

Roman Epic

History and Folk Tradition

Livy, *From the Founding of the City* 2.3-13

Discussion

- Livy wasn't writing epic, he was writing history (historiography), but the tales he tells (by choice) have an epic flavor to them.
 - What is similar between Livy's descriptions of the events of the earliest days of the Republic, and what we've read about in the epics?
 - What is different, and what does that tell us about the goals of the different authors?

Livy the Author

- From a wealthy family in Padua
 - Little else is known of his life
- *From the Founding of the City*
 - Originally 142 books long
 - Only $\frac{1}{4}$ remains, some of which is only fragmentary
 - Abridged twice in antiquity



A Note About Ancient History...

“The speeches here represent what in my judgment it would have been most important for the individual speakers to say with regard to the current circumstances, while keeping as close as possible to the general sense of what was actually said.”

- Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.22.1

- Ancient audiences were aware that histories weren't chronicles
 - Interpretations that gave political and moral messages

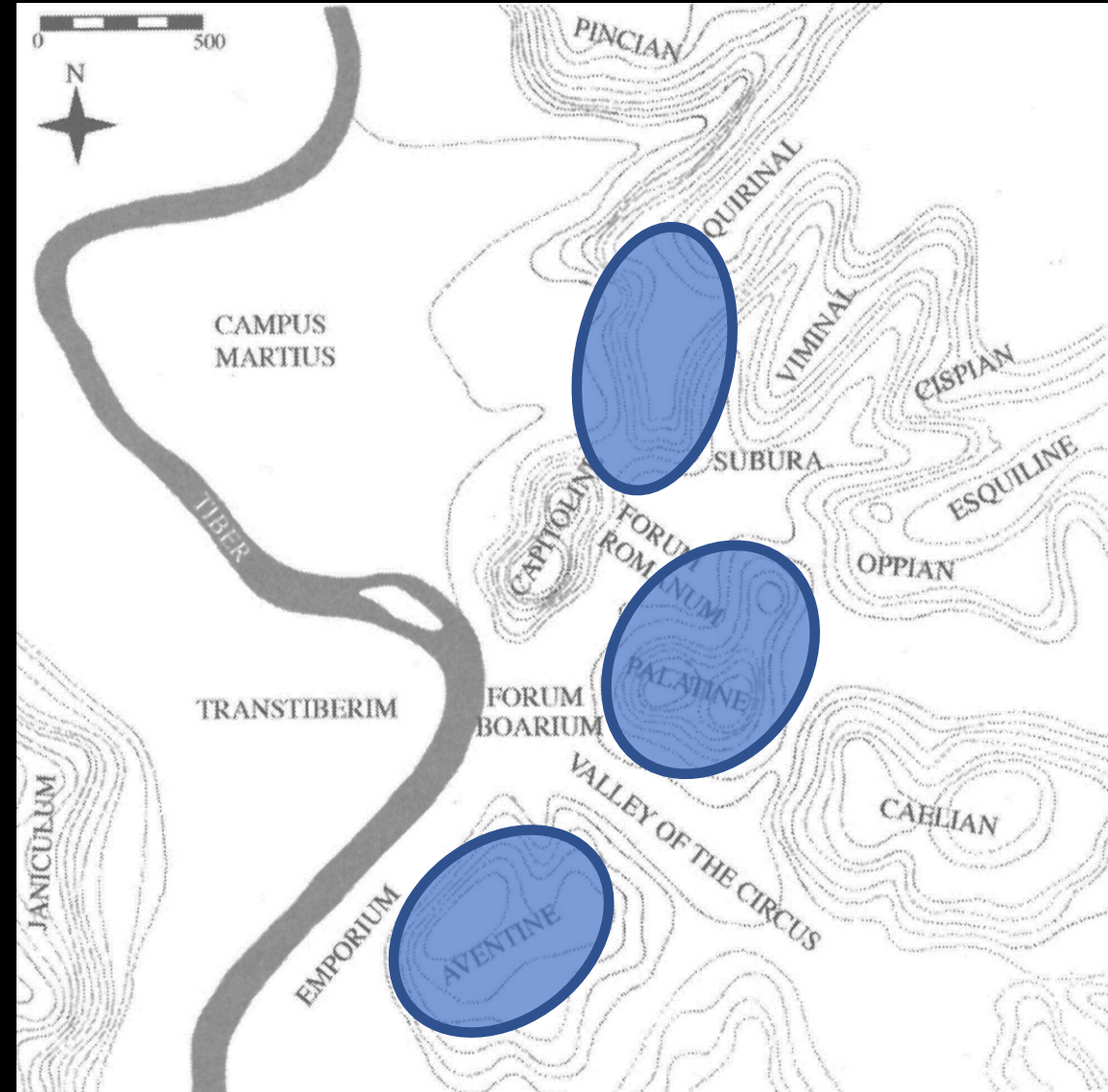
The Kingdom of Rome



The Kingdom of Rome

- Humble origins 753-509 BCE

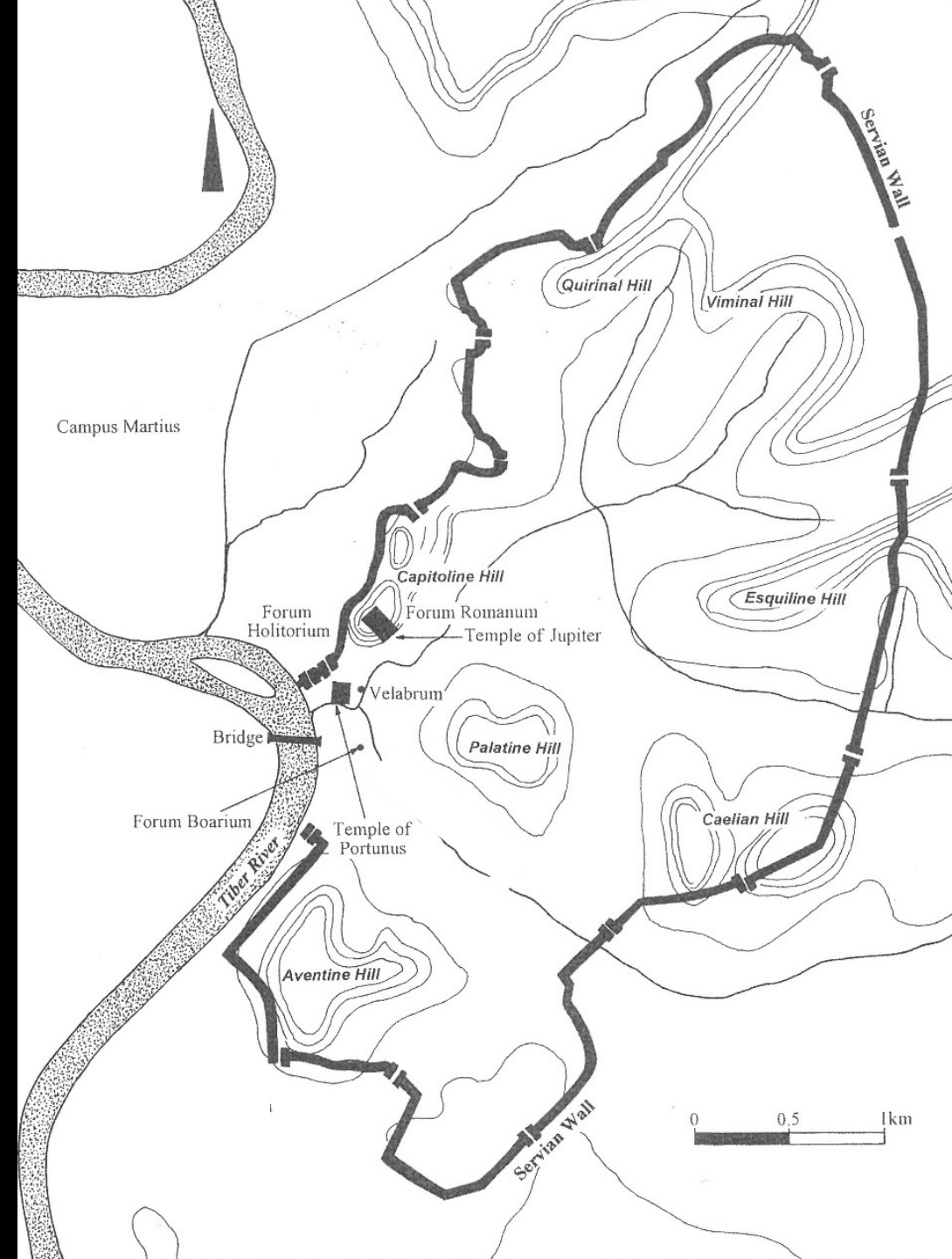
Original settlement areas



The Kingdom of Rome

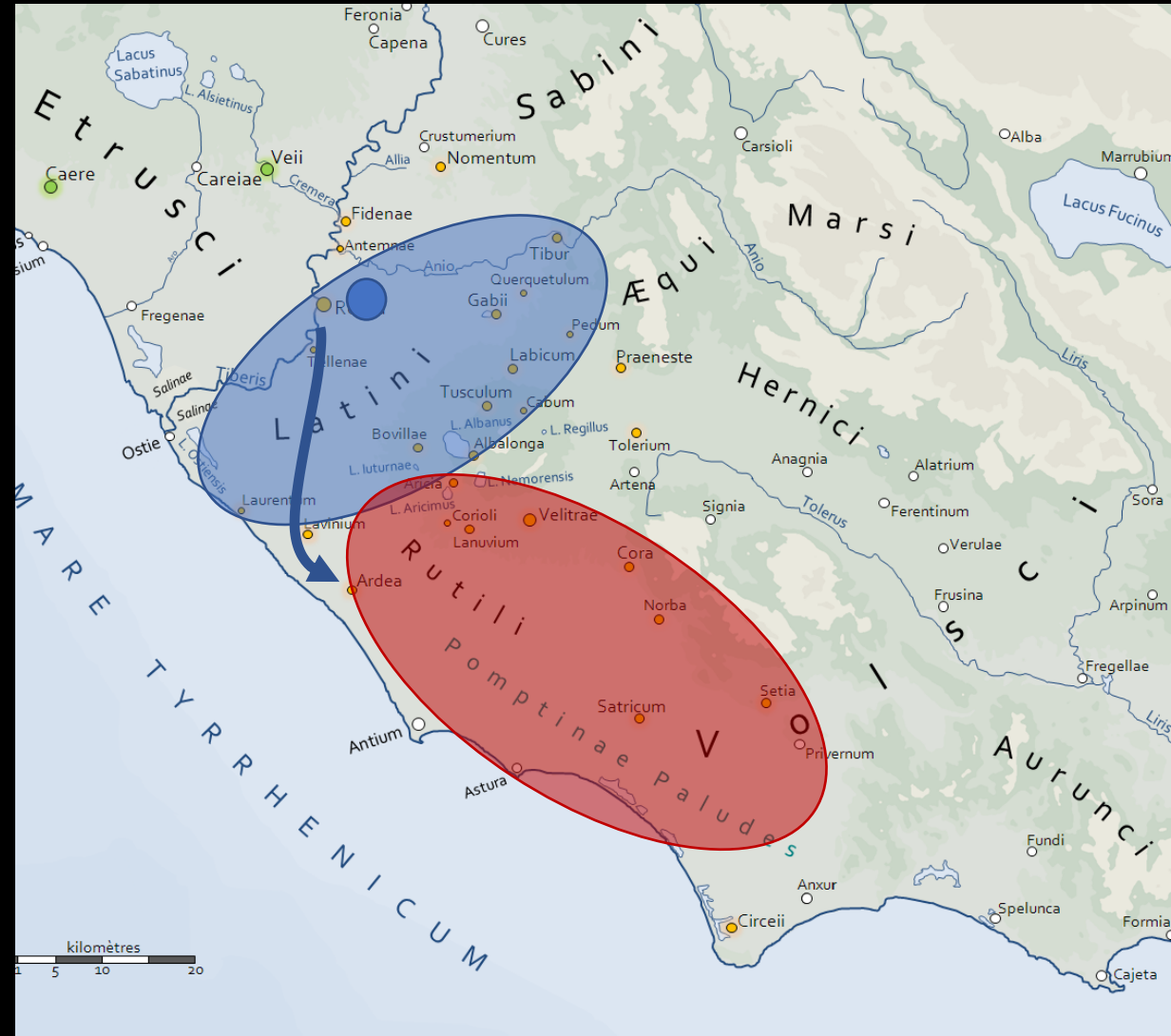
- Humble origins 753-509 BCE
 - Grew to the last king, Tarquinius Superbus
- Ended disgracefully in 509 BCE

