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REFLECTIONS ON A MIRROR: POSSIBLE EVIDENCE FOR THE EARLY ORIGIN OF THE CANONICAL VERSION OF THE ROMAN FOUNDATION LEGEND

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T.P. Wiseman (1991:115-124) suggests that the whole story of the twins - and in particular the life and death of Remus - was progressively invented between the Lex Licinia Sextia in 367 and the battle of Sentinum in 295, a period which "saw the establishment of a new mythology, a new way of making sense of Rome and her destiny in an era of cataclysmic change".[1] Wiseman has not been the only scholar to postulate a relatively late development of the Romulus and Remus legend: H. Strasburger (1968) argued that it was created during the last decades of the 4th century or, more probably, during the first decades of the 3rd. Furthermore, he maintained that, because the tale contained elements - notably that of fratricide - which did not reflect favourably on the image of Rome, it was essentially the product of anti-Roman propaganda. Wiseman, on the other hand, suggests that Remus represents the Roman *plebs* and that the twins actually symbolise the "power-sharing" between patricians and plebeians brought about by the Licinio-Sextian laws. The starting point of Wiseman's thesis is that the *plebs*' "lateness" in coming to power is reflected in the name "Remus", which signifies "slowness"; and he cites the etymology given in the *Origo Gentis Romanae* (21.5), where "Romulus" is derived from "rhome" ("strength") and "Remus" from "remores", because that is what the ancients called people who were "slow" by nature.

The explanation of the "twin" motif in the Roman foundation legend and the probable date of its origin have been the subjects of ingenious speculation.[2] It is not intended to embark on a detailed analysis of this and other controversial aspects of the Romulus and Remus legend, but rather to focus on the validity of the belief that the whole Romulus and Remus story developed - for whatever reason - only towards the latter part of the 4th century B.C. For it seems that the canonical version of the legend is characterised by a number of elements which could have their roots in an archaic era, long before the Ogulnii brothers erected a statue group depicting the she-wolf and twins in 296 B.C. (Livy 10.23.12). While the latter monument - together with coinage from the period 269-266 B.C.[3], depicting the she-wolf and twins - constitutes the earliest evidence of an "official" recognition of the foundation legend, this does not preclude the possibility that this element of the legend was already part of a long-established oral tradition. Nor is it safe to assume

1 Wiseman (1991:115) points out that it was this period that saw the introduction of explicit "power-sharing" in the magistracies between patricians and plebeians, the outlawing of debt-bondage of Roman citizens, the reduction of the *patrum auctoritas* to a rubber-stamp of the People's decisions and the granting of legal authority over the whole citizen body to the resolutions of the Roman *plebs*.

2 For a convenient survey of the various theories see Basto (1980:169ff).

3 E.g. RRC 20/1. See also Rosenberg, "Romulus", *R.E.* 35:1080, who dates Campanian coinage with this motif to c.335-321 B.C.

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that the failure of the Greek literary tradition of the 5th and 4th centuries to show an awareness of anything resembling the canonical version of the Romulus and Remus legend is another indication of a late origin of the "twin" element[4]: the "hellenocentric" nature of the Greek view of the world (see Bickerman 1952) encouraged their writers to construct versions of pre-history outside the constraints of local, indigenous traditions. Thus Cornell (1975:27) makes the pertinent observation: "As far as the Greek scholars were concerned, the development of Roman historiography in the second century B.C. did not restrict their freedom of conjecture, and they continued to interpret the origins of Rome in their own way and from an independent point of view. This fact inevitably destroys the argument that the story of Romulus and Remus is of late origin because the early Greek sources do not refer to it. If it was possible for the Greeks to ignore the Roman tradition after 200 B.C.[5], it was surely easy for them to do so before."

