

# Sacred Landscape in Early Rome.

## Preliminary Notes on the Relationship between Space, Religious Beliefs and Urbanisation

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**Abstract:** The relationship between strategies of territorial occupation and religious beliefs has been of great importance for ancient urbanisation, particularly during the early stages of the process. Strategies adopted during this more or less long period responded not only to economic considerations and functionality, but also to complex systems of religious beliefs, developed in correlation with the surrounding landscape. The position of public buildings, above all those of a sacred and/or sacred-political character, was never casual and has played an important role in creating a sacred-ritual landscape, a *fil rouge* which through processions and other forms of interaction connected different parts of a city.

With a specific regard to the city of Rome, this preliminary study highlights the formation of a sacred landscape at the beginning of the urbanisation process, between the end of the Iron Age and the Orientalising period.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The urbanisation processes that took place in the western part of the ancient Mediterranean world depended on a variety of diversified factors.<sup>2</sup> Between the final period of the Bronze Age and the early phases of the Iron Age, the Tyrrhenian region of the Italian peninsula experienced a series of long-lasting processes,<sup>3</sup> which resulted in the formation of large proto-urban centres – politically unified communities – located on large plateaus previously occupied by a series of villages.<sup>4</sup> By taking this development as a starting point, with a particular attention paid to the Orientalising period, one may

note a progressive consolidation of the socio-political and sacred structure of these centres, a clear indication of the acquisition of the urban form,<sup>5</sup> i.e. more complex entities which may be defined as cities.

Starting from Fustel de Coulanges, researchers from different research areas have provided various definitions of what constitutes a city. Sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, historians of religions and economic development, archaeologists, etc. have tackled the issue from different angles and reached divergent conclusions.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, one may assume that a fundamental prerequisite for urban

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<sup>1</sup> The analysis of the dynamics that determined the establishment of the sacred within the urbanisation process of Rome is the main theme of the author's doctoral project.

<sup>2</sup> For a complete synthesis see Osborne – Cunliffe 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Pacciarelli 2001; Barbaro 2010; Pacciarelli 2009, 390–395; and Marino 2015, with references.

<sup>4</sup> About the reasons for this crucial change see Marino 2015, 100–103, with references.

<sup>5</sup> On the south Etruscan context cf. Marino 2015, 108–119; for Rome see Torelli 1989, Smith 2005, with references and Carafa 2014. On the formation of a new political structure promoted by aristocratic groups see Motta – Terrenato 2006, Terrenato 2011.

<sup>6</sup> An excellent summary of current research is the recent third volume of *The Cambridge World History* (Yoffee 2015), in which see in particular Yoffee – Terrenato 2015, with references.

development is a close interaction between political, religious and social factors,<sup>7</sup> and how this conjunction has become associated with a specific topography. In an effort to clarify the relation between man, landscape and religious beliefs, I intend to emphasize how the creation of a sacred landscape has influenced early Roman urbanisation. This involves the application of a multidisciplinary approach, a combination of anthropological, historic-religious and archaeological insights.

### The city and its spaces – places

In the recent past, phenomena such as globalisation and the development of communications have contributed to a breakdown of distances, causing a progressive and inexorable shrinking of the planet and, consequently, a redefinition of the concept of space.<sup>8</sup> Space is relative and varies according to the cultural context it is referring to. In order to avoid excessive specifications, researchers tend to distinguish space from place. From an anthropological point of view, “space” is simply a topographically limited area, defined by visible shapes and features, while a “place” is defined as space transformed by human interference – it has become culturally animated.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, place may be defined as

- *identitary*, since it defines the identity of the individuals who inhabit it;

- *relational*, as it constitutes an area of social relationship in which members of a particular group live and interact;
- *historical*, since it is being shaped and transformed over time.

A place indicates the relationship individuals maintain amongst themselves, with other human beings and with a shared, common past.<sup>10</sup> The concept of place is thus related to culture, which in its tangible aspect may be said to be constituted by ‘*incisioni, tagli, pressioni, abbattimenti, scavi, perforazioni*’ (incisions, cuts, pressures, abatements, excavations, perforations), which concern humans and their behaviour and the places they inhabit.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, a distinction can be made between a profane and a sacred place. A sacred place may thus be considered from an:

- (A) *autonomist perspective*,<sup>12</sup> meaning that the sacred place is not connected to any specific, social context, thus becoming self-sufficient and trans-historical;
- (B) *non-autonomist perspective*,<sup>13</sup> i.e. the sacred place is a result of the *sacralisation* of a specific space, meaning that it is delimited, explained and venerated by humans;
  - (B<sub>1</sub>), the sacred place may be considered as an illusion that

<sup>7</sup> Such factors have been identified by different researchers, e.g. Ampolo 1980, who refers to the definition of a city provided by ancient authors as well as to the first modern attempt to define the issue, i.e. Fustel de Coulanges. In his work *La Cité Antique* (1864), the French historian stressed the idea that family structures and religious beliefs related to the ancestor cult were fundamental elements for the development of an ancient city. Starting from this situation more or less extended family groups began to elaborate the idea of private property to meet the need of burial grounds for their dead. According to de Coulanges ancestral cults were probably officiated by an adult male invested with religious leadership. This basic structure was eventually adopted on a larger scale, allowing for the formation of larger settlement entities, i.e. cities where the role and functions of a high priest were assumed by a king. A re-examination of de Coulanges’s

theories has been made by C. Ampolo (Ampolo 1980), and by N. Terrenato in Yoffee - Terrenato 2015, 6–10. For a critical analysis of de Coulanges’s model see also Momigliano 1984, as well as Finley 1977 and Morris 1990.

<sup>8</sup> Augé 2007.

<sup>9</sup> See De Sanctis 2014, 143–146. Concerning the opposition between place and space, and how a ritual space is established see De Certeau 2001, 151 and 176–177.

<sup>10</sup> Augé 1993, 43–69.

<sup>11</sup> Remotti 1993, 47–48.

