THE BEGINNINGS OF ROME

Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars (c. 1000–264 BC)

T. J. CORNELL

ROUTLEDGE HISTORY OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

THE BEGINNINGS OF ROME

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T.J. Cornell is Professor of Ancient History at the University of Manchester.

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T.J. Cornell

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For Mary

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PREFACE

This book is about the origins of Rome. By this I mean not simply the remote beginnings of the city, but the origins of Rome as a major power in the Mediterranean world. The aim, in other words, is to trace the development of Roman society and the Roman state from their first visible beginnings down to the time, in the early third century BC, when all of peninsular Italy was firmly under Roman control. The terminal date of 264 BC has been chosen not only as a convenient stopping point, but as a symbolic moment; for in that year the Romans embarked on their first major overseas adventure, when they sent an army to Sicily to confront the Carthaginians. The start of the first Romano-Carthaginian war marked the beginning of the end for Carthage, and ultimately for all the other major powers of the Mediterranean basin. For Rome, it equally clearly signalled the end of the beginning.

As a subject for historical inquiry the question of the origins of Rome, on this broad definition, scarcely needs justification. To borrow a phrase from Polybius (1.1.5), who could be so idle or apathetic as not to want to know how Rome grew from nothing to become the dominant power in Italy? When, how and why did the city come into existence? Who were the Romans, and what were the secrets of their success? Such questions, one would have thought, would stimulate anyone endowed with even the most modest level of historical curiosity. We need not be surprised that the origins of Rome were the object of endless fascination and inquiry in antiquity, not only for the Romans themselves but also for their partners, rivals and enemies; nor that ancient accounts of early Rome have been preserved and intensively studied ever since.

What is surprising, and needs to be explained, is the fact that early Roman history has been largely ignored by scholars in the English-speaking world. This seems to be a curiously Anglo-Saxon phenomenon. Elsewhere the subject is flourishing – not only in Italy, where 'Roma arcaica' is probably more intensively researched than any other historical topic, and the volume of publications has far exceeded the limits of what a normal person could hope to take in, but also in other continental countries, including France, Belgium, Holland, Germany and the Scandinavian countries. In the English-speaking

world, however, Roman history before the Punic Wars is regarded as a marginal topic. It is hardly ever taught in school or university courses, and almost no one chooses it as a subject for research. As for publications, most important books in English have been either translated from other languages (e.g. the work of Raymond Bloch, Georges Dumézil, Jacques Heurgon, Massimo Pallottino), or written by exiles (Andreas Alföldi, Arnaldo Momigliano, Stefan Weinstock) and others who choose English in preference to their own languages (Einar Gjerstad, Par Goran Gierow, Endre Ferenczy, Jørgen Christian Meyer, Hendrik Versnel, Rudi Thomsen).

It is not easy to account for this state of affairs. It undoubtedly has something to do with the fact that in English-speaking countries ancient history is closely tied to the study of Classics, with the result that the periods chosen for historical study coincide with those that produced great works of literature; but this is surely not the whole explanation. We cannot (can we?) be so lacking in historical sense as to allow our choices to be determined by such arbitrary and irrelevant criteria. In any case English-speaking historians have not been deterred from tackling other areas that lie outside the main classical periods – Mycenaean and dark-age Greece, for example, or the Hellenistic world, or the later Roman Empire.

In my experience the most commonly advanced justification for neglecting the early centuries of Roman history is that the evidence is too uncertain. The written accounts were all produced centuries after the events they purport to describe, and there is no way of ascertaining the truth of most of what they say. In the absence of any contemporary sources, so the argument runs, the history of Rome before the Punic Wars cannot be written. There is enough truth in this formulation to make it plausible, but one of the purposes of this book is to show that the situation is not nearly as bad as that. The evidence is indeed extremely difficult, and problems of verification are acute, but it is incorrect to say that nothing can be known about how Rome began, or how it developed during the early centuries of its existence.

The problematic nature of the sources has not deterred scholars on the Continent from making the attempt. Some of these continental experts are extremely sceptical; in order to study this period one does not have to be credulous or uncritical. Moreover, the difficulties are no more acute, indeed they are probably less intractable, than those that face students of the Mycenaean age, but that has not stopped English-speaking historians from producing an apparently endless stream of publications on the Trojan War or the Greek 'dark age'. In any case, for all our many faults, I would not regard cowardice in the face of difficulty as a distinctively British or American characteristic.

The lack of any established tradition of scholarship on this subject in the English-speaking world remains a puzzle which I for one am not able to explain. But whatever the answer, the situation presents both an opportunity and a justification for a new synthesis. There is a desperate need for a new

history of early Rome; this book is offered in an attempt to meet that need. I have tried to make it comprehensible to non-specialists as well as presenting new ideas that may be of interest to experts in the field. I have also tried to set out the most important problems, to acknowledge and recommend the best of previous scholarship, and to be up to date with references to current research; but in all three of these efforts I have necessarily had to be selective. Whether the finished product lives up to any of the stated aims is for the reader to decide.

This book has been many years in the making, and could not have been written without the help and inspiration of teachers, friends, colleagues and students, who over the years have enabled me to shape and clarify my thoughts on the beginnings of Rome. It would be impossible to name them all, and invidious to discriminate between them. To this general rule, however, I shall make one exception, in acknowledging the profound intellectual and personal debt I owe to my former teacher, research supervisor and friend, the late Arnaldo Momigliano. Those who were privileged to know him, and those familiar with his work, will be able to detect his influence in every part of this book. I hope that it may contain some reflection of his clarity and sureness of touch; such merits as it may possess are likely to be due, at least in some measure, to him. Alas, I was unable to show him a draft manuscript, and to have the direct benefit of his penetrating insight and criticism. If the book turns out to contain flaws in its structure, argument and interpretation, these are entirely my own responsibility.

A number of people helped in the final preparation of the text. The general editor, Fergus Millar, read the whole typescript, and suggested a number of changes and additions which I have incorporated into the final version. Fergus also deserves credit for the patience and characteristic good humour he has shown to one of the more awkward and dilatory contributors to his series, and for encouraging and commending my efforts even when they offer interpretations that are diametrically opposed to his own. I am also grateful to Michael Crawford, who read and commented on parts of the typescript and kindly allowed me to make use of a draft version of his new text and commentary on the Twelve Tables.

Special thanks are due to my mother, Margaret Cornell, who compiled the index, and at an earlier stage read through a complete draft of the book. Her critical eye, sharpened by years of editorial experience at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, corrected numerous errors of style and grammar. Richard Stoneman and his assistants at Routledge have been unfailingly courteous and helpful, and have agreed to most of my requests and suggestions on the form the book should take. The sub-editor, Margaret Deith, has worked heroically to bring consistency and order to a chaotic typescript. To all of these, and to David Saxon who drew many of the text figures, I am immensely grateful.

Much of the book was written during a period of leave granted to me by

my department in the autumn of 1993. The sections on the organisation of the early Roman army, and on warfare in archaic Italy, benefited substantially from a period of research on ancient warfare which I undertook in 1994, funded by a grant from the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. The last four chapters of the book cover the same ground as my contributions to the *Cambridge Ancient History* (2nd edn), vol. VII.2, 1989, and some sections represent a rewritten version, sometimes shortened, sometimes extended, of the corresponding pages of the *CAH*; a part of the final chapter is reproduced almost word for word. I am grateful to the Cambridge University Press for permission to include this material.

Finally my wife, who has no interest whatever in Roman history, has helped and sustained me during the writing of this book in ways that only she can know. I dedicate it to her, with love and gratitude.

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ABBREVIATIONS

This list contains abbreviations of periodicals and other works referred to by initials or in severely abbreviated form. It does not include books that are frequently cited in the notes in an abbreviated form; these abbreviations will, I hope, be self-explanatory. Full details are given in the bibliography.

AC	*L'Antiquité Classique*
Acta Arch.	*Acta Archaeologica*
AION	*Annali dell' Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
AJAH	*American Journal of Ancient History*
AJPh	*American Journal of Philology*
Annales (ESC)	*Annales (Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations)*
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (Festschrift J. Vogt), ed. H. Temporini (Berlin, New York, 1972–)
Arch. Class.	*Archeologia Classica*
Arch. Laz.	*Archeologia Laziale*
Arch. Reports	*Archaeological Reports*
ARID	*Analecta Romana Instituti Danici*
ASNP	*Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*
BAGB	*Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé*
BCH	*Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*
BCom	*Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma*
BIBR	*Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome*
BMCR	*Bollettino dei Musei Comunali di Roma*
Boll. Arch.	*Bollettino di Archeologia*
BPI	*Bullettino di Paletnologia Italiana*
Broughton, *MRR*	T.R.S. Broughton, *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic* I–II (New York 1951–2)
BSA	*Annual of the British School at Athens*
Bull. Soc. Ling.	*Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique*
CAH	*The Cambridge Ancient History*
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
CJ	*Classical Journal*
CLP	*Civiltà del Lazio Primitivo*, Exhibition Catalogue (Rome 1976)

CPh	*Classical Philology*
CQ	*Classical Quarterly*
CR	*Classical Review*
CRAI	*Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*
Crawford, *RRC*	M. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage* I–II (Cambridge 1974)
CSSH	*Comparative Studies in Society and History*
DdA	*Dialoghi di Archeologia*
De Sanctis, *StdR*[2]	G. De Sanctis, *Storia dei Romani*, 2nd edn
EAA	*Enciclopedia dell'Arte Antica Classica e Orientale*
Enea nel Lazio	*Enea nel Lazio: archeologia e mito*, Exhibition catalogue (Rome 1981)
Entretiens	*Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique* (Fondation Hardt, Vandœuvres-Geneva)
Eph. Ep.	*Ephemeris Epigraphica*
FGrHist	F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* I–III, 11 vols (Berlin–Leiden 1923–58)
FIRA	*Fontes iuris Romani antejustiniani* 1–3, ed. S. Riccobono (Florence 1940–3)
GRT	*La grande Roma dei Tarquini*, ed. M. Cristofani, Exhibition catalogue (Rome 1990)
HSCPh	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
ILLRP	*Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae* (ed. E. Degrassi)
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (ed. H. Dessau)
Jacoby, *FGrHist*	See *FGrHist*
JDAI	*Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JRA	*Journal of Roman Archaeology*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
LCM	*Liverpool Classical Monthly*
LEC	*Les Etudes Classiques*
LIMC	*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*
MAAR	*Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*
MEFR(A)	*Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome (Antiquité)*
Mommsen, *Staatsr.*	T. Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht*, 3 vols (Leipzig 1887–8)
Mommsen, *Strafr.*	T. Mommsen, *Römisches Strafrecht* (Leipzig 1899)
Mus Helv.	*Museum Helveticum*
NAC	*Numismatica e Antichità Classiche*
NSc	*Notizie degli Scavi dell'Antichità*
OCD[2]	*The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford 1970)
Op. Rom.	*Opuscula Romana*
PAPS	*Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*
PBA	*Proceedings of the British Academy*

