

Jeremy Armstrong

“Bands of Brothers”: Warfare and Fraternity in Early Rome

Abstract: Family bonds, and particularly fraternal relationships, play key roles in many of the narratives relating to Rome’s Regal and early Republican periods. In particular, the literary sources for these periods are full of references to brothers standing side by side, fighting for, and in many ways embodying (sometimes quite literally), the various social and political entities which were struggling for supremacy in archaic Latium. The present study will endeavour to tease out some of the nuances of this bond and explain how the concept of brotherhood in early Roman narratives seems to differ from that presented in accounts relating to the late Republic. It will accomplish this using four case studies in early Roman brotherhood—Romulus and Remus, the Dioscuri, the Battle of the Champions, and the archaic *sodales*—which cover the diverse range of relationships encapsulated in the early Roman concept of fraternity, demonstrating how the current scholarly interpretation of Roman brotherhood, based largely on the principle of equality, does not fully describe the bond as it relates to this period. While equality, and to a certain extent blood, do seem to represent key aspects or preconditions of Roman fraternity, in accounts of the early city it was actually military camaraderie and battlefield unity which seem to have been the defining characteristics. This interpretation of early Roman fraternity shifts our understanding of the relationship toward a more active, and arguably ephemeral, model and sheds further light on myths involving brothers from early Rome and particularly those—like that of Romulus and Remus—which involve the breakdown of this bond.

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Jeremy Armstrong: Department of Classics Ancient History, University of Auckland, Auckland, 1042, New Zealand, E-Mail: js.armstrong@auckland.ac.nz

Even a quick look through the literary evidence for Republican Rome reveals the obvious importance of the fraternal bond in Roman society. From the founding of the city to the events of the civil wars, brothers—real, or in some cases metaphorical—often took centre stage in both mythic and more historical narra-

tives, with the strength and nature of their relationship frequently proving pivotal to the story. Indeed, as has been noted many times before, the bond between brothers was unusually privileged throughout the entire corpus of Roman literature. Looking to the Empire, Plutarch, writing under the Principate, wrote the treatise *On Brotherly Love* which commented at length on the strength of the fraternal bond, which in many cases included “brothers using the same house and table and undistributed estates and slaves.”¹ In legal cases the fraternal relationship seems to have endowed brothers with a special identity and bond which may have even transcended civic status.² For instance, in the *Digest* there are a number of exemptions within the law for brothers which makes it clear that this relationship was unique and outside of the usual norms.³ But despite the importance of this bond, or indeed perhaps because of it, it is still not entirely clear how the fraternal bond was actually defined at various points in Rome’s history, and what the presence of brothers in a narrative may have indicated.

Our most complete view of the Roman conception of brotherhood, and the one upon which the majority of scholarship has focused, comes from the late Republic where the fraternal bond seems to have been largely synonymous with the concept of equality—an idea which is perhaps best expressed in Publius Nigidius’ first century BC definition of the term *frater*, preserved in Aulus Gellius: “*Frater*” inquit “*est dictus quasi ‘fere alter’*” (“A *frater*,” he says, “is so called because he is, as it were, *fere alter*, that is ‘almost another self’”).⁴ This flexible definition seems to have been widely accepted in Roman society at the time as the fraternal bond was applied to a number of other relationships—friends, lovers, soldiers, etc.—where this type of equality was seen as the ideal. For instance, in the *Tristia* Ovid described his friends as brothers (using both the terms *fratres* and *sodales*) and Vergil utilized the trope a number of times in the *Aeneid*, particularly in Books IX and X.⁵ This sense of equality has therefore been identified as the main aspect of the fraternal relationship in Rome, not the biological connection as one might initially suspect, and scholars like Bannon have argued that it was

1 Plutarch, *On Brotherly Love* 7 (trans. W. C. Hembold).

2 Bannon (1997), 5.

3 *Digest* 22.5.4. The limitation on testifying is not limited to brothers but is also extended to parents and children and others living in the same house. Although these laws clearly refer to the Empire, it is likely that they were in place much earlier, for which see Geib (1846), 336.

