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Myths and Mythology: How Stories Shape the World

Foundation myths

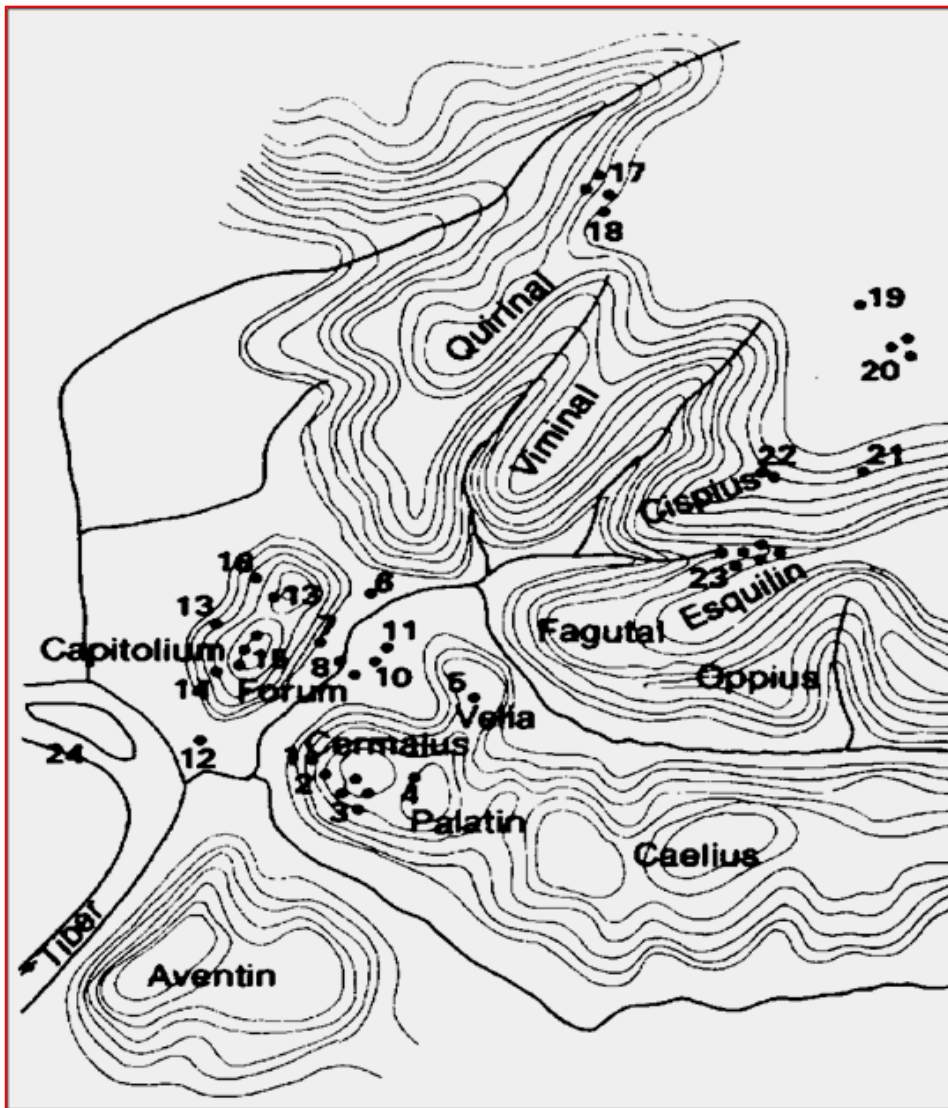
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Bronze and early Iron Age settlements around Rome



- 14th-13th c. BC: Bronze Age pottery and animal bones
 - “Sant’Omobono” (underneath Capitolium / F. Boarium)
- 11th c. BC: Forum: settlement & funerary evidence
- 10th c. BC: necropolis on Palatine
- 9th c. BC: settlement: on the peak of Palatine
- Quirinal: settlements from 8th century BC



Model of early settlement on the Palatine.

The Palatine Museum, Rome.



