

# A comparison of tullus hostilius and I. tarquinius superbus



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Livy's *Rise of Rome* is a history of Rome's early years, bringing to the modern reader a glimpse of the civilization's vast mythology. Its stories are populated with a rich cast of mystical kings, heroic champions, and malicious villains, who come together to form a vivid, dynamic image of Rome's creation. Of these characters, two of the most intriguing are Tullus Hostilius and L. Tarquinius Superbus, a pair of kings who ruled approximately a century apart. Despite their similarities, Livy portrays Tullus Hostilius in a far more positive light than L. Tarquinius Superbus, citing both his honourable approach to war and his benevolent style of governance.

Tullus and Tarquin are, above all, very similar characters. Both are very combative figures, either leading Rome into battle or using violence for personal gain. This is in stark contrast to their respective predecessors—Numa Pompilius before Tullus, and Servius Tullius before Tarquin—both of whom were known for their peaceful regimes. The two also share the same influences behind their warlike actions: their famous ancestors, his grandfather in Tullus' case and his father in Tarquin' case. As Livy says, “[Tullus’] mettlesome nature was the product of youth, strength, and awareness of his grandfather’s prowess,” (l. 22) while for Tarquin the entire reason why he seized power was because he felt his father’s blood gave him the right. Finally, both of them did much to expand Rome’s influence, with Tullus uniting the kingdom with Alba, and Tarquin building new colonies to house the plebeians, as well as bringing all the Latin states under his control.

Despite these parallels between the two characters, at heart they are very different men: Tullus embodies honourable Roman values, and while he may not be perfect, he is certainly more of a leader than the treacherous,

<https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-of-tullus-hostilius-and-l-tarquinius-superbus/>

cowardly Tarquin. This is first evident in their motivations: while Tullus fights for the glory of Rome, Tarquin does so for his own gain. When Tullus ascends to the throne, the reason why he seeks out opportunities for Rome to wage war is because he thinks the state is becoming “ weak from inaction” (l. 22) under Numa Pompilius’ reign. Tarquin, on the other hand, “[makes] and [unmakes] war, peace, treaties, and alliances as he [pleases],” (l. 49) purely at whim, and with no deeper motivation to improve Rome’s status. Tullus’ superiority as a ruler is also evident in his actual approach to conflict: he fights with honour and discipline, whereas Tarquin uses treachery and deception. The only time Tullus’ actions are ever described as deceptive is when he tricks the city of Alba into declaring war on Rome- yet even this is for the kingdom’s benefit, as he does it to lay the blame for the war on Alba, and get the gods on Rome’s side (l. 22). Furthermore, not only does Tullus try to be honourable himself, he also doesn’t support treachery among his allies: notably, after Mettius retreats during the battle against Fidenae and Veii, Tullus has him physically split in half, just as his loyalties were during the battle (l. 28). In contrast, whenever Tarquin comes into conflict with someone, he is either too cowardly or too weak to face them head-on, and thus resorts to traps and deception. For instance, when Turnus Herdonius offends him during a meeting of the Latin heads of state, Tarquin frames him for plotting to kill everyone present, and has him executed- when Tullus does the same to Mettius, at least he has a valid reason (l. 51). On another occasion, when Tarquin was attempting to take the city of Gabii by force, he “ could not carry on a successful siege after being repulsed from the walls, [and] fell back on a wholly un-Roman stratagem, deceit and treachery” (l. 53), having his son Sextus infiltrate the city and gradually kill off its leaders.

<https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-of-tullus-hostilius-and-l-tarquinius-superbus/>

Finally, Tullus follows the Roman tradition of being kind to defeated enemies, while Tarquin relies on fear. Even after executing Mettius and demolishing his city, Alba, Tullus invites all of the now-homeless Albans to live in Rome, giving them citizenship, extending the city to accommodate them, adding their noble families to the Senate, establishing new military units for them (I. 30). Tarquin, on the other hand, tries to cow his enemies into submission, ranging from his own people to hostile Latin states.

Another aspect of the two kings that differentiates them is their style of governance outside of the military: while both undertook great building projects and left an impact on the city after they left it, that impact is far more positive for Tullus than for Tarquin. In terms of construction, the main difference is their motivation- Tullus' projects are mainly for the benefit of the Alban people moving into Rome, including extensions of the city around the Caelian Hill to house them, and the Curia Hostilia to accommodate the enlarged Senate (I. 30). As for Tarquin, while his Temple of Jupiter may be grander and more ambitious, his entire reason for building it is personal glory, to the point where his funds are "scarcely enough to pay for the cost of the foundation" (I. 55), and he doesn't even have enough left to pay for labourers. This leads to his use of plebeian conscription, essentially using his own citizens as slave labour to build edifices to himself- certainly not the mark of a selfless leader. Aside from construction, Tullus was also superior in his relationship with his subjects, who trust him a lot more than they do Tarquin. For instance, after Horatius, the hero who saved Rome from Alba, commits the crime of killing his sister, the people immediately bring him before Tullus, trusting in the judgement of their king on how to handle the

situation (l. 26). When the Alban army retreats during the battle against Fidenae, such is the trust that the Roman soldiers have in their king that they still do not lose hope, “[thinking] it [is] all part of Tullus’ plan, and so [fight] all the harder” (l. 27). Even when Tullus, driven mad by sickness, becomes extremely religious and superstitious, “ the people [begin] to follow his lead as well” (l. 31). Tarquin and the Roman people have no such bond—he knows that they bear no affection towards him, to the extent that he feels the need to surround himself with an armed escort at all times (l. 49). In return, Tarquin shows the people no trust or respect either: he sets up a charade of a law court with himself as the sole judge, doling out punishments to “ execute, exile, and fine not just those he suspected or disliked, but those from whom he wanted nothing but their money” (l. 49). He marries his daughter to the Latin king Octavius Mamilius of Tusculum, to protect his throne against his own people through foreign alliances (l. 49). And even after using the plebeians as slave labour to build his temple, he has the nerve to send many of them off to the colonies of Signia and Circeii, feeling their “ large numbers to be a burden on the city” (l. 56).

It is clear that Tullus Hostilius is a superior leader to L. Tarquinius Superbus, despite whatever similarities they may share. Yet, in the end, no matter how noble Tullus was in battle or how well he treated his people, it was still he who died of the gods’ wrath, struck down by Jove’s thunderbolt. And as for Tarquin, he died in exile and disgrace, his dynasty overthrown and his kingdom overtaken. The two men, so different in life, were equal in death.