

## MYTH: Sabine Women

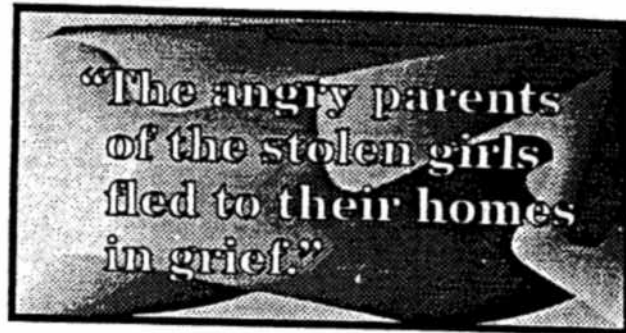
As legend has it, the first citizens of Rome were almost all male, the followers of Romulus and Remus. Well, no matter how mighty a city might be, if most of the inhabitants are men, this greatness will only last one generation. So the first serious problem for these new Romans was to find suitable wives.

Surrounding Rome were many villages of other tribal groups. In every village were women of marriageable age. So Romulus sent out a delegation of young Romans to request permission to pursue marriage with these available maidens. Everywhere they were refused. The villagers gave many different reasons, including the fact that Rome was a small, primitive, and backward village unworthy to ally itself with the richer cities of the Plains of Latium.

When persuasion failed, Romulus decided to try more direct measures. He made up his mind to kidnap prospective brides from the neighboring people. He announced that somewhere in his territory an altar to the god Consus had been found buried in the earth. Then, as now, buried objects possessed magical significance in the Mediterranean world, and people would travel a great distance to see them. According to legend, the Romans invited the neighboring tribesmen—most of them Sabines—to attend the ceremonies in honor of the newly discovered altar and to bring their womenfolk. They came willingly and unarmed to this celebration that was to include a great horse race at the end of the day. Romulus spared no expense in his festivities, with plenty of food and drink as well as the opportunity to see the new city of Rome.

People came from far and near to see the buried altar. After an afternoon of feasting and laughing and the playing of games, the trumpet sounded for the beginning of the horse race. All eyes and minds turned to focus on

the primary event of the day. While their guests were distracted, the young Romans, already mounted on swift horses, swooped down upon the crowd, seized as many unmarried young maidens as they could, (some sources say 683, others only 30) and quickly fled back inside the city gates, taking their new brides with them.



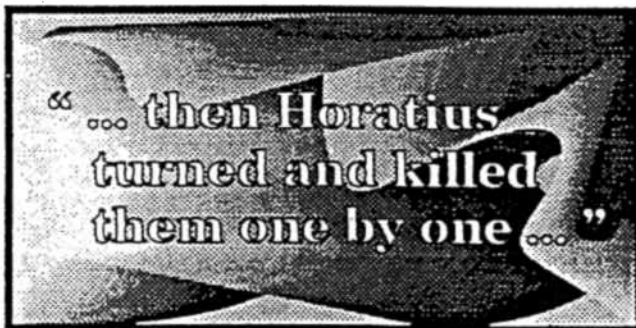
The angry parents of the stolen girls fled to their homes in grief, accusing the Romans of violating the laws of hospitality and crying out to Jupiter to punish the Romans for their crime. They raised a large army and set out to attack Rome. They were never able to conquer the city, however. After a long period of fighting with each other, the two groups reached an agreement. By this time, the stolen women were happy with their new husbands and homes. They approached their still angry fathers and brothers to suggest a truce.

Romulus, the Roman leader, and Titus Tatius, the king of the Sabines, would jointly rule the seven mighty hills of Rome. At this moment, the Romans and Sabines formed the center of a new nation. The Sabines paid tribute to Romulus in their own way by calling him Quirinus after their own god of war, and eventually the Romans adopted Quirinus as a second war god to rule with Mars—two kings, two gods. The Romans would later have two consuls—an inheritance from the time of the two kings. The next king of Rome was a Sabine. Who do you think won: the Romans who got the wives they needed, or the Sabines who got a kingdom?

