

ROME

DAY ONE

ANDREA CARANDINI

Translated by Stephen Sartarelli



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Contents



INTRODUCTION

| | |
|--|----|
| First Thoughts | 1 |
| An Epochal Event | 12 |
| The Site of Rome before Rome | 15 |
| The Places of Rome | 27 |
| Remus and Romulus and the Kings of Alba Longa | 33 |

THE PALATINE

| | |
|---|----|
| The Preliminary Rite on the Aventine | 41 |
| The Blessing of the Palatine and the Founding of Roma Quadrata | 50 |

THE FOUNDING OF THE FORUM, THE CAPITOL, AND THE CITADEL

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| The Forum | 64 |
| The Capitolium and the Arx | 93 |

THE ORDERING OF THE REGNUM,
OR THE *CONSTITUTIO ROMULI*

The Ordering of Time 101

The Ordering of Space and Men 102

Enemies 110

CONCLUSION 116

Literary Sources 123

Index 165

INTRODUCTION



First Thoughts

Historians tell us that the oldest Rome was the *Roma Quadrata*, a fenced settlement on the Palatine. . . . [W]e will ask ourselves how much a visitor . . . may still find left of these early stages in the Rome of today. . . . Of the buildings which once occupied this ancient area he will find nothing, or only scanty remains. . . . Their place is now taken by ruins, but not by ruins of themselves but of later restorations made after fires or destruction. . . . Now let us, by a flight of the imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past—an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one. This would mean that in Rome the palaces of the Caesars and the Septizonium of Septimius Severus would still be rising to their old height on the Palatine, and the castle of S. Angelo would still be carrying on its battlements the beautiful statues which graced it until the siege by the Goths, and so on. But more than this. In the place occupied by the Palazzo Caffarelli would once more stand—without the Palazzo having

to be removed—the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus; and this not only in its latest shape, as the Romans of the Empire saw it, but also in its earliest one, when it still showed Etruscan forms and was ornamented with terracotta antefixes. Where the Coliseum now stands we could at the same time admire Nero's vanished Golden House. On the Piazza of the Pantheon we should find not only the Pantheon of today, as it was bequeathed to us by Hadrian, but, on the same site, the original edifice erected by Agrippa; indeed, the same piece of ground would be supporting the church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva and the ancient temple over which it was built. And the observer would perhaps only have to change the direction of his glance or position in order to call up the one view or the other. . . . The question may be raised why we chose precisely the past of a *city* to compare with the past of the mind. The assumption that everything past is preserved holds good even in mental life only on condition that the organ of the mind has remained intact and that its tissues have not been damaged by trauma or inflammation. But destructive influences which can be compared to causes of illness like these are never lacking in the history of a city. . . . Demolitions and replacements of buildings occur in the course of the most peaceful development of a city. . . . [I]t is rather the rule than the exception for the past to be preserved in mental life.¹

¹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, translated by James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), pp. 16–19.

I have decided to begin the discussion with this passage from Sigmund Freud because it captures the deepest essence of Rome, a city that can be likened to a mind, from which scraps of memory emerge that our feelings link to other memories and epochs. Its history is so intricate that it looks, at least at first glance, like an unfathomable jumble. Particularly striking is Freud's comparison of Rome with the timelessness of the unconscious. Simultaneously present in both are vast ruins and more modest constructions from the most diverse eras, and together they form a multilayered reality. In the city too, the preservation of the past—demolitions aside—is the rule, where different phases are phantasmagorically present, while those “change[s] . . . of glance” that Freud says would allow us to see all at once, in a timeless view, all the different stages of a building are today made possible by archaeological computer software.

Thus we live on top of meters and meters of accumulated memories lying invisible beneath concrete and asphalt, and they have influenced, literally from below, what still stands above them today: our urban life, in harmony or in contrast with what came before.