4 A. Gellius, *Attic Nights* 13.10.4 (trans. J. C. Rolfe).

5 Ovid, *Tristia* 1.3.65. Virgil, *Aeneid* 9.703–55, 10.401–4, 10.335–41, 10.575–601, 10.390–3, etc. (see Bannon (1997), 148–56 for discussion). Cicero utilizes language similar to that of Nigidius (*est enim is qui est tamquam alter idem*) when referring to friendship (Cicero, *On Friendship* 80).

this conception of Roman fraternity which formed “a stable core of meaning around which new ideas could be oriented and through which new experiences could be understood and reconciled with the past.”⁶

The idea of fraternal equality has a long history in Rome, with origins which may reach all the way back to the community’s Indo-European roots, and it is clear that equality was a fundamental aspect of this relationship.⁷ But is this really the only, or indeed primary, way we should understand the fraternal relationship in the Roman Republic? Even in the late Republic fraternal equality did not exist in a static and isolated state, but rather was part of a complex relationship which, at least in the genre of history, was also often defined by an active element. Being a brother was not simply a state of being, as an emphasis on equality might imply, but was something which involved action—and the further one goes back in Roman history, the more important this active element seems to become. In an early Roman context fraternal equality was typically evident, but conflict, and particularly where brothers found themselves on the battlefield—either beside each other or facing one another—often became paramount in defining the relationship. In this interpretation, early Roman fraternity was subject to many of the same preconditions, and contained many of the same aspects, as its late Republican equivalent, but it was much more than the sum of these. True fraternity was a bond which only really existed when it was expressed, most commonly through unity in conflict.

I Cooperation and Conflict

The importance of conflict in defining the fraternal relationship would have been a concept familiar in a late Republican context, although by second and first centuries BC the location of the conflict had largely shifted from the battlefield to the forum. The positive aspect, that of fraternal cooperation in a conflict, can be seen in the accounts of several sets of brothers active in warfare and politics in the third, second and first centuries BC. The importance of kinship and family ties is well documented in Roman politics in the middle and late Republic, but the importance of brothers to each other in Roman politics is marked, and there is evidence for a number of sets of brothers rising to prominence through cooperation and team effort—for instance the Ogulnii in the middle of the third century BC.⁸ But in this

⁶ Bannon (1997), 5.

⁷ See Wiseman (1995), 18–30 for discussion.

⁸ See particularly Potter’s work on brothers as consular colleagues, at Potter (1932), 523–24.

mid to late Republican political context, cooperation, although beneficial, was not vital to the relationship. The relationship and the men could exist without it and so equality was emphasized instead, and it was really the Scipiones who laid claim to the label of fraternal equality and political cooperation with some of the most successful pairs of brothers during this period. The brothers Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio (cos. 222) and Publius Cornelius Scipio (cos. 218) rose to power in the late third century BC, both fighting against Hannibal during the Second Punic War and both earning some renown. They were followed by the brothers Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus and Lucius Cornelius Scipio Asiagenus, both sons of Publius Cornelius Scipio (cos. 218) and both elected consul themselves, who evidently worked alongside each other, bolstering each other's power—although Africanus was clearly the more prolific of the two. But despite the different honors achieved by the two brothers, later historians still portrayed the lives and careers of Africanus and Asiagenus as intertwined, if not equal.⁹ As Livy noted, Africanus is recorded as consistently naming his brother and his accomplishments as equal to his own (for instance see Livy 26.48.14 and 28.4.2).

This ideal of equality and cooperation was naturally not the only model of brotherhood in play in the late Republic. The civil wars of the first century BC brought to light a different fraternal dynamic—the conflict between brothers which ultimately resulted in fratricide—and while evidence for actual attested brother against brother conflict is problematic for this period, often the discord of the civil wars was described in these terms. See for instance Livy, *Epit.* 79 (trans. W. A. McDevitte):

In quo bello duo fratres, alter ex Pompei exercitu, alter ex Cinnae, ignorantes concurrerunt, et cum victor spoliaret occisum, agnito fratre ingenti lamentatione edita, rogo ei extracto, ipse se supra rogum transfodit et eodem igni consumptus est.

In this war, two brothers (one of Pompeius's army, the other of Cinna's), encountered each other without knowing it; and when the conqueror despoiling the enemy recognised his brother, he vented his grief in uncontrolled lamentation, and having prepared a funeral pile for him, he stabbed himself on it, and was consumed with him.

In these accounts of brotherhood the equal status of the brothers is at once emphasized, heightening the level of the conflict, and also destroyed, as one brother is always victorious over the other. There are clearly multiple ways to read and interpret these instances of fratricide, for instance, one could argue that the inequality inherent in that victory may have signalled the destruction of the bond.

