



Marble panel showing two men dressed in togas guiding a yoke of two oxen (bulls?) with four similarly dressed figures following. 3rd century A.D. Found at Aquilea.

As the toga is hardly peasant's working dress, this relief was taken to represent a ritual scene by its discoverer, in fact the drawing of the 'sulcus primigenius', even though the manner of wearing the toga (the heads are not covered) does not conform to the descriptions of the rite. 'Notizie Scavi', 1931, p. 472 ff.; 'Archäologischer Anzeiger' 1932, p. 454
Museo Civico, Aquilea

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The Idea of a Town /

The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy
and the Ancient World

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

understood without comparing them with those of other peoples, usually weaker and sometimes of the most primitive savagery—or so they would have seemed to the Romans. The Romans were not alone among ancient peoples in practising a form of rectilineal planning and orientation. All the great civilizations practise it, all have mythical accounts of its origins, and rituals which guide the planner and the builder. I propose also to consider such parallel accounts to arrive at some estimate of the enormous value which the Romans, and such ancient peoples as have left us records of their beliefs, placed not only on these forms, but also on the procedures by which the forms were drawn. However, always it is the conceptual model and its relation to the place and the plan shape which interest me, rather than the material remains with which the archaeologist must concern himself: definite patterns, definite, assertive configurations of streets and squares, private and public buildings, which will not yield their meaning to the common means of urban analysis.



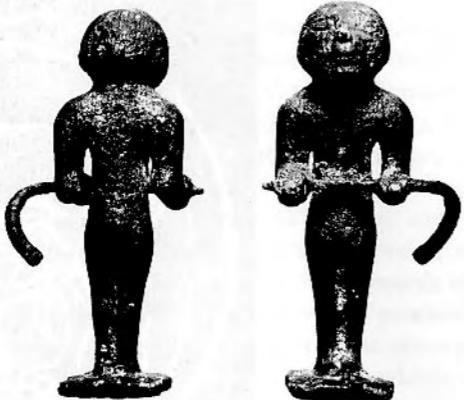
2. Romulus and Remus.
Denarius of L. Papius Celsus
By courtesy of the
Warburg Institute

One Town and Rite: Rome and Romulus

The remains of Roman towns are still visible, are still part of everyday experience in Western Europe and round the Mediterranean: and the more closely they are examined, the more puzzling they appear. In examining them I shall often appeal to associations established by assonance and rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, allusion or simply physical resemblance—all the apparatus of dream analysis, in fact. We have grown so accustomed to one word per meaning, one meaning per word, in any context, that the reader may hesitate to place any reliance on such seemingly vague connections. But in antiquity the idea that everything means itself and something else as well, was general and ingrained: it was taken for granted. In the specific instance of the town plan, its laying-out according to a model was hedged about with elaborate ceremonial, the words and actions of which constituted the conceptual model. The foundation was commemorated in regularly recurring festivals, and permanently enshrined in monuments whose physical presence anchored the ritual to the soil and to the physical shape of the roads and buildings.

Romulus and Remus

The most familiar story connected with such a foundation is the account of the death of Remus in Plutarch's 'Life of Romulus'. 'As Romulus was casting up a ditch,' Plutarch says, 'where he designed the foundation of the city wall, [Remus] turned some pieces of work into ridicule, and obstructed others; at last, as he was in contempt leaping over it, some say Romulus himself struck him, others one of his companions. He fell however. . . .'¹



3. Naked man holding a crooked staff. Possibly an augur. Small bronze statuette found under the Lapis Niger in the Roman Forum
Antiquario Forense Rome



4. Bronze statuette of man holding a crooked staff, with his head covered. Possibly an augur. Etruscan, c. 600 A.D.
After D. Strong 'The Early Etruscans', Evans Bros. London 1968

There is nothing unusual about the combination of murderer, fratricide and town founder. In scripture, too, the first founder of a town is the archetypal fratricide, Cain.² But from the outset there are glaring absurdities in the story: the tiny moat and wall, the gratuitous killing, the hesitant explanation, make one suspect that this is an allusion to a forgotten ritual. The allusion seems reflected in two obscurer legends: firstly Oeneus, the Calydonian wine-god, killed his son Toxeus for jumping over the ditch he had dug round his vineyard,³ and secondly the hero Poimander aimed a stone at the cynical architect Polycrithos who jumped over the new walls of his fortress. He missed, however, and hit the architect's son Leucippus, killing him instead.⁴ Plutarch himself knew that his account of this incident in his 'Life of Romulus' was inadequate. In another book, *Roman Questions*, he says of Romulus and Remus: 'It seemeth that this was the cause why Romulus killed his owne brother Remus for that he presumed to leape over an holy and inviolate place. . . . Remus then was killed for sacrilege.'

