

THE HIRPINI: *EX ITALIA SEMPER ALIQUID NOVI*

E. T. SALMON

NEWS HAVE INDEED COME FROM SAMNIUM, and more specifically from the Samnite tribe of the Hirpini. In the very centre of their country, south-east of Beneventum, recent extensive and important discoveries have shed new light on their history from the time of the Samnite expansion in southern Italy and onwards.¹

Like most tales of origins in antiquity, the story of the Hirpini begins with a legend. It will be remembered that their name is said to derive from *hirpus*, the Oscan word for "wolf,"² the tradition being that the Hirpini had been originally led to their historical habitat by a wolf on the occasion of a *ver sacrum* or Sacred Spring. The ethnology and the geography of the Hirpini from about 600 B.C. on are not in serious doubt.³ Ancient writings and archaeological investigations proclaim then an inhuming and Oscan-speaking Samnite people who lived in the part of southern Italy, due east of Campania, that extends 60 miles or so to the vicinity of Luceria, the Latin colony established by Rome in 314, and to the Daunian mountains. On the south, the Ofanto, Horace's *tauriformis Aufidus*,⁴ separated the Hirpini from the Lucani, although Compsa south of the river was Hirpinian. On the north, the Calor, a tributary of the Volturnus and the most Samnite of rivers, to some extent separated the Hirpini from the Pentri, these latter being the Samnites *par excellence*.

Because of their proximity to Magna Graecia and to hellenized Campania, the Hirpini were far more exposed to Greek cultural influences⁵ than

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¹M. Frederiksen, *Campania* (Oxford 1984) 134, on the Samnite migrations.

²Festus, p. 98L; Serv. ad Aen. 11.785.

³Archaeologically the Hirpini are definable (like the Pentri) from the sixth century on. Cf. G. Onorato, *La ricerca archeologica in Irpinia* (Avellino 1960).

⁴Odes 4.14.25. On the west the river Sabatus separated the Hirpini from the Caudini and from Campania. As boundaries the rivers are only convenient indications; the precise boundaries are unknown.

⁵Bruno d'Agostino, "Il mondo periferico della Magna Grecia," *Popoli e civiltà dell'Italia antica* 2 (Rome 1974) 177-271, at 184.

their Pentrian neighbours who inhabited a much loftier and less accessible zone of the Apennines. Nevertheless the Hirpini were authentically Samnite. The recent discoveries reveal them at the most important period in their history,⁶ the fifth and fourth centuries. The earlier finds are from about 420 B.C. when, according to ancient writers,⁷ the Samnites seized Capua and Cumae. It is noteworthy that in male burials, even in hellenized incineration tombs of advanced fourth-century date, the furnishings include the distinctive Samnite belts of leather and bronze.⁸

Like the Pentri, the Hirpini spoke standard Oscan. For writing they used the characteristic Oscan script. So far as we know, their political institutions were also typically Samnite: that is, they were organized as a tribal state administered by *meddices* who, although democratically elected, seem to have come regularly from a group of landed aristocratic families, such as the Magii at Aeclanum.⁹ Above all, the Hirpini were members of the Samnite League that fought Rome so bitterly in the fourth and third centuries for the supremacy of Italy. Indeed, if not the strongest member of that League, they were second only to the Pentri. Yet the Hirpini are never mentioned by name, not even once, in surviving accounts of the three Samnite Wars and the Pyrrhic War, even though all of these conflicts (apart from the First Samnite) were largely fought on their territory. The failure to name them will be understandable if we bear in mind that surviving accounts derive from Roman sources; and Livy's language suggests that the Romans visualized the wars as being fought against Samnium as a whole, a large, monoglotic, continuous, and undivided region, without much attention being paid to its separate tribes.

