Russell's Anthology of Latin Prose

Text 34: The rape and death of Lucretia (Livy)

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a) Source:

Ab urbe condita 1. 57. 4-59. 2.

b) Background (synopsis quoted from Russell's book):

"… one of his most famous stories, coming at the close of Book 1, written between 27 and 25 BC. The Roman army is besieging Ardea. A chance conversation among the young noblemen in the camp sets in train events which end in the expulsion of King Tarquin. The first scene of the drama is set in the camp. The second is at Collatia, where the chaste Lucretia excites the desires of the villain, Sextus Tarquinius, the son and loyal instrument of the king. The third is the brutal rape; then follows Lucretia's death."

c) Language comment:

There is some oratio obliqua (in line 53), some historic infinitives distributed around the text, but the text does not offer more difficulty than some unusual words (relative to military life and banquets) in the first lines.

d) Content:

As the war seems to be in a rest period, the noble commanders of the Roman army entertain each other celebrating banquets, and in one of these they reach the decision to check whose wife is the most chaste. Their sudden visit to Lucretia, Tarquinius Collatinus' wife, provokes an extreme passion in Sextus Tarquinius, the king's son, and some days later S. T. returns to Lucretia's house and rapes her. Lucretia calls her relatives, explains the events and commits suicide. The revenge will lead to a series of events that will end up with the expulsion of the king from Rome.

e) Distribution of content:

(numbers refer to the lines in the printed edition)

1-4:   State of affairs at the camp.
4-12:   The generals boasting in the banquet about their wives.
12-19:   Tarquinius Collatinus wins the contest.
19-22:   Sextus Tarquinius desires Lucretia.
23-36:   S. T. achieves what he wants.
36-41:   Lucretia calls her relatives.
41-54:   She relates the sad events.
54-58:   She kills herself.
59-65:   Iunius Brutus swears to put an end to monarchy.
65-69:   The other three join him in the decision.

f) Notes for help:

1) "longo" = "in longo".
2) "regii iuvenes": take into account that the leaders of the army were all of them of royal origin.
4) "forte" = "casually", nothing to do with "fortis, -e", and don't confuse it with "fortasse".
5) "et" = "also", not "and".
6) "laudare": historic infinitive.
7) "negat": observe how it's not possible to say "dicit...non".
8) "posse": this infinitive is indirect statement, it would depend on the "negat", only that of course in this case it would rather mean "dicit".
"praestet": remember that this verb governs a dative, and moreover here it's in subjunctive because it is an indirect question.
9) "iuventae": "iuventutis" would have been more usual.
"Inviso" = "inspect", nothing to do with "invisus/a/um" = "hated" and "unseen".
10) "nostrarum": supply "mulierum".
"sit": iussive subjunctive.
12) "age sane" = "let's go".
"cum...pervenissent": historic "cum"
13) "se intendere" = "to stretch oneself" (the darkness, here).
14) "ut": comparative.

16-17) "deditam" and "sedentem" : these participles go with "Lucretiam".

17) "penes" + Ac. = "in the possession of".

18) "excepti": supply "sunt", and the meaning "to receive".

20) "stuprandae": gerundive, with "Lucretiae".

"cum...tum" = "both...and".

23) "inscio Collatino": ablative absolute.

24) "exceptus": as before, supply "est".

"ignarus": don't confuse it with "ignavus".

25) "cum...esset": historic "cum".

29) "moriere": could have been "morieris".

30) "emiseris": observe that he uses the future perfect, that variation, instead of simple future in both sides.

"cum...videret": historic "cum".

"ex somno": supply "excitata".

31-32) historic infinitives.

33) "ne...quidem" = not even.

34) mortua": supply "ea" (Lucretia).

35) "positurum": supply "esse", it would be a future infinitive to replace what in direct speech would have been a simple future.

"ut": final.

"necata": supply "esse". It is in nominative, in spite of going with an infinitive, because is adapted to an "ea" to be supplied which would be the subject of "dicatur".

36) "quo": demonstrative relative.

"cum vicisset": historic "cum".

37) "profectus" goes with "esset"; of course, also depends on the former "cum", a second historic infinitive.

40) "maturare" may also mean "to hurry", apart fom its basic meaning of "to mature"; so, this double dative here would mean "for the fact and the hurried (fact)", it's an idiom.

41) infinitives that would depend on a "dixit" to be supplied.

45) "obortae": supply "sunt".

46) "salvi": genitive depending on "quid".

 "amissa pudicitia": ablative absolute.

48) "fidem dare" + inf. = "swear that".

49) "pro" = "instead of".

50) "sibi"

52) "noxam" doesn't go with "aegram". it's the direct object of "avertendo".

53-54) infinitives of indirect statement, supply "dicunt".

"afuerit-abesse": the same verb used twice: infinitive of indirect statement and inside it a place clause.

54) "videritis": perfect future, with simple future sense, or iussive subjunctive, as you wish.

55) "absolvo-libero": a combination of two verbs both of them governing accusative ("me") + ablative ("peccato-supplicio").

56) "exemplo" = "with the example of".

 "vivet": future; a present subjunctive (iussive) would have been more normal.

57) "eum": unnecessary repetition of "cultrum".

"volnus" = "vulnus" (it's an archaism).

"prolapsa": "prolabor" = "fall"; remember that deponent verbs are the only ones that can have a perfect participle with active meaning.

58) "conclamat": if this verb had been at the end of the sentence, it would have been in plural.

59-60) two absolute ablatives.

61) "sanguinem": remember that this word is masculine, so nothing to do with "regiam iniuriam".

63) "ferro igni quacumque…vi": juxtaposition, we would have expected some "et" between them.

64) "exsecuturum": supply "esse", and it would go with the former "me".

65) "passurum": the same as before with "exsecuturum".

66) "unde": it replaces "a quo" = "from which", and refers to "rei"; moreover, in this "relative" sentence you have to supply the verb "erat" or "surrexit" or something similar.

67) "ut": comparative.

68) "expugnandum": gerundive.