

THE AENEID AS FOUNDATION STORY

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DEFINITIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Foundation stories constitute a subclass of stories about beginnings.¹ I define a foundation story as a narrative about the origins of a particular human community that is perceived from the outset as one among several communities. In this sense a foundation story is different from a creation story, which I define as concerning the origins of the entire human race. The story of Adam and Eve, for example, is a creation story; it is set within the context of the divine creation of the cosmos; Adam and Eve are characterized by attributes that apply to all peoples: they are masters of all the animal kingdom; they are beholden to God, their creator; their loss of innocence compromises the relation of all humankind to God, and his punitive reaction to their initial sin determines the conditions of necessity under which all subsequent humans must toil.

Foundation stories, by contrast, typically focus on the primacy of human initiative and agency. Even when natural or divine powers play a central role in foundations, these narratives are nonetheless concerned with the creation of a particular community and call attention to some aspect of that community's distinctiveness. Several ancient communities, for example, attributed their origins to Hercules. For each of them the identification, generally, with the more culturally "advanced" Hellenism that Hercules represented and, more specifically, with a "hero" constituted the basis for a certain superiority to surrounding communities.² More exclusive is the identity perpetuated by the Athenians' idea of autochthony. Believing they were sprung spontaneously from the soil itself, the Athenians defined themselves as a people timelessly attached to a specific place. From the perspective of this story, one cannot become an Athenian: one is either descended from those who sprang from Athenian soil, or not.

These two examples illustrate how foundation stories concern the circumstances that set one community apart from others. The stories of Hercules focus on certain cultural traits that confer (at least to certain audiences) status: his foundations embody the ideal of civilization associated in the ancient world with Hellenism. The story of Athens focuses rather on race or ethnicity. The difference between the two types of story is significant. A community defined by culture is potentially open: one may become a member of that community by acquiring its culture. A community defined by race or ethnicity, on the other hand, is accessible only to those who are born to existing members of the requisite group. In practice, of course, the two often overlap: race and ethnicity may be associated with certain qualities and vice versa. In either case, foundation stories help to define who is in, who is out, and whether membership is open or closed.

The interests and needs of communities change over time, and communities' perception of themselves alter accordingly. A changing sense of identity calls for reassessment of original foundation stories, for their modification or replacement by new stories to match or justify new self-perceptions.

Foundation stories are typically generated not at the time of foundation, but after the fact, in an effort to address changes in self-perception associated with other changes in the community. They may be efforts to inhibit change, calls for return to essential values in danger of being lost, efforts either to support innovation by presenting it as a return to traditional values, or to redefine the community by claiming to displace a false story of foundation with "the true story." Similarly, because foundation stories concern the essential identity of a community and who can belong to it, a great deal is at stake in these stories, and they are often highly contested. Consequently, a community's foundation stories may not only proliferate over time; several of them may compete for acceptance at any given moment, especially during times of intense political, social, or cultural disturbance.

Let me illustrate these points by reference to "America." I put "America" in quotes here because the notion of what constitutes "America" is in fact a matter of dispute. Some would define it as "the Americas," a new community, however loose and diverse within itself, that began with Columbus' discovery of "the New World"- "new", that is, from the perspective of Europeans, not from that of the peoples who preceded the arrival of the Europeans. For others "America" is above all the United States. This "America" may have its origins, variously, with the first colony of European settlers, with the arrival of the Pilgrims, with the "American Revolution," or with the signing of the Constitution, depending on whether one wishes to emphasize America's Anglo-Saxon heritage, its tradition of religious toleration, its commitment to the principles of political and economic self-determination, or the broader humanitarian and constitutional principles enunciated in the Constitution.

All of the foregoing events achieved their status as foundation stories not at the time of their occurrence but sometime after the fact: George Washington was hailed as "father of his country" only after his death; others among his contemporaries had to wait much longer for inclusion in the canon of "Founding Fathers," a category that remains vague and unstable today. Fourth of July celebrations did not achieve wide popularity and a regular character until the generation after 1815, and only a generation later became "secularized," that is, occasions criticized for excess whether in eating, drinking, and revelry, or in the bombast of speakers who exploited them for partisan ends.³

The "American" foundation stories to which I have referred remain current today, although each receives varying degrees of emphasis in different contexts and has enjoyed different degrees of prominence at different periods of our history. Contemporary private militias call attention to the "right to bear arms" articulated in the Constitution and see themselves as heirs to the citizen militias of the Revolution. The story of the Pilgrims becomes important in relation to ongoing questions of religious freedom and toleration or the issue of the separation of church and state. The Founding Fathers were early associated with the Declaration of Independence, although interest in that document seems to have changed from a focus on the iniquities of King George III before the 1790s to interest, later, in the broader philosophical principles laid out in the preamble.⁴ Today, however, the Founding Fathers seem most often to be evoked as guarantors of one or another interpretation of the Constitution. The character of Columbus and his status as the discoverer of "America" have recently been questioned in conjunction with an emerging effort to redefine "America" as a multicultural rather than a Eurocentric community. The intensity of emotions surrounding debate about Columbus reflects the very real issue

at stake: who can claim to be "real" Americans?