To support his contention that the canonical version of the legend did not exist before the political developments of the 4th century helped to create it, Wiseman makes use of an important item of visual evidence: a bronze mirror from Praeneste (Fig. 1). This mirror, recently the subject of a detailed comparative analysis by R. Adam and D. Briquel (1982), has been attributed to a Praenestine workshop in the third quarter of the 4th century B.C. It is of particular importance because the scene engraved on it constitutes the earliest known evidence of the twin-motif in the Roman foundation legend: it in fact predates the Ogulnian statue of 296 by approximately a generation. However, more pertinent to Wiseman's thesis are elements which, in his view, make the scene very unorthodox and thus indicate that the artist was working at a very early stage in the development of the legend. The following is a summary of Wiseman's observations and conclusions:

1. The figure on the right must be Faustulus: because he is holding a spear rather than a herdsman's staff, he is probably not the king's swineherd who, in Livy's version, rescues the twins, but Faustulus, a descendent of Evander's Arcadians, to whom (according to a revisionist account recorded by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.* 1.84.3) Numitor entrusted the infants.

2. The unkempt figure on the left, wearing a goatskin, must be a Lupercus or possibly Faunus, the god of the Lupercalia.

3. The reclining figure "is recognisable as Hermes, the god of Arcadia and father of Evander, who brought his worship to Italy" (Wiseman sees significance in "Faunus" and "Faustulus" being names of good omen and in Hermes' role as the god of good fortune).

4. The context suggests that the female figure behind Hermes could be Evander's mother, Carmenta, who first prophesied the greatness of Rome (Vergil, *Aen.* 8.341ff). However, because "she looks a little sad", she is perhaps the mother of the twins.

5. The bird on the left is not obviously identifiable, but the other is "clearly Pallas Athene's owl".

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4 Alcimus (mid-4th c.) does not show any awareness of a twin-relationship: "Rhomylos" appears as the grandfather of "Rhomos". Callias (d. 239 B.C.) makes "Rhomylos" and "Rhomos" (Remus?) brothers, together with "Telegonos".

5 The account of Hegesianax (ambassador to Rome in 193 B.C.), for example, makes Romus a son of Aeneas and the sole founder of Rome.

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6. The tree is "a mere structural element in the composition" and the "absence of identifying leaves shows that its species is immaterial"; therefore, it is not the *ficus Ruminalis*.

7. The suckling scene takes place on the slope of a hill, which must be the Palatine, although "there is no sign of the cave or grotto with which later sources identify the *Lupercal*".

8. The strangest feature of the composition is the lion in the foreground (reminiscent of a late 5th century *cista*, also from Praeneste, which shows a lioness suckling a child).

Wiseman concludes that "the scene on the mirror, both in what it puts in and in what it leaves out, is profoundly uncanonical"; and he goes on to remark that, if we believe that the story of the twins is primordially ancient, then the scene on the mirror is unintelligible.

However, there are reasons to believe that the scene engraved on this mirror has a much closer correlation with the canonical version of the legend than Wiseman would allow. If this is the case, it would imply that the salient features of the legend could have taken shape long before they found more definitive expression in the writings of Fabius Pictor at the end of the 3rd century B.C. I propose, in the course of interpreting the scene on the Praenestine mirror, to highlight those feature which, collectively, suggest that we are probably dealing with a very old indigenous tradition.

It is very likely that certain elements of the canonical version of the legend emerged from a long period of oral transmission. The *carmina convivalia*, which celebrated the virtues and accomplishments of famous ancestors (see Plut. *Cato maior* 25.3; Varro *De Vita Populi Romani*, fr.84 Riposati)[6], may well have contributed to the formation of a tradition relating to the remote legendary period. In the context of the aristocratic oral tradition, one may surmise that another formative influence may have come from the dirge or *nenia*, in which a female singer celebrated the deeds of the deceased (Varro, *De Lingua Latina* 7.70). Wiseman (1989:133-137) himself explores the possibility that the oral tradition played a more influential role than has hitherto been assumed. In addition to the essentially aristocratic genres of *carmina convivalia* and funeral praise-songs, he draws attention to possible oral influences in the popular context: the *circulatores* or professional story-tellers, of the type mentioned by Pliny (*Ep.* 4.7.6) and Petronius (*Sat.* 68.6), are very likely to have been active in archaic Rome and Italy. A much more important contribution would have come from the sphere of dramatic performance; as Wiseman stresses, Rome was certainly familiar with drama long before Livius Andronicus introduced Greek plays in Latin: "there is no shortage of visual evidence for the performing arts in 6th and 5th century Etruria, and Livy's account of the Etruscan origin of Roman drama (7.2.4-10) may well reflect reality..." (Wiseman 1989:137). Furthermore, the strong likelihood that the words *scaena*, *persona*, *ludius* and *histrio* are Etruscan versions of the Greek terms is additional evidence for the existence of a Hellenized-Etruscan form of drama at Rome long before Livius Andronicus. Finally, Wiseman makes the point that "it is surely inconceivable that the Roman games did not celebrate in some form the Romans' conception of their own origins and achievements" (Wiseman 1989:137).[7]

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[6] Dionysius, *Ant. Rom.* 1.79.10, mentions that Romulus and Remus "are still celebrated by the Romans in the hymns of their country".

