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Introducing Early Rome

Introduction

In 44 BCE, graffiti appeared on the statue of Lucius Junius Brutus, the founder of the Roman Republic. It explicitly called on him for help against Julius Caesar, Rome's leader at the time, who had taken to wearing traditional royal symbols. This Brutus had received the nickname "The Liberator" for driving out Rome's kings (**7.6, 8.1**); by requesting his aid, the writer suggested that Caesar was a king too, and had to be eliminated.

> Some men scrawled 'If only you were alive!' on the statue of Lucius Brutus. Similarly, on Caesar's own statue they wrote a ditty: 'Brutus kicked out the kings and became the first consul; Caesar kicked out the consuls and then was made king.' (Suetonius, *Life of Julius Caesar* 80)

Caesar's biographer Suetonius linked the graffiti to Caesar's assassination. If you know the quote *et tu, Brute*, you might too: Brutus' descendant Marcus Brutus, a friend of Caesar's, was one of the leaders of the conspiracy. By reminding fellow citizens of a past heroic act, the anonymous writer made a statement that was politically, socially, and culturally relevant to his own day. Nor was such historical modeling limited to periods of political strife.

Myths and legends held long-term significance in many aspects of Roman society. In fact, stories about the city's past formed a backbone of *shared cultural knowledge*. These tales taught men and women, natives and foreigners how to behave, what qualities were valuable, and how to make sense of the world and their community. In addition to teaching Romans about their past, these

stories also gave advice about the future and helped create meaning for the entire Roman community. Modern scholars study Roman myth to learn about the city's culture, customs, history, and literature.

1.1   What Is a "Myth"?

You're probably familiar with the terms "myth" and "legend" from books, movies, or previous courses. Sometimes these words are used interchangeably, but often they refer to different types of traditional stories. These differences are sometimes defined by a spectrum of truth value (Calame 2003, 9–11). For example, a "myth" can be defined as a tale that explains the origin of natural features, such the formation of mountains or cities; it does not need to have a basis in scientific fact, but is rather a divine explanation for a visible phenomenon. In contrast, a "legend" is usually based on a factual event and has been exaggerated. The elaboration of these tales may include fantastic elements such as the use of magic or the possession of special powers by the hero or his companions – but the legend still must have a "kernel of truth." A "folktale," in contrast, may or may not have a basis in fact; it more often has a basis in social standing. Myth and legends tend to retell stories of extraordinary people, often of high status; folktales focus on the lives and deeds of ordinary people.

In studying the classical world, "myth" is usually applied to traditional Greek stories about gods and heroes. Similar stories from other parts of the ancient world are called "legends." This distinction and definition are increasingly seen as problematic for a number of reasons. For one thing, we know about many Greek myths thanks to the works of Roman authors like Ovid. So "Greek" is not an exclusive category; in many ways, "Greco-Roman myth" is a better term.

But this term leads to a second problem: how do you pinpoint what is "Greek" or "Roman" about a given narrative? We do not have much information about Roman society before it had contact with Greece. Yet there are clearly traditional tales from Rome that do not appear in any surviving classical Greek evidence. Is this the best way to define "Roman" myth?

Another problem is that many Roman traditional tales do not involve gods or semi-divine humans, but rather ordinary people who do extraordinary things. This led early researchers to conclude that Romans did not have myths of their own. Instead of the anthropomorphic gods associated with Greek myth, these researchers found that early Romans believed in *numina* (divine powers). Because these powers did not necessarily have faces and names, like "Athena" or "Ares" in Greece, there was no need to develop stories about them. Later, Romans learned about Greek myths; they were captivated by the Greeks' creativity and adopted their gods and traditional tales as their own. As a result, Roman myths are simply copies of Greek mythology. This theory of Rome's

"mythless society" was popular for many decades, and is now thought to be wrong.

Instead, scholars now realize that Roman traditional tales are quite different from Greek traditional tales. As Mary Beard (1993, 48) has written, "the observation (or complaint) that Rome has no myth is probably no more than an observation that it does not have *Greek* myth." In other words, "myth" has been defined in such a way that only a limited number of story patterns will match it. Greece offers the gold standard for such tales; other societies, including Rome, inevitably fall short. In order to study Roman myths, we must first understand that not all myths match the Greek model of gods with human qualities who fall in love, misbehave, cause trouble, rescue men, or otherwise interfere in human affairs.

