The Endless Foundation

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10 April 2024

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Riccardo Palma[1]

Abstract: This paper examines the foundation of Rome by dealing with Romulus, the Founder, as if he was a contemporary architect who can help us in facing some important problems of our settlements. Contemporary cities are often unfounded because their public spaces have lost any relations with the architecture of Earth. The paper thesis is that foundation produces an architectural representation of the geomorphological features of the founded site and that this representation is technically developed within the cartographic space of the architectural design. Through the studies of Andrea Carandini about the foundation of Rome and the thought of Michel Serres about the idea of foundation in the western world, the paper affirms the necessity of re-thinking the role of foundation as a project that returns many times during the life of the settlements ("like a refrain", writes Serres) and that every time describes the architecture of the Earth. Like the sprawled villages that constituted archaic Rome, our sprawled settlements can be re-designed by means of a project of foundation able to attribute an identifying value to public spaces. In analogy with the "identifying descriptions" proposed by Alberto Magnaghi, public spaces can become architectural descriptions of those geomorphological features of places that enhance the identity of the communities.

Key words: Carandini, Heidegger, Magnaghi, Serres, deterritoralisation.

Foundation and territorialisation

This paper will examine the foundation of Rome, one of the most ancient urban projects of western architecture. My aim is to write about Romulus, the Founder, as if he was a contemporary architect who can help us in facing some important problems of our unfounded cities. In the essay "Anaximander's Saying", Martin Heidegger stated that the first known text of western philosophy resonated together with the last one, Nietzsche's works. In the same way that "Anaximander's Saying" is somehow the founding stone of western thought, the birth of Rome can represent the foundation of the western city. Heidegger's idea is that the being of Anaximander is the being of Nietzsche; my idea is that the Romulus architecture concerns also our architecture. Obviously this statement negates the historical paradigm. Heidegger in fact criticizes

1. Riccardo Palma: Associate Professor, Politecnico di Torino; email: riccardo.palma@polito.it.

historicism and affirms that: «If we can manage, just once, to hear the saying it will speak to us no longer as a historically remote opinion. If that happened, then we would not be misled into the vain attempt to reckon historically, that is, psycho-philologically, what was really present in the past, in the man called Anaximander of Miletus, as the condition of his representation of the world».[2] Therefore, for us, the problem is not to understand and/or to reconstruct the conditions of the representation of the world of Romulus but to consider the problems of contemporary architecture to be like the experience of the foundation of Rome.

Historical proximity or the remoteness from Romulus are not important: on the contrary we are neither near nor far from Romulus; we are, as Heidegger writes, in the "wandering". The more we try to put Romulus within an historical dimension, the more we go away from the understanding of what Romulus can say about the contemporary city.
If we abandon history, we are able to describe Romulus as a contemporary architect: «We seek what is Greek neither for the sake of the Greeks nor for the advancement of science. We seek a dearer dialogue not for its own sake but solely for the sake of that which wishes to come to language in such a dialogue, provided it comes of its own accord. This is that same which, in different ways, is destined to concern both the Greeks and us. It is that which brings the dawn of thinking into the destiny of the West. It is as a consequence of this destiny that the Greeks first became, in the historical sense, the Greeks».[3]

Consequently, "Romulus" doesn't mean in our language a historical, psychological and anthropological character: "Romulus" means – as "Greek" means for Heidegger – the dawn of dwelling on Earth through architecture, the paradigm of destiny according to which architecture founds places for dwelling. Thus when Romulus founded Rome he faced a problem that also belongs to our dwelling and settling: the problem of the indiscernible bind between architecture and Earth's surface. «The question comes up: are places first and only the result and issue of making-room? Or does making-room take its special character from the reign of gathering places? If this proves right, then we would have to search for the special character