<sup>12</sup> Researchers referring to this perspective are for example R. Hertz, J. Cassier, G. Van der Leeuw, M. Eliade, M. Nilsson.

<sup>13</sup> Researchers referring to this perspective are for example W. Robertson Smith, E. Durkheim, M. Halbwachs, C. Geertz, F. Remotti, and I. Malkin.

has been rationalized through scientific analysis;

- (B<sub>2</sub>), the sacred place is an illusion, which has become endowed with social consistency, thus assuming a great importance in the lives of individuals and of the society in which they live.

Scholars generally refer to perspective A by stating that a sacred place is not designated by humans, only discovered by them.<sup>14</sup> However, such a sacred place has certain features, topographic or otherwise, which connote it as such.

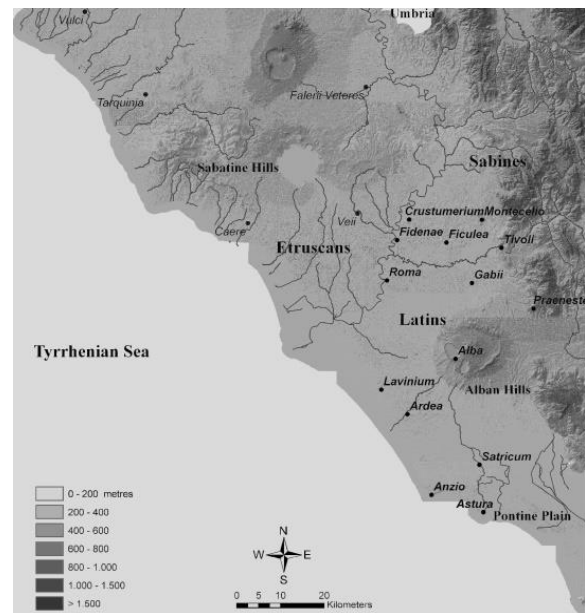
Scholars referring to perspective B affirm that a sacred place is created by humans and therefore a cultural product. For members of a specific social group a sacred place thus becomes a collective expression of their society. They need to believe in, and more specifically, localise specific beliefs that produce a spatial organisation that, according to E. Durkheim, corresponds to their social organisation.<sup>15</sup> A further development of this assumption was made by M. Halbwachs, who explained a sacred place by using the *cadres sociaux* theory,<sup>16</sup> describing how visible and lasting features of a such a place tend to secure the permanence of the collective memory of a social group. Accordingly, it is the durability of sacred places which contributes to preserving memory and tradition. Greek colonies of the Western Mediterranean apparently established sacred areas as signs of their permanence, something that appears to be demonstrated by the fact that several such places have been localised within areas previously destined for private housing.<sup>17</sup> With regard to sacred places it is important to establish dynamics defining them as such. Were they discovered and defined as natural abodes of divine presence, or were certain areas deliberately

established as, or transformed into sacred places? Or did the process combine both notions/strategies?

In accordance with the perspective B<sub>2</sub> mentioned above, a bilateral relationship apparently exists between the characteristics of a certain area and the religious beliefs that eventually were attached to it. The construction of a given building in a specific place transforms it into a defied space and may furthermore be considered as the ultimate result of the veneration of a locality that previously functioned as a place of interaction with the divine.<sup>18</sup>

### The urbanisation of Rome: archaeological research and theories

The identification and construction of sacred places within a specific part of a city, or a landscape, especially in the ancient world, involved several, different factors. Due to the availability of various sources an endeavour to determine some of these factors may be done while investigating the urbanisation process of Rome and



**Fig. 1: Map of southern Etruria and Latium Vetus** (after Fulminante – Stoddart 2010, 12 fig. 1).

<sup>14</sup> Eliade 2001, 334–335, adhering to the theories of G. Van Der Leeuw.

<sup>15</sup> Durkheim 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Halbwachs 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Malkin 1987.

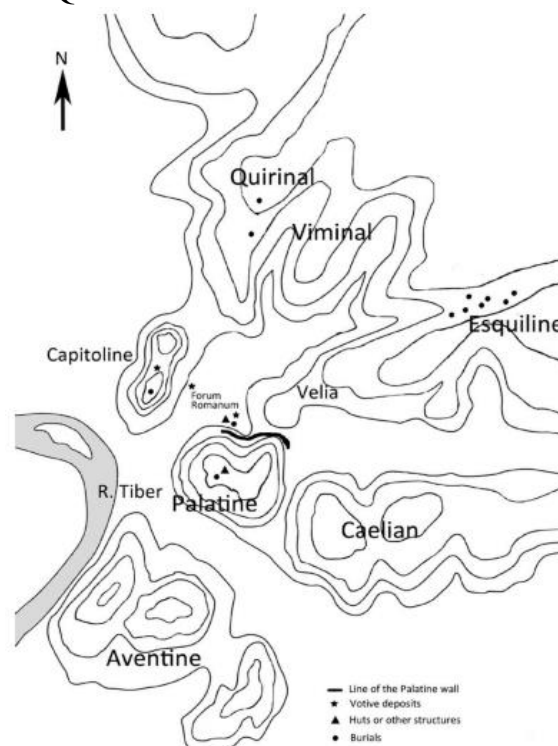
<sup>18</sup> De Sanctis 2014, 150-151, also for a perfect summary of the perspectives mentioned above.

the territorial context of central Tyrrhenian Italy.<sup>19</sup> (fig. 1)

Two main theories have so far dominated research into the origins of Rome's urbanisation. The *exogenous* theory considers the Palatine Hill to be the first inhabited nucleus which, through a linear process, gradually included the seven Roman hills. By the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE this process is assumed to have resulted in the formation of a city, which through influences from Greek culture developed into a fairly advanced political entity. Initially introduced by M. Pallottino,<sup>20</sup> this theory was soon accepted by many scholars.<sup>21</sup>

