



ELEONORA ZAMPIERI (ed.)

***IN AMBITIONE
ARTIFICES:***

**ELECTIONEERING
AND ELECTIONS
IN THE ROMAN REPUBLIC**

EDITORIAL UNIVERSIDAD DE SEVILLA
PRENSAS DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE ZARAGOZA

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Edited by
Eleonora Zampieri

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(FORMER) TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED. WOMEN AND ELECTIONS IN THE ROMAN REPUBLIC¹

Giulia Vettori

Introduction

The pre-Roman Veneto provides significant evidence of the potential interaction between women and the public sphere. In the very heart of the ancient urban centre of Padua, known as ancient *Patavium*, on San Biagio Street, two boundary stones made of local trachyte, dated to the mid-4th century BCE, were discovered in 2007. These *cippi* display the same Venetic inscription on all four sides, and both mention certain *mediai*, a term referring to female members of a *collegium* with a public function, for which no comparison can be found in other cultural contexts of ancient Italy, apart from priestly associations. As with their male counterparts, these *mediai* held authoritative functions in managing urban spaces, publicly installing a terminal stone (*termon*). They thus operated within the internal spatial definition of the city (*terminatio*), holding a public office.² The female public

1 I am most grateful to Eleonora Zampieri for organising the conference, where an earlier version of this chapter was presented, as well as to the attendees and Elvira Migliario for their helpful and insightful comments and feedback. All remaining imperfections are entirely my own responsibility.

2 *mediai // termon // teuters // [-]-vortei* (*cippus* Battisti); *medi[ai] // termon // teute[rs] // e[.]* (*cippus* San Biagio): Gambacurta – Ruta Serafini – Marinetti – Prosdocimi 2014. The masculine plural noun *Medioi* is probably mentioned in another boundary stone from Padua, *Pa 14: *entollouki / termon // [-]edios / teuters*. On this text, see Fogolari – Prosdocimi 1988: 293-295.

role attested by these boundary stones remains unparalleled in both pre-Roman and Roman Italy, and we may never know how these women attained their positions: specifically, whether they were elective offices.

This remarkable epigraphic discovery serves as a methodological *caveat*. When dealing with the history of women in antiquity, we must consciously challenge our interpretative categories at every step, regardless of whether new evidence emerges or fresh sensitivities and research questions permit us to reinterpret what is already known.³

Given that the *ius suffragii* and the *ius honorum* were privileges reserved for Roman male citizens, women and elections appear to be two mutually exclusive concepts.⁴ In this respect, at least until recently, the joint contemplation of these two elements could quite reasonably be labelled as “Tales of the Unexpected”. However, in recent decades much work has been done to move beyond the narrow institutional perspective: the definition of politics and political participation has been significantly broadened. It now focuses on extra-institutional topography and practices, while also highlighting a wide range of agents, by no means limited to Roman senatorial and equestrian male elites, operating within and influencing Roman political culture.⁵ This reassessment has also had major implications for women. The

3 Ancona – Tsouvala 2021.

4 Livy 34.7.8: *non magistratus nec sacerdotia nec triumphi nec insignia nec dona aut spolia bellica iis contingere possunt* (“Magistracies, priesthoods, triumphs, insignia, prizes or spoils of war are not accessible to them”); Val. Max. 3.8.6: *Quid feminae cum contione?* (“What business has a woman with a public meeting?”; transl. by D.R. Shackleton Bailey); App. *B Civ.* 4.32.140: Τί δὲ ἐσφέρωμεν αἱ μήτε ἀρχῆς μήτε τιμῆς μήτε στρατηγίας μήτε τῆς πολιτείας ὄλως, τῆς ὑμῶν ἐς τοσοῦτον ἤδη κακοῦ περιμαχήτου, μετέχουσαι (“Why should we pay taxes when we have no access to the offices or the honors or the military commands or the entire political process, which you have now brought to such a sorry state by your rivalries?”; transl. by B. McGing); *Dig.* 50.17.2 pr. (Ulp. 1 ad Sab.): *Feminae ab omnibus officiis civilibus vel publicis remotae sunt et ideo nec iudices esse possunt nec magistratum gerere nec postulare nec pro alio intervenire nec procuratores existere* (“Women are debarred from all civil and public functions and therefore cannot be judges or hold a magistracy or bring a lawsuit or intervene on behalf of anyone else or act as procurators”; transl. by A. Watson). Cfr. Lact. *ant. Div. inst.* 33.5. On the reasons invoked to justify women’s exclusion from *virilia officia* see Dixon 1984.

5 The literature on these topics is so extensive that an exhaustive overview would be prohibitive. For the more useful contributions to this profound reconsideration see Yakobson 1999; Rosillo-López 2017; Angius 2018; Rosillo-López 2022. Also worthy of mention is Arena – Prag 2022, whose entire Section IV deals with various political agents involved in Republican political culture.

variety of patterns of their engagement within the public sphere and their general involvement in politics, along with the multifaceted dimensions of the citizenship of Roman women, and even their contribution to the process of legal change, have by now been firmly established in the scholarly debate.⁶ A link between women and elections is therefore something we *ought* to expect, and is naturally corroborated by ancient sources.

Focusing particularly on the broader social dimension linked to Roman elections and elite women and drawing attention to the economic and financial issues at stake in canvassing, this paper seeks to explore how far and in what contexts women could influence electoral competition in the Roman Republic. The first section discusses cases in which women appear as the object of the electoral strategies of their kinsmen; the second addresses the circumstances in which a female agency can be traced.