*Rome during the
later Kingdom and
early Republic*



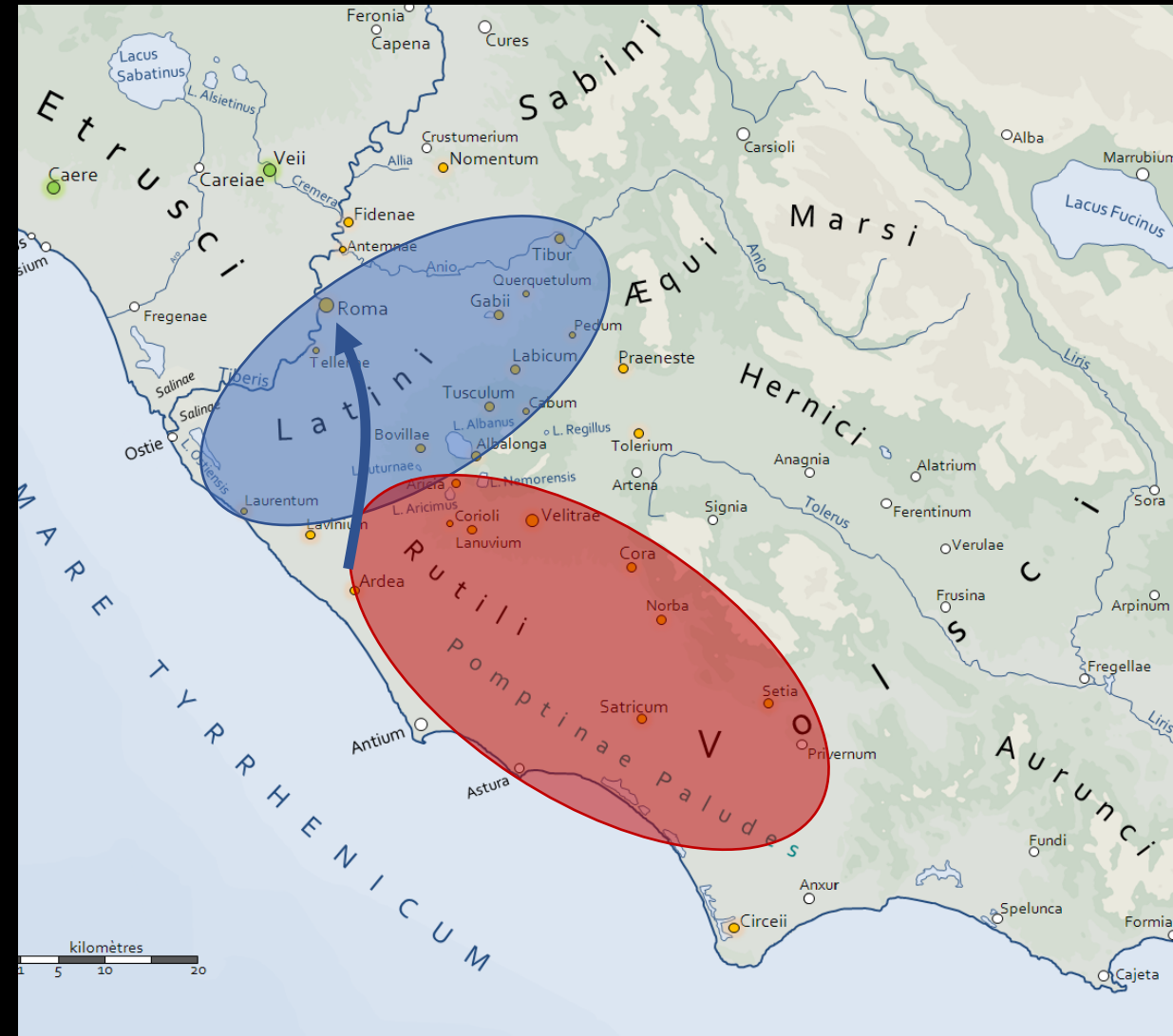
Establishing the Republic

- 509 BCE: King Lucius Tarquinius Superbus goes to war vs the Rutuli
 - Tarquinius' son Sextus outrages everyone back home
 - Lucretia's husband, Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, and Lucius Junius Brutus (cousin and nephew of the king) rebel
 - King is deposed in absentia and Republic is established



The Narrative: Fighting for the Early Republic

- Tarquinius tries to negotiate to regain his throne
 - Tries to sell his stuff, buy support



