POWERFUL MATRONS.
NEW POLITICAL ACTORS
IN THE LATE ROMAN REPUBLIC

POWERFUL MATRONS. NEW POLITICAL ACTORS IN THE LATE ROMAN REPUBLIC

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INTRODUCTION

"What business has a woman with a public meeting? If ancestral custom be observed, none".[1] Valerius Maximus is the author of these words. Throughout his collection of historical *exempla*, which dates to the 1st century CE, he gathered a selection of virtuous and negative behaviours. He aimed to inspire his fellow citizens to follow the guidance of Tiberius' Principate. The *mos maiorum* stated that political activity was an exclusively male prerogative: only men could hold magistracies and military offices, operating in the locations devoted to the city's politics – the senate, the popular assemblies, the courts, the Forum; and they alone could practice the art of public speaking, the spoken word being an indispensable tool for political activities.

Women, on the other hand, were obliged to follow a traditional behavioural model that excluded them from any form of political activity. This code of conduct was particularly binding for matrons, the female expression of the ruling class, and it corresponded to a selection of virtues, well attested in funerary epigraphy,[2] but also in the portrayals of women attested by ancient historiography. Women were required to be pleasing in

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1 Val. Max. 3.8.6: *Quid feminae cum contione? si patrius mos servetur, nihil*. All the translations in English, if not differently specified, are from Loeb Classical Library.

2 Between the second half of the 2nd and the 1st century BCE see esp. the inscriptions of Claudia (*CIL*, I 2 2211), Turia (*CIL*, VI 1527, 31670, 37053) and Murdia (*CIL*, VI 10230).

their appearance, which was believed to be a reflection of their inner beauty. They were expected to take on the double role of wives and mothers to secure a future generation of citizens; to be righteous and loyal to their husbands, thus assuring their children's paternity and, as a consequence, the certain identity of the children's ancestors. The Romans believed that political and military skills were transferred as a veritable biological inheritance from father to son, thereby legitimising an oligarchic structure that only entrusted power to a restricted group of families: in the future, their descendants would assume the duties and responsibilities which their fathers had taken on in the past, much to the benefit of the *res publica*. Matrons were dissuaded from seeking attention through any gesture or choice of clothing: they would thus refrain from attracting excessive attention or engaging in any kind of intimacy with strangers, the unhappy consequence of self-exposure.

Matrons were encouraged to take up spinning and weaving. Legend had it that women had been assigned these occupations after the abduction of the Sabine women, duties agreed upon by the Roman kidnappers and their victims' fathers, who wished to protect their daughters from hard labour in the future. However, standing at the loom was also a means of identifying the physical space deemed suitable for matrons, the inner, most sheltered, private rooms of the house. Women were encouraged by tradition to operate within the confines of their houses, demarcating both the physical boundary of their activities, but also their sphere of competence, i.e., the family and housekeeping. Conversely, the urban areas – the streets, the Forum, the court – reserved for public life were deemed suitable for men's actions, and were only ever the setting for women's activities during cult and funerary practices. Matrons were encouraged to use the spoken work exclusively in private contexts and only in a measured manner, to curb women's natural propensity to harmful chatter.[3]

The traditional range of behaviours appropriate to matrons had remained practically unaltered over the centuries. This was due to several factors. The Roman mentality recognized the positive value of tradition, and was suspicious of innovation. Moreover, this behavioural model exclusively concerned those who spent most of their existence within the *domus*, a place only marginally affected by the significant transformations taking place in Roman society.

3 On the female model see Cenerini 2009b: 16-38 and 59-86; Lamberti 2014: 61-84.

Normative gender roles, therefore, conditioned the behaviour of matrons; but they also provided a means to evaluate women's conduct, determining their appreciation or condemnation. Sometimes they also worked as a pretext for strategically criticising women's actions, the ultimate targets of controversy but, more often, merely a smokescreen for enemies hoping to discredit or damage their fathers, husbands, brothers and children.[4]

Moreover, the same gender roles were responsible for excluding women from politics. The specific circumstances and reasons for this prohibition become clear in the speeches which Livy attributes to Lucius Valerius and Marcus Porcius Cato. The occasion for these speeches to be pronounced was the proposal to repeal the *Lex Oppia* in 195 BCE, supported by the former and opposed by the latter.[5] It is impossible to verify the historicity of the words Livy attributes of the tribune of the plebs and the consul because of the mediation of the Augustan historian; but it is possible to reconstruct in generic terms the mentality which gave rise to those speeches, a mentality which made these words credible to readers only two centuries after the facts.[6]

The *Lex Oppia* was a sumptuary law passed in 215 BCE that restricted women's display of wealth: forced to renounce their jewellery and their luxurious gowns, women were compelled to mourn the financial and human losses that had struck Rome after its defeat at the hands of Hannibal. After the positive outcome of the war, the tribune Lucius Valerius had proposed a return to normality. There had been a lively debate on the issue, which had seen Valerius clash with the consul Cato. Meanwhile, the Roman women left their houses and poured in the streets to support the proposal that would allow them to flaunt their jewels and don their precious garments, the status symbols of their class. Although in disagreement over the specific topic of contention, both Valerius and Cato agreed that the domains of male and female action should remain distinct. Valerius argued that men were called to act outside their houses, taking on crucial roles in public, political and military life; women's duties, on the other hand, kept matrons within the domestic perimeter and pertained exclusively to the domains of housekeeping and family life. Cato stated that a woman, an irrational animal, was by nature unsuitable to take on any form of responsibility within the community: her

4 On the matrons' portrayal see Garlick – Dixon – Allen 1992.
5 See *infra*.
6 Valentini 2012: 8-21.

interference in public life would have resulted in the dissolution of the family sphere and the overturning of current political and social order, causing serious damage to the *res publica*.[7]

The portrayal of women outlined in this debate in the early 2nd century BCE seems to have persisted well into the next century, which is the chronological focus of this book. For instance, Cicero's opinion, attested by the Christian *rhetor* Lactantius between the 3rd and 4th century CE, appears to be identical to that of Cato and Valerius.[8] In the *Epitome* of the *Divine Institutes,* Lactantius expounded the principles of Christian theology, contesting pagan beliefs, and reflecting on the misery of any city where women were responsible for public activities, a traditionally male duty.[9]

In arguing therefore that women were not to be involved in political life, Valerius Maximus was adopting a perspective widely shared both in the past and in the centuries to come. However, he identified a significant exception to this assumption; in fact, he went on to argue that: "But when domestic quiet is stirred by the waves of sedition, the authority of ancient usage is subverted and compulsion of violence has greater force than persuasion and precept of restraint".[10] The historian was commenting on the unusual appearance of a matron, Hortensia, in the Forum, a public place and in full view of the magistrates of the *res publica*.[11] He dismissed any condemnation of this woman's initiative: he explained that the emergency situation of the civil wars had not only led some women to political action, but that this situation also justified their activism. Moreover, matrons had already been involved in community life in the past, and had served it well: thus, for instance, after the destruction of Veii in 396 BCE, the Roman matrons' jewellery (their status symbol) had secured the amount of gold required to forge the tripod promised to Apollo as a votive offering;[12] in 390 BCE they

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7 Livy 34.1-8. Peppe 1984: 44-47; Mastrorosa 2006: 590-611. The difference in characteristics between the male and female gender is studied in Hallett – Skinner 1997; Milnor 2005: 158-185.

8 See Cic. *Rep.* 1.43.67: Cicero, paraphrasing Plato, argues that when slaves and women do not obey, it is anarchy.

9 Lactant. *Epit.* 33.38.5.

10 Val. Max. 3.8.6: *sed ubi domestica quies seditionum agitata fluctibus est, priscae consuetudinis auctoritas convellitur, plusque valet quod violentia cogit quam quod suadet et praecipit verecundia*.

11 See *infra*.

12 Livy 5.25.

had once again surrendered their jewels to pay for the ransom which led Brennus to relax his grip on Rome;[13] and during the war against Hannibal, they had beseeched the gods with acts of great devotion.[14] As an expression of the citizenry in their own right (despite their legal status being quite different from that of their men) women had successfully interfered in matters of public interest, acting collectively and thus as a recognised group. These were limited incidents, linked to times of particular emergency. The internal conflicts that ripped through Rome between the mid-2nd century BCE and the beginning of Augustus' Principate also saw the unprecedented intervention of a new protagonist on the political scene: matrons. The instability and conflict that characterized many areas of the empire and especially Rome, the seat of government, heavily impacted its institutional life: the senate, popular assemblies and the courts continued their political activity, but these were often hindered by frequent and significative absences. Many representatives of the Roman ruling class lost their lives on the battlefield or in the riots that bloodied Rome's streets; and many stayed away from the *urbs* for many years: some in the provinces as governors, others in command of armies engaged in internal political conflicts, others on the run after heading the losing party or because they were proscribed. These men were also absent from more informal political occasions: meetings in private residences, in the city itself or in their country villas, where agreements and alliances were struck and new political coalitions in the senate and the people's assemblies were defined.

The absence of numerous representatives of the ruling class was compensated in part by the interventions of women, as has often been the case during wartime in times far closer to ours. Despite being excluded from institutional offices, magistracies and military command, matrons still found different ways to interfere in the politics of the city. They operated from the privacy of their houses: firstly, because they were barred from the institutional settings of political life; secondly, because tradition condoned and therefore legitimized female initiatives within a domestic setting; and thirdly, because political initiatives were increasingly maturing in non-institutional contexts. But matrons also acted in public places, such as squares, streets, courts, military camps; in such public settings, they adopted different communicative solutions, sometimes taking over male behaviours; sometimes introducing in

13 Livy 5.34.
14 Livy 26.9.

these new contexts practices borrowed from funerary and cult rituals – public occasions recognised as falling within their sphere of competencies. The matrons' new condition was nevertheless disconnected from any desire for emancipation, which was entirely extraneous to Roman mentality. Instead, it arose from the contingent need to represent and replace those who until recently had managed the city's politics, and to safeguard the ruling power among the families on which the oligarchic system was based. For these reasons, the matrons of the Late Republic did not act in the hope of upturning female duties and changing social roles, but instead they acted as guardians of a power that passed – fleetingly and only out of necessity – through their hands.

However, their new role was foreign to female customs and was frequently delegitimized by traditional values, which had always guided women's conduct and condoned or condemned their actions. In some cases during the Late Republic, this situation led to matrons being judged harshly and criticised; on other occasions, their contemporaries and subsequent historiography found ways to justify these women's actions so as not to compromise the image of their men.

A wife praised by her husband in the so-called *Laudatio Turiae* is a concrete example of the new conduct of some matrons during the civil war.[15] Her husband, perhaps Quintus Lucretius Vespillo, celebrated the woman with an articulated eulogy that survives in fragmentary form on an epigraphic support and dates to the end of the 1st century BCE. She is remembered for her traditional virtues: she worked in the house, she was moderate in her actions, she wove wool, and was devoted to her family and the gods. However, and much to her credit, Turia's political, judiciary and economic initiatives are also mentioned, initiatives which, according to traditional custom, fell within the remit of men's activities. The matron had ensured the criminal procedure of her parents' murderers; she had protected her father's will from her relatives' greed; administered her own property as well as that of her husband while he, a supporter of Pompey, was on the run; she had financially supported him in his run; and she had pleaded with the triumvir Lepidus for her husband, now proscribed, after Octavian had guaranteed his reinstatement. This document, therefore, attests how during this century women's interference in politics was

15 *CIL*, VI 1527, 31670, 37053. Flach 1991; Hemelrijk 2004: 185-197; Evans Grubbs 2006: 313-316; Keegan 2008: 1-7; Osgood 2014; Franco 2016: 137-163; Fontana 2020.

sometimes considered not only admissible but even worthy of appreciation. It also testifies how this gradual process of legitimation was accomplished: by citing the situation of emergency during the civil wars and by linking these initiatives to *pietas*, that is, devotion to one's family; it was one of the founding virtues of the female behavioural model and it had been exercised by Turia not only towards her parents but above all to her husband.