Women as Objects of Political Strategies. The Mourning Policy of Caesar and Others

Thanks to Polybius' memorable account, as well as so many other influential studies, the political significance of the Roman *funus*, and its value as a cornerstone of aristocratic republican ideology and self-promotion, has been thoroughly acknowledged.⁷ One of the most distinctive features of the Roman *laudatio funebris*, which seems to have had no equivalent in the Greek world, was that these eulogies were delivered to commemorate women as well as men.⁸

One well-documented case vividly illustrates how a clever exploitation of the memory of female relatives could serve as a key element in gaining popular consent: this refers to Julius Caesar's funerary strategies. Caesar shrewdly utilised the social capital accumulated in the *funus publicum* and implemented a comprehensive mourning policy centred on the women of his family. In 69 BCE, at the outset of his political career, and just a few months

6 See, for example, Hemelrijk 2015; Cenerini – Rohr Vio 2016; Rohr Vio 2019; 2022a; 2022b; Richlin 2021; Webb 2022; Rosillo-López – Lacorte 2024. On women and legal change see Morrell 2024. On female networks and the public sphere see also Setälä – Savunen 1999.

7 Polyb. 6.53.1-54.3; Flaig 1995; Flower 1996: esp. 91-127, 211-216; Bodel 1999; Hölkeskamp 2006; 2023: 272-340.

8 Plut. *De mul. vir.* 242e-f; Pepe 2018: 282-283.

after being appointed quaestor,⁹ Caesar paid tribute to two deceased women of his family by delivering their eulogies. These were his aunt Julia, widow of Marius (*cos.* 107, 104-100, 86), and his wife Cornelia, daughter of L. Cornelius Cinna (*cos.* 87-84).¹⁰ Both Suetonius and Plutarch emphasise that Caesar's rhetorical performance took place in the Forum, the quintessential public space, and was delivered from the *Rostra*, the platform from which Roman leaders typically spoke to gain political influence. Thus, the speeches were given in front of a significant crowd of people.¹¹ Public speaking was a key aspect of politics in Republican Rome, both in theory and in practice, and Caesar should have been as accomplished in epideictic oratory as he was in political oratory. These skills, which included eulogising the women of his family, worked as a real springboard for his career.¹²

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these funerary performances depended not only on the orator's words. The funeral procession of Marius' widow, Julia, entailed the first public display of the Marian masks after the "memory sanction" decreed by L. Cornelius Sulla (*cos.* 88, 80). Caesar paraded the *imagines* of the two Marii, the general and his son (*cos.* 82), a symbolic and audacious choice of ultimate political relevance, according to Plutarch.¹³ This choice aimed to celebrate Marius as a military hero, thereby enhancing the prestige of Caesar's own family through that kinship. At the same time, it triggered the rehabilitation of his political memory and symbolically ended a season bitterly shaped by the violent and divisive memories of the civil war.¹⁴ As Plutarch notes, "some criticised Caesar fiercely, but the people shouted them down, greeting the sight with brilliant enthusiasm and applause".¹⁵

9 Broughton 1952: 132 and 136 n. 7; cfr. Broughton 1986: 105-106; Caesar likely began his assignment in Hispania Ulterior during the spring-summer 69 BCE.

10 Suet. *Iul.* 6.1 (= ORF⁴ 121 F29-30); Plut. *Caes.* 5.1-5 (= ORF⁴ 121 F28 and 31). On this episode see Lincoln 1993: 387-393; Badian 2009: 20-21; Pepe 2015: 30-32; Zampieri 2023: 27-29; Rohr Vio 2022a: 63-64; Östenberg 2022: 44-49.

11 Pina Polo 2005: esp. 149-155.

12 van der Blom 2016: 146-180. On the effectiveness of the speech and its stylistic quality see Pepe 2018: 293-295.

13 Far-reaching political implications of the *pompa funebris* also emerge clearly in Cic. *de orat.* 2.225-226; Tac. *Ann.* 3.76 (with Pepe 2015: 27-28, 51-53).

14 It is generally assumed that Caesar's choice was a "a powerful political proclamation" that "laid the foundation of his career as a champion of the People" (see, for example, Lincoln 1993: 392-393), but the need to bridge divisions may perhaps have been the prevailing concern: Gruen 2009: 24-25; Morstein-Marx 2021: 46.

15 Plut. *Caes.* 5.3, transl. Pelling 2011: 80.

However, Caesar was not a pioneer in providing funeral honours for matrons: *laudationes* for older women were indeed traditional, though perhaps not particularly common, and the earliest can be traced back to the 2nd century BCE.¹⁶ Conversely, eulogies for young women were uncommon in the final decades of the Republic.¹⁷ Accordingly, Caesar's funerary speech for his young wife Cornelia in 69 BCE marked an innovative practice in this regard, earning him great popular favour: Plutarch expressly states: "this too brought him goodwill. Together with his grief, it was most effective in winning the favour of the ordinary people, who admired him as a man of tender and sensitive feeling".¹⁸ Popular support was particularly crucial at that juncture because Caesar was about to leave Rome to fulfil his duties overseas as quaestor: after entering office on 5 December 70 BCE, he was due to depart for Hispania Ulterior, where he was to stay until 68 BCE.¹⁹ Could he miss the opportunity to capitalise on the performative potential of the *funus* for his wife? The image of the grieving husband and the chance for the Roman *plebs* to sympathise with the family's grief over Cornelia's untimely death may, in this case, have imprinted an even more tangible mark in the collective memory than mere words.

Caesar exploited and leveraged the symbolic significance and political weight of the funerary honours for the women of his family throughout his political career as he resorted to even more complex and impressive arrangements. In the late 50s, two notable Julian funerals took place in the Forum: Caesar's daughter Julia died in childbirth in 54 BCE, followed, in late 52 or 51 BCE, by her aunt Julia, Caesar's younger sister and grandmother

16 The very first known *laudatio* of a woman was that of a certain Popilia and was delivered by her husband, Q. Catulus the Elder (*cos.* 102 BCE), who was still alive: Cic. *De or.* 2.44; Flower 1996: 103, 122-123; Pepe 2018: 283-285. It is disputed whether the *laudatio Popiliae* was pronounced as part of a *funus publicum*. On the history of funeral eulogies (*laudationes funebres*) for women see Pepe 2015.

