1 | Introduction: the journey to Rome

There is a strong and pleasant memory for hills.

Kevin Lynch (1961: 173)

The map

I was born in a 'city of seven hills'. Durham is one of the hilliest cities in the north of England. Yet even now I am unsure which of its contours add up to seven. It is hard to imagine any of them competing with the dramatic Cathedral peninsula, which gives the city its name (Figure 1.1). In 995 CE, when the monks of Lindisfarne on the Northumbrian coast were looking for a permanent resting place for the body of their bishop, Saint Cuthbert, he appeared to them in a vision directing them towards 'Dunholm' or 'hill island'. Despite the vividness of this name ('dun' means 'hill', and 'holm' means 'island', in Anglo-Saxon), it took a milkmaid and her 'dun cow' to help them find their destination.

Archaeological evidence points to a history of settlement in the Durham area long before the monks' arrival. But it is at this point that the settlement becomes a city. When Durham acquired its seven hills is less clear. Yet knowing that there are seven is, in a sense, sufficient – safe, solid and strangely familiar. The concept underwrites Durham's urban credentials, taking us back to cities as old as Babylon and Jerusalem. As old as Rome. Small wonder that when writer DBC Pierre was describing the faded glories of Durham's Miners' Gala, the best-known and largest meeting of the mining community in England, he found it an obvious way of invoking tradition and summoning regional pride. It was 2004, a decade after the last colliery in the Durham coalfield had closed, yet comfort is gained from 'the men, women and children of the pit villages labouring up and down any number of Durham's seven hills under sizable silver instruments'.[1] Their route is irrelevant; it is the general terrain that makes

[1] Pierre 2004. Though Pierre was brought up in Mexico City and considers himself Mexican, his mother was born in Durham, and, like me, he would return there for holidays.

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Figure 1.1 The Cathedral, Durham City.

their marching momentous. Seven hills lend *gravitas* to Pierre's account, turning struggle into an image of triumph.

Durham is not the only 'city of seven hills' in Britain. Bath, Bristol, Edinburgh and Sheffield all celebrate as much in their tourist information and university websites, while for Torquay on the South Devonshire coast, its 'famous seven hills provide the backdrop to a waterfront scene that matches anything you'll find on the French Riviera'.[2] The precise

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[2] For the active myth that is the seven hills of Bath, see, for example, the *Bath Chronicle* on 28 August 2008 and *The Independent* (www.independent.co.uk/travel/uk/winter-walks-and-refreshing-rambles-1845579.html?action=Gallery&ino=2, last accessed 13 August 2011). For Bristol, see the description in *The National Gazetteer of Great Britain and Ireland* (1868): 'The surface is very irregular, so that within the limits of the town, there are, as in ancient Rome, seven hills'; www.bristolviews.co.uk/views-h.htm (last accessed 13 August 2011): 'As with many English towns and cities, Bristol claims, like Rome of old, to be built on seven hills'; and the recent composition by Jolyon Laycock entitled 'Among Seven Hills – Sinfonia Concertante for Piano and Orchestra', which, though about Bath, premiered at Colston Hall, Bristol. For Edinburgh, see Anderson 1922: 136: 'Like ancient Rome, Edinburgh is now a city of seven hills', and the folded map that is *Edinburgh: Seven Hills* (1998). And for Sheffield, the BBC website, also accessed 13 August, www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/classic/A659847: 'Another feature of Sheffield is the hills. Sheffield, like Rome, is built on seven hills' and, less positively, George Orwell (diary, 3 March 1936; Orwell and Angus 1968: 91): 'I have now traversed almost the whole city. It seems to me, by daylight, one of the most appalling places I have ever seen . . . I

stratigraphy of these places is less important than their aspirations. The fact that even Cambridge, one of the flattest of England's cities, has been known to manipulate its fenland into seven 'hills' highlights how wide the gap can be between image and experience.[3] Leave the British Isles behind, and the list becomes formidable: not only Babylon and Jerusalem, but Bergen, Brussels, Budapest, Istanbul, Lisbon, Moscow, Nijmegen, Nîmes, Prague, Siena, Turku, Seattle, Somerville in Massachusetts, Rio de Janeiro, Kampala in Uganda, Amman in Jordan, Thiruvananthapuram in India . . . [4] This cannot be a coincidence. A visit to any of them reveals that their 'seven hills' are a sales-pitch rather than a reality. The currency of the seven hills goes beyond western culture to imply a universal, or at least transferable, idea of 'citiness'.[5]