This explains the killing, but does not account for the tiny wall, small enough to jump over, nor for its sacred character. In fact, Plutarch is here considering 'for what reason they (the Romans) considered the walls of the city to be sacred and inviolable, but not their gates . . . ' and he wonders: 'Is it (as Varro said) because we ought to think the walls so holy that we will die generously in their defence . . . on the other hand it was not possible to consecrate and bless the gates, through which many necessities were transported, and in particular the bodies of the dead . . . '⁵ which does not entirely satisfy him. But the *Roman Questions* are not intended to be conclusive, and Plutarch says little more on the subject, but describes the foundation rite to which the

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incident draws attention: 'and therefore, they who begin to found a citie, environ and compasse first with a plough all that purrise and precinct wherein they mean to build . . .' He refers to this rite in even greater detail in the 'Life of Romulus'. 'The founder', he says, referring to Romulus, 'fitted a brazen ploughshare to the plough, and, yoking together a bull and a cow, drove himself a deep line or furrow round the bounds; while the business of all those that followed after was to see that whatever was thrown up should be turned all inwards towards the city, and not to let any clod lie outside. With this line they described the wall and called it by a contraction *pomoerium*—that is, *postmurmum*, after or besides the wall; and where they designed to make a gate, there they took out the share, carried the plough over, and left a space; for which reason they consider the whole wall as holy, except where the gates are . . .' And in *Roman Questions* he ends his more abrupt description with an almost self-evident rider: '. . . because they considered all ploughed land sacred and inviolate . . .' Many other Greek and Latin authors allude to or give some account of this rite, which the Romans were said to have imported from Etruria. It was performed at the foundation or re-foundation of any town which aspired to the title of 'urbs'.⁷ The ancients thought it a thing of capital importance for the whole religious and social life of the community; it is difficult for us now to accept their assessment of it. Any account of the ceremony must inevitably begin by setting such ritual formulae against the body of Roman religious literature. The Romans inherited most of their 'scriptures' from the Etruscans. They were apparently written down at an early stage of Latin literacy in archaic Latin. They consisted of tablets, presumably of bone or bronze, and were in the care of the pontifical college. These writings took the form of ritual recipes and formulae, forms of contract with divine powers (many Roman prayers were of this kind), and some hymns. Several instances of a pontiff dictating the form of prayer to the officiating magistrate from a written text are recorded by historians, such as Decius Mus's *devotio* before his suicidal charge at the battle of Veseris.⁸ The 'Gubbio tablets' may well be a fragment of the analogous 'ritual books' of the Iguvine people.

The Ritual Books

The Roman ritual books are usually divided into two portions: the *libri Tagetici*, called after Tages, a dwarf who jumped from under the plough of the augur or *lucumon* Tarchon⁹ in the morning, dictated his laws and disappeared in the evening,¹⁰ and the *libri Vegoenses* called after the shadowy nymph Vegoia or Begoia.¹¹ The Tagetic books deal mostly with the reading of omens in general and the appeasing of the gods (*libri Fatales*), with the dead and the underworld (*libri Acheruntici*), and with the interpretation of sacrificial entrails (*libri Haruspicini*).¹²

The *libri Vegoenses* contained instructions about the interpretation of lightning (*libri Fulgorales*),¹³ and the collection of ritual rulings with which I shall be most concerned, the *libri Rituales*.¹⁴ The ancient lexicographer Festus says something about their contents: 'Rituales nominantur Etruscorum libri in quibus praescriptum est quo ritu condantur urbes arae aedes sacrentur, qua sanctitate muri, quo iure

portae quomodo tribus, curiae centuriae distribuantur, exercitus constituant[ur] ordinentur, ceteraque eiusmodi ad bellum ac pacem pertinentia. . . . 'Those books of the Etruscans called *rituales* in which are set out the rules for the rites by which towns are founded, temples and shrines consecrated, and walls are hallowed, what the laws of the gates are, how tribes, curiae and centuries are to be distributed, the army constituted, and how other things pertaining to war and peace are to be arranged . . .'¹⁵ When compared with Plutarch's or Livy's account of the doings of Romulus, this summary will appear to be a fair abstract of his law-giving. So it is hardly surprising that the first thing mentioned by Festus is the rite by which cities are founded. What happens before this rite is before recorded history began, and belongs to hearsay, to legend. Commenting on a similar matter in another context, the great historian Fustel de Coulanges wrote: 'Ancient history was sacred and local history. It began with the foundation of the city, because everything prior to that was of no interest—that is why the ancients have forgotten the origins of their race. Every city has its own calendar, religion, history.'¹⁶

The foundation rites of a city provide a key to its history. *Ab urbe condita* the Romans reckoned theirs.¹⁷ If the annalists' circumstantial account of the foundation is compared with the vague and cursory references to the early days of Romulus and Remus and the even vaguer accounts of their antecedents, it will become evident that for them the rites of foundation really were the key to the town's history. Moreover, many of the puzzling features of ancient towns can be explained if they are related to these rites. Such a confrontation may even provide a guide to the form of the ancient city, because the performing of the rites actually fixed the physical shape of the city.