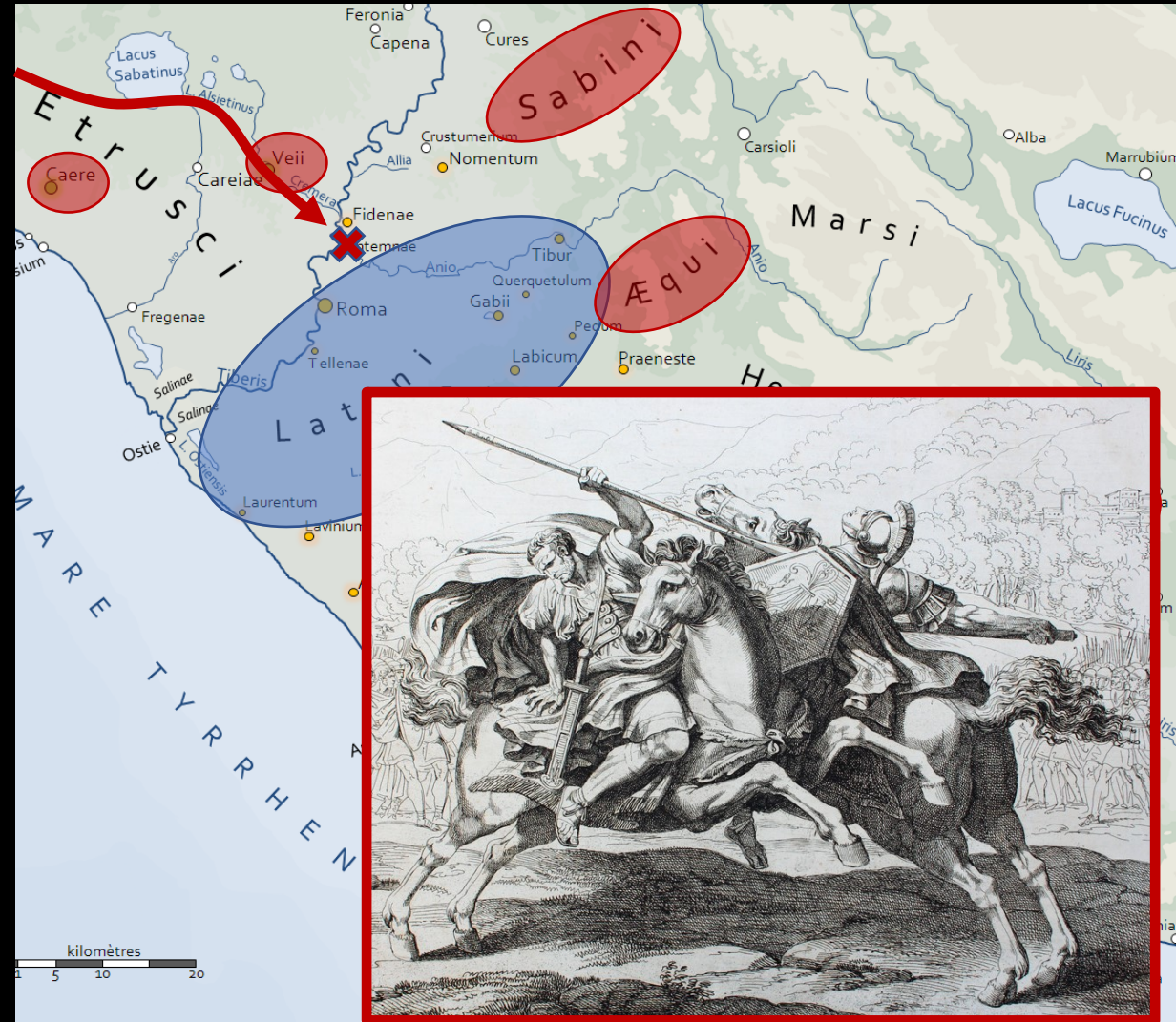
The Narrative: Fighting for the Early Republic

- Tarquinius tries to negotiate to regain his throne
 - Tries to sell his stuff, buy support
 - Counter-rebellion put down by Brutus
 - Executes his sons without special favor
- Tarquinius retreats



The Narrative: Fighting for the Early Republic

- This creates problems, Rome is short on allies
 - Invasion threatens more than Tarquinius returning to power
- Tarquinius returns with an Etruscan army (from Tarquinia and Veii)
 - Battle of Sylva Arsia
 - Brutus and Arruns kill one another, all in the service of Rome



The Narrative: Fighting for the Early Republic

- 508 BCE: Tarquinius returns with a different Etruscan army (from Clevsin)