⁹ See Bannon (1997), 116–127 for detailed discussion.

Whatever more nuanced explanation is espoused, underlying the narrative is clearly a sense that this type of conflict is unnatural, that brothers simply should not fight one another, and that this is a perversion of the natural order. It is perhaps worth emphasizing here that the disruption of the natural order was not that “equals” were fighting, as arguably that would be lauded, or indeed that family members were killing one another—as the Romans would not necessarily have viewed this as a negative—but that brothers were in conflict.

When the concept of fratricide is evoked, for a Roman we can assume it would bring to mind the fratricide of Romulus and Remus, grounding the entire concept in their corporate history. As Fox and others have pointed out, when the Romans wanted to establish an idea or principle they typically sought a solid grounding in their own past, the more distant the better, and the same is true for the Roman conception of brotherhood.¹⁰ It should be no surprise then that in the extant accounts of early Rome (all, of course, written in the late Republic or Empire) there are an incredible number of brothers—and particularly twins and triplets—mentioned. In the *Aeneid*, Turnus is allied with twins from Tibur (Coras and Catillus), while Teuthra and his brother fought alongside Aeneas.¹¹ Later in the traditional narrative we naturally come across Rome’s most famous brothers, Romulus and Remus, who epitomized the extremes of fraternity (complete co-operation and later fratricide). Later still we have the Battle of the Champions between the two sets of triplets, the Horatii from Rome and the Curiatii from Alba Longa, then the sons of Ancus Marcius fighting for their right to the throne of Rome, and of course many others. What is interesting about these instances of fraternity in early Roman myth is that while equality is often hinted at, most notably by the twinning of some of the characters, they are all unified in their use of conflict as a defining characteristic.

Given the first century BC origin of most of our extant sources for early Rome, it is not entirely clear which period we should ascribe this association between conflict and fraternity to, if indeed we should ascribe it to one period more than another. However, the sheer unanimity of the sources for early Rome in espousing this conflict-based model of fraternity, compared to the more nuanced versions of fraternity which refer to the third and second centuries BC, suggests this is either a preserved aspect of early Roman society or at least a key part of mythmaking as it related to early Rome.¹² The goal of the present study is to explore this important and complex aspect of the fraternal relationship as it relates to early Rome.

¹⁰ Fox (1996), 14–20.

¹¹ Vergil, *Aeneid* 7.672; 10.402.

¹² See particularly von Ungern-Sternberg (1988), 266–288 and the edited volume by Vogt-Spira (1989). More recently see Chassignet (1996) particularly his lengthy introduction to the *Annales*

Specifically, it will offer four brief vignettes into early Roman “brotherhood”—that of Romulus and Remus, the Dioscuri, the Battle of the Champions, and finally the pseudo-brotherhood which may be seen in the *Sodales* of Populos Valesios—to show how equality and conflict are *both* important aspects of the relationship, but in a way which differs slightly from the traditional understanding.

II Romulus and Remus

Any study of Roman fraternity should really begin with the archetypal Roman brothers, Romulus and Remus, a case which stands out as one of the most obvious instances of writers in the late Republic using the ideal of the fraternal relationship (and its antithesis) to add meaning to a narrative. Given the mythic character of the story, which lent itself to invention, coupled with the story’s regular reinterpretation by various authors in the context of the civil wars—e.g. Cicero, Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Vergil, and various Augustan poets—it is hard to get a clear picture of what the early myth even looked like.¹³ It is clear, however, that at least some aspects of the narrative and the relationship between the brothers were likely altered to provide an appropriate parallel for events of the late Republic. Indeed, this topic has been so well covered by figures such as Syme, Birley, Earl, and Wiseman, that further discussion is unwarranted, except to highlight Wiseman’s argument for the use of twins to represent a clear duality (and therefore equality), demonstrating that this key aspect of brotherhood was present at least as early as the third century BC, and also to emphasize the role which conflict played throughout the narrative of their relationship, both positively and negatively.¹⁴

Almost all of the key aspects of the fraternal relationship between Romulus and Remus seem to have involved conflict. In the early years their lives were defined by the conflict with Amulius, where they barely survived their infancy

(pages VII–CVII), Beck and Walter (2001), 17–54, and Smith (2011) for discussion and bibliography.