The *endogenous* theory considers the Palatine Hill to be part of a larger original settlement which, through the juridical-sacral acts connected to it, becomes a city. The first exponent of this theory was H. Müller Karpe, who suggested that Rome's urbanisation process was already completed by the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE;<sup>22</sup> R. Peroni<sup>23</sup> and G. Colonna,<sup>24</sup> who also refer to this theory, assumed that Rome became a city after the assimilation of two independent settlements that previously existed on the Palatine and Quirinal hills. These two researchers assumed that the formation of the city can be dated to the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. G. Colonna has reconstructed the urbanisation process in different steps: by the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE the inhabited areas of the Palatine and *Velia* had extended, including the *Fagutal*, *Oppio* and *Cispio* mountains. At the same time an independent settlement system had developed at Capitoline and Quirinal hills, called *collino*. These two distinct areas merged gradually, something that is evidenced by the common renunciation of the future area of the *Forum* as a burial ground. From

that period onwards, new burial grounds emerged on the Esquiline and at the edges of the Quirinal hills.



**Fig. 2: Rome, schematic map with key areas of development by late 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE** (after Lomas 2017, fig. 7).

At the same time, constructions began on the slopes of the Palatine and Capitoline hills, as well as in the valley between them. (fig. 2).

In the early stages of this gradual and long-lasting process, as well as in other areas of southern *Etruria*<sup>25</sup> and *Latium Vetus*,<sup>26</sup> graves of adults were removed from residential areas, while infant burials seem to have remained. Infant burials have been discovered in the area of the *Regia*<sup>27</sup> and of the *Domus regis Sacrorum*,<sup>28</sup> within huts in villages on Caesar's *Forum* and in the area of the temple of *Antoninus* and *Faustina*, as well as in villages located on the Palatine and the Capitoline hills.<sup>29</sup> The process was finished during the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup>

<sup>19</sup> For a complete synthesis cf. Fulminante 2014. See also Fulminante – Stoddart 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Pallottino 1960.

<sup>21</sup> Ampolo 2013, with references.

<sup>22</sup> Müller Karpe 1959; Müller Karpe 1962.

<sup>23</sup> Peroni 1960.

<sup>24</sup> Colonna 1964; Colonna 1974; Colonna 1976.

<sup>25</sup> Bartoloni – Benedettini 2008.

<sup>26</sup> De Santis – Fenelli – Salvadei 2008.

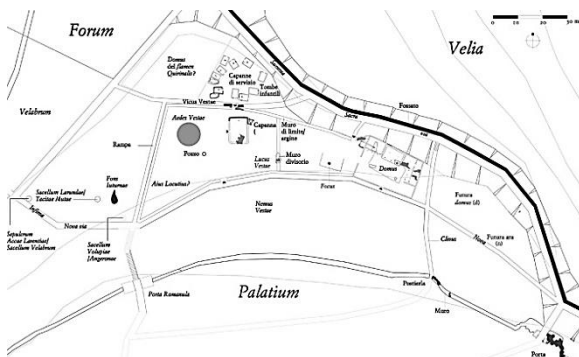
<sup>27</sup> Cf. Brocato 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Filippi 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Gusberti 2008.

century BCE; shortly after that the area of the *Forum* was paved and between the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, sacred and political buildings were erected, which was of crucial importance for the completion of the urban complex. All adherents to the *endogenous* theory trace the early stages of the urbanisation process of Rome and, thanks to a reconstruction made first by G. Colonna,<sup>30</sup> of the central Tyrrhenian Italy, back to the crucial passage from Bronze Age villages to the proto-urban centres of the Iron Age.<sup>31</sup>

The debate regarding the urban formation of Rome has involved several generations of researchers and continues in the light of recent discoveries.<sup>32</sup> Still on-going archaeological investigations along the North Slope of the Palatine (between *Porta Romanula* and *Clivo Palatino*) (fig. 3), initiated by the team of A. Carandini in the 1980s, have revealed new data which is highly relevant for any discussion concerning the issue.<sup>33</sup>



**Fig. 3: Rome, Forum – Palatium between Porta Romanula and Clivo Palatino** (after Carafa – Bruno 2013, 726 fig. 4).

Of particular interest are:

- the remains of a wall and a door located on the northern slopes of the Palatine,<sup>34</sup> which on

several occasions have been renovated between the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> and the third quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. These structures have been related to rituals concerning the *inauguratio* of the Palatine Hill. In close association with them are different burials interpreted as sacrifices connected with several types of rituals. Related to the walls and the door is a road of crumbled tufa and pebbles;

- the remains of two walls in raw clay found in the area of the sanctuary of *Vesta*<sup>35</sup> have been stratigraphically dated to the third quarter of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, preserving the same orientation even during subsequent renovations. Of these walls, one has been interpreted as constituting the outer boundary of the first sanctuary, while the other appears to be part of a 60 m<sup>2</sup> hut, which has been interpreted as the first residence of the Vestals;

- a rectangular building located to the east of the Vestal hut,<sup>36</sup> which has been rebuilt several times from the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. This building has been interpreted as a royal residence and a place for common meals. In connection with reconstruction activities, infant burials within *dolia* have been found, something that may indicate ritual activities connected to the recurrent changes of the structures;

- a sanctuary in *Summa Sacra Via*,<sup>37</sup> of which the first phase dates back to the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, was discovered in an area previously occupied by structures referable to an Iron Age village.

<sup>30</sup> Colonna 1974.

<sup>31</sup> See the introduction of this paper. For an exhaustive discussion on the topic cf. Marino 2015.

<sup>32</sup> The first comprehensive picture of the ruins of archaic Rome dates back to a little over a century ago and is due to G. Pinza, who at that time proposed that the city of Rome was the result of a process that involved distinct settlements: Pinza 1905. More recent exhaustive syntheses, with different points of view and

goals, are Holloway 1994; Cornell 1995, Forsythe 2005, and Lomas 2017. Cf. also Coarelli 1983 and Hopkins 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Carandini – Carafa – D’Alessio – Filippi 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Carandini – Carafa 2000.