17 Plut. *Caes.* 5.4; Pepe 2015: 33.

18 Plut. *Caes.* 5.4 (transl. by C. Pelling 2011: 79). On the political meaning of the eulogy for Cornelia, which supposedly commemorated the deceased's father, L. Cornelius Cinna (*cos.* 87, 86, 85, 84 BCE), too, see Flower 2006: 105; Blasi 2012: 24, 37.

19 Caesar reached Hispania Ulterior in spring-summer 69 BCE, and his likely date of return was early 67 BCE (Taylor 1941, 122-124) or at the end of the year (Pina Polo – Díaz Fernández 2019). He seemed particularly eager to return to Rome and left Hispania before finishing his term, when the praetor Antistius Vetus was still in charge. Full discussion in Pina Polo – Díaz Fernández 2019: 265-266.

of Gaius Octavius.²⁰ Julia's funeral in 54 BCE²¹ served as a means of consolidating popular favour with its leader; under popular pressure, and not without bitter opposition, particularly from the consul L. Domitius Ahenobarbus (*cos.* 54 BCE),²² Julia was granted the exceptional honour of a public burial in the Campus Martius.²³ Her funeral also likely tempered Caesar's prolonged absence from the *Urbs*, given that he had been campaigning in Gaul since 58 BCE. Caesar's *Commentarii* are usually regarded as a means of disseminating information about his transalpine successes and gaining popularity. Equally intriguing is the idea that Julia's death provided an opportunity for his family, friends and partisans to publicise the military achievements of the absent conqueror of Gaul. Thus, it was not only Roman senators and a relatively small group of interested readers of his accounts who were well informed about the progress of his campaigns, but also the Roman People.²⁴

Caesar's mourning policy for the women of his family undoubtedly represents an extraordinary phenomenon. This is due particularly to the extensive and popular mobilisation he achieved through the posthumous public honours granted to his aunt and daughter, and for the outstanding results in promoting his own political career. Nevertheless, two elements are worth emphasising.

Firstly, the selectivity of Caesar's mourning strategy, whereby he failed to feature the memory of his mother, Aurelia, who closely witnessed his political rise and lived well into his fifth decade, dying in 54 BCE.²⁵ Her active involvement as a witness in the trial against P. Clodius Pulcher (*tr. pl.* 58 BCE), a former tribune and then political ally of Caesar, was likely

20 The funeral oration for Julia, Caesar's sister, was delivered by the young Gaius Octavius when he was just 12 years old: Suet. *Aug.* 8.1; Quint. *Inst.* 12.6.1; Nic. Dam. *VitCaes.* 4; Blasi 2012: 59-64, 181-185.

21 It is no coincidence that, in 54 BCE, Caesar commenced his building programme for a new Forum and the restoration of the Campus Martius: Cic. *Att.* 4.16.8. For an analysis of Julius Caesar's urban projects and their political implications see Zampieri 2023: esp. 93-109.

22 The opposition was probably an optimate linked to Pompey. See Blasi 2012: 78-81.

23 Livy *Per.* 106; Plut. *Caes.* 23.5-7, cfr. Dio Cass. 39.64. Wesch-Klein 1993: 12-13, 125 assumes that the statue for an anonymous imperial woman buried in the Campus Martius, mentioned in *CIL* 6.41025, was for Caesar's daughter, but the evidence is not conclusive: Hemelrijk 2015: 323 n. 153. Fontana 2021: 86-90.

24 Morstein-Marx 2021: 215.

25 Suet. *Caes.* 13 and 26.

problematic.²⁶ Female conduct could easily become a weapon to damage the reputation of a political enemy, as clearly demonstrated by the representation of many female figures in Republican oratory and historiography.²⁷ Interestingly, all references to women in the *Commentariolum Petitionis* are derogatory and seek to undermine electoral adversaries.²⁸ The good or bad qualities ascribed to women influenced the social and political standing of their male relatives, who were somehow held accountable for the actions and behaviour of those within the *domus*²⁹.

Secondly, despite their remarkable features and outcomes, Caesar's choices must be understood within the broader context of female funerary commemoration. This encompassed not only the *laudationes pro contione*, awarded to women from the most prominent Roman and provincial families with significant influence and extensive public engagement, but also private funeral orations, or eulogies intended solely for written dissemination, such as the *Laudatio Porciae* noted by Cicero.³⁰ The conventionality of the rhetorical structures and the qualities attributed to matrons illustrate that celebrating the individual personality of the deceased held less importance than exalting a system of shared social values. Consequently, "female eulogies were not merely a speech *in memoriam* delivered by a bereaved relative, but first and foremost a medium of political communication for the men delivering them".³¹ In other words, these texts reveal the aspirations of the ruling elite – or those seeking to join it – presenting themselves as role models, thereby consolidating their authority and public standing.

The female protagonists of the tales recounted so far appear to be the objects of male funerary and political strategies. Of course, this does not take

26 On this point see Blasi 2012: 62-65. For the Bona Dea scandal see Cic. *Att.* 1.12.3; 1.13.3; Plut. *Cic.* 28; *Caes.* 9-10, with Osgood 2024: esp. 144 for the crucial testimony of Aurelia and Julia.

27 See e.g. Cicero's Clodia or Sallust's Sempronia.

28 Cicero, *Comment. Pet.* 2.8: [*Antonius*] *in magistratu amicam quam domi palam haberet de machinis emit*; *Comment. Pet.* 2.9: [*Catilina*] *educatus in sororis stupris*. On the *Commentariolum* see Tatum 2018.