13 Given the revised dating of the Capitoline wolf to the early Middle Ages, for which see Carruba (2006), something which is still being debated, some scholars have picked up on Wiseman’s assertion (1995), 63–76 that the myth of the twins may only date to the late fourth century BC. See Ramsay (2011), 31–33 for discussion and bibliography.

14 Wiseman (1995), 18–30. It is worth noting, however, that the concept of equality in sets of twins and triplets is a complex one, as it never seems to fully exist. For instance with the Dioscuri, one is human and the other divine, with Romulus and Remus, one overcomes the other, and with our later example of the Battle of the Champions, one is victorious while the others fall. It is almost as if brothers, and particularly twins, strive for equality as the ideal but are always doomed to fall short, even when dealing with divine twins.

and then went on to fight side by side, raiding with their fellow shepherds and ultimately re-establishing Numitor on the throne of Alba Longa. In sharp contrast, the final moments of their relationship were defined by the antithesis of cooperation, conflict with each other. As noted above, this myth was reinterpreted many different times during the course of the late Republic and the nature of this final conflict changed quite dramatically with each retelling. Livy, for instance, offers one of the most direct confrontations between the brothers, having Romulus kill Remus with his own hand (1.7.1). Alternatively, Diodorus Siculus and others suggest that Remus was actually killed by Romulus' follower Celer, with some authors claiming he was honoured for his action and others suggesting he was forced to flee afterward.¹⁵ But whether the conflict was personal and direct or conducted through their followers, whether it was premeditated or accidental, the sources are unanimous that the brothers and their followers did enter into a conflict which resulted in the death of Remus. So throughout their lives, conflict—and we may push it a bit further and say “warfare”—was a defining feature. Further, despite the very duality of their existence as twins, given that their relationship ultimately ends in fratricide, one brother overcoming the other, it may be possible to suggest that it is actually conflict and not equality which provides the only continuous link. The brothers are not always equal, but they are always in conflict, and what really mattered for their definition and their relationship was with whom they were in conflict.¹⁶ As brothers they were united in conflict against Amulius, but when they came into conflict against one another the relationship broke down and the fraternal bond was broken.

III The Dioscuri

It is worthwhile to mention here the other set of twins which played a key role in early Roman society, Castor and Pollux, both as a parallel and a comparison. Although a Greek import, the Dioscuri were quickly integrated into Latin culture and religion with inscriptional evidence for their worship at the site of Lavinium going back to the sixth century BC and a temple to twins in Rome (interestingly often only called the “Temple of Castor”) traditionally dedicated in the early fifth century BC.¹⁷ Although multifaceted, the Dioscuri had strong associations with

¹⁵ See Diodorus Siculus 8.6.3, Servius, *Aeneid* 11.603, Festus 48L, Dionysius of Halicarnassus 2.13.2–3 for Celer being honored, and Plutarch, *Romulus* 10.2, Ovid, *Fasti* 5.467–72 for his flight.

¹⁶ See also Schilling (1960) for discussion.

¹⁷ Champlin (2011), 74. The earliest evidence in Latium is a sixth century bronze tablet from Lavinium (ILLRP 1271a) which bears the inscription *Castorei Podlouqueique qurois*. The dedication

conflict and warfare, having developed a habit, in both the Greek and Roman worlds, of being present at or announcing famous victories. In the Greek world the most famous instance of this was during and after the Spartan victory over the Athenian fleet at Aegospotami, while in a Roman context the twins were first seen during and after the Roman victory at Lake Regillus in 499/496 BC.¹⁸ Although the Dioscuri most commonly served as harbingers of victory, they were also sometimes associated with the combat itself, typically appearing as beautiful young men mounted on white horses, bearing spears and wearing the distinctive *pileus*, who arrived at a crucial moment in a battle.¹⁹ The battle of Lake Regillus represents a wonderful example of this from early Roman myth. Both Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus report that the dictator Aulus Postumius vowed a temple to the twins if they would come to his aid, although the nature of this aid is left ambiguous. While Livy goes no further than noting the vow, Dionysius describes the actions of two young men during the battle who bore a striking resemblance to the Dioscuri and who later appeared in Rome, watering their horses at the *lacus Juturnae*, to announce the victory.²⁰