[7] On the probable importance of drama in the development of historiography see also Wiseman 1994:1-22.

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Michael Grant (1971:34) makes the pertinent observation that in any society oral traditions rarely go beyond the third generation, unless a practice or belief or family interest is involved. If, as seems likely to me[8], there was an integral connection between the ancient Lupercalian rites and the Roman foundation legend, then the former would have provided precisely the sort of basis for the continuity of the tradition. It is therefore important to stress that the emergence of Rome's literary tradition is not necessarily synonymous with the creation of the whole substance of that tradition: historical (or legendary) material does not have to rely upon the written word for its transmission. If a plausible case can be made for seeing a strong correlation between the scene engraved on this 4th century mirror and the canonical version of the Romulus and Remus legend, it raises the distinct possibility that the origins of certain features of that legend could go well back into the pre-literate or archaic era.

To what extent, then, can it be argued that the scene depicted on the Praenestine mirror (Fig. 1) harmonizes with the salient features of the canonical version of the legend? To begin with, I believe that the setting of this scene is by no means as imprecise as Wiseman (1991:117) and Adam and Briquel (1982:43-44) maintain. To anyone familiar with the story of the she-wolf and the twins, the juxtapositioning of a tree and a rocky outcrop must surely have suggested the *Lupercal* and the *ficus Ruminalis*; more than that, it can be argued that the configuration of the rocks behind the she-wolf and the sense of depth created by the rocks in the left foreground are quite suggestive of a cave - compare the very stylised representations of the Lupercal from a late Republican coin (Fig. 2) and a terracotta relief from the baths of Constantine (Fig. 3). The absence of identifying leaves is likewise no serious obstacle in the way of recognising the tree as the *ficus Ruminalis* (compare the tree depicted on the coin illustrated in Fig. 4: to deny that this tree is intended to represent the famous fig-tree would be as perverse as to argue that the scene does not necessarily represent the discovery of Romulus and Remus while they were being suckled by the she-wolf!) It might also be argued that the omission of foliage from the tree on the Praenestine mirror not only facilitated the clear representation, in a confined space, of the figures in the upper portion of the engraving, but may also be a perceptive detail incorporated by the artist: not only are the rounded twig-ends reminiscent of plump fig-branches, but the fact that in the legend the Tiber is described as being in flood at the time of the twins' exposure (Livy 1.4.4; D.H. 1.79.5; Plut. *Rom.* 3.5) makes the Mediterranean winter the most likely context for this episode (when, of course, fig-trees are entirely leafless).

Wiseman toys with the possibility that the veiled female to the right of the tree is Carmenta, the mother of Evander; but this is surely the Vestal virgin, Rhea Silvia, characteristically veiled in bride's regalia. Adam and Briquel (1982:46) observe that the figure is unlikely to be a deity, because she is relegated to the background; but I am not convinced that one should explain her presence as a mere decorative element, a female onlooker to complement the reclining male figure. Both her appearance and her proximity to the central group encourage positive identification with the mother of the twins.

The identification of the bearded man on the right as Faustulus to whom Numitor entrusted the infants, rather than the shepherd who discovered the twins, in unconvincing. The fact that he is holding a spear rather than a herdsman's staff is of less significance than his general portrayal as a rough, tunic-clad rustic and, more importantly, his pointing at the twins - which is clearly intended to convey the idea of discovery, and therefore exactly in keeping with the role of the shepherd Faustulus in the canonical version of the legend.

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8 See Tennant (1988:81-93).