29 See e.g. Livy 34.7.13; Tac. *Ann.* 3.34.

30 Pepe 2015: 38-49; on the *Laudatio Porciae* see Cic. *Att.* 13.37.3 and 13.48.2; Caputo 2017; Pepe 2018: 291-292. The private *laudationes* are epigraphically attested by the *Laudatio Turiae* (*CIL* 6².41062), the *Laudatio Murdiae* (*CIL* 6.10230), and the public *laudatio* of Emperor Hadrian for his mother-in-law Matidia the Elder (*CIL* 14.3579). Cf. Vettori 2022: 17-59.

31 Pepe 2018: 290.

away from the active role that women may have played in supporting relatives throughout their lives.

Women's Agency in the Electoral Competition: from Striking Interventions...

In Book 40 of his *History of Rome*, Livy dwells on the tortuous yet surprisingly positive path that led Q. Fulvius Flaccus (*cos. suff.* 180 BCE) to achieve the consulship.³² After three electoral defeats, he was ultimately elected suffect consul due to the untimely death of his stepfather, C. Calpurnius Piso (*cos.* 180 BCE).³³ A rumour arose that the consul had been poisoned by his wife, Quarta Hostilia; she had sought to create a vacancy to secure her son's success and was subsequently convicted of *veneficium*.³⁴ While the historicity of the episode is highly questionable,³⁵ the ambitious and unscrupulous maternal involvement attributed to Quarta Hostilia in promoting her son's political career serves as a somewhat sinister archetype for the extent to which female intervention could effectively influence electoral competition.³⁶ Indeed, the active participation of women in promoting the political careers of their male relatives is supported by ancient sources.

Despite varying levels of agency, women's social respectability is considered a significant factor in the campaigning efforts of their relatives. According to the fragmentary Book 24 of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, as his first term as tribune approached its conclusion, Tiberius Gracchus (*tr. pl.* 133 BCE) employed numerous provocative strategies to secure re-election to the tribunate for 132 BCE, alongside his brother Gaius, and for his father-in-law to attain the consulship. He was quick to present his sons and his wife, Claudia, daughter of Appius Claudius Pulcher, before the people. In a desperate bid to garner public support, the tribune relied on the visible presence and appeals of his wife and children as key parts of his initiatives.³⁷

32 Livy 40.37.4-7.

33 Broughton 1951: 387.

34 On poisoning as a quintessential female crime see Cavaggioni 2004: 53-65.

35 Briscoe 2008: 503 argues that the plague was likely the cause of the death of C. Calpurnius Piso.

36 On this episode see Briscoe 2008: 503-504.

37 Dio Cass. 24 FR 83.7-8 = EV 72; cfr. Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 13.6. For an extensive commentary on this passage and a persuasive interpretation of the identity of the μήτηρ mentioned in Cassius Dio see Urso 2013: 104-111.

Even more telling, not least due to the degree of female protagonism evident in the episode, and the success of the outcome, is what occurred during the electoral campaign of L. Licinius Murena (*cos.* 62 BCE). The Vestal Licinia literally exploited her privileged position to support her close relative in his bid for the consulate. During the gladiatorial games, she ceded her special seat to Murena – a blatant gesture aimed at publicly expressing her political sympathies and promoting his candidature.³⁸ While her Vestal status ensured greater visibility for Licinia's actions,³⁹ the direct involvement of a woman in Roman campaigning was certainly not exceptional.

To gain a true understanding of female agency in electoral competition, and perhaps extend our knowledge beyond the limited scope of the Roman elite, we must refer to an alternative and much-debated documentary source: namely, the Pompeian *programmata* – electoral advertisements from campaign posters that are still visible on the main streets of Pompeii.⁴⁰ Out of more than 3,000 texts available, among around 400 texts in which *rogatores* can be identified,⁴¹ approximately 54 cases involve roughly 50 women supporting a candidate for a political office, namely that of aedilship or duumvirate.⁴²

Despite the interpretative challenges characterising these concise and formulaic documents, as well as the relatively few *rogatrices* attested, the

38 Cic. *Mur.* 73: *nec si virgo Vestalis, huius propinqua et necessaria, locum suum gladiatorium concessit huic, non et illa pie fecit et hic a culpa est remotus.* (“If a Vestal Virgin, a relative and friend, has given Murena her seat at the gladiatorial games, her gift is a mark of affection and his acceptance of it above reproach”; transl. by C. Macdonald). On Vestals and Roman politics see DiLuzio 2016: 223-239, esp. 231-232 regarding Licinia's campaign for Murena. On Licinia's career see Rüpke 2008: 765, no. 2218.

39 Cf. also the noteworthy case of Claudia, daughter of Ap. Claudius Pulcher (*cos.* 143 BCE), who used her personal inviolability as a Vestal to secure the triumph that her father was celebrating without the approval of the senate: Val. Max. 5.4.6; DiLuzio 2016: 225-228.

40 On the Pompeian electoral *tituli picti* see Mouritsen 1988; however, his interpretative model of the campaigns as an essentially ritualised reaffirmation by the broader population of the elite's right to rule has attracted some criticism: Biundo 1996; Chiavia 2002; Monteix 2018; Bruun 2024. For a *status quaestionis* and a balanced opinion see Tacoma 2020: 62-67.

41 For a recent edition of the *inscriptiones parietariae Pompeianae*, with extensive *addenda* and *corrigenenda* on the graffiti and painted writing on the walls of the buildings in the ancient Vesuvian cities, see the second and third fascicles of the supplement to *CIL* 4 and the digital updating in EDR by M. Stefanile: Stefanile 2017.