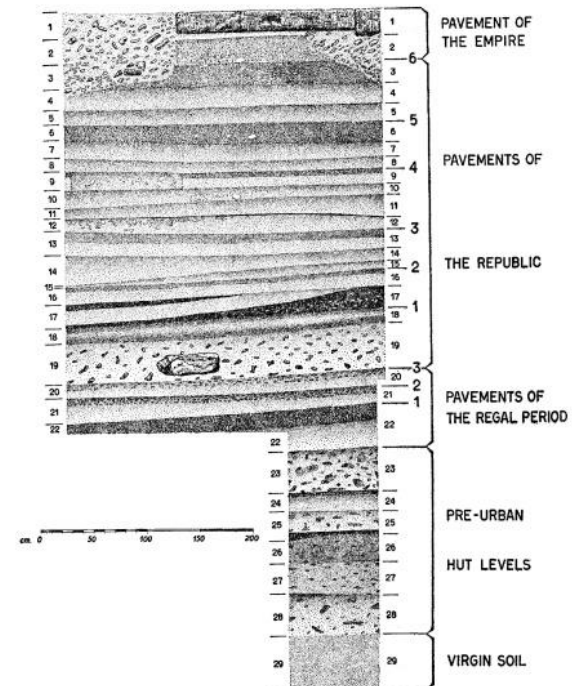
<sup>35</sup> For a complete edition of the excavation activities see Arvanitis 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Filippi 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Carafa – Arvanitis – Ippoliti 2013.

In addition to this new and important data, a complete review of some monuments and/or key contexts of the city was carried out. One of the most significant findings is documented on the western summit of the Palatine, the *Cermalus*. A large hut, dating back to the early Iron Age, was replaced by two smaller huts at around the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Soon afterwards one of the huts was transformed into a larger hut with two rooms. On the basis of literary tradition, one of these structures has been interpreted as the *Casa-aedes Romuli* and the other as the seat of the cult of *Mars* and *Ops*.<sup>38</sup> Of great importance is also data related to refurbishment works in the area of the future *Forum*. Reviews of the stratigraphic sequence of the Boni – Gjerstad excavation have allowed for the documentation of the presence of a pebble floor dating back to the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, well before what until now has been considered to be the first floor of the area.<sup>39</sup> More specifically the context consists of a considerable earth discharge of tufa and gravel flakes (layers 25-28 of the Boni – Gjerstad excavation) and another layer with a surface made by *ciottoli* (layer 24). These interventions were probably intended to be a first attempt to solve, at least temporarily, the problem of frequent flooding of the Tiber by raising the level of the area with about 1.40 m, also functioning as the first paving of the *Forum* (fig. 4).

The most ancient layers of the *Comitium*<sup>40</sup> have also been dated to the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE;<sup>41</sup> the same date has been given to some artefacts found in the annexed stipe, perhaps connected to the cult of *Vulcan*. Other important findings connected with the most ancient phases of Rome's urbanisation have been



**Fig. 4: Stratigraphic section of Boni – Gjerstad excavation in the *Forum Romanum*** (after Gjerstad 1952, 61 fig. 1).

obtained during excavations in the area of the *Curiae Veteres*,<sup>42</sup> along the north-eastern slopes of the Palatine. The documented structures cover a period from the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE to the late-antique period. However, findings and ritual activities make it possible to establish a first sacred frequentation of the area by the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. A fragment of a ring-shaped *kernos*<sup>43</sup> made in *impasto bruno*, unparalleled among Roman findings, indicates that such ritual activities were already taking place during such an ancient period (fig. 5).

<sup>38</sup> For the entire context cf. Brocato 2000, 284–287.

<sup>39</sup> For a stratigraphical reexamination see Filippi 2005.

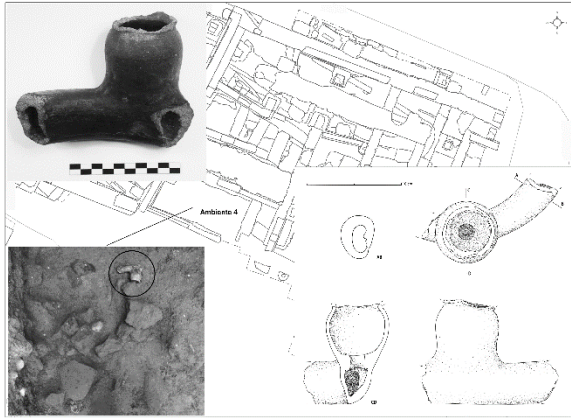
<sup>40</sup> Carafa 1998; Carafa 2005, and Carafa 2017, where are summarized the recent discoveries.

<sup>41</sup> Specifically a hearth and a pavement delimited by a wall made of red tuff splinters. Structures dating back to the Latial period IIIB period, and two other reconstructions of the same paving connected to remains of steps, the latter structures dating back to the Latial

period IVA: Carafa 2017, 54–55. This increase in the chronology of the *Comitium* has been recently accepted by M. Torelli, who emphasizes that some ritual performances dating back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE are in perfect analogy with the function of the *Comitium* of historical age, as place for penal *iudicia*: Torelli 2008, 69–72.

<sup>42</sup> Panella – Zeggio 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Panella – Zeggio 2017, 349–352.

