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T. P. Wiseman  
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**Romulus founded Rome – but why does the myth give him a twin brother Remus, who is killed at the moment of the foundation? This mysterious legend has been oddly neglected. Roman historians ignore it as irrelevant to real history; students of myth concentrate on the more glamorous mythology of Greece. In this book, Professor Wiseman provides, for the first time, a detailed analysis of all the variants of the story, and a historical explanation for its origin and development. His conclusions offer important new insights, both into the history and ideology of pre-imperial Rome and into the methods and motives of myth-creation in a non-literate society. In the richly unfamiliar Rome of Pan, Hermes and Circe the witch-goddess, where a general grows miraculous horns and prophets demand human sacrifice, Remus stands for the unequal struggle of the many against the powerful few.**

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# REMUS

*A Roman myth*

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*Roma fave, tibi surgit opus*

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## *Preface*

With the possible exception of the Trojan Horse, there is no scene in the whole iconography of classical myth more recognizable than that of the she-wolf and twins. And though few people today would be able to name even one of the Greek warriors hidden in the Horse, the she-wolf scene can still be relied on to evoke the formula 'Romulus 'n' Remus'. It takes a bit more knowledge to distinguish between them, and to put a story to the names. Fewer now than in our grandparents' generation know what happened to Remus.

Classicists know the story, of course, but they are astonishingly incurious about it. Dozens of books have been written about the Aeneas legend, its variants, its significance for Rome, its incorporation into the ideology of the Augustan principate. Nothing equivalent exists for the story of the twins. The specialist's equivalent of 'Romulus 'n' Remus' is the index entry that reads 'Remus, *see* Romulus'. In English at least, even those who should know better casually mispronounce the names; *Romulus* has a long 'o' (it is, after all, the eponym of Rome), *Remus* has a short 'e'. And even to put the names in that order is a solecism. For the Romans, the story of the twins was 'de Remo et Romulo'.

Remus in particular has suffered from this neglect. There are texts from antiquity which tell us that Remus was the elder twin; that Romulus was known as 'the other one'; that Remus outlived Romulus; and that *both* of them were demigods, celebrated in hymns and invoked in oaths. None of that makes sense if we assume that the story made canonical by Livy, Ovid and Plutarch is all there ever was. But there is no need to

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assume that – and every reason *not* to, given the large number of variant versions detectable even in the ancient sources that survive.

The aim of this book is to look carefully at what the ancient sources tell us (and what they show us, for visual evidence is important too), paying particular attention to variants, contradictions and inconsistencies; and to apply it to what we know or can infer about archaic and republican Rome, in order to draw up a hypothetical reconstruction of the origin, development and exploitation of the legend.

I hope it will become clear in the course of the argument that in order to understand the process we must rid ourselves of preconceptions about ‘the legalistic, authoritarian, and sometimes pompous, if pragmatic, Romans’ (to quote an agreeably pithy recent formulation of the standard view), and think ourselves back into a pre-imperial and perhaps less inhibited Rome, a community whose self-image was still evolving, in which openness to outside influences was not yet a matter for anxiety. It should never be forgotten that our picture of the Romans is almost wholly constructed from the works of authors writing – with the partial exception of Plautus – at a time when Rome was an imperial power which had defined itself as different from, and superior to, the peoples it had subjected.

Let others better mould the running mass  
 Of metals, and inform the breathing brass,  
 And soften into flesh a marble face;  
 Plead better at the bar; describe the skies,  
 And when the stars descend, and when they rise.  
 But, Rome! ’tis thine alone, with awful sway,  
 To rule mankind, and make the world obey:  
 Disposing peace and war thy own majestic way.  
 To tame the proud, the fettered slave to free,  
 These are imperial arts, and worthy thee.

The ‘other Rome’, as I call it in chapter 10 – the city in which and for which the Remus story was created – pre-dates this ideology. We shall have to do with a Rome which was not yet a paradigm of power.

Since I hope the book will be of interest not only to classicists

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and ancient historians but to anyone with a taste for myth, legend and story-telling, I have translated Greek and Latin quotations and done my best to avoid or explain technicalities. Even so, I am very conscious of the complexity of the argument. It could hardly be otherwise, when the subject is the elaboration of a legend over several centuries, in a society for which the sources of our knowledge are lamentably inadequate. I think some kind of sense can be made of it, but it does demand concentration.

It is a pleasure to record those who have helped in the writing of this book. I am grateful above all to the University of Exeter, for the two periods of study leave which enabled me to write it at all, and to the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, for providing me with ideal working conditions for three months in 1992. Sceptical but tolerant audiences at lectures and seminars in various places (from Finland to California), in the period 1988–93, helped to sharpen the argument, and my Exeter colleagues have been generous with ideas and suggestions. Tim Cornell and John North heroically read through and commented on the whole typescript; I am very grateful indeed for their advice, and hope I have profited from it even on the points where I have persisted in my own view. My thanks to Rodney Fry and Susan Rouillard, for drawing the maps and diagrams, and to Pauline Hire, for her confidence that my half-formed ideas would eventually make a book. Finally, I should like to repeat something I wrote twenty-four years ago, which is even more true today. My wife has been involved with this book and its vicissitudes to a degree well beyond the call of duty. For her patience and encouragement no thanks can be adequate.

TPW  
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