

ROMANS IN BRITAIN: The story of Romulus and Remus and how Rome really came to be formed

A legend is a story that has been passed down through history which may not be fact. It is often about a person or group of people who have done something heroic. The reason we can't treat it as fact is because there is either very little proof or no proof at all. The legend of Romulus and Remus is a good example of a legend that was taught to Roman Children for many hundreds of years. It is an exciting story of survival, quarrelling and finally the success of Romulus in creating the city of Rome. However, we now know that the real story of how Rome came into being is a little less exciting. Read the two different versions below and see which one you like the best.

THE LEGEND

Romulus and Remus were twins whose mother was a princess called Rhea Silvia and their father was the God Mars. Rhea's Uncle, Amulius, killed her father, King Numitor, and made himself King. Then he became worried that the twins would eventually grow up and try to take the throne, so he put them into a basket that was then placed into the River Tiber. Soon, the basket ran aground and the twins were discovered by a female wolf who fed them from her milk and raised them for a short while before they were found by a shepherd called Faustulus. The shepherd then brought up the twins as if they were his own children.

As they were growing up, Romulus and Remus gained a reputation as brave heroes who would do anything to help people, even chasing down and attacking robbers to take back things that had been stolen from their friends and neighbours. Eventually they discovered their real identities and they decided to seek revenge by killing Amulius and putting their grandfather Numitor back on the throne. When this was done they then decided to build a city of their own.

At this point the legend branches off into slightly different versions but they all end the same way, with Romulus killing his brother Remus. Some versions have it happen because they quarrelled about the site of the city, some because they both wanted to name it, and some say it was even because they made fun of each other's walls they both built!

Whichever version you believe, the legend always ends the same, with Romulus giving his name to the city of Rome. The date given for the founding of Rome is 753 BC and there the legend ends.

THE TRUTH (AS RESEARCHED BY HISTORIANS AND ARCHAEOLOGISTS)

Around the same period as the legend of Romulus and Remus took place there were a number of settlements of people that had grown up around seven hills that were near the river Tiber because of the water it supplied. Another reason that this was an important location is because it was narrow enough at this point to be bridged so that they could cross it.

At first, the settlements lived apart, separated by marshland, but they soon realised that if they joined together they would be much stronger against attackers. This was quite complicated as the marshland had to be drained first, which took many years of hard work. This is in complete contrast to the legend of Romulus and Remus, which had the city appear almost overnight!

Mostly, the people who formed this larger settlement of early Rome were from a tribe called Latins, which is where the name for the Roman language came from. This was because they came from the Plains of Latium. Because the Latins were successful farmers and traders and they became rich and successful very quickly and Rome flourished and soon grew in size.

It wasn't long before other tribes from outside Rome wanted to conquer it and steal its riches and in these early days this caused great battles. In particular, the Romans fought against the Etruscans and the Samnites for many years.

For this reason, the leaders of Rome invested in an army and became much more organised, resulting eventually in the great Roman Empire, which not only defended the city but also conquered many parts of the world, including Britain!

**ROMANS IN BRITAIN:
Romulus and Remus questions**

Questions about 'THE LEGEND' section

1. What were the names of the seven characters in the story? They are all mentioned in the first paragraph.						
2. Why did their Uncle Amulius kill their father?						
3. What reputation did the two brothers gain as they grew up with Faustulus? Quote the line from the text here:						
4. The text says "At this point the legend branches off into slightly different versions but they all end the same way, with Romulus killing his brother Remus." - why do you think that legends often have so many different versions?						

Questions about 'THE TRUTH' section

1. How many hills were in the area where Rome was formed?	
2. Find the two reasons why this was a good place to settle.	
3. Why was it easier for all the different groups to join together? Can you also think of any other reasons apart from the one written in the text?	
4. As you can see, the true story of the formation of Rome is quite different (and took a lot longer) than the legend of Romulus and Remus, even though it has lasted so long.	
Why do you think the ancient Romans used this legend to tell their history instead of the actual truth of what happened?	

Bonus question

Which character would you be in the legend and why? Try to give more than one reason