

This ancient account of the abduction of the Sabine women comes from the Roman historian Livy who wrote around the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century during the Augustan Era. This translation is by Rev. Canon Roberts and is available at [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu).

## **LIVY, *THE HISTORY OF ROME*, BOOK I, CHAPTERS 9-13**

### **CHAPTER 9**

#### **THE RAPE OF THE SABINES**

The Roman State had now become so strong that it was a match for any of its neighbors in war, but its greatness threatened to last for only one generation, since through the absence of women there was no hope of offspring, and there was no right of intermarriage with their neighbors. Acting on the advice of the senate, Romulus sent envoys amongst the surrounding nations to ask for alliance and the right of intermarriage on behalf of his new community. It was represented that cities, like everything else, sprung from the humblest beginnings, and those who were helped on by their own courage and the favor of heaven won for themselves great power and great renown. As to the origin of Rome, it was well known that whilst it had received divine assistance, courage and self-reliance were not wanting. There should, therefore, be no reluctance for men to mingle their blood with their fellow men.

Nowhere did the envoys meet with a favorable reception. Whilst their proposals were treated with contumely, there was at the same time a general feeling of alarm at the power so rapidly growing in their midst. Usually they were dismissed with the question, 'whether they had opened an asylum for women, for nothing short of that would secure for them inter-marriage on equal terms.' The Roman youth could ill brook such insults, and matters began to look like an appeal to force.

To secure a favorable place and time for such an attempt, Romulus, disguising his resentment, made elaborate preparations for the celebration of games in honor of 'Equestrian Neptune,' which he called 'the *Consualia*.' He ordered public notice of the spectacle to be given amongst the adjoining cities, and his people supported him in making the celebration as magnificent as their knowledge and resources allowed, so that expectations were raised to the highest pitch. There was a great gathering; people were eager to see the new City, all their nearest neighbors-the people of Caenina, Antemnae, and Crustumerium-were there, and the whole Sabine population came, with their wives and families. They were invited to accept hospitality at the different houses, and after examining the situation of the City, its walls and the large number of dwelling-houses it included, they were astonished at the rapidity with which the Roman State had grown.

When the hour for the games had come, and their eyes and minds were alike riveted on the spectacle before them, the preconcerted signal was given and the Roman youth dashed in all directions to carry off the maidens who were present. The larger part were carried off indiscriminately, but some particularly

beautiful girls who had been marked out for the leading patricians were carried to their houses by plebeians told off for the task. One, conspicuous amongst them all for grace and beauty, is reported to have been carried off by a group led by a certain Talassius, and to the many inquiries as to whom she was intended for, the invariable answer was given, 'For Talassius.' Hence the use of this word in the marriage rites.<sup>1</sup> Alarm and consternation broke up the games, and the parents of the maidens fled, distracted with grief, uttering bitter reproaches on the violators of the laws of hospitality and appealing to the god to whose solemn games they had come, only to be the victims of impious perfidy.

The abducted maidens were quite as despondent and indignant. Romulus, however, went round in person, and pointed out to them that it was all owing to the pride of their parents in denying right of intermarriage to their neighbors. They would live in honorable wedlock, and share all their property and civil rights, and--dearest of all to human nature--would be the mothers of freemen. He begged them to lay aside their feelings of resentment and give their affections to those whom fortune had made masters of their persons. An injury had often led to reconciliation and love; they would find their husbands all the more affectionate because each would do his utmost, so far as in him lay to make up for the loss of parents and country. These arguments were reinforced by the endearments of their husbands who excused their conduct by pleading the irresistible force of their passion--a plea effective beyond all others in appealing to a woman's nature.