⁶W. Johannowsky, *Note di archeologia e topografia dell'Irpinia antica* (Avellino 1987, Edizioni del Centro Dorso) 103–117. Cf. reports on archaeological exploration in the valley of the river Ufita in *Relazioni e Comunicati Stampa*, published by the Soprintendenza archeologica delle province di Salerno, Avellino, e Benevento. Stages of Samnite culture and Greek influence are also noted in *Relazioni* (February 1985).

At the necropolis of Piano La Sala in the Carife area, the tombs, of late fifth-century date, included Etruscan and Greek bronze vases, Etruscan candelabra, and Italiote ceramics. Of the same date, and also near Carife, a tomb, unique in Samnium for its large size and opulence, contained many locally produced and imported furnishings, objects of convivial use reflecting contemporary Greek influence; the grave is of a *fossa* type. At the vast necropolis of the Contrada Addolorata at Carife, the tombs, of the fourth century, are constructed a camera with blocks of travertine or *alla cappuccina* with large terracotta tiles. Cf. R. M., "Carife," *Studi Etruschi* 52 (1984) 502; Michele De Luca, *Carife: Scavi di archeologia* (Avellino 1982). Much of the relative prosperity of the Hirpini is attributable to provisions supplied by mercenaries of Hirpinian origin. Cf. E. T. Salmon, *Samnium and the Samnites* (Cambridge 1967) 64–65.

⁷Livy (4.37.1) however seems to know that the Samnites were in Campania and in Capua long before they "seized" the city.

⁸Matilde Romito, "I cinturoni delle necropoli sannitiche di Carife," *L'Irpinia nella società meridionale* (Avellino 1987, Edizioni del Centro Dorso).

⁹Velleius 2.16.2 alludes to his great-grandfather Minatius Magius of Aeclanum, a man of influence, a local dynast.

Only after Pyrrhus' departure from Italy and the dismantling of the Samnite League did the Romans, in pursuance of their regular policy of *divide et impera*, insist on differentiating one Samnite tribe from another, and especially the Hirpini.¹⁰ Be that as it may, the Hirpini are not mentioned anywhere *by name* (not even in Fabius Pictor's roster of the peoples of Italy in 225) until Polybius' account (3.19.14) of the Second Punic War when, after Cannae, they threw in their lot with Hannibal and fought the Romans yet again.

Their persistent hostility to Rome inspired Silius Italicus to call the Hirpini *vana gens* (11.11): and, much more importantly, they paid very dearly for it. The Romans stripped them of their territory, repeatedly, even though details of the Roman confiscations are imperfectly recorded. Nor can they be divined with certainty; Festus' list of Italian communities that had been made into Roman *praefecturae* does not include any Hirpinian settlement (p. 262L). One place annexed, presumably at the end of the Pyrrhic War, was the principal centre of communication of southern Italy, the place that up until then had almost certainly served as *caput*, or administrative centre, of the Hirpini. They called it Malventum. But when the Romans seized it and changed it into a Latin colony in 268, they also changed its name to Beneventum, *auspicatius mutato nomine*, as Pliny says (*HN* 3.105). They endowed the *coloni* with a large *territorium*, of course at the expense of the Hirpini. Thereby Rome separated the Hirpini from the Caudini, the Samnite tribe to the west of them. As for Malventum's Oscan-speaking inhabitants, *vae victis*: they were presumably exterminated, expelled, or enslaved (Livy 9.27.14).