Together with this redefinition of Roman myth, classicists are coming to realize that even Greek myth is not unitary. Not only did Greeks recognize many variations of their "standard" tales, but they also retold narratives that we do not recognize as mythic in structure. As Claude Calame (2003) has argued, the Greeks did not recognize "myth" as a category distinct from "legend," "folktale," or "fiction." These modern distinctions have been wrongly applied to the ancient material, confusing our understanding of how ancient narratives worked in context.

Some scholars have argued that Rome has a special type of mythology, which can be called "historical myth" (e.g., Fox 1996). They prefer this term to "legend," which (as we saw above) implies that the tale contains a certain amount of truth. "Historical myth," in contrast, shares the dubious reality of myth; it is true *to the culture*, but need not be true outside of that culture. Unlike the traditional category of "myth," which tells stories from a timeless past, the tales of "historical myth" take place in a concrete and historically defined period. For those studying ancient Rome, that period is called "early Rome" (see **1.5**). Roman myths take place in specific locations (in and around the city) and in specific eras. Although the dividing line between "myth" and "history" is intensely debated by modern scholars, many would agree that stories about the gods or their children are mythical, while stories that had contemporary documentary support are historical.

But there is substantial disagreement about what records were available to ancient authors. We aren't sure what records were kept before approximately 300 BCE; we also don't know how much Romans cared about preserving strict historical accuracy versus imagining the past. The debate about how to deal with the "memory" of the past through oral and visual means is ongoing in ancient history, as well as other fields. This book takes a broad view of "myth." It includes stories about larger-than-life heroes, some of whom may have existed historically. They are "mythical" because their actions are unrealistically exaggerated. By including characters who would typically be considered "legendary," this book suggests that the exact distinction between "myth" and "legend" may not be helpful for understanding Roman society. Rather, the myths that were told about early Rome can help us understand how

Romans thought about their history. Myths tell us which stories were worth retelling; what degree of variance between different versions was acceptable; how authors decided that an event was believable (or not); and how authors expected or wanted their audiences to interpret the story's outcome.

An example of how one well-educated Roman understood the city's traditional tales can be found in Cicero, *On the Laws* 1.5. Discussing the material that's appropriate for history and poetry, Cicero distinguishes two types of tale: the *fabula* (more fictional) and the *historia* (more truthful). The criteria for determining what makes a *fabula* fictional are vague, suggesting that questions of veracity were left to individual discretion, at least to a certain degree. In reading narratives in this book, you'll come across the judgments of authors themselves. Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Plutarch are particularly prone to reflect on the likelihood of various alternative narratives, and their judgments offer modern historians the best evidence for what was credible (or not) in antiquity. But be careful: these authors often disagree, leaving modern historians unsure about how their readers would have interpreted the story. Ancient authors also include stories that they claim are false or suspicious. The inclusion of such tales in historical writing has long puzzled scholars, and there is no currently accepted boundary between "true history" and "myth." This boundary is something you should consider as you read, but don't worry if you can't find a single answer!

It is important to recognize that these terms – myths, legends, "historical myths" – are not universally recognized or mutually exclusive. Modern historians disagree on the appropriate vocabulary to use when discussing Rome's traditional tales. Some scholars will use the terms myth, legend, and folklore interchangeably; others use them to indicate different themes or truth values. It is in your best interest to read this scholarship carefully, paying particular attention to definitions. Be careful: these are sometimes found in footnotes (or endnotes).

From this point forward, this book will refer to all traditional tales about the regal period and early Republic as "myths," regardless of likely historicity. This choice underlines an important aspect of Roman traditional stories: that regardless of whether modern scholars view them as true or false, they had continuing value *to the elite Romans* who read and wrote the works we examine. In that sense, they all try to communicate some "truth" to their audience. Stories that had no value to society were not retold.

1.2 Types of Stories You Will Read in this Book

As you probably realize by now, "Roman myth" includes a variety of different stories. These can be categorized into a number of different subtypes, which are not unique to Rome (although the stories themselves may be). These labels are not mutually exclusive – a story can easily fit into two or more categories.

