

The Babylonian Origins of Trier

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1 Introduction: The Real History of Trier

Isidore of Seville complains: 'Concerning the question of by whom a city was founded, disagreement is a common thing, so that even the origin of the city of Rome cannot be established with certainty'.¹ In Trier, the memory of the fact that the city was temporarily one of the capital cities of the Roman Empire led to the construction of a legendary prehistory which was to surpass that of all cities, except perhaps Rome, with age and grandeur. This circumstance is well known and has often been investigated. In this contribution I will summarize how the legend of the founding of Trier developed in the course of the Middle Ages and how the humanists of the Renaissance reacted to it; finally, I will touch upon the rather delicate question of the ideas of architectural history behind such an early dating.

Nowadays, historians believe to know about the origins of Trier [Fig. 20.1].² The city was founded by Emperor Augustus; her name, Augusta Treverorum, from which the present name derives, means city of Augustus in the country of the Treverians, which was what the Germanic tribe that resided there was named. During the second century the city attained great wealth. At the end of the third century it became the seat of a bishop. Immediately after the conversion of Constantine the Great to Christianity, and still during his reign, the first construction of the cathedral was completed. It was the first bishop's church outside Italy. From the year 318 Trier was the seat of the Gallic Prefecture, which was one of the highest authorities in the Western Roman Empire. In the fourth century Trier was a seat of government of the Roman Empire and an imperial residence. The city would then have numbered approximately 80,000 to 100,000 inhabitants. In the Middle Ages Trier was greatly diminished, as were most Western cities, but the church still gave her great importance. The

1 'De auctoribus conditarum urbium plerumque dissensio invenitur, adeo ut nec urbis quidem Romae origo possit diligenter agnoscī'. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* xv, 1, ed. W.M. Lindsay, vol. II (Oxford: 1911, reprint 1962).

2 Heinen H., *Trier und das Trevererland in römischer Zeit. 2000 Jahre Trier*, vol. I (Trier: 1985); Anton H.H. – Haverkamp A. (eds.), *Trier im Mittelalter. 2000 Jahre Trier*, vol. II (Trier: 1996).



FIGURE 20.1 Image of Trier, from: Matthias Merian, *Topographia Germaniae, Archiepiscopatum Moguntiensis, Trevirensis, et Coloniensis* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1646)
IMAGE © AUTHOR

archbishop of Trier was one of the three ecclesiastical electors of the Empire and was often considered the most noble. The Holy Robe of Jesus, which is preserved in the cathedral, is one of the most prominent relics of Christianity and attracted many pilgrims. Since the mid tenth century the city was called, as proudly as Constantinople, a 'second Rome'; this was also repeated in the eleventh century on coins of the archbishop.³

The buildings and infrastructure of antiquity shaped the face of the city until the Middle Ages. Nowadays some impressive monuments still bear witness to her great Roman past: these are two thermal baths and an arena, the Roman bridge, the audience hall of the imperial residence – i.e. the so-called Basilica [Fig. 20.2], which was included in the archbishop's residence – and one of the four city gates, the Porta Nigra [Fig. 20.3]. During the Middle Ages, the ruins of many other buildings, large graveyards, and parts of the ancient city walls with the other three large city gates also were preserved. These city gates were as magnificent as the Porta Nigra, which remained unaffected only

3 Anton – Haverkamp, *Trier im Mittelalter*, vol. II, 168, 232.



FIGURE 20.2 The Basilica or Aula Palatina at Trier (ca. 310 AD)
IMAGE © AUTHOR



FIGURE 20.3 The Porta Nigra (180 AD) of Trier, field side
IMAGE © PUBLIC DOMAIN

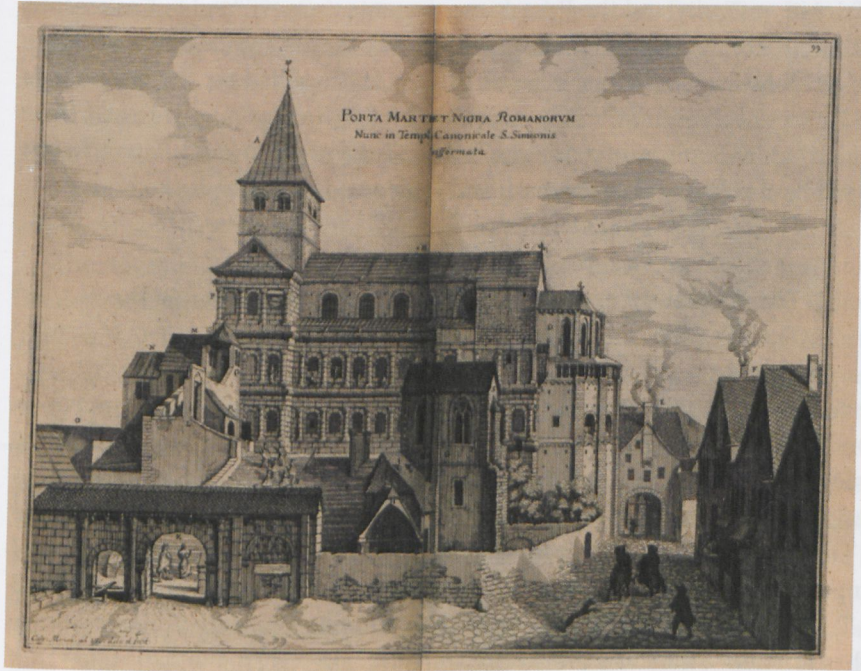


FIGURE 20.4 Caspar Merian, Porta Nigra, town side with the church of St. Simeon. From: Christoph Brouwer – Jacob Masen, *Antiquitatum et annalium Treverensium libri xxv* (Liège, Johannes Mathias Hovius: 1670–1671) vol. 1
IMAGE © AUTHOR

because a church was built into it [Fig. 20.4]. It was then evident that the ancient city walls were about twice the size of the medieval one. In no city north of the Alps were antiquity and early Christianity as present as they were in Trier. The city of Trier was proud of her great monuments. She portrayed them on her seal and on coins.⁴ The old seal (of which only an exemplar dated 1261 is known) shows quite realistically the Palace Hall, and on some archiepiscopal denarii the Porta Nigra and another city gate, the Porta Alba, which has since disappeared, are represented somewhat idealized.

Trier competed with other bishop cities for power and prestige. In the ninth century Trier had already claimed primacy over the entire province of Belgica Gallia, established by Augustus, which included the western part of Belgium, the north-eastern part of today's France, and the catchment area of the Moselle where Trier is situated. In 969 by an indult of Pope John XIII Trier did indeed obtain the primacy over Gaul and Germania. The prominent secular position

4 Anton – Haverkamp, *Trier im Mittelalter*, vol. II, 198–200.

of Trier in antiquity and the Roman monuments were pointed out as reasons for this preference.⁵ However, the archbishop of the old capital of the province of Belgica Gallia, i.e. Reims, resisted the claim. He relied on the fact that in the Diocletian Reformation the province established by Augustus had been divided into two parts, one around Trier and the other around Reims. Reims should have primacy over one part, and Trier over the other part.

2 The Founding Legend of Trier: Origins and Reception in the Renaissance

Since the mid eleventh century the city of Trier underlined her elevated position by the invention of various legends. St Peter was said to have sent a disciple of Christ, Saint Eucharius, to Trier, in order to convert the population to Christianity. He was considered to be the first bishop of Trier. His presence in Trier was the main reason for the indult of Pope John XIII. The parents of Emperor Constantine the Great, Constantius Chlorus and Saint Helena, lived in Trier. Saint Helena was thought to have brought the Holy Robe and other relics to Trier.⁶ There was even a document created in Trier which stated that Pope Sylvester, who allegedly received the western half of the Roman Empire from Constantine the Great, had elevated the bishops of Trier to be head pastors of all Germans and Gauls, and this was declared to have been regularly reconfirmed by the following popes.⁷

Moreover, the legend of the primeval foundation of Trier emerged. The Roman history of the city Augusta Treverorum was moved into the second row behind this legend; sometimes it was even completely suppressed. As all other cities north of the Alps had to be surpassed in age, one had to go far back in time. Many cities, like Rome, traced their origins back to Trojan heroes who escaped to Europe. Johannes Trithemius, although himself an inventor of historical myths, complained that everyone was seeking to secure a Trojan ancestor, 'as if there had been no peoples in Europe before the fall of Troy and no crooks

5 Anton – Haverkamp, *Trier im Mittelalter*, vol. II, 218; Kentenich G., "Die Trierer Gründungssage in Wort und Bild", in Gesellschaft für nützliche Forschungen zu Trier (ed.), *Trierer Heimatbuch. Festschrift zur Rheinischen Jahrtausendfeier 1925* (Trier: 1925) 193–212, spec. 198.

