The History of Rome

Lecture 1. The founding legends.
Selected Reading:

Vitruvius, De architectura libri decem;

Polybios, Historiae;

Vegetius, Epitoma Rei Militaris;

Livius Ab urbe condita libri

A Companion To The Roman Empire (Blackwell Companions To The Roman World), D.S. Potter (ed), Oxford, 2006;


Ziółkowski A., Storia di Roma
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Ab Urbe Condita Libri (Livy) (from Wikipedia)

Ab Urbe Condita Libri—often shortened to Ab Urbe Condita—is a monumental history of ancient Rome in Latin begun sometime between 27 and 25 BC by the historian Titus Livius, known in English as Livy. The Latin title can be literally translated as "Books since the city's founding".

It is often referred to in English as The History of Rome. The work covers the time from the stories of Aeneas, the earliest legendary period from before the city's founding in c. 753 BC, to Livy's own times in the reign of the emperor Augustus. The last year covered by Livy is 745 AUC, or 9 BC, the death of Drusus. About 25% of the work survives.

Chronology
- Books 1–5 – The legendary founding of Rome (including the landing of Aeneas in Italy and the founding of the city by Romulus), the period of the kings, and the early republic down to its conquest by the Gauls. (c.753 BC – c.386 BC)
- Books 6–15 – The subjugation of Italy (the Samnite Wars) before the conflict with Carthage. (Books 11–15 are lost). (c.387 BC – 264 BC)
- Books 16–30 – The first two Punic Wars. (Books 16–20 are lost). (264 BC – 201 BC)
- The following books are lost:
- Books 46–70 – The period after 167 BC to the outbreak of the Social Wars (90 BC)
- Books 71–90 – To the death of Sulla (90–78 BC)
- Books 91–108 – To the Gallic War (78–50 BC)
- Books 117–133 – To the death of Antony (44–30 BC)
- Books 134–142 – The Rule of Augustus down to 9 B.C.
History of Rome overview

- Founding legends
- Geography / pre-Roman world
- The Etruscans / Roman-Etruscan wars
- Roman independence / early Republic
- Latin wars
- Political system / social structure
- Roman law
- Punic wars
- Gracchian reforms / decline of the Republic
- Civil war
The two founding myths of Rome

- The most familiar of these myths, and perhaps the most famous of all Roman myths, is the story of Romulus and Remus, the twins who were suckled by a she-wolf.
- This story had to be reconciled with a dual tradition, set earlier in time, the one that had the Trojan refugee Aeneas escape to Italy and found the line of Romans through his son Iulus, the namesake of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.
The Aeneid

• The Aeneid is a Latin epic poem, written by Virgil between 29 and 19 BC, that tells the legendary story of Aeneas, a Trojan who travelled to Italy, where he became the ancestor of the Romans.

• The first six of the poem’s twelve books tell the story of Aeneas’s wanderings from Troy to Italy, and the poem’s second half tells of the Trojans’ ultimately victorious war upon the Latins, under whose name Aeneas and his Trojan followers became then known.

• The hero Aeneas was already known to Greco-Roman legend and myth, having been a character in the Iliad.
The Aeneid

- Virgil took the disconnected tales of Aeneas's wanderings, his vague association with the foundation of Rome and his description as a personage of no fixed characteristics and fashioned the Aeneid into a compelling founding myth or national epic that
- tied Rome to the legends of Troy,
- explained the Punic Wars,
- glorified traditional Roman virtues,
- legitimized the Julio-Claudian dynasty as descendants of the founders, heroes, and gods of Rome and Troy.
- The Aeneid was written under Augustus, who claimed ancestry through Julius Caesar from the hero and his mother Venus.
- The Aeneid is widely regarded as Virgil's masterpiece and one of the greatest works of Latin literature.
Aeneas and Dido

- According to the Aeneid, the survivors from the fallen city of Troy banded together under Aeneas and underwent a series of adventures around the Mediterranean Sea.
- The fleet takes shelter on the coast of Africa, where Aeneas rouses the spirits of his men, reassuring them that they have been through worse situations before.
- There, Aeneas's mother, Venus, in the form of a huntress very similar to the goddess Diana, encourages him and recounts to him the history of Carthage.
- Eventually, Aeneas goes into the city, and in the temple of Juno he seeks and gains the favor of Dido, queen of the city, which has only recently been founded by refugees from Tyrus and which will later become a great imperial rival and enemy to Rome.
The "Odyssey" of Aeneas
Aeneas and Dido