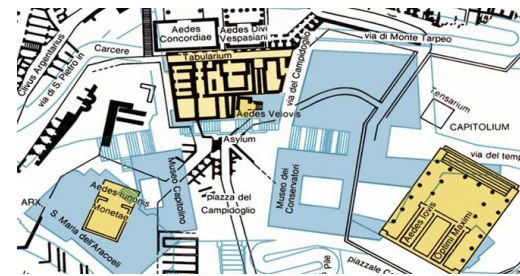
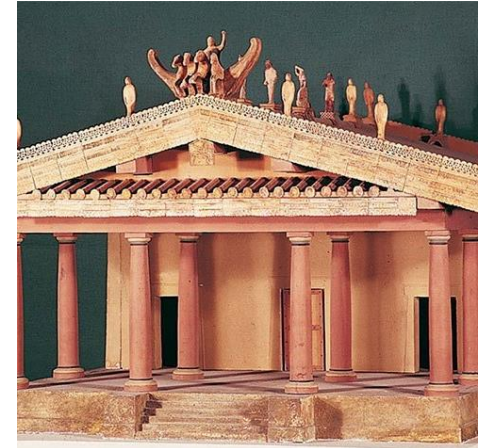
Key developments in the regal period

- Engagement with the Sabines: Sabine presence in earliest Rome, esp. on the Quirinal
 - Romulus and the rape of the Sabine women (Liv. 1.9-10); Plut. *Num.* 1)
 - Some aspects of collegiate magistracy attributed to this duality of Roman and Sabine
- Expansion to the Tiber mouth and its salt flats; trade goods and trade routes;
 - First bridge at Rome
- Establishment of key priesthoods and cults (some little understood later)
- Establishment of some magistracies
- *Engagement with Etruscans and Etruscan kings in the city itself*
- *Drainage of the forum area: Cloaca Maxima*
- *Improved defences around Rome: (parts of) Servian wall*
- *Establishing Rome as federal cult centre for Latium*
- *Building of the Jupiter Capitolinus temple of the Capitoline (6th C BCE)*

The temple of Capitoline Jupiter

- Likely build mid-6th C BCE;
- Stronger influence from Etruscan architecture in its first version than later on;

Determined to finish his temple, he sent for workmen from all parts of Etruria, and not only used the public treasury to defray the cost, but also compelled the plebeians to take their share of the work. This was in addition to their military service, and was anything but a light burden. [2] Still they felt it less of a hardship to build the temples of the gods with their own hands, than they did afterwards when they were transferred to other tasks less imposing...(Liv. 1.56.1-2)



Roman aetiological myths

- There is a range of Roman myths that try to explain the origins of topographical features, buildings, and customs
 - The narrow, target-based definition: myths are stories that explain the origins of places, objects and customs: *aetiological myths*
- ...but they are pliable and stretch to accommodate the story teller's needs:
 - “We have chosen to define a Greek myth as a tale rooted in Greek culture that recounts a sequence of events chosen by the maker of the tale to accommodate his own medium and purpose and to achieve particular effects in his audience.” (Tyrell B. & Brown F. 1991 *Athenian Myths and Institutions: Words in Action*, 6)

Working with examples

- What is your text about?
- What customs or features are explained, and how are they related to the Roman reader's world?
- How are the different characters described?
- Who features? Did you expect them to turn up? Why/why not?

Texts on foundation of Rome

- Vergil *Aeneid* – Verg. *Aen.* 8.190-279 [Cacus]
- Livy *From the Foundation of the City (Ab urbe condita)* – Liv. 1.1
- Ovid *Fasti* – Ov. *Fast.* 2.359-422 [Lupercal]...and many more
- All three from the Augustan period: Rome is already a multicultural, pan-Mediterranean power
- Its myths must position it in that role while also making sense of its rather humble past

Vergil *Aen.* 8: Evander's rome

So did they wear out the night and the day with rowing and mastered all the long windings of the river, moving under the shade of all manner of trees and cleaving green woods in smooth water. The fiery sun had climbed to the middle of the vault of heaven when they saw in the distance walls and a citadel and the roofs of scattered houses. [...] in those days was a poor land ruled by Evander.

It so happened that on that day the Arcadian king Evander was performing yearly rites in honour of the mighty Hercules, son of Amphytrion, and was sacrificing to the gods in a grove outside the city. His son Pallas was with him, and with him also were all the leading warriors and senators, poor men as they were [pauper senatus]. They were offering incense and war blood was smoking on the altars.

'We are of the Trojan race. These weapons you see are for use against our enemies the Latins. It is they who have driven us here, exiles as we are, with all the insolence of war. We are looking for Evander.' (Verg. *Aen.* 8.94-119)



Model of 6th C BCE Rome.

Brock, A. 2016 'Envisioning Rome's Prehistoric River Harbor: An Interim Report from the Forum Boarium', *Etruscan Studies* 19: 1-22, 6.