The point of such categorizations is not to fence in similar stories and protect them from alternative classification; rather, by identifying themes of various stories, we can better understand what interested Romans about their past and the type of question they asked (and didn't ask) about their contemporary society. You'll notice that Romans often asked different questions than we do! In understanding their questions, we can better understand how these authors understood their world, both in the past and in their own day.

Some of the uses of myth can be striking to those not used to ancient patterns of thought. Romans sometimes used tales of the city's early past as we do, to try to learn about the historical life of their ancestors. But the study of the past for its own sake (called "antiquarianism") was different from the study of the past directed towards contemporary goals. Rome's early history could be manipulated to make a new custom seem old (or older); help Romans feel proud of their city and teach them how to behave in similar situations; advertise the crucial importance of an elite family to the city; inform foreigners of basic virtues; and reinforce the importance of traditions. Other uses of historical myths were also possible – for example, orators may cite myths in legal cases – but connecting the past to the present in some way is the most common reason to (re)tell a narrative above the past.

Foundation narratives relate the establishment of cities and peoples (a term that is broadly similar to an "ethnic group" in modern usage). They require at least one founder, and it is rare to have a large group; in Italy, however, the presence of two founders seems relatively common. A single place might have multiple foundation narratives, and these narratives can be complementary (for example, Rome's foundation tales of the Lupercalia and the walls: **3.2, 3.3**) or contradictory (for example, the different accounts of Remus' death: **3.4**). We should not think that there was only one "correct" narrative. Rather, one narrative might be more or less correct for a given genre or context.

Aetiological tales are similar to foundation narratives: they relate the creation of cults, customs, and other rituals. *Aetiology* comes from the Greek word *aetia* (meaning "cause"), and answers the question "why do we do this?" A single event frequently has multiple aetiologies. As with foundation narratives, these different explanations aren't necessarily mutually exclusive. It's quite common in Rome for at least one aetiology to be traced back to the foundation. Roman society, like many traditional societies, prized ancestral custom and was suspicious of novelty. Anything associated with the city's founder, Romulus, was immediately old and therefore respectable. As a result, many customs were associated with Romulus, even if they were already attributed to another figure in Rome's history. Jacques Poucet (1985) has called this process "**Romulization**."

In this book, only aetiologies that take place in early Rome will be covered. But aetiologies could relate to any period in the city's history, including the quite recent past. A similar type of tale is the *exemplum* (plural: **exempla**). An *exemplum* can be either a person or deed, and serves as a shorthand for a

particular virtue. We might say that an *exemplum* embodies that virtue. *Exempla* provided a useful way to communicate a complex cultural concept. This book opened with an *exemplum* in action: the *exemplum* of Brutus the Liberator encouraged Romans to free themselves from the "king" Julius Caesar. *Exempla* are more complex than they seem, and will be discussed further in **chapter 8**. For now, you can think of them as similar to invoking Hitler to indicate that someone is evil, with a range of associations.

Another concept that's similar to aetiologies is the **eponym**. Roman authors were interested in the names of locations, gods, and rites. They often tell stories that relate these names to a single individual. That person is the eponym of that place or ritual. You can probably find an eponym where you live: some examples named after European monarchs include Adelaide in Australia; Victoria in British Columbia, Canada; and the U.S. states of Georgia and Virginia.

Although Rome had fewer **tales of gods and heroes** than Greece, it did have some. We easily recognize heroic tales that set Greek heroes into a new location. Many Italian cities, Rome included, retold legends about the visit of Hercules on his way home from Spain. Similarly, many Italian cities claimed that they were founded or visited by heroes of the Trojan War whose ships got lost or diverted on the route between Anatolia and the Greek mainland. Early Greek colonies in central and southern Italy may have contributed to the proliferation of these tales.

Not all heroic tales go back to Greece. The hero Caeculus of Praeneste (**6.6**)) is an Italian original. Similarly, many of the stories told about the Roman kings lack convincing Greek parallels. The same can be said about the majority of Rome's tales about gods. These are relatively few in number, if you don't count the stories that take place in Greece. But when Roman gods do act in Italy, they often act in characteristically Roman ways, such as the hair-splitting dialogue between king Numa and Jupiter over human sacrifice (**5.2.3**).

