

THE LEGEND OF ROMULUS AND REMUS

According to tradition, on April 21, 753 B.C., Romulus and his twin brother, Remus, found Rome on the site where they were suckled by a she-wolf as orphaned infants. Actually, the Romulus and Remus myth originated sometime in the fourth century B.C., and the exact date of Rome's founding was set by the Roman scholar Marcus Terentius Varro in the first century B.C.

According to the legend, Romulus and Remus were the sons of Rhea Silvia, the daughter of King Numitor of Alba Longa. Alba Longa was a mythical city located in the Alban Hills southeast of what would become Rome. Before the birth of the twins, Numitor was deposed by his younger brother Amulius, who forced Rhea to become a vestal virgin so that she would not give birth to rival claimants to his title. However, Rhea was impregnated by the war god Mars and gave birth to Romulus and Remus. Amulius ordered the infants drowned in the Tiber, but they survived and washed ashore at the foot of the Palatine hill, where they were suckled by a she-wolf until they were found by the shepherd Faustulus.

Reared by Faustulus and his wife, the twins later became leaders of a band of young shepherd warriors. After learning their true identity, they attacked Alba Longa, killed the wicked Amulius, and restored their grandfather to the throne. The twins then decided to found a town on the site where they had been saved as infants. They soon became involved in a petty quarrel, however, and Remus was slain by his brother. Romulus then became ruler of the settlement, which was named "Rome" after him.

To populate his town, Romulus offered asylum to fugitives and exiles. Rome lacked women, however, so Romulus invited the neighboring Sabines to a festival and abducted their women. A war then ensued, but the Sabine women intervened to prevent the Sabine men from seizing Rome. A peace treaty was drawn up, and the communities merged under the joint rule of Romulus and the Sabine king, Titus Tatius. Tatius's early death, perhaps perpetrated by Romulus, left the Roman as the sole king again. After a long and successful rule, Romulus

died under obscure circumstances. Many Romans believed he was changed into a god and worshipped him as the deity Quirinus. After Romulus, there were six more kings of Rome, the last three believed to be Etruscans. Around 509 B.C., the Roman republic was established.

Another Roman foundation legend, which has its origins in ancient Greece, tells of how the mythical Trojan Aeneas founded Lavinium and started a dynasty that would lead to the birth of Romulus and Remus several centuries later. In the *Iliad*, an epic Greek poem probably composed by Homer in the eighth century B.C., Aeneas was the only major Trojan hero to survive the Greek destruction of Troy. A passage told of how he and his descendants would rule the Trojans, but since there was no record of any such dynasty in Troy, Greek scholars proposed that Aeneas and his followers relocated.

