Notes on Quiz #9: The Roman Aristocratic Matron

1. Most Roman upper-class women married at least once, but the birth rate among nobles remained low. Reasons for this include all of the following EXCEPT:
   a. Arranged marriage was standard for the nobility, leading to unaffectionate couples and both parties turning to lovers and adultery
   b. Roman women are thought to have been less fertile than other nations, producing fewer eggs
   c. Mothers died during childbirth often enough that females had a shorter lifespan overall
   d. Roman married couples (and adulterers) practiced contraception and, if necessary, abortion to prevent unwanted children

Reasons for a low birth rate among Roman noblewomen were several. Arranged marriage. Within the nobility, marriages tended to be arranged for the political and financial profit of the families involved, rather than for sentimental reasons. Girls as young as 12 could be so married, and the first marriage usually took place between 12 and 15. Men, however, though eligible from 14, often married much later, increasing the differences between husband and wife. — Adultery. Adultery was common, but the law held it against the woman only. It was considered a public offense only in women, leading to divorce, forfeiture of half the dowry, and exile or death. Husbands were not liable for criminal prosecution for adultery. This gave tacit permission for husbands to sleep with women other than their wives. (Stoic philosophy, important in Rome from the Late Republic on, did contemn both male and female adulterers.) — Death in childbirth. This happened frequently enough that females had a shorter lifespan overall, making the likelihood of giving birth to two children much lower than giving birth to one. This also produced a gender imbalance, with more male nobles than female. — Contraception. Roman married couples (and adulterers and other illicit pairings) practiced contraception and, if necessary, abortion to prevent unwanted children. There were a variety of methods in both cases.

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2. According to the story related by Livy in "The Capture of the Sabine Women," after being abducted, the Sabine women
   a. angrily rallied their fathers and brothers to war and called on them to destroy the Romans
   b. appealed to the gods for Rome to be obliterated
   c. watched in horror as the Roman and Sabine men slaughtered each other
   d. prevented battle between their old families and the Romans, saying their duty was now to Rome

The women intervened and stopped the war between their old families and the Romans, saying they owed their duty to Rome and their families now that they were Roman matrons.

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3. In "The Rape of Lucretia," Lucretia is killed by
   a. the king's son, Sextus Tarquinius
   b. the enraged senator, Brutus
   c. the disgraced husband, Conlatinus
   d. Lucretia herself

After her father and husband vowed vengeance on her behalf, Lucretia committed suicide so as not to provide future matrons with a model of virtue that had been corrupted. Ultimately the entire clan of the Tarquins was ejected from Rome (leading to a series of wars with the Tarquins' Etruscan and Latin allies).

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4. Marriage *with* manus
    a. transferred guardianship from the wife's paterfamilias to the husband's
    b. was the traditional, conservative form and was increasingly uncommon in the Roman Republic
    c. could be prevented by sleeping three consecutive nights outside the husband's home
    d. all of the above

Manus marriage was relatively rare by the time of the Late Republic. It was achieved through either formal ceremony (confarreatio or coemptio) or through continuous cohabitation for one year (usus, also known as common-law marriage). It constituted a transfer of guardianship from the wife's paterfamilias to the husband from which she had no refuge. A wife married by manus changed from her birth household religion to her husband's; the husband's ancestors became hers. Whether the husband's manus gave him the same absolute power over his wife as a paterfamilias is unclear, but her birth family remained invested in her behavior (supervising her drinking, for example) and provided a bulwark against the husband's abuses. Manus marriage gave the wife some rights over the husband's property, but also gave the husband rights over hers. — Non-manus marriage was the more common form. It was achieved by interrupting cohabitation by spending three continuous days elsewhere than the husband's home. Non-manus marriage gave the wife more freedom; the husband had no formal authority over her, and she could return at will to her birth family. There was no transfer of religion, and the wife was theoretically excluded from household rites, remaining instead in her father's cult. She did not gain rights relating to the husband's property; her own property remained with her birth family.

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5. The idealized matron Cornelia was famous for all of the following EXCEPT:
    a. After becoming widowed, she remarried to a Ptolemy, becoming Egyptian royalty
    b. She was admired for being independent, cultured, self-assured, and devoted to her children's education
    c. She took pride in being the daughter of Scipio Africanus, who defeated Hannibal
    d. She bore 12 children, two of whom grew up to be important political figures

Cornelia, daughter of the war hero Scipio Africanus and mother of the populist firebrands Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, was famous among Romans for representing the ideal matron through her strength, independence, and devotion to Rome and her children's future.

Optional Extra Credit

EC. Why did the king's son, Sextus Tarquinius, decide to rape Lucretia? Why her specifically?

Full of the pride of his family's power over the rest of Rome, Sextus raped Lucretia explicitly because she was the most virtuous of all the Roman matrons. This betrayal by the king's family caused the Romans to foreswear monarchy altogether and instead declare a Republic, in which no one man or family would have greater authority than any other.