INTRODUCTION: "THIS PLACE WAS HOLIEST OF ALL"

During or just after the reign of Rome's first emperor Augustus (r. 27 B.C.E.–14 C.E.), the Greek geographer Strabo penned his work *Geographica* and provided a valuable description of many of the peoples and places in the Greco-Roman world.[1] When Strabo reported the "best accredited story of the founding of Rome," he recounted the tale, "partly fabulous but partly closer to the truth," of Rhea Silvia, a woman forced by her uncle Amulius to become a Vestal Virgin to assure she would remain childless, thereby preventing the birth of a potential political rival.[2] Notwithstanding her sacred inviolability, Rhea Silvia was impregnated by the god Mars. She gave birth to Romulus and Remus, semidivine twin boys who grew into manhood, defeated Amulius and his sons, and established the foundations for the city of Rome.

Lacking natural defenses and usable arable land, the location for Rome's foundation was suitable "more as a matter of necessity than of choice."[3] For his part, Strabo forgave the early Romans for not beautifying their city, citing their understandable preoccupation with matters of government and war. The successors to Rome's mythical founders would eventually reduce its vulnerability by building protective circuit walls and defensive gates as early as the fourth century B.C.E. By the reign of Augustus, however, Strabo noted that circumstances had indeed changed. Rome's leaders of the late republic and the first imperial court had not neglected the city's infrastructure; rather they filled Rome with "many beautiful structures."[4]

> In fact, Pompey, the Deified Caesar, Augustus, his sons and friends, and wife and sister, have outdone all others in their zeal for buildings and in the expense incurred. The Campus Martius contains most of these, and thus, in addition to its natural beauty, it has received still further adornment as a result of foresight. Indeed, the size of the Campus is remarkable, because it affords space at the same time and without interference, not only for chariot-races and every other equestrian exercise but also for all that multitude of people who exercise themselves by ball-playing, hoop-trundling, and wrestling; and the works of art situated around the Campus Martius and the ground, which is covered with grass throughout the year, and the crowns of those hills that are above the river and extend as far as its bed, which present to the eye the appearance of a stage-painting – all this, I say, affords a spectacle that one can hardly draw away from. And near this campus is still another campus, with colonnades round about it in very great numbers, and sacred precincts, and three theatres, and an amphitheatre, and very costly temples, in close succession to one another, giving you the impression that they are trying, as it were, to declare the rest of the city a mere accessory. For this reason, in the belief that this place was holiest of all, the Romans have erected in it the tombs of their most illustrious men and women.[5]

This area known in Strabo's day as the "Campus Martius," or "the Field of Mars," was located not in the city proper but north of the Capitoline Hill, just outside of Rome's first defensive walls. Large and flat and, for much of the republican period, grassy and unencumbered by man-made structures, the Campus Martius was part of a floodplain framed by the Capitoline Hill to the south, the Tiber River to the west, the Pincian and Quirinal Hills to the east, and a narrow throat of land between the Tiber and the Pincian Hill to the north. Until the late imperial era, most of the region lay outside the *pomerium*, the mythical plow line or sacred furrow that delineated the city limits and relegated certain activities to one side (intrapomerial) or the other (extrapomerial). For example, according to long-standing republican tradition, rituals that sought divine approval for mortal actions could be performed within the *pomerium*, but Rome's own armed troops were forbidden to cross the pomerial boundary and enter the city unless expressly invited by the Senate.[6] Soldiers mustering for war and citizens gathered for census counting, centuriate assemblies, and military unit assignments were relegated to the plain of the Campus Martius, outside the sacred line. Following a successful return from campaign, Roman legions would assume military formations on the open plain in preparation for the triumphal processions that snaked their way through the narrow city streets. In addition to troop assembly, certain foreign ambassadors were temporarily housed in the Campus Martius while they waited for an invitation to cross the *pomerium*.[7] Moreover, the open field was also an ideal location for the construction of temples vowed by generals during

the heat of battle with Rome's many enemies, some dedicated to foreign gods that could be worshiped only beyond the city walls. Likewise, cremation and burial rites were permitted only outside of the pomerial line; some of the most significant funerary structures were constructed in the Campus Martius, including the great mausoleum of Rome's first emperor.

