

Romulus & Remus

and the Founding of Rome

Alba Longa



Aeneas, a veteran from the Trojan War, and son of the goddess Venus, left Asia Minor after the fall of Troy in 1184 BC with his father **Anchises**, his son **Ascanius**, and a group of fellow refugees. He wandered around the Mediterranean for seven years until he finally landed in Italy. The Trojans were met by a local Italian tribe under the rule of a king named **Latinus**. The two peoples fought a short battle but then made peace. Aeneas then married Latinus' daughter, **Lavinia**, and founded a city named **Lavinium** in her honor. When Ascanius, also known as Iulus, grew up, he left home to found a new city named **Alba**

Longa ('The Long White City'). Some say that Lavinia was the mother of this Ascanius, others that he was Creusa's son that came to Italy with Aeneas. Whoever his mother, Aeneas was surely his father. His descendants ruled over Alba Longa for many generations as the family line went from Ascanius to Silvius to Aeneas Silvius to Latinus Silvius to Alba Silvius to Atys Silvius to Capys Silvius to Capetus Silvius to Tiberinus Silvius to Agrippa Silvius to Romulus Silvius to Aventinus Silvius to Proca.

Romulus and Remus

King Proca of Alba Longa had two sons named **Numitor** and **Amulius**. Numitor was the eldest of the two and thus gained the throne when Proca died. Amulius was envious of his brother and plotted to overthrow him. Rather than kill his own blood, Amulius simply sent his brother away and forced

Numitor's daughter **Rhea Silvia** to become a **Vestal Virgin**. A Vestal Virgin was not allowed to marry and have children. In this way Amulius tried to assure that his throne wouldn't be threaten in the future by any of Numitor's descendants. . One night, **Mars**, the god of war visited Rhea Silvia, and impregnated her. Amulius was furious when Rhea Silvia gave birth to twin boys, but he was persuaded not to kill Rhea Silvia by his daughter Antho. Instead, Amulius exiled his niece and had a soldier place the twins in a basket in the Tiber River with the hope that they would drown. The Tiber, however, was flooding at that time and the basket came to rest on dry land when the waters receded.



The twins were soon found by a wandering **she-wolf** who fed them her own milk. They are later found by **Faustulus**, Amulius' swineherd, and raised as shepherds by him and his wife **Acca Laurentia**. The twins, **Romulus** and **Remus** grew up to be stout farmers and shepherds. At this time the countryside was rife with thieves and robbers who preyed upon the shepherds and farmers. With the energy of youth and the natural aggressiveness of their royal heritage, Romulus and Remus began ambushing the thieves and stealing their plunder, which they then distributed among their fellow countrymen. In this way Romulus and Remus attracted quite a large band of followers who looked up to them as leaders. During the Lupercalia festival a band of robbers attacked Romulus and Remus. Romulus defended himself but Remus was captured. Angry at all the booty and plunder they had lost, the thieves took him to King Amulius and accused Remus of having attacked some of Amulius' holdings. Of course, Amulius



didn't know who Remus was and referred him to his brother Numitor, not wanting to be bothered with trivial matters.

After a long discussion with Numitor, Remus discovered his true origins and quickly sent for his brother. The three of them soon made a plan to overthrow Amulius and reinstate Numitor as king. With the help of many Albans who disliked King Amulius, Romulus and Remus gained access into the palace and savagely murdered their uncle.

After returning the throne of Alba Longa to their grandfather, Romulus and Remus decided to found a new city next to the Tiber River that they floated down as infants. Since both men were the same age, they couldn't decide which should be the one to found the city, so they sought the advice of the gods.

Romulus sat on the **Palatine hill** and Remus sat on the **Aventine hill** along with **augurs** for each who would interpret the signs. Soon, **six vultures**, the bird of Mars, flew over Remus' head, and his supporters cheered for their leader. Directly after that, though, a **dozen vultures** flew over Romulus,



signifying to his supporters that he was the true victor. The augurs argued over which should take precedence, the earlier sighting or the greater number. In the end, Romulus' twelve vultures outweighed Remus' priority. Remus was furious and did not willingly accept the outcome. He started a fight with his brother, and when he mockingly jumped over the **pomerium** that marked the sacred boundaries of Romulus' new town, Romulus killed him, saying "Any other who leaps over my walls will have the same".