Much as we all know stories about our own families that have become quasi-legendary, Roman aristocratic clans also had **family legends**. These narratives are almost never explicitly called family legends by Roman authors. Instead, modern scholars have guessed that such legends "belonged" to a group of family legends based on the prominence of a particular family in the story. A good example of such a family legend is the tale of the 306 Fabii (**8.7**), where even the name announces that it is about the Fabian *gens*. Similar tales may have explained the reason behind an individual family *cognomen* (such as Scaevola (**8.3.2, 8.3.4**) or Brutus (**5.6.5, 8.1**)) or glorified individual Roman ancestors (such as Cloelia (**7.7**) or Horatius (**5.3.2**)).

Although it is not certain, many scholars believe that such familial legends were retold at aristocratic funerals (see Polybius 6.53–54). Because some families were associated with particular cults and rites, it's also possible that these legends were publicly recounted at festivals and rituals. The average Roman may also have seen images of these tales on public buildings, monuments, or statues. Unlike the written texts that make up the majority of this book,

public images were viewed by non-elite Romans. Private imagery also supplies a potential source of iconography that would be recognizable to a broader audience. Pictorial representations offer us valuable insight into the ways that Romans may have learned about their past.

Not all stories will match one of the above categories, and others will fit in to more than one. Perfect categorization of a diverse set of myths is unlikely. Instead, these categories should help you begin to conceptualize the topics Roman authors found *worthy of myth*. In other words, these tales give us answers to the questions Romans asked about their past. We can use these answers to help us reconstruct not only the questions, but also the potential reasons why such questions were important.

1.3   Literary Genres in this Book

We tend to think that history is transmitted in a limited number of ways: textbooks, primary source compilations (such as the one you're reading now), and documentary films are a few examples. In the ancient world, almost any type of material could contain information about the legendary past. Romans seemed to have used this period as a way to conceptualize their contemporary customs, struggles, and decisions in a way that is quite different from how modern historical thinking works. On the one hand, this openness means that students of Rome's mythic history have almost limitless options for understanding a particular story or theme. But we also must be careful to avoid falling into traps of genre.

Every style of writing has its own conventions. Academic books are annotated; depending on the discipline, they may use parenthetical references, footnotes, or endnotes. Memoirs are lightly fictionalized; autobiographies, ideally, are not. An understanding of the conventions of the different genres of ancient writing, both Greek and Roman, will help you determine the best way to evaluate your sources.

Narrative history is probably the most familiar genre. Writers in this category are primarily concerned with producing chronological accounts of Roman history that are more or less "accurate" in their own terms. A standard way for an ancient historian to differentiate himself from his predecessors was to accuse those predecessors of carelessness or even lies; you should be wary of such accusations. Many, but not all, narrative historians provided the reader with several potential historical scenarios. These options allow us to identify variants of a given narrative, and they should not be seen as mutually exclusive. As many modern scholars have pointed out, the beliefs of ancient historians are not the same as ours; therefore, what seems fantastic to us was not necessarily outside the realm of possibility in their view.

But historians also transmitted some stories that they didn't believe were true. Often the importance of these stories is attributed to "tradition": this

tale has been part of Roman culture for so long that it *must* be retold in its chronological place. An example of such a tale is the divine birth of Romulus (**3.1**). This habit has led many modern scholars to speculate about how Romans understood their past. While this book does not attempt to provide answers, the **Further Reading** options often do.

Before their histories were written down, Romans had other ways of transmitting details about their past. These **oral** and **visual sources** continued to be consulted after written histories came into use. In addition to the funeral orations mentioned in **1.2**, we have evidence for historical painting (for example, the Esquiline Fresco of Fabius and Fannius[1]), probably similar to the plaques that were displayed in the Roman triumph (Holliday 2002). Other images were found on public statues, monuments, and reliefs. Peter Wiseman (1998) has also suggested that dramatic performance was a means of transmitting historical information, as were various forms of poetry (Cato, *FRHist* 5 F113[2]). Modern scholarship on oral traditions suggests that they're less fixed than written narratives, which may help explain why Roman myths, which were written down relatively late in Rome's history, vary so greatly in specific details.