The main reason for women's participation in Roman politics is, therefore, to be connected to the emergency times brought about by internal political conflicts. It seems significant in this sense that certain legends acknowledged women's fundamental role in times of change and in the most decisive moments of Rome's history. Because of their legendary nature, these tales do not offer accurate historical reconstructions; however, they portray historical events in a simplified form and are a precious testimony of the mentality of the time in which they were conceived or reformulated. These legends were recast during the Late Republic and the Early Principate, at times when certain matrons were involved in city politics: these tales identify authoritative precedents in the past that would legitimise women's initiatives in the present, placing women at the centre of times of transition, even when it was violent. For instance, the Sabine women led by Hersilia were responsible for the conciliation between their fathers and brothers and the Roman kidnappers; Tanaquil had championed her husband Tarquinius Priscus' ascent to power and had guaranteed the succession of her son-in-law Servius Tullius; Tullia the Younger, daughter of Servius Tullius, had propitiated Lucius Tarquinius Superbus' accession to the throne; Lucretia had instigated her father and husband's revenge on Sextus Tarquinius, which eventually led to the fall of the monarchy and the inauguration of the republican government. All these women, remembered in reference to the Roman monarchy, collectively acquired roles independent from their men, albeit within the complex framework of values such as family, country and modesty – all codified by men. Even episodes of Early Rome began to feature more frequently in narratives during the Late Republican age, as these too offered legitimizing precedents: thus Veturia and Volumnia are remembered for persuading Coriolanus, the leader of the Volsci, to desist from the siege of Rome, resolving tensions on complex military environment in the same way Cloelia had with the Etruscans of Porsenna. The literary tradition also preserves the memory of later events, also unfolding in times of emergency similar to the 1st century BCE, such as women's initiatives after the war against Tarentum, and especially during the war against Hannibal.

If indeed an emergency situation was the primary and legitimising condition for female public action, then the circumstances which led some matrons to acquire new societal and political roles must be identified in the transformation of the female condition of the 2nd century BCE. This was a direct consequence of the changes that affected the entirety of Roman society as it rapidly amassed riches.[16] Indeed, the positive consequences of Rome's expansion between the 4th and 2nd centuries BCE had led to women's improved wellbeing, freeing them from domestic duties now entrusted to slave labour. Conquests brought pedagogues to Rome, and they contributed to the cultural formation not only of men, but also of the women from the upper classes, and contributed to spreading a new mentality. The novel mindset was supported by the increased availability of books and libraries, acquired as spoils of war from the Hellenistic communities,[17] and by the intensification in both quantity and quality of exchanges with foreign political systems, which saw women involved in politics and power as well as men.[18] The juridical and financial status of women also gradually changed: they were now able to acquire substantial amounts of family assets through inheritance, and manage them independently;[19] in time, they also emancipated themselves from their guardians, who had previously been their juridical managers and necessary intermediaries for their economic activities: women could now act with greater autonomy.[20] The opening of new markets, moreover, allowed them to enrich themselves through alternatives ways rather than land ownership only, allowing the monetization of wealth and its use in ways that would be impossible when dealing exclusively with real estate.[21]

Moreover, matrons were now present to the political operations promoted by their male relatives, often taking place in private settings, such as convivial occasions. Men attended these informal political occasions alongside their female family members, who could therefore observe and learn, acquiring skills they had previously barred from.[22] These circumstances naturally

16 Clemente 1990: 235-266.

17 Hemelrijk 1999 ed. 2004: 21-22 and 88-91; van der Bergh 2000: 351-364; Keener 2007: 747-775.

18 Bielman Sánchez – Cogitore – Kolb 2016 ed. 2021; Bielman Sánchez 2019 (papers of Carney, Widmer, D'Agostini, Bielman Sánchez – Joliton, Ferriès).

19 Gardner 1986: 67-77 and 163-203; McClintock 2017: 1-50.

20 Gardner 1986: 14-29; Lamberti 2014: 61-84.

21 Berg 2016.

22 Badel 2006: 259-280.

determined a close connection between a matron's opportunities for political action and her family of origin (or acquired through marriage). The women who participated in the public life of the 1st century BCE did so under the guise of daughters, mothers, sisters and wives of the men they were related to, and only thanks to such family bonds.

From the second half of the 2nd century BCE, therefore, and pursuant to the changes engendered by Rome's expansion and the crisis of the *res publica*, Roman society underwent a double transformation.[23] Political dynamics changed drastically: some matrons entered the scene, albeit never in a formalised manner – they did not take on institutional or military offices. But the role of women in society also changed: what would be defined in modern terms as new opportunities for action opened up. This book investigates the details of female conduct between the 2nd and the 1st century BCE: it explores matrons' autonomy in decision-making and its independence from the directives set down by the men of the family, the multiple types of female intervention in Rome's public life, and the ways in which these women promoted such initiatives, either by borrowing from male political practices, or by "exporting" into novel contexts the practices traditionally attributed to women, but which had until recently been confined to the female sphere of action (such as ritual practice and funerary ceremonies).

Sources very rarely remember matrons' political dynamism during this historical period. The surviving evidence is prevalently historiographic in nature; however, it reserves only sporadic and discontinuous attention to female initiatives: it allocates space to matrons only when their actions had significant repercussions upon their men they had relationships with, who were the primary focus of ancient historians.[24] Therefore, it is only by juxtaposing all attested numerous episodes bearing similarities in the types of female political interventions, that we can interpret each female initiative not as an exception, but as evidence of the emergence of a new kind of female behaviour, which had become common practice in this historical period. Because history is reconstructed through evidence, the basis for this research will be the ancient sources, and the study of each of the episodes examined in

23 On the new particularly favourable conditions that from the 2nd century BCE permitted the involvement of matrons in politics see Bauman 1992.

24 On the problems relating to the description of women in ancient sources see Garlick – Dixon – Allen 1992; Späth – Wagner-Hasel 2000; Dixon 2001; Gourevitch – Raepsaet-Charlier 2001.

the next chapters will begin with the analysis of the most authoritative literary source. The careful contextualization of each event is key to the interpretation of the historical facts. The resulting narrative coincides with the portrait clearly outlined by Tacitus: "… and autocratic orders as from the women, who, once in curb by the Oppian and other laws, had now cast their chains and ruled supreme in the home, the courts, and by now the army itself".[25]

* *

This book originates from my study "Le custodi del potere. Donne e politica alla fine della repubblica romana", published in 2019 in Italian by Salerno Editrice (Rome). Its publication for the Editorial Universidad de Sevilla and Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza in English has represented an opportunity for me to revise the text, whose contents have since been expanded and its structure redesigned. The new edition is also accompanied by an integrated and updated bibliography and a new chapter discussing the legitimacy of women's political initiatives in the 1st century BCE, which is key to understanding the processes outlined in these pages.

I would like to thank Giovannella Cresci Marrone, Francesca Cenerini, Alessandra Valentini and Tomaso Maria Lucchelli, who generously shared their expertise on many occasions during our discussions on these issues. I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues Francisco Pina Polo, Cristina Rosillo López and Antonio Caballos Rufino who generously accepted the volume in the *Libera Res Publica* series. I also thank the Editorial Universidad de Sevilla and Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza who agreed to publish this book and Salerno Editrice who believed in the value of my studies on Roman matrons and facilitated the publication of this volume. Finally, a heartfelt thanks to Thea Sommerschield who carefully translated the book and to Helen Thomas and Maddalena Vio because of their valuable assistance.

This book is dedicated to the memory of my father Giovanni and to the women of my life, my mother Daniela and my daughter Maddalena.

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25 Tac. *Ann.* 3.33: …*impotentibus mulierum iussis quae, Oppiis quondam aliisque legibus constrictae, nunc vinclis exsolutis, domos, fora, iam et exercitus regerent*. On the dating of the Aulus Caecina Severus' speech at 21 CE see *infra*.

I
CREATORS OF FAMILY TIES AND POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS

1.1. Matrons as instruments in their own family's marriage strategies

"Moreover, Caesar tried to avail himself still more of the influence of Pompey. He had a daughter, Julia, who was betrothed to Servilius Caepio. This daughter he betrothed to Pompey, and said he would give Pompey's daughter in marriage to Servilius, although she too was not unbetrothed, but had been promised to Faustus, the son of Sulla. And a little while afterwards Caesar took Calpurnia to wife, a daughter of Piso, and got Piso made consul for the coming year, although here too Cato vehemently protested, and cried out that it was intolerable to have the supreme power prostituted by marriage alliances and to see men helping one another to powers and armies and provinces by means of women."[1]

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1 Plut. *Caes.* 14: Καῖσαρ δὲ μειζόνως ἔτι τῆς Πομπηΐου δυνάμεως ἐπιδραττόμενος, ἦν γὰρ αὐτῷ Ἰουλία θυγάτηρ ἐγγεγυημένη Σερουϊλίῳ Καιπίωνι, ταύτην ἐνεγγύησε Πομπηΐῳ, τὴν δὲ Πομπηΐου τῷ Σερουϊλίῳ δώσειν ἔφησεν, οὐδ'αὐτὴν ἀνέγγυον οὖσαν, ἀλλὰ Φαύστῳ τῷ Σύλλα παιδὶ καθωμολογημένην. ὀλίγῳ δ' ὕστερον Καῖσαρ ἠγάγετο Καλπουρνίαν θυγατέρα Πείσωνος, τὸν δὲ Πείσωνα κατέστησεν ὕπατον εἰς τὸ μέλλον, ἐνταῦθα δὴ καὶ σφόδρα μαρτυρομένου Κάτωνος καὶ βοῶντος οὐκ ἀνεκτὸν εἶναι γάμοις διαμαστροπευομένης τῆς ἡγεμονίας, καὶ διὰ γυναίων εἰς ἐπαρχίας καὶ στρατεύματα καὶ δυνάμεις ἀλλήλους ἀντεισαγόντων; see Plut. *Pomp.* 47 and 70; *Cat. Min.* 31.