6 Anton – Haverkamp, *Trier im Mittelalter*, vol. II, 195–196. Kölzer T., "Zu Fälschungen für St. Maximin in Trier", in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter Teil*, vol. 3: *Diplomatische Fälschungen* (Hannover: 1988) 315–326. Heyen, F.-J., "Fälschung und Legende. Das Beispiel der Trierer Märtyrerlegende", in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter Teil*, vol. 5: *Fingierte Briefe, Frömmigkeit und Fälschung, Realienfälschung* (Hannover: 1988) 403–415.

7 Kentenich, "Trierer Gründungssage" 199.

under the Trojans.⁸ The Celts were also said to have come from Troy. Reims was supposed to have been founded by Remus at about the same time as Rome. But the city of Trier set her age back to the time of Abraham. She claimed to have been founded 1300 years earlier than Rome, and that many more cities had been founded from Trier; Reims was sometimes counted among them. During the Middle Ages, Trier appeared to be without dispute the oldest city north of the Alps. This is the topic of the present contribution.⁹

The founding legend was reported for the first time in the *Hystoria Treverorum*, dated 1050–1060, with reference to an unidentifiable *Historia Gallica*.¹⁰ It has the following main content: Trebeta was a son of Ninus, a great-grandson of Noah, and his first consort. Ninus founded the first empires – Babylon and Assyria – and built the Tower of Babel. After the death of Ninus, his second wife Semiramis became ruler and constructed or continued to construct the city of Babylon. She tried to force her stepson, Trebeta, to marry her. However, the young prince fled from his stepmother. He arrived in Belgica Gallia in the beautiful valley of the Moselle, at the place where he

- 8 Johannes Trithemius, *Chronologia mystica. Opera historica*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt, Marnius and heirs of Ioannes Aubrius: 1601), fol. 5 v. Cf. Staubach N., "Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Zeit", in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter*, vol. 1 (Hannover: 1988) 263–316. Grafton A., *Fälscher und Kritiker. Der Betrug in der Wissenschaft* (Berlin: 1990) 31, 49.
- 9 Basic mainly: Amiet J., *Die Gründungssage der Schwesterstädte Solothurn, Zürich und Trier* (Solothurn: 1890); Kentenich, "Trierer Gründungssage"; Haari-Oberg I., *Die Wirkungsgeschichte der Trierer Gründungssage vom 10. bis 15. Jahrhundert* (Bern: 1994). Moreover: Knaus H., *Vor Rom stand Trier. Die Trierer Gründungssage* (Trier: 1948); Zenz E., *Das legendäre Gründungsalter der Stadt Trier*, Trier-Texte 1 (Trier: 1983); Clemens L., "Zum Umgang mit der Antike im hochmittelalterlichen Trier", in Anton – Haverkamp, *Trier im Mittelalter*, vol. 11, 167–202; Bönnen G., "Formen und Funktionen der Trierer Geschichtsschreibung des 11. und 12. Jahrhunderts", *ibidem* 203–238, here 231–234; Binsfels W., "Trierer Archäologie von 1500 bis 1800", in *Gesellschaft für Nützliche Forschungen zu Trier* (ed.), *Antiquitates Trevirenses. Festschrift zur 200-Jahr-Feier der Gesellschaft für Nützliche Forschungen zu Trier*, Kurtrierisches Jahrbuch 40 (Trier: 2000) 25–30; Clemens L., *Tempore Romanorum constructa. Zur Nutzung und Wahrnehmung antiker Überreste nördlich der Alpen während des Mittelalters*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 50 (Stuttgart: 2003) 322–333. Also, many papers on the historiography of the Renaissance in general treat the foundation legend of Trier: Gotthelf F., *Das deutsche Altertum in den Anschauungen des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, *Forschungen zur neueren Literaturgeschichte* 8 (Berlin: 1900) 5–7. Ferguson W.F., *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Boston: 1948) 33–37; Borchardt F.L., *German Antiquity in Renaissance Myth* (Baltimore – London: 1971) 43–44 and *passim*; Krapf L., *Germanenmythus und Reichsideologie. Frühhumanistische Rezeptionsweisen der taciteischen "Germania"*, *Studien zur deutschen Literatur* 59 (Tübingen: 1979) 61–67; Wood C.S., *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: 2008) 26–29.
- 10 Kentenich, "Trierer Gründungssage" 196–197. Haari-Oberg, *Wirkungsgeschichte der Trierer Gründungssage* 19–20.

founded the city which he called after his own name *Treberis*. This was in the seventh year of Abraham, 1300 years before the foundation of Rome (753 BC). From Trier Trebeta subjugated vast areas of Gaul and founded other towns. In the ruins of these cities inscriptions were said to have been found, which stated that the supremacy of Trier was recognized. Altogether, it was claimed that Trier was the capital of all Europe, and that it was not the Romans who founded Trier, but that they had incorporated in their empire the city that had come into being long before, in the times of Abraham.

During the course of the Middle Ages, many chronicles were composed. They paraphrased the Trebeta legend, especially as it was recorded in the *Gesta Treverorum* (1101). Afterwards, the founding legend was taken over into other chronicles, especially into the famous *Chronica sive historia de duabus civitatibus* by Otto of Freising, which contrasts Jerusalem and Babel, the heavenly and the earthly kingdoms, but also contains much valuable information about the history of its own time (1143–1146).¹¹ Finally, the legend spread internationally. At the end of the twelfth century, Godefridus of Viterbo, who was temporarily employed in the service of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, quotes it in his chronicle that was much used up to the middle of the sixteenth century.¹² The variations introduced by the chronicles of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries have the following overall content: they specify that Trebeta after he had established Trier, founded Cologne and Mainz, the residences of the two other German ecclesiastical electors, as well as Strasbourg, Worms, and Basel. The origins of the construction of the city of Trier fluctuated. The *Gesta Treverorum* indicate that Hero, the son of Trebeta, began to build the city after inhabitants had already settled there. Anyway, around the year 1200 Trier was called the ‘second Babylon in the Occident’.¹³

Sometimes the foundation of Trier was connected with the legend of Troy. Godfrey of Viterbo reports that Trebeta had first established Troy, and afterwards had founded Trier as the capital of ‘Alamania’.¹⁴ In his *Memoriale de prerogativa Imperii Romani* (ca. 1281), the Cologne canonist Alexander of Roes writes about the escape of Trojan heroes into the West: while Aeneas settled in Rome, his brother named Priamus came to the city of Trier, which had existed since Abraham’s time.¹⁵ There, Priamus’s followers married German women and learned the German language from them. The result of this was that

11 Kentenich, “Trierer Gründungssage” 194–195.

12 Godefridus of Viterbo, *Pantheon, sive universitatis libri, qui chronici appellantur* (Basel, Iacobi Parci: 1559) 106–107.

13 Haari-Oberg, *Wirkungsgeschichte der Trierer Gründungssage* 63.

14 Idem 57–58.

15 Idem 70, 125.

Germans and the Italians must be brothers. The treatise is a pamphlet for the transfer of the universal supremacy from the Roman Empire to the medieval Empire. It is directed against the competition of the new French dominion, and against the claim of the popes to stand above the emperor. In a 1460 treatise on German national law, the story of the Trojan procession to Rome and Trier was resumed.¹⁶

Since the beginning of the sixteenth century, doubts about the founding legend were loud, and gradually more and more humanists rejected the story. Beatus Rhenanus wrote, around 1531, ironically:

Quae de Trebeta Augustae Trevirorum conditore et de eius vetustate quidam afferunt, ut Taciti verbis utar, neque confirmare argumentis neque refellere in animo est. Scio hoc inesse Chronicis monachalibus et multa licent vetustati, in quam inquirere sane nephas iudicatur.

