

The Tarquins' Ethnic Identity in Livy

Although in the past some scholars have criticized Livy for not providing sophisticated portrayals of foreign peoples (Walsh 1961; Luce 1977), more recent scholarship has begun to emphasize the nuances in Livy's portraits of foreign peoples and Romans alike (Bernard 2015). The early books of *Ab Urbe Condita* often include characters of foreign extraction, and through them Livy explores aspects of Roman identity and its development in an unusually complex way. In this paper I provide one case study of Livy's handling of ethnic identity by focusing on his treatment of the Tarquins. The Tarquins are often associated with a foreign, Etruscan dynasty in Rome. Yet a closer look at Livy's narrative of the Tarquins reveals a nuanced exploration of what it means to be Roman, a theme that the Tarquins' name and ethnic heritage often mask. I will argue that, through the contrasting figures of the two Tarquins, Livy conveys the message that values are more important for Roman identity than ethnic origins.

Livy draws attention to issues of ethnic identity from the start of his narrative, noting that Tarquinius Priscus was born as Lucumo at Tarquinii to a Greek father and an Etruscan mother. Because of the local Etruscans' prejudice against his foreign ancestry, Tarquinius Priscus could not attain the highest political office at Tarquinii. So Tanaquil, his aristocratic Etruscan wife, convinces him to abandon Tarquinii and move to Rome, where any man of ability and vigor might succeed. And succeed he does. He moves to Rome, changes his name to Lucius Tarquinius Priscus, and eventually becomes Rome's fifth king (1.34-35). He holds to the ideal of *virtus*, and by Livy's assessment he is a good king and a good Roman, despite his mixed Etruscan origins.

The second Tarquin, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, who in Livy's version is Tarquinius Priscus' and Tanaquil's son (1.46), shares his father's name but little else. Despite his Etruscan ancestry, Livy makes a concerted effort to stress Superbus' Roman, not foreign, origins. When his wife, Tullia, convinces him to usurp her father's throne by force, she explicitly calls him a Roman, insults his foreign ancestry, and claims that the Roman kingship is his birthright (1.47). But Tullia has the wrong idea about being Roman, for Tarquinius Superbus' behavior, as Livy observes (1.53), is decidedly un-Roman. Ultimately, his son Sextus' crimes bring about the end of the king's tyranny, and the Tarquin family is expelled from Rome (1.60). It is only after his expulsion, and for the first time in Livy's narrative, that Tarquinius Superbus opportunistically begins to stress his Etruscan ancestry in order to get the throne back (2.6). Although Tarquinius Superbus was born in Rome, unlike his father and so many of the other kings, Livy shows him to be the least Roman of them all.

Livy underscores the importance of values over origins in a story that he tells about the aftermath of the Tarquins' expulsion in Book 2. In an effort to free the newly founded Roman Republic from tyranny, the consul Lucius Junius Brutus and the Senate pass a measure to exile Brutus' co-consul Tarquinius Collatinus, Lucretia's widower, for no other reason than his Tarquin name (2.2). The Roman people, however, exile the wrong person in Collatinus, for, ironically, it is Brutus' sons who are discovered to be part of a conspiracy to reinstate the monarchy, and Brutus must put his own children to death (2.4-5).

Both Tarquins share the same name and ethnic heritage, but the father was born in Etruria and the son in Rome. Nevertheless, in Livy's account the father is more Roman than the son due to his character. Similarly, Livy shows that the sons of the founder of the Roman Republic could be traitors to Roman values, while at the same time a Tarquin could be blameless. Through his

tale of the Tarquin kings, Livy develops the idea that true Romanness lies not in origins but in values.

Bibliography

Bernard, J.-E. 2015. "Portraits of Peoples." B. Mineo (ed.), *A Companion to Livy*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK; Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 39-51.

Luce, T. 1977. *Livy: The Composition of His History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Walsh, P. 1961. *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.