Eight hundred years before the birth of Christ, the Romans went to war with the city of Alba Longa. The first Roman settlers came from Alba Longa so these two cities were related by blood. Nevertheless, they were locked in a dispute as to which of the two cities would rule supreme on the Plains of Latium.

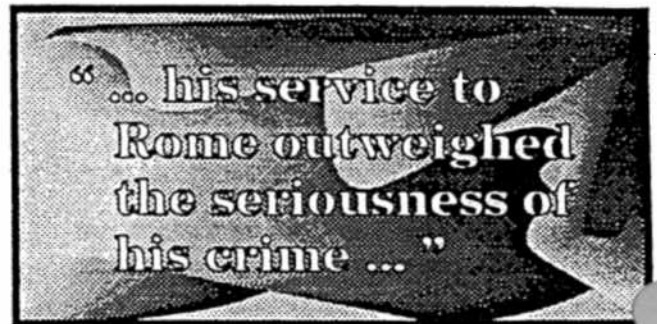
Not wanting to engage in a bloody war that would pit relative against relative, the leaders of both cities decided to settle their dispute in a unique way. Instead of the armies of both cities fighting, they decided to allow three outstanding warriors from each city to engage in mortal combat and promised to abide by the outcome of the "mini war."

The Albans selected the Curiatii, a set of triplets that had won great acclaim on the battlefield. The Romans, likewise, chose triplets, the Horatii. The warriors, in all their armor, met each other in front of the assembled soldiers and began the battle that would decide which city would rule the plains.



After a long hard fight, two of the Horatii were dead and all three of the Curiatii wounded. The remaining Horatius, knowing he could not defeat three warriors by himself, then showed that he was clever as well as brave by pretending to run away. Amid the jeers of the Alban soldiers, the Curiatii pursued him, gradually becoming separated from each other as they ran. When they were strung out along the road, with a good distance between them, then Horatius turned and killed them one by one, winning the war for Rome.

The entire population of Rome, including his sister, turned out to give him a hero's welcome. His poor sister had been promised in marriage to one of the Curiatii, and when she saw that her brother was wearing the dead man's cloak, which she had made herself, she burst into tears and called out her lover's name. This so enraged the Horatius that he drew his sword and plunged it into her heart. "Take your girl's love," he cried, "and give it to your lover in hell! Rome means nothing to you, nor do your two dead brothers. All Roman women who mourn for the enemy should perish this way."

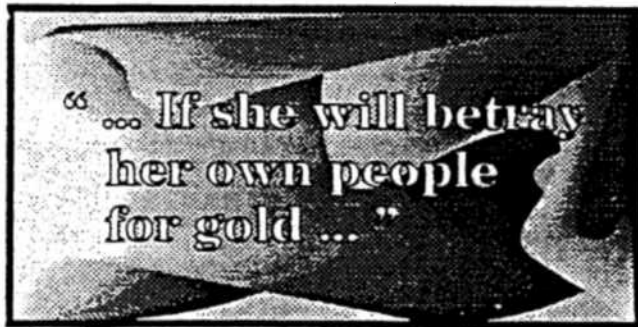


For this terrible crime, Horatius was condemned to death, but on his way to his execution, he appealed to the Comitia (an assembly of citizens), which voted to pardon him because it was thought that his service to Rome outweighed the seriousness of his crime. He had placed the welfare of the city before his own family. From that time on, any Roman citizen condemned to death could appeal his sentence to the Comitia for pardon.

## MYTH: Tarpeia

After the theft of their daughters, the Sabine tribesmen raised an army and marched on Rome. Rome's walls, however, proved to be more than the Sabines could conquer, and it looked as though they would be unsuccessful in obtaining their revenge. Within the city of Romulus, there lived a young maiden, Tarpeia, whose greed for gold was well known. As her father was the commander of the city gates, she had reason to know which entrances to the city were heavily guarded and which were ignored.

In the dark of night, she slipped out of Rome's gates and approached the enemy camp. She had seen the bright golden bracelets most of the Sabine warriors traditionally wore on their left arms. She made a deal with the commander and his troops that in return for what the Sabines wore on their left arms, she would open the gates to her own city and permit the enemy to surprise the Roman fortress. Satisfied that she would get what she wanted from the Sabines, she returned to the city awaiting the moment when those golden bracelets would make her rich beyond her wildest imaginings.



