



Myth at the heart of the Roman Empire

The foundation of Rome

Many monuments and episodes in history are symbols of Rome.
Tanti monumenti, tanti elementi che fanno parte della storia simboleggiano Roma.

They are part of my DNA, my culture, my history. They are part of all of us, part of Rome.
Fa parte del mio DNA, della mia cultura, fa parte della mia storia. Fa parte di noi, fa parte di Roma. They will always be a part of history because as they say Rome is eternal, and the myths are eternal too. Rimarranno sempre nella storia, 'che' Roma, Roma, come si dice, e' eterna, e anche i miti rimarranno eterni.

Over the centuries people have been fascinated by the shape of ancient Rome.

Chris Smith:

You can see in the archaeology the political development of Rome. The story we all know about the Romans is they went around killing people, and invading and conquering, and it's all pretty bloody and militaristic, but the archaeology is showing a city which develops political space very early on, but monumentalises that space, that tells stories about that space, the *comitium* critically important, there from the 7th century BC onwards right the way through.

Jessica Hughes:

There are representations of the foundation myths all over the city. Now this included sites where the legendary founders and their descendants were meant to have physically lived and walked around, so Romans could go up onto the Palatine Hill and see the hut where Romulus was supposed to have lived.

Jessica Hughes:

The one that you see everywhere is the she-wolf and the twins, and this isn't any old she-wolf and twins, it's actually a copy of the Capitoline she-wolf and twins. And you see this on football shirts, on postcards, on fridge magnets. You see it everywhere. It's an image that very neatly sums up how Rome is ordained by nature so you have this idea of an animal, this miraculous event of her giving milk to the twins, and that just shows what's special about Rome.

The link between Rome and its foundation myths dates back more than a millennium.

Chris Smith:

So what we're dealing with are almost three different things. We're dealing with the archaeological reality, we're dealing with a story, which has grown up, and then we're dealing with the Romans' capacity to put that story onto the monuments that they themselves see.

Jessica Hughes:

The foundation myths were particularly important in the time of Augustus and this is partly because he came to power after fifteen years of civil war and he inherited a very fragmented community, and he used the foundation myths to give people a sense of communality, of common origins and of social unity.

Chris Smith:

You end up with a foundation myth which says that Aeneas lands in Italy, his son founds Alba Longa, the uncle is a king of Alba Longa, Romulus and Remus wander down the Tiber, find themselves in Rome, found the city, they're part of a dynasty, and later on you have Julius Caesar and Augustus who is able to represent himself as a new founder of the city.

In later periods, artists and their patrons kept returning to the foundation myths.

Jessica Hughes:

I think the fact that we see so many representations of the foundation myths in modern Rome shows their continued power to encapsulate Roman identity.

For as long as people visit Rome, these myths will continue.

Finche' c'e' sempre gente che ricorda, che viene a trovare Roma, ci sara' sempre questo ricordo dei miti.

I believe that mythology still exists today. We must not lose it or we risk losing our identity. Io credo che la mitologia esista ancora. Non la dobbiamo perdere, altrimenti rischiamo di perdere la nostra identita'.