

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

## The Rise of Rome

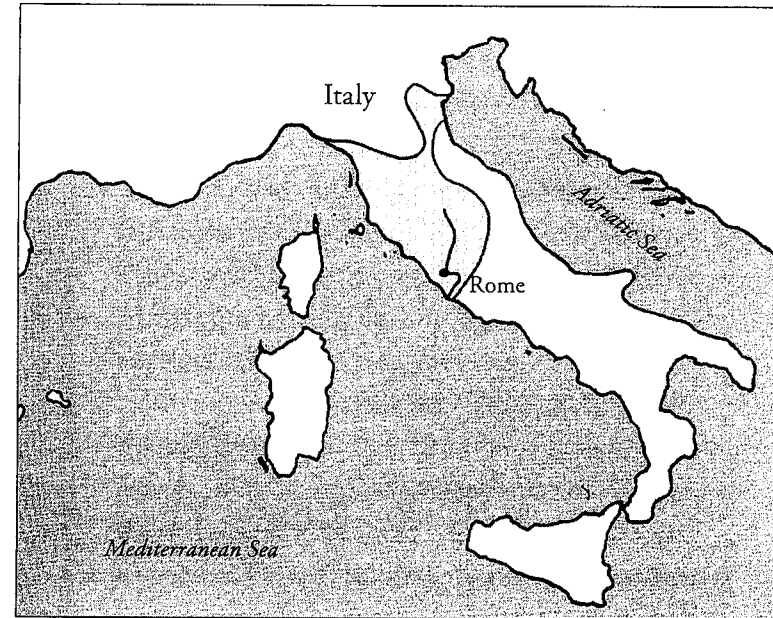
## Romulus and Remus

Assyria was a great kingdom, but it was conquered by Babylon. Babylon was a great empire, but it was conquered by Persia. Persia and Greece were great empires, but they were conquered by Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great built his own huge kingdom, but then he died and his generals broke the kingdom up into pieces.

That is what the story of the ancient world is like. One king comes along, wins battles, and builds a big empire. His empire lasts for a little while, but the kings who come after him slowly lose control of it. Then another king from another country does the same thing and builds another empire. After a little while, that empire too falls apart. This happens over and over again.

So you won't be surprised to learn that we're going to learn now about *another* big empire. But this one was bigger and stronger than any empire we've read about before. It grew to be bigger than Alexander's empire, and it lasted much longer. As a matter of fact, it lasted for hundreds and hundreds of years. Over a thousand years after this empire fell, people were still learning its language, reading its books, and copying its government. This empire was called Rome.

## Rome and the Area Under Etruscan Rule



At first, Rome was just a tiny village in the hills of Italy. Go west from Greece and you'll see a piece of land that looks like a boot, jutting down into the Mediterranean Sea. This is called a *peninsula*, because it sticks out into the water. This peninsula is Italy.

The people who lived in Rome told this story about the village's beginning:

Once upon a time a great king named Numitor had twin grandsons—strong, healthy baby boys, named Romulus and Remus. But Numitor also had a wicked younger brother who plotted against him and stole his throne. The new, evil king wanted to get rid of anyone who might claim to be the rightful king.

“Those babies might grow up to take my crown!” he said. “Go put them in the Tiber River!”

So a servant took the boys down to the Tiber River. But she felt sorry for them, and put them into a basket and pushed it out into the current.

The basket floated along the river until it got stuck in the root of a fig tree at the river’s edge. That might have been the end of the two boys—but a wolf heard them crying. She peered around the trunk of the fig tree, and saw the basket with the babies in it.

Now, this wolf had cubs of her own. She felt pity for the two hungry babies, and so she tugged the basket up onto the bank and then back to her own den. There, she raised the babies with her own wolf cubs, as her own.