Recent studies have shown that conceiving the future is impossible without a memory of the past, because the same circuits of the mind that enable us to sail through our remembrances will color the backdrops of tomorrow. The past, on the other hand, is not only the residue that naturally remains;

it is also continually projected and re-projected by each present moment, much the same way we envision the days ahead of us. The urban stratifications filed away under our feet are thus only potentially a storehouse of data; they acquire meaning and value only in the reconstruction and narrative given them by the questions of our time.



I am an archaeologist, that is, a historian whose primary sources are things made by man. I am a peculiar sort of narrator, one who takes his cues from objects but who, in the process of reconstructing the past, later avails himself of every kind of source, including literary ones. The reconstruction of history, in fact, can only be a multivocal composition, with every voice bearing equal significance. The archaeologist, however, starts with structures and things. I certainly am not a bearer of absolute truths, which in any case are unattainable. Rather, I pose questions and propose solutions—that is, more or less plausible hypotheses whose results are provisional, the outcome of an attempt at synthesis that I am able to make today. As de Finetti writes, “everything is built on quicksand, though naturally one seeks to make the pillars rest on the relatively less dangerous points.”²

² B. de Finetti, *L'invenzione della verità* (Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 2006).

In translating things into a narrative—especially as concerns the archaic and early-archaic periods—we must imagine ourselves not only as historians of a special kind, but also as *reges-augures*, *flamines*, and *pontifices*, that is, as kings and priests, men of religion as well as reason, because the first Romans firmly believed in their gods and the rituals they used to worship them. Law, politics, and the state—which were beginning to emerge at that time—were still enveloped in a sacred aura. Religion, morality, and politics had not yet become separate areas of life but were interconnected realities in the mind. The wise secular historian does not secularize a past steeped in sacredness but rather uses keen rational thought to understand phenomena originally imbued with theology, myth, and ritual, a sphere of pervasive and unifying emotions.



It is not possible to understand the beginnings of a human settlement without retracing the urban history in reverse. A bit like what happens in the game of pick-up sticks: first one takes away the last sticks to fall, which cover others without being covered by them, and one proceeds in this fashion until all that is left is the last stick, which was the first to fall onto the table. The question I happen to ask most often of my

collaborators during excavations is the following: “Which is the uncovered stratum to be excavated?” During twenty years of investigation of the land between the Palatine and the Forum, we have gone back over broad swaths of space and time, transforming the vast accumulation of surviving materials—the “stratification”—into a sequence of actions, activities, and events ordered over time and fathomed by human intelligence—“stratigraphy.” Without stratigraphic culture and technology, one can dig up the ground in search of lost treasures, but one cannot unearth the memory of a city and reconstruct it analytically and as a whole. The digger is like a hunter who catches an animal by burning down the forest in which it dwells. The excavator, on the other hand, is more like a naturalist, who is interested in the forest overall and can observe a common plant, an insect, a mammal, or a gigantic tree with the same eye.

In this same spirit I would like to take the reader by the hand and have him or her descend with me some thirteen meters under the city of Rome—to where, atop the rubble and rubbish, the living settlements once grew, one on top of the other—and go back more than twenty-seven centuries into the past, in search of the first acts and the first day of Rome’s existence: April 21, around 750 BC (fig. 1). What was born on that day? What events of importance for us and for world history followed over the millennia?

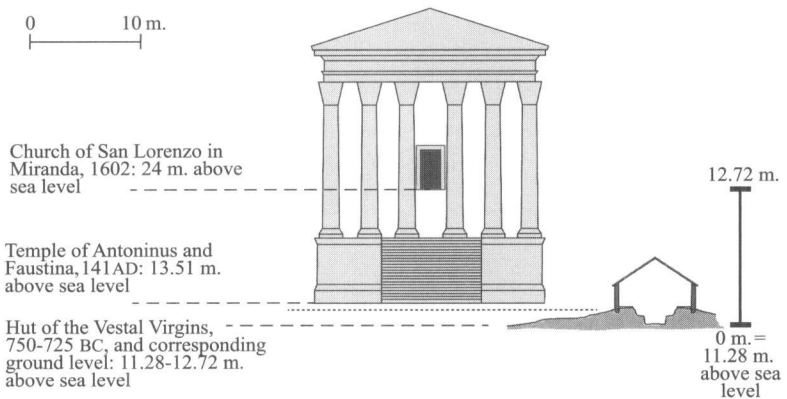


Fig. 1. Rome, thirteen meters of stratification between the eighth century BC and the seventeenth century AD.