42 Discrepancies in the data provided by scholars can be attributed to interpretative doubts. Sometimes, even ascertaining the supporters' sex is complex. On this point see Savunen 1995: 203, n. 4. 195; Biundo 1996; Chiavia 2002: 199; Akar 2016: 167-168.

electoral notices provide direct insight into female involvement in canvassing and electioneering, showcasing notable female activism in local electoral commendations across various social strata. Alongside a few matrons, likely of decidedly modest status, were tavern-keepers and numerous workers and servants, some of whom belonged to the lower strata.⁴³ Women often appeared as the sole endorsers, but they also participated in joint or collective initiatives, sometimes in a prominent position, even featuring alongside men.⁴⁴

The inscriptions rarely provide precise information about the identity of these *rogatrices*, the exact motivations behind their electoral support or the effectiveness of their interventions; nor do they demonstrate anything specific about their engagement in political campaigning compared to men. Nonetheless, it is evident that *programmata*, especially for the office of aedile, constituted a far-from negligible tool in the Pompeian electoral competition and that women's expressions of support were deemed to have some influence on the electorate. In other words, this epigraphic dossier attests to the full engagement of women in the civic life of the local community.

Among the rare exceptions in which significant details can be inferred, the case of Taedia Secunda is undoubtedly worthy of mention. This is the only instance where the family tie between the female supporter and the candidate is made explicit.⁴⁵ In the electoral notice displayed at the entrance of a building belonging to her, the *rogatrix* declares herself to be the *avia* of L. Popidius Secundus, who was running for aedilship and was a member of the Popidii family – one of the most prominent and wealthy families in Pompeii during its final years. Given the woman's interest in real estate speculation, her support for her grandson was likely not entirely unselfish.⁴⁶

Pompeian electoral posters were typically displayed on the outer façades of buildings along the busiest commercial streets, where crowds of voters were most likely to see them.⁴⁷ Yet, in 2023, excavations in Insula 10 of Regio IX

43 On women's presence in the painted electoral notices see Chiavia 2002: 197-203; Savunen 1995: esp. 198-200 for social standing; Akar 2016. For an impressive and recent overview on female agency see Longfellow – Swetnam-Burland 2021.

44 See, for example, *CIL* 4.171; *CIL* 4.3678 mentions exceptionally two women, *Statia et Petronia*; Chiavia 2002: 201-202.

45 *CIL* 4.7469: *L(ucium) Popi[dium] S[ecun]d[u]m aed(ilem) o(ro) v(os) f(aciatis) | Taed[i] a Secunda cupiens avia rog(at) et fecit.*

46 On Taedia Secunda's economic activities see Gallo 2022.

47 Chiavia 2002: 91-94; Akar 2016: 168-169.

in Pompeii uncovered a series of electoral posters inside a private house, specifically in the room containing the *lararium*, the household shrine.⁴⁸ This is hardly surprising: following the guidelines expressed in the *Commentariolum Petitionis*, the *forum* and the *contiones*, which women could also attend from the age of Cato the Elder,⁴⁹ and the *domus* itself was an essential part of the canvassing areas. This could be either the household of the candidates themselves or those of their supporters who, evidently for profit, opened their doors and transformed their homes into instruments of propaganda.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, women are neither mentioned nor involved in this newly discovered *programmata*. However, as vividly illustrated by this recent Pompeian finding, domestic spaces and dynamics could play a decisive role in consensus-building processes and politics. In this domain, women had ample means to be influential.

... to more subtle, yet no less incisive, forms of influence

Beyond the opportunities for political engagement in the “public” sphere, private gatherings and domestic conversations provided women with equally significant and incisive political avenues.⁵¹ Recent studies have highlighted well the extent of female involvement in the broad network of informal communication that animated Republican politics.⁵² Some particularly striking examples include Sulpicia, the mother-in-law of Sp. Postumius Albinus (*cos.* 186 BCE), as well as Servilia and Terentia, whose political engagement is supported by an unusual amount of information.⁵³ However,

48 Scappaticcio – Zuchtriegel 2023. This may be related to the custom of organising events and dinners to promote electoral campaigns in the homes of candidates and their friends.

49 Though in the early Republic their participation was forbidden as it was deemed contrary to the *mos*, women were progressively permitted to take part in *contiones*: Livy 34.2.11; cf. Livy 22.7 and 22, Savunen 1995: 195 and n. 19; Angius 2018: 258-259. The benchmark study for *contiones* is Pina Polo 1989, which stresses the exceptionality of female presence. Women could occasionally speak at *contiones*, as did Hortensia in 42 BCE: Dio Cass. 83.8; Val. Max. 3.8.6 and 8.3; App. *B Civ.* 4.32-34.

50 Cicero, *Comment. Pet.* 16, 17, 40, 44, 47, 49, 50. On the *salutatio* see also Vitr. 6.5.1-2.

51 On the meaning of the terms of *privatus* and *publicus* in Roman culture see Russell 2016b: 1-42. Osgood 2024.

52 Rosillo-López 2017; Flower 2024; Osgood 2024.

53 For Sulpicia see Livy 39.8-19 with Flower 2024; for Servilia see Cic. *Att.* 15.11.1-2 (44 BCE) with Flower 2018; Treggiari 2019: 191-192; for Terentia, see, among others, Plut. *Cic.* 20: ἡ δὲ Τερεντία [...] φιλότιμος γυνὴ καὶ μᾶλλον, ὡς αὐτὸς φησιν ὁ Κικέρων, τῶν

this phenomenon was much more common and pervasive than can be ascertained from our scattered evidence. Most importantly, the presence of women in political discussions appears to have been widely accepted and not perceived as being subversive. A particularly eloquent reference is found in Cicero's letters: the anonymous mother of C. Cassius Longinus (*pr.* 44 BCE) and her views were publicly cited by the consul himself during the informal meeting held by the presiding magistrate before the voting – the *contio*.⁵⁴ Elite women, and occasionally women from lower strata in powerful positions, thus received visitors, cultivated relationships, forged alliances, and expressed opinions.⁵⁵ Elections and electioneering are unlikely to have been taboo subjects for them. On the contrary, given the frequency of elections in Rome, these topics would have sparked much daily gossip.

