



## [Ovid, \*Metamorphoses\* XIV.805-828](#)

The ascension of Romulus to heaven

**Name of the author:** Ovid

**Date:** 1st BCE to 1st CE

**Place:** Rome

**Language:** Latin

**Category:** Roman

**Literary genre:** Poetry

**Title of work:** *Metamorphoses*

**Reference:**

XIV.805-851

### **Commentary:**

This passage, describing Romulus's ascension to heaven joins the deification accounts of Aeneas (XIV.581-608), Hercules (IX.134-272), and Julius Caesar (XV.843-849) in the *Metamorphoses*. Aeneas's apotheosis is particularly close to that of Romulus here, reminding of the connection between these two founders of Rome. Romulus's divine father, Mars (Gradivus) intercedes for his son to Jupiter, using the growth and stability of the Roman state as proof that the time is now right for Romulus's deification, which Jupiter has already promised (808-814). This pattern mimics that of Venus pleading with Jupiter for Aeneas's deification (XIV.581-595). Joseph Sodlow points out that Jupiter's prior agreement to deify Romulus forms the most significant part of Mars's argument – he does not refer explicitly to Romulus's deservedness – it was always an eventuality (Joseph Sodlow, *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses*, p. 191). For Sodlow, Ovid's apotheosis accounts in the *Metamorphoses* do not consist of a raising of status as such, but rather a realisation of a state or worthiness that the individuals already possessed. There is no movement up or down the scale of quality of being (Joseph Sodlow, *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses*, p. 190). Mars does refer to Romulus's deification in terms of a "reward," but the process of his transformation, likened rather painfully to a lead bullet leaving a sling and melting in the air, simply enhances his appearance so that his form is more fitting to his new abode – he is not fundamentally *changed*, as such.

Garth Tissol argues that because Romulus was so well known to Roman readers of Ovid's text as a "mythico-historical parallel to Augustus," the apotheosis of Romulus was ripe for panegyric symbolism and allegory. However, this opportunity is not taken by Ovid. The poet does not dwell on Romulus's earthly achievements, choosing instead to focus almost exclusively on the heavenly sphere. This said, however, it is worth noting that the passage is framed by references to Romulus as a law giver (806, 824). Ovid effectively remythologises Romulus, drawing him into the overall theme of the *Metamorphoses*, wherein divinities are active, and humans are acted upon. In this sense, Ovid reverses the approach of his main textual source, Ennius's *Annales*, in which Romulus's apotheosis (I.62) is understood by commentators such as Otto Skutsch (*The Annals of Quintus Ennius*, p. 260) as being the result of his own virtue and merits while on earth (Garth Tissol, *Roman History and Augustan Politics*, p. 328-329). A euhemeristic interpretation of Romulus's deification is therefore difficult to maintain. It may be that Ovid omits details of Romulus's earthly actions, particularly given his murdering of his brother, Remus, which would make parallels with Augustus more awkward to say the least. Constructing a parallel between Romulus and Augustus here is far from simple, however, particularly given that in Mars's appeal to Jupiter he claims that Rome is no longer reliant on one man's strength (808-809). Romulus is easily taken from the earth, which hardly seems to sit comfortably with the issue of succession that surrounded the *princeps* (Garth Tissol, *Roman History and Augustan Politics*, p. 331-332).

Keywords in the original language:

- [concilium deorum](#)



- [deus](#)
- [ius](#)
- [omnipotens](#)
- [Quirinus](#)
- [rapina promissa](#)
- [regia iura](#)
- [res Romana](#)
- [Romulus](#)
- [trabeatus](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [ascension](#)
- [deification](#)
- [Mars](#)
- [Palatine](#)
- [Quirinus](#)
- [Roman state](#)
- [Romulus](#)

**Bibliographical references:** Skutsch, Otto, [The Annals of Quintus Ennius](#) (Oxford: Clarendon , 1985)  
Sodlow, Joseph, [The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses](#) (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988)  
Tissol, Garth, "[The House of Fame: Roman History and Augustan Politics in Metamorphoses 11-15](#)", in Brill's Companion to Ovid (ed. Boyd, Barbara W.; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 305-335  
Wheeler, Stephen M., [Narrative Dynamics in Ovid's Metamorphoses](#) (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2000)

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