What some people say about Trebeta, the founder of Augusta Trevirorum, and its old age, to use the words of Tacitus, I neither want to support by arguments nor deny. I know that this legend is found in monks' chronicles – and much is permitted to the old days, in which to enquire would be a blasphemy.¹⁷

However, German writers often repeated the founding legend during the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries.¹⁸ Even great pioneers of humanism, such as Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa and Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who afterwards became Pope Pius II, adopted it.¹⁹ The reason why Cusanus was fond of the legend may have been that he was a native of the Trier region. Incidentally, his great library, which is still preserved in the St Nicolas hospital in Cusa (founded by Cusanus) gave access to writings of ancient authors in the Trier area. Enea was so determined to show the importance of Trier so much that he also included in his *Germania* the legend that St Peter had sent the first bishop to Trier. Obviously, there were political reasons for his acceptance of the founding legend of Trier; however, it is still amazing: The aim of Enea's treatise was to

16 Idem 123–124.

17 Beatus Rhenanus, *Rerum Germanicarum libri tres* (1531), ed. and trans. F. Mundt, *Frühe Neuzeit* 127 (Tübingen: 2008) 392.

18 Haari-Oberg, *Wirkungsgeschichte der Trierer Gründungssage* 76–164. Borchardt, *German Antiquity*.

19 Nicholas of Cusa, *Concordantia catholica*. written in Basel 1431–1433; Piccolomini Enea Silvio, *Germania*, ed. A. Schmidt (Cologne – Graz: 1962) 51; Borchardt, *German Antiquity* 43–44, 53–55. Haari-Oberg, *Wirkungsgeschichte der Trierer Gründungssage* 120–123.

contrast the primitive culture of pagan Germany, as Tacitus describes it, where the Germans lived in huts scattered in forests, with the flourishing country at the beginning of the Renaissance, which had made progress towards civilization, culture, and prosperity thanks to Christianity and the Roman Church. The foundation of Trier, with its magnificent monuments, 1300 years earlier than the one of Rome does not fit well with this view of history. Nicholas of Cusa and Enea Silvio Piccolomini brought the legend to Italy. Widespread works, such as the *World Chronicle* of Hartmann Schedel (1493) and the *Cosmography* of Sebastian Münster (1544), spread it internationally.²⁰ The legend also entered into French and Italian writings.²¹

In Trier, the founding legend was presented on special occasions. At the Reichstag held in Trier in 1512, the Holy Robe was first exhibited, and simultaneously the corpse of St Eucharius was discovered. On this occasion, Johann Enen, professor at the University of Trier, which was founded in 1473, wrote an account of Trier's history and relics. There he repeats the legend of the Babylonian foundation, relying on the *Gesta Treverorum*.²² When Cardinal Giovanni Francesco Commendone visited Trier as a papal nuncio in 1562, he got to know the foundation legend and the story of the city's particular position in the Roman Empire, with the conclusion that Trier was the capital of the entire province of Belgica Gallia.²³ This should certainly be reminiscent of the archbishop's demands in church politics.

As many cities, Trier managed to gradually obtain economical and juridical self-determination. Trier was well on its way to attaining imperial immediacy. The archbishops had opposed it since the early sixteenth century.²⁴ They

20 Schedel Hartmann, *Das buch der Cronicken und gedechtnus würdigern geschichten* (Nuremberg, Anton Koberger: 1493), fol. 23 r. Münster Sebastian, *Cosmographia* (Basel, Henrich Petri: 1546) 75. Haari-Oberg, *Wirkungsgeschichte der Trierer Gründungssage 140–144*. Joachimsen P., *Geschichtsauffassung und Geschichtsschreibung in Deutschland unter dem Einfluß des Humanismus* (Leipzig: 1910) 87–91, 189–194.

21 Foresti Jacobo, *Supplementum cronicarum* (Brescia, Boninus de Boninis: 1485) 103. Lemaire de Belges Jean, *Les illustrations de Gaule et Singularitez de Troye* (written 1511–1513), in *Œuvres* II, ed. J. Stecher (Leuven: 1882) 288–289. Corrozet Gilles – Champier Symphorien, *Le Catalogue des antiques érections des villes et cités, fleuves et fontaines, assises ès troys Gaules, c'est assavoir Celticque, Belgicque et Aquitaine* (Paris, Estienne Groulleau: 1551), fols. 14 v–15 v (first ed. 1531).

22 Enen Johann, *Medulla Gestorum Treverensium* (Metz, Caspar Hochfeder: 1514) I.4.

23 Nuntiatrberichte aus Deutschland nebst ergänzenden Aktenstücken 2, 2: Abt. 2, 1560–1572, ed. Wandruszka A. (Tübingen: 1953) 145–150. Wandruszka A., "Kurtrier vor vier Jahrhunderten. Ein italienischer Reisebericht aus den Jahren 1561/62", *Kurtrierisches Jahrbuch* 9 (1969) 129–138.

24 Kentenich, "Trierer Gründungssage" 206–207; Burgard F., "Auseinandersetzungen zwischen Stadtgemeinde und Erzbischof (1307–1500)", in Anton – Haverkamp, *Trier im Mittelalter* 295–398.



FIGURE 20.5 Anonymous artist, *Trebeta as legendary founder of cities* (1559). Painting, destroyed during World War II

IMAGE © G. KENTENICH 1925

succeeded in removing Trier from the Imperial Register (the list of the Imperial Estates) and refused to confirm the old treaties with the citizens. The citizens protested against the removal. They tried twice to defend their rights before the Imperial Court (1560, 1580). In 1571 they presented the lawyer Wilhelm Kyriander as their attorney. In order to justify the right of the imperial immediacy, he wrote the *Annales sive commentarii de origine et statu antiquissimae civitatis Augustae Treverorum*. A central argument for him was the founding legend.

In 1559 the citizens commissioned a painting for an administration house which presented Trebeta with the cities he had founded. On the painting, there are several inscriptions [Fig. 20.5].²⁵ One of them has the following verses:

²⁵ The picture was destroyed in the World War II; there remains a modified version of it, dated 1684. Kentenich, "Trierer Gründungssage" 210.

Vor Christus Geburt Trier, die alte Stat,
 Zway dusent acht und nuinzig Jar gebuit wart,
 Drey dusent hundert syben und sybenzig Jar
 Nach Anfang der Welt ist angefangen sunder far
 Dusent drey hundert Jar vor Rom
 Wardt uffgericht Trier, die edle Kron.

Two thousand and ninety-eight years before the birth of Christ,
 Trier, the ancient city, was built.
 Three thousand one hundred seventy-seven years
 After the beginning of the world safely,
 One thousand three hundred years before Rome,
 Trier, the noble crown, was erected.

The other inscription bundles the founding legend of the city and ends with the words:

Den sy auch behielt
 Gueten Schirm und Frid
 Nach der Statt und Rom Sitt.
 Der sy sich gleichet an Ars und Regiment,
 so das sy darnach wart genent
 der ander Steten ein Bloem,
 das ander und dis zweith Rom.

For she also remained
 Well in safety and peace
 According to the custom of the city and Rome,
 To which she is equal concerning art and government,
 Wherefore she was called
 A flower among the cities
 And another and a second Rome.