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The wild and dishevelled figure on the left must, as Wiseman says, be either a *lupercus* or Faunus, who may have been the deity associated with Lupercalian rites. The goat-skin knotted about his neck, his general nakedness and wild appearance can hardly encourage identification with Faustulus, as is tentatively suggested in the *Lexicon Iconographicum* ("Faustulus", p.131). The only detail to support such an identification is the *pedum*, or shepherd's crook, which he is holding; but even this loses some force when one considers that the figure representing a *lupercus* (or Faunus) is holding - uncharacteristically - a club.[9] Whatever this figure represents, some connection with the Lupercalia seems obvious, particularly if the scene depicted on the mirror is intended to show the *Lupercal* and the *ficus Ruminalis*.

The reclining figure is undoubtably the most problematical. Wiseman (1991:117) says that he is recognisable as Hermes and supports the identification by pointing out that Hermes was the father of Evander (to whom the cult of Faunus was attributed) and that the names Faunus, Faustulus and Evander are names of good omen; in this context Hermes, the god of good luck, would have been appropriate. Other suggestions have been that the young man represents the mountain deity of the Palatine, or the god of the Tiber, or that he is merely a decorative element complementing the female figure - a sort of protective spirit (Adam and Briquel 1982:51). While the cloak and hat are some of the attributes of Hermes, it does seem strange that this deity should be the focal point of the composition, since he played no role whatsoever in the canonical version of the legend.[10] The suggestions that he may be the deity of the Palatine or of the Tiber (Adam & Briquel 1982:51) have more to recommend them. However, the former is an extremely rare motif and topographical considerations would seem to militate against a clear association with the river god, despite his typical reclining posture.

I want to suggest that the young man who occupies such a prominent position in this composition is none other than the god Mars. Adam and Briquel (1982:51) do indeed point out that Mars would be more in keeping with this context, as father of the twins, but are dissuaded from pursuing this identification for two reasons: first, this would presuppose a stage of development of the legend which conforms with the account of Fabius Pictor; and second, the representation contains no iconographic detail which would support identification with Mars. The first objection is of course pertinent to the central issue of the present discussion, and I hope to show that there may be good reason to believe that the salient features of the legend were shaped long before Fabius Pictor's time. .

The second objection is more serious: not only are early representations of Mars few in number, but the god is shown with all or at least one of his distinguishing accoutrements - helmet, spear or shield. There is even a representation of the infant Mars - from Praeneste of all places! - in warlike attire (Fig. 5). The *Lexicon Iconographicum* provides only three

9 Without going into the enormously complicated problem of the original nature and purpose of the Lupercalian rites, there is a suggestion made some time ago by Deubner (W. Warde Fowler 1899:479) which *may* be pertinent here. He suggested that the beating of bystanders with strips of skin was a later accretion after the process of urbanisation and the incorporation of rites in honour of Faunus obliterated the original meaning of the Lupercalian ceremony, which was to ward off wolves (naturally, Deubner supported the etymology *lupus-arceo*). If indeed the Lupercalia did have some connection with wolves, then, as Deubner suggested, the strips of skin may have been substituted for something carried in the hand to drive away wolves.

10 Horsfall (1987:13) maintains that Arcadian origins for some Roman institutions "began to be claimed in the second century BC, prompted by Rome's dealings with the Achaean League, by the fabled virtue and antiquity of the population, and by numerous names and monuments in need of explanation". See also the comments of Momigliano (1982:16-17).

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examples of Mars without any of the above accoutrements: two Etruscan engravings of c.300 B.C. (Fig. 6, 7), showing the infant Mars involved in a strange ceremony, and a marble relief from the Ara Casali, depicting Mars and Venus caught in a compromising situation by Vulcan and the sun (Fig. 8): clearly the artist had used his imagination here and was conscious of the inappropriateness of clanking armour and sharp spear-points in an amorous context![11] This somewhat flippant observation leads to a more serious hypothesis: provided the context and circumstantial details are clear enough, could an artist dispense with conventional iconographic detail? Apart from the general context, which, to my mind, shows a very strong correlation with the canonical version of the legend, are there any other details in the composition which also point to the presence of Mars? I think that there are - in the form of the two birds juxtaposed with the reclining figure. Wiseman (1991:117) remarks that the one on the left is "not obviously identifiable" - similarly, Adam and Briquel (1982:46) regard it as of indeterminate type - while the other is "clearly Pallas Athene's owl". However, R. Peter (Roscher's *Lexicon*: 1495) has no hesitation in recognising the former as a *woodpecker*. If this is correct, this would be a strong iconographic pointer to Mars, since the woodpecker was closely associated with this deity and - very significantly - played a role in the feeding of the twins. All these elements are succinctly combined in Plutarch's account, for example: "The infants, as the story goes, lying there, were suckled by a she-wolf, and fed and taken care of by a woodpecker. These animals are sacred to Mars; and the woodpecker is held in great honour and veneration by the Latins" (Plut.*Rom.*4.2). Armstrong (1958:101-102) emphasises the antiquity of the association between the woodpecker and Mars, citing a reference to *Piquier Martier* in an Umbrian inscription. In his view the association "no doubt ... goes back to the time when Mars was an agricultural deity."[12]

