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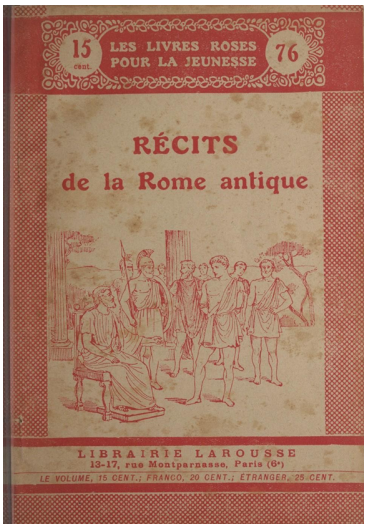
Jeanne Bloch

Stories from Ancient Rome [Récits de la Rome Antique]

France (1912)

TAGS: Aeneas Amulius Anchises Ascanius / Iulus Caesar Cleopatra VII Coriolanus Mark Antony Mercury Numitor (King) Remus Romulus Trojan Horse Troy Venus



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General information	
Title of the work	Stories from Ancient Rome [Récits de la Rome Antique]
Country of the First Edition	France
Country/countries of popularity	France
Original Language	French
First Edition Date	1912
First Edition Details	*Récits de la Rome Antique*, adapt. pour les enfants par Mlle Jeanne Bloch, "Les livres roses pour la jeunesse" 76. Paris: Larousse, 1912, 60 pp.
Available Onllne	gallica.bnf.fr (accessed: June 17, 2021)
Genre	Adaptations, Myths, Short stories
Target Audience	Children
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Creators

Jeanne Bloch (Author)

Jeanne Bloch (unknown, 18..–19..) was an *agrégée de l'université**, professor at the famous Collège Sévigné in Paris, the first French non-denominational (private) high school for girls opened in 1880 by the group of founders of the *Société pour la propagation de l'instruction parmi les femmes*. Since 1919, a kindergarten was added to the school which remains still an active and highly praised private establishment. A number of well-known French scholars and intellectuals taught at the Collège, among them the outstanding Hellenist, Jacqueline de Romilly (1913–2010), member of the Académie Française and Collège de France. Jeanne Bloch was the author of many French adaptations for *Les livres roses pour la jeneusse* - collection for children published by Larousse, such as: *Un été au pays des écureuils: histoire de monsieur Moustache et de son chemin de fer aérien* (1910), *La conversion de Catherine* (1911), *Contes de la Chine et de l'Inde* (1911), *Nouvelles aventures du Vieux Frère Lapin* (1911), *Le roman d'un lutin; suivi de La tortue bavarde: conte de l'Inde* (1911), *Les travaux d'Hercule* (1911), *Persée, le vainqueur de la Gorgone* (1911), *La Tempête et Comme il vous plaira* (1911), *Récits et légendes de la Rome antique* (1912), *Histoire de Gallus, Poulette et Glouglou* (1912).

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* According to the French education system. More here (accessed: September 9, 2020).

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Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	In the series, *Récits de la Rome Antique* are preceded by No. 75: *Les deux Voix*, and followed by No. 77: *Lucienne, la petite vaniteuse*, both unrelated to classical Antiquity.

Summary

The booklet is divided in 8 chapters, each contains a mythical story or a legend of ancient Rome known from Livy's *Ab Urbe condita* or it introduces a historical character.

At the beginning, the child is told the story of Aeneas, the father of kings, which here begins with the long siege of Troy ending with the fall and burning of the city as a result of the wooden horse trick. Having avoided death in flames, Aeneas flees from Troy with his father, Anchises and son, Ascanius. He is safe from harm being guided by Mercury, his divine protector. Then he follows the star of Venus, to reach the Italian shore where, along with some other refugees, he builds a clay city named Lavinium, after the name of a beautiful young girl he wants to marry. There they live happily until the day Aeneas goes missing, taken by the gods who want to spare him the pain of senility and death.

Chapter two tells the mythical story of the twins Romulus and Remus which begins with the founding of the city Alba Longa and the quarrel between the sons of its eleventh king, Numitor and Amulius. Amulius dethrones his brother and forces his daughter to become a vestal, so that she does not bear an heir. One day, however, she gives birth to male twins who are thrown into the Tiber. As they are washed ashore, they are fed by wild animals and then found by a shepherd, Faustulus who becomes their foster parent. As they grow up, they take care of Amulius' livestock and one day fight with shepherds of Numitor. As Remus is captured, he is led to his grandfather and then recognized. Eventually the twins restore Numitor to the throne as the legitimate ruler.