The citizens lost the processor case. The archbishop then suppressed Kyriander's writing as much as possible; however, John I, Count Palatine and Duke of Zweibrücken had it printed during a quarrel with the archbishop in 1603.²⁶ It was republished three more times up to 1629. In 1626 new annals

26 Kyriander Wilhelm, *Annales sive commentarii de origine et statu antiquissimae civitatis Augustae Treverorum* (Zweibrücken, Kaspar Wittel: 1603) 20–24.

of Trier, written by the Jesuit Christoph Brouwer on behalf of the archbishop, were published. There, the founding legend was consigned to the realms of fantasy. However, in 1670 another Jesuit, Jacob Masen, quickly corrected and revised the work in such a way that the founding legend was again fully confirmed.²⁷ Both Kyriander and Masen justify their confirmation of the founding legend not by means of new historical documents, but by listing at length all the post-classical authors who had confirmed it, underlining especially the contributions of the humanists, who were known to be critical. This method is actually typical of the Middle Ages and has been criticized by humanist historians since the beginning of the Renaissance.

In 1683, the master of the baker's office and secretary of the cathedral Johann Wilhelm Polch had the so-called Red House erected as the site of representation for the citizens on the main market place of Trier. He placed the following proud inscription on the facade as an opposition to the disasters which the wars of Louis XIV had brought upon the country [Fig. 20.6]:²⁸

ANTE ROMAM TREVIRIS STETIT ANNIS MILLE TRECENTIS.
PERSTET ET AETERNA PACE FRVATVR. AMEN.

Trier existed thousand and three hundred years before Rome.
May it continue to exist and enjoy eternal peace. Amen.

The Renaissance writers who questioned the legend of Trebeta's founding of Trier have not always replaced it with versions that today's scholars might consider appropriate. Jacob Wimpfeling, one of the fathers of humanism in Germany, was looking among ancient authors for evidence of the city's pre-history. This method was generally appropriate for the new humanist historiography; less appropriate was the idiosyncratic strategy to create himself the evidence he desired. Thus, he managed to interpret Ammianus Marcellinus in the way that Trier originated about two thousand years before Christ, and to confirm the old age of the Germans by means of etymological speculation: Wimpfeling argued that the Romans called the Rhinelanders 'Germani', which

27 Brouwer Christoph – Masen Jacob, *Antiquitatum et annalium Trevirensium libri XXV duobus tomis comprehensi*, vol. I (Liège, Joh. Mathias Hovius: 1670–1671) 6–7.

28 Kramer J., "1300 Jahre vor Rom stand Trier. Die Inschrift am Roten Haus und ihr geistesgeschichtlicher Hintergrund", in Bagola B. – Kramer J. (eds.), *Mosel, Maas, Mississippi. Kontakte zwischen Romania und Germania in Westeuropa und Nordamerika*, Romania occidentalis 31 (Veitshöchheim: 2005) 65–77, here 65.



FIGURE 20.6
The "Red House" ("Rotes
Haus"), Trier, Market place
(1684)
IMAGE © KONRAD
OTTENHEYM

is the same Latin word as that for 'brothers', or 'fraternal' because they felt that the Germani bore a resemblance to themselves.²⁹

Many early avant-gardists augmented the legends about Trier even further and spread new ones. Confederate patriots supported the young legend that Solothurn and Zurich had been founded shortly after the foundation of Trier by a brother or another relative of Trebeta.³⁰ Some humanists came up with newly invented information, e.g. that Julius Caesar was born in Trier, or that Alexander the Great was German.³¹ The prominent historian Johannes Aventinus discovered that Trebeta did not really originate from the Orient but was German, because his father, the Assyrian King Ninus, was in fact German.³²

29 Borchart, *German Antiquity* 99–103. Borst A., *Der Turmbau von Babel. Geschichte der Meinungen über Ursprung und Vielfalt der Sprachen und Völker*, vol. III, 1 (Munich: 1995) 1055.

30 Esp. Glareanus (1488–1563) and Franz Haffner (1609–1671); Amiet, *Die Gründungssage*.

31 Borchart, *German Antiquity* 83, 117; Haari-Oberg, *Wirkungsgeschichte der Trierer Gründungssage* 159, 181–182.

32 Borst, *Turmbau von Babel*, vol. III, 1, 1059.

It turned out that to a large extent the Germans had actually dominated human culture. The name of their language, 'Alleman', means 'all men' or 'all people'. This proves that until the fall of the Tower of Babel all people spoke German or just 'Alleman'. This circumstance led to the insight that Adam and Noah had been Germans.³³ Such reflections were confirmed until well into the seventeenth century by the discovery of particular features of the German language, as were its similarity to Hebrew and even to primordial sounds.³⁴

The Germans learned the most fundamental new knowledge from Italy, the source of humanism. This relates to the chronicle of the primordial history of mankind which the Babylonian priest Berosus wrote during the first half of the third century BC in the Greek language, and of which only quotations from Flavius Josephus were thus far known. In 1498 Annio da Viterbo published a fake version of the chronicle with a scholarly commentary. Most Western scholars fell upon it enthusiastically and based their historiographical accounts on it.³⁵ Thus, some Italian towns, such as Verona, also got the chance to date their origins back to Babylonian times and even earlier. The pseudo-Berosus is recorded in the legends of the Trebeta painting of 1559, too.

In the pseudo-Berosus the German and French humanists found especially that the hero Tuisco, whom the Germans according to Tacitus worshipped as a god, was a son of Noah and came from the east of the Rhineland, where he settled and became the progenitor of the people named after him, the 'Teutsche'.³⁶ This Tuisco was also called Tuscano and gave the Tuscans or Etruscans their name. Therefore, even in the nineteenth century some Germans who loved Italy still felt how closely the 'Teutschen' were spiritually related to the Tuscans.³⁷

33 Borchardt, *German Antiquity* 117; Borst, *Turmbau von Babel*, vol. 111, 1, 1051. Haari-Oberg, *Wirkungsgeschichte der Trierer Gründungssage* 158; Eco U., *Die Suche nach der vollkommenen Sprache* (Munich: 1994) 108–111.

34 Eco, *Suche nach der vollkommenen Sprache* 108–111.

35 Weiss R., "Traccia di una biografia di Annio da Viterbo", *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 5 (1962) 425–441; Stephens W., *Giants in Those Days: Folklore, Ancient History and Nationalism* (Lincoln, NE: 1989) 98–138; Grafton A., *What Was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: 2007); Bizzocchi R., *Genealogie incredibili. Scritti di storia nell'Europa moderna* (Bologna: 2009).

36 Joachimsen, *Geschichtsauffassung* 95, 161–163; Borchardt, *German Antiquity* 89, 114, 137; Borst, *Turmbau von Babel*, vol. 111, 1, 975–977, 1056–1059; Lemaire de Belges, *Les illustrations de Gaule* 286.

37 Tiede M., "Klenzes Versuch einer Wiederherstellung des toskanischen Tempels", in Wünsche R. – von Buttlar A. (eds.), *Ein griechischer Traum. Leo von Klenze – der Archäologe*, exh. cat., Glyptothek (Munich: 1985) 227–245, spec. 230.

3 Written Evidence for the Founding Legend of Trier

The earliest source for Trier as a dependency of Babylon dates back to the tenth century. It is the transcription of a poem in verse on Trebeta without comment.³⁸ It reads:

Nini Semiramis, quae tanto coniuge felix,
 Plurima possedit, sed plura prioribus addit,
 Non contenta suis nec totis finibus orbis.
 Expulit a patrio privignum Trebeta regno,
 Profugus insignem nostram qui condidit urbem.
 Treberis huic nomen dans ob factoris amorem,
 Quae caput Europae cognoscitur anteritate.
 Filius huius Ero patris haec epigrammata pono,
 Cuius ad inferias hic cum Iove Mars tenet aras.
 Sidere concordi pax est, non dissocianti.

Semiramis, Ninus's wife who was lucky to have such a great husband,
 Owned an enormous number of possessions, but added to them even
 many more,
 Because she was satisfied, neither with her own possessions nor with the
 whole world.
 She expelled her stepson Trebeta from his father's realm,
 Who, a refugee, founded our eminent town.
 He gave her the name Treberis, inspired by the love of the builder for his
 creation,
 A town that is generally recognized as Europe's capital, because she is
 older than the others.
 I, Ero, son of this father (Trebeta), dedicate these epigrams to him,
 Whose grave Mars holds, together with Jupiter.
 Peace emerges when the stars are in concordance, not when they are
 discordant.

