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

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Word Count 546
Level 730L

Romulus and Remus are the mythical twin brothers who legends say founded ancient Rome. They are thought to have been born around 770 B.C.

Twins' Grandfather Was A King

The legend 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. Mysteriously, though, Rhea Silvia gave birth to twin boys.
Amulius was upset when he heard that Numitor's daughter had had children. That was supposed to be impossible. He ordered one of his servants to drown the twins in the Tiber River. But the servant couldn’t bear to watch them die. Instead, he floated them downstream in a crib.

**A Wolf Saved The Twins**

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 thought these two animals represented the god Mars. Many think Mars was the twins' father.

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. They had no idea their grandfather used to be king.

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 other townspeople, Romulus and Remus killed Amulius. Numitor was once again king.

**Brothers Fought Over The New 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. Remus preferred Aventine Hill.
They decided to settle the question through augury. That is a form of fortune-telling in which the will of the gods is made known. This time, it was determined 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, unable to agree on which omen was better. But Romulus started building his city anyway. He named it Roma after himself.

Ancient historians say there are several different stories about Remus’ fate. In most versions of the myth, Romulus tried to build a wall around his city. When Remus jumped easily over it, Romulus grew angry. He or one of his supporters killed Remus.

Romulus buried Remus, but Rome lived on. The city eventually grew into the center of one of the strongest empires in history. The story of Rome’s founding is one of the most famous Roman legends. The two brothers are often shown in paintings or statues as babies being raised by a wolf.
Quiz

1. Read the selection from the section "A Wolf Saved The Twins."

Together, with the help of other townspeople, Romulus and Remus killed Amulius. Numitor was once again king.

Based on the selection, which of the following is TRUE?

(A) Romulus and Remus had special gifts as children of gods that enabled them to defeat Amulius.

(B) Numitor was a well-liked king who had the strong support of his people.

(C) Romulus and Remus wanted to help Numitor because they always knew they were related to him.

(D) Numitor was a weak king who was not powerful enough to protect himself.

2. Select the sentence that BEST explains that the story of Romulus and Remus is not completely based on facts.

(A) He ordered one of his servants to drown the twins in the Tiber River.

(B) Legend has it that she mistook the boys for wolf pups and nursed them as though she were their mother.

(C) One day, a shepherd named Faustulus and his wife, Acca Larentia, stumbled upon the boys and adopted them.

(D) Rather than stay in Alba Longa, Romulus and Remus decided to build a new city.

3. What effect did using augury have on Romulus and Remus?

(A) It helped them to agree that their city should be built on Palatine Hill.

(B) It caused them to continue fighting with one another over the location of their city.

(C) It made them decide to build a wall around their city to keep birds out.

(D) It showed them their fortune about building one of the world's most beautiful cities.
4 Why did Amulius think it was necessary to kill the twins?

(A) He was worried that one of the twins would try to become king when they grew older.

(B) He wanted to punish their mother for not following his orders to become a priestess.

(C) He was concerned that their father was a powerful god who could take over his rule.

(D) He was afraid the twins would try to get revenge for taking their grandfather's spot as king.