Rome's earliest narrative histories were written in Greek, either by Greeks (such as the historian Timaeus of Tauromenium, in Sicily) or by Romans perhaps eager to communicate with a Greek audience (such as Quintus Fabius Pictor, a Roman patrician). These Roman authors are sometimes called "annalists," because their works took a year-by-year structure (see Wiseman (2007)). The group of "annalists" includes authors such as Livy, whose *From the Foundation* may be familiar to you. You'll find more information on these authors in **Appendix 1**.

Another genre that frequently draws on the legendary past is **epic poetry**. Epic poetry refers to the large-scale poems written by authors such as Vergil. Many, but not all, of these poems take place in the legendary past. Be careful not to confuse the modern word "epic" (large-scale, impressive) with the ancient genre of epic, which is based on poetic meter. All epics, regardless of their subject matter, were written in a meter called dactylic hexameter. Many epics told the stories of past heroes who were capable of deeds that could no longer be accomplished in the writer's own day. Common features of such narratives include the personal involvement of the gods in the hero's life (in the *Aeneid*, for example, the hero is the son of Venus); at least one meeting of the gods ("divine council") to determine the fate of the hero and/or his companions; a journey to the underworld (see *Aeneid* book 6); battles; and arming scenes (in which armor is described at length). Because these scenes are standard for the *genre*, they may represent authorial additions to the myth. Nevertheless, these new additions might be included in subsequent retellings.

Elegiac poetry differs from epic in both meter and typical subject matter. Just as epic poetry was defined by dactylic hexameter, elegiac poetry had to be written in a specific verse pattern called the "elegiac couplet." Although this genre started out as a funeral lament, by the Roman period elegiac poetry

was typically (but not always) about the romantic failure of a high-status male. Themes of such **love elegy** include the lover's lament, often outside the locked door of his girlfriend; the motifs of love as a battlefield and the lover as soldier; the lover's inability to retain the interest of his girlfriend, despite his higher status; and gender inversion, in which the high-status male becomes subservient or enslaved to his low-status female love interest. Elegiac poets such as Propertius and Ovid used these themes to redefine the past in their own terms.

You may have had experience with the first three genres in other classes dealing with antiquity. The next three genres are often less common in undergraduate courses. Although **philosophy** is often more closely associated with the Greeks, Romans also wrote philosophical works. The most important for this book is Cicero, who often used Rome to explore political philosophy. Cicero wrote about history of the city in various works and occasionally contradicts himself, which suggests that an individual's understanding of the past was flexible and could change over time.

Didactic treatises fall into several different categories. For us, the most important are **antiquarian** literature and **commentaries** on poetic works. Antiquarian literature may at first seem hard to differentiate from historical works. One of the major differences is how the material is arranged: antiquarian works are frequently arranged by topic, whereas histories tend to be written chronologically. There may also be a difference in methodology: antiquarians may accept traditions that do not seem true enough to be historical, but are nonetheless important to Roman self-definition, tradition, or culture. Some of these distinctions are fuzzy: Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for example, writes a history that we call the *Roman Antiquities*. Both genres are valuable: Cicero (*Academica* 1.3.9) claimed that Varro's great antiquarian works (now lost) "let us recognize where and who we are."

Closely related to the antiquarian works are the commentaries on canonical literature, such as Vergil. These books are organized line by line (or sentence by sentence) and provide valuable contextual information on many topics. These commentaries were written several centuries after the works in question, and don't speak for the author. Instead, they show us how the work was understood in antiquity. Such commentaries often offer **fragments**, which are references to or quotations of earlier writers whose complete works are lost. Although any incomplete work can be considered "fragmentary," the term is usually reserved for works that can't be understood in their existing state.

Finally, **Christian apologetics** offer a variety of material relating to Roman myth. In order to defend their own religion, apologists retold Roman mythic material in order to ridicule or argue with it. Sometimes they cite an author directly, providing a fragment (for example, most of our knowledge of Varro's work comes from Augustine's *City of God*). In other instances, they cite too vaguely to identify an author or not at all. Because these works are frequently aimed at discrediting the Roman myth in question, their information must be carefully assessed. It's rarely sufficient to reject the myth because it is found in a Christian source, or to accept it simply because it is ancient.

1.4 Theoretical Approaches to Roman Myth

For a long time, Roman myth was considered derivative of Greek myth. As a result, many of the theories used to analyze Greek myth were used to analyze Roman myth. Although most modern scholars now appreciate the creativity behind Roman myth, they continue to use many of the same theoretical tools.