However, the houses and villas in which women hosted these informal gatherings and conversations were not necessarily owned by their husbands or male relatives.⁵⁶ In fact, with the spread of the so-called *sine manu* marriage that was prevalent in the late Republic, upon the death of their *paterfamilias*, women could become *dominae* in their own right.⁵⁷ Moreover, female affluence was a considerable element in electoral competition and could play a significant role in the political careers of many senators, particularly in their early stages.⁵⁸ Within the context of the progressive monetisation of politics noted from the 2nd century BCE onwards⁵⁹, two

πολιτικῶν μεταλαμβάνουσα παρ' ἐκείνου φροντίδων ἢ μεταδιδούσα τῶν οἰκιακῶν ἐκείνῳ ταῦτά τε πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔφρασε καὶ παρώξυνεν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄνδρας· (“So Terentia, who was [...] an ambitious woman, and, as Cicero himself tells us, more inclined to make herself a partner in his political perplexities than to share with him her domestic concerns, gave him this message and incited him against the conspirators”; transl. by B. Perrin); Dixon 2007; Osgood 2024.

⁵⁴ Cic. *Fam.* 12.7.1 (43 BCE): *In contione quidem Pansa dixit matrem quoque tuam et fratrem illam a me sententiam noluisse dici. Sed me haec non movebant, alia malebam; favebam et rei publicae, cui semper favi, et dignitati ac gloriae tuae* (“In fact Pansa told a public meeting that your mother and brother too had been against my making my motion. But all this did not affect me; I had other considerations more at heart. I was for the commonwealth, as always, and for your dignity and glory”; transl. by D.R. Shackleton Bailey).

⁵⁵ See, for example, Verres' Chelidon and Tertia in or Mark Antony's Cytheris in Cic. *Phil.* 2.58, 2.62; *Fam.* 9.26.2. On female mediation in politics see Rohr Vio 2022a: 149-172.

⁵⁶ Vettori 2022: 78-79; Flower 2024: 14-18.

⁵⁷ Gardner 1986; Vettori 2022.

⁵⁸ Hellegouarc'h 1963: 15: “il [était] indispensable d'être riche, non seulement pour réussir, mais même pour entamer une carrière politique”.

⁵⁹ Rosillo-López 2016; Ioannatou 2006: 175-226.

factors may assist in assessing – albeit approximately – the influence of women’s wealth on political competition and progression in the *cursus honorum*: namely, matrimonial strategies and possible evidence of public games funded by female relatives.

Regarding the first point – marital customs among elite Roman males – the traditional marriage pattern encouraged young men to wed in their mid-twenties, coinciding with the onset of a potential political career.⁶⁰ The provision of a substantial dowry, despite progressively harsher restrictions being placed on husbands regarding its management, could undoubtedly supply a future candidate with significant liquidity, especially through the income derived from the *dos*.⁶¹ Cicero married Terentia in 79 BCE, when he had enjoyed his first oratorical successes and had the prospect of running for the quaestorship. Her good lineage and large dowry made her the ideal match for the first marriage of a *homo novus*.⁶²

At times, the prospect of financial improvement could prompt unions that were markedly different from those typical of the Roman elite. In general, senatorial unions were socially and geographically endogamous and isogamous, occurring between individuals of roughly equal status. Still, wealth could act as a compensatory mechanism for the modesty of family prestige, thus making unorthodox unions entirely acceptable, albeit less frequent.⁶³ Caesar’s engagement to Cossutia at the tender age of 16, though it is unlikely that he actually married her,⁶⁴ underlines how a marital alliance with a family from the equestrian order might have been a suitable option and even a strategic choice for a young senatorial scion, particularly one in pursuit of a future political career.⁶⁵ Occasionally, a man could descend even further down the social ladder. For Antony, who grew up in a family that had belonged

60 Saller 1994: 25-41.

61 Treggiari 1991: 323-364; Vettori 2022: 101-154; 2024: 133-134. A certain scepticism regarding the historical accuracy of the data reported by ancient authors may be justified, thus inevitably prompting questions about the potential significance of dowry assets in defining the patrimonial position of a citizen for his participation in public life.

62 Broughton 1952: 98; Treggiari 1991: 92-93; Terentia’s dowry amounted to 400,000 sesterces – precisely the threshold for entering the senate: Plut. *Cic.* 8.2; Saller 1994: 214 and n. 31.

63 Treggiari 1991: 93-95; Canas 2019: 90.

64 Plut. *Caes.* 1.1; 1.5; 5.3. Despite Suetonius’ use of the term *dimissa* (Suet. *Caes.* 1.1), there had never been a marriage and the two were only engaged: Fezzi 2020: 51-69.

65 Suet. *Caes.* 1.1.

to the plebeian *nobilitas* for generations but was yet encumbered by debts, the union with Fadia, the daughter of the freedman Q. Fadius Gallus, may have been crucial in silencing his numerous creditors before he enlisted in the cavalry and began his successful military career.⁶⁶

Shifting to the second element, alongside the dowry, donations – especially those intended to fund games and festivals – provided women a way to participate, to some extent, in political competition. The *ludi*, which increased both in number and duration throughout the Republic, were exceedingly costly yet notably advantageous in terms of political capital.⁶⁷ During his tenure as aedile, Caesar organised extravagant games and thus incurred significant debts.⁶⁸ However, Plutarch clearly emphasises the public favour that these expenses garnered him.⁶⁹

As a result, individuals often sought loans to mitigate the negative impacts of absent or inadequate resources for gaming expenses, relying on the support from their network of relatives, friends and allies, as well as professional assistance from moneylenders.⁷⁰ The involvement of women in this hectic exchange of loans and donations, shaped by late Republican political competition, is well documented, as is their financial backing in advancing the political careers of their male relatives, especially their sons.⁷¹

The tangible possibility of a woman contributing to the field of public games seems to emerge from Cicero's correspondence, which involves Servilia in her roles as both mother and wife. As an urban praetor in 44 BCE, Brutus would have been obliged to preside over the games in honour

66 Cic. *Phil.* 2.3; 3.17; 13.12; *Att.* 16.11.1. Plut. *Ant.* 2 records the exorbitant debt of 6 million sestertii. On the historicity of the marriage, questioned by some scholars, see Huzar 1985-1986: 97-98; Canas 2019: 80-81.