PBSR	*Papers of the British School at Rome*
PCPhS	*Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*
PdP	*La Parola del Passato*
Popoli e civiltà	*Popoli e civiltà dell'Italia antica*, 7 vols (Rome 1974–8)
PPS	*Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*
Quad. Top.	*Quaderni dell'Istituto di Topografia Antica dell'Università di Roma*
RAL	*Rendiconti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche
RBPhH	*Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*
RE	*Reallexikon der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* (eds Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll)
REA	*Revue des Etudes Anciennes*
REG	*Revue des Etudes Grecques*
REL	*Revue des Etudes Latines*
Rev. Arch.	*Revue Archéologique*
Rev. Hist.	*Revue Historique*
RFIC	*Rivista di Filologia e di Istruzione Classica*
RHDFE	*Revue Historique de Droit Français et Etranger*
Rh. Mus.	*Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*
RIDA	*Revue Internationale des Droits de l'Antiquité*
RIL	*Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo*, Classe di Lettere, scienze morali e storiche
Röm. Mitt.	*Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts (Römische Abteilung)*
RPAA	*Rendiconti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*
RPh	*Revue de Philologie*
RSA	*Rivista Storica dell'Antichità*
RSI	*Rivista Storica Italiana*
SDHI	*Studia et Documenta Historiae et Iuris*
SE	*Studi Etruschi*
SNR	*Schweizerische Numismatische Rundschau*
Syll.[3]	W. Dittenberger (ed.) *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 3rd edn
TAPhA	*Transactions of the American Philological Association*
TLE[2]	*Testimonia Linguae Etruscae*, ed. M. Pallottino (2nd edn, Florence 1968)
TLL	*Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*
TLS	*The Times Literary Supplement*
Trans. Phil. Soc.	*Transactions of the Philological Society*
Tria Corda	E. Gabba (ed.), *Tria Corda: scritti in onore di Arnaldo Momigliano* (Como 1983)
TvR	*Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis*
Wissowa, *Ruk*[2]	G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer* (2nd edn, Munich 1912)
ZSS	*Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte (Romanistische Abteilung)*

1

INTRODUCTION: THE EVIDENCE

It is customary for books on the ancient world to begin with an introductory account of the evidence. But whereas for most periods of ancient history a brief catalogue of the main sources is usually sufficient, something more is required in a book on the early history of Rome. The reliability of the written sources, and the relevance and interpretation of the archaeological material, are so controversial, and raise such complex issues, that a more extended account is called for. Discussion of particular problems will occur throughout the main part of the book, but it is important to begin with a general outline of the various types of evidence, and to define and defend the approach to them that will be taken in the following chapters.

1 HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS

The most important evidence for the early history of Rome comes from literary sources – that is, books written during the classical period and published in manuscript form. Copied and recopied, first as manuscripts and later in printed editions, these texts were preserved through the Middle Ages and down to modern times. Scholars sometimes use the blanket term 'literary tradition' to encapsulate the mass of data contained in ancient texts and representing what the Romans of the late republican and imperial periods knew, or thought they knew, about their own past. This is a convenient label, but it is important not to exaggerate the consistency and uniformity of what is in fact a variegated and often fragmentary corpus of material.

The most important texts are complete works devoted specifically to the remote past of Rome. These can be divided into two groups: those of historians, who produced chronological narratives, and those of the so-called antiquarians, who collected information about the past in all kinds of ways, both systematic and haphazard, and for all kinds of reasons – and sometimes, one suspects, for no reason at all. These eccentric individuals are difficult to characterise, but they shared a passionate and sometimes obsessive erudition, and were most definitely not historians. According to one recent study, an

antiquarian can be defined as 'the type of man who is interested in historical facts without being interested in history'.[1]

The first historians whose texts we can still read lived in the first century BC. The most readable of them, and by far the most important surviving source for the history of early Rome, is **Livy**. Titus Livius (59 BC – AD 17), a well-to-do gentleman from Patavium (Padua), was almost an exact contemporary of the emperor Augustus (63 BC – AD 14). His history of Rome *From the Foundation of the City* (*ab urbe condita*) began to appear in the early 20s BC, and when complete at the end of his life occupied no fewer than 142 books. Only thirty-five of these are still extant, but they include the first ten books, covering the period from the origins to 293 BC. The first book dealt with the kings, the next four with the early Republic to the Gallic sack (390 BC), and the remaining five with the century from the sack to the Third Samnite War.[2]

The second major narrative source, which should be read alongside Livy, is the work of his Greek contemporary **Dionysius of Halicarnassus**, a scholar and rhetorician who lived in Rome under Augustus.[3] His *Roman Antiquities*, which began to appear in 7 BC, covered the period from the origins to 264 BC in twenty books, but we possess the complete text of only the first eleven of these, taking the story down to 443 BC, and short excerpts of the rest. Dionysius thus gave more space to the earliest period than Livy; his first book dealt with the prehistory of Italy, followed by three on the kings, and a further eight on the first sixty or so years of the Republic.

The narratives of Livy and Dionysius tell very much the same story and are often in close agreement in matters of detail. This is probably due to the use of common sources rather than the direct use of Livy by Dionysius (the reverse can be ruled out on chronological grounds). No one has ever been able to decide for certain whether the two men knew each other personally, or even if either knew the other's work. It is quite clear in any case that they differed widely in their aims, methods and approach, but they drew upon the same body of material and their accounts complement each other.

Livy and Dionysius constitute the main narrative sources down to 443 BC, after which Livy stands alone. But they can be supplemented by other accounts which cover some or all of the same ground. One of the most important, if only because of the standing of its author, is the work *On the State* (*de republica*) by **Cicero** (106–43 BC), the orator and statesman who was also the outstanding intellectual figure of his generation. Cicero never got around to writing the history of Rome that he sometimes contemplated, but he does offer a brief survey of the early development of its political system in the second book of the *de republica* (44 BC), a work in dialogue form on political theory. The only manuscript, which was discovered in 1820, is damaged, and there are some infuriating gaps; otherwise Cicero's outline of the early history of Rome, covering the kings and the early Republic to the middle of the fifth century BC, is the earliest continuous narrative we possess.[4]

Another important text of about the same time (probably published in the 30s BC) is the surviving portion of a universal history by the Greek writer **Diodorus Siculus**. The fully preserved text of books 11 to 20 covers the period from 486 to 302 BC, and includes the names of the Roman magistrates for each year, and notices of other Roman events in some years. One or two episodes (e.g. the Decemvirate and the Gallic sack) are treated at length. If all the references to Rome are extracted from Diodorus' text, the result is a chronicle-type account which presents significant differences from all the other sources and to which scholars have attributed great importance. This assessment is based on the assumption that Diodorus was little more than a compiler, and that his notices on Roman history were drawn exclusively from the account of an early annalist. But scholars are now less certain about this than they once were, and the idea of Diodorus as a mere cipher has been undermined in an important study by Kenneth Sacks.[5]

During the Empire the early history of the city ceased to be a major concern for serious historians; those authors who did write about the early period were mostly hacks and epitomators who relied exclusively on Livy, now firmly established as the standard account. For that reason surviving narratives of the archaic period by writers such as Florus, Eutropius and Orosius are of little value for our purpose. But at least one historian did attempt to write an independent account of the whole history of Rome. This was **Cassius Dio**, a Greek writer (also a Roman senator and consul), who was active in the early years of the third century AD. His account of the period to the Punic Wars, which occupied ten books, does not survive, but we possess substantial fragments of it as well as a fairly faithful summary by a twelfth-century Byzantine monk called **Zonaras**. Dio's work seems to have been based on republican sources and appears to be partly independent of Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus. It frequently provides details that are not in other sources.[6]

A continuous account that contains much relevant historical information, even if it is not strictly a narrative history, is the *Geography* of **Strabo** (*c.* 63 BC – AD 21), a work in seventeen books dealing with the whole of the known world. Book 5, on Italy, contains some extremely important sections on the early history of Rome, Latium and Etruria drawn from well-informed sources.[7]

The last important narrative source is **Plutarch** (*c.* AD 46–120), the Greek biographer whose famous *Parallel Lives* include several that fall within our period, namely Romulus, Numa, Publicola, Coriolanus, Camillus and Pyrrhus.[8] Plutarch is important because he read voraciously, and faithfully reported what he found in a wide variety of sources. He drew heavily on Livy and (especially) Dionysius of Halicarnassus, but he also provides much additional information not contained in their accounts, including recondite material taken from antiquarians and others (the Lives of Romulus and Numa are especially valuable in this respect). The Life of Pyrrhus is a key text, since

it refers to the period from 293 to 264 for which we possess neither Dionysius nor Livy; indeed, it is the main source for the age of Pyrrhus.

Apart from these continuous accounts, we also possess important references to early Rome in the works of historians of other periods; two that deserve particular mention are **Polybius** and **Tacitus**. Polybius (*c.* 210–131 BC) was a Greek historian who wrote an account of the rise of the Roman Empire in the age of the Punic Wars. His text is a century older than any of the surviving continuous accounts of the archaic period, which makes him an especially important source in those passages where he refers back to the remote past of Rome. His account of the early treaties between Rome and Carthage (3.22–5) gives priceless information about documents of which we should otherwise be entirely ignorant, and his account of the Gauls and their wars against Rome (2.14–20) is the most reliable evidence we have on that important subject. We can only lament the loss of the so-called *archaeologia* – the digression in book 6 which gave a survey of the early history of Rome down to *c.* 450 BC.[9]

Cornelius Tacitus (*c.* AD 56 – *c.* 120), the historian of the Roman Principate, includes a number of well-informed digressions on archaic Rome, particularly on the origins of institutions and on topographical questions.[10]

2 THE SOURCES OF OUR SOURCES: LOST HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS

The historical sources provide us with a clear narrative framework, a well-established chronology, and a great deal of substantive information. The problem is that they were all written centuries after the events they describe, which inevitably raises the question of how historical they really are. The obvious first step is to ask where these historians obtained their information.

What were the sources of our sources? At one level this question can be easily answered. Roman historians did not, as a general rule, carry out original research; unlike the antiquarians, they did not try to discover new facts about the past, but rather to present received facts in a new way. Their aims were rhetorical, artistic, political and moral. For the most part they were content to take their information from the works of their predecessors, whom they then hoped to eclipse. Indeed, Livy's masterpiece was so successful in this respect that his predecessors (and rivals) were rapidly forgotten, and their works failed to survive. Dionysius was to some extent insulated from this process because his text was in Greek, and would not have suffered by comparison with Livy among the many Greek-speaking inhabitants of the Roman Empire who never learned Latin.