ELEMENTS OF THE FOUNDATION STORY IN THE *AENEID*

The *Aeneid* takes us back to the moment when the formation of Roman identity began. In fact the poem identifies that moment alternately as the murder of Turnus, when the Trojans secured their position in Italy and thus set in motion the long process of imperial expansion that would come to embrace the entire world, or as the fall of Troy and the circumstances that impelled Aeneas to abandon the traditional, Greek ideal of heroism and seek a new destiny. In the latter case, the *Aeneid* views Rome in terms of an idea or ideal, one that defines heroism in terms of service to the community rather than single-minded pursuit of one's own reputation for martial prowess; in the former, in terms of an actual community that begins with the elimination of the first great obstacle to the union of Trojans and Italians.⁵ In both cases the poem focuses on defining aspects of the community and on the question of who belongs to it. Further, the first half of the poem calls attention to the qualities that define Romanness in its contrast between Aeneas' Trojans, the bearers of those nascent qualities, and others who do not share them, for example, the Trojans who elect to stay behind in Sicily (5.60~754, M 795-993).

When we first see Aeneas it is as he laments that he could not die the traditional hero's death as did others, both Greek and Trojan, in the world that he has left (1.9~101, M 133~3). This, it turns out, is part of the process by which he learns that his ruling virtue must be Roman *pietas*, obedience to the claims of ancestors and community, rather than Greek *arete*, the display of personal prowess. Aeneas' account of the fall of Troy (Book 2) focuses as well on another traditional Roman virtue, *fides*, "trustworthiness, reliability," again through contrast with others. This time the contrast is not between Aeneas and the whole heroic world, but between the generous-spirited Trojans and the duplicitous Greeks. Such contrast between Romans and treacherous others was a commonplace among Vergil's contemporaries: Hannibal and the Carthaginians who had once invaded Italy, for example, were well known for their *Punica fides*, "Carthaginian [bad] faith."⁶ By virtue of such contrasts, we come to know the Romans as a unique people, distinct from others.

Vergil, however, does not deny all connection between Roman identity and the world of Greek heroic achievement. Aeneas, after all, does come from that world, even if he must learn a new hierarchy of values. His own status rests in part on his divine ancestry and in part on his participation in the heroic fight for Troy. Both aspects of his heritage play a role in his pursuit of Roman destiny. The gods take an active interest in him: he benefits from their protection and guidance, even as he suffers the hostility of Juno; memory or report of the Trojan War and his part in it often assure him a sympathetic welcome as he makes his way to the destined shores of Italy. His heroic temper and prowess reassert themselves ever more powerfully as he is drawn more and more into renewed hostilities in Italy.

As the first half of the poem progresses, the idea of Romanness is refined by contrasts between Trojans and peoples that they meet on their journey to Italy. Prominent among these are Dido's

Carthaginians, who seem to have everything that Aeneas is seeking except the fact of having achieved it for himself and his own people. But not the least of those from whom Aeneas and his followers are differentiated are those Trojans who do not have the heart to press on to the final destination that has been decreed by fate and where there await *bella, horrida bella* ("wars, horrid wars," 6.86, M 122; 7.41, M 51). Such events help to define further what is distinctive about the Romans.

Other passages reinforce and expand Our appreciation of Roman identity. Here, too, the emphasis is on Roman uniqueness. Thus, in Book 1, Jupiter promises universal Roman *imperium*, a condition that necessarily differentiates Romans from all others. In what are perhaps the poem's most famous lines, Anchises advises Aeneas that it is the Romans' destiny to rule, while others will be more productive in rhetoric and the arts (6.847-53, M 1129-37). Any Roman would have understood this contrast as applying particularly to all those whom the Romans regarded as Greeks," that is, all the Hellenized peoples of the eastern Mediterranean. These explicit contrasts are important in their own right and also because they confirm the other, dramatized contrasts that help define the Romans' uniqueness.

If Roman identity is to be fulfilled, however, it must be more than an idea. It requires a community that will embody Roman virtues and destiny and will realize its potential. This is the theme of the second half of the poem, the story of how Aeneas finds a place for his people. The place is, significantly, not the city of Rome; settlement of Rome will come later. Rather, it is Latium, which in time will incorporate all Italy and, of particular importance, all Italians. As the decisive encounter between Aeneas and Turnus nears, Aeneas swears that if he fails, he will retreat to Evander's town and be content with it (12.183-86, M 24~51). That is, he will be content with the site of what was to become the city of Rome. If, however, he should be successful, Aeneas promises that he will not subordinate Latins to Trojans, but rather treat them as equals (12.190, M 258), join with them in eternal alliance (12.191, M 258), even name his settlement Lavinia in honor of his Latin wife (12.194, M 263).

This vision of a union between Trojan and Latin is ratified and developed even further at the end of Book 12. There Jupiter finally persuades Juno to relent in her opposition to Aeneas and his followers. He offers her in exchange the prospect of a single people who will honor her above all others (12.840, M 1117). Trojans will not only give up their name and share power as equals with the Latins; they will also give up all separate identity. They will first merge into the race of Latins, then of all Italians:

sermonem Ausonji patrium moresque tenebunt,
utque est nomen erit; commixti corpore tantum
subsident Teucri. morem ritusque sacrorum
adiciam faciamque omnis uno ore Latinos.

