Chapter 13

Women and elections in Pompeii

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(CIL IV, 1062)

A number of electoral inscriptions from electoral campaign posters are still visible in the main streets of Pompeii. These posters, programmata, are a unique source for scholars of municipal elections in the ancient world. The elective comitia in which upper magistrates, aediles and duoviri, were elected for a year, was held every year in March.

Women also participated in canvassing. Although many scholars have considered their role important, it has never been systematically studied. My aim in this paper is to analyse in detail the electoral posters made by Pompeian women and to discuss the role of women in Pompeian municipal politics. Why did women endorse candidates publicly? What were the relationships between candidates and supporters? I work on the assumption that the women were not a homogeneous group, but differed in terms of, for example, social status. I also assume that the programmata made by women did not differ from those made by men or groups in terms of either format or motives. In this way analysis of programmata made by women can also shed light on the background and underlying motives of programmata in general.

Programmata fall into two categories: programmata antiquissima, dating back to the period immediately following the establishment of the Roman colony in 80 BC, and programmata recentiora, originating in the last 17 years of Pompeii. The two types differ in a number of ways, the most obvious of which is that in programmata antiquissima the supporter (= rogator) is seldom mentioned and is never a woman.

The simplest of the programmata recentiora consisted of the candidate's name – or merely his initials – and the office, both in the accusative case. The name was usually followed by standard phrases and abbreviations such as OVFF = oro vos faciatis, VB = virum bonum, DRP = dignum reipublicae. The name of the supporter was not required. Of the more than 2,500 programmata discovered only about 30 per cent include the supporter's name.

Fifty-two posters were made by women, and in all we have 54 women supporting 28 different candidates. Fifty-two of these women used their own name, either cognomen or nomen gentilicium. Most women (33) had a poster of their own, but some featured alongside a man (13) or another woman (four). Behind two women there seems to have been a larger group called suas. Two inscriptions have preserved an attribute which probably refers to a woman: CIL IV, 913, Hilario cum sua, and CIL IV, 7213, Amandio cum sua. However, sua can also refer to familia or domus. Scholars have found it difficult to assign Pompeian women and the electoral notices they produced to a specific place within the more general framework. Bernstein and Mouritsen have both tried to clarify the role of kinship in the programmata. According to Mouritsen, the direct involvement of women in an election campaign would have cast a doubtful light on the candidate, unless the women featured in the capacity of members of the candidate's clientela. Mouritsen's general idea concerning personal connections is interesting, but his theories on women's involvement are far from convincing.

FEMINA POLITICA

A great deal of satisfactory work has been written on the role of women in politics and public life. The most substantial work has been done in the field of Roman law by studying the duties and status of women.

According to the well-known Ulpian passage, women were excluded from all duties whether civil or public, and were thus unable to become judges or magistrates. Only free-born and emancipated male citizens had the right of access to the magistracy and to vote in comitia. Women, slaves, condemned persons and foreigners who did not have permanent residence in the city were not allowed to vote. Women could take part in contiones, preliminary public meetings, in which citizens appeared unsorted. It is very likely – although we have no evidence that women also participated in contiones in Pompeii.
The analysis of powerful women known from literary sources has also been valuable. During the Republic upper-class women took part in political affairs, and in the principate the women of the imperial family in particular were able to influence Rome’s destiny. The lack of franchise was not the crucial point, as women could exercise political power through amictia and cientela.\textsuperscript{11}

Bauman has recently argued that the entire basis of male politics changed under one-man rule and the system became more advantageous to women. In Rome elections and voting for proposals in comititia were in decline: the decreased importance of the popular assembly made the denial of the franchise to women less relevant.\textsuperscript{12} However, as electoral notices show, in small municipal towns like Pompeii political life was on the increase.\textsuperscript{13} The participation of women in elections in Pompeii seems to call into question the significance of the franchise and the idea of citizenship.