The Greek biographer Plutarch, reporting on the events preceding the the so-called first Triumvirate in 60 BCE, describes the initiatives leading Gaius Julius Caesar, Marcus Licinius Crassus and Pompey the Great to form a secret alliance. Betrothals and marriages play a crucial role in Plutarch's narrative, and Marcus Porcius Cato's stinging comment on the matter further proves the point. Cato's conservative political views made him hostile to the three men, and he was concerned by their pact: his words shed light on the close connection between citizens' private and public lives. The process of decision-making in the Roman Republic did not arise from debates among self-organised and stable groups, as is the norm in modern parliamentary practice. Instead, political decisions were the outcome of *ad hoc* alliances formed to address contingent issues, and were therefore often unstable and ephemeral.[2] Betrothals, which were often formalised during lavish ceremonies to ensure their public visibility, had a very real impact on political life, as did marriages. The latter could be either *cum manu* marriages, where the wife passed under the legal control of her husband, or *sine manu*, where the wife remained under the legal control of her father (this being the preferred option from the 2nd century BCE). Marriages and betrothals forged ties between families, which could lead to political alliances and even have financial implications.[3]

Several examples of this political strategy can be presented. Around 83 BCE Julius Caesar married Cornelia: this bond directly linked Caesar, patrician who was pursuing the lead of the *populares* at the early stages of his career, to Lucius Cornelius Cinna, the bride's father. Cinna had succeeded Gaius Marius as a *popularis* politician, and Marius was also Caesar's acquired relative after marrying his aunt Julia.[4] The conservative leader Sulla did comprehend the potential impact of this marriage upon Roman political life, despite Cinna's death in 84 BCE. After unsuccessful attempts to force Caesar to divorce his wife, he finally curbed the young patrician's ambitions by depriving him of the office of Flamen Dialis, the high priesthood of Jupiter and one of the most eminent positions of Roman religious hierarchy. Sulla also denied Caesar his wife's dowry and gentilician legacy: Caesar was ultimately forced to go hiding until after the death of the dictator in 78 BCE.[5]

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2 Zecchini 1997 ed. 2018: 15-77.

3 See Andreau – Bruhns 1990 (esp. Moreau 1990: 3-26); Corbier 1990: 225-249; Corbier 1991: 655-701; Corbier 2006: 199-208; Canas 2019: esp. 41-104.

4 Plut. *Caes.* 1. Fezzi 2020: 57-65.

5 Suet. *Iul.* 1.

Marriages could have a variable impact upon strategies of self-affirmation: when Pompey married Antistia in 86 BCE, their union was underpinned by judicial matters with political repercussions.[6] At the time, Pompey was accused of embezzlement of public funds. His father, Gnaeus Pompeius Strabo, had misappropriated the plunder from Asculum obtained during the war against the Italian allies. Those assets had been inherited by his son, but were now under claim by the *aerarium*. The judge presiding over court proceedings was Publius Antistius, an edile or praetor from the equestrian order, who had made a name for himself as an orator.[7] At this juncture, Pompey was swiftly betrothed to the judge's daughter Antistia, and married her at the end of the legal proceedings.[8] The announcement of Pompey's acquittal was greeted by the people with the acclamation 'Talasius': Talasius had been one of Romulus' companions, who had received in his home one of the abducted daughters of the Sabines. This name had become a traditional nuptial cry at weddings to commemorate the first Roman matrimonies: by chanting it in unison, the people showed that they were fully aware of how Pompey's marriage had manipulated the trial's outcome.[9] Then in 82 BCE, a most attractive marriage opportunity arose for Pompey. Sulla, now the appointed dictator, wished to reward his faithful follower by means of a family bond: Pompey was persuaded to divorce Antistia and married Aemilia Scaura, daughter of Caecilia Metella Dalmatica (Sulla's present wife) and Marcus Aemilius Scaurus.[10] The marriage's motives and repercussions were duly noted by Plutarch, who stated in the *Life of Pompey* that "this marriage was therefore characteristic of a tyranny, and befitted the needs of Sulla rather than the nature and habits of Pompey."[11]

Cicero also contracted a marriage of convenience, but whereas Caesar had married as a political expedient and Pompey first for judicial reasons and

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6 Plut. *Pomp.* 4. See Amela Valverde 2014: 105-121.

7 Plut. *Pomp.* 4: *praetor*; Vell. Pat. 2.26: *aedilis*.

8 On Antistius see Cic. *Brut.* 227 and 311. His wife was Calpurnia Bestia. Because of the wedding between Antistius' daughter and Pompey, a supporter of Sulla, Marius the Younger had the feeling that Antistius was betraying the *factio popularis*; Marius ordered the assassination of Antistius and Calpurnia took her own life due to the death of her husband. Vell. Pat. 2.26.

9 Boëls-Janssen 1993: 173-180.

10 Plut. *Pomp.* 9 and *Sull.* 33. See Haley 1985: 49-59.

11 Plut. *Pomp.* 9: Ἦν οὖν τυραννικὰ τὰ τοῦ γάμου καὶ τοῖς Σύλλα καιροῖς μᾶλλον ἢ τοῖς Πομπηΐου τρόποις πρέποντα.

secondly in pursuit of his own affirmation, Cicero was motivated by financial considerations. During the 2nd century BCE, a woman's fortune, which corresponded to both her dowry and her available assets, was a tempting prize for those who hoped to solve their own financial hardships. After thirty years of marriage, Cicero divorced Terentia and married Publilia in 46-45 BCE.[12] The first wife blamed the young bride's beauty for her husband's rash decision, but Tiro, Cicero's well-informed secretary, thought otherwise: he saw a link between Cicero's financial difficulties and Publilia's fortune. Publilia was Cicero's ward, and he was to administer her fortune in agreement with his future father-in-law.[13] Nevertheless, their marriage did not last: the divorce appears not to have been linked to the misunderstandings between the newlyweds which Cicero mentions, but instead to the improvement of Cicero's financial situation, thanks to the large bequest left to him by Marcus Cluvius, a banker in Puteoli.[14] Cicero's real motive was publicly known, and Mark Antony directly mentioned the matter in his response to Cicero's *Philippics* in 44-43 BCE.[15] However, the practice of arranging and dissolving marriages on the basis of financial needs must have been widespread: in his youth, Antony had married Fadia, daughter of the freedman Quintus Fadius, thus contracting a socially disadvantageous but economically necessary union to instil financial security to his waning wealth.[16] Then, around 52 BCE, he married his cousin Antonia to protect the family fortune after her father and Antony's uncle, Antonius Hybrida, was taken to trial in 59 BCE.[17] Both marriages had been a matter of convenience: the social asymmetry of the first marriage and the endogamy of the second were both underpinned by financial considerations.

The influence marriages had on Roman politics did by no means cease when they were dissolved: political contingencies encouraged divorce, making marriages of convenience volatile affairs. This was in apparent contradiction with the rooted idea of the *matrona univira*. The primary function of marriage

12 Cic. *Fam.* 4.14.1 and 3.

13 Treggiari 2007: 142-143 n. 148.

14 Cic. *Att.* 13.45-47; 14.9-11. Mastrorosa 2016: 65-87, esp. 77-78.

15 Quint. *Inst.* 6.3.75; Plut. *Cic.* 41; Dio Cass. 46.18.

16 Cic. *Phil.* 2.3. Cresci Marrone 2020: 28.

17 The charge was *de vi* (complicity in Catilinarian conspiracy or incompetence as governor of Macedonia) or *de maiestate*: see Alexander 1990: 119-120, nr. 142. Cic. *Phil.* 2.99 describes the specious accusation that Antony made to his wife, suspected of having a sexual relationship with Publius Cornelius Dolabella; with this justification Antony intended to divorce and marry Fulvia.

was that of procreation, but family planning was also regulated by interests of a private and public nature.[18] The birth of legitimate children guaranteed heirs to the upper classes of Roman society, ensuring the bloodline's continuity and the concentration of power in hands of the élite from generation to generation. In the oligarchic system of the Roman Republic, power was a birth right, a genetic heritage of sorts. The art of politics was an integral part of a child's upbringing in senatorial families, as it was practiced by most of their relatives.

Procreation also responded to the need for demographic expansion, which was essential to the community's prosperity and development. But motherhood among Rome's matrons was also a means to ensure the survival of marriage alliances well into the next generations, regardless of the length of the actual marriage. The birth of children meant that the blood of both parents would continue to be mixed: children embodied and guaranteed the indissoluble bond between paternal and maternal families. Moreover, if either spouse were to remarry, the opportunity to generate new descendants would soon arise. These heirs would be linked, by blood or through their extended family, to their stepsiblings and would also contribute to the expansion of alliances and family networks.[19] Thus, in 54 BCE when Marcus Aemilius Scaurus was implicated in a trial for extortion in Sardinia, he hoped to be acquitted because of his family's authority. His wife Mucia Tertia had been previously married to Pompey and borne him three children. This meant that Scaurus' own son with Mucia Tertia was the half-brother of Pompey and Mucia's children. Scaurus was ultimately acquitted thanks to the ability of his lawyer, Cicero, and not because of Pompey's intervention – for he feared the enmity of Marcus Porcius Cato, who presided over the jury. However, the fact that the accused believed his family relations would play a decisive role in the trail's outcome is significant.[20]

In the same vein, around 56 BCE Marcus Porcius Cato conceded his wife Marcia, whom he had married in 60 BCE,[21] to the famous orator Quintus Hortensius Hortalus.[22] Hortensius already had two children, Hortensia and

18 Moreau 1990: 3-26.

19 About the role of the mother, that was essential in the Roman matrons' life see Dixon 1988 ed- 2014.

20 Asc. *Sc.* 19C.15-19.

21 Strab.11.9.1 (515) and Plut. *Num.* 25 (*Comp. Lyc. et Num.* 3).

22 Plut. *Cat. Min.* 25; cf. Quint. *Inst.* 3.5 and 10.5. See Cantarella 2005: 115-131. On Marcia see also Strab. 11.9.515; 10.5.13; Luc. 2.327-391; Plut. *Cat. Min.* 25; 37-39; 52; *Pomp.* 44; App. *B Civ.* 2.413; Tert. *Apol.* 39.8-9; Jer. *Adv. Iovinian.* 1.46.

Quintus Hortensius, from his previous marriage to Lutatia.[23] Hortensius was already Cato's close friend, but he wished to further cement their alliance by means of a family bond: "Among the many lovers and admirers of Cato there were some who were more conspicuous and illustrious than others. One of these was Quintus Hortensius, a man of splendid reputation and excellent character. This man, then, desiring to be more than a mere associate and companion of Cato, and in some way or other to bring his whole family and line into community of kinship with him, attempted to persuade Cato, whose daughter Porcia was the wife of Bibulus and had borne him two sons, to give her in turn to him as noble soil for the production of children. According to the opinion of men, he argued, such a course was absurd, but according to the law of nature it was honourable and good for the *res publica* that a woman in the prime of youth and beauty should neither quench her productive power and lie idle, nor yet, by bearing more offspring than enough, burden and impoverish a husband who does not want them. Moreover, community in heirs among worthy men would make virtue abundant and widely diffused in their families, and the *res publica* would be closely cemented together by their family alliances. And if Bibulus were wholly devoted to his wife, Hortensius said he would give her back after she had borne him a child, and he would thus be more closely connected both with Bibulus himself and with Cato by a community of children. Cato replied that he loved Hortensius and thought highly of a community of relationship with him, but considered it absurd for him to propose marriage with a daughter who had been given to another. Then Hortensius changed his tactics, threw off the mask, and boldly asked for the wife of Cato himself, since she was still young enough to bear children, and Cato had heirs enough. And it cannot be said that he did this because he knew that Cato neglected Marcia, for she was at that time with child by him, as we are told. However, seeing the earnestness and eager desire of Hortensius, Cato would not refuse, but said that Philippus also, Marcia's father, must approve of this step. Accordingly, Philippus was consulted and expressed his consent, but he would not give Marcia in marriage until Cato himself was present and joined in giving the bride away."[24]

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23 Hortensius the Younger, in 44 BCE Macedonian proconsul, in 42 BCE was killed by order of Antony after Philippi's battle: Livy *Per.* 124.3; Vell. Pat. 2.71; Plut. *Brut.* 28.