In Roman calendrical inscriptions one reads the words: *Roma condita*, that is, “Rome founded” (fig. 2). The exact year matters little—whether it is 753 BC or, as Roman historians maintained, a year between 758 and 725. What matters most is that Rome was born and created as a city and state between 775 and 675 BC, during the century to which tradition assigns the reigns of the three founding kings: the Latin Romulus and the Sabines Titus Tatius and Numa Pompilius.

The fundamental historical problem lies in determining whether the exploits of these three founding kings were in-

| | MARTIVS | APRILIS | MAIVS | IVNIUS | QVINCTILIS |
|----|---|--|---|---|--|
| | I | II | III | IV | V |
| 1 | KAL. Iunoni Covellae (?); Iunoni Lucinae (?); Marti, ancilia moventur. | KAL. Iunoni Covellae (?). | KAL. Iunoni Covellae (?). | KAL. Iunoni Covellae (?); Marti extra portam Capenam (?). | KAL. Iunoni Covellae (?). |
| 2 | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | POPLIVGIA Iovi. |
| 6 | | | | | |
| 7 | NON. Vediovi inter duos lucos (?). | NON. | NON. | NON. Vesta aperitur; Dio Fidio in Colle (?). | NON. Nonae; Caprotinae (?); Romulus non apparuit (?). |
| 8 | | | | | |
| 9 | Ancilia moventur. | | LEMVRIA Lemuribus. | VESTALIA Vestae. | |
| 10 | | | | | |
| 11 | | | LEMVRIA Lemuribus, Maniae | MATRALIA Matri Matutae. | |
| 12 | | | | | |
| 13 | | | LEMVRIA Lemuribus. | | |
| 14 | EQVIRRIA Marti; Mamuralia (?). | | | | |
| 15 | EID. Ferae Iovi; Annae Perennae. | EID. Ferae Iovi; FORDICIDIA Telluri Marti. | EID. Ferae Iovi; itur ad Argeos. | EID. Ferae Iovi; Vesta clauditur; Q.ST.D.F. (Quando stercus delatum, fas). | EID. Ferae Iovi. |
| 16 | Itur ad Argeos. | | | | |
| 17 | LIBERALIA Libero, Liberiae; AGONALIA Martia; itur ad Argeos. | | Ambarvalia Deae Diae (?). | | |
| 18 | | | | | |
| 19 | QVINQVATRUS Marti; ancilia moventur, saltatio saliorum in Comitio | CERIALIA Cereri. | | | LVCARIA. |
| 20 | | | | | |
| 21 | | PARILIA Pali; Roma condita. | AGONALIA Vediovi (?). | | LVCARIA. |
| 22 | | | | | |
| 23 | TUBILVSTRUM Marti, ancilia moventur. | VINALIA (priora) Iovi. | TUBILVSTRUM Volcano. | | NEPTUNALIA Neptuno. |
| 24 | Q.R.C.F. (Quando Rex comitavit, fas). | | Q.R.C.F. (Quando Rex comitavit, fas). | | |
| 25 | | ROBIGALIA Robigo. | | | FVRRINALIA Furrinae. |
| 26 | | | | | |
| 27 | | | | Laribus (?); Iovi Statori (?). | . |
| 28 | | | | | |
| 29 | | | | | |
| 30 | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** |