A very popular way to analyze Roman myth is the **historical approach**. This type of analysis sees Roman myth as a type of oral history. The more improbable aspects of the stories (such as Aeneas' and Romulus' divine parents) can be explained through narrative elaboration: generations looking back to their past inflate their legendary heroes into larger-than-life figures. Although this may seem unlikely to us because we live in a heavily documented society, scholarship on modern oral traditions has shown that it takes only a few generations for traditions to become mythicized. The historical approach is a common perspective for stories that occur from the Tarquins on (see **1.5**). A subtype of this model is **exemplary history**, which is discussed further in **chapter 8**; in brief, Romans used idealized stories about their past as models to guide present behavior.

Another common model is **structuralism**. Although the term "structuralism" derives from the theories of the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, scholarship before Lévi-Strauss had already advocated for similar ideas in the myths of Rome. The basic model is that these myths symbolize a binary opposition in society. For Rome, the most common oppositions are primitive/civilized (also called savage/civilized), plebeian/patrician, modest/luxurious (sometimes nationalized as Latin/Sabine or Latin/Etruscan), and male/female. Because these oppositions are mutually exclusive, the myths offer contemporary audiences a way to negotiate their values in a safe space. Lévi-Strauss argued that oppositions allowed a population to negotiate the differences between ideas to produce new relationships.

Similar to structuralism in concept, but quite different in execution, is Georges Dumézil's **trifunctional** model. These three functions are, according to Dumézil, broadly applicable to all Indo-European cultures (including Roman, Greek, Vedic, and Norse myth) provided that they all appear in the same tale. Therefore trifunctionality is a form of **comparative mythology** (in which similarities between the myths of different cultures can be used to better understand the myths of a single culture or the process of cultural exchange). The three "functions" are the three areas that early societies seemed to value most: the priest, the farmer, and the warrior. Both myth and society were organized along the same lines, so myth serves to illuminate society. As Dumézil admitted, his approach did not work for *every* myth, but only those myths that featured a struggle for power between the three functions.

Romans themselves often suggest that their society is worse than the society of previous generations. This **model of decline** is also common in Greek thought, and should not be taken literally. It is a conservative way of viewing

the past that seeks to preserve the *status quo* and promote traditional values. In some cases, these values had long been lost or disappearing (see especially the stories of women in **chapter 7**).

We have already seen that myths can act as **aetiologies** for customs and rituals. These explanations reinforce the local importance of particular tales. For example, in tales involving a Greek hero like Hercules, the aetiological model would emphasize connections to Roman religious rites, public traditions, or particular locations in the city. Tales that aim to record the reasons for religious rites may also have been retold at the rites, gaining a wider audience than the text. Studying this wider audience is part of the approach called **cultural memory**, which attempts to discover what Romans in general "knew" about their past and their society. You'll notice as you read that Roman authors, especially Ovid and Livy, are eager to make these connections, and that this model therefore has roots in antiquity.

It's important to recognize that although these theories are distinct, they do not need to be mutually exclusive. Current work on Roman myth often features a combination of theoretical approaches. The models outlined above are also only a selection of the most common approaches to Roman myth, and shouldn't be considered comprehensive.

1.5 Chronology of Early Rome

"Early Rome" is a loosely defined period in classical scholarship. In this book, "early Rome" refers to the years between **c. 1200–c. 390 BCE** (the abbreviation "c." means "approximately"). These boundaries cover, in terms of narrative, the years from the arrival of Aeneas in Italy to the Gallic sack of Rome. It is important to realize that these dates are our society's translation of ancient dates into our own terms. The Romans did not use the dating system BC/AD or BCE/CE; these are modern, Christian dates that use year "0" as the moment of Jesus' birth. Roman authors used a variety of dating systems which had to be synchronized in complex ways. This different system of keeping records helps explain why we are often unsure of the exact year, much less month or day, in which events in ancient history occurred.