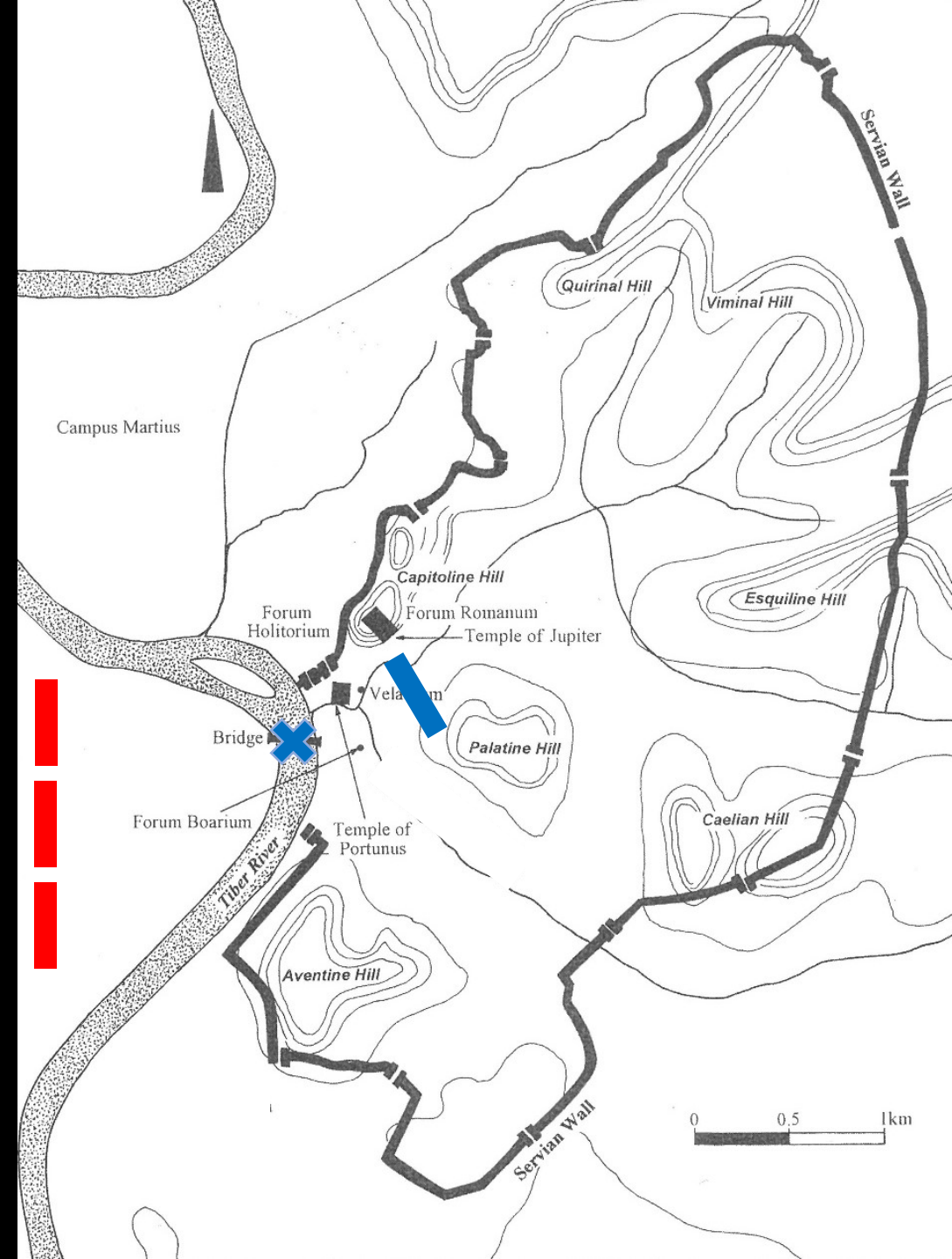


The Narrative: Fighting...