| | SEXTILIS II = SEPTEMBER | SEPTEMBER II = NOVEMBER | | | |
|----|---|--|--|--|---|
| | SEXTILIS I = SEXTILIS | SEPTEMBER I = OCTOBER | OCTOBER = DECEMBER | NOVEMBER = IANUARIUS | DECEMBER = FEBRUARIUS |
| | VI | VII | VIII | IX | X |
| 1 | KAL. Iunoni Covellae (?). | KAL. Iunoni Covellae (?); Tigillo Sororio (?); Fidei (?). | KAL. Iunoni Covellae (?). | KAL. Iunoni Covellae (?). | KAL. Iunoni Covellae (?). |
| 2 | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | |
| 7 | NON. Saluti in Colle (?). | NON. | NON. | NON. | NON. Fornacalia. |
| 8 | | | | | |
| 9 | | | | AGONALIA (Iano). | |
| 10 | | | | | |
| 11 | | MEDITRINALIA Iovi. | AGONALIA INDI (GETI); Septimontium Palatuae (?). | CARMENTALIA Carmentae. | |
| 12 | | | | | |
| 13 | | FONTINALIA Fonti. | | | Parentalia. |
| 14 | | | | | |
| 15 | EID. Ferae Iovi. | EID. Ferae Iovi; Iovi Feretrio (?); (September=) Octo- ber equus Marti (?). | EID. Ferae Iovi; CONSUALIA Conso. | EID. Ferae Iovi; CARMENTALIA Carmenta. | EID. Ferae Iovi. LUPERCALIA Fauno Lupercio. |
| 16 | | | | | |
| 17 | PORTVNALIA Portuno. | | SATVRNALIA Saturno. | | QVIRINALIA Quirino. |
| 18 | | | | | |
| 19 | VINALIA (rustica vel altera Iovi). | ARMILVSTRIVM Marti, ancilia moventur. | OPALIA Opi ad Forum. | | |
| 20 | | | | | |
| 21 | CONSUALIA Conso. | | DIVALIA Angeronae. | | FERALIA dis inferis, Tacitae Mutae. |
| 22 | | | | | |
| 23 | VOLCANALIA Volcano, Horae Quirini, Maiae supra Comitium | | LARENTALIA Accae Larentinae, Iovi. | | TERMINALIA Termino. |
| 24 | | | | | REGIFVGIVM Iovi?. |
| 25 | OPICONSIVA Opi Consiviae in regia. | | | | |
| 26 | | | | | |
| 27 | VOLTVRNALIA Volturo. | | | | EQVIRRIA Marti. |
| 28 | | | | | |
| 29 | *** | | *** | | *** |
| 30 | | *** | | *** | |

Fig. 2. The Romulian ten-month calendar (reconstruction) and the day of the Parilia.

vented at a later date and projected back to the eighth century BC to ennoble the humble obscurity of the origins, as contemporary historians maintain, or whether we are dealing with realities that are part myth, part history—that is, “mythohistorical,” in which the true is blended not so much with the false as with the fictive. Romulus being the son of Mars, for example, is clearly myth, whereas his deeds, as we shall see, are not merely legend.

To test whether these deeds were at their origin likely to have happened, we need testimonials outside the ancient literary tradition represented by Cicero, Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Plutarch, on the one hand, and Varro and Verrius Flaccus, on the other. We need something that might allow us to evaluate the legend of Rome and reconstruct what objectively happened in the early days of the city.

Contemporary historians maintain, as a rule, that the city was not “founded” by anyone but “formed” gradually and anonymously. In their opinion, there was a city-state at Rome no earlier than the second half of the seventh century BC, at the time, that is, of Ancus Marcius and Tarquinius Priscus. In this way, the legend is reduced to a fable projected onto an entirely falsified eighth century BC.

Archaeologists, on the other hand—and, in particular, we who have been excavating in the heart of the city over the past twenty years, between the Palatine and the Forum (fig. 3)—maintain that the topography and stratigraphy now