This book is about Rome's role in this economy. Rome is the 'city of seven hills' par excellence. What are the names of these hills? The Palatine, Capitoline, Aventine – sites which are as central to Rome's identity and foundation history as the Cathedral peninsula is to Durham. After this, though, the list is harder to compile. Even specialists in classics founder. The modern city sprawls either side of the River Tiber, embracing the Oppian and Cispian spurs of the Esquiline hill, the Caelian, Quirinal, Viminal, the Pincian Hill and Monti Parioli to the north, Monte Mario and the Janiculum to the west, not to mention Monte Testaccio, to the south, an artificial mound made from the sherds of discarded amphorae. This already gives a total of thirteen, with such names as Monte Savello and Montecitorio adding to the confusion. Which of these 'hills' are included in the canon? What counts as a 'hill' in the first place? How and when did *seven* hills come to be

doubt whether there are any architecturally decent buildings in the town. The town is very hilly (said to be built on seven hills, like Rome) and everywhere streets of mean little houses blackened by smoke run up at sharp angles, paved with cobbles which are purposely set unevenly to give horses etc a grip. At night the hilliness creates fine effects because you look across from one hillside to the other and see the lamps twinkling like stars.' The quotation about Torquay is repeated on tens of tourist websites.

[3] Castle Hill, Pound Hill, Honey Hill, Market Hill, Peas Hill, St Andrew's Hill and Senate House Hill. Although rumours have long circulated about the existence of an early map of the city which celebrates this canon, my classics colleague, James Clackson (pers. comm.), assures me that these rumours are false, and that he is the list's inventor. To counter construction with construction, see Iman Wilkens (1991), who has suggested that Troy is in Cambridgeshire.

[4] Some websites now extend these claims to Athens: see http://wikitravel.org/en/Athens (last accessed 13 August 2011). On the question of whether ancient Roman cities ever made the claim, see Chapter 2.

[5] Thucydides (7.77.7), in a sentiment which can be traced back to the Greek lyric poet Alcaeus (fr. 22), reckoned that 'citizens make a city, not walls nor ships devoid of men', but cities remain difficult to define. See de Certeau 1984, Rodwin and Hollister 1984, Middleton 1996, Frey and Zimmer 2001, Amin and Thrift 2002, Mayernik 2003 and Reader 2004. On the city as a work of art, see Calvino 1972 and Olsen 1986, and on Rome itself, Rykwert 1976.

the magic number, and less a description of the scenery than an enviable concept?

These questions demand that we dig through the layers of Rome's geographical and historical landscape – back to its mythological foundation by Romulus. As we dig, some strata will detain us longer than others: the radical interventions made to the urban environment by Mussolini, Napoleon, Sixtus V, Aurelian, Augustus; the ways in which this environment was represented in nineteenth-century engravings, Renaissance maps and painting, late antique, Flavian and Augustan poetry, Republican prose texts . . . But, unlike most books which bring this breadth of material together, the subject of this one is not Rome and its development, but the development of an idea – Rome as a city of seven hills – and how this idea was honed and sustained to give coherence to a chaotic, growing, shifting metropolis. First celebrated in the literature of the late Republic, but with a resonance that hints at a pre-established heritage,[6] 'the seven hills' have withstood major shifts in Rome's topography, and in representational strategy, to become one of the city's chief characteristics, and one which other communities have seen fit to appropriate for themselves. How did this happen? This book tells the story of their status and celebration over time. Unlike Heiken, Funiciello and De Rita's *The Seven Hills of Rome* (2005) or ongoing projects to map the various phases of the ancient city, it is not about land formation, but canon formation; about the written-ness of urban geography.