2. Heidegger 1946, p. 247.
3. *Ivi*, p. 253.

of clearing-away in the grounding of locality, and we would have to meditate on locality as the interplay of places?».[4] Heidegger's questions describe how foundation produces a process of territorialisation and de-territorialisation. When we found, we do not only occupy the Earth's surface with our settlements, but above all we "re-produce" the Earth's surface. "Making-room" (that henceforth for us means "design process") does not generate the site but it is the site that leads design (or rather, that gives form to design). On the contrary, can the site exist without this "making-room"? Without the representation that design produces of a site, can a site become inhabitable? On the other hand, are built or imagined architectures generated by the form of the places? Foundation makes substantially indiscernible the relationships between architecture and site: architecture discovers site and site founds architecture. I shall look at this perpetual oscillation, without ever solving it. My hypothesis in fact is that the architecture of foundation is nothing else than a constructed representation of the founded site: the space "left by the grounding" in Heidegger's words. Foundation territorializes the settlement, putting it in the ground but at the same time it de-territorializes the ground transforming it in architecture.

Foundation and description

«The ancient bed of the Tiber, the elevations of tuff with vertical slopes, on whose tops were set small plateaus, and the areas of level ground that crept between these heights before opening out in to the Campo Marzio were revealed to be elements of a landscape that, notwithstanding its transformations, persisted with all its telluric force in the constructed city that I was discovering. […] Alongside the visible city stood a natural pre-city, now almost completely invisible except with the imagination».[5] It is easy to observe, as Alberto Magnaghi states, that the architecture of the contemporary city and territory is very far from the idea that foundation is related to geography: «The increasing liberation from territorial constraints ("deterritoralisation") has led in time to a loss of awareness about the relations between the human settlement and the environment […]. The destruction of the memory and

4. Heidegger 1969, p. 306.
5. Purini 2015.

biography of the territory forces us to live in anonymous sites, reduced to supporting the functions of an instant society, which has brusquely interrupted relations with the history and the memory of place».[6]

The disjunction of settlements from the Earth's surface, the lack of identity that this disjunction implies, the impossibility of identifying collective spaces within our unfounded settlements, the denial of geographical features as elements of cultural identity: all these phenomena mark an era in which the separation between architecture and Earth is called the "generic city". The definition coined by Rem Koolhaas represents the idea of a global settlement, absolutely uninterested in the specificity of places: a kind of strata uniformly built and superposed on an abstract surface. So we do not inhabit places but a planet reduced to a geometrically perfect and smooth sphere. In this perspective, the "grounding" no longer has meaning because what is absent is exactly the "ground", i.e. the geological and imaginary stratification that distinguishes each inhabited space from the others.

Despite this ideology, places continue to exist, for better or for worse, as we can see for instance when they become scenarios of natural disasters exactly because of their physical features and of the "negation" that the settlements have operated about them. When people build inside alluvial areas or omit the maintenance of the hillsides, they deny the existence of the places and take refuge in an unconscious form of the "generic city" that lasts very little time: tragically places are destined to be destroyed.

Thus, when today we study the process of the foundation, we affirm the necessity of reinventing places in order to return to inhabit Earth. This necessity does not concern, as is evident, only the safety of the settlements, but the meaning itself of the relation between geography and dwelling.

However it would be ingenuous to face this problem through an idea of place understood as a simple space having fixed features. André Corboz has argued the need for architects of take in account the constitutive multiplicity of spaces: «apart from a few rare exceptions (more impressions or hypothesis than certainties), everything continues, for architects and urban planners, to take place with the trap

6. Magnaghi 2005, p. 11.

of sacrosanct perspective, the first matrix of absolute space, because it too presupposes a homogeneity of space».[7] Indeed places are the result of a stratification of many spaces and they can be represented as much time as there are spaces. So, I can suggest the hypothesis that, first of all, foundation is that particular representation of the place whose collective nature ensures effectiveness to the settlements.