The Field of Mars also was connected intrinsically to the foundation legends of the city. The Tiber that ran along its western boundary was the same flood-swollen river into which Rhea Silvia's twin sons were thrown, only to wash ashore in their cradle further downriver. Years later, according to one legend, Romulus, then Rome's sole king, ascended to heaven in a storm cloud from the center of the open field, where he had been mustering his troops for battle. Ultimately, this land "between the city and the Tiber" became, according to Livy, the property of Rome's last Etruscan king, Tarquinius Superbus.[8] After the defeat and exile of Tarquinius in 509 B.C.E., the plain was once again reclaimed by Rome's Latin citizens and dedicated to the god Mars.[9] Following the expulsion of the foreign despots, the area north of the pomerial line was known, according to Livy, simply as the Campus Martius, or "Field of Mars."[10]

As it contained few structures until the third century B.C.E., the swampy plain north of the city accommodated large crowds on a periodic and usually seasonal basis. Soldiers mustered there in the spring and received discharge orders in the fall. Citizens gathered in the field for important religious festivals tied to the war god, such as the equestrian contest known as the October Horse and the holiday Anna Perenna on the Ides of March, in addition to remembrances every July to Romulus's death. As the location for triumphal parade formations, the Campus Martius received throngs of visitors on the dates set for the celebration of military victories. Lying in a floodplain and infested with mosquitoes in late summer, the plain was deemed ideal for periodic military training and festivals but not for daily urban activities. For five centuries after Rome's mythical founding, use of the field by Rome's residents was limited.

With the advent of the Punic Wars beginning in the mid-third century B.C.E., Rome expanded its military reach throughout the Mediterranean basin and north of the Alps. This resulted in the slow demise of the annual rhythm of warfare and, with it, the requirement of seasonal musters in the Field of Mars. No longer needed entirely for unobstructed troop exercises, the Campus Martius began to attract development that complemented its military and other public uses. The plundered treasures of foreign conquest pouring into the capital during overseas military adventures funded the construction. The scale and cultural importance of the Campus Martius made it an ideal location for the conspicuous and tangible display of political ambition. It was there that leading republican citizens constructed temples to provide lasting reminders of their personal successes and public munificence. Some temples

were surrounded with beautiful colonnades, creating sacred precincts in an area that could accommodate vast enclosures. The marbled spaces served as repositories for extraordinary art and provided various "firsts" for the city, including the first temple entirely of marble and the first colonnade as a victory monument.

Notwithstanding the construction of temples and occasionally temporary wooden theaters, until the mid-first century B.C.E., the use of the Campus Martius by Rome's residents remained as it had been for centuries, a place for periodic gatherings and festivals. A significant transformation of the space began, however, when one of Rome's greatest generals, Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (Pompey the Great), dared to erect a permanent venue for theatrical shows. He chose the flat, open plain as the ideal location for his enormous stone structure. Other buildings in the Campus Martius designed for entertainment as well as for bathing followed, and by the beginning of the common era, streams of visitors came to the field on a daily basis.

With the ascension to power of Augustus, the Field of Mars began its conversion into a showcase for imperial architecture and the physical manifestation of Rome's preeminence. At the time Strabo called the location of the Campus Martius the "holiest of all," the open fields were quickly shrinking. Drained and leveled, the alluvial plain was filling from the south to the north with colonnades, theaters, an amphitheater, public baths, temples, and sacred precincts. Although the earlier martial functions of the plain were no longer critical to the success of Augustus's empire, inscriptions and carved images on triumphal arches, commemorative columns, and temple pediments proliferated throughout the Campus Martius to serve as reminders of the area's connection to the god of war and the foundation legends of Rome.