24 Plut. *Cat. Min.* 25: ἐν πολλοῖς ἐρασταῖς καὶ θαυμασταῖς τοῦ Κάτωνος ἦσαν ἑτέρων ἕτεροι μᾶλλον ἔκδηλοι καὶ διαφανεῖς, ὧν καὶ Κόϊντος Ὁρτήσιος, ἀνὴρ ἀξιώματός τε λαμπροῦ καὶ τὸν τρόπον ἐπιεικής. ἐπιθυμῶν οὖν τῷ Κάτωνι μὴ συνήθης εἶναι μηδ' ἑταῖρος

Prior to 67 BCE, Cato had been married to Atilia, daughter of Sextus Atilius Serranus Gavianus. They had two children, Marcus Porcius Cato and Porcia.[25] After their divorce in 60 BCE, Cato had married Marcia.[26] In order to honour the agreement with Hortensius, Cato had sought the necessary consent from his father-in-law: their marriage had in fact been *sine manu*, and his wife remained under the legal authority of her father. In fact, when Hortensius had originally proposed to marry Porcia, who at the time was married *sine manu* to Marcus Calpurnius Bibulus, he had approached not her husband Bibulus but her father Cato to discuss the arrangement. The union between Marcia and Hortensius lasted until June 50 BCE, the year of Hortensius' death;[27] once widowed, Marcia remarried Cato.[28]

Plutarch reported how the concession of Cato's wife was perceived by contemporary witnesses: Julius Caesar believed that Cato's actions were determined by greed: he wished to acquire Hortensius' wealth by giving up his

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μόνον, ἀλλ' ἀμῶς γέ πως εἰς οἰκειότητα καταμεῖξαι καὶ κοινωνίαν πάντα τὸν οἶκον καὶ τὸ γένος, ἐπεχείρησε συμπείθειν, ὅπως τὴν θυγατέρα Πορκίαν, Βύβλῳ συνοικοῦσαν καὶ πεποιημένην ἐκείνῳ δύο παῖδας, αὐτῷ πάλιν Βύβλῳ συνοικοῦσαν καὶ πεποιημένην ἐκείνῳ δύο παῖδας, αὐτῷ πάλιν ὥσπερ εὐγενῆ χώραν ἐντεκνώσασθαι παράσχῃ. δόξῃ μὲν γὰρ ἀνθρώπων ἄτοπον εἶναι τὸ τοιοῦτον, φύσει δὲ καλὸν καὶ πολιτικόν, ἐν ὥρᾳ καὶ ἀκμῇ γυναῖκα μήτ' ἀργεῖν τὸ γόνιμον ἀποσβέσασαν, μήτε πλείονα τῶν ἱκανῶν ἐπιτίκτουσαν ἐνοχλεῖν καὶ καταπτωχεύειν <οἶκον> οὐδὲν δεόμενον·κοινουμένους δὲ τὰς διαδοχὰς ἀξίους ἄνδρας τήν τ' ἀρετὴν ἄφθονον ποιεῖν καὶ πολύχουν τοῖς γένεσι, καὶ τὴν πόλιν αὐτὴν πρὸς αὑτὴν ἀνακεραννύναι ταῖς οἰκειότησιν. εἰ δὲ πάντως περιέχοιτο τῆς γυναικὸς ὁ Βύβλος, ἀποδώσειν εὐθὺς τεκοῦσαν, οἰκειότερος αὐτῷ τε Βύβλῳ καὶ Κάτωνι κοινωνίᾳ παίδων γενόμενος. ἀποκριναμένου δὲ τοῦ Κάτωνος, ὡς Ὀρτήσιον μὲν ἀγαπᾷ καὶ δοκιμάζει κοινωνὸν οἰκειότητος, ἄτοπον δ' ἡγεῖται ποιεῖσθαι λόγον περὶ γάμου θυγατρὸς ἑτέρῳ δεδομένης, μεταβαλὼν ἐκεῖνος οὐκ ὤκνησεν ἀποκαλυψάμενος αἰτεῖν τὴν αὐτοῦ γυναῖκα Κάτωνος, νέαν μὲν οὖσαν ἔτι πρὸς τὸ τίκτειν, ἔχοντος δὲ τοῦ Κάτωνος ἀποχρῶσαν διαδοχήν. καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν εἰπεῖν ὡς ταῦτ' ἔπραττεν εἰδὼς οὐ προσέχοντα τῇ Μαρκίᾳ τὸν Κάτωνα·κύουσαν γὰρ αὐτὴν τότε τυγχάνειν λέγουσιν. ὁ δ' οὖν Κάτων ὁρῶν τὴν τοῦ Ὀρτησίου σπουδὴν καὶ προθυμίαν, οὐκ ἀντεῖπεν, ἀλλ' ἔφη δεῖν καὶ Φιλίππῳ ταῦτα συνδόξαι τῷ πατρὶ τῆς Μαρκίας. ὡς οὖν ὁ Φίλιππος ἐντευχθεὶς ἔγνω τὴν συγχώρησιν, οὐκ ἄλλως ἐνεγγύησε τὴν Μαρκίαν ἢ παρόντος τοῦ Κάτωνος αὐτοῦ καὶ συνεγγυῶντος. See also Luc. 2.327-391.

25 Plut. *Cat. Min.* 7 and 24.

26 Plut. *Cat. Min.* 24 and *Luc.* 2.387.

27 On Hortensius and Marcia's descendants see Geiger 1970: 132-134; Corbier 1991: 655-701; Corbier 1992: 871-916, esp. 915 who attributes a child to the couple, Marcius Hortalus, adopted by his grandfather Lucius Marcius Philippus, consul in 56 BCE, or by the homonymous maternal uncle, consul in 38 BCE.

28 Luc. 2.327-391. This marriage would have been sterile.

own wife.[29] Plutarch's other source, Cato's friend Thrasea Paetus,[30] believed Julius Caesar's interpretation to be malicious. Instead, he believed Marcia had returned to Cato so that she may care for the children while Cato was busy defending Pompey's cause. His interpretation firmly places the matron at the heart of the traditional values attributed to the female role in Roman society.[31] It would appear that public opinion was split over the episode, and it is interesting to note how in Plutarch's testimony the matter of contention was not the husband's concession of his own wife, but Cato's ulterior motive, made all the more manifest after Marcia's return.

At the time of her marriage to Hortensius, Marcia was already expecting a son from Cato.[32] This realisation did not cause dismay, for marrying a woman pregnant from her former husband was a common practice in the Late Republic. For instance, in 82-81 BCE at the behest of her stepfather, Aemilia Scaura divorced Manius Acilius Glabrio and married Pompey (who had repudiated Antistia).[33] On her wedding day Aemilia Scaura was already pregnant with Glabrio's child, but she died of childbirth soon after her marriage with Pompey. Despite the tragedy, Pompey had successfully forged valuable family ties with the Caecilii Metelli through Aemilia Scaura, although he could not benefit from the family links that the unborn heir would have secured. After Aemilia Scaura's death, Pompey wedded Mucia Tertia, who was also from the Caecilii Metelli family.

When Octavia, Octavian's sister, married Mark Antony in 40 BCE, she too was expecting a child from her former husband, Gaius Claudius Marcellus.[34] The marriage between Octavia and Mark Antony rekindled the alliance between the two triumvirs: the pact they had formed while fighting Caesar's assassins had recently been put under strain. Mark Antony's wife Fulvia and his brother Lucius Antonius had waged war against Octavian while

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29 Plut. *Cat. Min.* 52. On Cato's greed employed by Caesar see Zecchini 1979: 78-87, esp. 82; Zecchini 1980: 39-56, esp. 41.

30 On Trasea, who read the story of Hortensius, Marcia and Cato in Munatius Rufus' writings and was an admirer of Marcus Brutus and was the source of Plutarch' report, see Geiger 1979: 48-72, esp. 49; 60-61: he also supposes that Munatius mediated between Cato and Hortensius (pp. 50 and 53). On Munatius Rufus in Cyprus with Cato see Calvelli 2020: 229-242. On Munatius see Plut. *Cat. Min.* 37.1.

31 Plut. *Cat. Min.* 25 and 52.

32 Luc. 2.331; Plut. *Cat. Min.* 25.

33 Plut. *Pomp.* 9; *Sull.* 33.

34 Plut. *Ant.* 31; Dio Cass. 48.31.

Mark Antony was in the East, as they opposed the allocation of confiscated land to Octavian and Antony's victorious troops after the battle of Philippi in 42 BCE. The two triumvirs met at Brundisium in 40 BCE and reached an understanding – albeit a temporary one. Octavia's current pregnancy did not prevent the new marriage; on the contrary, the birth of a son, Octavian's nephew, who would be raised in the house of Octavia's new husband Mark Antony, would have further consolidated the alliance.

Another example of pregnancies acting as incentives for new marriages took place in 39 BCE when Livia Drusilla, pregnant with child from Tiberius Claudius Nero (the father of the future emperor Tiberius), married Octavian on her former husband's request.[35] Livia Drusilla was the daughter and wife of conservative representatives who opposed Caesar's heir. Livia Drusilla's father, Marcus Livius Drusus Claudianus, had taken his own life after fighting Octavian and Mark Antony in Philippi, while her husband, Tiberius Claudius Nero, had fled after being proscribed. Her new marriage, arranged by Octavian and Nero, would heal the contrasts between the two political factions and promote Octavian's leadership among noble pro-republicans.[36] Octavian, born into an equestrian family from Velitrae, would now be joined in matrimony to an exponent of the distinguished Roman families of the Livii and the Claudii. Furthermore, the marriage would secure a political future under Octavian's protection for Nero and the members of his faction.[37] Instead of hindering the marriage, Livia Drusilla's pregnancy provided another motive: the new-born child would join his brother Tiberius, three years his senior and son of a conservative leader, to be raised in the paternal home. Octavian would have become his guardian in the event of his father's death, which indeed occurred a short time after. In this way, the conservative aristocracy placed its own young representative in the centre of Rome's political power.

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35 *IIt* 13.2.22; Vell. Pat. 2.75; 94; Suet. *Aug.* 62; *Tib.* 4; *Claud.* 1; Tac. *Ann.* 1.10; 5.1; 12.6.2; Dio Cass. 48.15; 34; 43-44; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 1.23. Cato and Marcia's story provided an advantageous precedent for Octavian's marriage to Livia: see Rohr Vio 2016a: 53-65. On Livia Drusilla see, for exemple, Barrett 2002 ed. 2006; Kunst 2008; Cenerini 2009a: 9-24.

36 In this book, the term faction is used to identify groups that are protagonists of the political dialectic of this historical period; they are not structured parties, nor officialised alliances, but groups that change through time according to personal interests of their components. See Pina Polo 2020: 13-15.

37 Suet. *Tib*. 4; Dio Cass. 48.44.

These episodes jointly illustrate how a husband's concession of his pregnant wife to a potential political ally served the contingent objective of establishing family ties between the spouses' *gentes*. They also show how this practice strengthened family bonds well into future generations: the couple's children shared the blood of the first husband and the mother, and be raised by the second spouse's family.