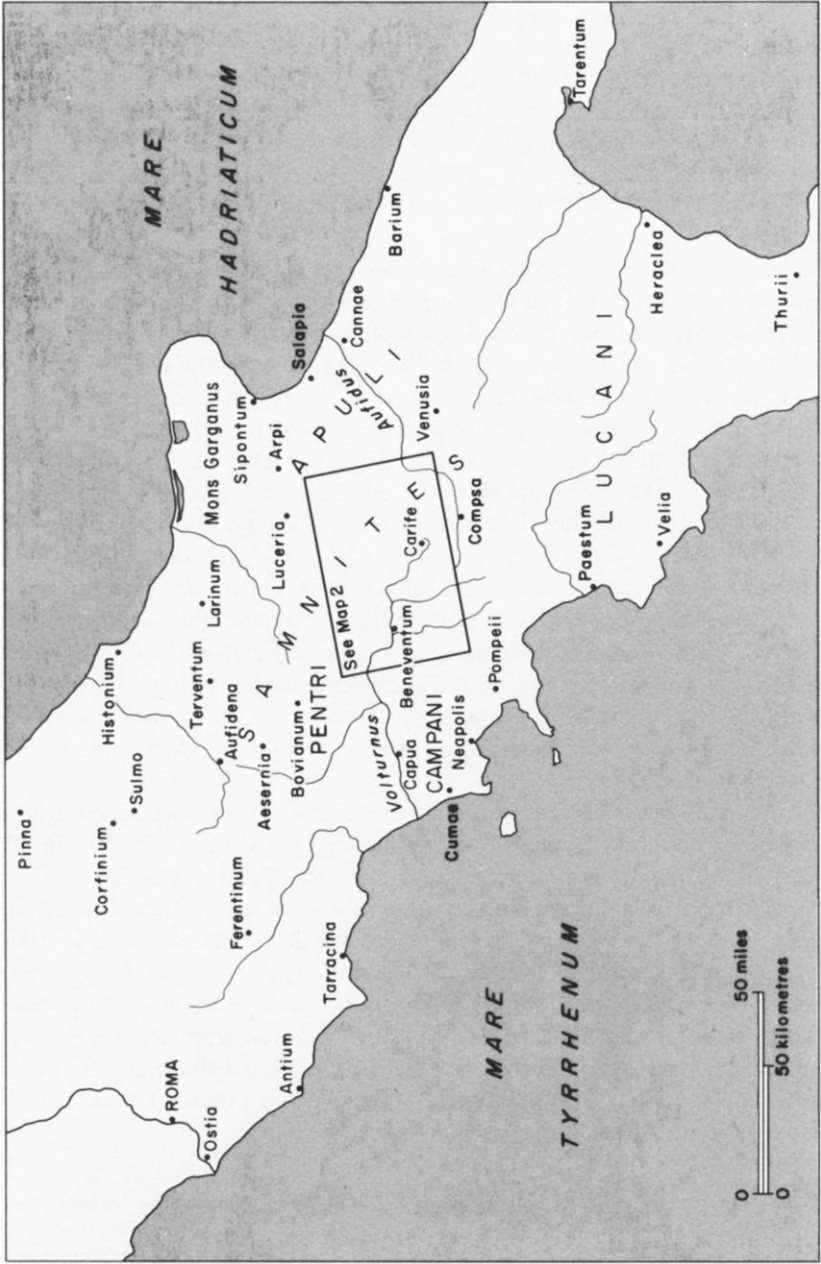
The Romans similarly cut the Hirpini off from physical contact from the Pentri, their fellow Samnites to the north, by seizing a broad strip of territory along the River Calor, perhaps after the Pyrrhic War also. The land seized here was known as the *Ager Taurasinus*.¹¹ Once again the Romans seem to have got rid of the Oscan-speakers. At any rate in 180 they re-peopled it with thousands of Ligurian Apuani (in all forty-seven thousand, plus wives and children), whom the consuls of the preceding year (181), a Cornelius and a Baebius, forcibly transferred from the La Spezia region of north-west Italy down to the south,¹² where the later times of the Roman Empire found them municipally organized as *Ligures Cornelianii et Baebiani* (= San Bartolommeo in Galdo).¹³

¹⁰E.g., Polybius 3.91.10 and Livy 22.13, 23.37, and 23.41 mention the Hirpini as a separate people.