It is well recognised that Livy and Dionysius relied principally on the works of earlier historians, who had themselves done the same in their turn. There has been much debate, most of it futile, about the working methods of Livy (and to a lesser extent Dionysius), and about the identity of the sources

they used at different stages of their works. This type of source analysis (or *Quellenforschung*, as the Germans call it) is of doubtful value, however, not only because it makes unverifiable assumptions about the working methods of Livy and Dionysius (for instance that they followed one source at a time), but also because it is not clear how useful it would be to know that at a certain point Livy used Valerius Antias, and at another Licinius Macer (the two first-century historians who are assumed to have been his principal sources in the early books), because we know almost nothing about these writers or their works, so naming them as sources would not advance our understanding of Livy's text or our assessment of its reliability.[11]

All we know for certain is that Livy and Dionysius came at the end of a long line of historians, each of whom had covered the history of the city from its foundation. This succession of historians is conventionally known as the 'annalistic tradition', and its practitioners as 'annalists', because they followed a year-by-year arrangement and in many cases called their works *annales* (Livy and Dionysius did not use this title, and are therefore not usually considered annalists, although they did adopt a year-by-year structure). It is not entirely certain, however, that the earliest Roman historians were annalists in this sense; some have suggested that the first proper annalist was L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi, who lived at the time of the Gracchi in the latter half of the second century BC.[12]

However that may be, the Roman tradition of historiography goes back some way before Piso. The first Roman to write the history of the city was Q. Fabius Pictor, a senator who lived in the second half of the third century BC and wrote probably a few years before 200 BC. He is an obscure figure, whose work is represented by only a handful of quotations in later authors, but we do know one fact of outstanding importance: he wrote in Greek. This indicates that Fabius was consciously applying the canons and methods of Greek historiography to the past of Rome.[13] Others quickly followed where Fabius led the way, but even less is known about them than about Fabius. Things become clearer with the development of historical writing in Latin. Here the decisive role was played by two crucially important figures: Ennius and Cato.

Quintus Ennius (239–169 BC) composed a highly original narrative poem in Latin hexameters (the Greek epic metre used by Homer), but on the theme of the history of the Roman people, from the wanderings of Aeneas after the sack of Troy down to his own lifetime. The poem, significantly entitled *Annales*, comprised perhaps as many as 30,000 lines, of which over 600 are preserved – enough to give us a flavour of the original and some idea of how it was structured. At least six books (some 10,000 lines) dealt with the period down to the Punic Wars. Ennius' work became a national epic, and was extremely influential in shaping the Romans' view of their own past.[14]

M. Porcius Cato the Censor (234–148 BC), one of the great men of his time, was the first to write history in Latin prose (during the last years of his life).

The resulting work, called *Origines* (*The Origins*), contained seven books, the first of which dealt with the origins of the Roman people (*origo populi Romani*). It covered not only the remote origins of the city, but also the age of the kings and the early Republic, probably down to *c.* 450 BC. If so, it had the same scope as Polybius' *Archaeology* and the second book of Cicero's *On the State*, which is not a coincidence.[15] The next two books dealt with the origins of all the other cities of Italy. There followed four books of historical narrative, starting with the First Punic War and describing the conquest of the Mediterranean by Rome at the head of a united Italy.[16] Around 150 fragments survive, making Cato's *Origines* the best known work of republican historiography before the time of Caesar.

We know far less about the many historians who came after Cato. These included, apart from Piso (see above), the poorly attested Cassius Hemina and Gnaeus Gellius,[17] as well as others who are little more than names to us, such as Vennonius (see below, p. 175). This brings us finally to the first century BC, and the immediate predecessors of Livy: Valerius Antias, Licinius Macer, Claudius Quadrigarius and Q. Aelius Tubero. These were the annalists *par excellence*, about whom so much has been written but so little is actually known.

The importance of these late republican annalists in the present context is that they are presumed to have been the main sources of Dionysius, and the only sources used by Livy. Consequently the assessment of the reliability of everything we read in Livy entails an assessment of the later annalists. The worry is that these late annalists are widely believed to have been less scrupulous than their second-century predecessors. They are said to have written at much greater length about the archaic period, and to have supplied the raw materials for this expansion from their own imaginations.[18] We thus arrive at the position where any statement in one of our sources, unless it can be shown to go back to an early historian such as Fabius Pictor, Cato or Piso, is suspect because it might be the capricious invention of one of the late annalists.

It has always seemed to me that this theory introduces an unnecessary complication into an already complex story. If it is true that the later annalists wrote at greater length about the early period than their second-century predecessors (which is not certain, at least not in all cases), it does not necessarily follow that they filled out their accounts with invented 'facts'. It is much more likely that the early historians had presented a bare chronicle of annual events, and that their first-century successors fleshed out this skeleton with rhetorical elaborations. This at least is what Cicero implies, when he criticises the dry-as-dust manner of the earliest historians and laments the paucity of their literary style.[19] It is also possible that the later annalists added to the stock of genuine facts by doing further research among archives that had not hitherto been exploited. We know that Licinius Macer

made use of a list of magistrates recorded on linen rolls kept in the temple of Juno Moneta.[20] This was probably not an isolated example.

It would be sensible to acknowledge the extent of our ignorance in these matters. In truth we do not know precisely which sources were used by Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, nor how they used them. It is arbitrary to suggest that Livy did not consult the works of early historians like Fabius Pictor and Calpurnius Piso, but only quoted them at second hand; but there is equally no reason to assume that these earlier historians were more honest and scrupulous than the later annalists, whose reliability we are not in a position to judge.[21]

All we can say is that Livy and Dionysius were dependent on an annalistic tradition that went back to about 200 BC. Given the limitations of our knowledge, we can only ask in general terms about the historical value of this tradition, as it is represented by Livy, Dionysius, and the other extant accounts. It obviously makes better sense to discuss Livy, whom we can actually read, than his lost precedessors, whom we cannot read.

In general, speculation about the competence and integrity of individual annalists is a red herring, diverting attention from the main question that needs to be addressed to the annalistic tradition as a whole. How did the Roman historians, the earliest of whom lived in the second half of the third century BC, set about constructing their accounts of the earliest history of the city? Where could they find evidence about events that had happened centuries before their time?

As far as we can tell, there were essentially four types of material that would have been available to the earliest Roman historians: relevant information in the works of Greek historians, family records, oral tradition, and ancient documents and archives. Let us examine these four types of evidence one by one.

3 THE SOURCES OF OUR SOURCES: GREEK ACCOUNTS

Greek historians were an extremely important source for Fabius Pictor and his successors. As early as the fifth century Greek historians had mentioned Rome in connection with the wanderings of Aeneas and Odysseus (see below, p. 64), but it was not until the fourth century that they began to take a serious interest in the city as a topic in its own right. This was the result of the growth of Roman power in Italy, which began to affect the political interests of the Greek cities in Italy and Sicily, and later of the Hellenistic monarchies. In these circumstances it was logical for Greek historians to focus their attention on two aspects of Roman history: the remote origins of the city, a topic which they investigated in order to discover who the Romans were and where they came from, and the most recent past, in which Rome's affairs had begun to impinge on Greek interests.

The first major Roman event to be recorded by Greek writers was the sack of the city by the Gauls in 390 BC, which was mentioned by Theopompus, Aristotle and Heraclides Ponticus (Plutarch, *Camillus* 22.2–3); later Duris of Samos described the battle of Sentinum (295 BC). Finally the sensational defeat of Pyrrhus (275 BC) created a flurry of historical research into Rome and the Romans. As far as the present subject is concerned, the most important figures were Hieronymus of Cardia and Timaeus of Tauromenium, both of whom wrote accounts of the Pyrrhic War, and introduced their readers to the Romans by describing the origins of the city.

Hieronymus (died *c.* 250 BC) was later recognised as the standard authority on the history of the successors of Alexander the Great, and was one of Plutarch's main sources for the Life of Pyrrhus; Dionysius of Halicarnassus tells us that he was also the first Greek historian to write an account of the *archaeologia* (i.e. the earliest history) of the Romans.[22] For his part Timaeus (*c.* 356–260 BC) was the leading historian of the western Greeks; his great work in thirty-eight books began with a general account, in five books, of the history and institutions of the peoples of the western Mediterranean. This was a pioneering effort, which completely superseded the casual and spasmodic curiosity of earlier Greek writers. It was Timaeus who brought Rome within the normal range of Greek knowledge, first in his general history, then again in a monograph on the Pyrrhic War.[23]

The first Roman historians would have found in the works of these Greek writers not only narrative accounts of the period of the late fourth and early third centuries, but also detailed discussion of how Rome came to be founded. As Emilio Gabba has shown, this explains the curious 'hour-glass' shape of the earliest Roman histories, which included extensive accounts of the foundation and of contemporary events, but dealt only summarily with the period in between.[24]

Unfortunately we know all too little about how the Greek historians dealt with the story of the origins of Rome, and where they found their information. But it seems certain that some of them made use of local traditions. For instance the ancient and indigenous story of Romulus and Remus had been written up in Greek sources before Fabius Pictor (Plutarch, *Romulus* 3.1); and we know that Timaeus connected local Roman customs (such as the annual festival of the October Horse) with the tradition that they were descended from Trojan refugees (Polybius 12.4b). It is uncertain to what extent Greek writers went beyond the foundation of the city and treated events of its early history. Timaeus seems to have written about Servius Tullius (Pliny, *n.h.* 33.43); and it may be that Greek historians were responsible for those stories that implied extensive Greek influence on Rome's development – for instance the legend that Numa was a pupil of Pythagoras, or that the Tarquins were descended from Demaratus of Corinth (see below, p. 124). It is unlikely, however, that Fabius Pictor would have found a systematic account of the whole regal period in any Greek writer,

even Timaeus; but if he did, we should still have to confront the same problem at one remove – i.e., what primary sources was it based on?

4 THE SOURCES OF OUR SOURCES: FAMILY TRADITION

Republican Rome was an aristocratic society in which status depended on a combination of birth and achievement. Roman nobles sought to justify the domination of their class, and to boost their individual claims in competition with their peers, by celebrating the achievements of their ancestors. In these circumstances it is inevitable that the great families preserved a record of their past achievements, and had ways of passing the information on to subsequent generations. That the early historians, who themselves belonged to the nobility, obtained information from this source seems likely. What we do not know is how reliable the information was or how it was transmitted. In the late Republic aristocratic houses contained ancestral portrait busts and had family trees painted on the walls, with details of the triumphs and offices held by individual ancestors; but by this date families were also sponsoring full-scale family histories in literary form. Cicero's friend Atticus, we know, wrote a history of the Junii at the request of M. Brutus, and, on behalf of other friends, histories of the Claudii Marcelli, Fabii and Aemilii.[25]

Whether the families had any documentary evidence to support their claims, and if so how far back it went, we cannot know. That they maintained a vigorous oral tradition seems certain, however, and it is probable that this was well established at least as early as the fourth century, when the Roman elite was fired by a competitive ethos. One of the ways in which family history was publicised and transmitted was the practice of delivering eulogies at funerals, a ceremony that is brilliantly described by Polybius. The funeral was attended, he tells us, by relatives of the deceased wearing the death-masks of his ancestors, and clothed in the dress suitable to the rank they achieved in their careers.

> They all ride in chariots preceded by the fasces, axes, and other insignia by which the different magistrates are wont to be accompanied according to the respective dignity of the offices of state held by each during his life; and when they arrive at the rostra they all seat themselves in a row on ivory chairs . . . . Besides, he who makes the oration over the man about to be buried, when he has finished speaking of him, recounts the successes and exploits of the rest whose images are present, beginning with the most ancient. By this means, by this constant renewal of the good report of brave men, the celebrity of those who performed noble deeds is rendered immortal, while at the same time the fame of those who did good service to their country becomes known to the people and a heritage for later generations.
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> (Polyb. 6.53.8–54.2)

It is likely enough that aristocratic family traditions played a part in the formation of the surviving narrative accounts of early Rome, but it is difficult to define the precise nature of their influence. The only explicit comments are negative ones; both Cicero (*Brutus* 62) and Livy (8.40.2) tell us that funeral eulogies distorted the record by making false claims. Both seem to imply that the problem was not that people were fabricating fictitious ancestors, but rather that they were falsely claiming descent from great men of the past to whom they were not, in fact, related. If so, the amount of potential damage is considerably reduced. The context of Livy's statement also makes it seem as if the object of dispute was the identity of the individual magistrates who undertook particular tasks: which consul – Fabius or Fulvius? Or was it the dictator Cornelius? The same evidence also suggests that the false claims related to the period of the later fourth century.