In the first book of *Roman Antiquities* (1.14), Dionysius of Halicarnassus includes an interesting piece of information in connection with the ancient Latin city of Tiora: "In this city, they say, there was a very ancient oracle of Mars, the nature of which was similar to that of the oracle which legend says once existed at Dodona: only there a pigeon was said to prophesy, sitting on a sacred oak, whereas among the Aborigines a heaven-sent bird, which they call 'picus' and the Greeks 'dryokolaptes', appearing on a pillar of wood, did

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11 Perhaps Ovid, too, envisaged Mars in similar guise (or lack of it!) when he exhorted the god: "Following Pallas' example, take time to put aside your lance: you shall find something to do unarmed. You were also unarmed on that occasion when the Roman prietess captivated you, so that you might bestow your mighty seed on this city" (*Fasti* 3.7-10). It is also worth noting that there are several Pompeian representations of a distinctly *youthful* Mars in the company of Venus (*Lexicon Iconographicum* II.2, 412-413). Here the discarded helmet, shield and spear seem merely to identify the god, rather than to emphasise his warlike character (contrast the numerous representations of an older, bearded Mars in his full battle regalia). Do the Pompeian frescoes perhaps provide another illustration of the artists' imaginative response to a particular context?

12 For Mars as an agricultural deity in origin see: Roscher's *Lexicon* 2, 2399ff and 2420; Warde Fowler (1899:48ff) and Bailey (1932:68ff). The latter takes the view that at the earliest stage of development Mars was "primarily an agricultural deity" but that "he was also, as far back as we can penetrate, a military deity". He summarizes his view as follows: "Perhaps we may see in him the protector of crops, cattle, and young men, of all young things, and suppose that his priests (i.e. the Salii) "leapt" for the prosperous growth of all, much as the Curetes did to Zeus in Crete." Armstrong (1958:94ff) draws attention to the woodpecker's close association with rain in legends "right across Europe" and suggests (102) that the connection which exists between war gods and rain gods "may be due to the thunderstorm being viewed ambivalently as destructive and also as bringer of the fertilising rain".

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the same." This mention of the woodpecker as an oracle of Mars is strikingly confirmed by the discovery of two engraved carnelians, which depict the bird on top of the sacred pillar with a warrior facing it (Figs. 9, 10). I wonder whether we are looking at rather crude attempts to portray the large Black Woodpecker, whose scientific name, interestingly, is "Dryocopus martius" (Fig. 11); furthermore, it is the largest of the species, averaging 45cm in length. It could be argued that lack of accuracy in representation is amply compensated for by the strongly suggestive contexts: there can hardly be any doubt that the bird on the pillar is a woodpecker, and anyone familiar with the tale of Romulus and Remus would probably have had little hesitation in assuming that Mars and his sacred bird were portrayed in the mirror-engraving as well.[13]

More misleading is the assumption that the bird on the right is necessarily Pallas Athene's owl: both owls and woodpeckers played a role in ancient Umbrian augury, as evidenced by the *Tabulae Iguvinae* (see F.C. Grant 1957:4-8). Tablet VIA, dealing with the expiation of a town, begins as follows: "This sacrifice must begin with the observation of the birds, when the owl and the crow are favourable and the woodpeckers, male and female, are on the right hand." The association of woodpecker and owl in an ancient indigenous ceremony is surely good enough reason not to assume an identification with Pallas Athene's owl.