Under such circumstances, the status acquired by procreation would seem to justify its pre-eminence within the model of female behaviour (well attested in funerary epitaphs), and at the same time clarify how sterility was considered legitimate grounds for a husband to repudiate his wife. Sterility was a condition blamed exclusively on the woman: the first to achieve a dissolution of marriage because of his wife's alleged sterility was consul Spurius Carvilius Ruga. Sources variably place this episode between the 7th and the 3rd century BCE, but regardless of the exact chronology, it set an important precedent.[38] Sulla also used his wife's sterility as an excuse to dismiss Cloelia, his third wife, and marry Caecilia Metella Dalmatica in 89 BCE, who undoubtedly secured him valuable family ties. She was in fact the daughter of the *pontifex* Lucius Caecilius Metellus Dalmaticus, and her family were supporters of Sulla's political program.[39]

Divorces, which were typically consensual, one-sided repudiations (a solely male initiative) and widowhood could also have political repercussions, for they broke off established family ties. For instance, upon his return from the successful campaigns in the East against Mithridates of Pontus, Pompey needed to redefine his political alliances after his long absence from Rome. In 62-61 BCE Pompey divorced Mucia Tertia,[40] whom he had married in 80-79 BCE after Aemilia Scaura. The marriage to Aemilia Scaura had been largely orchestrated by Sulla, who wished to establish a political alliance between Pompey and the conservative *gens* of the Caecilii Metelli. Pompey, a *parvernu* from Picenum, was to marry into a family which held sway over the senate

38 Dion. Hal. 2.25.7; Val. Max. 2.1.4; Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 14.267c; *Comp. Thes. et Rom.* 4.4; *Comp. Lyc. et Num.* 3.13; Gell. *NA* 4.3.1 and 17.21.44; Tert. *Apol.* 6; *De monog.* 9. See Mastrorosa 2016: 65-87.

39 Plut. *Sull.* 6.

40 Plut. *Pomp.* 42. Cf. Cic. *Att.* 1.12; Mart. 11.20 (he alludes to the many lovers of a certain Mecilla linked to Pompey, who perhaps is identified with Mucia); Suet. *Iul.* 50; Jer. *Adv. Iovinian.* 1.48; Zonar. 10.5. See Haley 1985: 49-59, esp. 50-53 and Dingmann 2007: 82-84. Pompey and Mucia had three children: Gnaeus, Sextus and Pompeia.

(and which was doubtlessly also keen on linking itself to one of the most promising generals of his time). Sulla himself had benefited greatly from his links to the Caecilii Metelli since his marriage to Caecilia Metella Dalmatica in 89 BCE:[41] his new wife's family had secured his command of the First Mithridatic War.

Pompey also reaped the benefits of his new family ties: despite lacking the requisites in age and status, he celebrated his first triumph after a successful campaign in Africa in 81 BCE. Aemilia Scaura's premature death in no way undermined the new family alliance, which was cemented by Pompey's subsequent marriage to Mucia Tertia. She was the sister of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Nepos and Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer. The three siblings shared a mother, but were born to different fathers: Licinia's first husband Quintus Caecilius Metellus Nepos was the father of Nepos and Celer; her second husband Quintus Metellus Scaevola Pontifex was Mucia Tertia's father.[42] However, the Metelli's policy progressively distanced itself from the new brother-in-law starting in 67 BCE. The change of heart was pursuant to Pompey's treatment of their relative Lucius Licinius Lucullus, who had been deprived of the command of the Mithridatic War and his triumph.[43] Pompey has successfully secured for himself extra-constitutional position thanks to the *Lex Gabinia* of 67 BCE, which granted him extraordinary proconsular powers to fight pirates and put him in charge of military operations in Crete – an action strongly contested by Quintus Caecilius Metellus Creticus.[44] The heightened family tensions led to Metelli to join in the accusations during the legal proceedings against Gaius Cornelius and Gaius Manilius in 67 and 66 BCE, both supporters of Pompey. In the same years, Metellus Creticus gave his daughter in marriage to Marcus Licinius Crassus, the homonymous son of the future triumvir, perhaps the richest man in Rome – however, he was not a friend of Pompey.

It was at this time that Pompey fell under the influence of Julius Caesar. It was probably following an arrangement between the two that Pompey repudiated his wife Mucia Tertia,[45] on the grounds that she was having an

41 Plut. *Sull.* 6. On the relationships between Sulla and the Caecilii Metelli see Schietinger 2013: 207-227.

42 On the kinship between Mucia and Metelli see Cic. *Fam.* 5.2.6; Dio Cass. 37.49.

43 Keaveney 1992: 141-142.

44 Fezzi 2019: 63-70.

45 See above.

affair with the future governor of Gallia. Pompey had known of the adultery for quite some time, but only now did he decide to take action against his wife, and shortly afterwards in 59 BCE married Caesar's daughter, Julia. This marriage was meant to strengthen the triumvirs' alliance, and Pompey hoped it would ensure his leadership over the Roman *res publica*.[46] The political importance of this new union was mentioned by Plutarch, commenting on Julia's premature death: "For the city became at once a tossing sea, and everywhere surging tumult and discordant speeches prevailed, since the marriage alliance which had hitherto veiled rather than restrained the ambition of the two men was now at an end."[47]

Resorting to divorces remained a popular solution within the redefinition of political agreements in the following decades. Immediately after the birth of his daughter Julia in 39 BCE, Octavian repudiated his second wife, Scribonia, and subsequently married Livia Drusilla on 17 January 38 BCE.[48] The end of this marriage was formally attributed to the woman's licentiousness;[49] in truth, the divorce was the enactment of a specific change in Octavian's policy, as in the case of his precedent divorce. In 42 BCE he had married Claudia to strengthen his alliance with Mark Antony, her stepfather.[50] But between 41 and 40 BCE, Octavian had fought with Lucius Antonius (Mark Antony's brother and consul at the time) and Fulvia (Antony's wife and Claudia's mother) over the handling of land distribution to the veterans of the battle of Philippi. Octavian won the war in Perusia.

At this point Octavian preferred to strike up a new alliance with Sextus Pompeius.[51] Scribonia was Lucius Scribonius Libo's sister,[52] who in turn was

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46 Plut. *Pomp*. 47 describes the influence of Julius Caesar on Pompey with regards to this marriage.

47 Plut. *Pomp.* 53: εὐθὺς γὰρ ἐκύμαινεν ἡ πόλις, καὶ πάντα τὰ πράγματα σάλον εἶχε καὶ λόγους διαστατικούς, ὡς ἡ πρότερον παρακαλύπτουσα μᾶλλον ἢ κατείργουσα τῶν ἀνδρῶν τὴν φιλαρχίαν οἰκειότης ἀνῄρηται.

48 Suet. *Aug.* 62; 63 and 69; Dio Cass. 48.34; Aur. Vict. 1.23. Tac. *Ann.* 2.27 also names Scribonia "Augustus' wife". Vell. 2.100 affirms that the woman voluntarily followed her daughter in exile in 2 BCE.

49 See Suet. *Aug.* 62. Sen. *Ep.* 70.10 names Scribonia "*gravis femina*".

50 Suet. *Aug.* 62.

51 On the influence of Scribonia's marriage on Octavian's approach to Sextus Pompeius see Scheid 1975: 349-375 and Scheid 1976: 485-491; Canas 2009: 183-210.

52 Dio Cass. 48.16 (and Zonar. 11.14) and App. *B Civ*. 5.222; *contra* Suet. *Gram. et rhet.* 19 believes that she was Libo's daughter. The matron was the daughter of Lucius Scribonius Libo, father of the consul of 34 BCE, and of Saentia: *CIL*, VI 31276.

Sextus Pompeius' brother-in-law.[53] In 45 BCE Sextus Pompeius had taken over his father's legacy after the deaths of Pompey in Egypt and of his elder brother Gnaeus in Hispania. He had brought together a substantial group of republicans and, alternating dialogue with warfare, he posed a dangerous threat to the political strategies of the triumvirs by fighting. In 43 BCE he was proscribed by the triumviri, but took control of Sicily; there, with a fleet commanded by freedmen, he intercepted ships carrying supplies to Rome. Rome was starving, and there were violent demonstrations against Mark Anthony and Octavian who seemed unable to secure the necessary supplies to the city. Sextus' main allies belonged to some of the most prominent members in Roman aristocracy, who were fleeing the city after Marcus Junius Brutus' and Gaius Cassius Longinus' defeat at Philippi in 42 BCE. The triumvirs' alliance was already beginning to show the weaknesses that would eventually lead to the battle of Actium in 31 BCE, as both parties' ambitions clashed for leadership. To strengthen his position, Mark Antony had entered negotiations with Sextus Pompeius; but Octavian forestalled his colleague and married Scribonia, supported by Libo, the woman's guardian: "With these matters on his mind, and having had proposals made to him about many young women he could marry, he wrote to Maecenas to arrange an engagement for him with Scribonia, the sister of Libo, the father-in-law of Pompeius, so that he might have this as the basis for a settlement with Pompeius, if it should prove necessary. When Libo heard of this he wrote to his family telling them to betroth her to Octavian without hesitation."[54]

But the situation was to evolve once more. In 40 BCE Sextus' front was shaken by deep internal turmoil: while the freedmen remained keen on violence, several voices among Sextus' more aristocratic followers called for negotiations with Octavian, in the hope of returning to Rome, reinstating their property and securing themselves attractive positions in politics and military.[55] In 39 BCE at Cape Misenus in the Gulf of Naples, following complex negotiations also conducted by Sextus' mother Mucia Tertia and

53 Scheid 1975: 366.

54 App. *B Civ.* 5.222: ὧν ἐνθυμούμενος (ἐλέλεκτο δὲ αὐτῷ περὶ πολλῶν παρθένων ἐς γάμον) ἐπέστελλε Μαικήνᾳ συνθέσθαι Σκριβωνίᾳ, τῇ Λίβωνος ἀδελφῇ, τοῦ κηδεύοντος Πομπηίῳ, ἵν' ἔχοι καὶ τήνδε ἀφορμὴν ἐς διαλύσεις, εἰ δεήσειεν. καὶ πυθόμενος ὁ Λίβων ἐπέστελλε τοῖς οἰκείοις ἐγγυᾶν αὐτὴν τῷ Καίσαρι προθύμως; see Dio Cass. 48.16. The woman had already had two husbands: Gnaeus Cornelius Lentulus Marcellinus and, probably, Publius Cornelius Scipio Salvito.

55 Vell. Pat. 2.73;77.

Mark Antony's mother Julia, the triumvirs and Sextus reached an agreement:[56] the triumvirs conceded the control of Sicily, Sardinia, the Peloponnese and Corsica to Pompey's son, but forbade any invasion of Italy, which had been in Sextus' sights since 42 BCE.

Then in 38 BCE, the freedman Menodorus, admiral of Sextus' fleet, surrendered Corsica and the Peloponnese to Octavian. That same year, Octavian terminated his marriage with Scribonia and married Livia Drusilla. By so doing, Octavian lastingly upset the fragile balance of power the triumvirs had maintained so far. His actions certainly gave Mark Antony free rein to reach an agreement with Sextus, but Octavian's could now significantly expand his supporter base. By creating new alliances, he had drawn closer the members of the conservative aristocracy who wanted to return to Rome, even those who had originally supported Mark Antony. The families who had once ruled Rome, now reunited under a new flag, would have supported and thereby legitimised Octavian's political ambitions and brought their own personal experience and expertise to the table. This know-how had so far been lacking among Octavian's supporters, who came from municipal families who were not well versed in the management of the republic.

