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Summary Article: **Crassus**

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(krās'Əs), ancient Roman family, of the plebeian Licinian gens. It produced men who achieved great note in the 2d cent. and 1st cent. B.C.

One of the well-known members was **Lucius Licinius Crassus**, d. 91 B.C., a noted orator and lawyer (much admired by Cicero). He was a strict follower of constitutional forms, and he and Scaevola as consuls in 95 B.C. proposed a law—called the Licinian Law, the Lex Licinia, or the Lex Licinia Mucia—to banish from Rome Latins who had gained Roman citizenship by illegal means (or what the law set as illegal means). This greatly aggravated anti-Roman sentiment among the allies and helped bring on the Social War.

d. 87 B.C., was consul in 97. He was the financial backer of the Roman colony of Narbo (modern Narbonne) in Gaul and achieved fame by his victories in Spain after his consulship. He was a partisan of Sulla and, after being proscribed by the followers of Marius, committed suicide.

His son, **Marcus Licinius Crassus**, d. 53 B.C., was the best-known member of the family. He was a man of considerable charm and almost unbounded avarice and ambition. He was a partisan of Sulla and commanded some of Sulla's forces. He was also a highly successful dealer in real estate, and bought property that was confiscated or deserted in the period of the bloody Sullan proscriptions. He became the principal landowner in Rome by organizing his private fire brigade, buying burning houses cheap, and then putting out the fire.

Crassus gained immense prestige—along with Pompey—for suppressing the uprising of Spartacus. They were both consuls together in 70 B.C., and Crassus' rivalry and jealousy of Pompey grew. He was involved in plotting against Catiline, apparently secretly encouraging the conspiracy but not directly participating in it. He and Julius Caesar drew closer together, Crassus hoping to use Caesar's ability, Caesar (deep in debt) hoping to use Crassus' money.

Caesar, seeing that he needed stronger support than Crassus, created (60 B.C.) the First Triumvirate—Crassus, Pompey, and Caesar. With Crassus' envy of Pompey and Pompey's scorn of Crassus, the arrangement worked only because of Caesar's consummate ability in handling men. Crassus seems to have backed the political maneuvers of the notorious Clodius, and trouble was stirred up between Crassus and Pompey. Caesar called both of them to Lucca, where in 56 B.C. a conference reaffirmed the alliance.

Crassus and Pompey were again consuls together in 55. Crassus managed to get Syria assigned for his proconsular service in 54. Avid for military glory, he left even before his term as consul was up to undertake a campaign against the Parthians. His ambition outran his ability. After early successes, his army was completely routed at Carrhae (modern Haran) by Parthian archers in 53 B.C. Crassus in this disgrace was treacherously murdered, and Caius Cassius Longinus (see Cassius) had difficulty in saving even the remnants of the army.

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