

# Einleitung

## FOUNDATION, DEDICATION AND CONSECRATION IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE. AN INTRODUCTION

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Across all times and cultures, mankind has invested the act of founding buildings and cities with particular meaning and rituals. As the essays in this volume demonstrate, multiple preoccupations and agendas are at play at foundational moments, be it the laying of the first stone, the dedication of a building, the embarkation upon new territory, or the foundation of a new institution. As a result, the components of the foundation act become heavily endowed with meaning, from the location of the future building, the act of depositing the first stone, to the invocation of prestigious mythical and historical models to add weight to the occasion.

Being associated with the very foundation of human society itself, the foundation act of a building or institution may well become emblematic for a larger entity, such as the city, or indeed the cosmos. This being the case, the image of a founder holds an immense appeal to future generations, and founders across all ages and societies eagerly tap upon the aura of sacrosanctity of founders from a distant, mythical past. In his eulogies composed to praise the reform program, or *Renovatio Romae*, of Pope Sixtus IV della Rovere, the humanist poet Brandolini frequently compared the achievements of the pope to those of the city's mythical founder Romulus and Emperor August, claiming that the pope surpassed them by far. Likewise, American politicians today hope to gain votes with references to the moral examples of the founding fathers, while Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad takes great pride in likening himself to King Cyrus II (d. 530 BCE), founder of the ancient Persian Empire.

In the same way, also institutions and communities eagerly appropriate the status of mythical founders and meaningful foundation dates in order to enhance their own status and inscribe themselves within history with the capital H. Once humanists in the circle of Pomponio Leto and his Roman Academy had established the date of the supposed foundation of Rome on 21 April, they chose that day for the annual staging of banquets, orations, and the conferral of laurel crowns to poets. Some four centuries later, in 1961, the Brazilian government opted for 21 April as the date of the inauguration of their new modernist capital Brasília, constructed from scratch in the heart of the country. Felicitously, that very date happened to coincide with the date of the discovery of Brazil itself, celebrated on 22 April 1500. During the Fascist Era, Benito Mussolini turned 21 April into the *Festa del Lavoro italiano*, a day off for the nation. Since it happily coincided with the *Dies Natalis* of Rome, over the years numerous archeological and urbanistic projects were inaugurated on that very day, broadcasting the imperial ambitions of the Duce. This being the case, the inauguration of Richard Meier's Ara Pacis museum in Rome on 21 April 2006 remains at best politically sensitive.

Then as now heavily invested with meaning, foundation and inauguration ceremonies are of key importance to establish enduring relationships both between patron, building, and a larger civic or religious community. Because of this relevance for social relationships, foundation ceremonies in

late medieval and early modern culture were typically staged as public events of major scale and expenditure, in order to create and consolidate bonds between buildings, communities and beliefs.

There is an inherent circularity to the notions of foundation, dedication and consecration, because each of these acts marks a new beginning by repeating or recalling a previous or original foundation act. This circle comes into being in a chain of ideas, artifacts and actions. The aim of this volume is to investigate the way foundation acts were performed, described, theorized and appropriated, and how they formed part of a larger network of similar acts acr