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In the Wake of Autocrats: The Plight of *Matronae* in the Late Republic

Abstract: The rise of dynasts, political mavericks, and would-be autocrats in the Roman Late Republic wreaked havoc on the socio-political elite. Through a series of case-studies, such as Licinia, wife of C. Gracchus, Metella, wife of Sulla, Terentia, Fulvia, and the so-called Turia this chapter reveals the impact of a socio-political elite society's struggles with authoritarianism as felt and experienced by the women of the Roman elite. This chapter further examines how major (often violent) events, as well as the legal and political tools used by the Senate and autocrats alike to deal with its (imagined or real) crises, while aimed at the male political elite, often had a profound impact on the wives, daughters, and sisters of those at whom they were aimed. Finally, the chapter looks ahead, offering similar examples of autocratic impact on women through modern history.

The history of the late Roman Republic (ca. 133–27 BCE) is riddled with stories of dynasts, self-serving politicians, and ambitious generals. The often-violent clashes caused by fierce internal rivalry between these would-be autocrats were rarely contained to the male sphere of operations, often spilling into the sphere and the very homes of the female elite, their children, and their families. The women of the socio-political elite, the *matronae*, continuously felt the impact of – and experienced trauma caused by the political, legal, and physical battles fought in the last century of the Republic. Innovations such as the so-called *senatus consultum ultimum*, the *hostis* declaration, and the proscriptions of Sulla and the triumvirate *r.p.c.*, were all aimed at the male political elite, but had profound direct and indirect impact on the wives, daughters, and sisters of those these tools targeted. This chapter therefore explores the much-neglected lived experience of the *matronae* of the socio-political elite during internal crises, and how they adapted to a society undergoing momentous change through continued fighting, encroaching laws and decrees, and the mass slaughter of the male elite.

This chapter shifts the focus from the perpetrators, the autocrats, to those who were perpetrated against, the elite women of Rome – not a homogenous group but rather a variety of groupings and individuals with different political and familial allegiances – and the impact autocratic rule had on their lives. By focusing on the women perpetrated against, we may gain new insights into the lived experience of elite

women, a group often neglected in modern studies of authoritarianism, and offer new ways of interpreting autocratic rule and its impacts, past and present.¹

Impact of the *Senatus Consultum Ultimum* and *Hostis* Declaration

When did women first feel the impact of authoritarian political and legal activities? There are abundant cases of autocratic behaviour found in the extant evidence, from which we get a reasonable idea of the subsequent impact on the women of senatorial standing. The current investigation focusses on autocratic activities originating in a legal and political framework in the Late Republic.

The death of Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus strikes as an obvious first marker given the immediate financial, emotional, and domestic impact felt by his wife, children, and mother.² Yet, his death was a result of a predominantly impromptu series of events. The death of his younger brother may offer more insight. Gaius Sempronius Gracchus served as tribune of the *plebs*, first in 123 and again in 122, and after gunning for a third term in 121, unsuccessfully, the senate, recognising the apparent danger to the state posed by Gracchus, and under the direction of the consul Lucius Opimius, enacted a political novelty. The senate issued Opimius with a *carte blanche* to deal with the rising internal threat and instructed Opimius to save the *res publica*.³ In the following skirmish Gaius fled and committed suicide.⁴ The novelty lay in the creation of a political emergency act with no base in legality, distinctly different from the office of dictator, designed to deal with an internal threat to the state posed by a citizen. Caesar names this decree in his *Bellum Civile*, calling it the *senatus consultum ultimum*, or The Final Decree.⁵ By issuing the decree the senate had effectively sanctioned authoritarian control of the state, and, in doing so, allowed military force within the *pomerium* and the death of citizens without due process. Opimius seemed

1 For recent scholarship on Dictatorships, Authoritarianism, and Autocratic rule, see Levitsky and Way (2010); Svobik (2012); Geddes, Wright and Frantz (2014); Frantz (2018); Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018); Chua (2019); Meng (2020); Frye (2021); Kivotidis (2021); Levitsky (2022); Steinweis (2023); Levitsky and Ziblatt (2023).