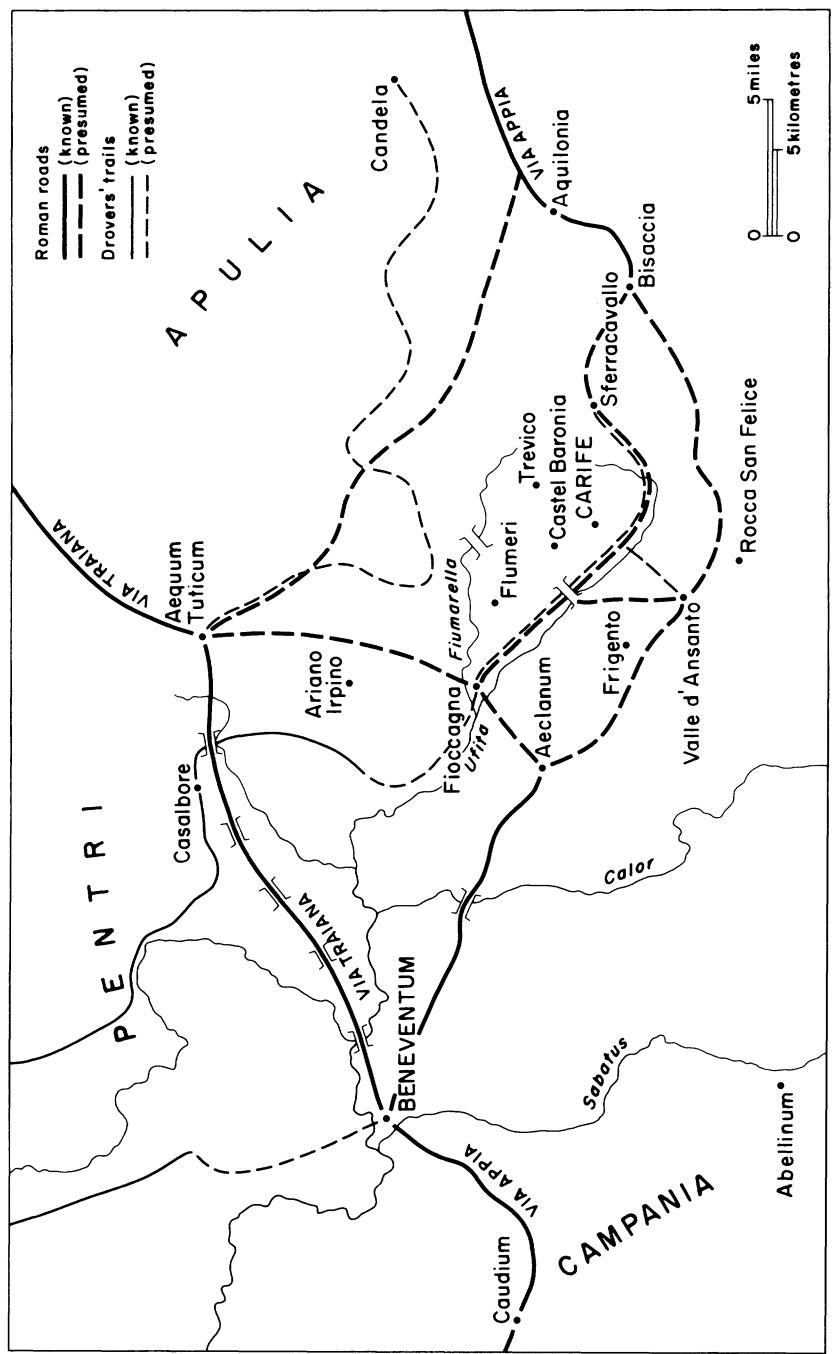
¹¹So called perhaps after the town Taurasia known from the inscription on the sarcophagus of Scipio Barbatus. Cf. A. La Regina, "L'elogio di Scipione Barbato," *Dialoghi di archeologia* (1968) 173-192.

¹²The transfer is described at Livy 40.38 and 41.3.

¹³The Ligures Baebiani may have been under the administrative centre of Aequum Tuticum.