Despite their foreign origin, the Dioscuri can be seen to fit neatly into a conception of Roman fraternity defined, at least in part, by unity in battle. Indeed, for the Dioscuri, having the bond of fraternity defined by unity in warfare represents one of the more straightforward ways to view the relationship as many of the other traditional aspects of the fraternal bond, including both equality and blood, are rather complex for these figures. By their very nature the Dioscuri were understood to be inherently unequal, one divine and the other mortal, despite attempts within mythology to reconcile this.²¹ Further, the root of this inequality—the different fathers for each of the twins, with Castor being fathered by Tyndareus while Pollux was the result of Leda's rape by Zeus—complicates the argument for a fraternal bond based on blood. So the twins unity in the sphere of warfare,

of the temple of Castor was supposedly done in 484 BC by the son of Aulus Postumius, dictator 499 or 496 and victor at the battle of Lake Regillus (Livy 2.42.5). This fifth century date has been corroborated by Nielsen, et al. (1992), 46–53. See also *LTUR* I (1993), 242–5, “Castor, Aedes, Templum” (I. Nielsen).

18 For the sighting after Aegospotami see Plutarch, *Lysander* 12.1, for the sighting after the battle of Lake Regillus see Livy 2.42. In a Roman context the twins are also reported to have appeared after the battle of Pydna in 168 BC, Vercellae in 101 BC, and Pharsallus in 48 BC.

19 Champlin (2011), 74.

20 Livy 2.21.12 and Dionysius of Halicarnassus 6.13.

21 Perhaps oddly then, it was the mortal twin Castor who seems to have dominated his immortal brother in Roman religion, often subsuming him in the cult. See Harris (1906), 58–62 for discussion.

riding side by side into battle, represents by far the most clear cut aspect of their relationship.

The use of the Dioscuri to emphasize the martial nature of the bond between brothers can be seen at various points in a Roman context. Perhaps the most interesting, however, is in the Temple of Castor in Rome, which was regularly rebuilt and repaired during the late Republic and early Empire—in 117 BC by L. Caecilius Metellus Delmaticus, in 74 BC by Gaius Verres, and in AD 6 by Tiberius—with the final construction by Tiberius representing an almost complete reconstruction and an intriguing example of the use of the Castor and Pollux myth to present a very particular message.²² In constructing his new temple to the Dioscuri, Tiberius likened himself and his deceased brother Drusus “Germanicus” to the divine twins. Recent articles by Champlin and Sumi have delved into the nature of this association in depth,²³ but a key point worth emphasizing here is the martial character of the message which Tiberius was putting forward. Although Tiberius was clearly playing on several aspects of the myth of the Dioscuri with this construction, most notably the immortalization of his deceased brother, the Temple of Castor explicitly emphasized the martial aspects of the relationship between Tiberius and Drusus by announcing that it was built using spoils of war and commemorating the brothers’ victories together in Germania during the reign of Augustus.²⁴

IV Battle of the Champions

Returning again to the early historical narrative of Rome, the Battle of the Champions, a mere generation after the death of Remus in the traditional account offered by Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, provides yet another example of conflict defining the fraternal relationship. The battle itself pitted two sets of triplets, who were also evidently cousins, against one another—the Horatii from Rome and the Curiatii from Alba Longa—in order to decide the fate of Rome.²⁵ Famously the Curiatii start off rather well and kill two of the Horatii quickly, forcing the third to run. But as the Curiatii chase him they gradually space out, allowing the final Roman triplet to turn and fight each one individually, ulti-

²² Interestingly, L. Caecilius Metellus Delmaticus was also famous for his fraternity as he was one of four brothers who gained political renown in the late second century BC: see Pliny, *Natural History* 7.142–144.

²³ Champlin (2011), 73–99 and Sumi (2009), 167–186.

²⁴ Alföldy (1992), 39–58.

²⁵ See Livy 1.24.1–5 for the sequence of events. See Ogilvie (1965), 109–113 for discussion.

mately killing them all and winning the day for Rome. Once again it is likely that this story involves a certain bit of invention or at least amplification, as scholars have noted how unusual it is to have so many sets of twins and triplets recorded in a population (today the average rate for twin births is between 10 and 50 births per 1,000 births, and the rate for triplets is less than 2 births per 1,000).²⁶ As a result, when confronted with several sets of twins fighting on either side of a conflict, as in the battle between Turnus and Aeneas, let alone, when looking at the Battle of the Champions, two sets of triplets which are also cousins, it should cause some scepticism and has led several scholars to plausibly suggest that at least some of these accounts may be either fabricated or at least embellished.