The god Janus had seen her deeds and came to the Sabine captain in a dream with the question, “If she will betray her own people for gold, what will she ask to betray the Sabines?” Deep in sleep, the Sabine commander knew the wisdom of Janus' message. Still, he had made a promise to Tarpeia. She was to receive what the Sabines wore on their left

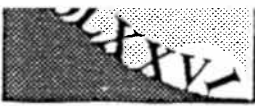
arms. Suddenly the answer came to him. He conferred with his warriors and they agreed with his plan.

The next night, when there was no moon in the sky, the Sabines approached the city wall where Tarpeia awaited them. She opened the small gate on the west side of the capitol and the enemy warriors filed into the city. The treacherous girl approached the commander and demanded her payment. “Give me what you wear on your left arms,” she shouted.

“As we agreed, so shall you receive,” he replied. “You expected golden bracelets, but you forgot, we Sabines use our left arms to carry our heavy metal shields as well. Take those instead, traitor!”



The commander threw his heavy shield upon the girl as did each of the Sabine warriors in his party. The Sabines had taken advantage of her treachery but had then pelted her to death with their shields, for her treason was so evil that even those who gained by it could not keep faith with her. In the end, the Romans threw the body of the wicked girl down a cliff and left it unburied, a horrible fate for any Roman. Forever after, this cliff was dedicated to her evil deed. The Tarpeian Rock—from which the Romans hurled criminals to their deaths on the rocks below—was a fitting end to those who could not live as proud, loyal, honest Romans.

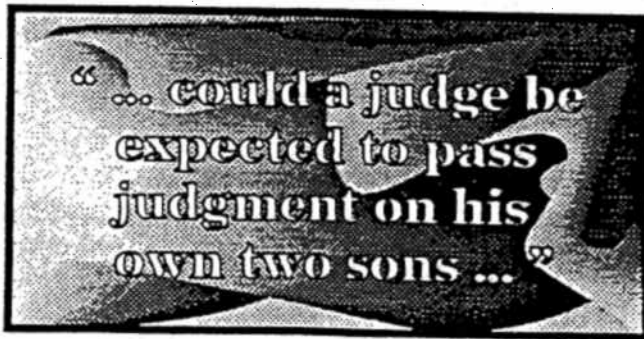


## MYTH: Junius Brutus

Lucius Junius Brutus was a member of the powerful patrician families that helped the kings to rule Rome. However, the last king of Rome, Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud) was a bad ruler. The council of elders, to which Brutus belonged, decided to replace their ruler with a council of elders that would make the wealthy patrician families the real rulers of the city. While the king was away on a military campaign, the leaders of the patricians expelled the king and declared that, "Never again would Rome have a rex (king)."

Brutus, as one of the wisest and most respected Romans, became one of the leaders of the new republic. All the Romans, though, did not agree with this new government. Because kings had ruled Romans for more than 200 years, many felt that that was the way their government ought to be organized. When Tarquinius Superbus raised an army and marched on the city of Rome, many of these citizens secretly supported him.

Among the secret supporters of the king were Brutus' two sons. They wanted Tarquinius to return as king. They planned to betray the city much as Tarpeia had done so many years before. Secretly, at night, they would open one of the gates. The Etruscan allies of Tarquin could sneak into the city and by morning Rome would again belong to a king.

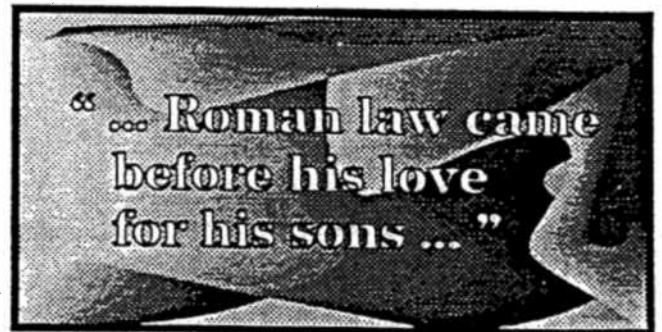


In their bragging, however, their plot became known. Angry Romans seized the two young men and took them to be judged. Brutus was one of the judges. The people were shocked.

