INTRODUCTION

This book is intended to provide a general introduction to the public affairs of the Roman People for a reader with no prior knowledge of the subject. As an introduction to public affairs, the work concentrates on political institutions and activities and thus could be considered to reflect a "traditional" view of history. Much modern scholarship, on the other hand, has turned to new perspectives on the past, for example social history that examines the lives and experiences of the lower-class population, women and slaves, segments of the population that are generally ignored by the ancient sources; cultural history that investigates the interaction between the Romans and the foreign peoples with whom they came into contact during their conquest of Italy and then the Mediterranean; and economic history that studies the economic patterns and institutions that played a large role in determining the political structure of the Republic and Empire. These and other topics not treated here would undoubtedly deepen the analysis but at the cost of inordinately expanding the length of the work and of obscuring the purpose that it is intended to serve. It is my view that the new historical disciplines complement rather than supplant traditional history. My aim, then, is to provide a readable and up-to-date general history on the basis of the numerous refinements in our understanding of traditional political history that have been made in recent years.

The desire to make this work both concise and readable has led to two decisions that the reader must always bear in mind. The first has to do with the nature of the source material available for ancient history. In studying modern (and even much of medieval) history, it is generally possible to take the overall course of events for granted, and the task becomes one of deciding how to interpret the evidence. This is seldom the case with ancient history. The surviving literary sources are often written many years (even centuries) after the facts they record on the basis of unknown intermediate sources.

Contemporary documentary sources in the form of inscriptions, papyri, and the legends of coins are extant for some periods, but the extent to which such sources can supplement the literary evidence is limited. The upshot is that very frequently there are discrepancies in the sources, and a large part of the job of historians of antiquity is to attempt to use various forms of source criticism to evaluate the divergent information available in order to recreate the reality of the historical events narrated in the ancient sources. Hence, there is virtually no declarative statement in this work that could not be qualified with expressions like "most likely" and "apparently." No doubt a full-scale discussion of Roman history would entail constant reference to the (often uncertain) evidence that lies behind the analysis, but such an elaborate (and confusing) procedure would obviate the very limited goal of the present work. I have therefore restricted myself to a short discussion of the sources of information available at the start of each of the five parts into which the book is divided and provide in the corresponding section of the bibliography a concise listing of the main sources. No one is more aware than I am of the extent to which our understanding of antiquity is dependent upon the subjective interpretation of the evidence.

The result of this uncertainty inherent to the ancient evidence is that there is much scholarly dispute not simply about the interpretation of events but often about the mere course of events. This, in turn, means that alternative scholarly views are available for practically every statement I make. To go into detailed discussion of those alternatives and to argue at length for my own position would defeat the purpose of this book. My aim is to give the novice student of Roman history a general overview of the developments of more than a millennium of history, and my hope is that this book will stimulate the reader to delve into the literature on specific points and see both what the available evidence is and why various scholars interpret it as they do. If this work achieves this modest goal, I will be content.

Because Roman personal names appear so frequently in the text, an appendix provides a discussion of the Roman system of nomenclature, which differs significantly from our own.

PART ONE

OBSCURE BEGINNINGS, TO 264 B.C.

How do we know anything about ancient Rome? Surviving written texts represent the main source of information, which may be supplemented with physical remains revealed by archaeology. Writing was introduced into Italy in the eighth century B.C. from Greek settlements in the south. Written sources can be divided into two categories. The first consists of official documents inscribed on materials that have been preserved to the present day (mainly inscribed on rock or metal, but in the later period some documents written with ink on papyri are preserved). Little documentary evidence survives from before the third century B.C. This is also the period when literary evidence, the second category of written evidence, begins to be preserved. In the later third century B.C., the Romans began to write literature (that is, texts composed with a self-conscious artistic aim in mind) under the influence of Greek literature. Included in this literary activity was the writing of history. Romans began to write histories of their own affairs, and as Rome grew to be the dominant power of the Mediterranean, Greeks began to write about them too. In order to assess the validity of the information about the earliest period of Roman history preserved in this literary tradition, it is necessary to consider both the information that would have been available to the writers in this tradition and the methods they used in conveying this information.

The ancient historians had access to documentary evidence that has since been lost. They occasionally refer to old inscriptions, but surviving examples show that the archaic language used in such documents would have been hard to understand, and for the most part we are not in a position to assess the accuracy of the interpretations put on them by the ancients. In any case, though some significant documents of unknown authenticity are preserved in the literary tradition, ancient historians tended not to engage in historical research involving primary documents and instead reworked the material provided by

their predecessors. The question really is, what information was available to those who began the literary tradition about early Rome? In addition to any stray documents that were known, there were presumably oral traditions about the past that were current when the literary tradition was first drawn up. Stray pieces of information do suggest that there were other traditions extant that differed from the one preserved in the literary tradition, but we are in no position to assess the accuracy of any of them. There was, however, one sort of chronicle surviving from the pre-literary period that had a major influence on early Roman historians: the *annales maximi*.