Leaving aside the evidence of the mirror itself, I should like to consider in general the possibility of Mars' early involvement in the indigenous legendary tradition. In telling of Ilia's (Rhea Silvia's) rape in a grove consecrated to Mars, Dionysius (1.77.1-2) mentions the following explanations of the identity of the father of Romulus and Remus: "Some say that the author of the deed was one of the maiden's suitors ...; others say it was Amulius himself ... But most writers relate a fabulous story to the effect that it was a spectre of the divinity to whom the place was consecrated." While it is very likely that the first two explanations stem from attempts to rationalise the tale, there is reason to believe that Mars' role in the foundation legend had its protagonists before the time of Naevius and Ennius, since the latter, in a passage quoted by Cicero (*De Rep.* 1.64), extols Romulus' divine ancestry:

> *simul inter*
> *sese sic memorant: "o Romule, Romule die*
> *qualem te patriae custodem di genuerunt!*
> *o pater o genitor o sanguen dis oriundum!"*
>
> "At the same time they said amongst themselves: 'O Romulus, divine Romulus, what a guardian of your country did the gods beget in you! O father, o sire, o blood sprung from the gods!'"

One cannot, of course, exclude the possibility that we have here an indirect reference to the goddess Venus, since both Ennius and Naevius regarded Romulus as the grandson of Aeneas. However, there is further evidence to indicate that Mars did appear in Ennius' account. In his description of the shield of Aeneas, Vergil wrote the following:

> *fecerat et viridi fetam Mavortis in antro*
> *procubuisse lupam ...*
>
> (*Aen.* 8.630-631)

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13 One might add that the she-wolf herself is not very accurately rendered, but the context leaves one with no doubt that this is the creature intended. Likewise, pictorial inaccuracy should not dissuade one from believing that the birds shown on the denarius illustrated in Fig.4 are most likely to be woodpeckers.

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"He (sc. Vulcan) had portrayed mother-wolf, as she had lain in Mars' green grotto ..."

Now it is interesting to note what Servius had to say about this passage: *sane totus hic locus Ennianus est* (*ad Aen.* 8.631). If indeed the phrase *Mavortis in antro* was a direct borrowing from Ennius, it indicates not only the presence of Mars in the local tradition at least as early as Ennius' era, but also a connection with the she-wolf and the *Lupercal*.

There is no doubt about Mars' association with wolves, but the association of Mars with the original Lupercalian rites is less certain. I am inclined to believe that there was such a connection (see note 8) and, without embarking on a protracted discussion of this issue, I draw attention first to a comment made by Warde Fowler (1899:313): "The connection with the Palatine, with the wolf, and with fructification, seems to me to point very closely in the direction of Mars and his characteristics"; and second to the chthonic side of Mars' character, which Wagenvoort (1956:210-211) and others have emphasised. The concept of Mars as primarily a chthonic deity of fertility may be of particular significance in view of the fact that the Lupercalian rites took place in the middle of the three *dies parentales* (propitiation of the dead). Altheim (1938:208) refers to the double nature of the *Lupercalia*, which not only contained the ritual of fertilisation, but was also concerned with averting mischief from the side of the dead.[14] The ancients looked upon the *Lupercalia* as essentially a purificatory rite, and it is highly significant that the Roman *lustratio* was connected with Mars: it is this god whose powers are invoked in the ancient *carmen arvale* and *lustratio*-prayer preserved in the writings of Cato (*de Ag. Cult.* 141).

There is another, but related, aspect of Mars' character which suggests a more clearly definable link with the story of the twins. As god of the wilds or "outer world", it was Mars who presided over the *ver sacrum* - a ceremony whereby, in times of distress or overpopulation, groups of young men were consecrated and expelled from the community in order to establish new settlements. Livy, in Book 22, provides clear evidence of a *ver sacrum* which was vowed in 217. The connection of Mars with *ver sacrum*-colonisation is clearly indicated by the names of the tribes which were established in this way: the *Mamertini*, the *Marsi*, the *Picentes* and the *Hirpini*. The latter two, of course, derive from *picus* (woodpecker) and *hirpus* (wolf) - both creatures sacred to Mars.