One thing is certain – and rather striking. Roman aristocratic families, unlike their Greek counterparts, did not, as a general rule, concern themselves with the business of inserting their forebears into the mythical past of the city. The great patrician clans (see below, p. 245), the Claudii, Sulpicii, Cornelii and Manlii, did not try very hard to claim ancestors among the companions of Aeneas or Romulus (or, if they did, they were not successful); and their role in the traditional account of the regal period was minimal or non-existent. Some families, it is true, paraded their supposed descent from the sons of Numa, but this was a transparent fiction of relatively late date, perpetrated by *arriviste* families of no great distinction.[26]

The result of this discussion is rather inconclusive. Family tradition probably furnished some of the information collected by the early Roman historians, and may well have given rise to some minor distortions. But in general it is difficult to separate what aristocratic families provided from the contribution made by oral tradition in a wider sense; and it is to this broader category of oral tradition that we must now turn.

5 THE SOURCES OF OUR SOURCES: ORAL TRADITION

Much of what we read in the surviving sources about early Rome must be derived from oral tradition – that is to say, stories passed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next. This general point can be asserted with some confidence, simply because of the nature and form of the stories themselves. The legends of the Horatii and Curiatii, the dramatic narratives of Coriolanus, Cincinnatus and Verginia, and the whole saga of tales surrounding the rise and fall of the Tarquins, cannot possibly have been based to any great extent on documentary evidence; and while some elements may be of late literary origin, the majority certainly predate the earliest Roman literature. That the famous legends of early Rome were handed down orally is not only inherently probable, but virtually guaranteed by the absence of

any serious alternative. It is also likely enough that many of them go back a long way. The most outstanding example is the foundation legend itself; that the story was already well known in the archaic period is proved by the famous bronze statue of a she-wolf, an archaic masterpiece which may be earlier than 500 BC (see below, p. 61).

At a general level there is no difficulty about this; it would be quite unreasonable to deny that much of the literary tradition is based ultimately on orally transmitted material. The trouble is that even the most time-honoured stories may be quite unhistorical, and comparative studies do not increase one's confidence in the capacity of oral traditions to preserve historical information without serious distortion.[27] The issue can only be tackled by examining each individual story on its own merits, and this will be done where appropriate in the course of the chapters that follow. In each case one must ask, first, whether there are grounds for regarding a story as ancient, or as a relatively late invention; and second whether there are reasons for thinking that it might be based on fact. Certainty can rarely be attained; it is usually a matter of probability. At all times it is important to exercise caution and to make no presumptions. The burden of proof lies as heavily on those who wish to deny as on those who wish to affirm. Where there is no evidence either way the proper course is to suspend judgement. It is quite wrong to dismiss the story of (e.g.) Verginia as fiction, simply because it cannot be shown to be based on fact. It cannot be shown to be fiction either (cf. below, p. 275).

Another major question concerns the means of transmission. Stories can be told and retold in any number of different social contexts; the question is whether we can define any formal mechanisms in early Roman society that might have facilitated the process. This is a topic that deserves more serious attention than it normally receives, even if there is relatively little firm evidence.

Two possibilities should be seriously considered. The first is drama. Dramatic performances were a feature of Roman life from the earliest times, and were associated with the annual games (*ludi*). At least two of the annual sets of games, the *ludi Romani* and *ludi plebeii*, were being celebrated as early as the fifth century, and although the earliest literary plays date only from 240 BC, it is probable that dramatic performances were instituted much earlier (Livy 7.2 suggests that drama was first introduced in 364 BC, but even that may be too late). The fact that technical words to do with the theatre, including *scaena* ('stage'), *histrio* ('actor') and *persona* ('mask', and, by extension, 'character'), were borrowed from Etruscan, points to an early date for the introduction of drama.[28] The plays regularly performed in the later Republic included the so-called *fabulae praetextae*, which dealt with Roman historical themes. For example L. Accius (*c.* 170–90 BC) presented plays on the overthrow of the kings (*Brutus*) and the battle of Sentinum (*Aeneadae vel Decius*). The earliest known example is the *Romulus sive lupus* (*Romulus*

or the Wolf) by the third-century playwright Cn. Naevius; but it is perfectly conceivable that earlier drama, performed without written texts, included historical plays.[29]

The second possibility is that there was a tradition of oral poetry in Rome. A well-known theory, most famously associated with the name of Barthold Niebuhr (1776–1831), although it was first formulated in the seventeenth century, maintains that all the well-known stories of early Rome were derived from popular lays or ballads that were performed at banquets.[30] The principal evidence for this idea comes from Cicero, who had no first-hand knowledge of the banquet songs, but had read about them in Cato's *Origines*.

> Cato, that most weighty authority, stated in his *Origins* that it was the custom among our ancestors for guests at banquets to take turns to sing, to the accompaniment of the flute, the achievements and virtues of famous men.
>
> (*Tusc.* 4.3 = Cato, *Orig.* VII. 13)

In another passage (*Brutus* 75) Cicero makes it clear that the songs were no longer extant, and that Cato had spoken of the custom as something that prevailed 'many centuries before his time'. This may imply that in Cato's day the songs were no longer being performed at banquets; but it does not necessarily do so, and it certainly does not mean that Cato did not know the songs or what they contained.[31] In any case Cato's testimony, which is independently corroborated by Varro, clearly indicates that a tradition of banquet songs had once existed at Rome.

The resulting picture is unfortunately rather theoretical and difficult to substantiate in detail. It is likely enough that many of the stories preserved in the literary tradition were handed down by word of mouth in the fifth and fourth centuries, and that at least some of them were celebrated in drama and song. This is altogether much more probable than the alternative: that the stories were consciously invented after the practice of historical writing had been introduced at the end of the third century. As for the authenticity of the stories, the above arguments are sufficient to demonstrate that they should not be dismissed out of hand. There existed more than one formal means of oral transmission, and there can be no objection in principle to the suggestion that the traditional stories might be based on fact.

6 THE SOURCES OF OUR SOURCES: DOCUMENTS AND ARCHIVES

The above conclusion may seem unduly negative, or at least non-committal. If that is the best we can say, does it not follow that any attempt to write the history of early Rome will be so inconclusive as to be not worth the effort? That would indeed be the case if oral tradition had been the only major source available to the earliest Roman historians, and if the surviving narratives

consisted of no more than a succession of poetic episodes like those of Horatius, Coriolanus and Verginia. But that is not what the literary tradition is really like. In fact these poetic episodes occur only infrequently in the course of a much more prosaic narrative, largely made up of routine annalistic notices.

The basic framework is present in all the main narrative accounts, and consists of the names of the chief annual magistrates, the consuls, listed at the beginning of each year, together with other items of public business that recur more or less regularly throughout the history of the Republic. Such items, which are often reported without any embellishment, include the foundation of colonies, military operations, triumphs, treaties and alliances with other cities and peoples, extensions of Roman territory, grants of citizenship and the creation of new rural tribes (see below, p. 174), temple constructions and other public works, legislation, plagues, droughts and food shortages, the deaths of prominent people (especially priests), eclipses, prodigies, and other events of religious significance.

Material of this kind must have been taken from documentary sources of an archival nature. The only possible alternative, that it is the product of fictitious invention, cannot be seriously entertained as a complete explanation for the bulk of the notices, although there may be reason to suspect the authenticity of some individual items. Most scholars accept the authenticity of the consular list (the *Fasti*) which goes back in a continuous series to the beginning of the Republic. The list can be reconstructed from the main narrative sources, which show occasional minor discrepancies but a broad measure of general agreement on the identity and order of names (see further below, p. 218). Since the consuls were eponymous – that is, they gave their names to the year and thus provided a system of dating – the practice of recording the names of the men who held the chief magistracy must go back to the very early years of the Republic, and it is certain that continuous lists were kept in written form.

The structure of the narrative sources seems to suggest that the Roman historians also had access to documents that listed not only the names of the annual magistrates, but also events that occurred during their years of office. This supposition is confirmed by Cicero, who tells us in his dialogue *On the Orator* (2.52) that the crabbed and meagre style of the earliest Roman historians was modelled on that of an official chronicle known as the *Annales maximi*. This is an extremely important reference, because it not only explains the characteristic structure that evidently underlies the surviving literary narratives, but also identifies an official document that could have provided most, if not all, of the archival material that they contain. That the *Annales maximi* were themselves a prime source for the earliest historians is implicit in Cicero's account.[32]

Not surprisingly the *Annales maximi* have prompted an enormous amount of discussion among historians of early Rome and early Roman

historiography. Here it will be possible merely to outline some of the main problems, and briefly to state my own position on the question. The main sources on the chronicle are Cicero, in the passage just referred to, and a group of later texts that all derive ultimately from the antiquarian Verrius Flaccus, the most important being a passage of Servius (Auctus), *Aen.* 1.373 (on these authors see below).[33]

Cicero and Servius make it clear that the *Annales maximi* were a chronicle kept by the *pontifex maximus*, and that they recorded, year by year, all important public events. Cicero tells us that the chronicle went back to the beginning of Roman history (*ab initio rerum Romanarum*) and continued to the time of P. Mucius Scaevola, who was *pontifex maximus* in the 120s BC. Servius says that each year's entry began with the names of the consuls and the other magistrates, that the events were recorded *per singulos dies* (that is, probably, with an indication of the day on which they occurred), and that the whole compilation occupied eighty books.

Many questions arise in relation to this chronicle, particularly how it was composed and how far back it went. One firmly attested detail is that the chronicle was intimately connected with a white noticeboard (*tabula dealbata*) which the *pontifex maximus* posted outside his official residence (the Regia: see below, p. 234) in order to keep the public informed of important events. The most likely interpretation of this fact is either that the contents of the *tabula* were transferred at the end of each year to a permanent record (Mommsen called it a *liber annalis*), or that the *pontifex maximus* maintained a continuous record of events in book form, but allowed some of what he put into it to be copied on to the *tabula* for the benefit of the public. Some such explanation is far more likely than the widely held belief that the *pontifex maximus* set up a new board each year, and stored the old ones in the Regia.[34]

But the precise nature of the documents on which the record was made is a secondary issue; what matters is that the *pontifex maximus* kept some kind of chronicle, which recorded events under the heading of the annual magistrates, and that it went back to a very remote period. We can be sure of this because it recorded an eclipse of the sun on the nones (i.e. the 5th) of June in a year which Cicero dates 'around 350 years after the founding of the city'.[35] It so happens that there was an 80 per cent solar eclipse visible from Rome on 21 June 400 BC. This fact allows us to make not only the trivial observation that the Roman calendar was at that time sixteen days adrift of the Julian year, but also the decisively important inference that an authentic record of this celestial event was preserved in the *Annales maximi*.