The term *annales* comes from the Latin adjective meaning "annual" and refers to a year-by-year account. The *annales maximi* were a register of annual events kept by the *pontifex maximus* (head of the Roman board of priests called *pontifices*). These accounts are not preserved for us, though ancient references give us some notion about them.

Every year the *pontifex maximus* kept a whitewashed board on public display near his official residence. This board had the name of the eponymous magistrates at the top and apparently listed the other magistrates. The board served as a form of official register; whenever something happened that was considered worth recording, it was listed under the date on which it occurred. The kinds of events that it contained included eclipses, famines, the beginning and end of wars, and triumphs (official victory celebrations). It apparently did not list the passage of laws or decrees of the senate.

When this record began to be kept is unknown; it ceased to be kept around 130 B.C. Apparently, the information on the yearly boards had been preserved permanently (presumably copied down in a more manageable format). At some point, the information contained in this way was published in eighty books, and this record purported to preserve events going back to the very foundation of the city (seemingly the Republic began around book eleven).[1] Since the record could not have been begun at the foundation of the city, at some point the events for the period before the record began to be kept must have been fabricated on an unknown basis. Another source of information was the list of magistrates going back to the foundation of the early Republic, the *fasti*, whose accuracy will be discussed in Chapter 2 (see pp. 25–26).

The literary tradition that began in the late third century B.C. was eventually superseded by the Augustan historian Livy, whose work was based on that of his predecessors and so surpassed them (in literary quality at least) that the earlier works are lost, apart from a few quotations preserved in other authors. The annalistic tradition is preserved not only in Livy but also in the Greek

1 That is, what the ancients considered a "book," which was a papyrus roll that contained about as much information as fifty printed pages. Thus, a work that we could consider a "book" actually often consisted of many books.

authors Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Diodorus Siculus, who also wrote in the time of Augustus.

The earliest authors of these Latin annals were mostly magistrates and seem to have anachronistically transferred into the history of the earliest period the concerns of their own day (e.g., agrarian legislation). Often these additions are obvious, but not always. In the first century, the annalistic tradition continued but took a turn for the worse in terms of content. The later annalists were not senators familiar with the workings of the Roman state but "armchair historians" who belonged to the landowning class and whose main aim in writing was entertainment. For patriotic purposes, they exaggerated Roman success, and in addition to fabricating false documents, they generally twisted their narrative for dramatic reasons. Unfortunately, Livy often used these sources, and it is at times difficult to distinguish fact from fiction in his narrative.

A general trend perceptible throughout the development of the literary tradition is the expansion of the history of the early Republic. The earliest accounts have been compared to an hourglass: the earliest history (the Kingdom) and recent history were treated at length and the early Republic rather less fully. Over time, it was felt that this imbalance had to be rectified, and since little additional information was available, only fiction of one kind or another could provide the necessary material.

According to the Greek conception, history concentrated on great public events, especially wars, and tended to interpret events through the actions of the highest political leaders. Thus, the ancient histories are quite limited in their perspective. Furthermore, ancient historians were expected not simply to "tell the truth" but to shape their material according to some moral or educational purpose. This is always a problem in assessing ancient historical writings, but the problem is particularly acute in the case of the earliest history, when much of what was written must have been conjectural. Fundamentally, one must always ask, when faced with ancient literary evidence about early Rome, how would anyone have known that?

Finally, one additional source of literary information is worth mentioning. In the first century B.C., a certain number of educated Romans engaged in what we would call "antiquarian" research, that is, the attempt to explain primitive practices and ceremonies that dated back to the early days of Rome. (Being a conservative people, the Romans preserved a number of such institutions whose significance was no longer clear.) While these antiquarians preserve a fair amount of detail about such survivals, the interpretation of the information, which pretty much by definition has been removed from its original historical context, is often controversial.

In short, the literary tradition for the period down to the third century B.C. is subject to grave doubts. While the general chronological framework

for the period from the foundation of the Republic is reliable, the period for the Kingdom is much more dubious, and the reliability of the details about even the early Republic, especially those involving internal politics, is also uncertain. For the earliest period, archaeology provides useful indications of the overall physical development of the city and gives important clues about the nature of society, but this sort of evidence is difficult to assess in terms of political history.

I

FOUNDATIONS AND KINGDOM, TO CA. 507 B.C.

Rome began, in the first half of the first millennium B.C., as a small settlement on the northernmost reaches of Latium, the area occupied by the Latins (for details about the Latins' ethnic identity, see Chapter 2). There are two main sources of information for the history of Rome before the foundation of the Republic at the end of the sixth century B.C.: the evidence uncovered by archaeological excavation and the ancient literary tradition that was written down many centuries after the Republic's foundation. When archaeological evidence first began to be discovered in the nineteenth century, the natural procedure was to attempt to explain it in light of the ancient tradition. As more physical remains were recovered and as the defects of the literary tradition became better understood, it came to be realized that these two sources of information are in many ways incompatible. Such theoretical issues cannot be addressed in detail within the compass of this treatment. Instead, we will look at the picture of early Rome that emerges from the archaeological evidence and then examine the written tradition.