Over time, the Field of Mars was crammed with constructions of marble, concrete, and wood, until little of Mars's open field was left. Large private landholdings of famous generals such as Pompey and Marcus Agrippa were subdivided into beautiful public parks with pools and statuary and extraordinary edifices supported on carved columns and arches. Open spaces were now enclosed in colonnades, and the once flat topography developed a verticality created by buildings such as Pompey's theater and Augustus's mausoleum that reached as high as the Capitoline. Although its natural beauty was replaced by the man-made, the Campus Martius still remained highly susceptible to nature's powerful forces. Draining the marshes and raising the ground level did not prevent the terrible inundations from Tiber floods that periodically washed across the plain. Visitors to the field's numerous entertainment attractions in late summer were at risk of malaria outbreaks from the mosquitoes that frequented Rome's low-lying regions. Like many sectors of the ancient capital city, the northern plain suffered from fires that frequently razed

buildings, thereby providing opportunities to build new structures with updated architectural designs and decorative programs. The interstices between temples, porticoes, baths, and theaters began to fill with commercial structures, houses, and apartment buildings. The *pomerium* shifted north, and in the third century C.E., the Aurelian Wall enclosed the Field of Mars within the city proper. The discernible features of the plain that distinguished it from the remainder of Rome were now blurred, as the Campus Martius was fully integrated into the *urbs* (city) that dominated the ancient world.

This book presents a case study of the repurposing of urban space in the Roman world and explores how uses that fit well with existing topographical features ultimately attracted architecture that forever transformed those features. It considers how the ideal topography and extrapomerial location of the Campus Martius allowed this sector to serve first as Rome's premier military assembly area and parade ground, space essential for a city-state that honored success in battle as the highest societal value.[11] Through its connections to the activities of war, the Field of Mars offered the perfect location for important foundation myths of Rome, and this, in turn, influenced the types and decorative programs of buildings constructed within it. These structures as well as the availability of open, flat terrain in an increasingly crowded urban landscape, attracted more grandiose public works, which then reshaped the topography, altering forever the once open field of the war god Mars. Chapter 1 introduces the space and major monuments through a topographical overview, defining its limits and noting the changes from a swamp to a marble wonderland. Chapter 2 considers the relationship of the campus to Mars and the myths of Rome's foundation. The variety and location of temples built most often as vow fulfillments for the battlefield successes of ambitious republican generals are considered in Chapter 3. Previously a locale for occasional theatrical performances in temporary structures built near the steps of temples, the landscape of the Campus Martius evolved into a premier entertainment zone punctuated with permanent stone theaters, a horse racing track, and a stadium for Greek-style games. These structures are the focus of Chapter 4, whereas Chapter 5 considers the development of colonnades which created large sacred spaces around temples and parks next to theaters and which were filled with sculpture and painting from conquered nations. Water, both channeled and untamed, pervasively affected the Field of Mars, and its impact on the plain and its monuments is discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 considers the imperial architectural programs that unified large sections of the Campus Martius and captured the martial and mythical past of the plain for the ideological and political agendas of Rome's emperors. The concluding chapter ties the various themes together and notes that, as Rome declined, the field that once awed Strabo now sheltered some of Rome's shrinking population among crumbling

buildings. The extraordinary marbled edifices became *monti* of rubble that serve as the foundation materials for a modern city that, in turn, remains a palimpsest for its ancient glory. To assist the reader in his or her understanding of the space, Appendix A lists the major monuments of the Field of Mars in chronological order and within the context of major political events, while Appendix B may be consulted for the meaning of various architectural terms employed.