Octavian's divorce from Scribonia was therefore a key piece in a strategic political puzzle, and had nothing to do with personal disagreements between spouses: this is further suggested by the fact that Octavian allowed Scribonia to maintain the name she had acquired from her third marriage and which linked her to the powerful triumvir: *Scribonia Caesaris* is the name appearing in the epigraphic documentation.[57]

1.2. Promoters of marriage ties and divorces

Betrothals, marriages, repudiations and divorces have traditionally been part of Roman politics. Roman law dictated that it was the *pater familias*' prerogative to determine the timings, arrangements and partners for his children's marriages. Were he to have already passed away, his male firstborn, once legally independent (*sui iuris*) could act of his own accord, whilst his sisters remained under the authority of an appointed guardian. Despite the gradual weakening of guardians' influence over their wards' marriage arrangements

56 See *infra*.
57 *CIL*, VI 7467; 26032; 26033; 31276; see Linderski 1988: 181-200.

over the course of the second half of the 2nd century BCE, women still played the role of necessary – albeit passive – actors in the nuptial arrangements. In the Late Republic, however, it appears that in certain circumstances some matrons were able to interfere in the decisions concerning the marriages of their female relatives, and are attested refusing their own marriage proposals, arranging the marriages of their children and grandchildren, and even having a say in the choice of their husband. These women's initiatives were also to have repercussions on Rome's political life.[58]

According to Livy,[59] during a banquet held by senators on the Capitoline Hill, Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus planned the marriage between his opponent Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus and his daughter Cornelia the Younger. Once he had returned home, he informed his wife Aemilia of his decision; the latter strongly objected to having been excluded from a matter concerning their daughter. Plutarch, aware of the existence of two different versions of this incident, reports another story. It was Appius Claudius Pulcher who arranged the marriage during a banquet held by the priests of Rome. The marriage was between Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus and Cornelia's son (the notorious tribune in 133 BCE who carried his father's same name) and Claudia. Once home, Appius Claudius Pulcher was reproached by his wife Antistia, who was unaware of the future groom's identity and had declared herself in favour of their daughter's marriage only if it was to Gracchus.[60] Whoever the real protagonists might have been in this narrative, the event shows us that women from upper class families in the 2nd century BCE were entitled to call out their husbands if their wishes concerning their daughters' marriages were ignored. Both parents appear therefore to have been granted equal say in their children's marriages – at least, of those of their daughters.

During the Late Republic, women's role as wives was once again transformed. The change in mindset can be detected in a speech delivered by Porcia, daughter of Porcius Cato and wife of Marcus Brutus, which is recorded by Plutarch.[61] In 44 BCE, in the run-up to Julius Caesar's assassination, Porcia noticed her husband's anxiety (despite being unaware of the conspirator's

58 On the matrons' control over one's own marriage or of one's own relatives see Rawson 1991: 31-98; Dixon 1992: 50; Urbanik 2016: 473-486.

59 Livy 38.57. Cf. Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 1.49.91; Val. Max. 4.2.3; Gell. *NA* 12.8; Dio Cass. 19 fr. 65.1.

60 Plut. *Tib.* 4.

61 On Porcia see Cenerini 2012: 101-120; Pérez López 2016: 237-250.

plans), and urged him to confide in her: "Now Brutus, since he had made the foremost men of Rome for dignity, family, and virtue, dependent on himself, and since he understood all the danger involved, in public tried to keep his thoughts to himself and under control; but at home, and at night, he was not the same man. Sometimes, in spite of himself, his anxious thoughts would rouse him out of sleep, and sometimes, when he was more than ever immersed in calculation and beset with perplexities, his wife, who slept by his side, perceived that he was full of unwonted trouble, and was revolving in his mind some difficult and complicated plan. Porcia, as has been said, was a daughter of Cato, and when Brutus, who was her cousin, took her to wife, she was not a virgin; she was, however, still very young, and had by her deceased husband a little son whose name was Bibulus. A small book containing memoirs of Brutus was written by him, and is still extant. Porcia, being of an affectionate nature, fond of her husband, and full of sensible pride, did not try to question her husband about his secrets until she had put herself to the following test. She took a little knife, such as barbers use to cut the finger nails, and after banishing all her attendants from her chamber, made a deep gash in her thigh, so that there was a copious flow of blood, and after a little while violent pains and chills and fever followed from the wound. Seeing that Brutus was disturbed and greatly distressed, in the height of her anguish she spoke to him thus: "Brutus, I am Cato's daughter, and I was brought into thy house, not, like a mere concubine, to share thy bed and board merely, but to be a partner in thy joys, and a partner in thy troubles. You, indeed, art faultless as a husband; but how can I show thee any grateful service if I am to share neither thy secret suffering nor the anxiety which craves a loyal confidant? I know that woman's nature is thought too weak to endure a secret; but good rearing and excellent companionship go far towards strengthening the character, and it is my happy lot to be both the daughter of Cato and the wife of Brutus. Before this I put less confidence in these advantages, but now I know that I am superior even to pain." Thus having spoken, she showed him her wound and explained her test; whereupon Brutus, amazed, and lifting his hands to heaven, prayed that he might succeed in his undertaking and thus show himself a worthy husband of Porcia. Then he sought to restore his wife."[62]

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62 See Plut. *Brut.* 13: Ὁ δὲ Βροῦτος, ἅτε δὴ τὰ πρῶτα τῆς Ῥώμης φρονήματα καὶ γένη καὶ ἀρετὰς ἐξηρτημένος ἑαυτοῦ καὶ περινοῶν πάντα τὸν κίνδυνον, ἔξω μὲν ἐπειρᾶτο κατέχειν παρ' ἑαυτῷ καὶ κατακοσμεῖν τὴν διάνοιαν, οἴκοι δὲ καὶ νύκτωρ οὐκ ἦν ὁ αὐτός, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ἄκοντα τῶν ὕπνων αὐτὸν ἡ φροντὶς ἐξέφερε, τὰ δὲ μᾶλλον ἐνδυόμενος τῷ λογισμῷ καὶ

Porcia's request was supported by two arguments. Firstly, she boasted her descent from Porcius Cato, who had shown rigour, courage and coherence once Julius Caesar's rule was established by taking his own life when faced with the fall of the Republic he had always defended. The reference is of particular significance in light of the reaction to Porcia and Marcus Brutus' wedding in the summer of 45 BCE. We know from Cicero's *Letters* that Servilia, Marcus Brutus' mother, deeply disapproved of this match,[63] and that the conservatives had met with concern the news of Marcus Brutus breaking off his previous marriage (and thereby his alliance) with the Appii Claudii, his former wife's family.[64] However, the new marriage had guaranteed Marcus Brutus a further correction to Porcius Cato, who was not only his uncle, but would then (posthumously) become his father-in-law. The union with Porcia might have reassured those who feared that Marcus Brutus would draw closer to Julius Caesar thanks to Servilia's intervention. But Porcia's words hint to a different objective: by supporting an aristocratic mentality which assured

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<ἐν>διατρίβων [ἐν] ταῖς ἀπορίαις, οὐκ ἐλάνθανε τὴν γυναῖκα συναναπαυομένην, ὅτι μεστός ἐστι ταραχῆς ἀήθους καὶ κυκλεῖ τι παρ' ἑαυτῷ δύσφορον βούλευμα καὶ δυσεξέλικτον. ἡ δὲ Πορκία θυγάτηρ μὲν ὥσπερ εἴρηται Κάτωνος ἦν, εἶχε δ' αὐτὴν ὁ Βροῦτος ἀνεψιὸς ὢν οὐκ ἐκ παρθενίας, ἀλλὰ τοῦ προτέρου τελευτήσαντος ἀνδρὸς ἔλαβε, κόρην οὖσαν ἔτι καὶ παιδίον ἔχουσαν ἐξ ἐκείνου μικρόν, ᾧ Βύβλος ἦν ὄνομα, καί τι βιβλίδιον μικρὸν ἀπομνημονευμάτων Βρούτου γεγραμμένον ὑπ' αὐτοῦ διασῴζεται. φιλόστοργος δ' ἡ Πορκία καὶ φίλανδρος οὖσα καὶ μεστὴ φρονήματος νοῦν ἔχοντος, οὐ πρότερον ἐπεχείρησεν ἀνερέσθαι τὸν ἄνδρα περὶ τῶν ἀπορρήτων, ἢ λαβεῖν ἑαυτῆς (τοιαύτην διάπειραν. λαβοῦσα μαχαίριον, ᾧ τοὺς ὄνυχας οἱ κουρεῖς ἀφαιροῦσι, καὶ πάσας ἐξελάσασα τοῦ θαλάμου τὰς ὀπαδούς, τομὴν ἐνέβαλε τῷ μηρῷ βαθεῖαν, ὥστε ῥύσιν αἵματος πολλὴν γενέσθαι καὶ μετὰ μικρὸν ὀδύνας τε νεανικὰς καὶ φρικώδεις πυρετοὺς ἐπιλαβεῖν ἐκ τοῦ τραύματος. ἀγωνιῶντος δὲ τοῦ Βρούτου καὶ δυσφοροῦντος, ἐν ἀκμῇ τῆς ἀλγηδόνος οὖσα διελέχθη πρὸς αὐτὸν οὕτως ἐγὼ Βροῦτε Κάτωνος οὖσα θυγάτηρ εἰς τὸν σὸν ἐδόθην οἶκον οὐχ ὥσπερ αἱ παλλακευόμεναι, κοίτης μεθέξουσα καὶ τραπέζης μόνον, ἀλλὰ κοινωνὸς μὲν ἀγαθῶν εἶναι, κοινωνὸς δ' ἀνιαρῶν. τὰ μὲν οὖν σὰ πάντα περὶ τὸν γάμον ἄμεμπτα·τῶν δὲ παρ' ἐμοῦ τίς ἀπόδειξις ἢ χάρις, εἰ μήτε σοι πάθος ἀπόρρητον συνδιοίσω μήτε φροντίδα πίστεως δεομένην; οἶδ' ὅτι γυναικεία φύσις ἀσθενὴς δοκεῖ λόγον ἐνεγκεῖν ἀπόρρητον·ἀλλ' ἔστι τις ᾧ Βροῦτε καὶ τροφῆς ἀγαθῆς καὶ ὁμιλίας χρηστῆς εἰς ἦθος ἰσχύς· ἐμοὶ δὲ καὶ τὸ Κάτωνος εἶναι θυγατέρα καὶ τὸ Βρούτου γυναῖκα πρόσεστιν· οἷς πρότερον μὲν ἦττον ἐπεποίθειν, νῦν δ' ἐμαυτὴν ἔγνωκα καὶ πρὸς πόνον ἀήττητον εἶναι." ταῦτ' εἰποῦσα δείκνυσιν αὐτῷ τὸ τραῦμα καὶ διηγεῖται τὴν πεῖραν. ὁ δ' ἐκπλαγεὶς καὶ ἀνατείνας τὰς χεῖρας ἐπεύξατο δοῦναι τοὺς θεοὺς αὐτῷ κατορθοῦντι ἀνατείνας τὰς χεῖρας ἐπεύξατο δοῦναι τοὺς θεοὺς αὐτῷ κατορθοῦντι τὴν πρᾶξιν ἀνδρὶ Πορκίας ἀξίῳ φανῆναι. καὶ τότε μὲν ἀνελάμβανε τὴν γυναῖκα. See Val. Max. 3.2.15 and Dio Cass. 44.13-4. On Porcia's speech see Buszard 2010: 83-115, esp. 85-89.