The 'seven hills' are not the only standard-bearer of what Rome is and was. The Capitoline hill and the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus upon it have a special standing as the 'nucleus of Roman glory, the centre of the universe'.[7] Even in antiquity Livy could claim, 'Here is the Capitol, where once upon a time, upon the discovery of a human head [*caput*, from which the hill is said to take its name], it was foretold that in that place would be the head of the world and the pinnacle of power.'[8] Not all members of the canon are equal. As we shall discover, their jostling for supremacy is part of what keeps the canon a live issue. Apart from the hills – in the valley between the Caelian and Esquiline – the mighty Colosseum vies for attention as an icon of Rome's identity (Figure 1.2). In 80 CE already, the poet Martial celebrated its completion by claiming that it surpassed, or could stand for, the seven wonders of the ancient world.[9] 'Here where the venerable mass of

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[6] This statement is complicated by the related issue of Rome's 'Septimontium' to which we will return in Chapter 3.

[7] Lady Morgan 1821: 114.

[8] Livy 5.54.7: 'hic Capitolium est, ubi quondam capite humano invento responsum est eo loco caput rerum summamque imperii fore.' See also Livy 1.55.5–6.

[9] Mart. *Spect.* 1 and the discussion by Fitzgerald 2007: 38. For a possible connection between Rome's seven hills and the seven wonders, see Chapter 3.

Figure 1.2 The Colosseum, Rome.

the amphitheatre rises in full view, were Nero's lakes ... Rome is returned to herself.'[10] The Colosseum too was able to function as a metonym.

Emphasis on one hill or one building inevitably fragments the city. Hence the importance of the idea of 'the seven hills' in lending Rome integrity. It took until the 270s CE and the emperor Aurelian for the capital to be

[10] Mart. *Spect.* 2.5–6 and 11: 'hic ubi conspicui venerabilis Amphitheatri | erigitur moles, stagna Neronis erant ... reddita Roma sibi est ...'

fortified by a hefty brick and concrete boundary. Before this, Rome was effectively without defences. The built-up area of the city had long spilt over the Republican walls, out into surrounding territory: 'in other directions, it [Rome] had been secured by lofty walls or precipitous mountains, except that the spread of buildings has added many cities'.[11] The capital was in danger of having multiple personalities. Several definitions of Rome as an administrative entity applied that were not contiguous with these walls: the sacred boundary or 'pomerium', the customs boundary.[12] But in visual terms,

If someone, by looking at these suburbs, wishes to estimate the size of Rome, he will necessarily be misled and have no secure sign by which to discern up to which point, as it stretches forth, the city is still the city, and from which point it starts not to be the city any longer – to such an extent is the fabric of the city interwoven with the countryside and provides its viewers with the notion of a city stretching to infinity.[13]

The Aurelianic wall provides a commanding circumference or frame for the first time for centuries, and one which is routinely plotted on post-antique representations of the city so as to mark its limits. Renaissance artist Pirro Ligorio's map of the ancient city, first published in 1561, constitutes a good example (Figure 1.3).[14] As Hendrik Dey puts it: 'the Aurelian wall came to dominate physical and mental landscapes of the Eternal City like

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[11] Plin. *HN* 3.67: 'cetero munita erat praecelsis muris aut abruptis montibus, nisi quod exspatiantia tecta multas addidere urbes'.

[12] Excellent on the problems of definition is Haselberger 2007: 19–22. Also important is Goodman 2007: 7–38. On the 'pomerium' specifically, see also Patterson 2000.