■ Large Etruscan army

■ Small Roman army

✕ Horatius Cocles and
his two companions

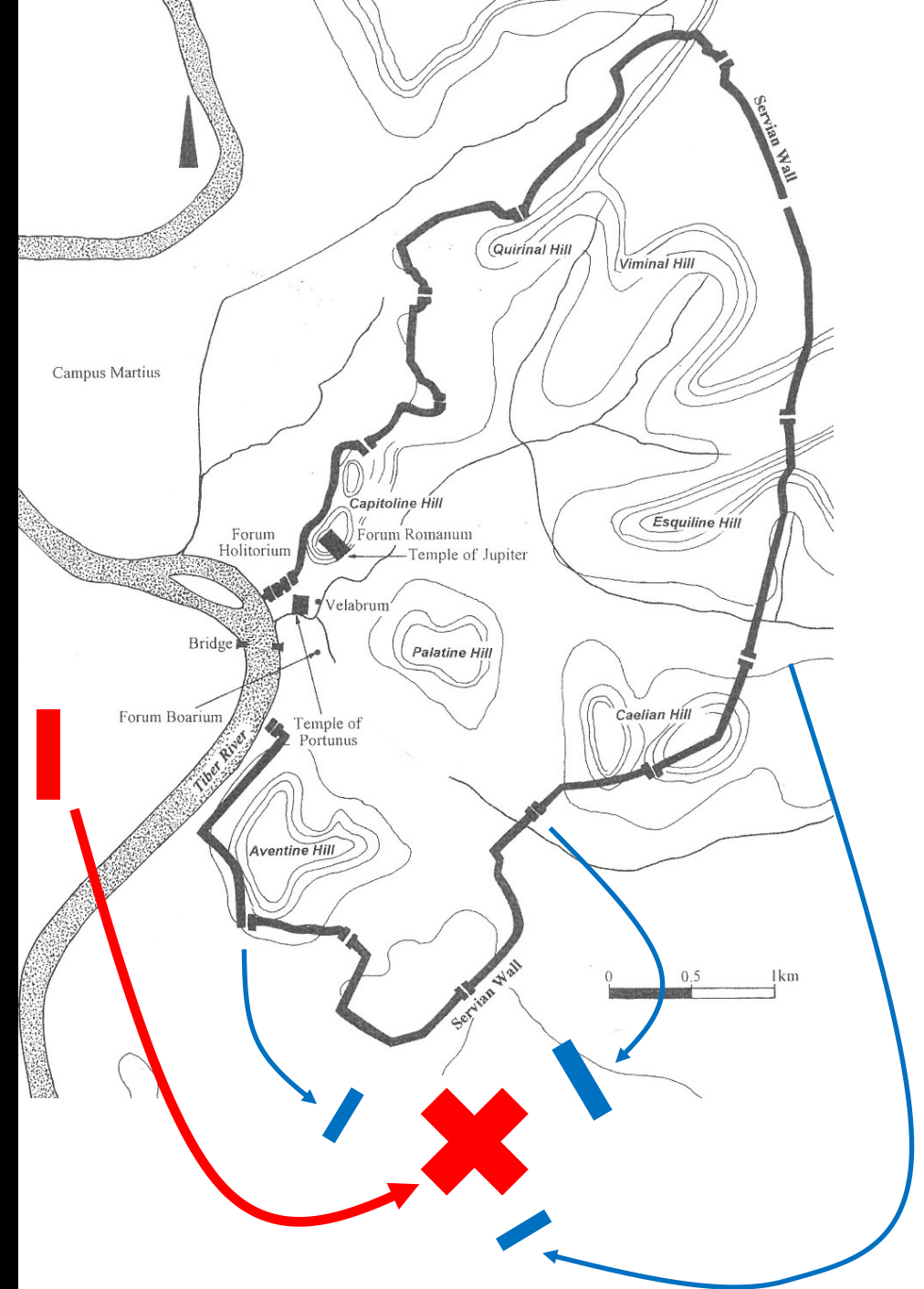


The Narrative: Fighting...