**WOMEN IN POMPEIAN POLITICS**

In order to be able to study programmata made by women, one first has to collect, count and classify all posters of all candidates.\textsuperscript{14} This is no easy task, as the names of both the candidates and supporters are fragmented and therefore open to various interpretations. There are many candidates with the same nomen, and it is difficult to decide which candidate is concerned in any given case. For example, Franklin and Mouritsen have arrived at different results, and the numbers in this paper differ from theirs.\textsuperscript{15}

The next step after collecting the posters is to divide candidates into two categories, those with women supporters and those without. The programmata of each candidate can also be divided into those with rogator support and those with non-rogator support. The latter means posters with no mention of a supporter. The rogator support category can in turn be divided into individual and collective support. Individual support means that the names of individual men or women were given. Collective support refers to posters made by specific groups, such as fullones universi, dormientes, furunculi, etc., some of which may even seem ridiculous. There are thus four distinct categories of support: women, men, groups and non-rogator support.

One poster can include more than one supporter and also more than one candidate. In this paper I use the concept of support expression, which includes all supporters and non-rogator support of one candidate. It has to be emphasised that poster and support expression are two totally different concepts. One poster can contain more than one support expression (e.g. in CIL IV, 171, Catpusia cum Nymphio there are two).

Comparison of different groups highlights some very interesting details. First, no candidate had only women supporters. Second, only 28 candidates had women supporters, but they got 1,286 posters and 1,356 expressions of support. In the group without women supporters there were 110 candidates with a total of just 1,253 posters and 1,298 expressions of support. Third, in a survey of all posters and expressions of support the percentual distribution between non-rogator support and rogator support is relatively similar regardless of whether or not there were women among the supporters (69 per cent if there were women, 75 per cent if not). Fourth, the distribution of collective support is also the same in both groups (5 per cent). Fifth, in the relative division of support the share of women is 2 per cent (men 21 per cent, collective 5 per cent, non-rogator support 72 per cent).

The similar distributions show that we are dealing with a random sample and in fact the groups are similar. The greatest difference between the groups lies not in the support of women but in the number of posters and thus in the number of support expressions. The division between women supporters and others is artificial. It was very likely that a candidate would have women among his supporters, the more so if he had at least 50 support expressions. If he did not have women among his supporters, this was more a result of having fewer posters and thus fewer support expressions.

There are, however, exceptions to this rule. Aedile candidate C. Cuspius Pansa had so many posters (ninety-six) and support expressions (twenty-eight men plus seven collective) that he could have been expected to have had women among his supporters – but he did not. On the other hand, the duovir candidate C. Iulius Polybius had just eighteen support expressions, of which seven were from women. Aedile candidate Cn. Helvius Sabinus and duovir candidate L. Ceius Secundus likewise had more women supporters than their total level of support would lead one to presume. However, as the sample is not statistically very representative, one has to be cautious about drawing far-reaching conclusions.

It has already been mentioned that electoral posters were rather uniform in character. The supporter’s being a man or a woman had no impact on the text of the poster. The same abbreviations, verbs and phrases were used in either case. The laudatory formulac used
were also, with few exceptions, very similar. The only exceptional formula to be found among women's programmata is GIL IV, 3678, M(arciun) Casellium et L(uciun) Albitxium aud(tes) O(ro) V(os) Faciat(se) Statia et Petronia rog(ant) tales cives in colonia in perpetuo.16

The choice of verbs (facere, rogare, cupere, volere) has presented several problems.17 Of all the theories put forward on this question, that of Grundel is the most interesting. He argues that the perfect tense fact refers to supporters who wished to convey to the candidate after the election that they had voted for him.18 Facere was used six times by women, but only once in the perfect tense.19 In men's programmata this tense was also very rare.20 This leaves Grundel's theory based on very poor evidence and unfortunately we have no other proof that Taedia Secunda or any other woman would ever have voted in the elective consilia of Pompeii. It does seem to me, however, that facere could imply a close relationship between supporter and candidate.