One day a shepherd, out looking for a lost lamb, heard a coo and then a gurgle from the brush surrounding the wolf’s den. He pushed some branches aside—and there saw two fat, happy baby boys, playing naked among the wolf cubs. The shepherd and his wife had no children of their own. So he took the boys home, and the two of them raised the babies to be tall, handsome young men.

When Romulus and Remus were grown, they went back to the fig tree where their basket had landed, so many years ago. They looked around and saw seven hills. “This is the perfect place to build a town,” they said to each other. “A town on top of these seven hills would be strong and hard to attack!” So they began to build a town.



**Romulus and Remus**

And Romulus declared himself the king of this new town. He put himself in charge of building a wall around it. “This wall will keep us safe!” he declared. “Anyone who climbs over my wall will instantly be killed!”

But Remus was angry with his brother. He thought to himself: “We built this town together! Why should Romulus be the ruler of it? I want to be the leader.” So he walked up to the wall and vaulted easily over it.

“What kind of a wall is that?” he sneered. “Anyone can climb over it! How can *you* keep this town safe?”

Romulus was so angry that he drew his sword, charged at his brother, and killed him on the spot. Then he named the town Rome, after himself. He was Rome's first king.

What does this story remind you of? Do you remember the story of Sargon, the ruler of one of the very first kingdoms we studied? He floated down the river in a basket until someone rescued him. And do you remember Cyrus? He was also raised by shepherds in the woods. Ancient people liked these stories about their kings. The stories made the kings seem even more legendary—like great fairy-tale heroes who could do anything!

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## The Power of Rome

The legend of Romulus and Remus tells us that Romulus was the first king of Rome. Other stories about ancient Rome say that he was the first of seven kings of Rome. These kings fought with other tribes of people who lived in Italy. The kings wanted to take over more and more land, so that Rome would get larger and stronger.

The most important Italian tribe was called the Etruscans. The Etruscans lived north of Rome, in the hills and mountains of Italy. They liked music and art, and painted pictures that we can still see today. The Etruscans also grew crops, made weapons and jewelry out of metal, and sailed back and forth

between Greece and Italy, trading with the Greeks. On these trips, the Etruscans learned how to use the Greek alphabet and worship the Greek gods.

The Roman kings fought with the Etruscans. But they also traded with them, and learned from them. The Etruscans taught the Romans how to dress like Greeks. They told the Romans about the Greek gods. The Romans learned about painting and music from the Etruscans as well. And they borrowed the customs of the Etruscan kings, who wore special robes called *togas*, with purple borders. The purple showed everyone how important the king was.

The Etruscan kings also carried a bundle of rods with an axe blade in it, as a symbol of royal power. The rods showed that the king had the power to punish anyone who did wrong. The axe blade showed that he could execute people who did very evil things. The Romans liked this symbol of power, which was called the *fascēs*. Soon Roman kings, like Etruscan kings, wore special purple-bordered togas and carried fascēs. Do you have an old dime? Look on the back of it and you will see a picture of the fascēs.

American courtrooms and government offices sometimes copy this Roman symbol, even today. They have a fascēs in them to show that the judges have the power to punish criminals. The courtroom in the United States Capitol building has two fascēs on the wall, one on each side of the American flag.

The fascēs showed how powerful the king was. But after seven kings, the people of Rome decided that the king had too much power. They didn't like living in a monarchy—a country where the king was in charge. Instead, they wanted Rome to be a place where the people could help make the laws and choose the leaders.

Do you remember the Greek city that wanted the people to help make laws and choose leaders? The city of Athens was a democracy, where the people voted on their laws and leaders. But Rome didn't become a democracy like Athens, though. In Athens, all the men who weren't slaves could vote about laws and leaders. But in Rome, only rich and powerful men called *patricians* were allowed to have a say in the government. Two of these patricians were appointed by the other patricians to be the leaders of the city. They were called *consuls*. The Romans thought that having two leaders, instead of one king, would keep any one man from getting too much power. The two consuls were supposed to keep an eye on each other! Neither one could do exactly what he pleased.