■ Large Etruscan army

■ Small Roman army

- The Romans set a trap

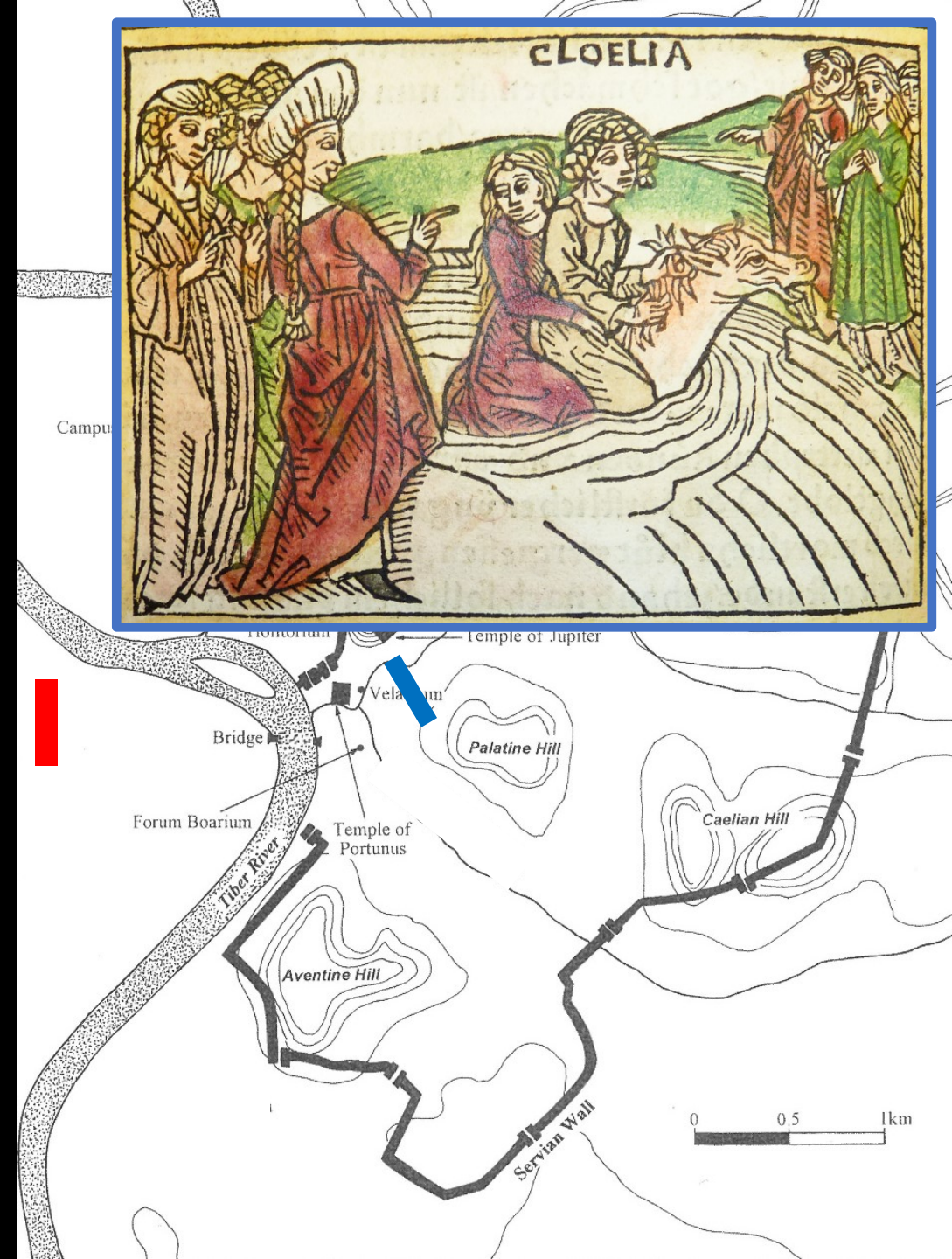


The Narrative: Fighting...

■ Large Etruscan army

■ Small Roman army

- Now ordinary Romans show bravery
 - Gaius Mucius' 300 nights of terror
 - Cloelia's sacrifices and equestrian bravery



The Analysis and Themes: Epic Differences

- Narrator not all-knowing
 - “their [the conspirators] names are lost in antiquity” (2.4.2)
 - Admitted discrepancies in who was consul and when (2.8.5)
 - Remember Thucydides?
- Method of story-telling without many similarities
 - Not poetry
 - No poetic language (mostly)
 - No formulaic descriptions
 - No supernatural actions

Maybe not the most rousing
or inspiring version of events?

- It does hammer in the
ideas of duty and service

The Analysis and Themes: Epic Similarities

- Aetiology of Tiber Island (2.5.3-4)
- The importance of liberty demonstrated through bad examples
 - Brutus' sons thought that "the liberty of the rest had resulted in their own enslavement" (2.3.3)
 - The justification for monarchy as some men are simply better than others (2.9.2-3)
 - Only people willing to sell themselves into slavery would betray their city "since the blockade and famine were causing desertions on the part of faithless slaves" (2.11.5)

The Analysis and Themes: Epic Similarities

- Heroic virtues
 - Service and sacrifice for the State
 - Brutus condemning his sons (2.5.5-9)
 - Brutus vs. Arruns Tarquinius (2.6.8-9)
 - Gaius Mucius (2.12.1 ff.)
 - Cloelia (2.13.6 ff.)
 - Military prowess in defense
 - Horatius at the Bridge (2.10.2 ff.)
 - Almost a Type-Scene of Aristeia
 - The importance of family
 - “the poor paid dues enough if they reared children [for Rome]” (2.9.6)

The Analysis and Themes: Epic Similarities

Livy

- Dedication to liberty
- Service and sacrifice
- Military prowess in defense
- Honoring family

Virgil

- Enrich lives of commoners
- Bound by duty and Fate
- “Establish peace, spare the humble”
- Pious and family-focused

“*mos maiorum*” — the old moral values of Roman society that governed how Romans should behave

The Analysis and Themes

- There's a reason I picked examples from these time periods... 1817
- “hey here's this thing the Romans did...”

Book written 1361-2 (illust. 1474)



ca. 1450



The Analysis and Themes

- These ideals have had a very long afterlife
- Macaulay (1842) wanted to “revive” the *mos maiorum* to inspire his people in his own culture
 - Inspiring them with the moral qualities necessary to run the British Empire and its colonies
 - Roman morals in service of State interests became standard in 18th–19th c. Europe through examples like these

