

## Marital Alliances and Political Careers in the Roman Republic

It is a truism frequently acknowledged that elite Roman men during the Republic married for political advantage and in order to create alliances with other powerful families. However, since Friedrich Münzer (Münzer 1920), there has been no major systematic study of the evidence for such a claim or for the effectiveness of such political unions. By uniting traditional prosopography and modern quantitative and statistical analysis, I analyze evidence from one hundred and twenty-five Roman Republican elite marriages in order to investigate the effects and significance of marital alliances upon Roman men's political careers.

In particular, my research focuses upon marriages between women of consular status and *novi* or New Men, examining what potential effect such advantageous marital alliances might have had for the political careers of the *novi*. I also examine the patrician and plebeian status of the individuals in these marriages to further establish whether these status markers were still relevant at various periods in the middle and late Republic or whether *nobiles* had fully replaced patricians as the elite class. When possible, as in the case of Pompeius Magnus or L. Cornelius Sulla, I take into account the change in spousal status over serial marriages, but in general I focus more on the average *nobiles* than on the extraordinary "Great Men."

Such a study has its limitations, naturally; we know far more about the marriages of particularly prominent Roman men than random consuls in uneventful years. The data is necessarily both limited and skewed. By closely examining and measuring all the available data in quantitative form, however, I hope to draw some firmer conclusions about the nature and structure of the Roman elite during this period. By analyzing whom young elite Roman women married, we may also be able to glimpse how Roman elites themselves viewed status differentials within their society. It also offers a glimpse of both upward and downward social

mobility; given the social and religious consequences, why would a patrician woman or her family choose to marry a plebeian man?

Previous studies of Roman marriages have focused either primarily on the legal evidence (Dixon 1992, Treggiari 1993) or on a few specific cases (Haley 1985, (Hallett 1984). My work seeks to gather and analyze a large set of historical evidence about actual marriages in order to further reveal the internal structures and hierarchies of the Roman elite during this period. In the process, we may also gain some small glimpse into the lives and choices of elite Roman women during the Republic. While we will never know the interior familial dynamics of these women and men, we can at least begin to understand some of the patterns underlying the most fundamental choice determining the path of an ancient woman's life: her spouse.

#### Works Cited

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