- Aeneas tells his story about Troy, and Dido realizes that she has fallen in love with Aeneas.
- Juno seizes upon this opportunity to make a deal with Venus, Aeneas's mother, with the intention of distracting Aeneas from his destiny of founding a city in Italy.
- Aeneas is inclined to return Dido's love, and during a hunting expedition, a storm drives them into a small covered grove in which Aeneas and Dido presumably get to know each other even better, an event that Dido takes to indicate a marriage between them.
Aeneas and Dido

• Jupiter sends Mercury to remind Aeneas of his duty, he has no choice but to part. Her heart broken, Dido commits suicide by stabbing herself upon a pyre with Aeneas's sword.

• Before dying, she predicts eternal strife between Aeneas's people and hers; "rise up from my bones, avenging spirit" is a possible invocation to Hannibal.

• Looking back from the deck of his ship, Aeneas sees the smoke of Dido's funeral pyre and knows its meaning only too clearly. Nevertheless, destiny calls, and the Trojan fleet sails on to Italy.
The Aeneid

• The Trojans were thought to have landed in an area between modern Anzio and Fiumicino, southwest of Rome, probably at Laurentum or, in other versions, at Lavinium, a place named for Lavinia, the daughter of King Latinus whom Aeneas married.

• This started a series of armed conflicts with Turnus over the marriage of Lavinia. Before the arrival of Aeneas, Turnus was betrothed to Lavinia, who then married Aeneas, starting the war.

• Aeneas won the war and killed Turnus. The Trojans won the right to stay and to assimilate with the local peoples. The young son of Aeneas Ascanius, also known as Iulus, went on to found Alba Longa and the line of Alban kings who filled the chronological gap between the Trojan saga and the traditional founding of Rome in the 8th century BC.

• Toward the end of this line, King Procas was the father of Numitor and Amulius. At Procas' death, Numitor became king of Alba Longa, but Amulius captured him and sent him to prison; he also forced Numitor's daughter Rhea Silvia to become a virgin priestess among the Vestals.
Romulus & Remus

- Romulus and his twin brother, Remus, were the sons of Rhea Silvia and Mars, herself the daughter of Numitor, the former king of Alba Longa. Through them, the twins are descended from the Trojan hero Aeneas and Latinus, the mythical founder of the kingdom of Latium.
- Upon the twins' birth, Amulius ordered that they be thrown into the rain-swollen Tiber. Instead of carrying out the king's orders, his servants left the twins along the riverbank at the foot of Palatine Hill.
Romulus & Remus

- They were saved by the god Tiberinus, Father of the River, and survived with the care of others, at the site of what would eventually become Rome. In the most well-known episode, the twins were suckled by a she-wolf, in a cave now known as the Lupercal.
- Eventually, they were adopted by Faustulus, a shepherd. They grew up tending flocks, unaware of their true identities. Over time, they became natural leaders and attracted a company of supporters from the community.
- When they were young adults, they became involved in a dispute between supporters of Numitor and Amulius. As a result, Remus was taken prisoner and brought to Alba Longa.
Romulus & Remus

Both his grandfather and the king suspected his true identity. Romulus, meanwhile, had organized an effort to free his brother and set out with help for the city. During this time they learned of their past and joined forces with their grandfather to restore him to the throne.

Amulius was killed and Numitor was reinstated as king of Alba. The twins set out to build a city of their own.

After arriving back in the area of the seven hills, they disagreed about the hill upon which to build. Romulus preferred the Palatine Hill, above the Lupercal; Remus preferred the Aventine Hill.
Romulus & Remus

- When they could not resolve the dispute, they agreed to seek the gods' approval through a contest of augury. Remus first saw 6 auspicious birds but soon afterward, Romulus saw 12, and claimed to have won divine approval.
- The new dispute furthered the contention between them. In the aftermath, Remus was killed either by Romulus or by one of his supporters. Romulus then went on to found the city of Rome, its institutions, government, military and religious traditions.
- In a variant of the legend, the augurs favoured Romulus, who proceeded to plough a square furrow around the Palatine Hill to demarcate the walls of the future city. When Remus leapt over the "walls" to show how inadequate they were against invaders, he was struck down by Romulus.
Establishment of the city