2 See mainly, Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 18–21.

3 Cic. *Cat.* 1.4: *Decrevit quondam senatus, ut L. Opimius consul videret, ne quid res publica detrimenti caperet.*

4 Plut. *C. Gracch.* 14.4–17.2; App. *B Civ.* 1.26; Plutarch calls the skirmish a battle (*C. Gracch.* 16.3–4). The deaths of the Gracchi were arguably the beginning of political violence used by the so-called *optimates* against politicians with *populares* leanings, see De Dijn in this volume on the response to feared populism in the ancient and modern world.

5 Caes. *B Civ.* 1.5.3: *extremum atque ultimum s.c.* See Morrell in this volume for a discussion on why the *s.c.u.* should not be considered an enabling law despite being a political emergency provision.

to bear all the hallmarks of an autocrat, persuading the senate into formalising the emergency powers and directing the public spectacle that prompted the immediate emergency.⁶ Interestingly, due to the *s.c.u.* and its novelty and subsequent legal impact, we know how this measurement affected Licinia, the wife of Gaius, financially and the impact similar measures had on the wives of rebellious or ambitious husbands. Plutarch, in narrating the events following Gaius' death, comments in passing on the effect the *s.c.u.* had on the wives of the now-slain troublemakers:

[C. Sempronius Gracchus and Fulvius'] property was sold, and the proceeds paid into the public treasury. Moreover, their wives were forbidden to go into mourning, and Licinia, the wife of Gaius, was also deprived of her marriage portion.⁷

The seizure and following sale of Gracchus' property probably included the *res dotales* of Licinia.⁸ Equally striking is the denial of mourning, suggesting that the *s.c.u.* implicitly revoked the citizen status of those it was aimed at, and, in doing so, annulled any marriage to a Roman *matrona*.⁹ However, from the *Digest* we learn that Licinia did not lose her property, but regained it, presumably through the *actio rei uxoriae*:

According to Servius, a husband is responsible for fraud and negligence in connection with all the property in the dowry apart from money. This is also the view of Publius Mucius; for he stated it in the case of Licinia, the wife of Gracchus, whose dotal property had perished during the insurrection in which Gracchus was killed, saying that the property should be restored to Licinia since Gracchus was to blame for the insurrection.¹⁰

Upon confiscating the property of a husband against whom the *s.c.u.* had been aimed, there was no distinction between his property and the *dos* of his wife, though these two were strictly divided legally in the case of a *sine manu* marriage.¹¹ The legal view was that Gracchus, by instigating insurrections and forcing the *s.c.u.*, had become liable and was at direct fault (*culpa*) for the loss of Licinia's property – which is explicitly stated as physical property and thus specifying her *dos*. It demonstrates that the very

6 Plut. *C. Gracch.* 14.

7 Plut. *C. Gracch.* 17.5: καὶ τὰς οὐσίας αὐτῶν ἀπέδοντο πρὸς τὸ δημόσιον· ἀπέλειπαν δὲ πενθεῖν ταῖς γυναιξί, τὴν δὲ Γαίου Λικιννίαν καὶ τῆς προικὸς ἀπεστέρησαν

8 On the *dos* in marriage, Treggiari (1991) remains the principal work. Vettori (2024) esp. 130–132, has recently discussed the seizure of dowries from Licinia through the civil wars of Caesar and the Triumvirate *r.p.c.*

9 It is very likely that the *hostis* declaration first issued by Sulla in 88 against the so-called Marians build on the same framework and took the *hostes* part (revoking citizen status) from the *s.c.u.* thus legalizing the potential killing. See below.