It is certain, therefore, that the *Annales maximi* go back to the fifth century; but it is probable that the earliest entries were not very detailed. For the first century or so of the Republic the chronicle probably consisted of a list of annual magistrates with the occasional addition of events that occurred during their year of office. In some years nothing at all was recorded. During the fourth century the record became more detailed, and in the last quarter of the

century it became a systematic chronicle containing a wide variety of annual events as a matter of routine. This was Mommsen's view, based on the pattern that underlies the surviving narrative accounts. In other words, the sparse and intermittent character of the fifth-century notices, and the increasing amounts of routine detail that appear in the later books of Livy's first decade, can be explained by an increase in the quantity, and an improvement in the quality, of the primary sources available to the annalists. This is an entirely legitimate inference, and in my view is almost certainly correct.[36]

This conclusion has positive as well as negative implications. The negative aspect is the fact that the documentary record of the period down to *c.* 350 BC is thin and desultory; but on the positive side the important thing is to have established that the elementary framework, skeletal though it is, does indeed rest on a solid documentary base. There is good reason to accept the authenticity of certain types of 'annalistic' information, such as reports of food shortages, temple constructions, hostile incursions by the Aequi and Volsci, foundations of colonies, the creation of new tribes, and so on. As we shall see, these various categories of information can be substantiated by independent arguments; what the foregoing discussion demonstrates is that the survival of genuine information about such matters is not wholly mysterious. The information survives because it was preserved in documents like the *Annales maximi*.

We should not forget that other documentary archives may have existed in republican Rome. The priestly colleges may have kept their own records, as indeed might other corporations such as the curiae. The plebeians had their own archive in the temple of Ceres (see below, p. 264), and we know that state documents were kept in the *aerarium* in the temple of Saturn, on the Capitol in the Treasury of the Aediles, in the Atrium Libertatis, and elsewhere.[37] Lists of consuls were undoubtedly kept from a very early period, and it is not necessary to assume that the *Annales maximi* were the only source for the first part of the *Fasti*. It is unlikely, however, that either the *Annales maximi* or any other systematic record stretched back as far as the regal period; indeed they may not even have gone back to the start of the Republic, although the consular list is probably genuine from the beginning.[38] In any case we can infer from the surviving sources that annalistic archives were available only for the Republic; the narrative of the preceding regal age is quite different in character and is manifestly based on different kinds of material, most of it oral and much of it legendary.

It does not follow, however, that the whole story of the regal period is fictitious. As we shall see, some of the legends appear to have a factual basis, and certain details, particularly the record of temple foundations, are almost certainly genuine. Moreover, the general picture of Rome as a rich and powerful city under the sixth-century kings can be confirmed, not least by archaeological evidence. It is also important to stress that even if there were no regular annalistic records dating back to the kings, the regal period

nevertheless did produce documents, and at least some of these were preserved. Literacy in Rome can be dated back to the seventh century BC, and we know that the use of writing extended to the public sphere.[39] Whether any documents on papyrus or wood survived from the regal period cannot be known (but it should not on that account be ruled out); in any case certain types of document, such as treaties, laws, dedications and building inscriptions, were recorded on permanent materials such as stone or bronze. Some of these undoubtedly survived to the late Republic; indeed a few of them are still extant (see below, pp. 94, 294, etc.).

These isolated documents would not have been sufficient on their own to provide historians with a connected account of the regal period, but they made a substantial contribution to the process of historical reconstruction. Texts of laws, treaties and so on also survived from the early Republic (e.g. the Carthage treaty, the treaty of Spurius Cassius, the Twelve Tables), and quotations from them are among the most important pieces of evidence we possess. The idea, still to be found in some modern works, that these and other documents were forged in the late Republic, is absolutely unfounded. This does not mean that we should uncritically accept all the documents cited in our sources as a matter of course. Each must be treated with due caution and its pedigree judged on its merits. But what is quite inadmissible is the presumption that all quotations from, and references to, archaic documents are false unless they can be proved genuine. Given what we now know about the extent and uses of writing in archaic Rome, the burden of proof clearly lies on those who wish to deny the authenticity of a public document cited in our sources.

7 THE RELIABILITY OF THE ANNALISTIC TRADITION

We may conclude that the historical sources contain a good deal of authentic material concerning the early history of Rome before the Punic Wars. Naturally there are distinctions to be drawn between the different periods of this early history. The literary tradition on the period before the foundation of the city is entirely legendary. This was a pre-literate age, and cannot therefore have been documented in any way. It was also too remote for oral tradition to have any serious chance of surviving to historical times. It is worth saying that oral traditions about the origins of Rome can hardly have existed before the formation of a self-conscious political community – that is, before the formation of the city. It is unlikely, therefore, that the legends of the pre-Romulean period contain any vestige of historical fact.

The regal period, on the other hand, does seem to have generated both documentary evidence (admittedly meagre and sporadic) and an oral tradition that bears some relation to what actually happened. Even so, the literary tradition also contains much legendary material, and needs to be treated with extreme caution. The traditional account of the Republic, however, is

different from that of the monarchy both in its formal structure and in the strength of its documentary base. But here too we should distinguish between the first century of the Republic, where the record is relatively thin, and the increasingly well-documented period of the fourth century, particularly after the changes of 367 BC. Finally, the age of the wars of conquest (from the 330s onwards) is fully historical, in the sense that it was extensively documented by written records, by accounts of Greek historians, and, perhaps most importantly, by first-hand oral tradition, since it was within the living memory of persons who could have transmitted their recollections to the first Roman historians.

Paradoxically, the period from 293 to 264 BC, which falls within this fully historical age, is the least well documented from our point of view; this is because of the loss of Livy's second decade, which means that no full-length continuous narrative survives. It should also be noted that, although the period around 300 BC is 'fully historical' in the sense indicated above, it does not follow that our sources are wholly reliable. Quite the contrary! Graeco-Roman history is different from most other fields of historical study precisely because much of the important primary evidence is literary and self-consciously historical – in other words, the work of historians. In any other field of history (other than historiography), such texts would be regarded as secondary sources by definition. It is in the nature of secondary sources that they offer interpretation and conjecture, that they tend to be biased, that they are frequently mistaken, and that they are sometimes dishonest.

Historical writing, which attempts to represent actual events by means of verbal narrative, and to construct a coherent story from a variety of more or less tractable raw data, is bound to be a distortion of reality. In this sense all history contains an element of fiction – although the view of some 'post-structuralist' literary critics, that what historians do is indistinguishable from what novelists do, is manifestly fatuous.[40] The way in which a historian bridges the gap between primary sources and finished (constructed) text depends on convention. The modern convention among professional historians is to make the relationship explicit, and as far as possible to indicate to the reader how the final product arises from the source material. It is further agreed that the historian must, if challenged, be able to support any and every statement with evidence. But in other genres (such as historical novels or biography), and in pre-modern historiography, there is much more leeway; writers are permitted to reconstruct, from their own imaginations, the feelings, aspirations and motives of persons and groups, to conjure up plausible scenes – on the battlefield, on the streets, or in the bedroom – and even to put their own words into the mouths of persons in the drama. These conventions were accepted without question in antiquity, when history was at least in part a rhetorical exercise.

For this reason historical accounts, even of the recent past, came to include a greater or lesser degree of imaginary reconstruction, set battle descriptions,

freely composed speeches, and so on. In the work of any ancient historian there is always a distinction to be drawn between the structural data on which it is based and the narrative superstructure within which the data are recounted, interpreted and explained.[41] This applies as much to a historian of the Principate as to a historian of the archaic period. In the surviving accounts of early Rome the proportion of raw data is probably quite small by comparison with the amount of secondary embellishment, especially in a highly rhetorical work like that of Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Given that the primary sources were comparatively meagre and difficult to understand, and that the annalists had no clear grasp of how different the conditions of the archaic period were from those of their own age, there was bound to be a great deal of misunderstanding and unconscious distortion. Nevertheless, the fact remains that our sources do depend ultimately on a hard core of authentic data, much of which is readily identifiable.

The task of the modern historian is to extract this core and to attempt to make sense of it. Some elements, such as the consular *Fasti* and other routine annalistic notices (for example the founding of colonies or the dedication of temples) are clearly identifiable; other material, such as popular agitation for agrarian reform, is more marginal, and will require extensive discussion.

8 THE ANTIQUARIANS

Modern historians sometimes appear to assume that our knowledge of early Rome depends exclusively on what survives of the annalistic tradition, and that if this tradition is not demonstrably reliable the whole subject must lie beyond the reach of serious historical inquiry. This approach is unjustified, however, not only because the annalistic tradition rests on a fairly secure base, but because the initial premise is mistaken. The annalistic tradition is not the only source of information available to us. Not only are we becoming increasingly dependent on archaeological evidence, which incidentally lends considerable support to the traditional annalistic account; we should also remember that the literary sources contain a great deal of information about early Rome that is independent of the annalists and free from their real or supposed shortcomings. This is the evidence provided by the so-called antiquarians, men who devoted themselves to learned research into many different aspects of the Roman past.

Within the huge range of topics chosen by antiquarians as objects of research, certain areas of interest seem to have been especially important. These include legal, political and military institutions, monuments and buildings, archaic texts, chronology, the calendar, family history, religious cults, social customs, art and technology, private life, and an all-pervading interest in language. Whatever the particular subject, antiquarians almost invariably investigated the meaning and origins of technical words, personal names, place-names, archaic expressions, phrases and sayings, ritual formulae,

legal terminology, and so on. Sometimes their efforts were directly aimed at language itself, as in Varro's work *On the Latin Language*, which is still partially extant. Speculation about etymology was a particular weakness of Varro, and remains to this day a curse of amateur antiquarianism, as anyone who has encountered a saloon-bar expert on 'phrase and fable' will testify.

Scholarly antiquarianism became a feature of Roman intellectual life in the second century BC, and was at least partially inspired by Hellenistic models.[42] The first great exponent was L. Aelius Stilo, who concerned himself with literary texts, grammar, and etymologies; he wrote learned commentaries on the Twelve Tables and the *carmen saliare* (the ritual hymn of the Salii, an archaic priestly college). Other noted antiquarians of the same period included C. Sempronius Tuditanus (cos. 129 BC) and M. Junius Congus 'Gracchanus' (so called because of his friendship with Gaius Gracchus), both of whom wrote about the origins and powers of the magistrates. It is worth observing that the efforts of these men marked the beginning of a split between scholarly antiquarianism and narrative historiography which was to have lasting consequences. The two activities remained separate until the eighteenth century, and to this day the breach has not been completely healed.[43]

The greatest Roman antiquarian (and perhaps the greatest antiquarian of all time) was M. Terentius Varro (116–27 BC), a pupil of Aelius Stilo, a friend of Pompey and Cicero, and a public figure in his own right. This astonishing man is said to have written 490 books by the age of 77 (another tradition gives his total output as 620 works). We know of 55 titles, but possess only one complete work: the *de re rustica*, a work in three books on agriculture, published in 37 BC. Of twenty-five books of the *de lingua Latina*, six are partially extant. The rest of Varro's life's work is represented only by fragmentary quotations. Nevertheless, his influence was all-pervasive; in the words of Nicholas Horsfall, he has perished by absorption.[44] His systematic organisation of knowledge provided the foundation for all subsequent Roman scholarship, and he was an indispensable source of factual information for later writers who occupied themselves in any way with the Roman past. The one significant exception is Livy, who along with the other late annalists paid no attention whatever to the findings of the antiquarians. Dionysius, on the other hand, made extensive use of Varro, particularly in his early books.[45]

Varro's most important work was the *Antiquitates*, divided between twenty-five books of *Res humanae* and sixteen of *Res divinae* (human and divine affairs). The latter were singled out by Christian apologists (especially St Augustine) as a major target in their attacks on pagan religion, with the consequence that we know more about them than about the books on human affairs; it is clear, however, that just as the 'divine affairs' dealt with Roman religion, so too the human affairs dealt mainly with Rome and the Romans. Cicero, in a remarkable tribute, says it made the Romans feel that they had been strangers in their own country, but were now being shown the way home.