Alberto Magnaghi's proposal concerning the "urban village" is based on the role which foundation of places can play today. Magnaghi describes how the problem of dwelling in contemporary territories has to be faced also through the mythical and symbolic dimension of foundation. With the aim of identifying tools by means of which it is possible to give real answers to the identity needs related to dwelling, Magnaghi has elaborated the concept of "identifying description" based on the role of representation of places: «The most recent 'statutes of places' meet this need to describe and represent the identifying features of a territory and the construction of a system of rules for its transformation, ensuring its specific features are enhanced».[8] Magnaghi points out the substantial indiscernibility between description and production of place: «The identifying description is a cultural document accompanied by specific iconographic apparatuses identifying the long-term structure and character of the place independently from its current and future uses […]».[9]

In this perspective foundation can be seen as a new description that unveils some hidden or removed characters of place. As a matter of fact, the meaning of *condere* – the roman verb that means both "to found" and "to hide" – brings an unsolvable paradox: the enigma of the continuous and unrestrainable oscillation between architecture that territorializes itself by representing the places and Earth that becomes architecture being invented by foundation. This mutual becoming is both an occultation and an unveiling: the ancestral marsh of Velabro is hidden under the first pavement of Foro Romano but, in the same time, the stone surface reproduces the flat and immobile surface of the water. Similarly the slopes of the hills are hidden but also remembered by the substruction walls, while Murcia Valley is substituted but also exalted by Circo Massimo: «Foundation, then, is the passage from the water

7. Corboz 1993.
8. Magnaghi 2005, p. 89.
9. *Ivi*, p. 93.

to stone, the transition of phases; let's us not forget the first waters»,[10] writes Michel Serres in his book about the meaning of the foundation of Rome for the contemporary societies. Hence foundation project aims to architectonically represent the ancestral enigma of indiscernibility between architecture and Earth's surface. Paraphrasing Heidegger's words, this enigma brings the dawn of design into proximity to that which is to be designed.[11]

Foundation and architectural design

«The foundation of Rome was not one event. It was an event, assuredly, but one that was only the first variation on a theme to be taken up again and again. Foundation is recurrent. It returns like a refrain. Rome does not cease to be founded; the act of origin or rooting continues indefinitely. To that Rome owes its long survival».[12]

How many times is it possible to found a settlement? This question sounds odd because foundation is often associated to the unrepeatable instant of the origin. According to the common opinion, after its foundation, a settlement grows along the uninterrupted line of a continuous time without ever coming back. The model is biological: settlement is founded, it grows, it lives, and it dies. But, if we try to distinguish "origin" from "foundation", we can see how only the first term holds the idea of a continuous time containing only unrepeatable events: on the contrary, "foundation" can be understood as an act, or better, a technique that is for definition repeatable. The debate about the birth of Rome have been for long time represented by two position: according to the first, Rome would grow through a slow becoming of an unique settlement (this position is due principally to Müller-Karpe's studies);[13] according to the second one, stated by Einar Gjerstad,[14] Rome would be originated from a sinecism between the communities of the several villages which occupied the site, until then independent and sovereign.

10. Serres 1991, p. 241.
11. "Then thinking must poeticize on the enigma of being. It brings the dawn of thought into proximity to that which is to be thought" in Heidegger 1946, p 281.
12. Serres 1991, p. 263.
13. Müller-Karpe 1962.
14. Gjerstad 1953-1973.

However in the half of '90 of the last century a new thesis has arisen. Andrea Carandini argued that Rome would be founded by means of a project, on the basis of the excavations that he carried out at the north slope of the Palatine from the Vesta temple to the Arch of Titus. Personified by the figure of Romulus, a deliberate act would have given a political, sacral and architectural unity to the federated system of the previous settlements. So, despite the legend, Rome would has been already formed when it was founded: «Romulus's first achievement, – writes Carandini – involving the blessing and walling of the Palatine, dates from the second quarter of the eighth century BC, and a fundamental part of the second achievement, involving the Sanctuary of Vesta in the Forum, also dates from the same part of the century, which would make it part of the same project of Romulus. We therefore have not only the *urbs* on the Palatine but also the sacred and political center of the *regnum* [...] we have, from its very beginnings, the city but also the state».[15]

This thesis attributes a very important role to a design *punctum*, in other words, to the time when a subject provided of will (not only the obscure and brute forces that dominate archaic history) performed a series of sacral and political acts accompanying them with some, accurate, architectural interventions on the site of Rome. The main demonstration of the existence of this *punctum* is the discovery of the remains of a defensive wall datable to the mid-eighth century BC, when the legend fixes the foundation of Rome. For Carandini this wall, and its urban and sacral meanings, demonstrates that the foundation of Rome was achieved by an architectural project and that it wasn't an *ex novo* creation or, on the contrary, a myth that symbolically represents the slow and progressive forming of the urban community. In Carandini's studies Romulus assumes the role of the Founder-Architect who acts in the space of design and not only in the temporal dimension of history: thus this *punctum* can be studied not only in view of its value for the understanding of the birth of Rome but also for its possible implication with architectural design of the contemporary cities. Romulus foundation can be seen as the chirurgical insertion of some specific architectures within an existent settlement: the wall around Palatine, the public platform of the Forum, the Sanctuary of Vesta.