(12.834-37)

For the Ausonians will keep
their homeland's words and ways; their name will stay;

the body of the Teucrians will merge
with Latins, and their name will fall away.
But I shall add their rituals and customs
to the Ausonians', and make them all
and with one language-Latins.

(M 1107-13)

While the immediate union will be specifically with the Latins, in time it will lead to a cultural and racial union with the Ausonians, that is, with all Italians. In this context Aeneas' determination to withdraw to Evander's Palatine community only if he fails against Turnus is particularly important: it makes emphatically clear that Rome's essential identity is bound up less with the actual city of Rome than with Italy and the Italian peoples.⁷

Vergil presents the ultimate union of these peoples as the culmination of a process that is inevitable. In Book 7 we are told again and again that the union of Trojan and Latin that will lead to the larger union of Trojan and Italian is not a matter of choice but of fate. Thus at lines 5~5 1 (M 62~3), for example, we hear that "the edicts of the gods had left Latinus no male descent" (*quibus huic fato divum prolesque virilis I nulla fuit*); at line 58 (M 73-74) we are told that "the omens *I* of gods with many sinister alarms" (*vanis portenta deum terroribus*) stand in the way of the proposed wedding between his only child, Lavinia, and Turnus. This warning is reiterated by the god Faunus who appears to Latinus, forbids the marriage of Turnus and Lavinia, and promises instead new sons-in-law whose blood

.... . qui sanguine nostrum
nomen in astra ferant, quorumque a stirpe nepotes
omnia sub pedibus, qua sol utrumque recurrens
aspicit Oceanum, vertique regique videbunt."

(7.98-101)

.... . will raise our name
above the stars; and their sons' sons will see all things obedient at their feet, wherever
the circling Sun looks on both sides of Ocean."

(M 1 2~27)

This is followed by Aeneas' own recognition of an omen signaling the Trojans' arrival at their destined home, and his exclamation, "Welcome, my promised land! [land owed to me by the fates]" (*salvefatis mihi debita tellus*, 7.120, M 153). At lines 241~2 (M 313-17) Aeneas' companion, Ilioneus, informs Latinus that "we were driven forward by the fates *I* of gods and their commands to seek your lands./ . . . Apollo *I* has urged us on by high decrees to find the Tuscan Tiber" (*huc repetit iussisque ingentibus urget Apollo I Tyrrhenum ad Thybrim*). His words recall to Latinus' mind the oracles of Faunus and

what the fates had foretold regarding his future son-in-law (7.254-58, M 332-38). Eventually even Juno, the wife of Jupiter, concedes that "I cannot keep [Aeneas] from the Latin kingdoms: *I* so be it, let Lavinia be his wife *I* as fates have fixed" (*non dabitur regnis, esto, prohibere Latinis, I atque immota manet fatis Lavinia coniunx*, 313-14, M 414-16).

As the narrative of the second half of the *Aeneid* progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that Italy's fated role in the Trojans' destiny cannot be accidental. Despite the intense hostilities that arise between Italians and the Trojan immigrants, there are important affinities between the two peoples. To begin with, we learn that the Trojans actually trace their ancestry' back to Italy; Italy is their home, as much and in some cases, perhaps ironically, even more so than it is the home of those who oppose their return: Latinus himself recalls a distant tradition that Dardanus, Troy's founder, came originally from Latium (7.205-11, M 272-79). Ilioneus, recalling Aeneas' own words to Dido, reminds Latinus of this fact (7.240, M 315; cf. 3.167, M 222~24).⁸ We learn that Turnus, on the other hand, is descended from the Greeks of Mycenae (7.371-72, M 492-95; cf. 7.409-11, M 545~7); Evander, ruler of the Palatine community where the city of Rome will eventually be founded, was a refugee from Greek Arcadia (8.155~2, 333-36; M 20~12, 43~37) and was himself preceded by the Golden Age of Saturn, who settled there after Jupiter drove him from Olympia (8.319-20, M 418-20).

In fact, what Aeneas finds in Italy is a fusion of the best from the Greek world with indigenous traditions that Vergil's contemporaries would have recognized as central to their ideal vision of themselves. Thus, for example, the Palatine community perpetuates the memory' and worship of Hercules, who, following his role as civilizer, eradicated the last vestiges of the Titans' primitive barbarism when he killed the monstrous Cacus (8.1 8~275, M 242-360). And yet Hercules brings nothing of Eastern luxury' or decadence to Evander's well-regulated kingdom. Rather, in Vergil's description, repeated contrasts between the modesty of Evander's kingdom and the grandeur of imperial Rome reflect a view common among his contemporaries that Rome owed its greatness to virtues inherited from a simpler past, virtues for which Italians claimed to be the guardians. Similarly, in the description of Latinus' palace, Vergil's contemporaries would have recognized the origins of institutions central to their own society and government:

hic sceptrata accipere et primos attollere fascis / regibus omne erat;...

.....

quin etiam veterum effigies ex ordine avorum / antiqua e cedro...

.....

multaque praeterea sacris in postibus arma, / captivi pendent currus curvaeque
securae

et cristae capitum et portarum ingentia claustra / spiculaque clipeique...

(7.173-86)

Here Latin kings received their scepters, here / beneath its auspices first took their
fasces;

.....

Here, too, carved images of their forefathers / were carved in ancient cedar...