10 *Dig.* 24.3.66 (Iavolenus 6 ex post. lab.): *In his rebus quas praeter numeratam pecuniam doti vir habet, dolum malum et culpam eum praestare oportere Servius ait. ea sententia Publii Mucii est: nam in Licinnia Gracchi uxore, quod res dotales in ea seditione qua Gracchus occisus erat, perissent, ait, quia Gracchi culpa ea seditio facta esset, Licinniae praestari oportere.*

11 Dixon (1992) 51–52; *Dig.* 23.3.10 pr. (Ulpian); *Dig.* 23.3.42 (Gaius).

first *s.c.u.* had an immediate impact on the *matronae* and their substantial properties in the form of dowries, and that the women could take legal action to regain their property.¹² This first use of the *senatus consultum ultimum* provided a precedent for the type of political and legal measures that future dynasts and autocrats, such as Sulla, Marius, Pompey, Cicero, Caesar, and the triumvirate *r.p.c.*, could, and often did, follow (see below).¹³ However, it was a two-edged sword. While some of the actions perpetrated by these dynasts were not specifically aimed at women, their actions spilled from the male-dominated world of politics and power, into the world inhabited by the wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of the political elite. Women were not exempt from the political and legal abuse that followed in the wake of the ambitious autocrat; nor did they stand idly by. As the *s.c.u.* formed the political framework for the later *hostis* declaration, we must assume, with some 20 *hostis* declarations and several *s.c.u.* with an unknown death toll (both intended and collateral) during the Late Republic, that several *matronae* followed the (legal) precedent of Licinia throughout the period. In the near century that followed Licinia's plight, the elite women of Rome were not considered non-combatants in either political or civil wars.¹⁴

In 88 BCE, L. Cornelius Sulla utilized the precedent set by the *s.c.u.* to issue the first *hostis* declaration. Earlier that same year the tribune of the *plebs*, Publius Sulpicius, along with C. Marius who, though an older man, still coveted the Mithridatic command, had passed a law which transferred the command from Sulla to Marius.¹⁵ In response Sulla turned his army on Rome and took the city with armed force. Sulla proceeded to have the senate and people condemn 12 leading men, including Marius and Sulpicius, by declaring them *hostes*, (foreign) enemies of the state.¹⁶ Ironically, the creation of Sulla came back to haunt him in 87 when Marius, who had returned with a vengeance, had Sulla declared a *hostis*.¹⁷ Contrary to the first *hostis* declara-

12 First *s.c.u.*: Cic. *Cat.* 1.4; Plut. *C. Gracch.* 14.3; App. *B Civ.* 1.26. The danger of losing property distinctly belonging to the wife was at the core of Cicero's worries during his exile (Cic. *Fam.* 14.4.4). This in turn suggest that the exile decree by Clodius bore a legal resemblance to the *hostis* declaration and the *s.c.u.* in terms of impact on female members of the *domus* and *familia* (discussed below).

13 Caesar, however, returned the dowries to the wives of those slain in the civil wars (Cass. Dio 43.50.2). The triumvirs promised to return the dowries of wives of the proscribed, but never did so (Cass. Dio 48.14.1–2). Contra Vettori (2024) 129–130, I do not see this promise as an intent to preserve families and their finances, considering the later taxation of the 1400 *matronae* (see below).

14 McCurry (2019) 15–62, convincingly argue for women's many plights, roles as combatants, and actions during the American civil war. The condition is comparable to those of the Late Republic.

15 Livy. *Per.* 77.

16 Livy. *Per.* 77; Val. Max. 3.8.5; Plut. *Sull.* 10.1–2; *Mar.* 34.1–35.4; App. *B Civ.* 1.60; On the *hostis iudicatus*, see Cic. *Brut.* 168; Sall. *Cat.* 36.2; Vell. Pat. 2.64.4; Val. Max. 3.8.5. D'Arms (1968) treats the ensuing confiscations. For a recent study of the *iudicare hostes*, see Zuchetti (2022). The *hostis* declaration had the force of law, as not only the senate ratified it, but the people too.