CHAPTER ONE

"THE SIZE OF THE PLAIN IS REMARKABLE": DEFINING THE LIMITS OF THE CAMPUS MARTIUS IN TIME AND SPACE

TIME

For many travelers to Rome today, the center of the city is often considered the area around the nineteenth-century monument to King Victor Emmanuel II, an imposing marble structure with a high colonnade that looks north over tightly spaced buildings and a busy traffic circle. Built hard up against the Capitoline Hill, a natural landscape feature known today as the Campidoglio, this memorial to the first king of a unified Italy hides from view the hill that once dominated the ancient skyline as seen from the northern reaches of the city. But wander off to the western side of the monument, and the visitor discovers the ramped carriage steps leading to the Campidoglio, the perfectly balanced space created by Michelangelo in the sixteenth century. From this high vantage point, the modern observer's gaze extends to the northern horizon across a plain dominated by tile-roofed structures from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. At the viewer's right is the very straight Via del Corso running north from the Piazza Venezia, but the undulating Tiber River on the left is now hidden by trees and a floodwall (Figure 1).

Three millennia ago the Capitoline was a very different place. As a result of lava flows from volcanic eruptions over the previous 600,000 years, nearly 100,000 square meters of hilltop formed a rugged saddle of tufa resting between two higher peaks.[1] A small village of wooden huts sat on the relatively flat space between the rises, with similar villages dotting Rome's other hilltops.[2] Instead

1. View north from the Capitoline Hill with modern Corso (ancient Via Lata/Via Flaminia) on the right. (Photo: Paul Jacobs)

of an urban landscape lying to the north of the Capitoline, there was a marshy plain punctuated by woods and shallow pools of water. Caught between the Tiber River to the west and the Pincian and Quirinal Hills to the east, the flatland became a lake for many days during the seasonal inundations from the river's floodwaters. Further north, where the Tiber curves close to the hills, a small volcanic fissure hinted at the region's seismic instability. A narrow stream, later known as the Petronia Amnis, wended from the Quirinal through the marsh before emptying into the Tiber (Plan 1).[3] Few, if any, artificial features stood between the trees and wetland pools on the plain to suggest human encroachment.[4] This, however, was the area that – many centuries later – Romans would know as the Campus Martius, the Field of Mars.

According to ancient writers, the city of Rome was founded in 753 B.C.E., but there is little archaeological evidence to suggest that at that time it was much more than a cluster of humble villages.[5] While a crude stone wall enveloped the Palatine Hill to the southwest of the Capitoline, and wood and thatch huts sat along the Palatine's crest, the most famous of the city's republican gathering places, the Roman Forum, was then a mere swampy lowland populated with a smattering of small dwellings and burial plots.[6] The northern plain would have shown little evidence of human intrusion, and although a century after the city's mythical founding other areas of Rome had changed dramatically, the floodplain to the north of the Capitoline was still open and marshy with few,

if any, man-made structures.[7] The villages resting on Rome's hills and tucked in its lower valleys had, by the sixth century B.C.E., expanded and converged into a city of stone, wood, and terracotta covering approximately 2.8 square kilometers. Fortified walls were under construction, and in the valley south of the Capitoline, the primitive wooden huts were cleared away to make space for the building of the Roman Forum.[8] An open sewer channel, later covered and known as the Cloaca Maxima, helped to drain the basin of the Forum.[9] On the lower of the two Capitoline peaks, the great Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus (Jupiter Best and Greatest) rose on a terrace approximately 3,300 square meters in area.[10] With white stucco walls, timber beams, and a wooden roof crowned by a statue of Jupiter in a chariot,[11] the enormous temple served as Rome's most significant religious structure. The open area that surrounded the temple functioned as the meeting place for Rome's first assembly, the Comitia Calata.[12]

