

The Rise of Rome ca. 1000-27 B.C.E.

Founded around 750 B.C.E., Rome was first ruled by kings. In the sixth century B.C.E., an aristocratic revolt led to the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of the Roman Republic. Over the next two hundred years, Rome gained control of the whole Italian peninsula, partly by conquest and partly in alliance with other states. During these same centuries, Rome's legal and political institutions underwent substantial change as the common people of Rome, the plebeians, fought for and won greater political and legal equality. In the course of three wars (264 to 146 B.C.E.), the Romans destroyed Carthage, the greatest power in the western Mediterranean, clearing the way for further Roman expansion. The wealth that came with the expanding empire allowed Roman culture to flourish and created more opportunities for leisure and the arts. Expansion was not, however, without costs. As the first millennium B.C.E. came to a close, republican institutions proved insufficient to cope with the growing social and economic problems created by expansion, and Rome descended into military rule and civil war.

The Moral Roots of the Republic LIVY, The Rape of Lucretia (ca. 27-25 B.c.E.)

From a Roman perspective, the power of the story of the rape of Lucretia came from the link it forged between the foundation of the republic and the triumph of core Roman values and beliefs. According to the story, excerpted here from Livy's (59 s.c.E.-17 C.E.) comprehensive history of Rome, the rape of the noble Roman lady Lucretia by the Etruscan prince Sextus Tarquinius¹ sparked the rebellion that culminated in the overthrow of the Etruscan monarchy. Thus, from the beginning, honor, duty, and the sanctity of the Roman family were at the heart of the republic. The Roman aristocracy rose against the Etruscans not simply to seize power but to protect Roman values. As you read the story, focus on the values it champions. What does the story tell you about the Romans' image of themselves?

A few days after, Sextus Tarquinius,¹ without the knowledge of Collatinus,² went to Collatia, with only a single attendant: he was kindly received by the family, who suspected not his design, and, after supper, conducted to the chamber where guests were lodged. Then, burning with desire, as soon as he thought that everything was safe and the family all at rest, he came with his sword drawn to Lucretia, where she lay asleep, and, holding her down, with his left hand pressed on her breast, said, "Lucretia, be silent: I am Sextus Tarquinius; my sword is in my hand, if you utter a word, you die."

Terrified at being thus disturbed from sleep, she saw no assistance near and immediate death threatening her. Tarquinius then acknowledged his passion, entreated, mixed threats with entreaties, and used every argument likely to have an effect on a woman's mind, but finding her inflexible and not to be moved, even by the fear of death, he added to that fear, the dread of dishonor, telling her that, after killing her he would murder a slave, and lay him naked by her side, that she might be said to have been slain in base adultery. The shocking apprehension conveyed by this menace, overpowering her resolution in defending her chastity, his lust became victorious, and Tarquinius departed, applauding himself for this triumph over a lady's honor. But Lucretia [,] plunged by such a disaster into the deepest distress, dispatched a messenger to Rome to her father, with orders to proceed to Ardea to her husband, and to desire

them to come to her, each with one faithful friend; to tell them, that there was a necessity for their doing so, and speedily, for that a dreadful affair had happened. Spurius Lucretius came with Publius Valerius, the son of Volesus; Collatinus with Lucius Junius Brutus, in company with whom he chanced to be returning to Rome when he was met by his wife's messenger.

They found Lucretia sitting in her chamber, melancholy and dejected: on the arrival of her friends, she burst into tears, and on her husband's asking, "Is all well?" "Far from it," said she, "for how can it be well with a woman who has lost her chastity? Collatinus, the impression of another man is in your bed, yet my person only has been violated; my mind is guiltless as my death will testify. But give me your right hands and pledge your honor that the adulterer shall not escape unpunished. He is Sextus Tarquinius, who, under the appearance of a guest, disguising an enemy obtained here last night by armed violence, a tri-umph deadly to me and himself also, if ye be men."

They all pledged their honor, one after another, and endeavored to comfort her distracted mind, acquitting her of blame, as under the compulsion of force, and charging it on the violent perpetrator of the crime, told her that "the mind alone was capable of sinning, not the body, and that where there was no such intention, there could be no guilt."

"[It is] your concern," said she, "to consider what is due to him; as to me, though I acquit myself of the guilt, I cannot dispense with the penalty, nor shall any woman ever plead the example of Lucretia, for surviving her chastity." Thus saying, she plunged into her heart a knife which she had concealed under her garment and, falling forward on the wound, dropped lifeless. The husband and father shrieked aloud.