17 App. *B Civ.* 1.73, 77, 81 also mentions Cinna as the instigator of the *hostis* declaration against Sulla.

tion, we are provided with specific information regarding the plight this caused to Sulla's wife, Metella, and their children, and by extension all those who were exiled and declared *hostes* along with Sulla.¹⁸ Metella and the children were forced to flee Rome and Italy as they were actively hunted by order of Marius and Cinna.¹⁹ The sources stress that all of Sulla's properties were either seized, confiscated or razed to the ground.²⁰ It is more than likely that Metella's own property was confiscated as well, considering the indiscriminate killings perpetrated by Marius and Cinna.²¹ The unprecedented targeting of Roman women and children, specifically treating Metella as a combatant rather than a civilian and revered *matrona*, stands out as a vindictive move by Marius. Metella had in 88 aided the Marian exiles, acting as a mediator in the traditional role of an *uxor consularis*, by lobbying her husband for their return to Rome.²² This subsequent targeting of her, seemingly the sole *matrona* targeted by Marius, along with the male adherents of Sulla cannot be explained as anything other than an attempt to exact vengeance and exert control over Sulla.²³ However, their escape saved Rome from a grim fate in 87 as Sulla continued the Mithridatic campaign instead of returning to Rome with fire and blood.²⁴

When the senate passed the *s.c.u.* against Catiline, Manlius and the conspirators in 63, decreeing that the consuls, Cicero and Antonius Hybrida, should see to it that the *res publica* suffer no harm, Cicero had the conspirators still lingering in Rome arrested in their homes and summarily executed.²⁵ Appian writes that as the senate could not agree on what to do with the conspirators, Cicero went forcibly into their homes and had them taken directly to the execution block.²⁶ Plutarch adds a layer to the story by involving the vestals, the collective *matronae*, and Cicero's wife, Terentia.²⁷ The sacred rites of *Bona Dea* were being undertaken the very night the conspirators had been arrested. At the rites the sacred fire, thought to have gone out, sud-

18 Sulla received several exiles and *hostes* fleeing from Rome prior to his invasion of Italy in 83: Livy. *Per.* 84; App. *B Civ.* 1.77.

19 App. *B Civ.* 1.73, 77, 81. Marius was particularly vicious and had several senators and members of the 'Sullan faction' killed in violent ways, including the tribune Sex. Lucilius who was thrown from the Tarpeian rock (Livy. *Per.* 80; Plut. *Mar.* 45.1; Cass. Dio 30–35, fr. 102.12).

20 Plut. *Sull.* 22.1; App. *B Civ.* 1.73, 77, 81.

21 Cass. Dio 30.102.8–10.

22 Plut. *Sull.* 6.10–12.

23 While Marius had feuds with members of the *Caecilii Metelli*, Metella appears to be the only *matrona* targeted in this instance (see, n. 19), suggesting her status as Sulla's wife was the *causa* for the targeting of her.

24 Sulla had had his command of the Mithridatic war restored in 88, though Marius had the command formally voted back to him in 87 (Plut. *Mar.* 45.6; App. *B Civ.* 1.75; *Mith.* 51).

25 Sall. *Cat.* 29.2: *senatus decrevit darent operam consules ne quid res publica detrimenti caperet*; Plut. *Cic.* 15.5; Cass. Dio 37.31.1: Cf. Cic. *Cat.* 1.4; Drummond (1995) 78–113 discusses the *s.c.u.* and its context, legality and precedents as presented by Sallust.

26 App. *B Civ.* 2.6.

27 Plut. *Cic.* 20.1–3.

denly erupted into a great flame. The vestals interpreted the omen to be in favour of putting the conspirators to death and instructed Terentia to take the news to Cicero. Given the present crisis of state, religious fervour may rightly have been high, and this move provided Cicero with religious legitimacy in exacting the death penalty.²⁸ The *Bona Dea* rites concerned the preservation of the state, and no man really knew what happened at these rites. Terentia, a colleague in Cicero's political life—as he himself styled her—likely orchestrated these events to provide her husband with religious legitimacy for executing the conspirators.²⁹ Cicero later used the rites as justification along with the *carte blanche* provided by the *s.c.u.*³⁰ Importantly, the vestals and Terentia were assigned religious *and* political agency and direct influence over the states' politics. In whatever way it is framed, women played an active part in dealing with the conspirators.