Plutarch's remarks in his *Roman Questions*, and in the 'Life of Romulus' are only brief allusions to the rite of foundation. And although he has more to say about it elsewhere, the founding of a Roman or Etruscan town was much more impressive and ceremonious than he might lead one to believe. Unfortunately, it is rather difficult to get a clear picture of what happened on such an occasion. The *libri Rituales* are lost; any report must be composed from twenty or so fragmentary descriptions.¹⁸ My account is intended to give some idea of what the ancients thought and felt about their towns, and how these ideas related to their general conception of the world, the dead and the immortals.

The New Community

New communities were begun in various ways. It seemed to be a general custom in Italy, for instance, that victors should impose the surrender of one-third of the vanquished territory, and there found colonies.¹⁹ The Romans vested power first in the king, probably; later proceedings would be initiated by a consul or a tribune of the people, or possibly even by the senate corporately; ultimately it became a prerogative of the emperor. But there was a custom, to which the wide diffusion of the Oscan-Umbrian peoples has been attributed,²⁰ which is particularly interesting in this connection: the *ver sacrum*.²¹ As its name implies, it was a springtime consecration, and the ritual was, it

seems, originally Italic. All the produce of a given town and its territory during a nominated spring was consecrated to a god in some great national emergency. After a time had passed, the animals and corn were sacrificed and the children born during the specified time expelled from the home town. Livy has recorded the details of the rite when describing the last time it was performed in Rome.²² On this last occasion no human beings were included in the sacrifice. But ancient writers record the normal presence of human victims.²³ And a number of peoples recorded their origin in a *ver sacrum*, particularly the southern Oscan-Umbrian peoples: the Hirpini,²⁴ the Samni,²⁵ the Picentes,²⁶ the Marsi,²⁷ the Mamertini²⁸ and the Sacri.²⁹ In most of these names the reference to Mars and to the animals sacred to him, the wolf and the woodpecker, are reiterated. March was also the month in which the sacrifice was normally performed, and it still bears the name of the god to which it was particularly sacred among the various people in Italy.

The Greeks had no exactly corresponding custom. The Chalcidians, at one point, vowed every tenth man to Apollo 'for the fertility of the fields', and sent them off to Delphi where the oracle commanded them to found a new town in Bruttium, the modern Calabria; this is the myth of the origin of Reggio.³⁰ Although Strabo speaks of this as a unique case in Greece, Dionysius of Halicarnassus describes it as most popular among Greeks and barbarians; moreover the sacrifice of a tithe was otherwise closely associated with Apollo.³¹

Planning Techniques: Rational and Irrational

Modern writers will always see irrelevant flummery behind what seem to them pedestrian motives: avoidance of overpopulation or economic expansion. They are right of course, nor do I wish to oppose economic to ritual considerations. But the economic and hygienic factors were always seen by the ancients in mythical and ritual terms. Cicero, for instance, lists the various sensible geographic, economic and hygienic reasons which led Romulus to found his new town where he did,³² but he prefaces this account with the legend about the choice of the site, of which I shall speak later.³³

The relationship between such common-sense factors as those listed by Cicero and the ritual performance is often dispatched summarily by modern writers. They see the religious duties as a perfunctory introduction to the real business in hand. This could never have been the attitude of the ancients. It is remarkable how thorough and rational, if their premises are accepted imaginatively, their treatment of myth and ritual appear, even in a matter as elaborate in point of ritual as the foundation of a town. On the other hand, their treatment of technological points is very often hesitant and elusive. The order sometimes appears to be topsy-turvy. While myth and ritual are discussed rationally and in detail, all that we would explore systematically nowadays seems to be muddled and insecure. The assumption which lies at the base of this confusion is the relatively modern one of continuity between scientific explanation and technological development.³⁴ This, however, was never achieved in antiquity: while scientific thought moved in the precise realm of mathematically formulated explanation,

technology remained in the baser realm of approximation. In a way, technology was more closely connected with the formulation of ritual, with its interference in the natural order, than with scientific thinking. In any case, even when the two ways of thinking overlapped, their relationship was always articulate. How this was done is demonstrated in an instructive story told by Plutarch in his 'Life of Pericles': my example, therefore, though referring to the classical period in Greece, was written under the Flavian Emperors, even if by a hellenistic intellectual. 'There is a story,' he says, 'that once Pericles had brought to him from a country farm of his a ram's head with one horn, and that Lampon the diviner, on seeing the horn grow strong and solid out of the middle of the forehead, gave it as his judgement that, there being at that time two potent factions . . . in the city, the one of Thucydides and the other of Pericles, the government would come to that one of them in whose ground or estate this token or indication of fate had shown itself, but that Anaxagoras, cleaving the skull in sunder, showed to the bystanders that the brain had not filled its natural place, but, being oblong like an egg, had collected, from all parts of the vessel which contained it, in a point to that place from whence the root of the horn took its rise. And that at that time Anaxagoras was much admired for his explanation by those that were present, and Lampon no less a little while after, when Thucydides was overpowered and the whole affairs of the state and government came into the hands of Pericles.'