38 Inserted by a different hand in the chronicle of Regino of Prüm dating from the tenth century (last two verses: eleventh century), Schaffhausen, Stadtbibliothek, Ministerialbibliothek, Min. 109 Cf. Kentenich, "Trierer Gründungssage" 195–196; Haari-Oberg, *Wirkungsgeschichte der Trierer Gründungssage* 17–18.

The idea that Trier was acknowledged as the capital of Europe indicates the sense of the early dating of its foundation: from the outset the primordial origins were supposed to emphasize the primacy of Trier.

The *Hystoria Treverorum*, as evidence of the old age of Trier, says that the ancient ruins 'until today' ('huc usque') bear inscriptions with the 'laws of the people of Trier' ('iura Treverorum'). The following accounts of the founding legend of Trier quote the poem and paraphrase the aspect of the primacy of Trier. The *Gesta Treverorum* (1101) are the first to comment that Hero put an inscription on the grave of his father Trebeta with the wording of the poem. The tomb was located on Mons Iuranus, today's Petersberg, which is to the east of the city of Trier and on which there is still a Roman burial mound, called Franzensknüppchen. According to the *Vita Sancti Willibrordi* (written by the Abbot Thiofrid of Echternach in 1104), this grave inscription of Trebeta had been found recently ('moderno tempore'); Ekkehard of Aura (died after 1125) writes in his 'World chronicle' that the epitaph, carved in stone, had been found in his time by pilgrims while they were exploring the burial mound in search of treasures: 'Unde etiam ad haec tempora parvum repertum fuit ibi in lapide sculptum hoc epitaphium' ('Where recently, cut into a stone, this short grave inscription was found').³⁹ Thus, proof had emerged that Trier's founding legend corresponds to historical truth. The way in which this proof came about is an open question: are the statements based on deliberate fakes or on erroneous decipherings of inscriptions or sloppy interpretations of writings born of the wish to prove the early foundation of Trier?⁴⁰

The critical minds of the Renaissance no longer trusted medieval data; the unmasking of the 'Constantine donation' as a forgery is a well-known example of this. Nevertheless, at the same time it was a widespread practice to create false documents. As we have seen, through his fake of the writings of Berosus, Annio da Viterbo provided Trier as many other cities with a wonderful instrument to confirm its historical legend. The authenticity of the Trebeta epitaph was rarely questioned in the Renaissance. On the contrary, it was used to prove the old age of Trier in the legal dispute that the citizens conducted against their archbishop's claim to power.

The humanists often repeated the founding text, and they sometimes presented it as if it were a new discovery: Hartmann Schedel took over from

39 Ekkehard of Aura, *Chronicon universale ad a. no6*, ed. G. Waitz, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores VI* (Hannover: 1844) 36, quoted from Haari-Oberg, *Wirkungsgeschichte der Trierer Gründungssage* 46–47; cf. Kentenich, "Trierer Gründungssage" 199.

40 Leonardy J., *Die angeblichen Trierischen Inschriften-Fälschungen älterer und neuerer Zeit* (Trier: 1867) 12–14, 24–31.

medieval chronicles the statement that the inscription was ‘found recently’, without qualifying it as a quotation from an old report.⁴¹ Jean Lemaire de Belges pretends that in his time (ca. 1500) a great stone was found bearing the same verses.⁴² Thus, the poem appears as a telling example of the ‘innovative’ epigraphy of the Renaissance.

The German writer Daniel Specklin had heard that a Chaldean inscription reflecting the founding legend of Trier was found in a subterranean vault in 1519.⁴³ In 1562, when the representatives of Trier presented their founding legend to the pontifical nuncio, they assured him that the stone tablet that attested it was found in the year 1200 on the summit of Mount Uranus, and could now be seen in the church of St Paulin.⁴⁴

4 The Ancient Monuments in Trier as Evidence of the Founding Legend

The second piece of evidence for the foundation of Trier in the days of Abraham was deduced from the ancient monuments of the city. In an allusion to the sentence recently shaped by Hildebert of Lavardin – ‘Roma quanta fuit ipsa ruina docet’ – the Chronicle of Otto of Freising writes about Trier: ‘Quae, quanta qualisque fuerit, ex ipsa ruina sui liquido probari poterit’ (‘Who, how great and what it was like, can clearly be demonstrated by her ruins’).⁴⁵ Already the *Hystoria Treverorum* (written around 1050–1060) reports which monuments Trebeta had erected in Trier. Its account is much more detailed than the founding legend though it is based on it: according to it, Trebeta set

41 Schedel, *Buch der Cronicken*, fol. 23 r. Haari-Oberg, *Wirkungsgeschichte der Trierer Gründungssage* 140–144.

42 Lemaire de Belges, *Les illustrations de Gaule* 289. The differences from the version quoted above are only slight: ‘[...] Expulit e [instead of ‘a’] patrio privignum Trebeta regno /Insignem, profugus [instead of ‘profugus insignem’] nostram qui condidit urbem’. Lemaire’s version of the poem ends here.

43 Specklin Daniel, *Les collectanées de Daniel Specklin, chronique Strasbourgeoise du seizième siècle*, ed. R. Reuss, *Fragments des anciennes chroniques d’Alsace* 2 (Straßburg: 1890) 23–24.

44 Wandruszka, *Kurtrier* 133. Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to check whether the inscription was visible, because during the campaigns of conquest by Louis XIV, French troops destroyed the church of St Paulin. Heyen F.-J., *Das Stift St. Paulin vor Trier*, *Germania sacra* N.F. 6 (Berlin – New York: 1972).

45 Otto of Freising, *Chronica sive Historia de duabus civitatibus*, ed. G. Pertz, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores XX* (Hannover: 1868) 135, quoted from Kentenich, “Trierer Gründungssage” 195.

up a port and surrounded the city with a wall that had city gates in all four directions: Porta Alba, Porta Media, the Port Gate, and Porta Nigra. In addition, many buildings arose to adorn and strengthen the city, such as a magnificent temple and an arena. The *Hystoria Treverorum* specially emphasizes the city fortifications. In this respect, the account is reminiscent of the description of Heavenly Jerusalem in the *Revelation of John*, which also treats the city walls most intensively,⁴⁶ or of the many medieval images of cities that show only the walls. Also, the *Mirabilia urbis Romae* begin with the description of the city walls. Perhaps the splendour of the city gates of Trier also contributed to the concentration on the city walls. Again and again it is repeated in the Chronicle that everything described in it did rise long before the founding of Rome, and that long before the founding of Rome much of the social order, the legal relations, and the rites had been established similarly to how they were later established in Rome. In this sense, Trier was referred to as the 'second Rome'.

The later chronicles mostly repeat the account of the *Hystoria Treverorum* more or less literally. They put special emphasis on the Porta Nigra because the other three city gates had disappeared [Figs. 20.2–3]. However, they are more precise in listing the buildings founded by Trebeta in the city: Palatia, temples, thermal baths, theatres, aqueduct, capitol. Many chronicles, especially that of Johann Enen, date the buildings only vaguely as having been founded after Trebeta or after his son Hero. But in general what was more prevalent was what the writer Jean d'Outremeuse of Liège said in 1399 about the founding of Trier by Trebeta: 'Et celle fut li premier [sic] edifiement qui fut fais en l'isle d'Europ, excepteit Ytaile'.⁴⁷ The restriction 'with the exception of Italy' is due to the fact that Jean d'Outremeuse already assumes that Rome had been founded by one of the sons of Noah.

After Otto of Freising has pointed out that the ruins testify to the former splendour of Trier, he presents for the first time the Basilica as a Babylonian building. He argues that to that day it had retained so much strength that no enemy was ever able to destroy it. No enemy could destroy it by any means, because it was made of fired bricks 'in the manner of the walls of Babylon' ('ad instar Babylonici muri'⁴⁸) [Fig. 20.2]. Various sources – the Bible, Isidore

46 *Apocalypse* 21; cf. also *Isaiah* 54:11–12.