As a result of his actions, Cicero came under heavy attack by the tribune of the *plebs*, P. Clodius Pulcher, in 58. Without specifically naming Cicero, Clodius proposed a bill, the later *Lex Clodia de Civibus Romanis Interemptis*, punishing all who had killed Roman citizens without due trial.³¹ Cicero chose to abandon Rome and Italy, going into exile before the law was passed.³² Lacking the protection of law, Cicero could not defend himself even though he had acted within the parameters of the *s.c.u.*, and Clodius proceeded to pass a bill officially exiling him by name.³³ Clodius' law also specifically saw to the confiscation of Cicero's property.³⁴ As a consequence, Terentia and Marcus junior were forced from their home. Terentia's dowry may very well have been confiscated along with Cicero's property.³⁵ Terentia, and presumably Marcus, took refuge in the Temple of Vesta where they should have been protected by the inherent sacrosanctity of the temple.³⁶ However, Clodius, ever the demagogue and

²⁸ Treggiari (2007) 45–47.

²⁹ Treggiari (2007) 45–47.

³⁰ Plut. *Cic.* 20.3. Plutarch used a now lost fragment of Cicero's work for events in 63.

³¹ Cic. *Att.* 3.15.5; *Sest.* 25, 53–54; *Pis.* 16, 30; Vell. Pat. 2.45.1; Asc. 46C; Plut. *Cic.* 30–31; App. *B. Civ.* 2.15; Cass. Dio 38.14–17; Livy *Per.* 103. Technically, the collective senate were the target of this bill, not just Cicero, as they had allowed and voted on the *s.c.u.* Nonetheless, it seems that there was no legal recourse to counter actions undertaken under a *s.c.u.* prior to Clodius' bill. On populism (with figures such as the Gracchi, Clodius and Caesar often being styled *populares*) in the ancient and modern world, see the contributions of Elliott and de Dijn in this volume.

³² Plut. *Cic.* 31.5; Cass. Dio 38.17.4. Cicero went to Thessalonica but never became a naturalized citizen.

³³ Cic. *Att.* 3.4, 12, 15, 20, 23; *Fam.* 14.4; Asc. 10C; Plut. *Cic.* 32; Cass. Dio 38.17.7.

³⁴ Cass. Dio 38.17.6–7: His property was confiscated; his house was razed to the ground as though it had been an enemy's.

³⁵ Cicero and Terentia were married *sine manu*. Cicero alludes to *her* property (which was not confiscated) in his letters e.g., *fam.* 14.1. Cicero was concerned that Terentia's property might be confiscated along with his.

³⁶ Cic. *Fam.* 14.2; Rawson (1983) 116; Treggiari (2007) 61.

autocrat himself, had her dragged (*ducta*) from the Temple to stand before the tribunes.³⁷ Despite being harassed by Clodius, Terentia met the challenge of lobbying for Cicero's return while safeguarding their son and her own property, and she proved herself more than capable. Regardless of no longer legally being Cicero's wife (*uxor iusta*), Terentia was constantly working for Cicero's return and maintaining his spirits – a difficult job as Cicero was suicidal at times and severely depressed.³⁸ She and Tullia wore mourning clothes in public, making a quiet protest and spectacle showcasing their grief and hardship.³⁹ They visited the friends of Cicero who were in a position to bring about a recall, and the women would have made use of the network of the *ordo matronarum*, of which they were both prominent members. The lobbying of the senators and the business of maintaining properties, wealth and status was not a simple task, as Cicero's letters clearly indicate. Terentia also kept Cicero apprised of financial matters, including the potential sale of some of *her* property.⁴⁰ Terentia was clearly in charge of Cicero's and her own property, and was the chief organizer for his return, labouring both physically and mentally, all while experiencing severely poor health.⁴¹ Being the wife of an exile, Terentia would have been considered somewhat of a social pariah in the eyes of a large part of the elite. Cicero, too, technically no longer a citizen, would for all purposes be regarded as socially and politically dead.⁴² This left Terentia in difficult circumstances in Rome.⁴³ She was, however, not left without allies. Atticus worked tirelessly for Cicero's return and for the safety of his family, as did Piso Frugi, Calpurnius Bibulus, Lentulus Spinther and Rabirius Postumus.⁴⁴ Terentia's efforts paid off. Cicero was restored in 57 and returned to Rome. Terentia was far from the only wife to lose a husband to involuntary exile. Countless women in the Late Republic were likely faced with the same responsibility thrust upon them, the same heartaches experienced, similar financial troubles and forced to

37 Cic. *Fam.* 14.2; *Dom.* 59; Dixon (1984) 82–83. On demagogues and their role in the erosion of “democratic” rule, ancient and modern, see Simonton in this volume.