'And yet, in my opinion, it is no absurdity to say that they were both in the right, both natural philosopher and diviner, one justly detecting the *cause* of this event, by which it was *produced*, the other the *end* for which it was *designed*. For it was the business of the one to find out and give an account of what it was made, and in what manner and by what means it grew as it did, and of the other to foretell to what end and purpose it was so made, and what it might mean or portend. Those who say that to find the cause of a prodigy is in effect to destroy its supposed signification as such, do not take notice that at the same time, together with divine prodigies, they also do away with signs and signals of human art and concert, as for instance the clashing of quoits, fire beacons, and the shadows of sundials, every one of which has its cause, and by that cause and contrivance is a sign of something else. . . .'³⁵

Plutarch is taking a defensive position on two fronts: natural science is not blasphemous, while divination is not irrational. The defence would have been unthinkable before the rise of the Eleatic school, or even in the time of Pericles, outside intellectual circles with some scientific interest. The belief in divination is one of the most hardy of the primitive beliefs of humanity, and, although it has been frowned upon for the best part of two millennia by the 'major religions', still continues to be practised by a large proportion of humanity in one form or another.

In a sense, statistical forecasting is a schematized form of divination. Being schematic, it leads to a degree of overconfidence which sometimes proves fatal to the calculators. In antiquity the approach to most matters which we treat with systematic assurance was often extremely

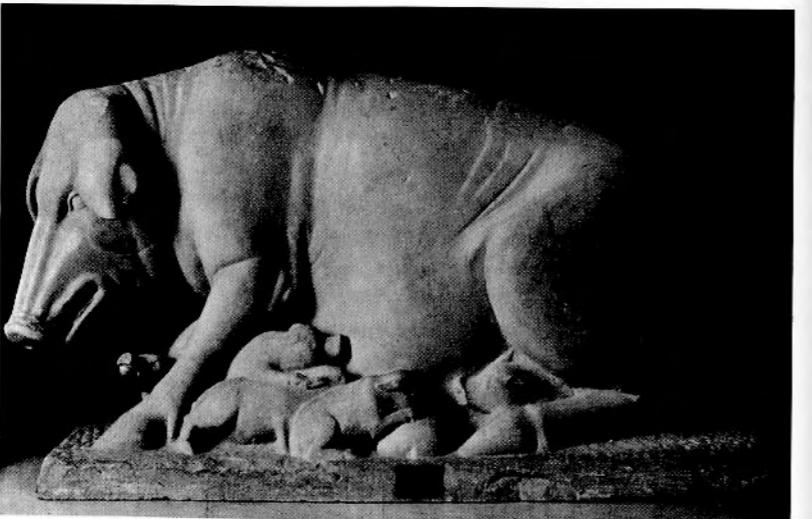
insecure. Often it could only be by guesswork or by inherited 'knack'; the erratic forces of nature, above all, could only be understood in terms of personality or be dealt with by some form of address or be conciliated in the form of drama.

The Choice of Site

Modern writers always consider the choice of a site for a town in terms of economy, hygiene, traffic problems and facilities. Whenever the founder of an ancient town thought in those terms he could only do so after having translated them into mythical terms. Even when faced with the matter directly, as Archias and Myscellus were, the choice is of one virtue as against the other. The Pythia at Delphi offered the two potential oecists a choice between health and wealth. Archias chose wealth (the obvious choice for a Corinthian) and was sent off to Syracuse, while Myscellus became the founder of Croton, the town where Pythagoras settled and which nurtured a famous school of medicine.³⁶

Even if the traditional Delphic pronouncement which Strabo quotes on the authority of Antiochus is a forgery,³⁷ it is clear that even at a late date the advantages of a particular site were revealed to the colonists as a direct and arbitrary gift of the gods, and not as a calculated gain obtained by the oecist for his colony. Myscellus, according to another tradition, made two further visits to the Delphic oracle, firstly because he could not locate the site which the oracle had 'given' him, and secondly because it looked to him, on reaching it, that the site of Sybaris was altogether preferable. He returned to Delphi, but the oracle snubbed him: 'Myscellus short-in-the-back, hunting for other things besides the gods' command, you are finding lamentations. Praise the gift the gods give.'³⁸