Most authors who wrote in Latin calculated the date based on how many years had passed since the foundation of the city. But this process was complicated by the fact that there was no agreement about when the city had been founded until the first century CE. Modern scholars use the "Varronian" date (see **Varro** in **Appendix 1**) of 753 BCE for the foundation of Rome; in antiquity, however, dates ranged from 815 (Timaeus (Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1.74.1)) to 750 (Eratosthenes (Solinus 1.27); see Dionysius of Halicarnassus 1.74.2). There was slightly more agreement on the era of the Trojan War: the Hellenistic chronographer Eratosthenes (third century BCE) determined that Troy fell in (our) 1184 BCE.

After the foundation of the Roman Republic in 509, dates of events in the city could be determined by the names of the yearly consuls ("eponymous" or "consular" dating). Because these two men changed every year, the combination of the consuls' names plus the number of years that had occurred since the foundation when these two men had jointly held the consulship offered a date. As you can imagine, this system was somewhat unwieldy and required much memorization! Lists were probably maintained from an early period, but our earliest lists have been lost. There's therefore a great deal of debate, both ancient and modern, about the reliability of early Republican history. Sometimes our authors express confusion about the consular dates: either they are not sure in whose consulship an event occurred, or they are not sure about the order in which the consuls held office (see Livy 2.8 for a famous example).

Greek-speaking authors of the Hellenistic period (c. 323–31 BCE) more frequently used the Olympiad dating system, which calculated one Olympiad every four years beginning in 776/5 BCE. These dates were sometimes equated ("synchronized") with other local dating systems, such as Roman consular dates or Athenian archon dates. After the establishment of the Roman Principate, contemporary events could be dated by regnal years of the emperor; for early Rome, there were few alternatives to the consular dating system established by the very first Roman historians (for further details, see Feeney 2009 and Frier 1979).

With these cautions, we can establish a periodization for early Rome that is based on dates that are *relatively* canonical. That means that these dates would not have been considered firmly set by many people in antiquity, who were less concerned about "the actual date" than we are. With this in mind, "Early Rome" falls into three broad eras:

(1) Aeneas and Alba Longa (c. 1184–c. 753 BCE): This period covers the events of Aeneas' departure from Troy to the end of his dynasty. Although many Roman noble families claimed to be descended from Aeneas or his followers (**1.2, 3.5.7**), Aeneas' line came to an end after the death of Romulus (**3.7**). This contradiction was unproblematic for many, although Cicero mocked the pretensions of contemporary Roman aristocrats who invented or "rediscovered" important family heritage (*Brutus* 62).

After Aeneas died, his kingdom was ruled by a series of kings now known as the Alban Kings, after their capital city of Alba Longa. Little is known about Alba Longa today, and the number of kings varies; some early Roman authors omitted the dynasty altogether. It seems that all sources include the first and last kings, Ascanius/Iulus (Aeneas' son(s)) and Amulius and Numitor (the grandfather and great-uncle of the city's founder Romulus); however, even these rulers are the subjects of dispute. Because of the many discrepancies in our sources, most modern scholars now believe that this dynasty was invented (different views in Grandazzi 2008 v.2; Cornell 1995, 45–57).

Key events of this period include the arrival of Aeneas in Italy, the foundation of Alba Longa, and the Alban Kings.

(2) The Regal Period (**c. 753–c. 509 BCE**)**:** This period covers the foundation of Rome itself and the seven original kings of the city. The kings may be divided in various ways; the most common methods are the division into "good" (all but the Tarquins) and "bad" (Tarquins) rulers, and the division into "Latin" (Romulus through Ancus) and "Etruscan" (Tarquin I through Tarquin II) rulers. Neither division is fully sanctioned by ancient texts or archaeological findings.

By the period of our earliest writers, these seven kings were canonical: that is, all seven consistently appear in our sources in the same order. Even in antiquity there was some dispute about which king was responsible for what; this will be discussed in more detail in **chapter 5**, where there is a detailed chronological breakdown of the different reigns. Key events of this period include the foundation of the city and many important monuments in it; the establishment of priesthoods and civic structures, such as voting divisions; and Rome's conquest of nearby cities, including Alba.

The Regal Period came to an end with the expulsion of the Tarquins and the foundation of the Republic. Ancient writers consistently associate this event with the rape of Lucretia (**7.6**) in the year 509.

