

ROMULUS AND REMUS

ILLUSTRATED BY LAUREN PARRIS

The early Romans lived in small communities that grew into city-states, often ruled by kings from wealthy families. About 150 years after Rome was founded, the legends say the Etruscans conquered the Romans. The Etruscans were brutal rulers who rained terror on the Roman people. They were eventually ousted by a group of Roman aristocrats who founded the Roman Republic.

Rome is an ideal place for a city. It is located along the banks of the Tiber River. The river made it easy to travel to and from the sea. The Tiber is very shallow near Rome. A shallow portion of a river is called a ford. The ford made it easier for people to cross the river. Seven hills surround Rome. The hills make it harder for invaders to approach the city and served as lookout areas for the Romans. Rome is also close to excellent farmland and an abundance of wood and stone. Civilizations have grown and prospered in Rome for thousands of years, which is why Rome is nicknamed "the Eternal City".

The origins of Rome are steeped in myth and legend. Many ancient Romans believed twin boys named Romulus and Remus founded the city.

The kingdom of Alba Longa was ruled by their grandfather, Numitor. The wicked brother of Numitor, Amulius, tried to depose Numitor (kick him off the throne).

Numitor fought back, but Amulius won. Amulius then sent Numitor into exile away from his family. King Amulius forced Numitor's daughter, Rhea Silvia, to become a Vestal Virgin (a priestess of the goddess Vesta). Vestal Virgins were not allowed to marry and have children.



One day Mars, the god of war, saw Rhea Silvia and fell in love with her.

The god Mars seduced Rhea Silvia and she later gave birth to twin boys.

The new king, Amulius, feared that the boys would grow up to overthrow him. So, he ordered his slave to throw the two twins into the Tiber River. But the slave left the twins in their cradle to give them a chance.

They floated down the river. At that time the river was flooded, and when the waters fell, the cradle, still containing the boys, came ashore near the Palatine Hill in what is now west central Italy.

The twins were found by a she-wolf who, instead of killing them, looked after them and fed them with her milk. A woodpecker also brought them food, for the woodpecker, like the wolf, was a sacred animal of the god Mars (who looked after the boys).



A shepherd of King Amulius, named Faustulus, saw the wolf with the baby boys. He took them home to his wife and adopted them. Faustulus the shepherd and his wife named the boys Romulus and Remus.

When they grew up, the boys became shepherds like their new father Faustulus. They eventually became leaders of their warlike band of shepherds. One day, they had a fight with another group of shepherds. Remus was arrested and sent to Numitor (the former king of Alba Longa and brother of King Amulius) as a prisoner because it was his shepherds he had been fighting. When Numitor heard the story he realized that Remus was his grandson! He told Romulus and Remus what had happened to him and their mother.

Angered at what Amulius had done to their grandfather Numitor, Romulus and Remus attacked their great-uncle, King Amulius, and killed him. Numitor was restored to the throne once again.



Romulus and Remus went to live with their grandfather Numitor in Alba Longa, but they got bored and missed the countryside where they grew up. They decided to move back to the banks of the Tiber River where the shepherd Faustulus had found them.

There, they decided to build their own city. But the twins argued over where the city should be built. Romulus wanted to build it on the Palatine Hill where the she-wolf had nursed them and Remus wanted to build it on the Capitoline Hill.

Signs from the heavens decreed that each brother would build their own city, but Romulus' city would be much larger. Romulus completed his city on April 21, 753 BC.



Remus teased his brother Romulus, claiming that his city had walls that were too short. To prove his point, Remus climbed over the wall.

Enraged, Romulus killed his brother Remus with an ax.

Romulus continued the building of the new city, naming it Roma (Rome) after his own name. Its first citizens were outlaws and fugitives, to whom Romulus gave Remus' settlement on the Capitoline Hill. There were, however, not enough wives for all these men, so Romulus decided to steal women from the Sabines, an Italian tribe.



Romulus proclaimed a festival and invited many Sabines to it. While the attention of the men was elsewhere, Romulus' men rushed in and carried off the women. This was the famous "Rape (carrying off) of the Sabine women", which later became a subject for painters.

The 1799 painting below now hangs in the Louvre Art Gallery in Paris, France and is from the famous painter Jacques-Louis David.



The Sabine men were furious. Led by their king Titus Tatius, they made war on Romulus and his city of Rome. When the fighting had reached its peak, the Sabine women, who had grown fond of their Roman husbands, rushed between the armies and begged both sides to make peace. So, the battle was stopped, and Romulus and Titus Tatius ruled together over the two peoples until Titus Tatius was killed in battle.

For the rest of his life, Romulus ruled alone, proving himself a great leader in peace and war. According to legend, he did not die. Instead, he disappeared one day in a violent storm. The Romans believed he had been taken up to heaven and worshipped him under the name of Quirinus.

Most of what is known – fact or fiction – about Romulus and Remus comes from Plutarch (*Lives of Romulus, Numa Pompilius and Camillus*), Florus (*Book I, I*), Livy (*Caprotine Nones, I, 21*), Cicero (*The Republic VI, 22: "Scipio's Dream"*), Dio (Dion) Cassius. *Dionysius of Halicarnassus (Roman History, I, L. 2)*.