> We now know who and where we are; you have shown us the past of our country, the sequence of events, ritual and priestly laws, the traditional customs of private and public life, the position of geographical areas and of particular places, and the names, types, functions and causes of all things divine and human.
>
> (*Acad.* 1.3.9)

Augustine tells us that the *Res humanae* were divided into four sections of six books each (following an introductory first book) on 'persons, places, times and actions' (*de civitate dei* 6.4); other than this, however, we have little precise information and few quotations.[46]

It is also not clear how the *Antiquitates* differed from the work *de vita populi Romani* (*On the Life of the Roman People*), written a few years later (the late 40s BC). This was a work in four books about the social and cultural past of Rome. Its structure was roughly chronological: the first two books dealt with the period of the kings and the early Republic, and described the institutions and private life (e.g. food, drink, domestic architecture, dress) of the early Romans, and laid stress on their simple austerity. The later books dealt with the Punic Wars and the later Republic, and illustrated the greed, corruption and moral decline that had taken place since the early days. A companion volume, the *de gente populi Romani* (*On the Ancestry of the Roman People*) dealt with the remote origins of the city.[47] It paid particular attention to chronology, a subject that Varro also treated in a work called *Annales*. It was Varro who established the system of Roman chronology that has since become conventional, with the foundation of the city in the year we call 753 BC, the first consuls in 509, and the Gallic sack in 390.[48]

Varro's activities had an immediate impact, and made antiquarian studies fashionable in intellectual circles. Cornelius Nepos, Atticus, Tarquinius Priscus, Nigidius Figulus, and many others tried their hand. Even Cicero adopted antiquarian methods in his later dialogues, as Elizabeth Rawson has shown, pointing out that what he lacked in erudition he made up for in his powers of argument.[49] In the Augustan age, whose backward-looking ideology of religious revival and moral regeneration would have been unthinkable without Varro, antiquarian studies continued to flourish. Two figures deserve particular mention. L. Cincius wrote extensively on ancient buildings, on archaic words, on constitutional and military antiquities, and on the calendar. Little survives of his output, but he is the ultimate source of some crucial pieces of evidence, notably the law about the *praetor maximus* and the account of how commanders were appointed for the forces of the Latin League (below, pp. 220, 299). The other major figure is Verrius Flaccus, who is important because of his huge influence, and because some of his work survives for us to read, even if only at second hand.

M. Verrius Flaccus was a freed slave who became tutor to Augustus' grandsons. His most important work was a dictionary entitled *de verborum*

significatu (*On the Meaning of Words*), which dealt alphabetically not only with the Latin language, but with Roman antiquities in general. This great work has not survived, but we do possess part of an abridgement made in the later second century AD by Sex. Pompeius Festus, and arranged in twenty books. The only surviving manuscript of Festus' abridgement, an eleventh-century codex, was severely damaged by fire in the fifteenth century. Only the second half was preserved (from the letter M onwards) in an imperfect state; some of the entries are severely mutilated. These gaps, and the entries in the first half of the alphabet, can be partially reconstructed with the help of an epitome, made in the ninth century by Paul the Deacon, and other medieval glossaries thought to have been based on Festus.

The result, a combined Paulus-Festus with occasional additions, is a mess; but this sorry compilation provides us with hundreds of precious nuggets of information reproduced more or less faithfully from Verrius Flaccus' original text. Verrius in turn had drawn upon Varro, Cato, Aelius Stilo, Cincius, and many others, as well as on his own first-hand research, to produce an invaluable work of reference whose importance is evident even in the present wretched state of the text. Festus (Paulus) is for us one of the most important sources on the history of early Roman institutions, and will be referred to constantly throughout this book.[50]

Varro, Verrius Flaccus, and the other antiquarians of the late Republic and early Empire, provided the primary materials for later scholars whose works survive for us to read. They also had considerable influence on Roman poetry. The Greek tradition of learned verse, associated especially with the name of Callimachus, was absorbed by Latin poets, especially the 'new poets' of the late Republic; in the Augustan age they began to direct their erudition towards Roman antiquity. The best known example is Virgil's *Aeneid*, which incorporates much antiquarian information (principally from Varro) in the section about Aeneas' adventures in Italy (books 7–12). Another is the *Fasti* of Ovid, a poetic account of the Roman calendar, covering the first six months of the year (the rest was never written). It includes much historical information, as it recounts famous events that occurred on certain days (for instance the massacre of the Fabii at the Cremera on 13 February – *Fasti* 2.193–242), and it is one of the principal sources of our knowledge of early Roman religion. Ovid's account of the festivals, though presented with considerable poetic licence as the product of first-hand observation and inquiry, derives from antiquarian sources, particularly Verrius Flaccus, who wrote a prose commentary on the calendar, and Varro's *Antiquitates*, which dealt with the festivals in the eighth book of the *Res divinae*.[51]

In the imperial period the antiquarian tradition continued, but it tended increasingly to degenerate into compilation, and the summarising and excerpting of earlier work, rather than new creative research. But the secondary productions of this period provide us with our most important surviving

texts. Apart from Festus, the leading figures in this story are Pliny the Elder, Plutarch, Aulus Gellius, Macrobius, and the Virgil commentators.

Pliny the Elder (AD 23/4–79) was a polymath, now known through his sole surviving work, the *Natural History*. This encyclopedic study, in thirty-seven books, deals with geography, zoology, botany, mineralogy, art and technology, but touches on all manner of subjects along the way. The work is entirely derivative, and draws on hundreds of sources, which are listed in book 1; it is also lacking in judgement and often careless. Nevertheless, it frequently provides information that would otherwise be completely unknown, and some of this concerns early Roman antiquity, for which Pliny's principal sources appear to have been Varro and Verrius Flaccus.[52]

These two were also the major sources for Plutarch's charming essay, the 'Roman Questions', a literary piece which conveys, perhaps more directly than any other surviving text, the feel of Roman antiquarianism. It consists of 113 little essays on strange Roman customs, each headed by a question, such as 'Why were patricians not permitted to live on the Capitoline?' (no. 91), or 'Why do they name boys when they are nine days old, but girls when they are eight days old?' (no. 102). Varro is frequently cited; Verrius Flaccus, though not mentioned by name, was probably also used, since over forty of the questions deal with matters treated in Verrius' dictionary.[53] Another essayist whose subject matter included Roman antiquities was Aulus Gellius, whose *Attic Nights* (written in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, AD 161–180) contain numerous quotations from early Roman documents (e.g. the Twelve Tables) and literary texts. Many essays deal with early Roman law, history and institutions, and preserve crucially important information drawn from good sources.[54]

In the later empire antiquarian studies formed part of the so-called 'pagan revival'; to the intellectuals of this movement in the late fourth century the study of ancient texts, and the recollection of traditional institutions, were as important as the observation of pagan cults. The work that most clearly represents this attitude is the *Saturnalia* of Macrobius, an imaginary dialogue (modelled on Cicero's *de re publica*) set at the festival of the Saturnalia in, probably, 384, but written in the early fifth century. The discussion ranges over a wide variety of topics, but is focused on scholarly criticism of Virgil. It is rich in quotations from historical and antiquarian sources, and frequently preserves important information about the archaic age of Rome.[55]

The tradition of Virgil criticism began almost immediately after the poet's death in 19 BC. The most important surviving representative of this tradition is the fourth-century commentary attributed to Servius (a scholar whom Macrobius mentions among those present at the Saturnalia). This work is preserved in two versions: a commentary written by Servius himself, and a much longer and slightly altered version known as *Servius auctus* ('enlarged Servius'), which was put together probably in the seventh or eighth century.

The extremely erudite and well-informed additions are almost certainly taken from the otherwise lost commentary by Donatus, a fourth-century scholar whom Servius is also thought to have followed.[56] The Virgil commentaries are a rich store of information about early Rome, drawing on all kinds of sources. Varro and Verrius Flaccus are naturally prominent, but there are numerous references to earlier antiquarians and historians. Many of the fragments of Cato's *Origines*, for example, come from the Virgil commentaries, and they are an important source of quotations from Ennius.[57]

It has seemed necessary to outline the work of the antiquarians in this way for various reasons. The first is to introduce readers to an important group of texts which are rarely considered as worthy of serious attention for their own sake. Second, they tend to be ignored in discussions of the sources for early Roman history, even in works that rely heavily on them. For many modern scholars, as was noted earlier, the literary tradition means the annalists. It is true that the annalists provide the essential narrative framework, but only the antiquarians give us any idea of what that framework might be based on. If it were not for the antiquarians, we should know nothing about, for example, the banquet songs or the *Annales maximi*. Our knowledge of Roman institutions, customs, monuments and so on is immeasurably enriched by antiquarian sources; without them, we should have a very different, and much dimmer, picture of archaic Rome.

The same is true even of legends. Take the foundation story itself. Livy gives us a straightforward account of the familiar saga, from Aeneas to Romulus. He occasionally notes that there were different versions of certain details. But if we examine what the antiquarians had to say, we discover an extraordinary variety of stories; thanks to antiquarian sources, we know of more than twenty-five distinct versions of the story as a whole, many of them containing no reference whatever to either Aeneas or Romulus.[58] The antiquarians, in other words, completely change the picture.

The example of the foundation legend illustrates another important point, namely that what the antiquarians tell us is not necessarily to be taken as more historical than what the annalists tell us. However learned they may have been, the antiquarians were often credulous and facile (as their feeble etymologies so amply attest), and did not possess the kind of skill and expertise that a modern scholar would be able to bring to an ancient inscription or monument. Nevertheless, the materials they were working with were genuine enough. Some modern books give the impression that in the late Republic very little survived from the city's ancient past. This absurd view is the exact opposite of the truth. The amount of evidence available to anyone in the late Republic who wished to investigate the archaic period was simply overwhelming. However poorly they understood what they found, the antiquarians are important because they can put us directly in touch with countless genuine vestiges of a forgotten past that is, almost by definition, missing from the elaborated narratives of the annalists.