While some scholars have gone with a simple argument that the fundamental importance of the fraternal relationship in late Republican society is all that is needed to explain this identification of the heroes on either side as brothers, in the past, others have advanced more in-depth arguments which touch on Rome's Indo-European roots. Most notably, Puhvel and Dumezil have argued that many of these fraternal myths should be seen as part of a larger Indo-European mythic cycle. Dumezil has linked Rome's fraternal myths to various Vedic myths which use twins to emphasize "abundance, vitality and fecundity" and found parallels in other Latin communities where twins and triplets seem to occupy a space between divinity and humanity (the links to the Dioscuii are also clear here).²⁷ While undoubtedly controversial, the evident use of twins and triplets in Roman myth to emphasize or amplify aspects of the characters and the sheer number of heroic and semi-divine twins in the traditional narrative make his arguments plausible. Puhvel approached Roman brotherhood from a different angle and argued that in early Indo-European myth twins were generative, and the ultimate origin of humanity.²⁸ In order for humanity to be born a sacrifice was needed, blood needed to be spilt, and so to Puhvel events like the death of Remus may represent "the primordial sacrifice of the Indo-European cosmic twin" needed to sanctify a new creation, in this instance the creation of Rome. According to this interpretation the Horatii and Curiatii may therefore represent a secondary sacrifice needed to sanctify Rome's expansion and conquest of Alba Longa, or it may simply be a retelling of the archaic story of the success of one against three.²⁹ Whichever interpretation one takes, be it that of Dumezil, Puhvel, or even simple scepticism based on the numbers of twins found in an average society, it

²⁶ Martin, et al. (2009), 2.

²⁷ Dumezil (1970), 252–3.

²⁸ Puhvel (1970), 285–7.

²⁹ Wiseman (1995), 18–30. See also Ogilvie (1965), 109 for discussion of other Indo-European links with his parallel of the Irish hero Cuchulain's defeat of three opponents.

seems likely that the relationships in these myths for early Rome have been altered to fit within an existing mythic structure which used the fraternal bond in a particular way. But although the fraternal bond was possibly amplified or used to allude to other archaic myths, this does not rule out the bond's actual early importance, particularly in the sphere of warfare, as there is ample evidence to support the importance of brothers, or at least some form of brotherhood, in this regard.

The key issue is what was “brotherhood” to the early Romans and did brotherhood only refer to biological brothers? As Koptev has argued, based partly on Freidrich's work on Indo-European societies, the term “brother” and “sister” may have referred not only to blood brothers but to members of the same clan group in general.³⁰ As Festus notes the Romans used the term *fratres* as the equivalent of male cousins (*sobrini*),³¹ and as the Romans used the term *sobrini* to refer to anyone within six degrees of kinship this opens up the term *fratres* significantly.³² Taking the argument further, as Bettini and Koptev have both done, this suggests that the Horatii and Curiatii in the Battle of Champions could have actually *all* been described as *fratres* given the right context, as they were supposedly cousins. The key difference here seems to have been their location on opposite sides of the battle line—or that, yet again, brotherhood in early Rome was being defined by conflict and who is fighting whom.³³

From this point of view, it seems that conflict was fundamental to the definition of brotherhood in early Rome, as it is often fundamental to the creation and cementation of other social bonds. Recent work in the fields of sociology and psychology has increasingly suggested that social groupings and societal norms are likely what dictate the nature of warfare within a given society.³⁴ Although this represents an admittedly controversial generalization for an incredibly complex and multifaceted phenomenon, the importance of groups and social bonds in the creation, control, and expression of aggression has been firmly established. Indeed, as far back as the 1950s it was suggested that the very formation of self-conscious societies and internal social groupings was often

³⁰ Koptev (2005), 388.

³¹ Festus 379L. See Smith (2006) for a detailed discussion of the Roman gens in context.

³² See also Bettini (1992), 160–162 who found the term *frater* used to describe a range of relationships.

³³ A related aspect of this bond may have been simple physical proximity. Given the very large networks of familial associations which made up a Roman family, Bradley (1991), 140 has argued that the strong emotional ties which we associated with family and brotherhood may have been created more by living in close physical proximity than blood ties.