In the story of Archias and Myscellus, the oecist chooses outright for the colonists. The oecist was either the leader of a dissident faction in the metropolis, or, if the metropolis was sending out a colony by legislation, was an appointed magistrate. After his death he was usually paid the honours of a hero, including a state banquet at which he was ritually present. The oecist was himself sometimes overshadowed by an eponymous hero or some other founding father drawn from myth: Hercules, or one of the Trojan War heroes whether Trojan or Greek, the *Nostoi*,³⁹ the Argonauts, or even Cretan figures. The eponymous hero or founder was also worshipped in the metropolis. Indeed, when Cleisthenes reformed the Athenian constitution, he appealed to the Pythia to select ten eponymous heroes from a list of a hundred names which he submitted to the oracle.⁴⁰ There was an altar to these heroes in the Athenian *agora*, and statues of them by Phidias, so Pausanias said, were also consecrated at Delphi.⁴¹ Also in the *agora* was an altar to the 'Archegetes', either the eponyms of the twelve tribes into which the Athenians were organized before the Cleisthenian reform, or of the twelve towns which took part in the Thesean *synoikia*. Theseus's tomb and altar were near by.⁴² Theseus's body had previously been hidden on Skyros where he died and Cimon had brought the relics to Athens as an ancient oracle required.⁴³ But there is some doubt about the twelve



5. The sow with thirty piglets.
Antonine marble statue
Vatican Museum, Rome

towns which Theseus united, for the *synoikia* was a destruction, if only nominal, of the separate towns, and was conceived by the Greeks in this way,⁴⁴ so that the separate forms did in fact lose their identity. The *apoikia*, the lore of colony and town foundation, would have been much more familiar to us had Aristotle's book on colonies survived, or perhaps the book on city founding by the shadowy Trismimachus.⁴⁵ As it is, we can only guess at the exact part which the oracle played in foundations, at the procedure and ceremonial which was followed at the foundation, if indeed there was a 'normal' form of procedure, such as the *ritus Etruscus*, or at the nature of the founder's heroic status from allusions dispersed in literary and epigraphic remains.

The Founder and the City

On the founder's relationship to his city we have, for instance, the categoric assertion of an old scholiast on Pindar: '... according to custom the founder was buried in the centre of the city. . . .'⁴⁶ This was by way of comment on Pindar's description of the monument to Pelops at Olympia: 'Near the ford of Alpheus, by the altar many strangers venerate, stands his much-frequented tomb.'⁴⁷ Though Pausanias⁴⁸ and the archaeologists⁴⁹ have described and located this monument, the practice of burying the hero-founder was not quite as general as the scholiast seems to imply. Like the Romans, the Greeks disapproved of burial within the city walls, even if the Greek prohibitions were never as categoric as those of the Twelve Tables.⁵⁰ And yet for heroes the prohibition did not obtain. Indeed, the Delphic oracle on one occasion ordered the building of a bouleterion over the burials of some unspecified heroes.⁵¹ The number of heroes worshipped or buried in the *agorai* of various Greek cities is quite considerable.⁵² They were not always city founders, they may have been athletes, particularly winners in one of the national games, or great poets, or just very good looking.⁵³ But city founding, and the fathering of tribes, as well as the invention of skills and trades are among the 'typical' characteristics of heroes.⁵⁴ Heroes are most often thought of as warriors, but this is only

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an aspect of the heroic life; they have the strongest connection with all matters concerning death, the hunt, games, divination, healing and mystery cults. City founders, therefore, entering on the status of hero, tended to have such matters associated with them. And there is a corollary to be noted: cities which were not known to have been founded by a 'historical' hero may well have devised one from fragments of myth. But historical persons who founded towns were, during their lifetime, given semi-heroic status and honoured as heroes after their death.

It is not a case of arguing causally. The city had to be founded by a hero; only a hero could found a city. In the same way the Pindaric scholiast's assertion implies a polarity: the hero-founder had to be buried at the heart of the city; only the tomb of the hero-founder could guarantee that the city lived. Indeed, the assembly of the primitive *agora*, in the sense in which the word signifies the men and not the place, was often in early literature attracted to a pre-existing tomb.⁵⁵ The Greek *agora* continued to have connections with funerary cults as long as the *polis* remained a religious as well as a political force. The founder's commemoration, which I mentioned earlier,⁵⁶ is the most striking instance of this side of civic religious life. At Amphipolis the oecist Brasidas was buried in full armour 'at a place facing what is now the *agora*'.⁵⁷ Thucydides goes on to describe the monument and the feasts: 'And they enclosed his monument and have ever since made offerings to him as a hero, offering him worship, and instituting games and yearly sacrifices.' Brasidas, the victor of the battle of Amphipolis in 422 B.C., was adopted as patron and *ktistes* of the city as a declaration of defiance by a colony founded by the Athenian Hagnon,⁵⁸ whose shrine had been destroyed. Here the ritual act is used to assert political independence. A monument recently discovered at Paestum seems to provide another variant on this feature of the Greek city. Bordering both *agora* and the great *temenos*, a little fenced shrine (18 x 15.6 m), a small independent *temenos*, was discovered just after the Second World War. Off-centre in it was a small building, completely sealed. A short *dromos* led to an entrance which had been blocked up. A double-pitched roof of stone slabs was covered with tiles. Within was a stone bench, supporting six iron rods to which was attached a metal and leather criss-cross of a kind reminiscent of bed-webbing; on top of that there appears to have been laid a linen sheet. By the walls stood eight bronze amphorae of great beauty, and two bronze hydriae, all of which contained honeycombs, still well-preserved, and an Attic black-figured amphora, representing on one side the apotheosis of Hercules and on the other Hermes and Dionysus watching a satyr dance. The vase had had its foot broken and it had been repaired with lead plugs, clearly before the sealing of the shrine. It may therefore be taken to have been considered an object of great value and particular relevance to its placing. It bears an unmistakable reference to hero-cults: Heracles was, after all, the archetypal hero. The honey in the bronze jars again points to the 'buried' shrine as a place connected with the worship of a dead person, a hero,⁵⁹ and again the empty bed suggests a cenotaph. The