... Beside them many weapons / hang from the holy doorposts: captured chariots / and curving battle-axes, helmet crests / and massive bars of gates and shafts and shields.

(M 228~5)

The practice of taking the auspices, the fasces as a symbol of public authority, the formal display of ancestral busts in one's entrance hall, and the display of military' trophies on household doorposts were all to become distinctive marks of Roman political life. Attention to such aspects of the world that Aeneas encounters on his arrival in Italy makes it clear that the Italians are neither mere victims of the Trojans, nor obstacles to be swept aside as the Trojans press forward on their path to becoming Roman. They are, rather, essential contributors to and partners in the realization of that destined end.

In light of all this-the Trojans' primeval ties to Italy, the virtues they share with the Italians, the qualities and institutions they owe to them-above all, in light of the inevitability of union between the two peoples, the bitter conflicts that precede that union seem especially tragic. They are in an important sense conflicts not between alien peoples but among a single people. Many passages invite us to think of these battles as civil wars. When Juno finally concedes that she is powerless to stop the eventual realization of Roman destiny and determines at least to delay it by stirring up hostility between the Trojans and Italians, she prays, "Let the son- and father-in-law pay *I* for peace with their own peoples' death" (*hac gener atque socer coeant mercede suorum*, 7.317, M 419-20). This, of course, refers most immediately to Aeneas and Latinus, who propose to join in a marriage alliance. But the idea of civil war as a conflict among relatives is an obvious metaphor and one well established at Rome. Consequently Juno's choice of words here has a larger, more ominous ring. When Allecto reports to Juno the successful completion of her mission, her language makes unambiguous her understanding that the resulting conflict is a civil war: "See the discord I made ripe *I* for you in bitter war," (*"en, peffecta tibi bello discordia tnti,"* 7.545, M 718-79). "Discord" here is a translation of the Latin *discordia*, a term that by Vergil's age had come specifically to distinguish civil from foreign conflict.

Paradoxically, this "civil war" between Trojans and Italians is essential to the two peoples' eventual union. It is the vital bridge that leads from the simple alliance between Trojans and nearby Latins that Aeneas first pursues to larger engagements between Trojans and Italians. These larger engagements look forward, in turn, to the eventual fusion of Trojans and Italians that Jupiter prophesies to Juno. The bitterness of Amata whose plans for her daughter are thwarted, the anger of the Latins over the murder of their pet deer, the resentment of Turnus over a broken alliance with the king of the Latins-these all-too-human rivalries and jealousies are catalysts that set the fateful wars between Trojans and Italians in motion. The wars themselves are the price the Italians must pay for partnership in the glories of Roman destiny, just as they are the price the Trojans must pay to attain the leavening of Italian virtue and custom that will make them, finally, into Romans. As Vergil observes in the introduction to his poem, "It was so hard to found the race of Rome" (*tantae molis erat*

Romanam condere gentem, 1.33, M 50).

THE AENEID IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Contemporary concerns lie behind the ways in which questions of identity and membership are framed in the *Aeneid*.¹ As I have noted, one of the most important ways in which the character of the Romans is defined in the poem is through contrasts with the Greeks. Concern about the relation of native Roman virtues and character to Hellenistic culture had long been a conspicuous element of public discourse in Rome. As early as the mid-second century² B.C., Cato the Elder made anti-Hellenism a defining aspect of his own self-presentation and a basis from which to discredit his rivals. Cato notwithstanding, the acquisition of Hellenistic goods (objets d'art, books, slaves) and the adoption of Hellenistic fashions (in dress, education, language) became increasingly widespread. This was especially significant among members of the Roman and Italian aristocracies. For them the trappings of Hellenistic culture came to play a central role in their rivalry³ for distinction through conspicuous display. This guaranteed that the relationship between essential Roman character and Hellenistic culture remained a highly charged issue in Rome, one that was frequently negotiated in terms of day-to-day political life (the characterization of someone as a collector or even connoisseur of Greek statuary, for example, in order to discredit that person politically).

Political developments during and immediately preceding the years when Vergil began composition of the *Aeneid* lent a particular urgency to the question of Rome's rulers in relation to Greek and Roman identity.⁴ The principal contenders in the civil wars for control of Rome sought increasingly to advertise their preeminence by identifying themselves with Hellenistic models of charismatic leadership (above all Alexander the Great) and by representing themselves in the symbolic language of those models. Thus, Pompey lay claim, early in his career (81 B.C.), to the Hellenistic tradition of heroic, supra-constitutional, and incontestable leadership by choosing for himself the cognomen *Magnus*, "The Great," in obvious imitation of Alexander the Great; his portraits stressed physical similarities between himself and Alexander, and, in keeping with the Hellenistic tradition of heroism, he presented himself as the descendant of a divine parent, Venus. Other eminent leaders such as Mark Antony and Julius Caesar also claimed divine or heroic ancestry.

This sort of behavior, of course, raised serious questions about the integrity of traditional republican government and values among Rome's leaders. Octavian seems to have attempted an adroit middle course: using Hellenistic conventions to advertise his superiority while simultaneously presenting himself as a defender of Roman identity against the Hellenization of his rivals. As relations between himself and Mark Antony worsened (3~32 B.C.), he made much of the fact that Antony had (for good tactical reasons) made Egypt, not Rome, his center of operations and that he had identified himself with that most un-Roman of Greek gods, Dionysus—an image that seemed to confirm Antony's reputation for drunkenness and sexual license. Octavian himself enjoyed the ancestry⁵ of Venus through Julius Caesar, his father by adoption, but during his conflict with Antony he stressed particularly not his descent from Venus but, more modestly, his protection by the more sober Apollo.