9 THE SOURCES AND METHODS OF THE ANTIQUARIANS

The evidence studied by the antiquarians was far more abundant than the admittedly rather meagre documentation that would have been available, even on the most optimistic interpretation, to the historians. This was because, unlike the historians, they did not confine themselves to material relating to political and military events. Religious texts (like the *carmen saliare*, the calendars, and the procedural books of the priestly colleges), building inscriptions, dedications, private documents and legal texts – all were grist to the antiquarian mill. For instance it was the antiquarians, rather than the historians, who studied the Twelve Tables, and observed, quite rightly, that they provided evidence not only about early Roman law, but about all kinds of social and cultural realities. Cicero, for example, realised that the funerary regulations in the Tables provided evidence for early Roman burial practices.[59]

Apart from documents, there were many physical reminders of the city's ancient past in the buildings, monuments and other relics that surrounded the Romans on every side. It is sometimes assumed that little could have survived from the period before 390 BC because in that year the city was sacked by the Gauls, who destroyed everything, including all documents. Indeed the annalists used the Gallic sack as an aetiology for the shortage of documentation for the early centuries (Livy 6.1.2; Plutarch, *Numa* 1.1). This explanation, however, will not stand up to scrutiny. As we shall see (below, p. 318), the effects of the sack were nowhere near as devastating as Livy makes out. Important buildings in which documents are known to have been kept (including the Regia, the temple of Saturn and the Capitol) survived the attack unscathed, and we know that many important documents, not to speak of buildings and monuments, did, in fact, escape. In any case it is unlikely that the Roman authorities, who were careful to send the Vestal Virgins and their sacred cult objects to Caere, did not take similar precautions to protect their archives when they heard news of the impending Gallic attack.

The topography of the city was central to the studies of the antiquarians (witness Cicero's tribute to Varro, quoted above), and forms an important focus of modern research. The Romans had an immense reverence for ancient buildings, and preserved their location, form and layout more or less permanently. In this way, even if rebuilding took place, the topography of the city was preserved in fossilised form, long after its original purpose, if any, had been forgotten. The physical layout of archaic Rome can therefore be 'read' in the monumental plan of the historical city, which thus forms a kind of notional document.[60]

Many other survivals persisted in a similarly abstract form. They included institutions, customs and practices which the Romans had inherited from their ancestors, and on which they placed great value precisely because of

their antiquity. Their consciously traditionalist ideology made Rome a kind of living museum, in which the past was continuously on display. This may seem surprising in a society which in the course of the Republic developed from a minor city-state into a world empire, and showed a remarkable capacity for innovation and for flexibility in adapting to change. The explanation for this paradox is not only that the Romans were experts at retaining the form of institutions while changing their substance (the best example being the restored Republic of the emperor Augustus); they also preferred to leave existing structures unchanged rather than reform them, and simply to superimpose new ones where necessary. Their approach was not unlike that of a householder who constantly buys new kitchen appliances, but cannot bear to throw the old ones away. The consequence is that the kitchen gets cluttered up with old-fashioned and redundant gadgets. Roman public life was just such a kitchen, but the Romans did not seem to mind. They found the new appliances efficient, and they quite liked the clutter, which came to seem quaint and even decorative.

A good example is the bewilderingly complex system of Roman popular assemblies. The *comitia centuriata* and *comitia tributa* (see below, pp. 179 and 265) did not replace the earlier *comitia curiata*; that archaic assembly retained a ghostly existence, and continued to meet, until the end of the Republic. Although the chief magistrates were elected by the *comitia centuriata*, they still had to submit to a second vote by the *comitia curiata*, which thereby conferred, or confirmed (scholars disagree about which of these it is), their formal powers. This *lex curiata de imperio* has been much discussed, and since the sixteenth century has been thought to contain the key to the understanding of the Roman constitution and the concept of *imperium*.[61] The idea that there is some kind of mystical essence in the notion of *imperium*, which can be unlocked by a study of these obsolete formalities, might strike the modern reader as unlikely, not to say absurd; but there can be no objection to the more hard-headed approach of the Roman antiquarians, who inferred that the *comitia curiata* and the *lex curiata de imperio* were relics of the Roman monarchy, and that they convey information about the nature of Roman kingship. In this they were undoubtedly correct.

A second area in which survivals provide invaluable evidence is religion. No sphere of Roman life illustrates so well the paradoxical combination of innovation and conservatism as religion. The Romans were notoriously conservative in the way they maintained ancient cult practices, and were punctilious in the performance of ritual acts in the manner prescribed by tradition. At the same time a remarkable feature of Roman religion was its habit of continually introducing new (usually foreign) deities and cult practices, particularly from the Greek world. This was an inherent feature, which can be traced back to the very earliest times. The old idea that the influx of foreign cults was a relatively late development, a symptom of the

deterioration and contamination of the original native cult, can no longer be sustained.[62]

As in the case of political institutions, however, the old cults were not replaced by the new ones, but continued to exist as before. The result was the proliferation of a large number, and a bewildering variety, of cults, festivals and ceremonies, which continued to be observed in the classical period, even though many of them were (and perhaps always had been) obscure and mysterious. That the regular procedures of Roman religion preserved historical information was as obvious to Roman antiquarians as it is to us. The historical explanations offered in our sources may very well be arbitrary or absurd, and indeed many of them are, but that does not mean that ancient religious customs cannot be explained historically, or that we should desist from attempting to interpret the same evidence. A well-known example of how rituals can be made to yield historical information is the use of festivals like the Lupercalia, the Septimontium and the Ambarvalia to reconstruct the topography of the earliest settlements of Rome at various stages, and the extent of its territorial boundary.[63]

10 ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

To leave the archaeological evidence till last is to invite the sort of criticism that was made famous at the marriage feast at Cana. There is indeed a sense in which the archaeological evidence is the best available. Archaeology produces tangible relics of past societies and can put us directly in contact with the material facts of their daily existence. Archaeological finds provide the only primary data we have for the early history of Rome; there are no contemporary documents other than inscriptions, which, though important, are brief and few in number, and are themselves the product of excavations. The importance of archaeology for this period cannot be overstressed, even when account is taken of the limited range and quantity of the material currently available, and the immense problems of interpretation it presents.

Archaeology is also the only source that can reasonably be expected to provide new information. Up to now it has had a tremendous impact on the subject, which has been completely transformed, not only since the days of Niebuhr, Lewis and Schwegler, who based their accounts (written in the first half of the nineteenth century) exclusively on literary sources, but even since the time of Gjerstad, who in the 1950s and 1960s produced a comprehensive synthesis of all the archaeological evidence then available from the site of Rome.[64] Gjerstad not only dealt with recent finds, but also presented all the material from the excavations that had gone on in the city since 1870, including the crucially important campaigns in the Forum directed by Giacomo Boni between 1898 and 1905. But Gjerstad's volumes, which were intended to be definitive, marked not the end, but the beginning, of a modern revolution in early Roman archaeology.

New excavations in and around the city (often necessitated by rapid urban development), and the application of modern approaches and techniques, have radically altered our knowledge of early Rome and Latium since the 1960s. The evidence now available allows us to trace the development of iron-age communities in Latium from around 900 BC until the rise of urbanised city-states in the seventh and sixth centuries. The details of the process can be documented in a way that would have been undreamed of twenty-five years ago. Our knowledge of the archaic period (especially the late sixth and early fifth centuries) has also been transformed by sensational new discoveries, not only in Rome itself, but at other sites too, such as Lavinium (Pratica di Mare), Ardea and Satricum. Archaeological work is continuing, and further discoveries can be expected in the future.

A significant fact about the archaeological evidence from Latium is that the great bulk of it comes from funerary contexts. The most important excavations have been of cemetery sites, and most of the artefacts have been found in graves. Cemeteries are prominent not because archaeologists are morbid by nature, but because of the remarkable habit, common in ancient societies, of burying grave goods with the deceased. Most of the artefacts we study have survived because they were deliberately deposited in sealed tombs, which have remained intact until unearthed by archaeologists (or tomb-robbers). Furthermore, graves represent 'closed find deposits'; that is, the artefacts they contain were buried all together at one moment, and are therefore contemporaneous. When a number of graves are excavated in the same cemetery, the archaeologist can compare the several groups of artefacts and order them in sequence; this makes it possible to establish relative chronology and is the basis of all archaeological dating.[65] Absolute dates can be provided for the whole scheme by graves containing objects (usually foreign imports) that can be dated independently.

The cemeteries of Latium provide evidence for the period down to about 580 BC, but not thereafter. This curious hiatus presents a problem that will be discussed more fully in the relevant place (below, p. 105). Here it is sufficient to note the shift in the focus of archaeological research from cemeteries to sanctuaries, which provide most of the evidence for the subsequent archaic period. The material from sanctuaries is essentially of two kinds. In the first place there are traces of monumental sacred buildings ('temples'), consisting not only of foundations, building blocks and rooftiles, but also terracotta sculptures. Some of these were purely decorative, and include statues in the round which adorned the main roof beam (these roof statues are called *acroteria*) as well as relief sculptures on the pediment; while others were also functional, and served to protect the exposed timbers. Eaves and projecting rafters were encased in a complex array of antefixes, gargoyles and revetment plaques, while the architraves were fronted with friezes, all elaborately moulded and decorated with brightly coloured paint.[66]

These architectural terracottas constitute an important body of diagnostic

material which can be analysed and classified in terms of style, iconography, provenance and date. They have been intensively studied, with valuable results. It is evident that material from the same workshops found its way to sites throughout central Italy, including southern Etruria (but it is misleading to describe it as 'Etruscan' – see below, p. 154). Finds of moulded architectural terracottas need not be associated with sanctuaries (although they often are); it is now clear that they were fitted to all kinds of public buildings, and also to the more luxurious private residences.[67] In a way this is not surprising, given the functional purpose of terracotta revetments.

Sanctuaries are also documented by material from 'votive deposits'. These are collections of artefacts, commonly found in sanctuary sites, which seem to have been deliberately buried and sealed in antiquity. For an explanation we can turn (where else?) to the Roman antiquarians. Varro (quoted by A. Gellius 2.10) tells us that it was the custom to place in underground cavities (in Latin, *favisae*) ancient bits of sculpture that had fallen off temples, together with other votive offerings that had been consecrated in the sanctuary. According to Verrius Flaccus (Paul.-Fest. s.v. 'favisae', p. 78 L), it was a way of disposing of sacred items that had outlived their usefulness. In any event these collections of votives represent another category of closed find deposit, and their contents provide us with valuable evidence. In many cases they prove that the sanctuaries in which they were found had been centres of cult activity long before the first evidence of any temple building.

The evidence shows that the golden age of archaic monumental sanctuaries lasted for about a century from *c.* 580 BC. No temple building or group of architectural terracottas can be dated much after the first quarter of the fifth century (although votive deposits indicate that cult activity continued). This is a remarkable finding because it coincides so precisely with the evidence of the literary sources. It is not simply that a long series of recorded temple dedications comes to an end in 484 BC (see below, p. 266); it is also striking that the literary sources should place so much emphasis on the events surrounding the foundation, construction and dedication of temples and sanctuaries during the period in question. On this point – the importance of monumental sanctuaries in the political, economic and cultural life of archaic Rome – the two types of evidence coincide in a remarkable way. This general observation, which will be analysed in detail in the chapters that follow, is the strongest single argument in favour of a conservative approach to the literary tradition.[68]

Tombs, sacred buildings, votive deposits – these form the traditional focus of Italian archaeology, and tend to give it an old-fashioned, artefact-based appearance. But recent decades have also seen great advances in the application of new techniques such as surface survey (pioneered in south Etruria by the British School at Rome) and the investigation of settlements. These new approaches are now beginning to yield valuable historical evidence.