[13] Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.13.4: καὶ εἰ μὲν εἰς ταῦτά τις ὁρῶν τὸ μέγεθος ἐξετάζειν βουλήσεται τῆς Ῥώμης, πλανᾶσθαί τ' ἀναγκασθήσεται καὶ οὐχ ἕξει βέβαιον σημεῖον οὐδέν, ᾧ διαγνώσεται, μέχρι ποῦ προβαίνουσα ἔτι πόλις ἐστὶ καὶ πόθεν ἄρχεται μηκέτ' εἶναι πόλις, οὕτω συνύφανται τὸ ἄστυ τῇ χώρᾳ καὶ εἰς ἄπειρον ἐκμηκυνομένης πόλεως ὑπόληψιν τοῖς θεωμένοις παρέχεται. Also important here are the ways in which jurists distinguished between the 'urbs' (the Servian city) and 'Rome': so P. Alfenus Varus, in the Augustan period, cited by second-century lawyer Ulpius Marcellus (*Dig.* 50.16.87): 'ut Alfenus ait, "urbs" est "Roma", quae muro cingeretur, "Roma" est etiam, qua continentia aedificia essent: nam Romam non muro tenus existimari ex consuetudine cotidiana posse intellegi, cum diceremus Romam nos ire, etiamsi extra urbem habitaremus' ('As Alfenus said, "urbs" is "Roma" which was surrounded by a wall, but "Roma" also extends as far as there are continuous buildings: for it can be understood from daily use that Rome is not considered to extend only as far as the wall, since we say that we are going to Rome, even if we live outside the urbs'). And, similarly, in the third century, Julius Paulus (*Dig.* 50.16.2).

[14] This version was made in 1570 for Braun and Hogenberg 1572–1617: 49, its caption, 'Urbis Romae Situs cum iis quae adhuc Conspiciuntur Veter. Monumet Reliquiis Pyrrho Ligorio Neap. Invent. Romae M.D.LXX'. Braun's accompanying commentary drew attention to the city's river, its gates, its seven hills and the Campus Martius.

Figure 1.3 Bird's-eye view of ancient Rome by Pirro Ligorio, as printed in Braun and Hogenberg 1572–1617. See also colour plate section.

no other manmade feature, ever'.[15] But even this wall can be breached – and not just by marauding invaders.[16] In contrast to Ligorio's image, the *Forma urbis Romae*, or Marble Plan, a map displayed in the hall, or *aula*, of the Temple of Peace from the start of the third century CE, marks neither geographical nor political boundaries and includes buildings *beyond* what will be embraced by Aurelian's perimeter.[17] Although invaluable for anyone studying urban topography, the Marble Plan is not a map as we would understand it, but a monument or exhibit, recently described as 'offering a hyper-abundance of cartographic information designed to overwhelm the viewer'.[18] Its Rome is its buildings, and its buildings are a chequerboard covering a hundred and fifty marble slabs. In recording the ground plans of

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[15] Dey 2011: 279. Dey is now the standard work on the wall and its impact on the city. Particularly relevant here are pp. 160–95.

[16] Note, however, Dey 2011: 135–7 on the wall's extraordinary effectiveness, at least according to the literary sources.

[17] Goodman 2007: 33–4.

[18] Trimble 2007: 378 in a piece which examines the plan's visual function in its original viewing context in the temple. Also relevant here is Favro 2006: 38: 'The largely illegible individual components shown on the map collectively projected the scale and grandeur of the city, but not its specificity. Alive and always growing, representing time and place, Rome was too complex, too grand for human observers to grasp. The aniconic image of the Forma Urbis

these buildings, this monument achieves in cumulative surface detail what Pliny achieves with the idea of elevation: 'if someone were to add the height of the buildings, he would certainly come up with a worthy estimate and would admit that the magnitude of no other city in the whole world could be compared to it [i.e. to Rome]'.[19]

For Pliny and the Marble Plan, the power of Rome lies in its capacity to spread onwards and upwards, to dominate the landscape, the world even – imperial expansion as expansiveness and order. It is an image of dominion which is of a piece with Roman expertise in road building and in controlling water (whether in bringing fundamental supplies along aqueducts or exploiting its sound and reflections to enliven a grotto or villa-garden). And it is very much an imperial vision, which can potentially accommodate similar *fora*, amphitheatres and bathhouses springing up throughout the provinces. These structures are an obvious part of what made settlements Roman. But what of Rome's natural landscape – the rustic Rome of Evander that these technologies adapted; the geology that made this part of Italy perfect for a city in the first place? What of the seven hills and the valleys between them? The Tiber is the only natural feature to be represented on the Marble Plan, and this, a gap or negative area left by the buildings.