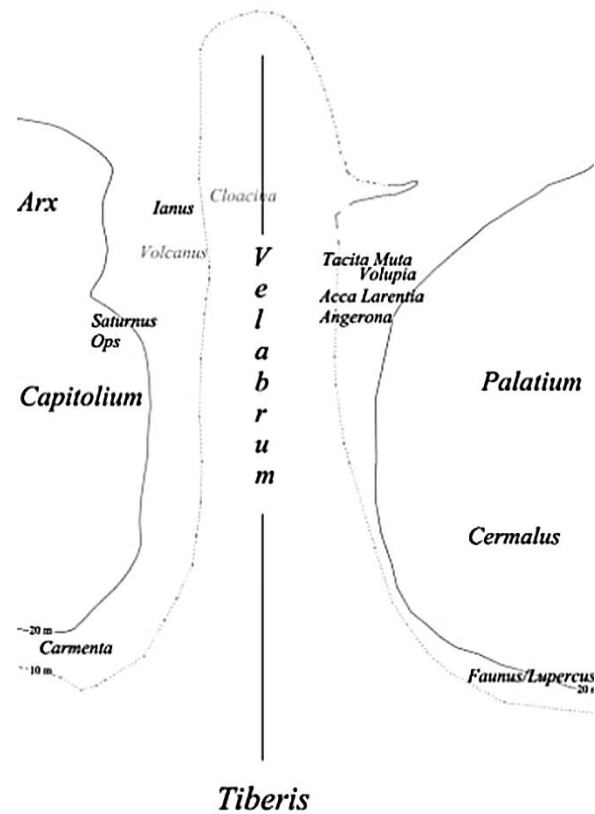


**Fig. 5: Rome, Curiae Veteres – Area II: fragment of a ring-shaped kernos** (after Panella – Zeggio 2017, 352 fig. 8).

Other interesting data concern the road network. Several beaten roads have been found, indicating a route leading to the *Forum* area as early as by the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>44</sup> Significantly, even the votive deposit of the *Promoteca Capitolina* on the Capitoline hill refers to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE;<sup>45</sup> this deposit has been interpreted as being connected to rituals carried out as part of the *inauguratio* of a sacred building, maybe that of *Jupiter Feretrius*.<sup>46</sup> Another important votive deposit is the one found on the Quirinal hill,<sup>47</sup> dating back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE and possibly related to a structure recently found nearby.<sup>48</sup>

New data has been obtained through geomorphological studies. Recent investigations in the area of the Velabro have revealed that during the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE the entire area was not a swamp, something that had generally been assumed. It was only a limited part of the area that had been marshy.<sup>49</sup> More specifically, stagnant waters have certainly been documented at the south-western corner of the Palatine, under the *Lupercal* (*Faunus/Lupercus*), and perhaps in the northwest corner, also in topographical continuity with the Palatine hill, where several liminal deities were located since the proto-urban

phase (*Tacita Muta, Acca Larentia*).<sup>50</sup> The presence of the cult of *Janus* near the brook could be an indication that the Velabro separated two settlements systems, the *collino* and the *montano*.<sup>51</sup> (fig. 6).



**Fig. 6: Topographical scheme of the cults of the Velabro** (after Filippi 2005, 97, fig. 2).

Lastly, waiting for unequivocal archaeological data, it is necessary to remember what literary sources refer to some ancient cults. Interesting observations have been made regarding the position of the *Ara Saturni* and of the *Ara Carmentis*: these *arae* were both located to the slopes of the Capitoline hill, and have been related to the proto-urban settlement located on

<sup>44</sup> Zeggio 2013, 27.

<sup>45</sup> Gusberti 2005, 153.

<sup>46</sup> Carafa 2000, 69; contra Ampolo 1988, 158.

<sup>47</sup> Magagnini 2005, with references.

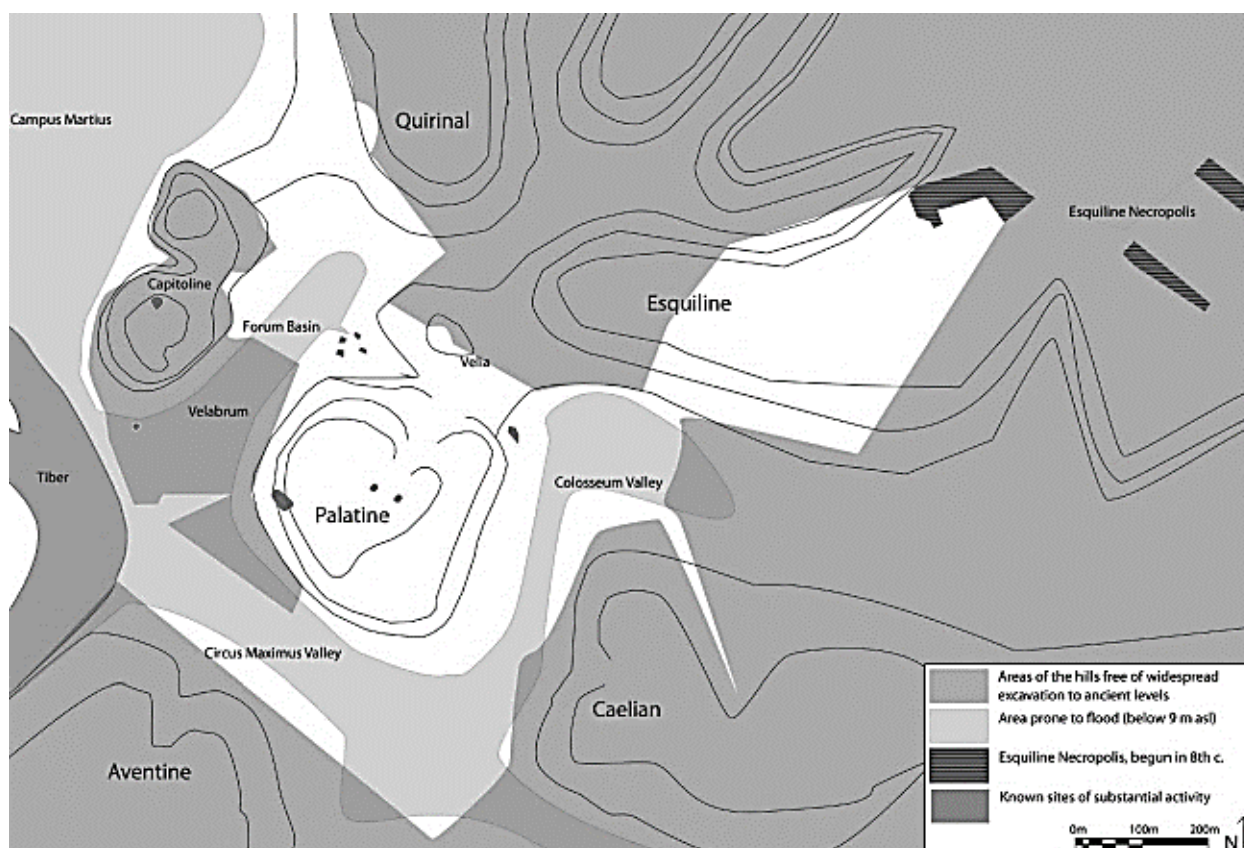
<sup>48</sup> Arizza 2015, 67–68.