In his portraits he gradually evolved a style that bypassed the Hellenistic models of his rivals and harkened back to the more distant models of fifth-century classicism.² Still, even in his most patriotic moments, Octavian/Augustus could take Alexander the Great as a model. Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23I~79) tells us that:

at Rome [the painter Apelles'] Castor and Pollux with Victory and Alexander the Great are much admired, and also his figure of War with the hands tied behind him, with Alexander riding in triumph in his chariot. The deified Augustus with restrained taste had dedicated both pictures in the most frequented parts of his Forum [the Forum of Augustus]. (*Natural History* **35.93~94**)³

This figure of War must certainly be the inspiration for the image to which Vergil gives such a striking place in the prophecy of Roman greatness that Jupiter offers in *Aeneid* 1.293-96 (M 4I2~17). In this, as in other ways, the essential ambiguity of Aeneas as an embodiment of Romanness (distinct from the Greeks, but still part of their world) is echoed in the *Aeneid* and is acknowledged as an aspect of Augustus' and Vergil's own age-assertions of Roman uniqueness notwithstanding.

The question of who could be a Roman likewise had a particularly contentious history' in Vergil's age.⁴ Tradition recorded that the Romans were almost constantly at war with their Italian neighbors during their first centuries as an independent community. During the fifth, fourth, and third centuries B.C., Romans gradually consolidated control of the Italian peninsula through a succession of alliances and conquests that established Rome at the center of a series of bilateral relationships with other Italian communities. As in the *Aeneid*, these relationships were established first and were most fully developed with the Latin communities closest to Rome both spatially and culturally. With time Roman alliances extended further afield. Rome's victory' over foreign invaders of Italy during the third century' confirmed her dominance in Italy beyond dispute and determined the basis for the extension of Roman *imperium* beyond Italy in the generations that followed: Roman leadership supported by Italian auxiliary' forces.

However, the Italian allies, or *socii* as the Romans called them, grew dissatisfied with this arrangement. After a few isolated rebellions, a great many of the *socii* joined together to oppose Roman domination in what became known as the Social Wars. These extended from 91-87 B.C., with the main fighting in 9~89 B.C. We possess no firsthand explanation for the Italians' discontent, but it is not difficult to imagine some of the considerations that probably influenced various groups and classes of Italians. Although members of the Italian aristocracies had their own records of local achievement and could boast of their own distinguished ancestries, they were generally excluded from holding office at Rome. This meant exclusion from the positions of highest prestige. It also meant exclusion from real power, including the opportunity to serve as commander. This position carried not only additional prestige but also the right to distribute booty, a means to political influence and the development of client followings, as well as to personal wealth. Similarly, the rank and file of the Italian auxiliary forces long were subject to separate and sterner discipline than their Roman

counterparts. While this complaint was addressed before the outbreak of the Social Wars, it is likely that the auxiliary forces continued to receive a smaller share of booty than Romans. We also hear of occasional, but probably not atypical, cases of Roman haughtiness toward their Italian junior partners in empire.

Whatever their actual motivations, most Italian communities joined a federation, established their own capital at Corfinium, minted their own coins (showing the Italian bull goring the Roman wolf), and sought to establish their independence from Rome. Their rebellion was as short-lived as it was because the outnumbered Romans adopted a policy of divide and conquer. In exchange for peace, the Romans made offers of full Roman citizenship, first to those Italians closest to them, the Latins, but gradually further afield. Still, some Italians, especially the Samnite hill tribes of the central Apennines, could be reduced only after protracted and bitter struggle. In 89 B.C. Rome agreed to incorporate into the citizen body virtually all free Italians, although actual enrollment of Italians in the Roman census might not have taken place until 70 **B.C.**⁵

The process of integrating Roman and Italian remained far from complete, however, and continued through the next generation on several fronts. Three of the most important were the following. Even after formal enfranchisement of the Italians, Romans retained tight control over access to Roman political office. Italians such as the elder Cato, Marius, and Cicero who did achieve high office in Rome did so only through the patronage of Roman aristocrats and were so uncommon as to be called *novi homines*, "new men. The de facto barriers that excluded Italians from Roman office-holding did not finally come down until Octavian's victory' at Actium in 31 **B.C.** brought an end to a succession of civil wars that had begun in 88 B.C. After 31 B.C. Octavian/Augustus' virtually complete control of government made it both possible and expedient for him to draw on the Italian aristocracy in order to replenish a ruling class that had been decimated by the civil wars. Second, competition for client followings among the rivals in the Roman civil wars made it desirable for them to extend the process of enfranchisement beyond the limits included in the settlement of the Social Wars to include new areas, most notably the Transpadine region of northern Italy. Finally, regional differences among Italian communities, each with its own historical relationship to Rome and often with loyalties to one or another rival politician, undoubtedly contributed to the shape and course of the civil wars themselves. For example, in the civil war of 82 B.C. between Sulla and the younger Marius, Marius found his chief support among Samnite hill people who had been among the last holdouts against Rome in the Social Wars and had been treated with particular harshness by Sulla. Their ill-fated decision to side with Marius, then, was undoubtedly influenced by resentments held over from the Social Wars. Defeat of the Marians only led to the Samnites' renewed suffering at Sulla's hands. It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that when the young Julius Caesar presented himself as the guardian of Marius' memory' and a champion of the Marians, he did so not only because his aunt had been Marius' wife. He was also appealing to Marius' Samnite followers, and they must have constituted a significant presence in his military' and political followings.