15. Carandini 2011, p. 88.

Hence foundation means both a difference, a series of spatial transformations, and a repetition, the re-description and the re-signification of a settlement. The consciousness of this double character of foundation is important exactly today when it would seem that there is no more places to found. In our time beginning appears lost in time and the idea of founding a new settlement looks ingenuous. Despite this appearance, nowadays, more than ever, the foundation of Rome is current. Rome already existed and nevertheless Romulus founded it. Romulus founded Rome and nevertheless Rome was founded many times yet: by Augustus, Nero or abroad in the colonies. Rome, like our settlements, continues to be founded.

From this point of view, foundation assumes an anthropological dimension that constantly recurs despite the historical differences and despite the long duration of the processes which the transformations of the settlements imply. This dimension affirms a role of design that is, if not sacral, at least symbolic: foundational design represents a cyclic exigence that we cannot confuse with the incessant process of transformation of the settlements. From this point of view the contraposition between foundation and formation, between fragmented or continuous development, disappears, and the two processes seem integrated.

Finally, the usefulness of the study of what could be happen in the site of Rome towards the second half of the VIII century BC lies in the structural analogy between archaic Rome and contemporary settlements and in the role that design could play in their architectural re-thinking[16]. Also many our settlements look like dispersed places waiting for being re-founded. We can learn from Rome that founding doesn't mean creating from nothing. We can think that the foundation is a design technique whose aims are oriented to the construction of a rediscovered identity for existent settlements. Abandoning the sacral and political meanings, nowadays foundational design aims to the identity of dwelling, to the consciousness of the geographical features of the inhabited space, to the role of public space as space able to architectonically represent the Earth's surface.

Foundation and cartography

«[…] Rome is a multiplicity. It resembles those paintings that,

16. About the political aspects of this analogy see Quaroni 1969.

seen from here, look like an ocean scene; seen from there, make us see a naked figure; seen from elsewhere, represent another scene. [...] Rome is a fabric of others; it does not strictly exist as a subject; it is an ichnography. Divide it and it is still Rome; a mixture can be divided without ceasing to be a mixture, and it can grow for the same reason».[17] According to Serres, the city from which the founder Twins went, Alba, looks as many contemporary settlements: «Alba precedes Rome; indetermination precedes the determinate. [...] Alba precedes Rome, as the possible precedes the realized [...]. Alba is in Rome as the potential is in power».[18]

Alba stretches along the Earth but is indistinct, without form and, for consequence, without relationships between its architecture and Earth's surface. Alba is a "platform of origin", the primordial condition of Rome, her predecessor as place made of water and stone. The multiplicity of spaces that constitutes Alba – the chaos isn't the absence of order but rather the superimposition of many orders – still does not represent a richness or a variety in act but rather her multiplicity is confused in an undetermined white space. As integrate of all the spaces, Alba is indeed a "landscape": «There is not a single space, but a landscape. A landscape is a mosaic of spaces, not an ensemble of objects put in a common space».[19] Like our contemporary territories, made of several and superimposed strata, Alba belongs to the category of landscape because she isn't able to cut her multiplicity by means of a foundational design.