The Marble Plan's decision not to represent the hills does not militate against their importance as an image of Rome in antiquity. As we shall discover, public, and it seems private, art was reticent about representing precise geographical features,[20] preferring to personify Rome and its elements, for example, the Tiber and the Campus Martius (see Figure 5.6 on p. 128).[21] More than this, depictions of *conquered* cities were particularly favoured. None of this detracts from the prolific presence of the seven hills in Latin poetry, or from their prominence in Rome's reception history. If anything, it better explains their function – not as territory but as concept, and one which exceeded the certainties of the Augustan or Flavian landscape, the physical appearance of the city such as one would plot by tracing its wall or measuring its buildings. If 'the seven hills' did reference real

Romae was an artefact of the capital's pictorial inconceivability.' For more compendious coverage, see Rodríguez-Almeida 1981 and, for a broader context, 2002, with the review by Najbjerg and Trimble 2004, as well as the Stanford Digital *Forma Urbis* Project (http://formaurbis.stanford.edu/), and the survey on the scholarship by Najbjerg and Trimble 2005.

[19] Plin. *HN* 3.67: 'quod si quis altitudinem tectorum addat, dignam profecto aestimationem concipiat fateaturque nullius urbis magnitudinem in toto orbe potuisse ei comparari'.

[20] For images of cities in Roman painting, see Pappalardo and Capuano 2006, and Goodman 2007: 28–36.

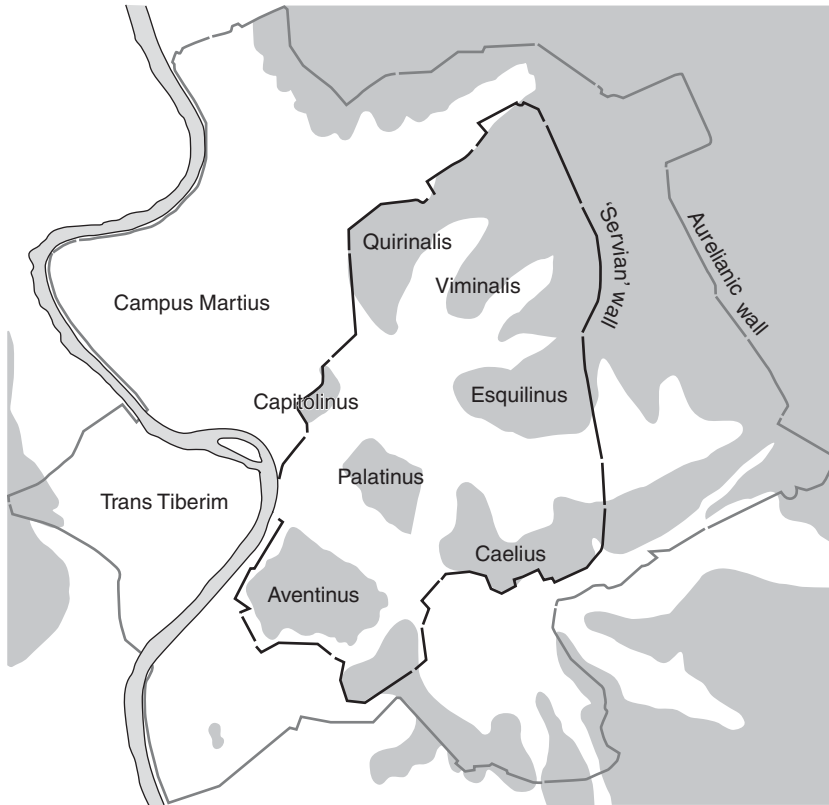[21] *LIMC s.v.* 'Campus Martius' and 'Tiberis, Tiberinus'.