DOI 10.1515/etst-2016-0001



Vergil *Aen.* 8

- ‘This altar was set up in its grove by Potitius, the first founder of these rites of Hercules [...]. We shall always call it the Greatest Altar, and the greatest altar it will always be.’ (Verg. *Aen.* 8.270-271)
- Then the Salii, the priests of Mars, their heads bound with poplar leaves, came to sing around the altar fires. (Verg. *Aen.* 8.285-286)
- The king, weighed down with age, kept Aeneas [...] by his side as he walked, and made the way seem shorter by all the things he told them. (Verg. *Aen.* 8.306-309)

*[...] there, twice every
day, see the young
boys*

*beat the ground with
their snow-white feet,
in a triple measure, like
Salian dancers.*

*(Horace, Odes, 4.1.26-
28)*

The Salii

- Group of priests said to have been instituted by the early king, Numa
- Task of the priesthood: festival of Mars
- Words found unintelligible by later writers (e.g. Horace, Ovid)

*Indeed, whoever praises Numa's Salian Hymn,
And seems, uniquely, to follow what he and I can't,
Isn't honouring and applauding some dead genius,
But impugning ours, with envy, hating us and ours. (Horace, Ep. 2.86-89)*

Roman foundation myths

AUGUSTUS' USE OF MYTHOLOGY



The Altar of Peace (13 BCE)

- Public monument in a then busy part of Rome
- Workshops, baths, markets, housing, theatres and entertainment, public meeting spaces...
- ...but set apart from the official and monumental Forum Romanum



What is it, then?

- An altar or shrine to the goddess Peace (Pax): a place for sacrifices
- The decorations mirror the religious function: sacrificial procession involving young and old...
- ...and celebrate the gifts of Mother Earth and the mythological origins of Rome





The Tellus panel of the Ara Pacis



The acanthus relief around the outside

Floral garlands (the inside of the altar)



Augustan Images

- Augustus deliberately made use of his ancestry in the iconography of monuments and art
- Ara Pacis (Altar of Peace) subtly links the sacrificing Augustus (south side) with the sacrificing Aeneas (right)
- Another panel depicted Romulus and Remus together with Mars (mostly destroyed)

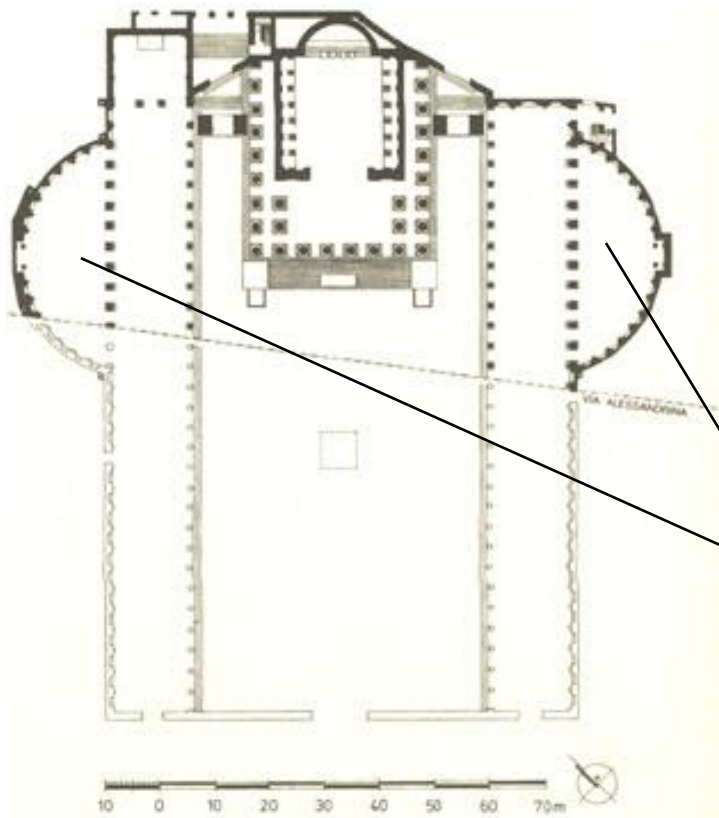


Augustus' Forum

- The temple of Mars Ultor celebrating the defeat of Caesar's assassins at Philippi in 42 BC, and the victory over the Parthians in 20 BC
- Dedicated in 2 BC
- **Links the past and the present**



Augustus' Forum



- Two groups of mythological statues in the exhedrae
- Groups of Roman dignitaries (Julians on the one side, a careful mix on the other).