The Beginnings of Rome

Rome was officially founded on April 21, **753 BC.** and Romulus became its first king. Rome began as a small settlement on the Palatine hill, called Roma Quadrata, and Romulus knew that he had to increase the population if his city was going to survive. In antiquity it was the custom of the founder of a new city to increase its population by throwing open the gates to all the homeless and destitute folk of the region and pretending that they were "born of the earth" to be his progeny. Romulus followed a similar course. He established an area on the **Capitoline Hill**, called the "**Asylum**". Here fled all the fugitives of the neighboring peoples, freedmen and slaves, all looking for a new start. Rome became the refuge of anyone who wandered inside the walls, including many criminals.

Romulus then set about creating a system of laws to govern his new city. He increased the dignity of his position as king by creating twelve **lictors** to attend his person in public. Some say that he chose twelve to symbolize the number of vultures that appeared to him in the augury. Others say that this custom was inherited from the Etruscans and represented the twelve cities of the Etruscan confederacy, each city supplying one lictor to accompany their king. He also created the **senate** and fixed their number at **one hundred**. The senate was an advisory body of leading citizens, heads of their clans, and consequently called "**Patres**", "the Fathers". The descendants of these senators were called "**patricians**". The rest of the population was called "**plebians**".

Rome was now strong enough to compete with her neighbors but the city's greatness seemed only to be going to last for one generation. The problem was that too few women were coming to Rome, and Romulus' subjects were becoming restless. Upon the advice of the Senate, Romulus sent emissaries to the surrounding states asking for an alliance with the privilege of intermarriage. But wherever they went they were jeered with comments like "Why don't you open your gates to female, as well as to male, runaways and vagabonds as that would surely be the best way for Roman men to get their wives". The Romans were embarrassed and angered and a conflict seemed to be inevitable.

The Rape of the Sabines

Romulus had tried diplomacy but in vain. It was clear that the neighboring cities were never going to allow their daughters to intermarry with the Romans whom they looked down upon as being no better than criminals. Seeing the restlessness of his men and realizing that wives must be attained if Rome was going to survive, he determined to get them by deceit. He invited everyone from the surrounding cities to the "**Consualia Games**", a new festival in honor of **Equestrian Neptune**. Although Rome's neighbors looked down on them, they were curious to see what the new city looked like. Curiosity got the better of them and on the festival day, families from all the neighboring districts poured into Rome. People from the neighboring towns of Caenina, Crustumium and Antemnae were present. The most by far were the **Sabines**, who had come down from the hills surrounding Rome. The stadiums were filled with husbands and wives, sons and daughters, who were all very impressed at how quickly Rome had grown. Just before the games began, by a predetermined signal, the Romans ran into the crowd and



carried off the most desirable of the young women. Most of the young women were the prize of those who got hold of them first, but a few of the most beautiful were previously singled out for some of the leading senators. One of the most conspicuously handsome women was so picked out for a certain senator named **Thalassius**. As the men who had been hired to whisk her away were fighting through the chaos and confusion, they kept yelling "Thalassius, Thalassius!" to prevent anyone else from trying to lay hands on her. It is said that this is the origin of the custom of yelling "Thalassius" at weddings. The men folk of these young women were unarmed and could do nothing for the moment but flee and return to their respective cities, muttering complaints of treachery and sacrilege.

The young women were also indignant at the turn of events and fearful of their fate, now that they were at the mercy of these brash young Romans. Romulus reassured them that they would not be harmed or violated. He also chided them for their indignation, pointing out that the entire fault lay with their parents who had so haughtily refused to allow intermarriage with the Romans. Romulus then tried to convince them that their fate was not so bad. Rome was a strong and up and coming city. The Romans were brave, handsome young men and would make fine husbands. Their recent impetuous behavior had really been caused by love and would make them that much more eager to please their new wives to make up for their indignant treatment. In short, the Sabine women

should pity their Roman captors and make the best out of the situation. Romulus' words somehow touched the hearts of the Sabine women and they began to warm up to their new husbands. Their husbands, true to Romulus' promises, treated them with love, respect and patience. In the end the women accepted their new roles as Roman wives. Their families, however, were not so quickly won over.