47 Jean d'Outremeuse, *Ly Myreur des histoires* 1, ed. A. Borgnet (Brussels: 1864) 13. Cf. Kramer J., "Jean d'Outremeuse und die Trierer Gründungssage", *Kurtrierisches Jahrbuch* 41 (2001) 109–120, and Haari-Oberg, *Wirkungsgeschichte der Trierer Gründungssage* 91.

48 Otto of Freising, *Chronica sive Historia* 135, quoted from Kentenich, "Trierer Gründungssage" 195.

of Seville, Orosius, Herodotus, Strabo, and Diodorus Siculus, and other ancient writers – offer the information that the walls of Babylon were made of bricks.⁴⁹

Previously, the Chronicles of Trier had already mentioned the special construction technique of some of the ancient monuments. This is a peculiarity which is not common in other reports on historical monuments. The *Hystoria Treverorum* states that the Porta Nigra is ‘made of cubic stones which are joined together not with mortar, but with iron by a wonderful art’.⁵⁰ The *Gesta Treverorum* beyond repeating this information, point out that the bridge over the Moselle was built using the same technique.⁵¹ According to Herodotus and Diodorus,⁵² the bridge of Babylon over the Euphrates was built in the same manner with iron clips. The later accounts of the early history of Trier repeat the information about the construction technique of the ancient monuments in Trier. They do not point to the parallel between the construction technique of the bridge over the Moselle and that of the bridge over the Euphrates, but originally this peculiarity was certainly considered as a confirmation of the idea that the monuments of Trier had been built by the Babylonians just as the construction technique with bricks similar to that used for the walls of Babylon was supposed to testify to the old age of the basilica.

The Renaissance authors who took over the founding legend usually saw no problems with the dating of the Trier antiquities back to Babylonian times. Actually, not even the Italians in the Renaissance could distinguish between Roman and Romanesque styles. If the Babylonian origin of the monuments in Trier was denied, it was only for historical reasons. Jean Lemaire de Belges, for example, took over from Annio da Viterbo’s forgery of Berosus the information that the Trojans had occupied Belgica Gallia and had completely destroyed

49 *Genesis* 11:1–3; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* xv, 4; Orosius, *Historiae adversum paganos* 11, 6; Herodotus, *History* 1, 178–188; Diodorus Siculus, *Universal History* 11, 7–10. Cf. Unger E., *Babylon. Die Heilige Stadt nach der Beschreibung der Babylonier* (Berlin – Leipzig: 1931) 324–335.

50 ‘Crevit itaque civitas illa regia [...] habens publicas portas, quatuor mundi climatibus obpositas, quarum prima, quae ad septentrionem respicit, ex lapidibus quadratis non cemento, sed ferro mirabili arte compaginatis constructa, Nigra porta vel Martis nomen accepit [...]’. *Hystoria Treverorum*, ed. G. Waitz, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores VIII* (1948) 145 (‘This imperial town [or: town of a king] became bigger [...]. It had city gates in all four wind directions. The first of them, in the north, is construed from cubes which are joined together not with mortar, but with iron by a wonderful art’).

51 ‘ex quadris lapidibus cum turribus magnis portam extruxerunt [...], cujus lapides non cemento, sed ferro conglutinabantur et plumbo’, and ‘[...] super Mosellam ex magnis lapidibus, ferro plumboque compactis, pontem construxere [...]’. *Gesta Treverorum*, cap. 4, 5.

52 Unger, *Babylon*, loc. cit.

the city of Trier.⁵³ Thus, according to 'Berosus's' version, neither the Porta Nigra nor any other existing monument of Trier could stem from Babylonian times. In an analogue way, some Renaissance historians denied the generally accepted fiction that the Florentine Baptistery was Roman, with the argument that old writings recorded the complete destruction of ancient Florence by Germanic invaders, without trying to underline their doubts using a comparison with the nowadays obvious similarity of the Romanesque facade of San Miniato al Monte.⁵⁴

5 Dating the Trier Monuments to the Babylonian Era, and General Ideas of Primeval Architecture

The presentation of quite well-preserved Babylonian buildings, even grand ones, in the foundation legend of Trier differs from the legends of the primeval foundations of other cities. In other places, only Roman monuments were known. The knowledge of earlier architecture was most vague. In fact, only the Egyptian pyramids were known. After the early fifteenth century, hardly anyone had seen the classical buildings in Greece; the few later visitors to Athens thought the buildings there were Roman; the archaic temples in southern Italy were consistently ignored.⁵⁵ There was hardly anything known to be preserved in Italy. Actually most of Etruscan architecture to which the writings the ancient authors relate, was too primitive to be preserved in later ages.

Notwithstanding the fact that the thesis of the Babylonian origin of the buildings in Trier is generally rejected today, it is appropriate for a historian to put it within the framework of the conceptions of the historical development of architecture that prevailed in the Renaissance. Against the background of the report in Tacitus's *Germania* on the old Germans living in wooden huts widely scattered in forests, the question arises as to whether the early dating of the ancient monuments in Trier has always been nonsensical, and whether it should have already been recognized in the Renaissance that the buildings were in fact of Roman origin.

53 Lemaire de Belges, *Les illustrations de Gaule* 291.

54 Straehle G., *Die Marstempelthese – Dante, Villani, Boccaccio, Vasari, Borghini. Die Geschichte vom Ursprung der Florentiner Taufkirche in der Literatur des 13. bis 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: 2001).

55 Günther H. 'Begegnung mit dem Fremden. Die Auseinandersetzung mit griechischer Architektur von der Renaissance bis zum Klassizismus', in Baumstark R. (ed.), *Das neue Hellas: Griechen und Bayern zur Zeit Ludwigs I* (Munich: 1999) 149–170.

Various ancient writings, the Bible, and some travelogues deal with Egyptian and Babylonian architecture.⁵⁶ They provided some knowledge of the pyramids and labyrinths of Egypt; they also offered some description of the appearance of the whole city of Babylon and its huge monuments, which were built using complex construction techniques, especially the wide city walls with their many towers and gates, the bridge over the Euphrates, the hanging gardens of Semiramis over large vaults, and the gigantic tower of Babel, which extended to the sky and consisted of eight superimposed towers with a square ground plan, and which had an outside staircase that ran around the building to the top. Isaiah⁵⁷ had prophesied that God would thoroughly destroy Babylon, and travellers confirmed that the city lay in ruins, but the foundations of the tower and the bridge over the Euphrates were preserved. Pliny the Elder considered the pyramids to be a foolish ostentation of wealth, and the labyrinths of the Egyptians, Mycenaeans, and Etruscans as an expression of exaggerated prodigality.⁵⁸ The Tower of Babel is disparaged in the Bible as being the epitome of arrogance. Instead, many ancient authors admired the old architecture of Greece. Vitruvius' detailed report on the origins of columns and their design is a decisive source for its ornamentation. This led most theorists of the Italian Renaissance to conclude that, in the early periods of the Egyptians and Babylonians, colossal edifices were emerging, but that it were the Greeks that first had invented artful architecture by inventing the columns and that the Romans combined art with magnificence.⁵⁹ Today, this view usually still enters our mind when we consider the idea of the development of architecture that prevailed in the Renaissance.

In reality, however, that was just one point of view, and this view is and was questionable for two reasons: firstly, as written sources attest, the ancient Egyptians and Babylonians had already built columns, and secondly, the Bible describes the Temple of Solomon in detail, reporting that it also had columns, and that it was proportioned as superbly as if God himself had designed it [Fig. 20.7]. Therefore, in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance Solomon's Temple was regarded as the epitome of perfect architecture.⁶⁰

During the Middle Ages, a different version of architectural development had already been created in France, in the orders of stonemasons.⁶¹ According

56 For Babylon: Unger, *Babylon* 324–342.

57 *Isaiah* 13:19–22; 14:22.

58 Plinius, *Naturalis historia* xxxvi, 74–75, and 84.

59 Alberti Leon Battista, *De re aedificatoria* vi, 3, ed. G. Orlandi (Milano: 1966) 450–457.

60 Günther H., “Die Salomonische Säulenordnung. Eine unkonventionelle Erfindung und ihre historischen Umstände”, *RIHA Journal* (January 2011).

