

## Reflections on Romulus: A Case Study on the Roman Foundation Myth in Cicero

The Roman foundation myth - the story of Romulus and Remus - centers Rome as a civilization built on fraternal bloodshed. One cannot think about Rome's foundation myth without also conjuring up images of civil war. Rome's foundation and fratricide seem to be interlocked. Or are they? This paper will explore the figure of Romulus as he appears throughout various works of Cicero. Expanding upon the work of Wiseman (1999) and Zetzel (1995), this paper explores the ways in which there are two Romulus characters throughout Cicero's work: Romulus, the deified founder of Rome, and Romulus the fratricide. It appears that Romulus, the deified foundational figure, often overshadows the fratricide figure in Cicero's work.

First, I will look at the portrayal of Romulus from *In Catilinam* 1.33 and show that Cicero wants his audience to view Romulus as a foundational figure and the builder of the temple for Jupiter *Stator*. Cicero does not want his audience to think of Romulus as a fratricide, especially given Cicero's involvement in killing Roman citizens during the Catilinarian conspiracy. Next I will pivot to a discussion of Cicero's court speech *Pro Balbo*, with a particular emphasis on section 31. I show that Cicero wants his audience here to view Romulus as the merciful and intelligent leader who welcomed foreign enemies – the Sabines – to become citizens in order to grow the waning population of Rome (*princeps ille creator huius urbis, Romulus, foedere Sabino docuit etiam hostibus recipiendis augeri hanc civitatem oportere*). I will demonstrate that Cicero again does not want the audience to think of Romulus as a ruthless murderer, since the orator is trying to use Romulus as an example of Roman clemency. If Romulus welcomed a group of foreign enemies into the state to become citizens, Cicero argues, surely his foreign client named Balbus, who is not an enemy to Rome, should be able to retain his citizenship. Then I will

take a look at Cicero's *De Re Publica* and show that the murder of Remus is completely disregarded in the dialogue. The name Remus is only mentioned once at *De Re Publica* 2.4.3, and the interlocutor Scipio simply states here in an offhand comment that Romulus was abandoned on the banks of the Tiber "along with his brother Remus" (*cum Remo fratre*). I show that Scipio in the dialogue praises the first king for his intelligence and his good character, which form the basis of his argument that Rome is the ideal state. Any mention of the murder of Remus would stain his arguments. Finally, I will discuss the appearance of Romulus in *De Officiis* 3.41 and show that Cicero explicitly mentions the murder of Remus in this passage to align the myth with the purpose of the text as a whole. In the third book of *De Officiis*, Cicero discusses moral duty, motivated self-interest, and the decision one is forced to make when those two forces come into conflict. The example of the fratricide arising out of Romulus' aversion to sharing political power with his brother fits perfectly into Cicero's discussion in *De Officiis*. I also suggest that the tumultuous events of the Civil Wars during the 40s and the further accumulation of political clout in one individual at the end of the Republic – in direct opposition to the rule of two consuls – may have led Cicero to acknowledge the fratricidal elements of the foundation myth.

After exploring the representation of Romulus in Cicero, I conclude that the orator throughout much of his early work suppresses the fratricidal elements of the foundation story in order to fully highlight the good elements of the founder's character and his contributions to Roman customs. A Roman audience would find patriotic appeal in viewing Romulus as the king of good character who helped bring about the glory of Rome, and Cicero prefers his audience to think about this type of Romulus over the fratricidal type. The fratricide is only mentioned when the purpose of the text dictates it necessary. My paper ends with a question: Is the suppression of

the fratricide an effective way for Cicero to highlight the good character of Romulus? Or is Remus' bloody fate drawn more to the forefront of a reader's mind given his absence?

### Bibliography

Cicero, Marco Tullio. *De Re Publica: Selections*. Edited by James E. G Zetzel, Cambridge UP, 1995. Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics.

Wiseman, Timothy Peter. *Remus: A Roman Myth*. Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999.