38 Treggiari (2007) 61. Cicero, while (perhaps) not being deprived of his citizenship, was not allowed to enter Rome and could not exercise his citizen duties – rendering him *de facto* stateless. If Cicero was no longer a citizen under the conditions of the exile, the marriage to Terentia would be annulled as no Roman, man or woman, could marry a non-Roman, see also n.42 for sources and discussion.

39 Cic. *Fam.* 14.2; *Red. Pop.* 8: *pro eodem me absente . . . Nam coniugis miserae squalor et luctus atque optima filiae maeror adsidui filii parvi desiderium mei lacrimaeque pueriles . . .*

40 Cic. *Fam.* 14.2 explicitly discusses the sale of a village owned by Terentia. A source of continuous income and of great importance to not only Terentia but more so the future of young Marcus Cicero, whom Cicero expected, or hoped, would be able to pursue a political career, funded in part by Terentia's wealth.

41 Cic. *Fam.* 14.1, 2, 3, 4. Cicero constantly worries about her health in his letters (14.3).

42 *Dig.* 4.5.5, 11; *Gai. Inst.* 1.128, 158–163; for a discussion on the citizenship status of Cicero during his exile, see Treggiari (2007) 58–59. Cicero's conditions of exile were framed by a law and not the customary escaping of a trial and conviction thus resembling the Sullan *hostis* framework.

43 See, Dixon (1984) on Terentia and Tullia.

44 Cic. *Fam.* 14.1; *Planc.* 73; *Balb.* 58; *Rab. Post.* 47; Treggiari (2007) 66 cf. n. 59, 60.

beseech men of power to recall their husbands from exiles prompted by *hostis* declarations, proscriptions, or civil war. The mere threat of a *hostis* declaration could cause severe distress to even a veteran politician's wife such as Fulvia.

While M. Antonius was besieging the city of Mutina in an attempt to force Decimus Brutus to hand over the province of Cisalpine Gaul in 43, Cicero was attacking Antonius in the senate, arguing for the Assembly to issue a *hostis* declaration against him.⁴⁵ Making use of the same tools as Terentia, Fulvia and Antonius' mother, Julia, wearing black mourning clothes and untethered hair, went from house to house imploring the leading senators to obstruct the vote and stop the declaration from being issued.⁴⁶ They followed senators on their way to the senate house and, when the women could go no further, they wailed, wept and shouted their prayers from the gates to the senate chambers. A *hostis* declaration would mean hardships and loss of status for Fulvia and her children, and her and Julia's efforts were very visible and sincere. Had it not been for Cicero's ardent oratory, Fulvia and Julia would have succeeded in their endeavours.⁴⁷ Antonius was declared a *hostis* and the impact was felt immediately by Fulvia. Antonius' sizable estates, property and wealth were seized, and his children left without legacy. Fulvia likely relocated to her house on the Palatine while being viciously targeted, chiefly by attempts to deprive her of her property, and 'she was distracted with lawsuits, and troubled with great terrors (*terror*) . . . and was unable after her reverse in fortune to discharge the debt regarding a property she had previously purchased'.⁴⁸ She was facing lawsuits from creditors, who wanted their pound of flesh, but she is likely to have undertaken a number of *actiones rei uxorae* herself, too, in order to regain her lost *dos*. Fulvia's circumstances illustrate the very real physical, legal, and financial danger a *matrona* could face when her husband was on the 'wrong' side.

⁴⁵ Cic. *Phil.* 4.2, 8.1–2: He demanded the *hostis* declaration and that the conflict at Mutina be styled a war (*bellum*) not an unrest or public emergency (*tumultus*).

⁴⁶ App. *B Civ.* 3.51. This happened between January 2nd and 3rd judging by Cicero's change in rhetoric, describing Fulvia in *phil.* 6.4–5 as a *mulier avarissima* for the first time. The wearing of mourning clothes was a classic form of protest, as Treggiari (2007) called it, used by men and women alike (Plut. *C. Gracch.* 10.7, 13.5: Cic. 30.6–31.1).