67 Livy 7.2.13. On Roman life as a “culture of spectacles” see, among others, Flower 2004: 322-343; Hölkeskamp 2006; for a historical overview of *ludi* see Bernstein 1998; Bartz 2023.

68 Sall. *Cat.* 49.3; App. *B Civ.* 2.8.13; Plut. *Caes.* 5.4-5; Suet. *Iul.* 10.18.1; Cfr. Asc. *in Scaur.* 18; Suet. *Aug.* 10.

69 Plut. *Caes.* 5.8-9. The popularity linked to the *ludi* is also apparent in the Ciceronian law of 63 BCE, aimed at preventing candidates for offices from giving gladiatorial games for two years beforehand: Cic. *Sest.* 133-134.

70 Verboven 2002: 150-153; Cic. *Off.* 2.57.9; in 37 BCE the aedile M. Oppius was willing to resign from his aedileship, due to his inability to cover the associated expenses: App. *B Civ.* 4.41.172-174; Dio Cass. 48.53.4-5.

71 Vettori 2022: 255-257. Sen. *Dial.* 12.14.3; Plin. *Ep.* 7.24; 10.4.2-3.

of Apollo (*ludi Apollinares*), usually held from 6 to 13 July 44 BCE. Forced to leave Rome, he was anxious about these games, which were to be organised in his absence but in his name, to encourage demonstrations in his favour.⁷² It appears that Servilia was expected to oversee the arrangements for the games, both in terms of the programme and finances, and it was specifically the financial aspects that may have prompted her contacts with Atticus, referred to by Cicero.⁷³

Furthermore, Servilia may have already been able to contribute to the financial burden linked to the games, in this case, to the benefit of M. Iunius Brutus's stepfather. They were possibly married in 76 BCE: Servilia was the young widow of M. Junius Brutus (*tr. pl.* 83 BCE), and D. Junius Silanus (*cos.* 62 BCE) had just begun his senatorial career. The influence and wealth of his wife could then assist him in achieving a priesthood at a relatively early age, as well as in staging spectacular games as an aedile. According to Cicero, the games were comparable to those of the Lucullii (*aedd.* 79 BCE) and Q. Hortensius Hortalus (*aed.* 75 BCE), and presumably won him the electorate's favour, easing his path towards the praetorship, which he likely held in or before 67 BCE.⁷⁴

While acknowledging that such an example may be little more than a hypothesis, it should be remembered that Republican sources are generally quite reticent about donations. Roman law prohibited gifts between husband

72 Cic. *Att.* 15.12.1: *Noster vero καὶ μάλα σεμνῶς in Asiam, postea quae mihi est adsensus tuto se Romae esse non posse (ludos enim absens facere malebat); statim autem se iturum simul ac ludorum apparatus iis qui curaturi essent tradidisse* ("Our friend for his part declared with all solemnity that he would go to Asia, once he had agreed with me that Rome was no safe place for him (he prefers to give the games in his absence). He added that he would go at once as soon as he had handed over the wherewithal for the games to those who would look after them"; transl. by D.R. Shackleton Bailey). Cfr. Plut. *Brut.* 21.1.

73 Cic. *Att.* 15.17.2 (14 June 44 BCE): *tu vero facies ut omnia quod Serviliae non dees, id est Bruto* ("It's just like you not to fail Servilia, which is to say Brutus", with commentary by Shackleton Bailey 2004: 265; Treggiari 2019: 196-200; 250). When Brutus left Rome, C. Antonius assumed the duties of Urban Praetor and celebrated the games; they were delayed to the Nones of July and took place without the hoped-for popular unrest. Broughton 1952: 319. See App. *B Civ.* 3.28 on the bribery of plebeians by Octavian to halt the demonstrations in favour of Brutus, funded by this latter's agents. Brutus' memories waned with the young Caesar's lavish games honouring Venus and his great-uncle's victory, held at the end of July: Cic. *Att.* 15.2.3; Suet. *Aug.* 10.1.

74 Cic. *Off.* 2.57. Broughton 1952: 577. The latest date for his praetorship is based on the fact that he could have stood for the consulship of 64: Broughton 1952: 143.

and wife and promoted a strict separation of property between spouses and their families.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, not only did the law contemplate numerous exceptions, but in the 2nd century CE, as expressly attested in a constitution of Antoninus Pius, *honoris causa* donations were explicitly envisaged if they aimed to enable husbands to qualify as *equites*, to embark on a senatorial career, or to hold games.⁷⁶ The emperor's official decision was motivated by contingent historical factors,⁷⁷ but the practice of drawing on the wealth of wives and mothers must already have been widespread to a degree that cannot be fully ascertained from the sources. In the 1st century CE, Seneca explicitly notes that his mother used her resources to help him and that his brother in succeeding in public life, covering the expenses they incurred as they advanced in their *cursus honorum*.⁷⁸

In situations where they needed funds for games or, more broadly, required cash for other electoral necessities, men could arguably rely on their kinswomen. According to Susan Treggiari, this reliance stemmed from the peculiar status of female wealth, which included movable property such as

75 Buongiorno 2018; on the strict separation of property between husband and wife see Treggiari 1991: 365-396.

76 *Dig.* 24.1.42 (Gai. 11 *ad ed. prov.*): *Nuper ex indulgentia principis Antonini recepta est alia causa donationis, quam dicimus honoris causa: ut ecce si uxor viro lati clavi<i> petenti gratia donet vel ut equestris ordinis fiat vel ludorum gratia* ("Another basis for a gift has been introduced recently by means of the indulgence of the Emperor Antoninus, which we call gifts for the sake of honor, for example, where a wife makes a gift to her husband to allow him to seek admission to the senatorial or equestrian orders or so that he can put on games"; transl. by A. Watson). Cfr. *Dig.* 24.1.40 (Ulp. 2 resp.).