63 Cic. *Att.*13.22. See *infra*.

64 Cic. *Att.* 13.9; 13.10.

that the virtues of a father would be passed on to his male heirs and extended to his female successors, Porcia was claiming her father's moral virtues for herself.[65]

Secondly, Porcia defined the profile of the Roman wife in new terms. Roman matrons were now required not only to care for her family (as exemplified by the reference to the table) and give birth to successors (the reference to the bed), but also share her husband's life in its public and political dimension. The historicity for this speech is of course doubtful, not only because of the temporal distance between the time of the event and Plutarch's writing, not only because of the private setting of the exchange between husband and wife, but also because Porcia's speech portrays her as a republican heroin.

Aemilia (in Livy's version) or Antistia (in Plutarch's) were putting Porcia's words into action, demonstrating the transformed status of women in Roman society during the 2nd century BCE. Other matrons followed suit. In 62 BCE, Atilia and Servilia, respectively Porcius Cato's wife and sister, insisted that he arrange his nieces Junia Prima and Junia Secunda's marriages (in other versions of this story, the girls were his daughters) to Pompey the Great and his son Gnaeus.[66] These events unfolded right after Pompey's return from the victorious eastern campaigns, while he was outside Rome, awaiting permission to celebrate his triumph. Because of this, he could not support the candidacy as consul of his legate Marcus Pupius Piso Frugi, and he requested the elections to be postponed. Porcius Cato opposed this, and according to Plutarch: "Considering that Cato would be a great stumbling-block in his way unless he were made a friend, he sent for Munatius, Cato's companion, and asked the elder of Cato's two marriageable nieces to wife for himself, and the younger for his son. Some say, however, that it was not for Cato's nieces, but for his daughters, that the suit was made. When Munatius brought this proposal to Cato and his wife and sisters, the women were overjoyed at thought of the alliance, in view of the greatness and high repute of Pompey; Cato, however, without pause or deliberation, but stung to the quick, said at once: "Go, Munatius, go, and tell Pompey that Cato is not to be captured by

65 Rohr Vio forthcoming.

66 Servilia, Julius Caesar's lover, Porcia, Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus' wife (Plut. *Cat. Min.* 41), and perhaps Servilia, Licinius Lucullus' wife, who could have been the daughter of Quintus Servilius Caepio, Cato's brother, (Cic. *Fin.* 3.8; Plut. *Luc.* 38; *Cat. Min.* 24; 29; 54) were Porcius Cato's sisters.

way of the women's apartments, although he highly prizes Pompey's good will, and if Pompey does justice will grant him a friendship more to be relied upon than any marriage connection; but he will not give hostages for the glory of Pompey to the detriment of his country." At these words the women were vexed, and Cato's friends blamed his answer as both rude and overbearing. Afterwards, however, in trying to secure the consulship for one of his friends, Pompey sent money to the tribes, and the bribery was notorious, since the sums for it were counted out in his gardens. Accordingly, when Cato told the women that he must of necessity have shared in the disgrace of such transactions, had he been connected with Pompey by marriage, they admitted that he had taken better counsel in rejecting the alliance."[67]

Servilia, however, also endeavoured to be involved in her son Marcus Brutus' marriage, although her efforts were ultimately unsuccessful. He divorced his first wife Claudia, the daughter of Appius Claudius Pulcher (who was consul in 54 BCE Publius Clodius' brother), whom he had married around 52 BCE, and in 45 BCE he wed his cousin Porcia, daughter of Porcius Cato and widowed mother of two children from her first marriage to Marcus Calpurnius Bibulus.[68] Both the divorce from Claudia and the subsequent marriage to Porcia were disagreeable to Servilia, who seems to have opposed to the marriage and then she maintained hostile relations with her daughter-

67 Plut. *Cat. Min.* 30.3-8: αὶ νομίζων οὐ μικρὰ προσπταίσειν τῷ Κάτωνι μὴ φίλῳ γενομένῳ, μετεπέμψατο Μουνάτιον ἑταῖρον αὐτοῦ, καὶ δύο τοῦ Κάτωνος ἀδελφιδᾶς ἐπιγάμους ἔχοντος, ἤτει τὴν μὲν πρεσβυτέραν ἑαυτῷ γυναῖκα, τὴν δὲ νεωτέραν τῷ υἱῷ· τινὲς δέ φασιν οὐ τῶν ἀδελφιδῶν, ἀλλὰ τῶν θυγατέρων τὴν μνηστείαν γενέσθαι. τοῦ δὲ Μουνατίου ταῦτα πρὸς τὸν Κάτωνα καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰς ἀδελφὰς φράσαντος, αἱ μὲν ὑπερηγάπησαν τὴν οἰκειότητα πρὸς τὸ μέγεθος καὶ τὸ ἀξίωμα τοῦ ἀνδρός, ὁ δὲ Κάτων οὔτ' ἐπισχὼν οὔτε βουλευσάμενος, ἀλλὰ † πληγεὶς εὐθὺς εἶπε, βάδιζε Μουνάτιε βάδιζε, καὶ λέγε πρὸς Πομπήϊον, ὡς Κάτων οὐκ ἔστι διὰ τῆς γυναικωνίτιδος ἀλώσιμος, ἀλλὰ τὴν μὲν εὔνοιαν ἀγαπᾷ καὶ τὰ δίκαια ποιοῦντι φιλίαν παρέξει πάσης πιστοτέραν οἰκειότητος, ὅμηρα δ' οὐ προήσεται τῇ Πομπηΐου δόξῃ κατὰ τῆς πατρίδος. ἐπὶ τούτοις ἤχθοντο μὲν αἱ γυναῖκες, ἠτιῶντο δ' οἱ φίλοι τοῦ Κάτωνος ὡς ἄγροικον ἅμα καὶ ὑπερήφανον τὴν ἀπόκρισιν. εἶτα μέντοι πράττων τινὶ τῶν φίλων ὑπατείαν ὁ Πομπήϊος ἀργύριον εἰς τὰς φυλὰς ἔνεμε, καὶ περιβόητος ὁ δεκασμὸς ἦν, ἐν κήποις ἐκείνου τῶν χρημάτων ἀριθμουμένων. εἰπόντος οὖν τοῦ Κάτωνος πρὸς τὰς γυναῖκας, ὅτι τοιούτων ἦν κοινωνεῖν καὶ ἀναπίμπλασθαι πραγμάτων ἀνάγκη Πομπηΐῳ συναφθέντα δι' οἰκειότητος, ὡμολόγουν ἐκεῖναι κάλλιον αὐτὸν βεβουλεῦσθαι διακρουσάμενον; see Plut. *Cat. Min.* 30 and 45: discussing Clodius accusing Cato of opposing Pompey because he had refused to marry his daughter. See. Flacelière 1976 I: 293-302, esp. 296; Hillard 1983: 10-13 and 28, esp. 11.

68 Cic. *Att.* 13.9 (June 17th, 45 BCE) reports the disapproval raised by the divorce among some exponents of the conservative *factio* Marcus Brutus belonged to.

in-law. Cicero says: "It's most tiresome about our friend Brutus, but that's life. The ladies are not behaving very considerately in showing hostility towards each other when he gives both of them their due."[69] The woman's interference is suggested by her attempt to join her son, who had already divorced but probably not yet married, at his residence in Tusculum.[70] We have already examined a case where a matron successfully managed to influence her daughter's marriage, when Caecilia Metella Dalmatica expressed her consent to the wedding of Aemilia Scaura to Pompey in 82 BCE.[71]

Ancient tradition does not only preserve examples of matrons playing an active role in the decisions concerning the marriages of children and grandchildren, but there are also cases when women could autonomously decide to marry, to refuse a marriage proposal, or to rescind their marriage bond. In 80 BCE Valeria, Quintus Hortentius Hortalus' niece, decided to marry Sulla, who had recently lost his wife Caecilia Metella Dalmatica. During a show of gladiators in Circus, Valeria sat beside the dictator and plucked a ribbon from his gown, adding she had claimed the good luck of Sulla the Fortunate. According to Plutarch, the gesture had the desired effect: "Sulla was not displeased at hearing this, nay, it was at once clear that his fancy was tickled, for he secretly sent and asked her name, and inquired about her family and history. Then followed mutual glances, continual turnings of the face to gaze, interchanges of smiles, and at last a formal compact of marriage. All this was perhaps blameless on her part, but Sulla, even though she was ever so chaste and reputable, did not marry her from any chaste and worthy motive; he was led away, like a young man, by looks and languishing airs, through which the most disgraceful and shameless passions are naturally excited."[72]

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69 Cic. *Att.* 13.22.4 (July 4th, 45 BCE): *de Bruto nostro perodiosum, sed vita fert. mulieres autem vix satis humane quae inimico animo ferant, cum <in> utraque officio pareat*.

70 Cicero asks if the matron has reached Tusculum: Cic. *Att.* 13.11 (June 22nd, 45 BCE) and 13.16 (June 26th, 45 BCE).

71 Plut., *Pomp.* 9. Cf. Plut. *Sull.* 33: in this source), however, the role of women is not emphasized.

72 Plut. *Sull.* 35: τοῦτο ἤκουσεν οὐκ ἀηδῶς ὁ Σύλλας, ἀλλὰ καὶ δῆλος εὐθὺς ἦν ὑποκεκνισμένος· ἠρώτα γὰρ ὑποπέμπων αὐτῆς ὄνομα, καὶ γένος καὶ βίον ἐμάνθανεν. ἐκ δὲ τούτων ῥίψεις ὀμμάτων ἐπ' ἀλλήλους ἐγίνοντο καὶ παρεπιστροφαὶ συνεχεῖς προσώπων καὶ μειδιαμάτων διαδόσεις, τέλος δὲ ὁμολογίαι καὶ συνθέσεις περὶ γάμων, ἐκείνῃ μὲν ἴσως ἄμεμπτοι, Σύλλας δέ, εἰ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα σώφρονα καὶ γενναίαν, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐκ σώφρονος καὶ καλῆς ἔγημεν ἀρχῆς, ὄψει καὶ λαμυρίᾳ μειρακίου δίκην παραβληθείς, ὑφ' ὧν τὰ αἴσχιστα καὶ ἀναιδέστατα πάθη κινεῖσθαι πέφυκεν. Valeria was Hortensia's daughter: Keaveney 1982 ed. 2005: 166.

Valeria had been divorced for some time and was in charge of her own estate.