<sup>49</sup> Ammermann – Filippi 2004, 14–19; Filippi 2005, 94–96.

<sup>50</sup> On the meaning of the swampy north-western corner of the Velabro see Filippi 2005, 96–99.

<sup>51</sup> Filippi 2005, 96–98.





**Fig. 7: Rome, schematic map with key areas of development by middle 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE** (author after Hopkins 2016, 29 fig. 7).

the nearby hill.<sup>52</sup> The *Ara of Acca Larentia*, located at the north-western slopes of the Palatine hill, has likewise been connected to the proto-urban settlement on the nearby hill.<sup>53</sup> While taking into consideration these cults, as well as those of the *Ara Maxima Herculis* at the *Forum Boarium*, the *Ara Consi* in Circo Maximo and the *Ara Evandri* at the south-western slopes of the Aventine, it may be assumed that during the immediately following urban phase they constituted a system of cults related to the distinction between the urban area and the surrounding agricultural context.<sup>54</sup> As already stated, almost all these examples are documented only

by literary sources; nevertheless they have to be kept in due consideration.

### Crucial urban features

Considering the archaeological features mentioned above it is easy to understand that recent data are of fundamental importance for a better understanding of the urbanisation of Rome.<sup>55</sup> In fact, all features date back to between the mid-8<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and document the development of an urban formation process already during this period.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, archaeological data co-

<sup>52</sup> Mazzei 2005, 69.

<sup>53</sup> Aronen 1989, 80–82.

<sup>54</sup> Rodriguez Almeida 1991, 44; see also Mazzei 2005, 67–73.

<sup>55</sup> Recent excavations have interested the *Comitium* (still unpublished they were presented at the conference “Il Comizio dei Re”, held at the British School of Rome, on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017), the area of the *Curiae Veteres* (Panella – Zeggio 2017), as well as the sacred area of *S. Omobono* in the ancient *Forum Boarium*

(Diffendale *et al.* 2016, Brocato 2017), the Capitoline hill (Cazzella 2001), and the Quirinal hill (Arizza – Serlorenzi 2015). Important results have been obtained with a series of geological surveys carried out more or less recently at different points in the *Forum Valley* (Ammermann – Filippi 2004) and in the *Forum Boarium* (Brock – Terrenato 2016).

<sup>56</sup> For a complete reexamination of these data and of the entire debate on the urban formation of Rome see Carafa 2014. See also Terrenato 2011 and Cifani 2014.



incide with what is already known from literary-mythological sources.<sup>57</sup>

Accordingly, it is already now possible to substantiate in more detail than before the ‘complexity and development around the *Forum*, Palatine and Capitoline’<sup>58</sup> and present ‘evidence of political authority, communal cult activity, and the organization of public space.’<sup>59</sup> (**fig. 7**).

The process can be summarized as follows:

- sectors destroyed and replaced by new and different features (the Palatine);
- new structures emerged within spaces with a not particularly dense or a completely absent previous occupation (the area between Palatine and Capitoline);
- not much change occurs compared to previous periods (different sectors);
- areas featuring a special status (on the top of the Capitoline).

Apart from the particular situation of the Capitoline hill (cults places, production workshops, private housing), two general trends may be detected. Thanks to the recent excavations, we are now able to find areas with no continuity to what was previously attested, as well as areas where no change has been detected. P. Carafa has interpreted the first group as an indication of changes connected with the foundation/formation of the city, while discoveries connected with the other group may be considered as individual cases and may be interpreted within a more general framework.<sup>60</sup> C. Ampolo has considered the second group to indications of a delay in the completion of an urban formation

process, which was finalized by the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>61</sup>

Differences cannot be random, they may rather be indications of well-defined strategies for the organization and definition of space, private and above all public. Features dating back from the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> to the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE are of crucial importance:

- reorganization of the *Forum* valley which now includes interconnected sacred (*Vesta* sanctuary, *Volcanal*) and socio/political buildings (*Domus Regia*, *Comitium*);
- *inauguratio* of the Palatine Hill (wall), with the subsequent creation of a well-defined path around it, probably related to the *Lupercii* procession;<sup>62</sup>
- Capitoline Hill to be understood as a place with an increased sacred *status*, the principal seat of the city’s political cults (*Iupiter Fere-trius*);
- new development documented in the *Velabro* area (several chthonic cults);
- new configuration of the *Forum Boarium*, indicating a continuity with already more ancient commercial activities and cults related to them (*Carmenta*, *Ara Maxima Herculis*);
- continuity documented in other areas, which still are used as private spaces (Caesar’s *Forum*);
- discontinuity documented on the Esquiline Hill (new burial grounds);
- existence of different paths connecting all territorial sectors.<sup>63</sup>

Since this evidence involves a wider territorial context it must also be linked to changes of the political/institutional situation.<sup>64</sup> These

<sup>57</sup> Carandini 2006a; Carandini 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Smith 2012, 22.

<sup>59</sup> Cornell 2012, 20.

<sup>60</sup> Carafa 2014, 323–324.

<sup>61</sup> The continuity of use detected in some sectors such as the area where the *Forum* of Caesar eventually will be established and of the *Giardino Romano* on the Capitoline hill indicates a process constituted by different phases and in different districts of the inhabited area, cf. Ampolo 2013. Within both sectors, settlements are documented starting from the recent Bronze

Age: for the excavation at the Caesar’s *Forum* see De Santis *et al.* 2010, for those at the *Giardino Romano* see Cazzella 2001.

