

# Myths and Legends: Romulus and Remus, and the founding of Rome

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TOP: The herdsman Faustulus finds the twins Romulus and Remus nursed by a wolf. Illustration: M.Michel/Getty Images. BELOW: The Palatine Hill today. Wikipedia Commons.

*Romulus and Remus were the mythical twin brothers credited with founding ancient Rome. They are thought to have been born around 770 B.C.*

## **Amulius Stole King Numitor's Throne**

The legend of how Rome came to be begins with a kingdom called Alba Longa. It was ruled by a king named Numitor. One day, Amulius, Numitor's evil brother, stole the throne from him. Once he was king, Amulius grew worried about one of Numitor's children or grandchildren seeking revenge. He had Numitor's son killed. Then he forced Numitor's daughter, Rhea Silvia, to become a priestess of the goddess Vesta. This meant she could never have children.

It isn't completely clear who Romulus and Remus' father was. Many versions of the myth claim it was the god Mars. In any case, Rhea Silvia somehow became pregnant and gave birth to twin boys.

Amulius felt threatened by the news that Numitor's daughter had had children. He ordered one of his servants to drown the twins in the Tiber River. The servant couldn't bear to watch young children die. So instead, he floated them downstream in a crib. Then a wolf happened to spot them. Legend has it that she mistook the boys for wolf pups and nursed them as though she were their mother. A woodpecker also helped to feed them. The Romans considered these two animals to be symbols of Mars, further proof he was the boys' father.

### **Brothers Were Adopted By A Shepherd**

One day, a shepherd named Faustulus and his wife, Acca Larentia, stumbled upon the boys and adopted them. They named them Romulus and Remus. The twins grew up as common people, unaware of their royal blood.

When the two brothers were about 18, Remus was arrested by Amulius' men. Numitor was asked to punish him. But when Romulus came to free his brother, Numitor recognized his long-lost grandsons. Together, with the help of the wicked king's frustrated subjects, Romulus and Remus killed Amulius. Numitor ruled as the rightful king once more.

### **Twins Wanted To Start Their Own City**

Rather than stay in Alba Longa, Romulus and Remus decided to build a new city. But they argued fiercely over where to build their new home and who should rule it. Romulus wanted to build a city on Palatine Hill, while Remus preferred Aventine Hill.

They decided to settle the question through augury, a form of fortune-telling in which the will of the gods is determined — in this case through the flights of birds. Each brother waited on his chosen hill and watched for birds. Remus was the first to receive an omen, or fortune. He saw six vultures. Romulus' vultures came later, but when they came, he saw 12. The brothers continued to argue because they could not agree on which omen was better, and Romulus began construction on his city. He named it Roma after himself.



Ancient historians say there are several different stories about Remus' fate. In most versions of the myth, Romulus attempted to build a wall around his city, which Remus then easily jumped over. Romulus was offended by this insult. He or one of his supporters killed Remus.

Romulus buried Remus, but Rome lived on, eventually growing into the center of one of the longest-lived and largest empires in history. The story of Rome's founding is one of the most famous in Roman mythology. The two brothers have often been shown in paintings and statues as infants being reared by a wolf.

## Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the section "Brothers Were Adopted By A Shepherd" shows that the brothers had the support of the common people?
- (A) One day, a shepherd named Faustulus and his wife, Acca Larentia, stumbled upon the boys and adopted them.
  - (B) The twins grew up as common people, unaware of their royal blood.
  - (C) But when Romulus came to free his brother, Numitor recognized his long-lost grandsons.
  - (D) Together, with the help of the wicked king's frustrated subjects, Romulus and Remus killed Amulius.
- 2 Which sentence from the article BEST supports the idea that there is still disagreement about the story of Romulus and Remus?
- (A) In any case, Rhea Silvia somehow became pregnant and gave birth to twin boys.
  - (B) But they argued fiercely over where to build their new home and who should rule it.
  - (C) Ancient historians say there are several different stories about Remus' fate.
  - (D) The story of Rome's founding is one of the most famous in Roman mythology.
- 3 Which answer choice BEST describes the brothers' reaction to the vultures on their hills?
- (A) They were happy because it helped make a decision about where to build Rome.
  - (B) They were frustrated because it created more disagreement between them.
  - (C) They were angry at the gods because they did not give the brothers a clear fortune.
  - (D) They were hopeful that they interpreted their fortunes correctly.
- 4 What is the relationship between the wolf and the woodpecker in the story?
- (A) They competed over who would best raise the brothers in the woods.
  - (B) They are symbols of the god Mars that hinted at the identity of the brothers' father.
  - (C) They worked together to help the servant protect the brothers from Amulius' attempts to kill them.
  - (D) They were both gods worshiped by the brothers' priestess mother Rhea Silva.