Place names in Italy indicate that the peninsula was at some point occupied by people who did not speak an Indo-European language. The speakers of the Indo-European languages (including Latin) that are called "Italic" must have arrived from elsewhere (probably the Balkans or central Europe), but the date or direction of their migration cannot be discerned from the archaeological record. During the Bronze Age (the period when bronze was the main metal used for making weapons and other instruments and the use of iron was unknown), which stretches from the early 2000s to the late 1000s B.C., Italy was sparsely populated, and the physical remains are characterized by a cultural uniformity that is in strong contrast to the diversity of the succeeding Iron Age. In the northwest of Italy during the early Iron Age, there was a general tendency to cremate the dead and bury the ashes, and this culture is known as

Villanovan. Cremation was introduced to Italy in the last stage of the Bronze Age, which is known as the Proto-Villanovan period (ca. 1200–900 B.C.). Cremation was at that time a widespread practice in central Europe, and it is not clear whether the adoption of cremation represents merely the borrowing of a cultural practice by the indigenous population of Italy or the migration into Italy of new populations from central Europe. If the former process is the case, the Italic speakers were already present in Italy during the Bronze Age; in the latter situation, the Proto-Villanovan period saw their arrival. In any case, it would seem that the regional cultural groupings perceptible in the archaeological remains for the Iron Age correspond to the linguistic groups that inscriptions and literary evidence show to have existed from 500 B.C. on.

In the early twentieth century, the Iron Age was divided into four phases (subperiods) referred to by capital Roman numbers. Phases II and IV have been divided into two with the addition of the capital letters A and B. Within Villanovan culture, the area of Latium can be distinguished by the fact that the urns used for burying ashes often took the form of small pottery models of huts, and this culture is called Latial. The approximate dates for these subperiods are as follows:

PHASE	DATES B.C.	CULTURAL DEFINITION	HISTORICAL DEFINITION
I	1000–875	Final Bronze Age (Proto-Villanovan)	Pre-urban
IIA	875–800	Early Iron Age (Villanovan)	Pre-urban
IIB	800–750	Early Iron Age (Villanovan)	Proto-urban
III	750–700	Early Iron Age (Villanovan)	Proto-urban
IV	700–580	Orientalizing	Urban

Much in this dating is quite arbitrary. Datable imported Greek pottery provides the only firm chronology framework, but unfortunately no Greek ware appears until Phase IV, though imitations are detected in Phase III. Since Latial I is thought to begin late in the Proto-Villanovan period (1200–900 B.C.), its start is placed in 1000 B.C. The lengths assigned to Phases IIA and IIB are little more than guesses.

The characteristics of these phases as they appear in Latium can be summarized as follows:

Latial I (1000–875 B.C.) There is little attestation for this period (the last of the Bronze Age). A few urn burials have been found in the area of the Roman Forum. No Latial I sites of habitation have been found.

Latial II (875–750 B.C.) The division of this period into two is a result of the situation in Rome, where two major areas of burial were found in the nineteenth century. The goods found at the two sites are generally similar, but there are a few noticeable differences. It used to be thought on the basis of the literary tradition that this situation represented two separate population groups, but one site is probably later in date.

Our knowledge of life during this period has been greatly enhanced as a result of excavations at the site of ancient Gabii, a settlement about eleven miles east of Rome. Here two cemeteries were found, and these apparently represent two separate family groups with similar but distinguishable customs. The level of economic development is rather low, and there was little wealth in this subsistence economy, each family apparently making its own pottery and wool. The village is estimated to have contained about 100 people. Burials indicate distinctions on the basis of age, sex, and function in the group, but no social stratification or economically distinct classes. In effect, there were two extended family groups living in close proximity to each other, but depending on their own (meager) resources and "managed" by some male head of the household.

Latial III (750–700 B.C.) Settlements increase in size, and there was a trend towards economic advancement and specialization. Olive and wine production was introduced, along with use of the potter's wheel. Pottery making was now an independent craft, and while no imported pottery is known, domestic patterns appear to be influenced by Greek pottery styles. There is clear distinction among tombs on the basis of wealth.

Latial IV (700–580 B.C.) Goods from the east, especially Greece, began to be imported, and hence this is called the "Orientalizing" period, by analogy with the period of about the same time when Greece was influenced by imports from the Near East. This period also witnessed a great increase in both the wealth exhibited in the burials of certain individuals and in the scale of building, both public and private.

In Latial IV, tombs exhibit

1. an increase in disposable wealth available for ostentation in burial;
2. a celebration of the military prowess and feasting of wealthy members of the community; and
3. a perpetuation of the family line over generations.