It is important to remember that the function of archaeology is to provide

historical evidence. This may seem a rather unfashionable point of view, and perhaps needs clarification. It is not meant to imply that archaeology should be subordinated to the study of texts, and called upon only when it contributes to a traditional narrative, still less that it should be relegated to footnotes in appendices on 'daily life' or the arts. The point is that history, if it is not to be confined to a study of kings and battles, must include those areas of life and culture that are illuminated by archaeological evidence. By the same token, it must be recognised that the issues that concern the best modern archaeologists – the organisation of settlements, demographic patterns, production, exchange and cultural processes – are historical issues. Archaeological research, if it is not to become a mindless application of mere technique, must be directed to answering historical questions.

Historians and archaeologists are therefore engaged in the same activity, but using different methods. It follows that written sources, if available, cannot and should not be ignored by archaeologists, any more than historians can avoid archaeological evidence. Attempting to write a purely 'archaeological history' is misguided.[69] The problem is that archaeological evidence and textual evidence provide the answers to very different types of question, and combining them effectively is extremely hard.

At first sight this might seem surprising. Archaeological evidence offers a body of material that is entirely independent of the data provided by written sources. It might therefore seem to be a straightforward matter to compare the two and to use the former as an independent check on the latter. Unfortunately the situation is not so simple. This is because the two bodies of data represent different kinds of reality, and have to be ordered and interpreted each according to its own rules. At the most basic level, archaeological data consist of pieces of tangible material – stones, ceramics, metals and organic matter. Even the most basic classification of this material into categories such as rooftiles, pots, coins and weapons, not to speak of such abstractions as 'cities' or 'sanctuaries', is already an act of secondary interpretation. When written sources are available, it is inevitable and perfectly proper that they should be used to assist in the business of interpretation. When an archaeologist finds a 'Greek' pot, or unearths an 'Etruscan' city, he or she is introducing categories that are derived, ultimately, from written sources.

Most archaeological 'facts' turn out to be a complex mixture of primary data and secondary interpretation. For this reason it is important to exercise extreme caution when arguing that some aspect of the literary tradition is 'confirmed' by archaeological evidence. The relationship is often the other way round. That is, the literary tradition is being used to interpret the archaeological data. A good example is the tradition about the Sabines. According to the story, the population of early Rome included a substantial element of Sabines (who had been integrated with the followers of Romulus after the rape of the Sabine women). It used to be thought (and one still finds

this idea in many books) that the tradition had been confirmed by the excavation of the graves in the Roman Forum, which were found to consist of a mixture of cremations and inhumations. This was assumed to indicate the presence of two distinct ethnic groups, one of which was identified with the Sabines.[70]

The line of argument is revealing. The two burial types would probably have been taken to indicate two different ethnic groups even without the literary tradition; in the early part of this century such ethnic interpretations were fashionable. But the archaeological evidence on its own in no way justifies the identification of either set of graves as 'Sabine'. What happened, clearly, was that the archaeologists used the legend of the Sabines in early Rome to help them interpret the archaeological evidence. Almost all archaeological 'confirmations' are circular in this sense, and many are equally illusory. The recently reported discovery of a wall, perhaps dating from the eighth century BC, on the north-eastern slopes of the Palatine might conceivably form part of the fortification system of an early settlement on that hill;[71] but it does not confirm any ancient tradition, nor does it make Romulus any less legendary – any more than finds of bronze-age pottery can prove the reality of Aeneas or Evander. These examples only serve to prove the truth of the old saying, that if you ask a silly question, you get a silly answer.

Jacques Poucet, in an excellent discussion of this issue, defines the situation as follows:

> Historians should be very careful when they appeal to archaeology to 'confirm the tradition' (to use the time-honoured phrase). Broadly speaking there are two situations, which need to be carefully distinguished. In a number of cases, archaeology provides only vague indications which are capable of several possible interpretations, one of them tending in the same direction as the tradition. In the name of sanity one cannot speak in such cases of confirmation of tradition. The situation is entirely different in the case of a series or organised system of archaeological data which, independently of tradition, suggest strongly, indeed affirm, a distinct state of affairs which can be taken either to strengthen, or to weaken, the traditional account. It is only in the second case that archaeology can be legitimately invoked as an argument for or against tradition. One should be under no illusions: often the archaeological picture will be neutral, and will permit no conclusion one way or the other.[72]

2

THE PRE-ROMAN BACKGROUND

1 EARLY ITALY

Italy has always been a variegated country. The regional diversity which has characterised the peninsula since the fall of the Roman Empire, and which still persists to this day, was even more marked in pre-Roman times. Before the Roman conquest Italy was a patchwork of different peoples, languages and cultures. Unfortunately our knowledge of these pre-Roman societies is scanty, and a full reconstruction of their historical development from prehistoric times is not practicable from the evidence currently available to us. It is certainly possible to say something about their culture and way of life at the time of the Roman conquest itself (fourth–third centuries BC);[1] historical accounts of the peoples defeated by Rome can be supplemented by linguistic data from contemporary inscriptions and from place-names, and by a growing body of archaeological material. The problem is to understand the antecedents of this situation, and to determine how much can be extrapolated into the remote past, so as to provide information about Italy at the dawn of history. For the period before the emergence of Rome, the only direct evidence comes from archaeology, and this evidence must form our starting-point.

Archaeologists are agreed that a decisive stage in the cultural development of early Italy is represented by the transition from the Bronze Age (second millennium BC) to the Iron Age (early first millennium). The nature of this transition, and the matter of whether there was continuity between the two or a cultural 'break', are much-debated questions, and not easy to resolve in the present state of knowledge. The main difficulty lies in the characterisation of the intermediate phase of the Late Bronze Age (roughly 1200–900 BC). The fact remains, however, that the material culture of Italy in the Bronze Age before *c.* 1200 BC differed radically from the iron-age cultures that emerged in the ninth century.[2]

The most striking fact about bronze-age Italy is its cultural uniformity, which contrasts sharply with the regional diversity of later times. This uniformity is evident in the distinctive pottery of the period, a kind of highly

burnished ware with incised geometric designs, which has been found the length and breadth of the peninsula in sites hundreds of miles apart, but with little or no visible variation of shapes or decorative motifs. A similar homogeneity is found in other artefacts such as bronze tools and weapons.

The sites themselves are widely distributed throughout the peninsula, but a surprisingly high proportion of them are situated in the mountainous central region; for this reason archaeologists have coined the term 'Apennine culture' to define the civilisation of the Italian Bronze Age.[3] The Apennine culture lasted from around 1800 to around 1200 BC. Although much of the evidence is the product of casual discovery rather than systematic excavation, it is nevertheless legitimate to conclude that the population was relatively sparse. Much of the land surface was covered by forest or woodland, and settlements were small; nothing larger than a small village has yet been detected. The dead were disposed of by means of inhumation.

The primary economy was based at least in part on transhumant pastoralism – that is, on a form of stock-raising that entails seasonal movement of flocks to upland pastures in the early summer and back to the lowlands again in the autumn. This custom has been traditional in Italy since time immemorial and is still practised today.[4] It used to be thought that the economy of the Apennine culture was exclusively pastoral, and that the population was nomadic; but this picture has been modified in the light of recent excavations, particularly at sites in southern Etruria, including Luni sul Mignone, Narce, and Sorgenti della Nova. These excavations have revealed permanently settled villages on defensive hilltop sites, with a mixed economy based on sedentary agriculture and animal husbandry as well as transhumance.[5] A number of similar sites have been identified in the south, especially in Apulia. In Latium bronze-age settlements have been discovered at a number of sites, including Lavinium, Ardea and Satricum. Some sherds of Apennine pottery have even been discovered at Rome itself, but so far there is no direct evidence of a permanent settlement there (see below, p. 48).[6]

In the later stages of the Bronze Age, from around 1200 BC, major changes become apparent in the archaeological record. The significance of these changes and the precise details of their chronological sequence are uncertain and much debated, but the results of the process are clear enough. These results can be considered under three headings.

First there is a marked increase in the number of sites and the range of artefacts represented in each site. These phenomena almost certainly indicate an increasing population; there are clear signs too of growth in the size of settlements. This demographic growth continues into the Iron Age. In the opinion of R. Peroni, 'if we can measure the population of an Early or Middle Bronze Age settlement in dozens, and that of a Late Bronze Age one in hundreds, it is without doubt legitimate to think of an Early Iron Age settlement as having thousands of inhabitants'.[7] Such growth implies a more intensive use of available resources. More sophisticated agricultural pro-

duction is suggested by the number and variety of metal implements that have been unearthed; these are moreover among the finds that testify to advances in metalworking techniques, and to an increased level of artisan production.[8]

Second, there was a change in funerary custom, with the rite of cremation taking the place of inhumation in many parts of Italy. The new burial practice is very distinctive. The ashes were placed in an urn and buried in a shaft in the ground. Cremation graves were grouped together to form 'urnfields' very similar in character to those of bronze-age central Europe; it is a natural assumption that the practice of cremation was introduced into Italy from across the Alps.

Some confirmation of this assumption comes from the fact that although the rite of cremation had been adopted throughout Italy by the end of the Bronze Age (urnfields have been found as far south as Apulia and even Sicily), the earliest manifestation seems to have been in the Po valley. These early cremation cemeteries are associated with settlements known as *terremare*, which have been found along the southern edge of the plain between Piacenza and Bologna, especially around Parma.[9] The adoption of cremation in peninsular Italy was accompanied by new types of pottery, as the Apennine culture was gradually superseded by a new culture which, because of its close affinities with the iron-age 'Villanovan' culture (see below), has been called 'Protovillanovan'.[10]

The third crucial change that occurred at the end of the Bronze Age is the appearance of distinct cultural variations between one region of Italy and another. The emergence of clearly differentiated local cultures in Italy was well advanced by the beginning of the Iron Age, which most scholars now place at around 900 BC. It is at this point that the history of the Italian peoples can be said to begin.

2 THE ITALIAN IRON AGE

The iron-age inhabitants of Italy can be divided into two groups: those for whom cremation was the main burial rite, and those who practised inhumation (Map 1). We may note in passing that the emphasis on burial customs is a reflection of the fact that most of the excavated sites are cemeteries rather than habitations, and that most of the evidence comes from tombs. There are excellent reasons for this, as we have seen (above, p. 27), but we should always remember that the nature of the finds may be giving us a distorted view. In archaeology we frequently know more about the way of death of early societies than about their way of life. The manner in which a society disposes of its dead is a cultural fact of great importance, but it is not necessarily a crucial defining characteristic. Inhumers and cremators need not be very different in other respects, and as we now know can easily coexist in the same culture, and even in the same society. Above all, burial customs are not racial habits.[11]