War with the Sabines



Rome's neighbors, who had lost their daughters in such an outrageous fashion, were in no way content to accept the "status quo". Unfortunately for them, they were unable to unify their efforts and made individual attacks against the Romans; first the city of Caenina, then Crustumium and then Antemnae. All were met and easily defeated by Romulus. The last and most serious threat to Rome was the Sabines, led by their most determined and able king, **Titus Tatius**. Spurius Tarpeius, the commander of the Roman citadel had a young daughter named **Tarpeia**. When she was getting water outside the walls of the city, she was bribed by Tatius to let his troops into the citadel. It is

said that she demanded what his soldiers had on their shield-arms, meaning the gold bracelets that Sabines at this time were accustomed to wear on their left arms. Once inside they paid the traitorous girl, not with the bracelets she had hoped for, but by piling their shields on top of her and crushing Tarpeia to death.

Now that the Sabines had a firm foothold in the city, a full pitched battle was unavoidable. The battle raged, with the advantage variously changing from one side to the other. When the fighting was at its height, seemingly from nowhere, the Sabine women, with their hair let loose and their clothes torn, fought their way into the middle of the two armies. They had been looking on at the battle with dread, knowing that if the Romans won they would lose their fathers and brothers and if the Sabines, their new husbands and the fathers of their small children. "We are mothers now, our children are your sons and your grandsons. If our marriage is so hateful, then kill us," they shouted. "We are the cause of this strife. We would rather die than live on either widowed or orphaned." This brave appeal had a profound effect on both sides. An agreement was reached whereby the Sabines would move into Rome and become one people with the Romans. The Sabine wives were honored by having their names given to the thirty tribes that Romulus now divided the Romans into. Romulus and Tatius ruled jointly until Tatius was killed and Romulus again ruled as sole king of Rome.

The Deification of Romulus

After many years and many triumphs, Romulus' reign over Rome finally ended on July 5, 716 BC. The king was in Capra Palus (Goat's Marsh) during a lightning storm, conducting a review of the army, when a bright light suddenly surrounded him. When the air cleared, Romulus was gone. The soldiery was alarmed but they accepted the explanation of the senators who had been standing around Romulus that he had been taken up into the heavens. Romulus was deified as the god **Quirinus**. There were those who suspected that Romulus had been murdered by the senators but this rumor was dispelled when a very respected senator named Julius Proculus said that Romulus had appeared to him and declared that Rome would one day be the ruler of the entire world.

Questions for Romulus and Remus reading.

1. What city did Aeneas found? _____

2. Who founded the city of Alba Longa? _____

3. Who was Numitor? _____

4. Who was Amulius? _____

5. Who was Rhea Silvia? _____

6. What was a Vestal Virgin? _____

7. Who was the father of Romulus and Remus? _____
8. Who raised Romulus and Remus? _____

9. How did Romulus and Remus become leaders of men? _____

10. Where did Romulus and Remus decide to build their city? _____

11. What is an “augur”? _____
12. How many vultures did Remus see and where? _____
13. How many vultures did Romulus see and where? _____
14. What is a “pomerium”? _____
15. Why did Romulus kill his brother? _____
16. When was Rome founded? _____
17. How did Romulus increase the population of Rome? _____

18. What was the “Asylum”? _____

19. What are lictors and how many did Romulus have? _____

20. What was the senate? _____
21. Who were the patricians? _____
22. Who were the plebians? _____
23. What problem did Romulus face in assuring the continuance of Rome’s growth? _____

24. How did Romulus solve this problem? _____

25. What festival did Romulus give? _____
26. Why did Romans yell “Thalassius” at weddings? _____

27. How did Romulus convince the Sabine women to accept there situation? _____

28. Who was Titus Tatius? _____

29. Who was Tarpeia and what did she do? _____

30. What happened to Romulus at his death? _____

