

Plutarch's *Life of Numa* is well known for its defiant belief in the relationship between Numa and Pythagoras, despite the obvious chronological impossibility. Plutarch notes this (*Num.* 1) but nonetheless continues to imply or state the connection (8; 14; 22). Moreover, the life is full of an array of references to Latin words which are derived from Greek (*flamines* from *pilamenai*; *laena* from *chlaina*; *ancilia*, for which a number of options are considered; April from Aphrodite), and he compares the Vestal fires with equivalents in Greece, and gives a very Greek twist to the story of Picus and Faunus, bound like Proteus and compared to the Idaean Dactyli.

There is no doubt that Plutarch is quite deliberate in his statements here. In the comparison (*Lyc. et Num.* 1.5), he actually states that Numa was far more Hellenic than Lycurgus as a lawgiver. This has led some to regard *Numa* as embodying a fairly straightforward view of the superiority of Greek culture; so Whitmarsh writes that this passage is proof of the '(broadly Isocratean) presence in these writings of a "universalist" equation of Hellenism with civilization' (*Greek literature and the Roman empire: The politics of imitation*, Oxford 2001, 118).

In this paper I will argue that the situation is rather more complex. Numa is an outsider, not a Roman, who resists kingship, and when he accepts it, takes it in wholly different directions from Romulus, and part of his approach does not survive beyond him; as Plutarch notes, his failure to deal with the issue of education means that nothing he built survived. This is a radically different approach from that of Livy for instance, for whom Numa's religious reforms are crucial to Rome's development and long-term future. Yet for all Lycurgus' focus on education, it is not all clear that Plutarch wholly admires what Spartans do with their education, any more than he relishes the return to Roman belligerence. His criticism of those who prefer wealth, luxury and empire to safety, gentleness and independence with justice looks like a very sharp criticism both of the Roman empire and of where Sparta found herself in the fourth century (as Isocrates would note), and of some of his contemporaries.

The picture of Numa as a philosopher king, influenced by Greeks, but failing to create the appropriate educational system to sustain his position, is therefore complex, interestingly Isocratean, and rather darker than one might at first sight think. It opens up possibilities for a surprising critique of the Roman world, and a vision of an all too brief golden age, an alternative Rome which could have ruled the world justly, but did not. Plutarch's Pythagorean Numa remains an uncomfortable juxtaposition of Greek and Roman ideals.