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## CHAPTER 3

## THE FOUNDING OF ROME

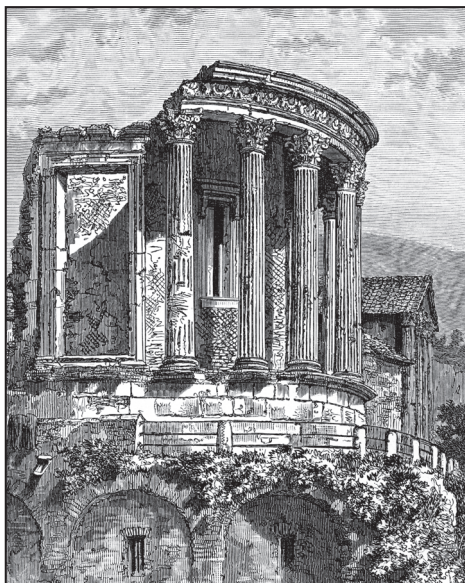
IT IS VERY DIFFICULT to know the truth about the early history of Rome because there are so few historical records of that far-off period. In 390 B.C., when Rome was burned by the Gauls, all the public records were destroyed, and it was not until long after that date that out of the traditions and legends which had been handed down, a history was made. But if reliable historical records are scanty, legend and tradition are full of tales which tell us what the Romans themselves believed as to their own origin. Though these tales must not be looked upon as real history, they have, nevertheless, a distinct importance of their own. For the character of a nation is influenced by what that nation believes about its origin, and by the traditions on which it brings up its youth. It is from such traditions that we can learn what a people admired and what it despised, what kind of heroes were held up as examples to be followed, what was considered noble and honorable, and what was held to be petty and mean.

According to the most ancient tradition, Aeneas, after the fall of Troy, fled from the burning city accompanied by his father and his little son, Ascanius, together with a few faithful followers. After many adventures he reached the coast of Italy, which, so good omens assured him, should be his home

*Aeneas*

and the land over which his descendants should rule. The king of Latium came out to drive back the strangers, but he was defeated by Aeneas, who then made peace with him, and after a time wedded his daughter, Lavinia. After the death of the king, Aeneas ruled in his place until he was slain in battle fighting against the Etruscans. Ascanius then became king, and, finding the city in which his father had lived too small for the increasing population, he founded Alba Longa and made it his chief city.

The descendants of Aeneas ruled in Alba Longa for three hundred years. At the end of this time, the rightful king was Numitor, but he was dethroned by his brother Amulius, who, fearing lest Rhea Silvia, the daughter of Numitor, should have sons who might grow up and claim the kingdom, caused her to be made a priestess of the goddess Vesta.

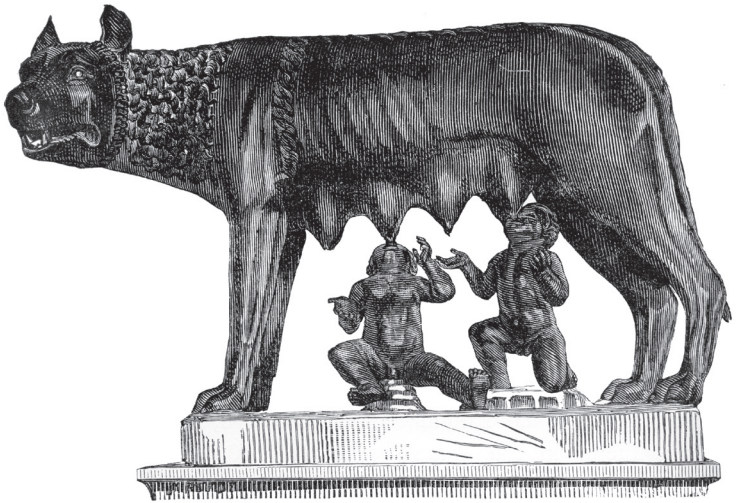


*Temple of Vesta*

Amulius thought that all was well and that his brother would never be strong enough to regain his kingdom, when news was brought to him that Rhea Silvia had twin sons of great beauty, whose father was none other than the god Mars. "But neither gods nor men sheltered her or her babes from the king's cruelty; the priestess was thrown into prison, and the boys were ordered to be thrown into the river."<sup>1</sup>

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[1] Livy, I,4.



*She-wolf of the Capitol*

Now it happened that just at this time, the Tiber had overflowed its banks, and the servant who had been charged to drown the infants left them in the shallow water on the bank, thinking that it would be deep enough to drown them. But the river went down and the infants were left on dry ground at the foot of a fig tree. Here, tradition tells us,

a thirsty she-wolf from the surrounding hills, attracted by the crying of the children, came to them, and nursed them, and was so gentle towards them that the king's flockmaster found her licking the boys with her tongue. According to the story this man's name was Faustulus. He took the children to his hut and gave them to his wife to bring up.<sup>2</sup>

Faustulus knew who these boys were, and he brought them up

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[2] Livy, I,4.

with the knowledge and secret assistance of Numitor. They went to school and were well instructed in letters and other accomplishments befitting their birth. And they were called Romulus and Remus. As they grew up they proved brave and manly and of undaunted courage. But Romulus seemed rather to act by counsel, and to show the sagacity of a statesman, and in all his dealings with their neighbors, whether relating to feeding of cocks or to hunting, gave the idea of being born rather to rule than to obey.<sup>3</sup>

Both boys were noted amongst the shepherds for their skill in protecting the flocks, driving off robbers, and in delivering from injury all who were oppressed.

When Romulus and Remus had reached manhood, they learned who they were, and how Amulius had taken the throne which belonged of right to their grandfather. A plot was formed, Amulius was slain, and Numitor replaced him on the throne. But Romulus and Remus had been so long accustomed to take the lead amongst their companions that they were not content

to dwell in Alba without governing there, nor would they take the government into their own hands during the life of their grandfather. Having therefore delivered the dominion up into his hands and paid their mother befitting honor, they resolved to live by themselves, and build a city in the same place where they were in their infancy brought up.<sup>4</sup>

They began to build, but the brothers could not agree as to which should be the founder of the city or who was to give his

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[3] Plutarch: *Life of Romulus*.

[4] Plutarch: *Life of Romulus*.