Women supported the same candidates as men and their posters were similar — there was no feminine way of producing posters. The candidates supported by women were also those with the most posters and support expressions. Women supporters cannot be distinguished from any others. On the contrary, it would seem that female support constituted part of a candidate's campaign and as such was as acceptable and as legitimate as posters produced by men and groups. There is nothing that would indicate clearly that candidates supported by women needed more posters than others on account of their being less well-known or of less distinguished descent.21

**SOCIAL STANDING AND POLITICAL POWER**

There can be four derogative motives underlying programmata: gender, social status, disrepute or shameful profession. It has been argued above that there appears to be no difference between women supporters and others. It is therefore likely that gender itself was not considered suspicious by Pompeians. The fact that women often produced programmata together with men reinforces this hypothesis.22

Assessing the social standing of supporters is a difficult enough task, but research into profession and possible disrepute presents even greater problems. In most cases a name is preserved in only one inscription. Indications of status are very rare in electoral inscriptions. The identification of supporters as slaves or freedwomen is of course a feasible proposition but accuracy cannot be guaranteed. The site of the inscription can also provide clues as to identity but is highly problematic. Most inscriptions cannot be dated exactly, and the function of the building may have changed in the course of time.

Della Corte23 identified persons who featured as supporters in an electoral notice on the exterior of a house as occupants of that very building. However, this is mere conjecture, as it is unclear whether Pompeians actually wrote electoral programmata on the walls of their own houses or on those of others.24 There are indications that walls were regarded as parts of public streets and would thus have been at the disposal of scribes.25

The only indicator of a supporter's social status is his or her name. However, even though onomastic analysis allows us to determine a supporter's social status, there remains the task of demonstrating the extent of the supporter's personal prestige and/or influence over the election process. This is greatly complicated by the fact that we do not know which candidates were elected.

In our sample of women we have twenty-four different nomen gentilicia. Two women had both gentilicum and cognomen (Sutoria Primigenia, Taedia Secunda); all the others used either gentilicum or cognomen. It may be that the others had only a gentilicum or that they had a cognomen but they did not use it. Posters had to be short, and the use of the whole name formula would have taken up too much wall space. Forty-three per cent of these gentilicia belonged to politically active families.26

Twenty-three women featured only by cognomina. Helpis Afra had a double cognomen, one Latin and the other Greek. The proportion of Latin and non-Latin cognomina is otherwise equal. The question of Greek cognomina and the social status they implied is a widely disputed one. According to Solin,27 Greek names in Rome were a sign of servile origin in the first or second generation. This also seems to have been valid in Pompeii.

A women gentilicum indicates at least the status of a freedwoman. On the other hand, a cognomen implies a slave. However, the distinction is not quite so clear-cut. In a number of posters written by men only a cognomen was used, and in some cases that same cognomen is known to have belonged to a person who was undoubtedly free-born.28 This could suggest that certain supporters were so well-known that the use of cognomen alone was sufficient to convey the person's identity. It could also suggest that the cognomen was the name normally used by Pompeians. A candidate's support also seems to have been published only in certain districts of the city, and as supporters were well-known among their immediate neighbours the use of the whole name
formula was unnecessary. The number of gentilicia is noteworthy and shows that the low status of women cannot be taken for granted. This is confirmed by the number of non-Latin cognomina. Only 25 per cent of the total names were Greek cognomina and hence belonged to lower-class women.

In certain cases the archaeological evidence, in other words the original physical context of the inscription, can play a part in the identification. However, as the problems occurring in the following example illustrate, one has to be very cautious.

The electoral posters of four women – Asellina, Maria, Zmyrina and Aegle – may be seen to this day in the Via dell'Abbondanza on the wall of a house identified as a thermopolium. On the basis of this location della Corte identified Asellina as the owner (the place is commonly called Caupona di Asellina) and the others as her barmaids. In fact, there is no other evidence to identify them and even onomastic analysis is of little help. The evidence of the location is also disputable because bars in main streets were ideal sites for electoral posters as there they could be seen by as many people as possible. The disreputable character and suspicious profession of these women is a very feasible proposition but not certain.

It is important to note that the social structure of Pompeii changed in the last period of the city. The clearest evidence for this is in the construction boom following the earthquake in AD 62. Reconstruction took time because the Pompeians were impoverished. Aristocratic families moved to their country estates, abandoning town life and political activity. Their houses were turned into workshops. In contrast to the earlier period, builders were now freedmen or freedwomen. According to Castrén, many completely new families as well as sons of freedmen gained access to the Pompeian ordo in this period. Lex Malacitana from about the year AD 84 also suggests that already in the first century there was a shortage of people voluntarily applying for office. If this were the case, it would be no wonder that the majority of supporters were freedmen or freedwomen.