Map 1 South-central Italy



Map 2 The Hirpinian Territory (adapted from *L'Irpinia* ... [above, n. 8] 123)

The Hirpini also lost territory in the south, perhaps after the Second Punic War. There was still Roman *ager publicus* there in 130, since Gracchan *termini*¹⁴ (boundary markers) of that year have been found there near the town of Rocca San Felice not far from the source of the Aufidus and close to the epicentre of the disastrous earthquake of 1980. Rocca San Felice is also adjacent to the vale of Amsanctus with its celebrated shrine to Mefitis immortalized by Vergil (*Aen.* 7.563 f.) so that it too was almost certainly included in the Roman seizure. The Hirpini had other shrines of course (at Casalbare,¹⁵ for instance, and at Bisaccia), but the loss of their principal one must have been particularly galling to them, since for all Samnites such sanctuaries were prime promoters of tribal solidarity. The theatre-temple complex at Pietrabbondante, for example, seems to have been for the Pentri a more potent focus of loyalty than even their *caput* at Bovianum.

Even this may not complete the tale of Roman confiscation. It seems likely that the Hirpini were also forced to surrender some of their very heart-land in the valley of the river Ufita, to make provision for an addition to the Via Appia. That highway was prolonged from Beneventum to Brundisium, some time after the latter was also made into a Latin colony about 244. No such seizure is recorded. Moreover, the road extension was so poorly carried out as to be unworthy of Roman engineers.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the Hirpini may well have had to cede tracts of land there.

Losses of territory left the Hirpini weakened and embittered. Accordingly, when Italia rose against Rome in 91, the truncated Hirpinian state joined the insurgent side. To appraise its power at that juncture is not easy, owing to the uncertainty about the full extent of its territorial losses. But the settlement at the end of the Social War may provide some clues as to where the main strength of the Hirpini had lain at the time of the war's outbreak. It is known that, after the conflict, the Hirpini became prey to Sulla's greedy henchmen, the rapacious *possessores Sullani*, led by C. Quinctius Valgus, owner, according to Cicero (who receives confirmation from inscriptions) of large tracts of Hirpinian land,¹⁷ an evident forerunner

¹⁴Degrassi, *ILLRP* 473; *CIL* IX 1024, 1025. The Gracchan commissioners were M. Fulvius Flaccus, C. Sempronius Gracchus, and C. Papirius Carbo. Cf. Salmon (above, n. 6) 332 f. For the political background in Rome, see Ernst Badian, *Foreign Clientelae* (Oxford 1958) 175.

¹⁵Casalbare on the Pescasseroli-Candela tratturo had a shrine known as the Macchia Porcara. It was destroyed in the Second Punic War. On the Amsanctus sanctuary see I. Rainini, *Il santuario di Mefite in valle d'Ansanto* (Rome 1985, *Archeologica* 60).

¹⁶Cic. *Att.* 6.1.1; Strabo 6.3.7. The Beneventum-Tarentum stretch of the Via Appia was a very shoddy affair.

¹⁷Degrassi, *ILLRP* 523, and especially 598, 645, 646. Valgus had property at Aeculanum, Pompeii, and the *municipium ignotum* (see below, 232, and n. 23). Cf. Cic. *Leg. Agr.* 3.13.

of the carpet-baggers so notorious in the annals of the great republic to the south of us.¹⁸ But of far greater historical importance and, for our purposes, of much more telling significance, was the acquisition of Roman citizenship by the Hirpini and their enrolment for the most part in the Roman tribe Galeria.¹⁹ Their own tribal state was dismantled and its principal settlements were transformed into autonomous civic commonwealths, in other words into Roman *municipia*. Manifestly, by identifying these *municipia* we can tell which were the important Hirpinian places about the year 100.