It seems that the association of this god with bands of young men during the *ver sacrum* should be viewed against the broader background of his involvement in primitive initiatory rituals - a function which H.S. Versnel (1986:134-172) has argued was probably fundamental to the evolution of both Mars and Apollo. J.N. Bremmer (1987:38-43) has made a survey of the evidence relating to "Jungmannschaften", or groups of young initiates, and concludes that among the Indo-European peoples the pre-adult males often constituted a separate band which occupied a place at the margin of, or completely outside, society. Of particular interest in this regard is this inscription, discovered recently at Satricum and dating from about 500 B.C., which may constitute documentary evidence of precisely this sort of group under the protection of Mars:

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14 See the more recent article by Holleman (1985), who suggests that "Lupercalia" may be connected with the Etruscan *lupu* meaning "(to be) dead". Holleman argues that, even though it cannot be proved that the Etr. *lupu* also meant "wolf", the wolf nonetheless played a central role in the ceremony (Aita, the god of the Etruscan underworld, wears a wolf's head). He maintains that the Luperci represented the dead ancestors and that the flagellation of women signified the imparting of sexual strength for procreation by the ancestral spirits.

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ei steterai Popliosio Valesiosio
suodales Mamertei
"have erected - of Poplios Valesios -
the companions - to Mamars".[15]

Mythology and history also provide examples of notable personages (for example, Apollo, Paris and king Cyrus) who were required to spend a period of time outside civilisation in the company of shepherds, who, as Bremmer (1987:33) says "are typically people of the marginal areas".

This context is, of course, strongly suggestive of the story of Romulus and Remus' adolescence: they too were associated with shepherds and spent time in the wilds, leading a sort of "Robin Hood" existence with their peers. It has been suggested (Bremmer 1987:33) that Romulus' exploits against cattle-rustlers, as described in the literary tradition, were in fact transformations of less palatable tales in which the founder of Rome was himself involved in cattle-stealing; and the evidence suggests that the involvement of the youth in cattle-raids was a common feature of Indo-European societies (e.g. Achilles' theft of Aeneas' oxen, *Iliad* 20.188-190).

This element of the legend - like that of Mars' association with the wolf and the woodpecker - seems to have its roots in a more primitive, archaic era. There are other factors, cited by Bremmer (1987:47-48)[16], which corroborate this view: the absence of a *nomen gentile* amongst all the characters who play a role in the legend points to an early period, since the dual onomastic system was concurrent with the urbanisation of central Italy; furthermore the Etruscan character of the names *Amulius*, *Numitor* and *Remus* suggests a date when Etruscan influence was still strong.[17]

It does seem plausible, then, that certain features of the Romulus and Remus legend can be assigned to an archaic context in which the god Mars played a significant role, not so much as the war-god of the Roman city-state as the deity of the wilds and the protector of the young. In his comparative study of Apollo and Mars, Versnel (1986) has focused on the seemingly anomalous iconographic representations of the two gods: the former is portrayed as the "kouros" *par excellence*, while Mars is traditionally represented as an older, fully-armed warrior; and yet both gods are associated with the rite of passage of adolescents into adulthood. In seeking to explain the iconographic differences between the two gods, Versnel (1986:149) suggests that the representations of the gods are snapshots, as it were, of one and the same experience, but taken at different moments: Apollo, the "kouros", was pictured in the stage before the admission into male society, whereas Mars epitomised the adult warrior and full citizen.

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15 Bremmer (1987:41) remarks that "Versnel has convincingly interpreted the term *suodales* as meaning a 'group of comrades, a kind of *Gefolgschaft*'" and that "it seems therefore not improbable to see in the band of Publius Valerius a company of young warriors ...".

16 Bremmer suggests the first half of the 6th c. as "the most likely moment for the origin of the myth."

17 Herein, too, lies a probable objection to Wiseman's (1991:118) argument that Remus made a relatively late appearance in the tradition: both the place names connected with Remus - *remona* and *Remoria* - are Etruscan in origin and can be connected with the *gens* name *remne* (or *remu*). *Remoria*, meaning the "settlement of the *remne* or *remu*" (Rosenberg, "Romulus", *R.E.* 1079) is analogous to *Tarquinia* denoting "the town of the *tarchu* or *tarchna*" (Palmer 1966:47). It would seen, then, that this line of Ennius harks back to a very early stage in the genesis of the legend: *certabant urbem Romam Remoramve vocarent* (86W).