CLIENTELA OR INDIVIDUAL MANIFESTATION?

The most interesting point regarding programmata is the relationship between candidates and supporters. Was there a personal connection underlying programmata or did supporters have more general motives when choosing whom to endorse?

Unfortunately very little is known about electoral procedure or the official organisation of elections. Who was responsible for posters? Was it the candidate himself or persons connected with him who selected the supporters? Or did people go to the organisers and grant them licence to use their names in electoral posters? Or was there any organisation at all?

The significance of electoral districts is another problem that remains unsolved. It seems that the town area of Pompeii was divided into four districts probably known as vici. The fifth district lay outside the town walls. However, it is not known whether these administrative districts also formed the basis of the voting districts. It appears that the electoral procedure required a candidate to secure a majority of the districts in order to be elected. Thus each candidate had to ensure that he won in at least his own electoral district. This in turn would suggest that the inhabitants of a district supported the candidates chosen by that district.

Among women's programmata, the posters of candidates such as L. Albucius Celsus, M. Cerrinil'us Vatia, C. Iulius Polibius and M. Licinius Faustinus seem to have been concentrated in certain areas. In some cases, the candidate's own house can also be traced back to that same area. The support of Minia, Pollia, Caprasia, Miscenia, Specia, Zmyrina, Cuculla and Euhodia follows this pattern.

However, the concentration of posters is not a full explanation of the programmata. Political merit also appears to have played a role. The praise of Statia and Petronia for L. Albucius Celsus and M. Casellius Marcellus, tales cives in colonia in perpetuo, probably refers to the aediles' responsibility for organising games. This was probably also Olympionica's motive for supporting M. Casellius Marcellus. Primigenia is likely to have referred to the duovir's role as custodian of the public funds.

Personal relationships between supporters and candidates, such as kinship (Taedia Secunda was grandmother of her candidate), vicinity (Appuleia), religion (Biria?), clientela or amicitia (Caprasia, Primilla), were undoubtedly important, but as we do not know the nomen gentilicium of all the women it is difficult to determine the extent of the significance of patronage or clientela.
CONCLUSIONS

Although personal connection between supporters and candidates seems to have played an important part in elections, it was not the sole motive for producing posters. It seems only natural that people who endorsed candidates were in some way closely connected with them. If different districts had their own candidates, it is also natural that candidates received support from their local constituents. The latter also had a chance to participate in preliminary assemblies where the candidates were nominated. In this way they were informed about the elections and candidates.

The problems of electoral organisation may seem crucial, but from the point of view of women supporters they are, in fact, of lesser importance. If women produced posters by themselves it was because they knew how to make them. If, and this is more likely, professional scriptores painted posters on their behalf, they must have been allowed to do so.37 Had it been illegal or otherwise undesirable the scriptores would either not have painted the posters at all or if they had the candidates would have defaced them. Even if the campaigns were controlled by the candidates themselves and supporters selected beforehand, this would have no effect on the role of women, who would also have been selected beforehand along with the male supporters. As supporters women and men were equal. Posters produced by women had the same basis as those of men and as such they can be considered to have been as independent as the programmata of men and groups. No magisterial lists have been preserved and therefore we are not even able to assess the influence of men's programmata. It seems that programmata made by women constituted a part of a candidate's campaign. However, there is no evidence to suggest that women ever voted in Pompeii.

Other researchers have already observed that gender was not the sole determinant of public capacity.38 In Roman society citizens were not equal and therefore all citizens did not have identical rights and duties. The same holds true in the question of Pompeian programmata. Among male supporters there were some excluded from the franchise who nevertheless took part in the programmata. There is thus no reason to overstate the denial of franchise to women. The crucial issue beyond women's programmata is the whole question of the significance of elections and of electoral programmata in Pompeii.

Elections were part of Pompeian public life. Posters did remain in situ after elections and revealed to newly elected magistrates who had supported them. The programmata may be regarded as a collective activity in which women took part not only as members or clients of the family but also as members of the community and the electoral district. Participation in the programmata could have been more important than the elections themselves.