shrine has been interpreted by one scholar at least as the cenotaph of Is, the *ktistes* of Sybaris, the mother-city of Poseidonia; a cenotaph erected when the original tomb was destroyed with Sybaris in 510. This theory at any rate fits with the dating of the deposited objects.⁶⁰ It is not absolutely clear whether the whole of the shrine was buried under the pavement of the *temenos*, or the pitched roof protruded above the pavement level. A similar *temenos* existed in the fifth century at Kyrene. It stood on the east side of the *agora*, was enclosed by a low wall, and contained an open stone tomb, covered by pitched slabs. It replaced an earlier tumulus, which had stood a little to the west, and which its excavator dates to the first quarter of the sixth century. The shrine persisted until the Severan period, when it appears to have been buried under a stoa. Its excavators identify it as the tomb of the oecist-king, Battos I, described by Pindar and his scholiasts.⁶¹ At Kyrene there was also a roofless tholos on the west side of the *agora*, which had earlier been identified as the tomb of Battos. At the time of writing, this building has not been re-examined: it appears to have contained a bothros and to have had some connection with an oracular cult.⁶²

I mention this particular tholos because Battos of Kyrene is a founder whose doings seem specially interesting. Not so much his various transformations or his peculiar relationship to the Delphic oracle, nor yet the composition of his settlers or of the indigenous population of Libya and the various pre-founders of his city,⁶³ but the story Pindar tells of Battos's Argonaut ancestor Euphemus and the prophecy of Medea:

The Omen that shall make
Thera mother of mighty cities
Was given where Lake Tritonis flows to the sea,
To Euphemus once
a guest, gift from the god in a man's likeness
A clod: Euphemus, alighting from the bows
Took it, and father Zeus, son of Kronos
Well-pleased rang out in thunder . . .
Euryppylus, son of the undying
Shaker and Holder of earth
. . . knew of our hurry: there and then
Took a clod in his right hand, eager to offer
What gift he could
And the hero did not refuse it
He leaped to the beach, and clasping hand in hand
Took the piece of wonderful earth—
But a wave broke
I hear, and washed it
Overboard into the sea . . .
Into this isle has been thrown
The undying seed of Libya's wide meadows
Out of due time.
For had he come home, and cast it
Into hell's mouth in the earth

Had he come to Holy Tainaron—he
Euphemus . . .
With a Danean host, had taken that wide mainland . . .
But now he shall lie with foreign women
And get a chosen race, who shall come to this island . . .⁶⁴

So Medea goes on to prophesy the consultation of the oracle by Battos of Thera and the foundation of Kyrene. What interests me principally about this epic fragment is Pindar's account of the divine gift, (the hero Euryppylus was really Triton in disguise), and Euphemus' neglected duty to throw it by the mouth of hell at Taenarum, his home.⁶⁵

Pindar's version of the myth is expectedly clipped and allusive: it is repeated more expansively, though less circumstantially, by Apollonius Rhodius,⁶⁶ who draws, in all probability, on the same Hesiodic source.⁶⁷ The aetiology of this myth may well, as is often the case, go back to ritual. Pindar's telling of it suggests that the story is in any case a familiar matter. If such were the case, it would of course have been recorded not only in action, but in the decoration of the public buildings of the city. The indication of the right hand, in which the clod is taken, and the clasp between the two heroes, and the duty, understood by Euphemus, though neglected by him, to cast the clod into the mouth of hell in his home town, show that the postponement of the foundation followed a breach of ritual practice. The blessing the clod contained is not wholly turned away from Euphemus, however, even though, being miraculously conveyed to Thera, it is associated with another city.

In the Etruscan rite, according to Plutarch,⁶⁸ earth from the home town was thrown into a specially prepared ditch, called *mundus*, the world, a homonym for another institution which was the mouth of hell.⁶⁹ The mythical event described by Pindar is in a sense a symmetrical transposition of the Plutarchian rite. The clod of earth, given by an aborigine to a visiting hero-founder (even if hero-founder *manque*), is to be taken to his home town and there thrown into the mouth of hell to mark his possession of the territory to be colonized.