The penalty for this crime was death. Would Brutus treat his sons the same as any other young man found guilty of this crime? How could a judge be expected to pass judgment on his own sons?

The evidence left no doubt. The young men were guilty. Judge after judge passed sentence on Brutus' sons. At last, it was Brutus' turn to vote. He was such a respected man and had so many followers that he could have easily spared his sons, whom he loved very much. He looked at their faces—faces he had seen before him since their childhood. How could he condemn them? How could he let them go free?

"Guilty!" he said. "Let the sentence of death be carried out!" The judges took their seat to see justice served. The "fasces" were brought in. These were bundles of rods gathered around a double-headed ax and were the symbols of Roman justice. The young men were beaten with the rods. Then they were beheaded with the ax.



The people of Rome turned to look at Brutus. His face remained stern and grim. His heart was full of sorrow. Still, the Roman law came before his love for his sons. Brutus did his duty before the law and had proved himself a loyal Roman. To this day, many give Lucius Junius Brutus the credit for founding the Roman Republic.

## MYTH: Caius Mucius

Three kings from the Tarquin family, each more cruel than the last, had ruled the Romans. In fact, the people had risen up and assassinated the first two of these kings. Tarquin the Proud, however, was the worst of all. He had crucified Roman citizens in the Forum and violated their wives and daughters. The Romans would never accept a king as their ruler again. They were determined to have a republic in which the rulers were elected.

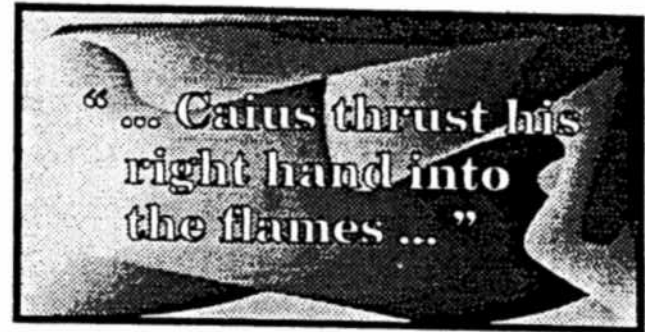
Tarquin the Proud, however, was not one to give up his throne easily. He gathered together his Etruscan allies and marched on Rome. The Etruscan army surrounded the proud city on the seven hills and demanded that the Romans surrender to their demands.

As the Etruscan siege grew longer and the food grew scarcer, they knew they would have to make a decision soon—accept an unwanted king or starve to death.

Happily, Fortuna sent another hero to Rome's defense, a young man named Caius Mucius. Disguising himself in Etruscan armor, he slipped out of Rome late at night and made his way to the enemy camp. His plan was to assassinate the Etruscan commander, Lars Porsena. This general was a famous warrior, and Caius reasoned that without his leadership the Etruscans would soon tire of Tarquin's demands and go home without conquering Rome.

When Caius reached the Etruscan camp, however, he couldn't be sure which was the tent of the commander. Spotting a large elaborate tent in the middle of the camp, he made his move. Inside was a warrior in fancy armor with a commanding figure. Caius, thinking this must be Lars Porsena, attacked this officer and killed him after a fierce struggle. The noise of the fight brought other Etruscan soldiers to the scene and Caius Mucius was soon under

arrest. Thinking he had accomplished his goal, he marched to the center of the camp fully expecting to die for his crime.



After his capture, Caius was informed that the man he had killed was not Lars Porsena, but merely a vain officer in gaudy armor. Lars Porsena, very much alive, ordered that Caius be burned alive. To show his contempt for the Etruscans and their sentence, Caius thrust his right hand into the flames and held it there long after the flesh had burned away. Lars Porsena and the Etruscans looked on in awe. Never had they seen such bravery. “Release this warrior,” shouted Lars Porsena, “such sacrifice must be rewarded.”

The condemned Caius Mucius was set free and returned to Rome as a hero. He was known forever after as Scaevola, the Left-Handed, in commemoration of the right hand he had sacrificed for Rome.