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **THE FIRST WARS**

The feelings of the abducted maidens were now pretty completely appeased, but not so those of their parents. They went about in mourning garb, and tried by their tearful complaints to rouse their countrymen to action. Nor did they confine their remonstrances to their own cities; they flocked from all sides to Titus Tatius, the king of the Sabines, and sent formal deputations to him, for his was the most influential name in those parts. The people of Caenina, Crustumium, and Antemnae were the greatest sufferers; they thought Tatius and his Sabines were too slow in moving, so these three cities prepared to make war conjointly. Such, however, were the impatience and anger of the Caeninensians that even the Crustumians and Antemnates did not display enough energy for them, so the men of Caenina made an attack upon Roman territory on their own account. Whilst they were scattered far and wide, pillaging and destroying, Romulus came upon them with an army, and after a brief encounter taught them that anger is futile without strength. He put them to a hasty flight, and following them up, killed their king and despoiled his body; then after slaying their leader took their city at the first assault. He was no less anxious to display his achievements than he had been great in performing them, so, after leading his victorious army home, he mounted to the Capitol with the spoils of his dead foe borne before him on a frame constructed for the purpose. He hung them there on an oak, which the shepherds looked upon as a sacred tree, and at the same time marked out the site for the temple of Jupiter, and addressing the god by a new title, uttered the following invocation: 'Jupiter Feretrius! These arms taken from a king, I,

Romulus a king and conqueror, bring to thee, and on this domain, whose bounds I have in will and purpose traced, I dedicate a temple to receive the *spolia opima* which posterity following my example shall bear hither, taken from the kings and generals of our foes slain in battle.'

Such was the origin of the first temple dedicated in Rome. And the gods decreed that though its founder did not utter idle words in declaring that posterity would thither bear their spoils, still the splendor of that offering should not be dimmed by the number of those who have rivaled his achievement. For after so many years have elapsed and so many wars been waged, only twice have the *spolia opima* been offered.<sup>1</sup> So seldom has Fortune granted that glory to men.

## CHAPTER 11

Whilst the Romans were thus occupied, the army of the Antemnates seized the opportunity of their territory being unoccupied and made a raid into it. Romulus hastily led his legion against this fresh foe and surprised them as they were scattered over the fields. At the very first battle-shout and charge the enemy were routed and their city captured. Whilst Romulus was exulting over this double victory, his wife, Hersilia, moved by the entreaties of the abducted maidens, implored him to pardon their parents and receive them into citizenship, for so the State would increase in unity and strength. He readily granted her request. He then advanced against the Crustuminians, who had commenced war, but their eagerness had been damped by the successive defeats of their neighbors, and they offered but slight resistance. Colonies were planted in both places; owing to the fertility of the soil of the Crustumine district, the majority gave their names for that colony. On the other hand there were numerous migrations to Rome, mostly of the parents and relatives of the abducted maidens.

## WAR WITH THE SABINES

The last of these wars was commenced by the Sabines and proved the most serious of all, for nothing was done in passion or impatience; they masked their designs till war had actually commenced. Strategy was aided by craft and deceit, as the following incident shows.

Spurius Tarpeius was in command of the Roman citadel. Whilst his daughter had gone outside the fortifications to fetch water for some religious ceremonies, Tattius bribed her to admit his troops within the citadel. Once admitted, they crushed her to death beneath their shields, either that the citadel might appear to have been taken by assault, or that her example might be left as a warning that no faith should be kept with traitors. A further story runs that the Sabines were in the habit of wearing heavy gold armlets on their left arms and richly jeweled rings, and that the girl made them promise to give her 'what they had on their left arms,' accordingly they piled their shields upon her instead of golden gifts. Some say that in bargaining for what they had in their left hands, she expressly asked for their shields, and being suspected of wishing to betray them, fell a victim to her own bargain.

