

# It is Not New Archaeology it is Fiction



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## Commentary

The director Matteo Rovere, who also was the producer, made an amazing job with the movie "Il primo Re" and tried to make it as realistic as possible. The photography, always in natural light, is just perfect. The movie deserves attention but it is not a documentary film "BBC style", nor an historical fiction or a peplum production: it is an epic drama. We saw peplum productions on the foundation of Rome already in the 1950's; but now the director rewrote the famous legend of the twins with the help of academic consultants and made a movie which is very different from the current Italian production. It is not the story of the twins after they were abandoned in a basket on the banks of the Tiber river and fed by a she-wolf - even if it is set before the foundation of Rome in 753 BC. Anyway there is an effort to be as authentic as possible: all the locations are near Rome, the historical background is quite good, huts are made of wood and hay, clothes are simple, basic and credible. But it is not so for weapons: for scenic reasons, they chose swords that were not in use in Latium at that time. In particular, I am referring to the so called "Halstatt antenna sword", which appeared in central Europe during the Bronze Age. Obviously "Il Primo Re" must not be considered an historical movie, but it certainly gives the feeling of that archaic period. Even more important, the actors speak original Paleo Latin language, with subtitles. This was done for example in Mel Gibson's movies The

Passion and Apocalypto. But in The Passion the pronunciation was a scholastic one - created during the Middle ages. In Il Primo Re, they managed to use the original pronunciation of Latin and adopted an archaic vocabulary and syntax. In fact Luca Alfieri, professor of Linguistics, translated into Latin the dialogues of the movie.

## Plot Summary

Romulus and Remus were young shepherds and loyal brothers, who lived near the Tiber river. During a great flood, they were swept away by the river and arrived into the town of Alba where they were reduced to slavery, and forced to fight one against the other (Figure 1). Romulus lead a rebellion, and the two brothers escaped with other prisoners. They stole the sacred fire of Alba, together with the Vestal virgin Satnei (Figure 2). When Romulus was wounded during a night assault, Remus became the leader of the rebel group. But just when Remus began to think that the Gods were on his side, the Vestal foretold a terrible prophecy: the future Empire will be named after the brother who will kill the other one. The actors are excellent in their roles, especially Remus (Alessandro Borghi) and the Vestal virgin (Tania Garribba), who has a very expressive face. A little less for Romulus (Alessio Lapice), who does not seem to understand what he is saying when dialogues are long.



**Figure 1:** During a great flood, they were swept away by the river and arrived into the town of Alba where they were reduced to slavery.



Figure 2: Sacred fire of Alba.

In an interview, the director said that he was inspired by *The Revenant*. “*Il Primo Re*” uses a similar storytelling perspective: minimal dialogues, stunning panoramas, a very realistic environment, metaphysical experiences. Many archaeologists did not like the movie. They claim that Romans look like Vikings,

and that the characters are full of hatred and ferocity. It’s a sign of our times, because the director made an “emotional reinterpretation” of the mythical legend about the foundation of Rome.



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