With the *pomerium* located at the foot of the Capitoline, the open plain to the north began to be used for military musters. Roman men of fighting age assembled in the marshland every spring before heading off on a path that led north in the direction of hostile tribes in Etruria. Annual equestrian contests were also held in the field. With the possible exception of a small altar to Mars near the center of the field, it was not until two more centuries had passed that visible changes finally came to the marshy field north of the Capitoline.[13] During the fifth century B.C.E., a large clearing was prepared about 300 meters beyond the hill in which citizens would congregate every five years to be counted in a census.[14] Known as the Villa Publica, the gathering space remained free of permanent structures, although a portico and buildings were added two centuries later during a renovation (Plan 2, No. 4).[15] Soon after space was cleared for the Villa Publica, a temple was erected on the southern edge of the field. Dedicated in 431 B.C.E. to Apollo Medicus (Apollo the Healer), the temple was raised in response to a plague that had recently ravaged the city (Plan 2, Inset C).[16] The city continued to grow to the south and east with walls, temples, public buildings, aqueducts, and housing, but the northern plain was slower to see change. Roman writers do not report construction of a second significant structure in the plain before 296 B.C.E., when a temple to the war goddess Bellona was vowed and a few years later dedicated next to Apollo's temple (Plan 2, Inset C).[17]

Three decades later, the pace of construction quickened with the advent of the three Punic Wars (264 to 146 B.C.E.). The open space north of the city walls soon became a popular site for the placement of temples vowed by generals. A vegetable market, the Forum Holitorium, just to the northwest of the Capitoline and near to the temples of Apollo and Bellona, became the location for three temples (Plan 2, Inset D).[18] By the Forum Holitorium and the temples of Apollo Medicus and Bellona, a site for temporary

markets and public meetings developed. Over time, the space known as the Circus Flaminius would be articulated by temple precincts and portico complexes (Plan 2). For the first time, the center of the plain became a construction site as well. In and around a sacred zone now known as the Largo Argentina (Plan 2, Inset A), temples of rather obscure water deities were erected. At least sixteen temples, or more than half of Rome's temples vowed during the period of the Punic Wars, rose on the floodplain north of the city walls.[19]

Whereas the orientation of the Circus Flaminius and the temples on its edge generally followed the path of the Tiber River to its west, the republican temples in the Largo Argentina district were built along a north-south axis, a topographical pattern that was expanded in future centuries of ancient Roman construction. The earlier dirt road used by mustering troops was monumentalized and renamed the Via Flaminia (Plan 2). It became a major Roman highway jammed with soldiers heading off to distant northern and western battlefronts, as well as farmers and merchants transporting agricultural products, imported items, building materials, and domestic animals to and from the city center. The northern marshland also became a destination point for citizens participating in Rome's numerous religious festivals. Temporary stages and bleachers were erected near temples for theatrical events connected with temple dedications and annual celebrations. A practice track for horse racing likely was cleared near the Tiber. The area around the Circus Flaminius would also attract spectators to the gathering point for triumphal parades awarded by the Senate to successful military generals.

By the beginning of the first century B.C.E., clusters of temples and some porticoes were located in the southern and central portions of the plain, reflecting the captured wealth from Rome's successful foreign conquests. The perimeter of the Circus Flaminius was now clearly defined by permanent edifices, including two temples of Hercules (Plan 2, Nos. 7 and 10) and temples of Juno Regina (Juno the Queen) and her consort Jupiter Stator (Jupiter the Stayer), both enclosed, at least in part, by the Porticus Metelli (Plan 2, Inset B). A temple of Neptune (Plan 2, No. 11), one of Mars (Plan 3, No. 23), and a temple of the twin horse tamers Castor and Pollux (Plan 3, No. 19) also rested on the edge of the circus. A portico built by Gnaeus Octavius, an ancestor of Rome's first emperor Augustus, ran along the northeast side of the Circus Flaminius, either covering over or parallel to a major street leading into the heart of the northern field (Plan 3, No. 24).[20] In the Largo Argentina region, a round temple now identified as honoring Fortuna Huiusce Diei (the goddess of the present day) was added (Plan 3, Inset A). The northern portion of the field that spread its way up to the narrow throat between the Tiber and the Pincian Hill remained open and relatively undeveloped. Because the plain was beyond the *pomerium*, burials were allowed there.