(3) The Early Republic (c. 509–c. 390 BCE): This period is an invention of modern scholarship, with only limited authority in ancient writings. Roman authors conceived of "the Republic" as a single period running from the fixed date of its foundation in 509 to a variety of termination points in the late first century BCE (for detailed discussion, see Flower 2010). In contrast, modern historians have divided the Republic into three periods: early (c. 509–c. 390), middle (c. 390–c. 133), and late (c. 133–c. 27).

The rationale behind the choice of 390, the Gallic sack of Rome, can be justified by the Roman historian Livy (6.1.2): "written records, the one faithful guardian of events, in those days were short and rarely kept. And most of whatever there was, in pontifical commentaries and public or private monuments, was lost when the city burned" in the sack. Where ancient authors perceived a break in history, modern historians have been eager to follow.

Literary evidence indicates that the city was razed. The archaeological evidence for the destruction of the city in this era is less clear (Cornell 1995, 313–322). Few would deny that Italy was invaded by Gauls, perhaps numerous times, in the fourth century (contemporary evidence cited in Plutarch, *Camillus* 22: see **8.10.2c**), but invasion should not be equated with destruction. It may be the case that written records were not kept, or not well–maintained, in the city prior to the fourth century BCE. Later Romans, who found the notion of not keeping records incredible, developed the idea that all of the records had been destroyed together with the city. The relationship of archaeological remains, textual traditions, and history "as it really was" remains contentious in modern scholarship.

Conclusion

Much of the information you've read may seem confusing, contradictory, or overwhelming. Don't worry! Early Rome is a complex and exciting topic, with many opportunities for original research and ideas. No one masters this material after only a few days.

To effectively use this book, you may find it helpful to refer to the author biographies in **Appendix 1** before or after reading each selection. Particularly in cases where there are many different versions of the same tale, why might an author choose to relate only one? (Or, alternatively, why tell multiple versions?) Can you find similar themes in the stories an author chooses to tell, or which he chooses to believe? Can you make a connection with the genre of the work and variant of the story? If so, congratulations: you're well on your way to understanding early Roman myth.

Notes

1. http://en.centralemontemartini.org/var/museicivici/storage/images/musei/centrale _montemartini/percorsi/galleria_fotografica/affresco_con_scene_militari_da_una_ tomba_a_camera_della_necropoli_esquilina/64857-8-eng-US/fresco_with_military_ scenes_from_a_chamber_tomb_of_the_esquiline_necropolis_gallery.jpg
2. This standard way to cite fragmentary historians is a little complicated: the format is the author's name, identifying number in a standard work (see **Abbreviations**), and the fragment number (indicated by F).

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Further Reading

Bremmer, Jan, and Nicholas Horsfall. 1987. *Roman Myth and Mythography*. London: Institute of Classical Studies. One of the earliest works to take Roman myth seriously in its own right, this book delves into the city's major myths. The authors present a series of case studies, rather than an introduction. The scholarship is dense, but both readable and fascinating. The book is available online (with subscription): http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/bics.1987.34.issue-S52/issuetoc (last accessed November 21, 2016).

Csapo, Eric. 2005. *Theories of Mythology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. Introduces the different ways of interpreting myth in their historical context. Although no background in ancient myth is required, this book isn't aimed at beginners. Students who are interested in the various approaches that scholars have taken to "myth" more generally are encouraged to read it carefully; it's an excellent introduction to the academic study of mythology.

Miles, Gary B. 1995. *Livy: Reconstructing Early Rome*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. A difficult but worthwhile read. Miles analyzes how Livy's history uses memory, monuments, and myth to re-imagine lost history. He is particularly interested in the repetition of motifs through different narratives.

Rea, Jennifer. 2007. *Legendary Rome: Myths, Monuments, and Memories on the Palatine and Capitoline*. London: Duckworth. Mainly interested in the Augustan-era poets' rendition of Rome's past. Rea argues that the need to recreate Rome for the new, post-war age drove many of the legendary recreations that we now have.

Wiseman, Timothy Peter. 2008. *Unwritten Rome*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press. Focuses on what we can learn about early Rome from three sources: religious ritual (represented in texts and/or images); dramatic performances; and poetry. Wiseman is an accessible writer; this is a series of case studies, some previously published and some new, about many aspects of early Rome.

In addition to the above works, there are now "Companions" to almost every major topic in this chapter and author in this book; these offer a good starting point for further research.