³⁴ See Keeley (1997), 8–22 for a detailed summary of this hypothesis and its evidence.

based on the social creation and use of aggression, typically demonstrated by the production of “in-group” and “out-group” biases.³⁵ As a result, it is only natural that conflict would bring together members of a group, forming a tight bond between what was previously a more loosely connected group of individuals. Or, to use more modern language, creating a “band of brothers” out of the notoriously ambiguous and amorphous *gentes* of Latium.³⁶ So while equality allowed the fraternal relationship, we can suggest it was really the conflict, or warfare, which defined it.

V Sodales

This ultimately leads to the fourth example of early Roman fraternity, the early *sodales*, whose relationship was not founded on traditional kinship at all as they seem to have been the precursors of the later fraternities and religious *sodalicia*. Here we push the Roman concept of fraternity to its furthest extreme to show again how it was really equality *and* conflict, and not blood, which underpinned the concept of brotherhood in early Rome. The *sodalis* relationship is probably one of the most important and therefore, quite naturally, one of the most difficult relationships from early Rome to decipher with Mommsen, Ziebarth, Palmer, Versnel and many others all presenting various (often contradictory) interpretations. In recent years, however, this relationship has been the subject of increased interest and study following the discovery of the famous Lapis Satricanus found in the temple wall of the late sixth century BC construction at Satricum and containing an inscription by the *sodales* of Populos Valesios.³⁷ As Versnel has shown, the word *sodales* is complicated and Roman etymologies (see particularly Festus 383L) do not seem to recognize a connection to *suus* as one would expect.³⁸ However, Plautus, writing in the late third and early second centuries BC, often used the word *sodalis* in his comedies to refer to a close friend or companion, although he clearly distinguished the word *sodalis* from both *amicus* and *vicine*, the two other words he often used to describe “friends.”³⁹ While it seems that

³⁵ Murphy (1957), 1018–1035.

³⁶ See again Smith (2006), particularly 15–17 and 281–298.

³⁷ The inscription reads: ...*IEI STETERAI POPLIOSIO VALESIOSIO SUODALES MAMARTEI*... See Stibbe (1980) and Bremmer (1982), 133–147.

³⁸ *Sodales dicti, quod una sederent et essent, vel quod ex suo datis vesci soliti sint, vel quod inter se invicem suaderent quod utile essent*. See with Versnel (1980).

³⁹ Plautus, *Merc.* 475; 611–612; 620 *Epid.* 344; *Capt.* 646; *Mos.* 310; *Bacc.* 60; etc. See Maurice (2003) for discussion.

these categories were not mutually exclusive (that is to say characters referred to as *sodales* could also be *amici* and *vicini*), *sodales* were required to have certain characteristics. Most notably, a *sodalis* was always a male friend, a point reinforced by the word's association with various fraternal organizations, and there was often a martial connotation. Additionally, Plautus referred to both young (*adolescentes*) and old (*seneces*) *sodales*, indicating that there was not a required age for this relationship. However, Plautus did not tend to mix ages within the relationship. So while both young men and old could be a *sodalis*, the relationship typically involved men of similar age.⁴⁰

The word clearly evolved during the course of the late Republic, but it still seems to have retained much of its original meaning. James, in her study of the word *condere* in Virgil, found that while it was typically used to describe peaceful activities, on certain occasions it was also used to denote an act of violence, most notably the plunging of a sword into a victim.⁴¹ However, *condere* was only used in this violent manner within a particular context, where two men, bound by a strong social bond, were fighting alongside one another.⁴² The relationships which allowed this use of *condere* were those which existed between lovers, between a father and son, and the relationship between *sodales*. Livy used the word *sodales* on several occasions in his history of the early Republic, and in every case it carried the meaning of “warrior-followers.”⁴³ Dionysius of Halicarnassus provided still further corroboration for this interpretation of *sodales* as he used the word *hetairoi*, a title synonymous with Alexander the Great's companions and Companion Cavalry, in his description of the Fabii in 479.⁴⁴ Indeed Catullus may have been playing on this martial connotation when he regularly used the word to refer to his friends and companions.

Sodalis also came to have religious connotations, as the term was often applied to priesthoods in the late Republic and Empire.⁴⁵ Many of these priesthoods were clearly archaic in origin, most notably the Arval Brethren, the *Salii*, and the *Luperci*. However the term *sodales* was revived during the Augustan

⁴⁰ See Maurice (2003), 164–165 for discussion.

⁴¹ James (1995), 623–637.