By contrast, Caesar's chief rival, Pompey the Great, drew much of his support from another quarter of Italy. His father had championed the extension of partial rights to Italians who lived north of

the Po River. Pompey began his political career by serving under his father, an unpopular but effective leader in the suppression of Italian rebels during the Social Wars. Later he recruited three legions from among his father's clients and with them he supported Sulla against the younger Marius. Thus, the eventual conflict between Caesar and Pompey undoubtedly involved regional as well as personal loyalties. It carried with it the memory' of differences that went back to a time when Romans and Italians were two separate peoples at war with each other.

Vergil's characterization of the wars between the Trojans and Italians as civil wars reflects, as I have suggested already, the irony of the wars' final outcome, the forging of a single people from these two adversaries. In the context of recent Roman history', however, it might equally serve to remind his audience that the civil wars were in important respects a continuation of the conflict that came to the surface with the Social Wars. It was not until Augustus that a final resolution of the relationship between Romans and Italians seemed a real possibility. A central element of his political program was finally to unite Romans and Italians as a single people behind his leadership. In preparation for the battle of Actium, Octavian (not yet Augustus) had called upon all Italy to swear personal allegiance to him.¹⁶ After victory' at Actium, as Augustus, he sought to consolidate his position constitutionally. He did this in part by sponsoring the admission of Italians into the Roman Senate. In this way he redefined Rome's political aristocracy as pan-Italic, while securing the personal loyalties of those Italian families who owed to him their new position at the center of Roman society and power.

THE *AENEID* AS ONE OF SEVERAL FOUNDATION STORIES

This brief sketch of Roman history cannot begin to do justice to the range and intensity of conflict and change that characterized Vergil's age. Nonetheless, it is sufficient to suggest that Vergil's account of Roman origins took its place among a variety of views about Roman cultural identity and in the debate over who were the true Romans. Even before Vergil's age Romans were familiar with a multiplicity of stories about the foundation of their community. One scholar has counted at least twenty-five basic Roman foundation stories.¹⁷ The literary survivals of Vergil 's own age suggest a concentration on two of them: the stories of Aeneas and of Romulus. Each basic version, however, received quite different interpretations at the hands of different authors.

Let us begin with the Italian-born Romulus, founder of the city of Rome. In one of his early poems Horace, for example, evoked the memory' of Romulus not as the heroic founder of the city, but as the murderer of Remus, an act that stood as the emblem and starting point for all subsequent civil wars at Rome (*Epode* 7.17-20):

Sic est: acerba fata Romanos agunt / scelusque fraternae necis,
ut inmerentis fluxit in terram Remi / sacer nepotibus cruor.

So it is: bitter fates pursue the Romans / and the crime of a brother's murder,
since the gore of undeserving Remus flowed into the earth / a curse to his descendants.

Another contemporary of Vergil, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, offered a quite different perspective. Writing as a Greek and in Greek for a Greek audience, he emphasized the continuities between Rome and the Greek world. For him, Aeneas was thoroughly Greek; Romulus, although born on Italian soil, perpetuated a Greek ideal of heroism in his distinguished ancestry and in his role as founder not only of the city of Rome but also of virtually all its essential institutions. Romulus was depicted as a thoroughgoing Greek even in his culture, for according to Dionysius the most reliable version of the twins' story is that they were not exposed on the banks of the Tiber River but that substitutes were exposed in their place; the twins themselves were spirited off to the nearby city of Gabii "in order to receive a Greek education" (*hos Hellada paideian ekmathoien*, Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.* 1.84.5).

Romulus is central to another, yet more subtly nuanced alternative to Vergil's account of Roman origins. This is the monumental history' authored by Vergil's contemporary, Livy.⁹ Although Livy acknowledges a tradition that Aeneas brought his Trojans to Italy, he treats it cursorily. His real interest is in the series of institutional developments that begin with Romulus. For him Romulus is the first of six individuals whom he identifies with the title *conditor*, "founder," a title Livy does not confer upon Aeneas. Each of Livy's six founders is associated with a particular act or institution: Romulus with establishing the physical city, Numa with laying the foundations of Roman piety, Servius Tullius with instituting the essential organization of the political state, Brutus (who expelled the Tarquin kings) with founding Roman *libertas* by instituting an annual consulship in place of monarchy, and Camillus with establishing the institution of refoundation that allows the city to survive and recreate itself after disasters. In that sequence of "founders," we find Augustus identified as "founder and restorer of all the temples" (*templorum omnium conditorem ac restitutorem*, 4.20.7), a reference to his ambitious campaigns to rebuild Rome and revive traditional religion at the end of the civil wars. Thus, although the personal and moral qualities that occupy Vergil are also important to Livy's conception of Roman identity and development, they take their place in Livy's narrative beside an equally central focus on the development of specific institutions.