77 There was indeed a need to replenish the ranks of the ruling class, compelled to bear ever-increasing costs for *munera* and weakened demographically and economically by the Antonine plague: Buongiorno 2018; 213-214. Canas 2019: 76.

78 Sen. *Dial.* 12.14.3: *Tu liberorum tuorum bonis plurimum gavisus es, minimum usque; tu liberalitati nostrae semper imposuisti modum, cum tuae non imponeres; tu filia familiae locupletibus filiis ultro contulisti; tu patrimonium nostrum sic administrasti, ut tamquam in tuis laborares, tamquam alienis abstineres; tu gratiae nostrae, tamquam alienis rebus uteris, percipisti et ex honoribus nostris nihil ad te nisi voluptas et impensa pertinuit* ("But you have always had the greatest joy in the blessings of your children, yet you have used them not at all; you have always set bounds to our generosity, though you set none to your own; you, though a daughter in your father's household, actually made presents to your wealthy sons; you managed our inheritances with such care that they might have been your own, with such scrupulousness that they might have been a stranger's; you were as sparing in the use of our influence as if you were using a stranger's property, and from our elections to office nothing accrued to you except your pleasure and the expense; transl. by J. W. Basore).

cash, jewellery, precious items and luxury furnishings that could be readily sold.⁷⁹ As kinswomen could effectively dispose of assets not tied up in real estate,⁸⁰ seeking assistance from them might have offered practical advantages in terms of easier access to resources and opportunities for negotiation in the transaction. After all, women benefited significantly from their relatives' political advancement, particularly in terms of their *dignitas*. It should therefore not be assumed that female generosity was entirely selfless, or that it occurred without consequences for the gender and family hierarchies both within and outside the *domus*. In 169 BCE, when warning of the potential risks posed by an excessive concentration of wealth in women's hands in his speech in support of the *lex Voconia*, Cato the Elder refers to a woman who, likely through inheritance, acquired a substantial sum of money that she subsequently lent to her husband.⁸¹ The anonymous woman then sent a servant to bother her husband publicly in the forum to ensure that the loan was repaid. We may never know for sure if electoral motives drove this request for money, but the canvassing costs were hardly irrelevant in the patrimonial relationship between husband and wife, as was the case in the relationship between mothers and sons.

Concluding remarks

In a well-known passage from the speech that Livy attributed to him as part of the debate on the repeal of the *lex Oppia* in 195 BCE, Cato the Elder laments the interference of women in the affairs of the *res publica*, in the public space of the Forum, in informal meetings (*contiones*), and even in

79 Treggiari 2019: 250. The wife in the so-called *Laudatio Turiae* was praised by her husband for using her jewellery to support him during the civil war: *CIL* 6².41062, II 2a-5a.

80 On women's various assets see Vettori 2026.

81 Gell. 17.6.1-2 (= ORF⁴ 158): *M. Cato Voconiam legem suadens verbis hisce usus est: principio vobis mulier magnam dotem adtulit; tum magnam pecuniam recipit, quam in viri potestatem non committit, eam pecuniam viro mutuam dat; postea, ubi irata facta est, servum receptitium sectari atque flagitare virum iubet* ("Marcus Cato, when recommending the Voconian law, spoke as follows: 'In the beginning the woman brought you a great dowry; then she holds back a large sum of money, which she does not entrust to the control of her husband, but lends it to her husband. Later, becoming angry with him, she orders a *servus receptitius*, or 'slave of her own,' to hound him and demand the money"; transl. by J.C. Rolfe). On the *lex Voconia* see McClintock 2022.

electoral assemblies (*comitia*).⁸² The historiographical complexities of Livy's narrative invite caution concerning the possibility of interpreting Cato's words literally, as a direct reflection of the political reality of the early 2nd century BCE.⁸³ Nevertheless, the scenario sketched by Cato offers some important elements. The potential for women to steer public opinion and in some way affect the outcomes of elections with their bodies, words and gestures was a matter of fact in Rome and seems to have been recognised and accepted even by the candidates themselves. This is perfectly demonstrated in the cases of Caesar and, even earlier, of Tiberius Gracchus.

However, such interference may not have historically always been as disruptive as Cato believed in Livy's account. For example, consider the role of women's assets in providing sufficient financial support for a candidacy or meeting census requirements. Although sources rarely mention this in normal circumstances, such a role had to be crucial during times of political and institutional crisis, when confiscations were used as a means to oust opponents from political life. Triumviral proscriptions provide an excellent case study in this respect: the political continuity enjoyed by some of the families targeted by the Triumvirs during the Augustan principate, among other factors, likely also depended significantly on women being able to preserve part of the household assets⁸⁴.

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82 Livy 34.2.11: *Maiores nostri nullam, ne privatam quidem rem agere feminas sine tutore auctore voluerunt, in manu esse parentium, fratrum, virorum: nos, si diis placet, iam etiam rem publicam capessere eas patimur et foro prope et contionibus et comitiis immisceri* ("Our ancestors did not want women conducting business, even private business, without a guardian acting as their spokespersons; they were to remain under the protection of fathers, brothers or husbands. But we, for God's sake, are now allowing them even to engage in affairs of state and almost to involve themselves in the Forum, in our meetings and in our assemblies" (transl. by J.C. Yardley, with modifications).

83 Vassiliades 2019; Vettori 2020a: 128-134.

84 Vettori 2020b: 55-72. On political continuity after Sullan proscriptions see Pina Polo – Rosillo-López in this volume.

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