## CHAPTER 12

However this may be, the Sabines were in possession of the citadel. And they would not come down from it the next day, though the Roman army was drawn up in battle array over the whole of the ground between the Palatine and the Capitoline hill, until, exasperated at the loss of their citadel and determined to recover it, the Romans mounted to the attack. Advancing before the rest, Mettius Curtius, on the side of the Sabines, and Hostius Hostilius, on the side of the Romans, engaged in single combat. Hostius, fighting on disadvantageous ground, upheld the fortunes of Rome by his intrepid bravery, but at last he fell; the Roman line broke and fled to what was then the gate of the Palatine. Even Romulus was being swept away by the crowd of fugitives, and lifting up his hands to heaven he exclaimed: 'Jupiter, it was thy omen that I obeyed when I laid here on the Palatine the earliest foundations of the City. Now the Sabines hold its citadel, having bought it by a bribe, and coming thence have seized the valley and are pressing hitherwards in battle. Do thou, Father of gods and men, drive hence our foes, banish terror from Roman hearts, and stay our shameful flight! Here do I vow a temple to thee, 'Jove the Stayer,' as a memorial for the generations to come that it is through thy present help that the City has been saved.' Then, as though he had become aware that his prayer had been heard, he cried, 'Back, Romans! Jupiter Optimus Maximus bids you stand and renew the battle.' They stopped as though commanded by a voice from heaven-Romulus dashed up to the foremost line, just as Mettius Curtius had run down from the citadel in front of the Sabines and driven the Romans in headlong flight over the whole of the ground now occupied by the Forum. He was now not far from the gate of the Palatine, and was shouting: 'We have conquered our faithless hosts, our cowardly foes; now they know that to carry off maidens is a very different thing from fighting with men.' In the midst of these vaunts Romulus, with a compact body of valiant troops, charged down on him. Mettius happened to be on horseback, so he was the more easily driven back, the Romans followed in pursuit, and, inspired by the courage of their king, the rest of the Roman army routed the Sabines. Mettius, unable to control his horse, maddened by the noise of his pursuers, plunged into a morass. The danger of their general drew off the attention of the Sabines for a moment from the battle; they called out and made signals to encourage him, so, animated to fresh efforts, he succeeded in extricating himself. Thereupon the Romans and Sabines renewed the fighting in the middle of the valley, but the fortune of Rome was in the ascendant.

## CHAPTER 13

### PEACE AND UNION WITH THE SABINES

Then it was that the Sabine women, whose wrongs had led to the war, throwing off all womanish fears in their distress, went boldly into the midst of the flying missiles with dishevelled hair and rent garments. Running across the space between the two armies they tried to stop any further fighting and calm the excited passions by appealing to their fathers in the one army and their husbands in the other not to bring upon themselves a curse by staining their hands with the blood of a father-in-law or a son-in-law, nor upon their posterity the taint of parricide. 'If,' they cried, 'you are weary of these ties of kindred,

these marriage-bonds, then turn your anger upon us; it is we who are the cause of the war, it is we who have wounded and slain our husbands and fathers. Better for us to perish rather than live without one or the other of you, as widows or as orphans.'

The armies and their leaders were alike moved by this appeal. There was a sudden hush and silence. Then the generals advanced to arrange the terms of a treaty. It was not only peace that was made, the two nations were united into one State, the royal power was shared between them, and the seat of government for both nations was Rome. After thus doubling the City, a concession was made to the Sabines in the new appellation of Quirites, from their old capital of Cures. As a memorial of the battle, the place where Curtius got his horse out of the deep marsh on to safer ground was called the Curtian Lake.

### **THE CURIES AND CENTURIES**

The joyful peace, which put an abrupt close to such a deplorable war, made the Sabine women still dearer to their husbands and fathers, and most of all to Romulus himself. Consequently when he effected the distribution of the people into the thirty curiae, he affixed their names to the curiae. No doubt there were many more than thirty women, and tradition is silent as to whether those whose names were given to the curiae were selected on the ground of age, or on that of personal distinction-- either their own or their husbands'--or merely by lot. The enrolment of the three centuries of knights took place at the same time; the Ramnenses were called after Romulus, the Titienses from T. Tatius. The origin of the Luceres and why they were so called is uncertain.

Thenceforward the two kings exercised their joint sovereignty with perfect harmony.