

GLORIA MVLIBRIS

Elite female status competition in Mid-Republican Rome

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ABSTRACT

Title: *Gloria muliebris*: Elite female status competition in Mid-Republican Rome

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Elite status competition permeated mid-Republican Rome (264–133 BCE). Struggles for superiority in status among the senatorial elite catalysed social growth and conflict in the *res publica*: competition and the desire for glory suffused elite society. Such competition was fostered by the ascendancy of the patrician and plebeian senatorial elite in the late fourth through early third centuries. This competition occurred during a period of increasing status differentiation between senatorial and non-senatorial equestrians and was funded by an influx of resources from warfare, trade, and agriculture in the third and second centuries. Prior studies have focused almost exclusively on status competition among elite men, illustrating its domains, its resources, and the often-ineffective legislative and censorial regulation thereof. By contrast, in this study, a compilation thesis of four articles, I reconstruct the dynamics of elite female status competition by rendering explicit some of its domains, resources, and regulation.

Article one highlights the interacting and overlapping domains of elite female status competition, namely sacerdotal public office, public religious rites, transport, adornment, religious instruments, retinues, family, patronage, houses and villas, banquets, and public funerals, many of which were similar to those for elite men. **Article two** and **Article three** show that elite women benefited from, and were integrated into, two domains of elite male status competition, namely magisterial public office and warfare, by virtue of their associations with the elite male status symbols of ancestor masks and triumphs. **Article four** underscores the importance of the domains of adornment and transport for elite women by focusing on their successful lobbying for the repeal of the *lex Oppia* in 195.

Elite women had access to various resources for status competition, particularly wealth, a social network, and status symbols. **Article one** and **Article four** emphasise the wealth available to elite women in their dowries, inheritances, personal effects, and other forms of property. This wealth could be mobilised and converted into other forms of capital (cultural, social, symbolic) for and during conspicuous displays. These two articles underline the importance of the order of married women for elite female status competition, a social network of senatorial and non-senatorial equestrian women with its own hierarchies and status symbols. These status symbols included the two-wheeled carriage, four-wheeled carriage, earrings, fillets, gold trimmings, purple clothing, and possibly funerary orations. **Article four** also indicates that elite women had access to gold rings, a senatorial status symbol they shared with elite men and which differentiated them from non-senatorial equestrians. **Article two** and **Article three** illustrate how elite women were closely associated with and benefited from ancestor masks and triumphs, particularly through the inheritance and marital transfer of patrilineal and matrilineal ancestor masks, funerary processions, elite female presence in the triumphal chariot, and triumphal names, among other associations.

Article four uncovers forms of legislative and censorial regulation that directly affected the practice of elite female status competition: the *lex Oppia* of 215–195 and a censorial action of 184. Both forms of regulation restricted and/or punished conspicuous display in the domains of adornment and transport and some of the status symbols of the order of married women. These regulations temporarily curtailed some of the domains and resources of elite female status competition and thereby some opportunities and means for status comparison and differentiation. The repeal of the *lex Oppia* in 195 after the public lobbying of women and support of some elite men testifies to elite female and male investment in status competition, its domains and resources.

This study demonstrates that elite status competition was a cooperative endeavour for members of an elite family and *gens*: an integrated, intergenerational family enterprise. During a period of increasing status differentiation, elite men and women mobilised, displayed, and expended natal and marital resources in various domains to compete, obtain competitive advantages, and attain, enhance, retain, and reproduce status, and deployed numerous strategies to do so. Both elite men and women sought glory. The domains and resources of elite male and female status competition were integrated and mutually supportive, affording elite families a variety of opportunities and means for status comparison and differentiation. Regulation failed to dampen their desire for glory and to curtail their competition indefinitely. Elite female conspicuous displays advertised personal, familial and gentilician capital, accruing benefits for their male relatives and vice versa. Without such competition, elite families could not compare and differentiate their status. An elite family rose or fell together: the struggles vital to the *res publica* were equally the struggles of elite women. More broadly, this study illuminates the remarkable publicity and visibility of elite women: these were no self-effacing, reserved women confined to marital subservience or producing wool. Elite women were prominent and visible.

KEYWORDS: elite women, senatorial women, status, competition, status competition, glory, Ancient Rome, Republic, *res publica*, mid-Republican Rome, domains, resources, regulation, capital, conspicuous display.