<sup>62</sup> For a re-examination of the *Lupercii* procession see Vuković 2017.

<sup>63</sup> On the ritual processions in archaic Rome see Coarelli 2005, with references. For a recent re-examination of the Argei procession see now Palombi 2017.

<sup>64</sup> On the ability of the Roman aristocratic groups to control a considerable amount of land see Terrenato 2011, 233–234.

characteristics could suggest the presence of a centralized authority, able to define territorial sectors of an entity that is no longer rural but may be considered as urban, i.e. a united, politically controlled entity.<sup>65</sup>

### Unusual territorial context – well defined sacred landscape

The geomorphological characteristics of the territory provide a better understanding of the efforts made at this stage.

The environmental context of Rome is quite unique if compared to that of other cities in central Tyrrhenian Italy. Rome does not occupy a vast and naturally defended plateau, but developed on several hills, separated by valleys affected by seasonal flooding.<sup>66</sup> During the late Bronze Age and still during the Iron Age these natural characteristics were elements of a separation between the two villages *montano* and *collino*.<sup>67</sup> As stated above, in the proto-urban phase both villages demarcated their borders through the establishment of sacred places, i.e. *arae*, usually located on the extreme slopes of the hills. These sacred places can be understood as not only delimitations, but also as mediation zones.<sup>68</sup> More specifically, the valley between the two villages, used as a burial ground until the end of period IIA of the Latial culture (mid-9<sup>th</sup> century BCE), gained importance during the following urban phase, starting from the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The abandonment of the funerary use of this area indicated the first step of a gradual process that transformed the valley into an important connecting sphere, i.e. the *Forum*. This district flanked by the Palatine and the Capitoline hills became an area in which political and religious spheres became explicit. Accordingly, Roman culture has been defined as a context where: *‘il sacro primeggia*

*sul politico, lo precede e lo fonda, tracciando la forma in cui il “politico” si dischiude’* (the sacred prevails over the political, precedes and founds it, tracing the form in which the “political” opens up).<sup>69</sup> Buildings such as the *Comitium*, with the related cult of *Vulcan*, the *Domus Regia*, and the sanctuary of *Vesta* are representative examples of this typical Roman way of thinking.

As far as the Velabro, it is easy to understand its role of hinge element between the *Forum* and the fort by the Tiber,<sup>70</sup> more specifically the *Forum Boarium*. Through the development of this area, we may recognize a political program aimed at creating a large-scale, sacred entity. The foreign cult of *Herculis* at the *Ara Maxima*, located within a nearby extra-urban position, more precisely in an area connected with the mythical tale of *Herculis* and *Caco*, allows us to document a new feature of the use of space. In continuity with the ancient commercial vocation, the area between the ford and the north-western slopes of the Aventine hill can be understood as the first Roman emporium. This theme deserves further investigation, here it may already be emphasized that the development of such a site has enabled the interchange between different ethnic groups and an involvement with commercial traffic on a Mediterranean scale. The presence of sacred spheres indicates the fact that economic/political activities were often carried out under the auspices of religion.

The territorial reorganization involved the sacred places of the previous villages in a new wider system that, through the *Ara Consi* in *Circo Maximo* and the *Ara Evandri* on the south-western slopes of the Aventine, now include the areas between the Palatine and

<sup>65</sup> See Hölscher 2005, 224–230.

<sup>66</sup> On the original morphology of Rome cf. Terrenato 1997.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Cazzella 2001.

<sup>68</sup> On the notion of border in the Roman world and implications deriving from it, cf. De Sanctis 2015.

<sup>69</sup> Scheid 2004, 58.

<sup>70</sup> On the role of Rome as the main hub of the trade linked to salt as early as the Bronze Age see Giovannini 1985; Torelli 1993. For a synthesis on the importance of the Velabro cf. Filippi 2005, with references.

Aventine. An equally clear distinction of space is that related to the *Lupercii* procession; i.e. the so-called *Pomerium Romuli*,<sup>71</sup> described in literary sources, which furthermore implied the *inauguratio* of the Palatine hill.

Accordingly, from the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, a distinction of space may be detected within the urban context and also between the urban and the extra-urban territorial context. This distinction was obtained through the establishment of several sacred places located at strategic points.

### Cultural time and spatial significance

While considering the urbanisation processes of the Greek *poleis* it has been observed that improved abilities to articulate space ‘imply three aspects of cultural time: (1) the unstable political present in the agora; (2) the timeless eternity of the gods in the sanctuaries; and (3) the normative memory of the past in the burial grounds’.<sup>72</sup> While relating these insights to Rome’s urbanisation process it appears as if they all may be applied. A connection between the present of the politics and the eternity of the gods is documented through a strong relationship that allow to unite (*Comitium* and *Volcanal*) and to approach (*Domus Regia* and the *Vesta* sanctuary) these two concepts of time, which evidently were perceived as being closely related to each other. It is furthermore possible to discern a connection to the memory of the past, evidenced by some liminal/chthonic sacred places located in the area between the Velabro and the slopes of the Palatine, which were probably not only related to the swampy liminal context in which they were located,<sup>73</sup> but also to memories of the previous use of the area as a burial ground.<sup>74</sup> As we have seen, it would seem that there was in fact a sort of principle of attraction between space and divinities

according to which every divinity was located in a space, or rather in a place, congenial to its sphere of competence.

A historical-religious approach makes it furthermore possible to identify the complex process of definition of space, which seems to be connected to, and sanctioned by, religious beliefs contextualized within the places connected to them.