Figure 1.4 The canonical seven hills inside the 'Servian' and Aurelianic wall.

topography, it was that of the sixth-century BCE city, contained within the wall attributed to the early king, Servius Tullius. And we shall be pursuing this possibility in more detail later. But, for all that the canonical seven – the Aventine, Caelian, Capitoline, Esquiline, Palatine, Quirinal and Viminal, as it turns out – were included in its circumference, Servius and his urban reforms are as legendary as Durham's milkmaid (Figure 1.4).

When in 7 BCE the first emperor, Augustus, took the sprawling metropolis by the scruff of the neck, organizing it into fourteen regions which formally recognized the extra-mural settlement as part of Rome, the Servian city was officially engulfed.[22] The Campus Martius, the low-lying plain in the bend of the river beyond the walls, was key to this development. Greek author Strabo, writing under Augustus, observes: 'for the size of the Campus Martius is wondrous'. Such is the intensity of the buildings there that 'they seem to

[22] See Sablayrolles 1981, Frézouls 1987, Coarelli 1988, Favro 2005 and Haselberger 2007.

render the rest of the city incidental'.[23] The focus of urban activity had shifted. From this moment, if not before, Rome's status as a city of seven hills was symbolic.

Given this symbolism, what reason was there for Rome's reluctance to personify its hills – especially when the Campus Martius was bodied forth as a strong young man and the Tiber depicted as a reclining, bearded male? The hills of other localities were personified in Greek literature from the fifth century BCE and are sometimes seen in the visual record.[24] For Rome, though, it is the sense of *seven* hills that is crucial. As is the case with each of the porphyry 'tetrarchs' that now grace the sea-facing corner of the south façade of the Basilica of San Marco in Venice (Figure 1.5), to give the hills individualized, charismatic bodies would have been to arm them with sufficient might to compete with one another for supremacy.[25] Jostling for position in the literary record is one thing – it reinforces the canon by making cohesion and membership something worth contesting. But visually, this competition risks fracturing the canon's unity: it gives each member attributes which refer to specific divinities, landmarks, legendary rivalries. Even after Rome's early hilltop settlements had come together as one community, hills had their own identities, with the Aventine, for example, associated in the fifth century BCE with the *plebs*, or poorest inhabitants, in their conflict with the patricians.[26] Personification would give these hills character traits, their own relationship to the river and place in history. Collectively, they could be more amorphous, a-temporal, before time even. They could bring the Rome of Augustus and heirs into dialogue with the Romes of Servius Tullius and of mythical founder, Romulus.

The chapters that follow trace exactly how this dialogue develops. Under Augustus already, the idea of the seven hills enabled the city to enjoy an established identity, a space to occupy which transcended the changes that were happening on the ground. Inevitably, ongoing urban development, including the removal of large mounds of earth to make way for buildings, and raised ground levels elsewhere in Rome led to further changes in the physical fabric, which made the relationship of 'the seven hills' to the land more pressing. It is hardly surprising that by late antiquity, with Old Saint Peter's rivalling the Capitoline as Rome's nucleus, the hills to the west of the river often appear in the canon: for example, the appendices to the late antique regionary catalogues, the *Curiosum* and *Notitia*, substitute the

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[23] Strabo 5.3.8: καὶ γὰρ τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ πεδίου θαυμαστόν . . . ὡς πάρεργον ἂν δόξαιεν ἀποφαίνειν τὴν ἄλλην πόλιν, and Coarelli 1997.

[24] *LIMC* supplementum, *s.v.* 'montes'. Also relevant here is Buxton 2009.

[25] See Bergmann 1977: 163–79; Rees 1993; and Smith 1997: 179–83.

[26] Cornell 1995: 242–71.