The third book of Pliny's *Natural History* gives a list of the chartered towns, *coloniae* and *municipia*, in each of Augustus' eleven Regions. The Hirpinian *municipia* were in the Second Augustan Region,²⁰ but so too were the Apulian *municipia*, and Pliny does not distinguish the one group from the other. His list of Hirpinian plus Apulian *municipia* is mixed up and confused, but from the jumble it emerges that there were four Hirpinian: namely Aeclanum, Compsa, Aquilonia, and Abellinum (soon to become a *colonia*). In effect Pliny places a *municipium* at the four corners of the Ager Hirpinus. But what about the centre? Pliny places no *municipium* there, even though it was at the very core of Hirpinian territory.

This Hirpinian heartland was the district known today as the Baronia, the valley of the river Ufita, a broad upland encircled by mountains, two to three thousand feet high. One approaches the Baronia through a mountain pass at Frigento and leaves it by another pass at Trevico,²¹ a lofty town with a magnificent panorama over two seas, the Tyrrhenian and the Adriatic. This is good farming country, as is indicated by the agricultural fair that it stages every year in May at Frigento. In fact the Baronia district is the true heartland of modern Irpinia and recent archaeological discoveries indicate that this was also the case in antiquity.

It is from this central part of the Hirpinian territory that archaeological evidence of considerable extent and significance has accumulated. Imported pottery and artefacts, most of Campanian and Apulian provenance, and local imitations of Campanian vases, indicate the range of trade and influence. This part of the country was also important as a necessary passage for some of the main highways of southern Italy. The drovers' trails that had in early times provided easy communication had gradually developed

¹⁸Cic. *Leg. Agr.* 3.8–9. Some of the confiscated land became private property of wealthy Romans.

¹⁹On the assignment of the Hirpini to Galeria see L. R. Taylor, *The Voting Districts of the Roman Republic* (Rome 1960) 111; E. T. Salmon (above, n. 6) 376.

²⁰With the exception of Abellinum placed in Region I. On Abellinum, see G. Colucci Pescatori, "L'alta Valle del Sabato e la colonia romana di Abellinum," *L'Irpinia nella società meridionale* (Avellino 1987, Edizioni Centro Dorso).

²¹Readers of Horace *Satires* 1.5.71–89 will remember that in his journey to Brundisium in 37, which took him through Hirpinian country, he spent a night at a villa near Trevicum.

into serviceable roads that later became part of the great arterial highways of consular and imperial construction. The Via Appia was one of them, crossing the Baronia not far from the town of Carife.

I contend that when the Social War broke out in 91 there surely must have been at least one Hirpinian settlement in the Baronia large enough and developed enough for instant metamorphosis into a Roman *municipium* at the war's end; and I suggest further that Pliny failed to list it²² simply because he lost track of it in his scrambled and jumbled list of chartered towns in Augustus' Second Region.

This is no idle conjecture. Since the Second World War inscriptions have been published that mention a *municipium* there, unfortunately without actually naming it. The documents do make it clear, however, that the *municipium* had *quattuorviri iure dicundo* as its principal local magistrates,²³ a sure sign (in my opinion) that it was a settlement that had a marked degree of development in its pre-Roman days. This *municipium ignotum* apparently belonged to the Roman tribe Galeria, an equally sure sign that it had been insurgent in the Social War. That it was not one of the four *municipia* named by Pliny seems certain, for the find-spots of the relevant inscriptions are too far away from any of Pliny's four, none of which were in the Baronia. However, there is in the Baronia a site ideally suitable for a *municipium*.

To sum up, it looks as if, at the time of the Social War, there were five communities in *Hirpinis* sufficiently urbanized to qualify for immediate conversion into Roman *municipia* when the conflict came to its end. Of these five, Aeclanum, controlling the main mountain pass leading into Apulia (the Mirabella), may well have replaced the lost Beneventum as the most important Hirpinian settlement after 268: the hundreds of inscriptions that survive from the later Roman period bespeak its consequence. Nevertheless, it seems very unlikely that Aeclanum took the initiative in persuading the Hirpini to throw in their lot with the Italic insurgents of 91. By that year there were pro-Roman groups in many if not most of the insurgent Italic districts. The most notorious of such pro-Roman groups was to be found amongst the Vestini at the town of Pinna. But Pinna was not unique.²⁴ Amongst the Hirpini Aeclanum played a very similar role. In fact Aeclanum had had a strong pro-Roman element ever since the Second

²²Pliny HN 3.99 f. also fails to list Aequum Tuticum.