NOTES

1 There is no reason to assume that they were typical only of Pompeii, however. Literary and epigraphical sources show that they existed elsewhere as well. CIL V, 1490, 1641; CIL VI, 14313, 29942; CIL IX, 4126. See Zangemeister in CIL IV, p. 10. For the magistrates and election in Pompeii see Castrén 1983; Franklin 1980; Jongman 1988; and Mouritsen 1988.

2 For example, Castrén 1983: 79; Mouritsen 1988: 60f. The only existing study on the role of Pompeian women is d'Avino 1967, which does not fulfill scientific requirements. The article of Will 1979 is only superficial. I shall pursue Pompeian women and also the subject of this article in more detail and with more extensive documentation in my forthcoming book, Women and the Public Sphere in Pompeii. For women and elections in Pompeii see Scaleria 1919: 387–405; and more recently Bernstein 1989: 1–18.

3 For the survival of programmata, problems of dating the magistrates and reconstructing the Pompeian fasti see Franklin 1980: 33f.; Castrén 1983: 113–114; Mouritsen 1988: 37f.

4 It is not always easy to ascertain sex because there are some contentious names. The names Heraca, Asela and Suelca have usually been interpreted as women's names but they are men's. Cf. Solin 1982: 345–356 and 482–483; and Kajanto 1963: 329. The sex of Cuculla and Animula is unknown but these names are more likely to have belonged to women, cf. Kajanto 1965: 345, 365. CIL IV, 99 has been preserved in a fragmentary state and there are three different ways of interpreting it. Della Corte 1963: 31 n. 2 reads Capiari; Mouritsen 1988: 175 Capari; the amendment in CIL IV, p. 460 Chypari, which is preferred also in this paper.

5 CIL IV, 1053 Lollia cum suis; and CIL IV, 7464 Sutoria Primigenia cum suis. Cf. cum suis in the following posters CIL IV, 233, 707, 1053, 3482, 7191, 7464, 7708, 9919; and Giordano and Casale 1990: 278 no. 10. Scaleria 1919: 391, 400 argues that in the case of Lollia cum suis is similar to cum familia while the expression cum suis refers to a woman whose participation remains almost concealed but shows more serious participation.


Scholars are unanimous that when *contio* changed into *comitia*, the non-voters were removed. For example, Ross Taylor 1966: 3. The formula giving dismissal is known from Festus (Gloss. Lat. 72): *Eceste, extra eto. Sic enim tector in quibusdam sacris clamitabat: hostis, vincitus, mulier, virgo exesto; scilicet interesse prohibebatur.

During the early Republic women were not allowed to participate even in *contiones*, but attitudes became more permissive later. It is not known when this change took place or what lay behind it. Val. Max. 3, 8, 6. See also Bowdich 1995: 326 n. 1. Livy 34, 2, 11 puts into Cato the Elder's mouth (234–143 BC) that before his generation women were not allowed to take part in politics or to be present at meetings and assemblies (*comitia contornias incassas*), which is, however, an exaggeration. At the time of Graechi, women could also speak at *contiones*, as did Hortensia in 43 BC: see Dio Cass. 83, 8; Val. Max. 3, 8, 6 and 8, 3; App. Buc. IV, 32–34.

10 Bauman 1992: 5. 4 There are, of course, posters in which the name seems to have been in the plural, it has been classified among the groups, otherwise among the posters of men.


12 Staveley 1972: 223f. However, the *Lex Malacitana* of about AD 84 points to the fact that this interest was of short duration. According to Franklin 1980: 120, in the last years of Pompeii there were never more than two women candidates for the two places to be filled. Cf. also Macrob. Sat. 2.3.11–12 where Cicero says to his friend P. Mallius who asks his support to obtain a decurionate for his stepson in Pompeii: *Romane, si vis, habeas; Pompeis difficiles est.*

13 There are, of course, posters in which the name is no longer legible. If the meaning seems to have been in the plural, it has been classified among groups, otherwise among the posters of men.