Livy is also much more insistent than Vergil on the uniquely Roman origins of Roman character and greatness. In presenting his account of Romulus as Rome's first real founder, Livy consistently expresses skepticism about the fantastic elements in Romulus' story': the rape of his mother by Mars, for example, or his rescue by a wolf. On the other hand, he emphasizes how the exposed infant grew to maturity among shepherds, totally cut off from his ancestors, how he owed his character to the demanding conditions of his rustic upbringing, and how both his assassination of his evil uncle, Amulius, and his founding of Rome were achieved entirely through his own resources (Livy 1.3.10-7.3). The independence of Rome from Greek culture is implicit in this emphasis upon Romulus' nature as essentially native and self-made. This idea is developed more directly in Livy's portrait of Rome's second king and founder, Numa Pompilius. There Livy goes out of his way to refute a tradition according to which Numa owed his wisdom to Pythagorean teaching. He concludes:

Suoapte igitur ingenio temperatum animum virtutibus fuisse opinor magis instructumque non tam

peregrinis artibus quam disciplina tetrica ac tristi veterum Sabinorum, quo genere nullum quondam incorruptius fuit.

Therefore I think rather that his mind was governed by virtues because of his own disposition and was educated not so much by foreign arts as by the stern and austere discipline of the old Sabines; no race has ever been more uncorrupted. (1.18.4)²⁰

It is for this native wisdom, learned among the Italian Sabines, that the Roman elders summon Numa to rule their city.

This emphasis upon native, self-made virtues contributes to a second theme central to Livy's portrayal of Rome's founders: their role as precedents for "new men who were pressing their claims for inclusion among the Roman political leadership during the late Republic. Technically "new men" were individuals who were the first in their families to hold the highest elected positions in Roman government. Many of them came from Italian aristocracy. Their small numbers reflected the exclusionary policies of a traditional Roman aristocracy that were not effectively challenged until the turbulence of the civil wars and the patronage of Julius Caesar and Augustus.

The idea that the kings of Rome constituted a precedent for recognizing the qualifications of "new men" is developed explicitly in Livy's narrative of the early political struggles that ultimately shaped the Roman constitution. Here, in a striking anachronism, the plebeian tribune, Canuleius, protests the exclusion of plebeians from political office by a general appeal to the example of "the best of the kings, new men" (*optimis regum, novis hominibus*, 4.3.17). Canuleius goes on to evoke the example of Servius Tullius in language that is particularly noteworthy because it applies almost exactly to the earlier representation of Romulus as well:

Enunquam creditis fando auditum esse, . . . Ser. Tullium
captiva Corniculana natum, patre nullo, matre serva, ingenio, virtute regnum tenuisse?

You do believe what you've heard people say, don't you, that
Servius Tullius . . . born of a captive woman from Corniculum, with no father, his mother a slave,
held the kingship through his natural abilities, his excellence? (4.3.10-12)

The references here to *ingenium*, "natural abilities," and *virtus*, "excellence," recall the arguments of "new men" such as Cicero that they were no different from the founders of the *nobilitas* who first established their families' preeminence at Rome on the basis of their own talent and virtue, not of birth.²¹ The characterization of Rome's "best kings" as "new men," then, provides the strongest kind of sanction for the "new men's" arguments.

The foregoing examples show a precedent for drawing upon Italian outsiders for Roman leadership. Livy addresses the relationship among Romans and Italians in many other ways as well. While he details the long history' of their varied conflicts, he also presents Romans as being conscious

from the very' first that their own survival and attainment of greatness depend on a policy of incorporating and assimilating Italians. Romulus acts on this policy at the outset of his reign. First, he sets up a place of asylum that attracts a motley crowd of Italian refugees who, like himself, come from the margins of society (1.8.1, 8.6; 2.1.4). Later, the sequence of events that leads to the abduction of the Sabine women and to Rome's consequent union with the Sabines begins with a realization that "due to a dearth of women, the greatness [of Rome] was only going to last one generation" ~*enuna mulierum hominis aetatem duratura magnitudo erat*, 1.9.1).

This theme is expressed implicitly throughout much of Livy's narrative and is developed at some length in the eighth book of his narrative. There, one of the leading statesmen of his day raises the question of what policy Rome should adopt toward rebellious Italians, arguing that there are really only two possible choices: they must either be treated with clemency or obliterated. He concludes:

Voltis exemplo maiorum augere rem Romanam victos in civitatem accipiendo? materia crescendi per summam gloriam suppeditat. Certe id firmissimum longe imperium est quo oboedientes gaudent.

Do you wish to follow the example of our ancestors and augment Rome by accepting into citizenship those who have been defeated? The means of growing to the highest glory is to hand. Without doubt that *imperium* whose subjects delight in it is by far the most secure. (8.13.16)

Thus, where Vergil emphasizes the tragic, if inevitable character of Roman-Italian relations, Livy focuses more on the essential contribution that Italians make in Rome's rise to greatness and on the laudable pragmatism of the earliest Romans who fight when they must, but consciously choose a policy of assimilation rather than forcible subjugation wherever they can.