Chapter three tells the myth of Rome's foundation. The twins want to found a city, the auguries are equally auspicious for both. In effect a fight begins, Remus and Faustulus are killed and a new town is born with a funeral. As there are only men around, Romulus seeks women for his soldiers and one day invites his Sabine neighbours with wives

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and daughters. During the visit all the women are captured, their families fail to get them back. Some months later the fight against Romans is about to begin, but the women beg their fathers to spare their new husbands and stop the combat. Thus peace is made and the women can safely raise their children.

The next chapter describes the legend of Horatii and Curiatii. During the reign of Tullus Hostilius, there is a war between Rome and Alba Longa in which the Horatii triplets fight on the Roman side and the Curiatii triplets on the Alban side. The Alban general Mettus suggests that the triplets as representatives of both sides fight in a decisive "duel," which is to take place on the battlefield between the lines. The combat is fierce, all Curiatii are injured and two Horatii die. The only chance for the last Horatius to survive is to separate the Albans. He pretends to run away to get a chance of defeating them one by one, which is exactly what happens: he wins and Alba is conquered by Rome without engaging the entire armies in battle.

Chapter five contains the episode of the sacred geese of Juno during the war with the Gauls. Romans, attacked by Gallic forces, retreat to the Capitoline fortress. As one of the Gauls hears the gaggle of the sacred geese of Juno coming from the summit, he craves their meat and the Gallic soldiers find a way to climb up. Some of them plan to scale the Capitoline Hill at night in order to capture the geese and make a pâté. When they approach the walls in silence, the geese start making noise which wakes up the Roman defenders on time to fight the enemy.

The next chapter is devoted to Coriolanus. A patrician, Caius Marcius, known as a brave soldier, is awarded a wreath of oak leaves. He covers himself in glory during a siege of Corioli in the war with the Volsci and thus is called Coriolanus. His mother is proud of him, but the plebeians perceive him as haughty and conceited. In the time of hunger, he presents an unpopular attitude towards grain distribution and is summoned before the court to justify his behaviour. He leaves Rome to seek shelter with the former foe, the Volsci, with whom he allies himself and then leads the Volscian army against Rome. Stopped by his wife and mother, he tells the latter that she has saved Rome but lost the son and withdraws from the siege, never to come back.

Leaving Livian legends behind, chapter seven presents Julius Caesar who, as a great warrior and conqueror of Gaul, also wants the glory of being crowned and calls himself the master of Rome. As the age of

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kings is gone, Rome has no king. Brutus, a descendant of the last king's killer, starts a conspiracy to defend the republic against Caesar's ambitions. Caesar is stabbed to death on the Ides of March (though the date given here is March 13, not 15).

The last chapter tells the story of Antony and his relationship with Cleopatra. They meet in Tarsos and Antony, impressed by the royal splendor of the queen as well as the luxury and richness of her galley, follows her to Alexandria. Then he defends his territories on the East and returns as the winner to Cleopatra who receives him with an extraordinary feast. The queen uses Antony for her purposes, which causes rage in Rome and leads to war. Having lost the naval battle, the couple escapes, and Antony, considering himself dishonored, falls on his sword. Cleopatra refusing the humiliation of being a captive of Rome, seeks death in the venom of a viper.

Analysis

Récits de la Rome Antique was published as no. 76 in *Les livres roses pour le jeunesse collection* [Pink Books for Youth] the Collection Stead of the Librairie Larousse – a series of fascicles, prepared especially for children, which includes fables, myths, legends, fairytales and various stories, also based on literature (e.g. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *As You Like It* or Scott's *Ivanhoe*). The collection of booklets was published in English by William Thomas Stead (1849–1912), an English journalist and philanthropist who died in Titanic's shipwreck, then in French. The authors of the provided texts are called *adaptateurs*, the names of illustrators usually do not appear, though the series contains a unified graphic design. The booklet *Stories from Ancient Rome* features 47 refined and detailed engraved illustrations, which are a great asset for children since they not only show the characters in action but can also be colored by the reader.