⁴⁷ App. *B Civ.* 3.51.

⁴⁸ Nep. *Att.* 9.1–5. Nepos represents the only (contemporary) source depicting the struggles of Fulvia and framing her in a more favourable light. Other sources predominantly paint Fulvia as a *matrona* who was too ambitious, too manipulating and wanting in female virtues, e.g., Cicero, Plutarch, Cassius Dio.

Reign in Blood: The Proscriptions

Returning to Italy in 83 BCE, bringing fiery vengeance, civil war and chaos, Sulla marched on Rome and had himself declared dictator *sine provocatione* in late 82.⁴⁹ The *lex Valeria* made Sulla dictator with a wide range of extraordinary powers, including the power to issue edicts with the force of law.⁵⁰ Sulla, always the innovator, deployed a new legal tool, proclaiming the first proscriptions; listing political enemies and wealthy citizens as marked for death, and legalising the killing of *matronae*.⁵¹ It is doubtful the actual proscription lists included the names of women, but the edict allowed for the killing of them via association.⁵² The edict promised death to all who aided and abetted those proscribed. Livy provides an example of a wife faced with this dilemma. The proscribed Samnite rebel and Italian leader Mutilus sought to take refuge at his wife's house in 80, presumably thinking this would be safe as the proscription lists closed in June 81.⁵³ His wife, Bastia, refused him entry on the grounds that he was a proscribed man, leading Mutilus to commit suicide at the doorstep of her house.⁵⁴ Had she sheltered Mutilus, she would have endangered the entire household including herself, not putting it past the henchmen of Sulla to kill everyone within the walls. Better that Mutilus died, and the family (and perhaps their children) lived on. This was a matter of preserving the family rather than the individual.

After retaking Rome, but before the passing of the *lex Valeria*, Sulla ordered bloody massacres carried out, in which numerous elite women and children were killed indiscriminately 'as if they were captives taken in a war'.⁵⁵ Following Marius and Cinna's lead from 87, elite women were being actively targeted and killed. The novelty lay in the *lex Valeria* which shrewdly made the killings legal with retroactive force.⁵⁶ The rationale behind the killings of women is not clear, however, Sulla must have recognised the untapped resources the elite women possessed and moved to secure them. The *de facto* proscription of women was likewise a tool of vengeance, with Sulla not having forgotten the brush with death Metella and their young children had had during their flight from Rome. Elite women had also financially supported Sulla's

49 On the reconquest of Italy and Sulla making himself dictator, see Vervaeke (2023).

50 On enabling laws such as *lex Valeria* and the later *lex Titia*, see Morrell in this volume.

51 Plut. *Sull.* 31.1–6; App. *B Civ.* 1.95; Cass. Dio 33.109.11–13.

52 Plut. *Sull.* 31.4, specifically mentions parents (γονεῖς) could be killed if they aided their proscribed children; App. *B Civ.* 1.95, provides the edict, which includes the death penalty for *any* who aids or conceals the proscribed.

53 Livy *Per.* 89; Vervaeke (2023) 224.

54 *admissus non est, quia illum proscriptum diceret* (*Per.* 89). The case of Mutilus may be unique as he was a Samnite who had actively fought against Sulla on several occasions. The closing of the proscription lists may also have been a PR stunt from Sulla's side. Caesar did not deem it safe to return to Rome until after Sulla had died in 78.

55 Cass. Dio 33.109.10–12. See, Thein (2017) on Sullan violence.

56 On the novelty of women being killed and the Valerian Law, see Vervaeke (2023) 202–203, 248.

enemies going back all the way to the outbreak of hostilities in 88, and Sulla was now in a position to retaliate against those who had opposed him, men and women alike. Sulla was extremely vindictive and ruthless in victory, a fact harrowingly demonstrated in the capturing of Praeneste where Sulla ordered the entire city's population, with no exceptions, executed.⁵⁷ A man capable of this onslaught of civilians and with close to absolute power would have no qualms in ordering the Roman female elite, otherwise off limits, killed for petty vengeance and monetary gain.