61 *Ibidem*.



FIGURE 20.7

Virgil Solis, *The Temple of Solomon*,
from: Luther Bible, *Das ist die gantze
Heylige Schrift* [...] (1588)

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to this version, the art of architecture had reached its first climax with the Tower of Babel. From Babylon the art had spread to Assyria and then to Egypt. When Abraham went from Chaldea to Egypt, he took it with him. Later, when the children of Israel stayed in Egypt, they picked up the art of architecture there, and they finally applied it after their arrival in the Promised Land. Thus, Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem with the knowledge handed down from the Babylonians and Egyptians to the Jews. The art Solomon taught the stonemasons then spread to the West. Indeed, in the medieval version of the development of architecture, it is not God who determined the design of Solomon's Temple, but the tradition of architecture received by the Egyptians from the Babylonians. This version, or variants of it, spread during the Renaissance also to Germany, the Netherlands, France, Spain, and England; even in Italy it was occasionally recorded.⁶² Solomon's Temple also was prominent in commentaries on architecture: In the Middle Ages, as well as in the Renaissance, the highest praise for buildings was often presented in the form of a rhetorical comparison with the Temple. Luca Pacioli had a reconstruction of its portal put printed in front of his treatise on the orders of columns (1509).

As in the Renaissance theoretical interest was particularly concentrated on columns, architectural history was then amended by the observation that columns had already been in place in Solomon's temple. The Corinthia, which according to Vitruvius was the most recently created order, was instead said

62 Here I supplement the works indicated by Günther, "Salomonische Säulenordnung", for the divulgation of the medieval version of the development of architecture in Europe: Coecke van Aelst Pieter, *Die Inventie der colommen* (Antwerp, Coecke van Aelst: 1539), "Preface to the reader", first page. Shute John, *The first and chief groundes of architecture* (London, Thomas Marshe: 1563), fol. 2 r.

to have already been inserted into Solomon's temple; the representatives of this direction of architectural history rejected Vitruvius' story of the invention of the Corinthia. The medieval account of the development of architecture sometimes was mentioned in relation to the the legend of the Babylonian foundation of Trier, or viceversa, the founding legend of Trier was mentioned in connection with version of architectural history.⁶³ Consequently, if the art of architecture as it was invented in Babylon spread over time to the Hebrews and then to the West, the similarity of the Porta Nigra with Roman architecture, if it was perceived, did not necessarily contradict a dating of the building to Babylonian times.

In order to see how Babylonian architecture was imagined, we may consult the Renaissance illustrations of Babylon.⁶⁴ In short, the result of such research suggests that there were no clear and specific ideas. The illustrations are either reduced to architectural symbols, such as a wall ring, large gates, etc.; or they are completely fantastic; or they essentially reflect contemporary cities, with tall towers, steep roofs and gables, Gothic shapes, etc. Even the most important depiction of the topic in Italy, namely one of the frescoes at the Campo Santo in Pisa painted by Benozzo Gozzoli between 1469 and 1485, portrays only buildings that could then be seen in Italy – Roman ancient, medieval, and modern ones. Giorgio Vasari praised the 'grandissima invenzione' without complaining about the borrowings from local architecture (1568).⁶⁵ The woodcut of ancient Trier in Schedel's *World Chronicle* conceives Abraham's era as a mixture of medieval German towns and contemporary Florence [Fig. 20.8], while that of Babylon, following directly afterwards, shows a completely fantastic medieval German town [Fig. 20.9].

The result is more specific when we concentrate on the portrayal of individual Babylonian buildings, especially on the many depictions of the Tower of Babel which originated during the Renaissance in the Low Countries, a region neighbouring Trier [Fig. 20.10]. The Tower of Babel is a typical motive of Dutch painting. Maarten van Heemskerck, who had intensively studied Roman architecture, often depicted the early buildings in Chaldea or Jerusalem in the engravings of the *The Disasters of the Jewish Nation (Clades, 1569)*, following the model of Roman architecture. Contrary to the description in the Bible, he

63 Kyriander, *Annales* 20–21. Coecke van Aelst, *Inventie der colommen* loc. cit. Shute, *First and chief groundes*, fol. 1 r.

64 Minkowski H., *Vermutungen über den Turm zu Babel* (Freren: 1991). Wegener U.B., *Die Faszination des Maßlosen. Der Turmbau zu Babel von Pieter Bruegel bis Athanasius Kircher* (Hildesheim: 1995).

65 Vasari Giorgio, "Bonozzi Gozzoli. Pittore fiorentino", in idem, *Le opere*, ed. G. Milanese (Florence: 1906) vol. III, 45–53, here 48–49.

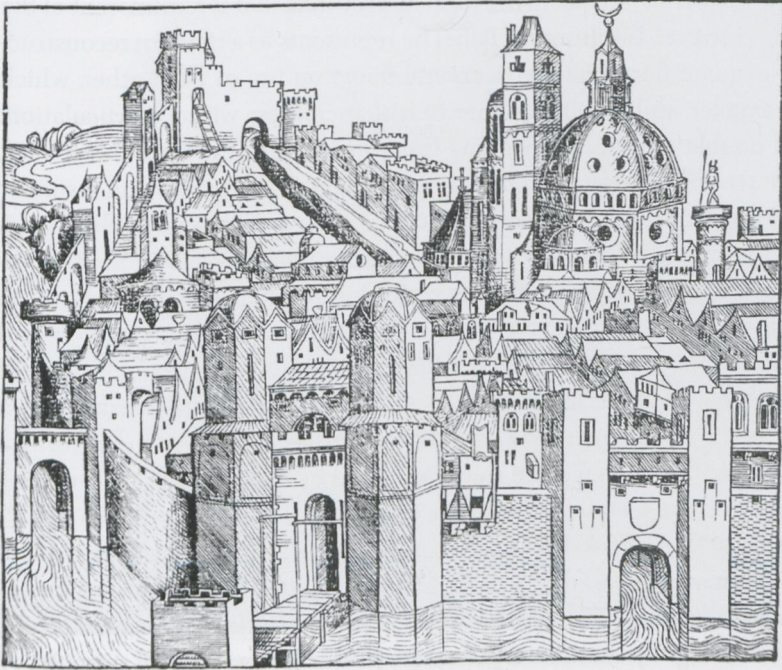


FIGURE 20.8 Trebeta's Trier, from: Hartmann Schedel, *Das buch der Croniken* (Nuremberg: 1493)
IMAGE © AUTHOR

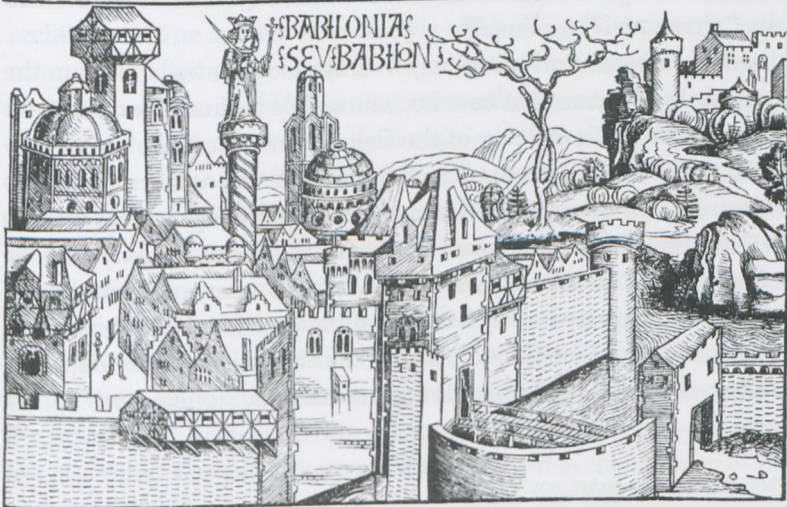


FIGURE 20.9 Babylon, from: Hartmann Schedel, *Das buch der Croniken* (Nuremberg: 1493)
IMAGE © AUTHOR

gave to the temple of Jerusalem the form of a rotunda that is reminiscent of the Pantheon. However, the Tower of Babel he represents as a modern reconstruction: on a square floor plan; with several floors on top of each other, which become smaller and smaller as the height increases; without articulation; and with double ramps, each leading from one floor to the next.⁶⁶ Hendrick van Cleve III and Marten van Valckenborch painted the tower with a similar ground floor.⁶⁷ It seems as if these depictions echo accounts of the building's relics, but perhaps they were just continuing the medieval tradition of representing towers as superimposed cubes which become smaller and smaller with increasing height. Hendrick van Cleve III and others sometimes set a round tower on top of a ground floor with a square plan. However, since the time of Pieter Brueghel the Elder until ca. 1700, the Tower of Babel had usually been depicted in a conical shape on a round base, without regard to the reports in the classical authors, even if the steps described by Herodotus as surrounding the building on the outside are taken into account.