It is difficult to see what weight may be attached to this hypothesis. Whether, for instance, one should suppose that the rite was peculiar to the Theran colonies, or to Kyrene itself, or if it is part of the rites generally connected with any foundation. For lack of corroborative evidence the matter must rest there.

Kyrene, however, provides evidence of another rite, in epigraphic form. This is the so-called 'Stele of the Founders', a somewhat mutilated monument probably carved in the first half of the fourth century.⁷⁰ After an invocation of the god (Apollo) and Tyche, and recording the prosperity promised by Apollo to Battos and the Theran founders of Kyrene provided they kept the oaths sworn when the colonizers left Thera on the orders of Apollo Archegetes,⁷¹ the stele records resolutions about the social organization of Thera and Kyrene and the right of Therans who go there, and continues:

This decree shall be carved on a stele of white marble to be placed

in the ancestral shrine of Pythian Apollo. On this stele shall also be carved the words of the oath which the founders swore when they took to sea to go to Libya with Battos, leaving Thera for Kyrene. The moneys necessary for the marble and the carving shall be levied from those in charge of the accounts of Apollo's revenues.

The Founder's Oath.

Resolved by the Assembly: since Apollo spontaneously prophesied to Battos and the Therans to colonize Kyrene, they resolve to send Battos to Libya as archegetes and king . . . that one son be conscripted from each family; that those who sail be in the prime of life. Of other Therans, every free man who wants to do so may embark. If the colonists succeed in establishing themselves, each one of their compatriots who will go to Libya later will enjoy full civil and political rights, and he shall be assigned by lot a piece of ground which has no owner. If the colonists do not succeed in establishing themselves, and if, the Therans being unable to help them, they are oppressed by necessity for five years, they shall be free to return to their homeland, Thera, without fear, and they shall recover their possessions and their civil rights. Who shall refuse to embark when he has been nominated a colonist by the city shall be liable to the death penalty and the confiscation of all his goods. Whoever has sheltered him, or has helped him to escape, even had it been a father that helped a son or a brother a brother, he shall be punished in the same way.

Both those who stayed and those who were going away to found the colony swore the oath according to the decree, and they proclaimed curses on those who would break the oath and not remain faithful, both among those who were to dwell in Libya and those who were to stay. They made images in wax and burnt them, and pronounced curses in unison; men, women, boys and girls: 'Who shall not remain faithful to these oaths, but will break them, let him melt and liquify as these images, he and his children and his goods. As for those who shall remain faithful to these oaths, both those who depart for Libya and those who stay in Thera, let them experience, they and their children, every prosperity.'

Although this text of the foundation oath of a colony is unique so far, the various elements of which it is made up are familiar enough in the literature of Greek religion: imprecations pronounced in unison against anyone breaking the common oath,⁷² for instance, or the use of wax dolls of the kind the oath suggests, are attested in another Kyrenean religious document,⁷³ as well as in funerary cults of the Greek mainland.⁷⁴

The *Lex Cathartica*, according to its first editor, provides the earliest written ritual formula in the Greek language.⁷⁵ Altogether there is something archaic about Kyrene, this hellenic kingdom set down in Libya sometime in the seventh century and governed by kings of its founding dynasty until the second half of the fifth century B.C. No doubt it was this archaic character of the town which appealed to

Pindar. But there is little evidence, certainly at that date, of any radical contamination of Kyrenean religion by African sources;⁷⁶ the documents quoted and the myths of the city are part of the common hellenic stock.

Recording the Foundation

Unfortunately the other surviving inscriptions referring to foundations deal mostly with constitutional and legal matters, though they also propose punishment for and curses on transgressors. The treaty between Locri and Naupactus is the most explicit and longest of such documents,⁷⁷ and the decree concerning the Athenian colony, Brea in Thrace, has interesting implications. 'The adjutants of the oecist', the first complete sentence begins, 'shall make provision for sacrifice in order to obtain favourable omens for the colony, . . . Ten distributors of the land shall be chosen, one from each tribe. . . . Democles shall establish the colony with full powers to the best of his ability. The sacred precincts that have been set apart shall be left as they are, but no further precinct is to be consecrated. The colony is to offer a cow and panoply to the great Panathenaea and a phallus to the Dionysia. . . . This decree is to be written on a stele and placed on the acropolis. The colonists are to provide the stele at their own cost.'⁷⁸