Récits de la Rome Antique corresponds with no. 64 in *Books for the Bairns*, the English version entitled *Stories from Ancient Rome* published by Stead. The publisher's idea was to give a French child a possibility of simultaneous reading to exercise and improve English.

Beyond the main text with Roman tales, there is also a page *récréations* with homework tasks (quizzes, charades etc.) and solutions of the tasks given in the previous booklet of the series, then a short story *Les Pass-temps de Colibri et de Bobinette*, advertisements for subscriptions and purchase from Larousse.

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The adaptations show the myths of origin of the city and the state of Rome, her heroes and historical events. Each chapter is based on chosen mythological or historical events or characters, treated not in a textbook-like informative way, but rather like a fictionalized tale in order to teach through entertainment. The booklet is aimed at children, the chapters are short and the text is adapted to the young age of an average reader. Some plots and motifs less relevant to the story or the most drastic details are omitted on purpose. For example, the issue of divine origin of Aeneas is not included, although Venus is still called his protector; the same situation occurs with the twins Romulus and Remus: Mars does not appear in the text as their father and future protector of Rome. In Coriolanus' story the protagonist withdraws from the siege never to return, which is correct, but there is no information that it means returning to the Volsci and getting killed.

In order to make the story similar to tales rather than to history textbooks, the narration includes episodes and elements added to resemble ordinary life and situations more familiar to the reader. In chapter five there is a sub-plot of a Gallic soldier whom the geese remind of his daughter and homeland as they are the only thing he remembers common to now and to his earlier life. The Gauls attack the fortress not to slaughter its inhabitants, but rather to steal as they crave to make a delicious goose meal, a *pâté*, French *spécialité de la maison*. This depicts them to be ordinary humans and not a cruel hostile army (especially that, what is important to remember, the French reader perceives himself to be a Gauls' descendant). The same effect is achieved by adding to the last chapter two scenes of an ordinary activity: the queen Cleopatra and Marc Antony fishing, even though the described process is quite extraordinary.

Besides these sub-plots, there are also retardations in the main action in the form of explanations or pieces of information needed to better understand the ancient world. A short paragraph at the beginning of some chapters connects a previous one, sometimes unrelated, with a new one (for example, reporting on the long period of time passed between Coriolanus and Caesar). Then information is provided that applies to historical, political or cultural issues as the background for the main story including, inter alia, the fact that it was Romulus who divided the people of Rome in two groups: patricians and plebeians, which resembles a feudal state known from history of France. Besides short notes about first kings Numa Pompilius and Tullius Hostilius, there are also descriptions of the political system of the royal era: a

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	Roman and a Sabine king reigning alternately, the republican political system, the position of the tribune. There are also some explanations in the main text: what role played the augurs, who the vestals were, who the ancestor of Brutus, Caesar's assassin, was, what a Lars' altar was. In some parts of the text, the Victorian era approach to raising children becomes visible through the language, attitudes, and chosen patterns and values. The joy of a Roman mother is to raise a son for a soldier; Coriolanus as a patrician despises plebs, but his main feature is just being brave. Then Caesar is shown as an ambitious soldier and statesman, not a man involved in an affair with queen Cleopatra. As for her, she is presented as a beautiful and rich queen of Egypt who made Antony forget family and friends, but rather because of her royal splendor, not seductive tricks. There is no mention of an affair between them, the couple behaves like good friends who enjoy spending time together. The queen has a son, here named Polémon, for whom she wants the kingdom of Armenia and still there is no information about the father of this boy or about Cleopatra' former partners. The queen is described as a great character, well dressed, proud and brave even facing death.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aeneas Amulius Anchises Ascanius / Iulus Caesar Cleopatra VII Coriolanus Mark Antony Mercury Numitor (King) Remus Romulus Trojan Horse Troy Venus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Conflict Death Family Heroism Siblings
Further Reading	De Blacam, Aodh, "Books for the Bairns", *The Irish Monthly* 74.876 (1946): 265–273 (accessed: June 17, 2021). Wood-Lamont, Sally W. T., *Stead's "Books for the Bairns"*, Edinburgh: Salvia Books, 1987, ackingthedevil.co.uk (accessed: June 17, 2021).

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