In contrast to Heemskerck, most of the paintings represent the Tower of Babel with an architectural articulation, and this articulation is largely orientated towards Roman architecture; occasionally are Gothic elements inserted, maybe just to signify that the architecture of the Tower was still primitive.⁶⁸ Often the walls are opened by arcades, and between the arcades are half-columns or pilasters similar to the external walls of Roman arenas and theatres. The hanging gardens of Semiramis were usually depicted in a similar way. In an engraving by Cornelis Anthonisz. (1547) and in a painting by Pieter Brueghel the Elder (1563), the representations of the Tower of Babel are clearly oriented towards the Colosseum [Fig. 20.10].⁶⁹

Sometimes the articulation is coarser, with simple arcades, similar to the inner circular walls of arenas that have become visible because the outer walls have been destroyed, as in the case of the Colosseum, or it is like a substructure, such as those of the Fortuna Sanctuary, which extends across a steep slope in Palestrina. The double-aisled ramps portrayed by Heemskerck are also present in Palestrina. Often the tower is not painted as being entirely made of bricks, as the Bible and Herodotus indicate, but as in Roman architecture, with only the interior constructed using bricks and the exterior clad in limestone. Sometimes, besides the construction of the tower, bricklayers are depicted, but more often, especially in medieval representations, stonemasons appear

66 Minkowski, *Turm zu Babel*, nos. 171–172.

67 Idem, no. 225–226, 328, 333.

68 For example, Maerten van Valkenborch, Minkowski, *Turm zu Babel*, no. 343.

69 Idem, no. 169, 210.

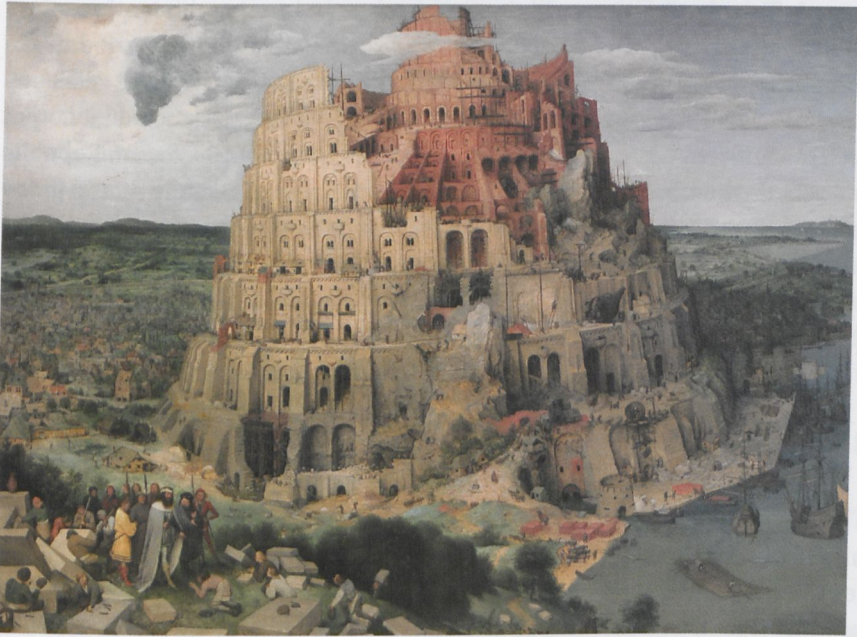


FIGURE 20.10 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Tower of Babel* (1563). Oil on panel, 114 × 155 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum
IMAGE © VIENNA, KUNSTHISTORISCHES MUSEUM

at work. All in all, the overview of the depiction of the Tower of Babel indicates that the ideas of Babylonian architecture were strongly influenced by Roman architecture. The ancient Roman style of an alleged Babylonian building – for example, the Porta Nigra – matched perfectly these ideas.

Finally, at least briefly I remind the reader that in other places too buildings were dated back to much earlier periods than they actually were, without any arguments or justification other than patriotism or falsified documents. Prominent examples of this are the medieval Florentine Baptistery, which was identified as a temple of Mars dating from the Roman Republic; the medieval church of S. Giacomo di Rialto, which was presented as the monument of the foundation of Venice in 421; and the Arena of Verona, which formally was dated in the era of Augustus and since the middle of the sixteenth century was said to have been built much earlier in the Roman Republic in the style of the old Etruscans (see chapter 3 in this volume). On the other hand, not only Babylon but also other very old cities could be portrayed in the manner of contemporary ones. This is demonstrated, for example, on Albrecht Altdorfer's painting *The Battle of Alexander* though it takes into account the ancient reports on the skythed chariots of Darius. Sebastian Münster still portrays the famous

Artemis Temple of Ephesus like a Gothic church. In many fifteenth-century Italian paintings which depict the deeds of the heroes from the period of the Roman Republic, great monuments from the imperial era appear, although humanists would have well known that that they were constructed later, that such magnificence in general did not exist in the times of the Roman Republic and that the heroic deeds depicted in the paintings were actually rooted in the spirit of simplicity and modesty, as being in contrast to imperial grandeur. A painter with a humanist education, such as Andrea Mantegna, even depicted in the *Triumph of Caesar* Roman buildings as ruins, although it was known that they were built only later, during the times of the Roman emperors.

6 Conclusion

The story of Trier's Babylonian foundation gives us an unusually good opportunity to observe how a historical legend arose, how it developed, how scholars responded to it, on what chronological ideas the explanations were based, and how the legend was used in political or social discourse. There is evidence that from the very outset the legend corresponded to the desire to give one's home town an old age, and thus a special political importance. Often the legend was simply an expression of love for one's fatherland, but time and again it was also used in a more specific sense, as a means of pursuing political goals, as well by archbishops against their ecclesiastical competitors, or by citizens or foreign rulers against the archbishops. The legend could even serve as an argument in a legal process.

It is not clear how exactly the legend of the foundation of Trier came into being. Throughout Europe many fantastic founding legends circulated, but in view of Trier's outstanding position outside Italy as one of the metropolises of the Roman Empire, it is strange that the chroniclers took refuge in such a vague fiction, and even occasionally marginalized the impressive historical reality. On the other hand, it was part of the legend to present concrete evidence of its truth, as in a legal case. These credentials were created either on the basis of deliberate fakes, on the erroneous decipherings of inscriptions, or on sloppy interpretations of classical texts. The ancient monuments were also taken as evidence of the truth of the legend. They were identified as Babylonian, because – as was so often the case – a preconceived idea replaced reality. On the other hand, it is remarkable how precisely the reference to Babylon was underpinned as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries by the observation of peculiarities of building techniques on the monuments.

The advent of modern science with the inductive method, which characterizes the transition from the Middle Ages to modern times, is only weakly reflected in the behaviour of humanists towards the legend. Mostly they bowed to political or social conditions. Some recognized the legend as a fiction, but already in the Middle Ages there were occasionally doubts about the legend being fact most of the humanists continued to support and even strengthened the legend. In that case, the most important argument was the appeal to the legend's old tradition and to the authorities that had sustained it. There were also rhetorical tricks to create new evidence. All that was needed was to repeat old reports of the discovery of testimonies without highlighting that they were quotations and thus it looked as if scholars had opened up concrete new evidence, following the guidelines of the modern inductive method.

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