

The Kidnapping of the Sabine Women

The Roman state had become strong enough to hold its own in war with all the peoples along its borders, but a shortage of women meant that its greatness was fated to last for a single generation, since there was no prospect of offspring at home nor any prospect of marriage with their neighbours. Then, in accordance with the decision of the senate, Romulus sent messengers to the neighbouring peoples to ask for alliance and the right of marriage for the new people:

But nowhere were the emissaries given a fair hearing. Some scorned, others feared the great power growing in their midst, both for themselves and for their descendants. In more than one place the emissaries were asked, even as they were being sent packing, why they hadn't offered asylum to women (criminals) too: that way they'd have had their marriage and with others of their own rank!

The youth of Rome took this insult badly and began to think seriously about the use of force. Romulus, to gain time till he found the right occasion, hid his concern and prepared to celebrate the Consualia, the solemn games in honour of equestrian Neptune.

He then ordered that the spectacle be announced to the neighbouring peoples. He gave the event great publicity by the most lavish means possible in those days. Many people came, some simply out of curiosity to see the new city, and especially the nearest neighbours, from Caenina, Crustumium and Antemnae. The entire Sabine population came, wives and children included. Received with hospitality in the houses, after having seen the position of the city, its walls, and the large number of buildings, they marvelled that Rome had grown so fast.

When it was time for the show, and everybody was concentrating on this, a prearranged signal was given and all the Roman youths began to grab the women.

According to Plutarch, who put flesh on Rome's founding myths in the 1st century AD, the women were kidnapped so that the future growth of Rome's population could be assured. The early history of Rome was "full of acts of deception and oppression". The kidnapping of the Sabine women was both a subterfuge and an "act of violence", but was **justified** in the sense that Romulus had a higher purpose

- A great power based on the unification of local tribes had been established

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- Although taken by violence, the Sabine women were soon won over by sweet words and childbearing
- none of this would have happened if their fathers hadn't been so inflexible in not letting them marry their neighbors