²³Degrassi, *ILLRP* 598, 599 in Frigento cathedral. The inscriptions record *IVviri* who were responsible for constructing public works in the *municipium*. Degrassi's notes on these inscriptions are relevant (pp. 88, 89). The inscriptions, on limestone blocks, were used as building material in the medieval church and were brought from somewhere else. Cf. *CIL* IX, p. 92 and the uncertainty about the *municipium aliunde ignotum*.

²⁴Livy 23.2 f. refers to the pro-Roman Mopsii at Compsa. Velleius 2.16.2 praises Minatius Magius' loyalty to Rome.

Punic War, when an ancestor of the historian Velleius Paterculus, a certain Decius Magius, a *domi nobilis* of Capua, led a band of followers away from that rebellious city and settled at Aeclanum.²⁵ When the Social War erupted in 91, this man's grandson, Minatius Magius, the great-grandfather of Velleius, raised a legion at Aeclanum to fight on the Roman side.²⁶ Aeclanum did, it is true, decide to join the insurgents in the Social War, but not very wholeheartedly. Its pro-Roman element no doubt explains why Aeclanum got special treatment at the war's end: in receiving Roman citizenship, it was assigned to the Roman tribe Cornelia²⁷ and not lumped along with the rest of the Hirpini into the tribe Galeria.²⁸

Surely therefore it must have been other Hirpini than the inhabitants of Aeclanum that took the lead in bringing their tribe into insurgent ranks in the Social War. It may even have been the place that stood near the centre of their territory, in the valley of the river Ufita. Obviously the possibility of this place becoming the elusive *municipium ignotum* comes to mind. In his account of the Third Samnite War, Livy (10.17) mentions a place, apparently in the very heart of Hirpinian territory, which was evidently of some importance, since on its capture by the Romans, in 296, it yielded huge spoils and thousands of prisoners. Its name was Romulea, and it was of such size and consequence that, unlike any other Hirpinian settlement, it found a place in the gazetteer of Stephanus Byzantius, who described it as a *polis* of the Samnites in Italy.

Neither Livy nor Stephanus pinpoints its exact location, but for that the Itineraries come to our aid. The Antonine Itinerary, the Ravenna Cosmography, and the Peutingerian Table all name Sub Romula²⁹ as a station on the Via Appia between Aeclanum (the modern Mirabella Eclano) and Pons Aufidi (the bridge across the Aufidus generally identified with the modern Ponte San Venere). Now Sub Romula was either 16 or 21 Roman miles from Aeclanum-Mirabella, depending upon which Itinerary you choose to believe. Today, at slightly more than 20 Anglo-Saxon miles from Aeclanum-Mirabella by the winding modern road there is the hill-town of Carife, in the midst of the already noted archaeological revelations. It is most probable,

²⁵See R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1939) 82, on the influence of the municipal aristocrats.

²⁶Velleius 2.126.2-3. Rome rewarded Minatius Magius by making his sons praetors at Rome.

²⁷Aeclanum was in the Cornelia tribe, as in *CIL* IX 1023 and 1132, the latter with a *IVvir iure dicundo*.

²⁸Degrassi, *ILLRP* 921, on a tombstone in the Frigento area, belonging to a man from the Galeria tribe. Cf. *CIL* IX 1049, 1050, regarding *quattuorviri iure dicundo* from the Galeria tribe. These too were probably brought from somewhere else.