CONCLUSION

It is tempting for us in retrospect to see how the different views of Roman origin that I have surveyed here may reflect in part the different circumstances of their authors. None of them was a "real Roman." Dionysius, of course, was a Greek, and, as I suggested above, wanted to minimize differences between his people and their Roman masters. Horace was the son of an ex-slave from Apulia, not far from the instep of Italy's boot. His hometown, Venusia, had joined the Italian rebels during the Social Wars and he had himself fought in Brutus' army when it was defeated by Antony and Octavian at Philippi in 42 B.C. His reference to Romulus' murder of Remus occurs in a poem that most likely was written while the last of Rome's civil wars was still in progress, before Vergil and Livy had begun their works. It reflects a disillusionment that is appropriate to an outsider who found himself caught up on the losing side in wars among Roman warlords.²²

Vergil and Livy had a slightly different relation to Rome. They were likely closer to native aristocracy than was Horace, but both of them came from Transpadine Italy, an area that had only

received full Roman citizenship during their own lifetimes, and neither the *Aeneid* or Livy's history' was made public until after the decisive battle of Actium promised a new, if still not clearly defined, era in Roman history. Both authors construct a distinctive Roman identity, particularly in contrast to Hellenism. Vergil's Aeneas redefines the Greek heroic tradition, even as he remains an intermediary between important aspects of that tradition and Rome: he brings with him divine ancestry and tutelage, his reputation from the Trojan War, and a sense of obligation to live up to that moment. Livy's self-made heroes mark a more radical break with Greek tradition: they derive their strength and character from the austere conditions of their way of life rather than from the lofty eminence of the gods, and their energies are realized in the creation of distinctively Roman institutions as well as in their prowess on the field of battle. Both authors also share the view that Italians are necessary' participants in Roman destiny. Vergil presents the story of their unification with Rome as simultaneously glorious and tragic but, in any event, beyond the power or even full comprehension of its agents. Livy records the long history' of conflict between Romans and Italians fully, but he prepares for the ultimate union of the two peoples as the consequence of a sustained and deliberate policy of assimilation, a policy that expresses the Romans' explicit awareness that their own greatness positively requires the infusion of Italian virtue and manpower. What all of these authors have in common is their determination to isolate the essential elements of Roman identity by tracing them to their origins. In so doing they claimed definitive authority for their own visions of Rome during a period when critical aspects of Roman identity and membership were hotly contested and the stakes were high.

The Aeneid is designed to exalt this new, ordered society and to glorify its virtues and finest features by their personification in Aeneas, an epic hero who is meant to represent the archetypal Roman. Aeneas embodies the most important Roman personal qualities and attributes, particularly the Roman sense of duty and responsibility that Virgil thought of as having built the Rome he loved. During the century prior to Augustus's rule, the Roman republic was ravaged by a constant series of civil wars, which caused large human and financial losses. In creating the story of the Aeneid, Virgil referenced a rich literary tradition of foundation stories and myths but was especially attuned to previous works of epic poetry. While invention is considered to be a writer's most important skill in the modern day, in antiquity it was a sign of great respect (and talent) to rework the material of one's predecessors. The story of Virgil's hero Aeneas is briefly mentioned in Homer's Iliad—he is Hector's cousin and takes part in some of the battles—but Virgil elevates him to a new significance in his epic. By codifying his identity as a Trojan and a founder of Rome, Virgil legitimizes the Roman nation by tracing a through line back to the mythical past. You, laying foundations for mighty Carthage! Obsessed with your wife! (Aeneid 4.265). As Dido commits suicide atop the pyre, the Trojans hightail it out of town and sail straight into a storm—a storm that blows them back from the future, from 810 BCE to 1177 or 1176 BCE, where they started. Fred implies all this with extreme subtlety in two adjacent footnotes (5.1 and 5.8–11): Aeneas returns to his own times. The visit to Carthage is set between two storms, as Odysseus's visit to Phaeacia is set between periods of sleep (Odyssey 6–13). Not so. Next time someone tells you they're impressed by the Iliad or the Odyssey, tell them about the Aeneid. Aeneas in Palestine. How the Israeli-Palestinian conflict makes sense of Virgil's Aeneid. eidolon.pub. Ten hacks for getting better at Latin. Start studying The Aeneid: story. Learn vocabulary, terms and more with flashcards, games and other study tools. What is the theme of the Aeneid, as revealed by the introduction? Arma virumque; arma stands by metonymy for deeds of arms, wars, referring to the wars in which Aeneas engaged. Why does Vergil refer to Aeneas in the first line as "virum"? Because he is so well known that he does not need to mention him until line 92. "qui primus ab oris Trojae (ad) Italiam venit" - What does this refer to? The Aeneid alludes to both the Odyssey and the Iliad, tales of the Trojan War composed as epic poems by the Greek poet Homer in the 8th century BCE. The first six books of the Aeneid are the stories of Aeneas and other Trojan survivors travelling around the Mediterranean, in the style of Odysseus and his crew in the Odyssey. The latter half of Virgil's work focuses on warfare, as Aeneas fights Turnus, king of the Rutuli and a warrior said to be more powerful than Achilles. Ancient History Encyclopedia Foundation is a non-profit organization. For only \$5 per month you can become a member and support our mission to engage people with cultural heritage and to improve history education worldwide. Become a Member Donate. Recommended Books. The Aeneid.