Shop exterior with Romulus & Aeneas murals IX. 13. 5 House of M. Fabius
Ululitremulus, Pompeii. <https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R9/9%2013%2005.htm>

Aeneas leaves Troy

- Encouraged by omens, Aeneas and his family flees the burning city on the night of its fall:
- “Well, then, dear Father,” I said, “come now, you must let them lift you onto my back. I will hold my shoulders ready for you; this labour of love will be no weight to me. Whatever chances may await us, one common peril and one common salvation shall be ours. Iulus must walk beside me, and my wife shall follow at a safe distance in our footsteps. [...] Now you, father, take up the gods of our ancestral home, our holy symbols. I cannot touch them without sin, for coming as I do straight from the fury of war, I have fresh blood still on them.” (Verg. *Aen.* 2.710ff)

Leaving Troy: Values

- *Pietas*
 - Relations to father and son
 - Regard for religious customs
- Bravery
 - ‘Straight from the fury of war’
- Status as someone protected by the gods
 - Aeneas addressed by Venus, omens from Jupiter prior to this section

Romulus and Remus

So the boys, born and thus brought up, grew to be young men they did not neglect their pastoral duties but their special delight was roaming through the woods on hunting expeditions. As their strength and courage were thus developed, they used not only to lie in wait for fierce beasts of prey, but they even attacked brigands when loaded with plunder. They distributed what they took amongst the shepherds, with whom, surrounded by a continually increasing body of young men, they associated themselves in their serious undertakings and in their sports and pastimes. (Liv. 1.4)

Livy Book 1

Remus is said to have been the first to receive an omen: six vultures appeared to him. The augury had just been announced to Romulus when double the number appeared to him. Each was saluted as king by his own party. The one side based their claim on the priority of the appearance, the other on the number of the birds. Then followed an angry altercation; heated passions led to bloodshed; in the tumult Remus was killed. The more common report is that Remus contemptuously jumped over the newly raised walls and was forthwith killed by the enraged Romulus, who exclaimed, 'So shall it be henceforth with every one who leaps over my walls.' Romulus thus became sole ruler, and the city was called after him, its founder. (Liv. 1.7)

The Sabine Women

When the hour for the games had come, and their eyes and minds were alike riveted on the spectacle before them, the preconcerted signal was given and the Roman youth dashed in all directions to carry off the maidens who were present. [...] Alarm and consternation broke up the games, and the parents of the maidens fled, distracted with grief, uttering bitter reproaches on the violators of the laws of hospitality and appealing to the god to whose solemn games they had come, only to be the victims of impious perfidy. The abducted maidens were quite as despondent and indignant. Romulus, however, went round in person, and pointed out to them that it was all owing to the pride of their parents in denying right of intermarriage to their neighbours. They would live in honourable wedlock, and share all their property and civil rights, and--dearest of all to human nature--would be the mothers of freemen. He begged them to lay aside their feelings of resentment and give their affections to those whom fortune had made masters of their persons. (Liv. 1.9)

Characteristics of Romulus

- The rape of Rhea Silvia by Mars: violence and a degree of impiousness vs. the theme of fertility and abundance
- The friends of the twins: opponents of bands of robbers and brigands - but was there much of a difference?
- Methods: violence - brave but brutish? The death of Remus: unsettling hints at internal strife
- The Rape of the Sabine Women - 'impious infidelity' vs. concern for the new city

Their Usefulness in Augustan Times

Romulus

- Force and power (Mars)
- Fertility and promise
- Continuity (cf. Romulus hut on the Forum; most important cult practices)

Aeneas

- Pietas
- Destiny (promise) (Venus) (=> fertility)
- Continuity (projected backwards in the *Aeneid*)

Romulus



- Pompeian wall painting in the style of the Romulus statue of the Forum of Augustus
- Romulus carrying the armour of an enemy chieftain defeated in one-on-one combat; Rome's first triumphator

Aeneas



- Wall painting from Pompei (twin of the previous) recalling the statue group of the Forum of Augustus
- Aeneas in Roman garb, Iulus in Phrygian – alluding to Aeneas' descent from Venus on Mount Ida



All About Herakles?

- Most legends concerning Herakles predate our written sources
- Similarities with mythological traditions of the Far East (e.g. Gilgamesh)
 - Herakles and the Nemean lion corresponds to oriental depictions of hero kings fighting wild beasts
- They may originally have been about different local heroes and only later become associated with Herakles
 - Why would this happen?