15 Other examples include: *CIL IV*, 187, 429, 597, 720, 4999, 6626.

16 Castrén 1983: 79 suggested that this problem and the role played by women in the Pompeian elections may have a joint solution. It was suggested already by Willems 1887: 84f. that the verb *facer e* and *rogare* correspond to two different stages of the election procedure. See also Mau 1889: 298–305.

17 Grünfeld 1967.

18 *CIL IV*, 7469 *L(ivius) Pop(ilius) S(lutius) L(ucilius) M(etrius) C(orneli) O(ro) V(ero) P(ropotivus)/Taudia Senula capita saxa negata et facta. Other cases *CIL IV*, 825 (Anastasia facie), 7513, 7873 (Apololias facie), 923 (Caphrasia facie), 457 (Iphysias facie), 7347 (Vatunias facie).

19 In all *fact* was used at least twelve times. In individual support *CIL IV*, 98 (p. 192), 221, 297, 935bd, 3582, 3583, 3760, 7618, 6667 is disputable. In collective support *CIL IV*, 1122. *CIL IV*, 7187 *multis factis benigne* is more a laudatory formula.

20 Bauman 1992: Dixon 1983: 91–112, Saxophon 1983: 100. "Women and elections in Pompeii" 205 posters and support expressions as follows: C. Cuspius Pansa 96/101/no women; L. Popidius Secundus 71/73/3 women; M. Samellius Modestus 52/55/2 women; and Cn. Helvius Sabinius 140/133/10 women. *Duovir* candidates: G. Gavius Rufius 35/36/no women; and M. Holcombus Priscus 38/51/0/no women. This could suggest that women especially supported aedile candidates who, applying for office for the first time, also needed more posters and more supporters than *duovir* candidates (C. Cuspius Pansa is the only exception). However, C. Iulius Polibius gained a total of 21 (one woman) support expressions when applying for aedile office but 40 (seven women) as candidate for *duovir*. L. Celsus Secundus gained 23 (one woman) support expressions as an aedile candidate but 95 (six women) as *duovir* candidate. See also Franklin 1980: 98–100.

21 *CIL IV*, 3527 *Appolionia Musia*, 207 *Nympho/doxas* et *Caprasia*, 171 *Caprasia* *Nympho*, 7667 *Aeropotipon* et *Cassia*, 6610 *Epidius ne si* *Clesius*, 3595 *Acceptus reg* *Euhadis reg* *Eulaius*? *Sparidse*, 3757 *Pyramus* *Olympionica* *Cales*, 3403 *Panthippe* *Rufius*, 1083 *Recepta ne si* *Thealos*, 7558 *Symnus ne si* *Tribus*, 3746 *Ambrosus cin *Vibia*, 913 *Hiriano* *Suis*, 7213 *Amandio* *Suis*. Some of these men were even magistrates, e.g. 7658 Trebius is very probably A. Trebius Valerius who was an aedile candidate during the Flavian period.


23 According to Mourtis 1988: 18–19, the homes of only 21 *roga*es can be located with reasonable certainty.

24 *CIL IV*, 7621 *Laternarii tene scalam* may show that posters were written at night.


26 For example Balbus in *CIL IV*, 935bdh, 2958 might be *duovir* candidate Q. Brutius Balbus and Vatia in *CIL IV*, 132 aedile candidate M. Gerrinius Vatia.


30 In the case of Asellina and Maria the names could have been either *gentilicium* or cognomen. See Kajanto 1965: 326; and Castrén 1983: 139 no. 47, 189 no. 242. For the name Asellina see also Vainänen 1937: 197–199. If Maria is a *cognomen* it is not Jewish as argued by della Corte 1965: 308, but Syrian. Cf. Solin 1983: 725. *Zimyra* and *Aegale* are names of foreign origin which very probably belonged to slave women: see Solin 1982: 326 and 612–613.

31 Richardson 1988: 21 and 261f. Cf. *CIL IX*, 846 concerning N. Popidius Celsus who was co-opted into the *ordo decurionum* at the age of 6 after having restored the Temple of Isis following the earthquake. The Temple of Venus was still under restoration. For the rise of new families see Castrén 1983: 118f.

32 This is the idea of Mourtis 1988: 44f.