



human development in landscapes
GRADUATE SCHOOL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KIEL

BIWEEKLY COLLOQUIUM
Monday, 14th of November, 17.00

TREES, WATERS, AND SCULPTURED STORIES: INHABITING THE FORUM
ROMANUM AS A LANDSCAPE OF MEMORY
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"Nature vs. culture", "wilderness vs. civilization": these oppositional binaries govern landscape consciousness in the world I share with my audience; as if valid for all times and places dominates our historical reconstruction of human conceptions of landscape and society and the expression of those beliefs in designed landscape at all times, in all places. But such mentalities need to be deduced from the evidence and they should not be a starting premise for investigation; the same is true of the popular rigid analytic trinity of the '3 Natures' -the wild (not humanly interfered with), the agriculturally cultivated, and the gardened. Post-antique European cultures and their global diaspora populations believe, with some truth, that our landscape architectures and sensibilities have an important descent from ancient Roman paradigms; but the scholarly community also believes, typically, that Roman landscape perceptions consistently categorically juxtaposition of Nature - unordered and spontaneous - to rigid urban and societal orders which survived by taming the unruly wild. That historical reconstruction is problematic. The obvious testing point should be the landscaping, of the communal spaces of the *Urbis Romae*, the spaces most important to its understanding of the order of the *res publica*, starting with the Forum Romanum, the approaches to it, and to the hilly skylines framing that stage for self-governance. Texts and images as well as newer archeological findings show that urban core to have been distinctively marked by carefully preserved very old trees, waters, geological features. These instantiated Roman memory of the community's providential coming-to-be; they encoded deep time itself, because some pre-dated the historic *urbs* (Romans wanted to believe) and others came into being at increasingly ancient crises of national survival; the sensory and iconic impacts of recurrent artificial 'landscaping' depended on juxtaposition with such real and mental survivals of overbuilt primordial terrain.

But who now holistically reconstructs the Forum with roofs of leaves as well as tiles, inhabited by three-dimensional satyrs and nymphs and animals, guarded by the wooded vista of the Aventine whose hunter-goddess and Dionysos and his bride guarded plebeian liberty, by the still unaltered crags, fatal to traitors, of Egeria's Capitoline? This little paper asks for such a historical vision - and its realization, too, in models and pictures of Rome's major political landscapes splashed with organic green, blue, brown. It explores how Rome's communal memory (religious, social and political) was demodied in the actual and imitative elements of 'natural' landscape interlaced within the city of brick and stone, with memory often reinforced by vivid images that weren't just art separate to their settings. Those brought to life human experience in the terrains of the past and that made visible the city's continued inhabitation by numinous "natural" beings, who had helped Romans make a Rome. The real Roman record of landscape-in-city, just like privately constructed landscapes, expressed a conviction that "Nature" is the nurse of ideal human order private and public; usually benevolently interested that we restrain our own savagery, this "Nature" is foundational not appositional to lawful freedoms and legally enforced just bonds, in society at large as in the household and house. These organic and geological markers reminded those who carried out the business of nation-building among them to look at "Nature" as if at a *monimentum* that demanded conscious care as much as the constructed monuments that focused Roman ideologies of social duration and preservation. It should not surprise that, brought up in a world where centuries-old tree roots were allowed to run from Forum to Forum Julium under the Senate House, Romans like Lucretius said that Rome's Trojan origins were an accident (in the scientific sense) of Phrygian material landscape, and Pliny the Elder made human artifice and and Roman exemplary actions into chapters in a "Natural History".

Venue: Seminar room 204, Leibnizstraße 1, CAU Kiel