⁴² Vergil, *Aeneid* 9.348; 9.443; 10.387; 10.816; 12.950.

⁴³ Livy used the term when discussing the followers of Tarquinius Superbus in Rome (2.3), again when discussing the followers of the Fabian *gens* who went along on their war against Veii in 479 (2.49), and when discussing Caeso Fabius' followers following the aristocrat's exile in 461 (3.14). He also mentions the *sodales* of the patrician Caeso Quinctius (3.14.3) and those of Demetrius and Perseus (40.7.1).

⁴⁴ Dionysius of Halicarnassus 9.14.

⁴⁵ Scullard (1981), 30.

period with the creation of the *sodales Augustales*.⁴⁶ While the duties of these various priesthoods varied, they were all male and often restricted to the social elite, particularly within the *sodales* which had evident archaic origins.⁴⁷ One of the most famous *sodalitates*, the *sodales Salii*, maintained the militaristic connotations of the term which were referenced in Vergil. These figures wore archaic Italian armor, were the keepers of the twelve sacred *ancilia* and held ritual processions through Rome.⁴⁸ This religious aspect of the *sodales* also harkens back to the context of the *Lapis Satricanus*. Torelli argued that *suodalitas* was an archaic social institution, possibly cemented by a special religious connection, which may have been similar to the aristocratic Germanic companies described by Tacitus in the *Germania*.⁴⁹

One can therefore interpret *sodales*, in its early Republican context, to mean a specific, social relationship between men of similar social status. The relationship also seemed to imply a further certain degree of equality, with men often being of similar age, although it does seem that *sodales* did recognize a hierarchy, often with a discernible leader at the top. *Sodales* also had a recognized religious aspect, at least in its earliest incarnations, which was revived by Augustus. Additionally, it seems to have contained a recognizably martial aspect. Consequently, the inscription from the *Lapis Satricanus* indicated the presence of a group during the early Republic that is consistent with the concept of *condottieri*, which is supported by the Emperor Claudius' identification of the figure of Mastarna as the *sodalis* of Caeles Vibenna.⁵⁰ So these early *sodales*, which later took on the title of *fratres* (most notably the *sodales fratres Arvales*), in a non-biological and ultimately religious context, seem to have fulfilled the early ideal of Roman brotherhood—unified in equality and conflict and through an extra civic religious bond, creating something akin to the idea of sword-brothers.

46 Liebeschuetz (1989), 62–64. Augustus, in addition to reviving the word *sodales* for the creation of the *sodales Augustales*, also may have revived some pre-existing *sodales* including the *Sodales Titii* (*ibid.* 53–56).

47 This social exclusivity became problematic during the Augustan period. While many of the archaic *sodales*, including the *Salii*, were restricted to the patricians into the Empire, the *Luperci* were reserved for the *equites* by the Augustan period and the membership of the *Augustales* was made up principally of freedmen (Liebeschuetz (1989), 64).

48 See Beard, et al. (1998), 126–128 for a brief overview of the *Salii*.

49 Torelli (1999), 17.

50 The “Table of Lyons”, *ILS* 212.I.8–27 = Smallwood (1967), no. 369.

Conclusions

In conclusion, Roman brotherhood seems to have been defined by at least two key aspects, equality and conflict, and not, as one would expect blood (except in the most general sense). Rather, it is likely that early Roman brotherhood was far more flexible than its later, strictly biological, definition for a number of reasons—key amongst them being perhaps Roman marriage practices.⁵¹ Further, of the two key characteristics, in early Rome it was actually conflict which was more significant in defining the bond, and while some degree of equality was arguably a necessary condition of the relationship the emphasis given to it in the sources may represent a late Republican convention—as by the late Republic, warfare became increasing tangential to civic life—although the focus on conflict may have been preserved in fraternal cooperation and *pietas* in the political realm. But in early Rome it was warfare, and standing alongside your equal in battle which was crucial to the fraternal relationship, meaning that rather than brothers being the model for the relationship between soldiers, it may have actually been the other way around, with the military “band of brothers” providing at least part of the basis for the ideal fraternal relationship in Rome.

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⁵¹ See Bradley (1991), 172–173, where he argues convincingly that given the rate of remarriage (particularly amongst the Roman elite) a high level of familial “blending” was common. As a result, blood connections represented but a single facet in the complex familial identities created during the Roman Republic. See also Smith (2006), 30–32 on the subject.

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