²⁹*CIL* IX, p. 26, VI: The Antonine, Ravenna, and Peutinger Itineraries show the stations on the Via Appia from Tarentum to Beneventum. (The Sub Murula in the Ravenna Itinerary is obviously a corruption of Sub Romula.)

as recently suggested by Johannowsky,³⁰ that Carife must occupy the site of ancient Romulea.

It is certainly suitable, not only because it is at the right distance away from Aeclanum Mirabella, and not only because of the extent and importance of its archaeology, but also because this Hirpinian centre was well placed near much travelled roads in a zone of transit that provided many contacts, to judge from the diversity of coins in a hoard³¹ found in the Carife area. These coins came from many towns in South Italy with its coastal regions, from Sicily, and from Rome.³² Of great advantage, one must assume, for cultural exchange and trade, was the vicinity of the sanctuary in the valley of Amsanctus, the most important of all the mephitic *loca sacra* frequented by devotees from all Samnium and celebrated in ancient literature. The sanctuary survived until some time in the fourth century A.D.

Archaeological evidence³³ suggests that the inhabitants of Romulea were a fairly developed community, with a certain degree of refinement in the production and choice of their artefacts. They were open to outside influences but kept their Samnite identity even while adopting Greek customs. And if Romulea *did* become a *municipium*, Stephanus Byzantius' description of it as a *polis* is justified.³⁴

One can of course object that a hill-town is not likely to have been a station right on the Via Appia. This is true. But then the Itineraries do not say that Romulea was right on the road. They say that Sub Romula was, and only a very obstinate and unreasonable sceptic will deny that Sub Romula must be the place on the actual highway, lying underneath the town of Romulea on the heights above.

Of course, it may seem strange that Hirpinian Samnites should have chosen so very Roman a name as Romulea for one of their major settlements.

³⁰ Johannowsky (above, n. 6) 104. Among previous, mostly inconclusive, attempts to identify the site of Romulea cf. Mommsen, *CIL* IX, p. 121. Hans Philipp, "Romulea," *RE* 1A (1914) 1074, and G. Radke, "Romulea," *Der kleine Pauly* 4 (Munich 1972) 1455, both place Sub Romula at the foot of the mountain on which stood the Samnite fortress of Romulea.

³¹ Renata Cantilena, in a report on Carife (Soprintendenza archeologica delle province di Salerno, Avellino, e Benevento, 1987) lists the coins found in a small hoard in the Carife area dating from the late third century. Coins from Arpi, Salapia, Brundisium, Tarentum, Heraclea, Thurii, and Syracuse were found along with Mamertine coins and specimens from Neapolis, Aquilonia, Rome, and possibly Fistelia.

³² A. Stazio, "Storia monetaria dell'Italia preromana," *Popoli e civiltà dell'Italia antica* 7 (Rome 1978) 113–193, at 164–165, provides a map and a list of coin hoards showing Beneventum and Carife as the only two find spots in the Hirpinian region.

³³ *Studi Etruschi* 52 (1984) 503 reports tombs *alla cappuccina* discovered fortuitously in the town of Carife itself, probably of the late first century B.C. This seems to confirm a continuity in the type of grave construction.

³⁴ Near the banks of the river Ufita, below Carife, remains of Roman villas show traces of prosperity. They have not yet been explored.

But why assume that the Romans had an exclusive and prescriptive right to use the name of Romulus? Is it fanciful to suggest that traditions from a very remote antiquity could have circulated among more than one of the various tribes peopling Iron Age Italy? In fact we know that Romans and Hirpini had at least one tradition in common: they both claimed to be "wolf"-people and it may well be the case that Romulus was a hero to others besides Romans. In this connection it is worth pointing out that the name Romulus (or something very like it) still survives in Hirpinian country today; just south and slightly west of Avellino there is a 2600 foot high mountain called Romola. I concede that the name may have been bestowed upon the mountain in modern times, but it may also preserve the memory of an ancient name.³⁵

³⁵Cf. *CIL* IX, p. 121.