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Clearly, the reclining, almost languid figure on the Praenestine mirror is more reminiscent of Apollo than of the Mars to which we are accustomed. I would suggest that the very primitive, rustic setting in which Mars was conceived as the protector of roving bands of youths may explain the unconventional representation of the god as a young man in partially rustic attire (the "travelling" *petasus* included - suggestive of his role as protector of roving bands?), rather than an obviously mature and warlike figure equipped with all or some of his armour. Is it not possible that the artist had in mind a figure more in keeping with the description found in Dionysius' account (1.77.2) of the rape of Rhea Silvia, where the appearance of the spectre was "far more marvellous than that of a man both in stature and beauty"? This would seem to have much in common with Ennius' account (Cic. *de Div.* 1.20.40) of Ilia's vision of a *homo pulcher* lurking in the thicket.

The identification of the reclining figure as Mars is obviously highly conjectural and the seemingly overwhelming iconographic evidence in favour of a warrior image of the god is being countered in this instance by the circumstantial evidence of a particular composition and by the belief that an unconventional artist may have been at work.[18] However, on balance, I think that one can have more confidence in the most obvious interpretation of this scene - that it is a remarkably faithful representation of a very familiar story; and the objection that such a conclusion is untenable because the engraving pre-dates the earliest literary accounts is not a formidable one if the likely existence of a lively oral tradition is given due emphasis.

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18 Artistic licence seems to have been a feature of Etruscan mirror engravings. J. Neils, in a review of Richard V. Nicholls, *Corpus Speculorum Etruscorum. Great Britain 2: Cambridge*, Cambridge 1993 (Bryn Mawr Classical Review 94.4.13), makes the following observation: "These mirrors demonstrate how the Etruscans could be somewhat cavalier with names and attributes ...."

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Fig. 1

Engraving on bronze mirror from Praeneste.

(Roscher's *Lexicon*, 1466.)

Fig. 2

Late Republican coin (impression).

(*Lexicon Iconographicum* IV.2, p.68.)

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Fig. 3

Terracotta relief from the baths of Constantine.

(*Lexicon Iconographicum* IV.2, p.67.)

Fig. 4

Denarius of Sextus Pompeius, 137 B.C.

(Armstrong 1958:100.)

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Fig. 5

Engraving from Praeneste.

(Roscher's *Lexicon* 2407.)

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Engravings on bronze mirrors.

(*Lexicon Iconographicum* II.1, p.502.)

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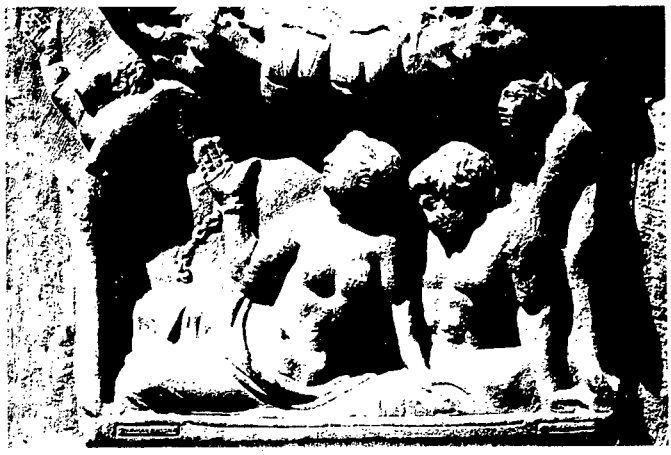

Fig. 8

Mars and Venus. Relief from Ara Casali.

(*Lexicon Iconographicum* II.2, p.414.)

Fig. 9

Engraved carnelian. Warrior consulting woodpecker of Mars at Tiora Matiene.

(Armstrong 1958:102.)

http://akroterion.journals.ac.za/

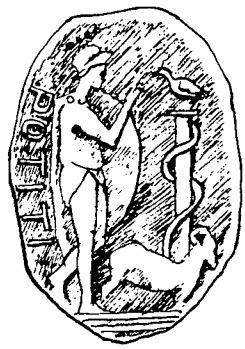

Fig. 10

Engraved carnelian. Warrior at shrine of Mars with woodpecker perched on sacred pillar and sacrificed ram beneath.

(Armstrong 1958:102.)

Fig. 11

Dryocopus Martius (45 cm.).