*, it appears, would provide us with such a justification.

Nonetheless, if that were the case, one might rightfully observe that Varro’s wording is in want of precision: so much confusion could be avoided, if only the text read *\*Romuli regis*<sup>87</sup>! However, the brevity of the transmitted expression, albeit regrettable, is not at all unsuitable to an author like Varro, who is frequently elliptical and sometimes even leaves essential logical links unsaid<sup>88</sup>.

It appears, indeed, that no solution can answer for all the problems raised by this part of Varro’s doctrine, and that none is immune to incongruities and contradictions. Nonetheless this proposal, though not utterly free from ambiguity, seems to be the more coherent with Varro’s interest in antiquity and deep knowledge of the various legends about the origins of Rome.

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<sup>87</sup> None of the occurrences of Romulus’ name in the *de lingua Latina* helps us clarify: Varro either mentions him generically as the founder of Rome (5, 144; 149), or as an example of a noun type (8, 45; 10, 15). I could not find other references to unspecified *reges* which could be persuasively lead back to Romulus: rather, in most cases Varro addresses a king by both the title of *rex* and his name.

<sup>88</sup> See Laughton 1960 and especially pp. 9-22, where the scholar gives numerous examples of “Varronian negligence”, such as the omission of pronouns and nouns, sometimes in a way that challenges the reader’s comprehension. E.g. *ling.* 6, 49: *Sic monimenta quae in sepulcris, et ideo secundum viam, quo praetereuntes admoneant et se fuisse et illos esse mortals* – «Hence the *monimenta* (‘monuments’) in the cemeteries; thus (*scil.* they are placed) along the way, so as to remind the wanderers that they are mortals, just as them», where the *monimenta* are implicitly identified with the people they commemorate. Another outstanding example is *rust.* 3, 7.4: *Columbaria singula esse oportet ut os habeat, quo modo introire et exire possit* – «Each nesting-box ought to have an opening, so that (*scil.* the dove) can go in and out». Here, as Laughton (p. 14) explains, «not only do the verbs *habeat* and *possit* have different subjects, but both subjects must be supplied from the phrase *columbaria singula*».

#### 4. Conclusion

A brand-new interpretation of the controversial *ling.* 5, 8 has been advanced in this paper, relying on two possible ways of reading the text: either as *adytum*, as has been suggested many times, but with a whole new meaning of the word, or as *asylum*, which has never been suggested before. While the former comes with a price (accepting a *hapax*: *adytum*, instead of the regular *asylum*, used with reference to Romulus' sanctuary), the latter fits into the text without creating any friction.

However, my proposal is ultimately and essentially exegetical, and this interpretation – that Varro is alluding specifically to Romulus' refuge – can either be defended by preserving the transmitted text (retaining *aditum* = *adytum*), albeit with a somewhat stretched meaning, or by emending it (replacing *aditum* = *adytum* with *asylum*).

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