

Ovid *Fast.* 2.359-422

Add Roman reasons, my Muse, to foreign ones,
And let my charger race his own dusty course.
A she-goat was sacrificed to cloven Faunus, as usual,
And a crowd had been invited to the scanty feast.
While the priests prepared the entrails, on willow spits,
The sun being then at the zenith of its course,
Romulus and his brother, and a shepherd boy,
Exercised their naked bodies on the sunlit plain:
Trying the strength of their arms in sport,
With levers, javelins, or hurling heavy stones.
A shepherd shouted from the heights: 'Romulus, Remus,
Thieves are driving the bullocks off through the wasteland.'
It would have taken too long to arm: they took opposite
Directions: and meeting them Remus re-took their prize.
Returning he drew the hissing entrails from the spits,
Saying: 'No one but the victor shall eat of these.'
As he said, so he and the Fabii did. Romulus returned,
Unsuccessful, finding the empty table and bare bones.
He laughed and grieved that Remus and the Fabii,
Should have conquered, where his own Quintilii could not.
The tale of that deed endures: they run stark naked,
And the success achieved enjoyed a lasting fame.
You might also ask why that cave is called the Lupercal,
And the reason for giving the day such a name.
Silvia, a Vestal, had given birth to divine children,
At the time when her uncle held the throne.
He ordered the infants taken and drowned in the river:
What was he doing? One of the two was Romulus.
Reluctantly his servants obeyed the sad command
(Though they wept) and took the twins to the appointed place.
It chanced that the Albula, called Tiber from Tiberinus
Drowned in its waves, was swollen with winter rain:
You could see boats drifting where the fora are,

And there in the vale of the Circus Maximus.
When the servants arrived there (since they were
Unable to go further), one of them said:
'How alike they are, how beautiful each of them is!
Yet of the two this one is the more vigorous.
If nobility is seen in the face, unless I'm wrong,
I suspect that there's some god within you –
Yet if some god were the author of your being,
He'd bring you aid at such a perilous time:
Your mother would surely bring help if she could,
Who has borne and lost her children in one day:
Born together, to die together, pass together beneath
The waves!' He finished and set them down.
Both squalled alike: you'd have thought they knew.
The servants returned with tears on their cheeks.
The hollow trough, where the boys were laid, floated
On the water, how great a fate the little ark carried!
It drifted onwards towards a shadowy wood,
And gradually settled where the depth lessened.
There was a tree: traces remain, which is now called
The Rumina fig, once Romulus' fig tree.
A she-wolf, newly delivered, (miraculously!) found the abandoned twins,
Who would have thought the creature would not harm them?
Far from harming them she helped them: and a wolf fed those
Whom their kin would have allowed to perish.
She stayed, caressed the tender infants with her tail,
And licked their bodies with her tongue.
You might know they were sons of Mars: without fear
They sucked her teats, and the milk not meant for them.
She gave her name to the place: and the place to the Luperci.
The nurse has a great reward for the milk she gave.