Sacred places were considered by the Romans as proof of the authenticity of the type of narratives, which by Latin authors were defined as *fabulae*.<sup>75</sup> These are tales that when referring to specific places explain the origin and the formation of the city. Accordingly, there is a close relationship between actual places and *fabulae*. The topography of Rome is constituted by places connected with the *fabulae*, as well as the significance/credibility of the *fabulae* is confirmed by the actual presence of such places.<sup>76</sup>

Literary sources have transmitted different stories dealing not only with the foundation of Rome, but also with the establishment of sacred places, which have been archaeologically documented. The subject is far too complex for the scope of this paper, and it may suffice to mention that some scholars have recently addressed the issue.<sup>77</sup>

However, in the context of recent archaeological discoveries related to urban development and sacred space, some deserve to be mentioned. The discoveries on the western summit of the Palatine, the so-called *Cermalus*, which have been dated to mid-8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, may be related to written sources. The findings constitute a foundation pit and an *ara*, interpreted by some scholars to be the *Roma Quadrata*,

<sup>71</sup> Cf. De Sanctis 2007, with references.

<sup>72</sup> Hölscher 2012, 175.

<sup>73</sup> Filippi 2005, 96–98, fig. 2.

<sup>74</sup> These cults were also connected to the previous situation of the area when it was used as a burial ground: Hölscher 2005, 226.

<sup>75</sup> On the meaning of the term see Bettini 2014, with references.

<sup>76</sup> Of fundamental importance Bettini 2014, 101–106.

<sup>77</sup> Carafa 2006a, 153–243, Carafa 2006b, 373–452, Bettini 2014, 94–106.

mentioned by Ovid,<sup>78</sup> as well as two small huts nearby. One of these has been assumed to be the *Casa-aedes Romuli*, while the other one, which later expanded into a larger hut with two rooms, might have been the seat of the royal cult of *Mars* and *Ops*, which is also mentioned in antique sources.<sup>79</sup> Another important archaeological discovery that appears to be confirmed by written sources is the sanctuary of the *Curiae Veteres*, by *Tacitus* mentioned as a vertex of the *Pomerium Romuli*.<sup>80</sup> Recent archaeological excavations have also identified the first establishment of the *Comitium* and, consequently, the adjacent seat of the cult of *Vulcan*, erected shortly after the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century, confirms what has been known from the literary sources.<sup>81</sup>

The establishment of another sacred place of particular importance has been dated to the third quarter of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. It is a sanctuary erected near a gate of the Palatine walls, perhaps the *Porta Mugonia*, and it has reasonably been identified as the temple of *Jupiter Stator*.<sup>82</sup>

The assumption of a close relationship between sacred places and *fabulae* has contributed to an understanding of how a religious notion is created and preserved. Religious notions become fixed in the collective memory<sup>83</sup> of a group through visible and lasting features of places that, through their static nature contribute to preserve it.<sup>84</sup> As well as they make narratives, like the Roman *fabulae*, credible at least at the level of significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*).

## Conclusions

Between the Final Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age, long-lasting processes have allowed several villages of central Tyrrhenian Italy to reach the urban form, through a gradual establishment of socio-political, economic, and religious structures.

Taking into account specific contextual differences, a similar development has been documented for Rome. From the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE onwards, one may follow the various steps of this process. The shared renouncing of a funerary use of the valley in the future *Forum* constituted a first indicator of this development. The process continued from the half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE with the establishment of a well-defined sacred and socio-political topography. The royal residence and the two related *sacraria* of *Mars* and *Ops* on the Palatine hill and the *Curiae Veteres* on its north-eastern slopes, as well as the *Vesta* Sanctuary and the *Comitium/Volcanal* in the area of the future *Forum*, the possible temple of *Jupiter Feretrius* on the Capitoline hill, and a ritual activity on the Quirinal hill, are all indications of an important phase in the urbanisation process. The portions of walls documented at various points at the base of the Palatine hill, dating back to the same period, are also part of this process. This reorganization was followed by other additions and modifications, like the sanctuary of *Jupiter Stator*, which was built one generation later close to one of the city gates. The first paving of the area of the *Forum*, can also be documented to the end 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

<sup>78</sup> Ov. fast. 4, 817-836. Bruno 2010a, 287–296.

<sup>79</sup> Dion. Hal. ant. 1 79, 10-11. Carafa 2006b, 429–430; Bruno 2010b, 297–302.

<sup>80</sup> Tacitus, ann. 12, 24. De Sanctis 2007.

<sup>81</sup> Plut. Rom 19, 7. For a summary of the recent discoveries cf. Carafa 2017, 54–55.

<sup>82</sup> Liv. 1 12, 3–6; Dion. Hal. ant. 2, 50, 3; Carafa – Arvanitis – Ippoliti 2013.

<sup>83</sup> According to H. Cancik, the collective memory of the early Roman community was represented by the knowledge of a system of connected signs such as

monuments, spaces and rites, which constituted a sacred landscape: Cancik 1985. That monuments of Republican and Imperial Rome may be understood as places of memory see also Beard 2000; Hölkeschamp 2014; Hölscher 2014; Wiseman 2014. On the relationship between archaic monuments and collective memory in mid-republican Rome cf. Cifani 2018, with references.

<sup>84</sup> On the socio-constructive character of memory, identified by Halbwachs, cf. Assmann 1997; Bettini 2012, 55–59.

To sum up, urbanisation progressed step by step, with the creation of different cultural markers through which it has been possible to characterize the space. In other words, a space was transformed into a place, or better, into many anthropological places that for the ancient Romans became aspects of society, identity, relations and historical consciousness. These distinct places were never understood as isolated entities, but had always been connected to each other, often through ritual processions that forged the contact between different territorial sectors. These well-defined sacred connections were perfectly contextualized

in the particular natural landscape of Rome, a larger territorial entity, which from this period onwards may be considered as urban.

An understanding of early urbanisation processes may gain a lot from a consideration of the establishment of sacred places and their connection to politics, communication and socialization. As we have seen, the thoughts and considerations on sacred and profane spaces have in fact, strictly interacted with and contributed to urban development.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> During the publication process of this paper the exhibition catalogue “La Roma dei Re. Il racconto dell’archeologia” has been published. The interesting

articles contained therein have therefore not been considered.

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