On the contrary, "Rome is a ichnography": according to Michel Serres, the foundation of Rome can be literally thought as a cartographic operation. Its result, Rome, is a map that reduces the indetermination of Alba to a determination. This is the crucial point: Romulus founded Rome by means a cartographic device able to engrave within the ground one of the strata that constitute Alba. Following the Etruscan rite, Romulus firstly traced on the top of Palatino the templum in terra that was a rectangular area from which the *auguri* scanned the bird's fly in order to determinate the right place to found the city. As Carandini explains, Romulus repeated this square diagram at three scales by means a series of "propagations": at the first scale he traced the templum itself, at the second scale he superposed the scheme to the morphology of

17. SERRES 1991, p. 151.
18. *Ivi*, pp. 45-47.
19. *Ivi*, p. 185.

the Palatino hill (since then it was also named Roma Quadrata) and at the third scale Romulus extended it to the entire settlement (see fig. Marliani). In this way the templum become the map of the site but also the diagram of the city walls and of all the walls that will sustain the other hills of the city. Romulus cartographically created what that Antonia Pizzigoni calls a "plane of attack" between geography and architecture: «The map isolates and extracts single themes, it shows how architecture, or better, some its components, characterize the points of passage between different geographic elements. Every cartographic plane, every strata is, as argue Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattarì, a 'plane of attack' between two facts among which one is a geographic element and belongs to the Earth and the second one is an element of the built, an architecture or a its component».[20]

In a similar way, in the sight of Romulus, The Architect, the cruciform diagram of the templum reproduces the cruciform shape formed by the bights of Tiber and their extension in the linear marshes of Velabro and Murcia Valley. The cardo-decumanic layout is not an abstract representation but is exactly the cartographic diagram of the site of Rome. Evidently Romulus foundational design performed the first "plane of attack" between architecture of the city and its site. But it also provided the cartographic device that allowed the propagation of Rome as diagram in the Roman Empire because it will become the layout of all the foundation roman cities. The sinking of this scheme in the ground is indeed the condition according to which Rome is an "ichnography": Rome transforms the indetermination of Alba into a cartographic representation that impresses the architectures within the surface of the Earth. In this way the map founds the Earth and the Earth doesn't preexist to its cartographic foundation.

The secret of the repeatability and actuality of the foundation is hidden within the technical and operational features of the map: "Rome does not cease to be founded; its history and its time are simply

20. Pizzigoni 2011, pp. 223-266. The orginal text is: "La carta isola ed estrae singoli temi, mostra come l'architettura o meglio alcune sue parti caratterizzino i punti di passaggio tra elementi geografici diversi. Ogni piano cartografico, ogni strato, è come dicono Gilles Deleuze e Felix Guattari un piano di «aggancio» tra due fatti di cui uno è un elemento geografico e appartiene alla natura e alla Terra, l'altro è un elemento del costruito, un'architettura o una sua parte".

what pass between two occurrences of the founding action",[21] writes Serres. Rome never leaves the time of dawn. In fact the foundation of Rome comes back again with Augustus, Nero, and Constantinus. Every time Rome encounters a determinate political and social project the city renovates the need to found herself in the Earth: while the Augustus Imperial Palace architectonically reproduces the features of the primitive site of Rome[22], the Neronian Domus Aurea designs in the middle of the city a landscape of water based on the reproduction of the coast between Rome and Naples.[23]

But, if every foundation is different from the others, if the projects change, we have also to admit that every time Rome is founded, she asks for a cartographic and geometric table (the "Anaximander's Table", as Franco Farinelli writes):[24] the cadastral order able to organize the space and to subdue the city by means of a new law. But, in the same time, through the act of building, through the obstinacy to build, this organization expresses that the Earth remains there as an essential sinking, that the foundation belongs to night, that the order grows only upon this indetermination, that the clear reason wouldn't win without basing on the obscurity. The venerated holes in the pavement of Foro Romano, like the Lacus Curtius, celebrate both the disappearance and the presence of the ancestral marsh. One of the most symbolic public spaces of the western civilization is also a flat monument in memory of the substitution of the water with the stone.

So, in every foundation, in the thickness of its obscure depth, the relation between settlement, its public spaces, and Earth's surface takes form. Foundation architectonically represents the identifying geographic features of the inhabited place. For this reason it is endless.

21. SERRES 1991, p. 115.
22. CARANDINI, 2008.
23. See for instance CHAMPLIN 1998.
24. On the "cartographic reason" as matrix of the western thought see FARINELLI, 1994, FARINELLI, 1998, FARINELLI, 2011.

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