- Choosing one hundred men from the leading families, Romulus established the Roman senate. These men he called patres, the city fathers; their descendants came to be known as "patricians", forming one of the two major social classes at Rome.
- The other class, known as the "plebs" or "plebeians", consisted of the servants, freedmen, fugitives who sought asylum at Rome, those captured in war, and others who were granted Roman citizenship over time.
Rape of the Sabine Women

- The new city was filled with colonists, most of whom were young, unmarried men; and while fugitives seeking asylum helped the population grow, single men greatly outnumbered women.
- With no intermarriage between Rome and neighboring communities, the new city would eventually fail.
- Romulus sent envoys to neighboring towns, appealing to them to allow intermarriage with Roman citizens, but his suggestions were not accepted.
- Romulus then formulated a plan to acquire women from other settlements. He announced a momentous festival and games, and invited the people of the neighboring cities to attend.
Rape of the Sabine Women

- Many did, in particular the Sabines, who came in droves. At a prearranged signal, the Romans began to snatch and carry off the marriageable women among their guests.
- The aggrieved cities prepared for war with Rome, and might have defeated Romulus had they been fully united. But impatient with the preparations of the Sabines, the Latin towns of Caenina, Crustumerium, and Antemnae took action without their allies – and lost.
Rape of the Sabine Women

- The Romans finally met the Sabines on the battlefield.
- The bloodshed finally ended when the Sabine women interposed themselves between the two armies, pleading on the one hand with their fathers and brothers, and on the other with their husbands, to set aside their arms and come to terms.
- The leaders of each side met and made peace. They form one community, to be jointly ruled by Romulus and Tatius.
Primary sources / chronological discrepancies

- Identifying those original elements has so far eluded the classical academic community. Although the tale takes place before the founding of Rome around 750 BC, the earliest known written account of the myth is from the late 3rd century BC.
- There is an ongoing debate about how and when the "complete" tale came together.
- Some elements are attested to earlier than others, and the storyline and the tone were variously influenced by the circumstances and tastes of the different sources as well as by contemporary Roman politics and concepts of propriety.
- Whether the twins' myth was an original part of Roman myth or a later development is the subject of an ongoing debate. Sources often contradict one another. They include the histories of Livy, Plutarch, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Tacitus as well as the work of Virgil and Ovid.
Primary sources / chronological discrepancies

- These works have been among the most widely read versions of the myth. In all three works, the tales of the Lupercal and the fratricide are overshadowed by that of the twins' lineage and connections to Aeneas and the deposing of Amulius.
- Modern scholarship approaches the various known stories of Romulus and Remus as cumulative elaborations and later interpretations of Roman foundation-myth.
- Particular versions were presented by Roman historians as authoritative, an official history trimmed of contradictions and untidy variants to justify contemporary developments, genealogies and actions in relation to Roman morality.
- The three canonical accounts of Livy, Dionysius, and Plutarch provide the broad literary basis for studies of Rome's founding mythography. They have much in common, but each is selective to its purpose.
Primary sources / chronological discrepancies

- The legend as a whole encapsulates Rome's ideas of itself, its origins and moral values.
- Ancient historians had no doubt that Romulus gave his name to the city.
- Most modern historians believe his name a back-formation from the name Rome.
- The myth was fully developed into something like an "official", chronological version in the Late Republican and early Imperial era; Roman historians dated the city's foundation to between 758 and 728 BC, and Plutarch reckoned the twins' birth year as 771 BC.
- A tradition that gave Romulus a distant ancestor in the semi-divine Trojan prince Aeneas was further embellished, and Romulus was made the direct ancestor of Rome's first Imperial dynasty.
Primary sources / chronological discrepancies

- Although a debate continues, current scholarship offers little evidence supporting the Roman foundation myth, including a historical Romulus or Remus.
- The archaeologist Andrea Carandini is one of the very few modern scholars who accept Romulus and Remus as historical figures, based on the 1988 discovery of an ancient wall on the north slope of the Palatine Hill in Rome. Carandini dates the structure to the mid-8th century BC and names it the Murus Romuli.
- In 2007, archaeologists reported the discovery of the Lupercal beneath the home of Emperor Augustus, but a debate over the discovery continues.