Of course there was nothing unique or even unusual about these documents. Plato records the use to which such an inscription was put by the kings of Atlantis acting on 'the commands of Poseidon which the law had handed down. These were inscribed by the first kings on a pillar of copper⁷⁹ which stood in the middle of the island, at the temple of Poseidon. . . .' The kings gather and judge; but before they utter judgement, they perform a sacrifice as a pledge, in which one of the free-ranging bulls of the temple is captured with staves and a noose, without use of weapons, 'and the bull which they had caught they led up to that pillar and cut its throat on the top of it so that the blood fell upon the sacred inscription. Now on the pillar, beside the laws, was inscribed an oath invoking mighty curses upon the disobedient.' The judgement and the oath are then described in detail: the only feature I wish to cite here is that swearing the laws inscribed on the pillar by the sacrifice performed before it (a common enough practice in Greece) and giving judgement was to take place by the light of the sacrificial fire only, at night.⁸⁰

The judgement by the light of the fire only points to another foundation custom, that of transferring fire from the city hearth of the mother country to that of the new colony. Of the Ionian league of twelve cities, or dodecapolis, Herodotus says that those Ionians considered themselves most noble who left 'from the Prytaneum of the Athenians', the place of the sacred hearth;⁸¹ implying what the old scholiast on Pindar's Eleventh Nemean ode says explicitly, that the colonists took fire with them from the mother city to light the fire on their own sacred hearth.⁸²

The picture I have been able to piece together here is very fragmentary. But, even from the fragments I have quoted, it is clear that the Greeks had established customs in the matter of the founding of

towns. These customs are alluded to by poets and historians.⁸³ According to the 'ancient custom' Thucydides says, the Heraclid Phalias, a Corinthian, was summoned from Corinth, the mother city of Corcyra, when they decided to found Epidamnus on the mainland.⁸⁴ The elements of the ceremonial appear fragmentarily. There may have been various customs for various nations, the Asian Ionians may have had a different ritual from the mainland Greeks.⁸⁵ But even non-Greek nations are recognized by Greek historians to have behaved as the Greeks did. Herodotus records that when Cambyses wanted to attack Carthage, the Phoenicians in the mother country of the colony refused to sail on the expedition, because 'they said that they were bound to the Carthaginians by great oaths, and would commit an impiety in waging war on their own children'.⁸⁶

What we have to gather, from scattered fragments of literary and epigraphic evidence, was clear to the inhabitant of every Greek city who, in the *agora*, could see, inscribed on marble or bronze stele, the decrees and oaths which bound his city to its colonies, or, if it was itself a colony, to the mother town, and described in detail the part which they undertook to play in each other's political and economic life, which was symbolized in the community of the religious life.

Two City and Site

The Kyrenean oath I described earlier¹ seems a reflection, an analogue of the great oaths and laws inscribed on the copper column which stood at the centre of Plato's Atlantis. It is an index of an aspect of the problem which modern commentators have, on the whole, preferred to ignore.

Plato and Aristotle are usually quoted in support of a 'commonsense' view of ancient planning. In the *Politics*, for instance, Aristotle makes quite explicit recommendations for a site: 'The land upon which a city is to be sited should be sloping, that we must just hope to find, but we should keep four considerations in mind. First and most essential, the situation must be a healthy one. A slope facing east, with winds blowing from the direction of sunrise, gives a healthy site, rather better than the lee side of north, though this gives good weather. Next it should be well situated for carrying out all its civil and military activities . . .'² and so on; this passage is echoed by Vitruvius, who also seems familiar with Aristotle's authority, Hippocrates;³ though Vitruvius is more circumstantial than the former and less than the latter. 'The choice of a healthy site must come first,' he says; 'such a site will be high, neither misty nor frosty, the climate neither too hot nor too cold, but temperate. Further, there should be no marshes in the neighbourhood. . . . Again, if the town is on the coast and exposed either to the south or the west it will not be healthy. . . . In founding towns, in short, beware of districts where hot winds can blow on the inhabitants . . .'⁴ and so on.

How to Choose the Site

(i) The Theorists

Although such common sense notions were current enough in Vitruvius's time, they were not often applied in practice. In the fifth century B.C., when Hippocrates formulated them, they must have seemed eccentric as well as revolutionary: they seemed to go right against the Pythia's advice to incipient colonists over the past four centuries. Agrigentum (*'Akραγας'*) for instance, a town founded about 580 B.C. by colonists from Gela, faced directly south-west on to the Mediterranean and was protected by a rocky escarpment, the Athenian rock, along all its northern limit. Some time in antiquity a breach was made through the escarpment to admit the north wind. Popular tradition has it that it was carried out on the advice of Empedocles, about a century and a half after the foundation of the town, which had, however, been founded on a site which would not have satisfied the Hippocratean conditions at all. The same is true of many towns on the southern coast of Sicily, the Tyrrhenian seaboard of Italy, and so on. Rome itself was founded on the Palatine hill, it is true, but overlooking the notorious malarial marsh in the valley of the Forum. On the point of orientation even the theorists are not altogether consistent. Aristotle had himself (in another book) found a site facing only south acceptable,⁵ and Xenophon,