But Brutus, while they were overpowered by grief, drawing the knife from the wound of Lucretia and holding it out, reeking with blood, before him, said, "By this blood, most chaste until injured by royal insolence, swear, and call you, O ye gods, to witness, that I will prosecute to destruction, by sword, fire, and every forcible means in my power, both Lucius Tarquinius the proud, and his impious wife, together with their entire race, and never will suffer one of them, nor any other person whatsoever, to be king in Rome." He then delivered the knife to Collatinus and, afterward, to Lucretius and Valerius, who were filled with amazement, as at a prodigy and at a loss to account for this unusual elevation of sentiment in the mind of Brutus. However, they took the oath as directed and, converting their grief into rage, followed Brutus, who put himself at their head and called on them to proceed instantly to abolish kingly power.

They brought out the body of Lucretia from the house, conveyed it to the forum, and assembled the people, who came together quickly in astonishment, as may be supposed at a deed so atrocious and unheard of. Everyone exclaimed with vehemence against the villainy and violence of the prince: they were deeply affected by the grief of her father and also by the discourse of Brutus, who rebuked their tears and ineffectual complaints and advised them, as they became men, as became Romans, to take up arms against those who had dared to treat them as enemies. The most spirited among the youth offered themselves with their arms, and the rest followed their example. On which, leaving half their number at the gates to defend Collatia and fixing guards to prevent any intelligence of the commotion being carried to the princes, the rest, with Brutus at their head, marched to Rome.

When they arrived there, the sight of such an armed multitude spread terror and confusion wherever they came, but, in a little time, when people observed the principal men of the state marching at their head, they concluded that what-ever the matter was, there must be good

reason for it. Nor did the heinousness of the affair raise less violent emotions in the minds of the people at Rome than it had at Collatia: so that, from all parts of the city, they hurried into the forum, where, as soon as the party arrived, a crier summoned the people to attend the tribune of the celeres,³ which office happened at that time to be held by Brutus.

He there made a speech, no way consonant to that low degree of sensibility and capacity, which until that day, he had counterfeited, recounting the violence and lust of Sextus Tarquinius, the shocking violation of Lucretia's chastity, and her lamentable death, the misfortune of Tricipitinus,⁴ in being left childless, who must feel the cause of his daughter's death as a greater injury and cruelty than her death itself: to these representations, he added the pride of the king himself, the miseries and toils of the commons, buried underground to cleanse sinks and sewers, say-ing that" ... citizens of Rome, the conquerors of all the neighboring nations, were, from warriors, reduced to laborers and stone cutters"; mentioned the barbarous murder of King Servius Tullius,⁵ his abominable daughter driving in her carriage over the body of her father, and invoked the gods to avenge the cause of parents.

By descanting on these and other, I suppose, more forcible topics, which the heinousness or present injuries suggested at the time, but which is difficult for writers to repeat, he inflamed the rage of the multitude to such a degree that they were easily persuaded to deprive the king of his government and to pass an order for the banishment of Lucius Tarquinius, his wife, and children. Brutus himself, having collected and armed such of the young men as voluntarily gave in their names, set out for the camp at Ardea in order to excite the troops there to take part against the king. The command in the city he left to Lucretius, who had some time before been appointed by the king to the office of prefect of the city. During this tumult, Tullia fled from her house; both men and women, wherever she passed, imprecating curses on her head and invoking the furies, the avengers of parents.

READING QUESTIONS

1. How did Tarquinius frighten Lucretia into having sex with him?
2. How did the men in Lucretia's family react to what had happened to her?
3. What does the story tell you about Roman ideas about the family? About Roman values?
4. How did Lucretia's relatives and friends connect her rape and suicide to the larger grievances of the Roman people? What picture does the story present of the role of the common people in Roman politics?

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1. *1 Sextus Tarquinius: Prince of Rome, son of King L. Tarquinius Superbus (r.535-"510 B.C.E.)*
 2. *2 Collatinus: Lucretia's husband.*
 3. *3 tribune of the celeres: Commander of the king's bodyguard.*
 4. *4 Tricipitinus: Spurius Tricipitinus Lucretius; Lucretia's father.*
 5. *5 Servius Tullius: King of Rome (r. 578-535 B.C.E.), who reorganized the Roman constitution to expand the political rights of the lower classes. He was killed by patrician conspirators, including his daughter Tullia.*