A new demonstration of the newly-won independence of some matrons took place in 50 BCE, once again to compensate the absence of the man who, if present, would have overseen the family's marriage strategies. While in Cilicia as a proconsul, Cicero had instructed his friend Titus Pomponius Atticus to investigate on his behalf the possibility of a new marriage for his daughter Tullia. In 57 BCE she had lost her husband Gaius Calpurnius Piso Frugi and in 51 BCE she had divorced her second husband, Furius Crassipes.[73] Tiberius Claudius Nero had been recommended as a possible candidate, and the idea was welcomed by Cicero. Nero would go on to become Livia Drusilla's husband and father of the future emperor Tiberius.[74] Tullia, however, had rejected the suitor, and was supported by her mother Terentia, preferring to marry Publius Cornelius Dolabella. It is Cicero himself who tells us of this episode in his letters to Atticus: "Here am I in my province paying Appius all manner of compliments, when out of the blue I find his prosecutor becoming my son-in-law! "Good luck to that" say you. So I hope and I am sure you so desire. But believe me it was the last thing I expected. I had actually sent reliable persons to the ladies in connexion with Ti. Nero, who had treated with me. They got to Rome after the fiançailles. However I hope this is better. The ladies are evidently quite charmed with the young man's attentiveness and engaging manners."[75]

The marriage, however, proved unhappy and resulted in a new divorce for Tullia;[76] but the woman and her mother had the ability to impose and enforce her will. Cicero's *Letters* report on other matrons who suggested suitors for Tullia: a certain Pontidia had supported a candidate perhaps to be identified as Marcus Pontidius from Arpinum, and Servilia had advocated the choice

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73 On Piso see Cic. *Att.* 1.3; 2.24; *Q fr.* 1.4; *Fam.* 14.3; *Cat.* 4.3. On Crassipes see Cic. *Q fr.* 2.4; 2.6.1; *Fam.* 1.7; 1.9; *Att.* 4.5. See Späth 2010: 147-172, esp. 157-165 and Mastrorosa 2016: 78.

74 Cic. *Fam.* 13.64.

75 Cic. *Att.* 6.6.1: *Ego dum in provincia omnibus rebus Appium orno, subito sum factus accusatoris eius socer. "id quidem" inquis "di approbent!" ita velim, teque ita cupere certo scio. sed crede mihi, nihil minus putaram ego, qui de Ti. Nerone, qui mecum egerat, certos homines ad mulieres miseram; qui Romam venerunt factis sponsalibus. sed hoc spero melius. mulieres quidem valde intellego delectari obsequio et comitate adulescentis.*

76 Cic. *Att.* 11.23 reports the relationship of his son-in-law with Caecilia Metella, Publius Cornelius Lentulus Sphinter's wife.

of Servius Sulpicius, the son of the lawyer Servius Sulpicius Rufus.[77] Thus, by choosing Cicero's daughter's third husband, Tullia, Terentia, Pontidia and Servilia seem to have played a far more active role than Atticus, whom had been charged with the matter, and that Cicero himself, whom as the father was by law in charge of the decision.

Both the acceptance and the refusal of marriage were sometimes decided by matrons. In 46 BCE Cornificia, the sister of the poet and politician Quintus Cornificius, who was no longer young and had already married several times, rejected Juventius Talna's marriage proposal: both she and her mother thought that the suitor's fortune, which did not exceed eighty hundred thousand *sestertii*, was not adequate.[78]

During the Late Republic, divorces, which were usually the result of a husband's initiative or the decision of the wife's father, in some cases were also the result of a matron's choice.[79] Caerellia, perhaps a maternal aunt to Cicero's wife Publilia, was probably solicited by Publilia's relatives to intercede with Cicero, her friend. Caerellia was to deter him from divorcing Publilia, an orphan whose brother Publilius was quite young, or perhaps to obtain advantageous conditions for the return of the dowry. While Publilius interceded with Cicero's friend Atticus, Caerellia, was to mediate with Cicero.[80] Publilia's own mother also played a role in the divorce negotiations, perhaps pursuant to the death of the *pater familia*, discussing the terms with her son Publilius and travelling with him to meet her son-in-law.[81]

In a letter to Cicero at the end of February 50 BCE, Marcus Caelius Rufus tells us that Fabia had decided to divorce Dolabella, who was involved in a court case against Appius Claudius Pulcher: "It comes to my mind that between the preliminary application and the laying of the charge Dolabella's wife left him."[82]

In the same year, another matron seems to have taken the initiative and responsibility for the dissolution of her marriage. In the April of 50 BCE, Polla Valeria left her husband, whose name is unknown and who was coming

77 Cic. *Att.* 5.4; 5.21.
78 Cic. *Att.* 13.28; 13.21a.
79 See McDonnell 1983: 54-80, esp. 70; Treggiari 1991: 444; Di Bella 2012: 57.
80 Cic. *Att.* 14.19; 15.1.
81 Cic. *Att.* 12.32.
82 Cic. *Fam.* 8.6.1: *Illud mihi occurrit, quod inter postulationem et nominis delationem uxor a Dolabella discessit*; see Quint. *Inst.* 6.3.73. See Rohr Vio 2006: 105-119, esp. 112 n. 53.

back to Rome from an unspecified province, and married Decimus Junius Brutus Albinus. Caelius once again reports to Cicero in April 50 BCE: "Polla Valeria, Triarius' sister, divorced her husband for no reason the day he was due to get back from his province. She is to marry D. Brutus. Her husband had not yet got back".[83] The matron seems to have belonged to a family which joined the senatorial ranks only in the last generation; Polla, the daughter of Gaius Valerius Triarius and Flaminia, was apparently the sister of Publius and Gaius Valerius Triarius.[84] Both the friendship with Cicero and Marcus Junius Brutus and, above all, his position in the civil war, which led him to his death in 45 BCE in Africa, suggest that Triarius had joined Pompey's side.

On the other hand, only four years earlier, Publius, her brother, had accused Marcus Aemilius Scaurus. Scaurus was a close friend of Pompey's, and he had married Pompey's former wife, Mucia Tertia. The two brothers therefore did not have a shared political affiliation in the shadow of Pompey and so they did not advise against the marriage of Polla Valeria to Decimus Brutus, a faithful follower of Julius Caesar until the Ides of March. Decimus Brutus had been one of Caesar's closest collaborators in Gallia and during the civil war: as a result, he had been named prefect in 45 BCE, included as one of the dictator's secondary heirs, chosen by the dictator for the proconsulate of Gallia Cisalpina in 44 BCE and destined for the consulate for the year 42 BCE. He was still married in January 43 BCE: the matron then went to Cicero to receive a letter to be forwarded to her husband, were he to have any communications while he was in the province.[85]

It is in these decades that a widow's choice not to remarry also appears to have been sometimes the result of a female decision. Despite the increasing frequency of divorces in the late Republican age, mostly owing to political needs, the choice to have only one husband over a lifetime was a defining feature of women's biography, because the traditional model included *univiratus* among the canonical virtues of the *matrona optima*. Valerius Maximus notes: "Women who had been content with a single marriage used to be honoured with a crown of chastity. For they thought that the mind of a married woman was particularly loyal and uncorrupted if it knew not how to

83 Cic. *Fam*. 8.7.2: *Polla Valeria, soror Triarii, divortium sine causa, quo die vir e provincia venturus erat, fecit: nuptura est D. Bruto; nondum ** rettuleras.*

84 Caes. *BCiv.* 3.92.2; Cic. *Brut.* 265-266. Gregori 2016: 109-120 identifies a zither player whose sepulchral inscription we know as a slave of the matron (*CIL*, VI 11583).

85 Cic. *Fam.* 11.8.1. See below.

leave the bed on which she had surrendered her virginity, believing that trial of many marriages was as it were the sign of a legalized incontinence."[86]

It is this moral quality that justifies the historiographic portrait of certain matrons who remarried several times: the memory of their previous husbands was sometimes forgotten, and the widowed or divorced women were remembered as monogamous by sources that are distant in time from the historical events. Thus, for example, Saint Jerome, who is usually historically well-informed but committed to promoting those aspects of classical culture which were compatible with Christian ethics, mentions Porcia as the virgin bride of Marcus Junius Brutus, omitting any reference to her former husband Calpurnius Bibulus, who was also a distinguished politician in his time.[87]

Cornelia instead chose the life of *matrona univira*. Once widowed by Tiberius Sempronius Graccus in 154 BCE, this matron received a marriage proposal from the king of Egypt, Ptolemy VIII Euergetes, nicknamed 'Physcon'.[88] A link with a woman of the powerful Scipio family and linked to the clan of the Sempronii Gracchi through her marriage and, after her husband's disappearance, through her children, would have secured Ptolemy with a privileged relationship with Roman nobility and undeniable advantages in his government strategy. However, Cornelia rejected the proposal. The status of widow, which she maintained throughout her life, assured Cornelia's portrayal as the exemplary *matrona univira*. Most importantly, this choice guaranteed her autonomy of action, which she would certainly have had to relinquish as Ptolemy's wife. Cornelia, in line with the conduct of her mother Aemilia who had not remarried after the death of Scipio, thus expressing a clear commitment to tradition, expressed a deliberate desire to secure legal and economic freedom for herself without linking herself to a new husband. Similarly, in 42 BCE Junia Tertia, Gaius Cassius Longinus' widow, did not remarry until her death in 22 CE. The matron, the youngest daughter of Servilia and Decimus Junius Silanus, was very rich, probably managing her assets independently.[89]

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86 Val. Max. 2.1.3: *Quae uno contentae matrimonio fuerant corona pudicitiae honorabantur: existimabant enim eum praecipue matronae sincera fide incorruptum esse animum, qui depositae uirginitatis cubile [in publicum] egredi nesciret, multorum matrimoniorum experientiam quasi legitimae cuiusdam intemperantiae signum esse credentes*.

87 Jer. *Adv. Iovinian*. 1.46.

88 Dixon 2007: 7-8.

89 Tac. *Ann*. 3.76.

On some occasions, some matrons were even suspected of assassinating their husbands in order to be able to interfere independently in politics. This was the case of Sempronia, daughter of Cornelia, who was suspected of poisoning her husband Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus in 129 BCE, who had destroyed Carthage in 146 BCE.[90] Scipio had led the retaliation against Tiberius Graccus' measures, and on the day of his death he was due to repeal his brother-in-law's legislation. The accusation of using poison was part of the canonical accusations made to delegitimise women, as shown by the trials held between the 4th and the 2nd century BCE.[91] Women were, moreover, the depositories of officinal knowledge, which passed on from generation to generation; competence in the use of natural therapies with a pharmacological function was sometimes imperfect, leading also to fatal effects on patients. In 59 BCE, some blamed the death of Quintus Caecilius Metellus on his wife, Clodia.[92] The husband, who had been for some time a supporter of the woman's brother Publius Clodius, had recently distanced himself from him.[93]

Despite their role as necessary albeit passive actors in betrothals, marriages, divorces and repudiations throughout the monarchy, the early and mid-Republic, Roman women actively interfered in Rome's politics. In the Late Republic women were increasingly involved in the initiatives and decisions of their husbands, brothers and sons. While operating from between the walls of their homes, the impact of their actions were transformative, and against the models of their ancestors, which excluded women from the political scene. The *matrona optima*'s primary commitment had been loom weaving, and some matrons of the Late Republic appropriated the symbolic value of this obligation, weaving relationships between families and factions as they did with the wool yarns. The impact of these newly created links upon family life placed their sponsors at the heart of tradition; however, their important political implications of these matrons' actions were in clear violation of the *mos maiorum*.

90 Vell. Pat. 2.4; App. *B Civ.* 1.83.
91 Cavaggioni 2004: 53-83.
92 Cic. *Att.* 2.1. Skinner 2011: 65.
93 Cic. *Att.* 1.18.