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The Founding of Rome – I

Lead: The true story about the founding of the city of Rome is lost in the mists of time. The absence of evidence did not prevent myth-makers and poets from trying their hands at filling in the blanks.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The major problem in determining the events that led to the establishment of one of the great cities of the world, the capitol of one of history's most storied empires, is the almost total lack of contemporary written evidence or even historical

accounts much before the late third century. There is a list of municipal magistrates that dates from about 500 BCE, but that is pretty spare pickings. In the absence of evidence, however, poets and those who traffic in legend have leapt into the breach, usually with a political or cultural agenda, and supplied fanciful, exotic stories to supply a needy Republic and then Empire with a history about which it could be proud.

There are two streams of legend, Greek and Roman that by the first century BCE had coalesced to form a coherent story line, particularly in the hands of the historian Livy and the poet Virgil. When the Greeks destroyed the city of Troy, the Black

Sea powerhouse and chief rival of the Greek city-states, this instituted the Trojan Diaspora, chief actor in which was the hero, Aeneas. He and his companions puttered around the Mediterranean founding cities and eventually settled in central Italy and Aeneas became king of the Latins. Aeneas died but not before founding a city, Lavinium, which he named for his wife Lavinia. His son, Ascanius founded the dynasty and Kingdom of Alba Longa. Eventually, there came to the throne of Alba a treacherous prince, Amulius, who staged a coup against his elder brother, Numitor. Sensing a clear threat, Amulius forced Numitor's daughter, Rhea Silvia, to become a Vestal Virgin, but before that could happen, she was

impregnated by the god Mars. Her twin sons, Romulus and Remus, were set to be drowned but miraculously escaped and were washed up on the banks of the Tiber not far from modern Rome's Palatine Hill. There they were suckled by a she-wolf, discovered and raised by a shepherd, Faustulus.

As befits the off-spring of Mars, they became great warriors, avenged themselves on Amulius, restored their grandfather to his rightful place and set out to found a city at the place of their rescue. The two brothers may have quarreled or there may have been a neighborhood brawl, but somehow Remus was killed, and Romulus founded the village that

became the future city of Rome on April 21, 753 BCE. The obvious political character of Livy and Virgil's narrative can hardly be denied since both the Emperor Augustus and his kinsman, Julius Caesar, are portrayed as direct descendants of Romulus and Remus and by extension, the Trojan hero, Aeneas. Next time: sorting fact from fiction.

Research by Ashleigh Greene, at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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