Enormous amounts of property were confiscated and auctioned off during the proscriptions, leaving a multitude of families destitute.⁵⁸ This would unquestionably have included the abundance of *dos* otherwise entitled to the *matronae*.⁵⁹ Had this been the *s.c.u.* or a confiscation under the *hostis* declaration, the *matronae* could have regained their property through the *actio rei uxorae*. However, Sulla specifically made legal provisions to avoid this by taking 'from the descendants of the proscribed persons all power of reclaiming the property of their ancestors'.⁶⁰ While this was chiefly aimed against the sons and male relatives, the provision impacted the wives and daughters as well. They were not able to reclaim their *dos* under Sullan law, and without substantial personal wealth the *matronae* and entire families might plummet from social standing and grace just for being associated with a proscribed man.⁶¹ One loophole did, however, exist for the particularly wealthy *matronae*. Italy had been exhausted of its male elite by continuous war, with military losses estimated at a staggering 200,000 men, of which some 150,000 were Roman citizens.⁶² Along with the indiscriminate killings committed by shifting autocratic leaders in the 80s as well as somewhere between 1500 and 2600 being proscribed and killed in the Sullan proscriptions, the severe loss of men impacted the social elite, creating an economic vacuum which the *matronae* could fill during the proscriptions. The vast amount of property auctioned off in Rome was likely purchased by the only large group left in Rome financially capable of doing so, the *matronae*, and, in so doing, the women retained their property and regained that of their male relatives, which they could preserve for inheritance for their children if they did not sell the properties for a profit later.⁶³

⁵⁷ Livy *Per.* 88.

⁵⁸ The proscriptions yielded an astounding amount of wealth, reportedly upwards of HS 350,000,000, see Vervaeke (2023) 224 cf. Steel (2018) 229.

⁵⁹ Confiscation of property, including *dos*, continued throughout the Late Republic, see Cass. Dio 43.50.2, 47.25.1–2.

⁶⁰ Livy. *Per.* 89.

⁶¹ The daughters would lose any potential dowry, an instrumental part of match making in elite Roman society; On Roman marriage Treggiari (1991) remains the principal work.

⁶² Vervaeke (2023) 207.

⁶³ As the case of Cornelia, likely Sulla's daughter, acquiring Marius' house and reselling it (Plut. *Mar.* 34.2). For a similar view, see Welch (2023); see, Tobin (forthcoming) on women and the auctions under Sulla. Of course, we must assume that large parts of the properties went into the pockets of Sulla's adherents and Sulla himself too.

Nearly 40 years after Sulla's proscriptions, the triumvirate was formed and legalized under the *lex Titia*.⁶⁴ Following the dictator's example, the triumvirs drew up lists for a renewed round of proscriptions. Like Sulla, each triumvir had political and personal enemies, and each was invested with extraordinary powers, which could be exercised *sine provocatione*.⁶⁵ The triumvirs abstained from proscribing women directly, but the edict did not exclude women from being killed if aiding any of the proscribed.⁶⁶ Appian provides the most detailed narrative of the proscriptions and its impact on women.⁶⁷ In contrast to Sulla, who had undertaken his mass slaughter in public and in the light of day, the orders to kill some 12 or 17 of the so-called conspirators complicit in the murder of Caesar were carried out under the cover of darkness before a proscription edict was made public.⁶⁸ Four of the conspirators were found in their homes while having dinner and were killed in front of family and friends, and without hesitation. The wife and family of the tribune L. Salvius saw armed soldiers breaking into their home, ordering them to remain where they were, while a centurion grabbed Salvius by the hair and dragged him onto the dinner table and beheaded him, taking only the severed head and leaving the bleeding body on the table.⁶⁹ The killings, especially the many carried out at dinners and in homes, would undoubtedly have been an extremely violent, abrupt, and traumatic experience for anyone who saw them, not least wives and children. The head of a proscribed man would be brought to the triumvirs as proof and the city and Italy were littered with corpses, with and without heads attached.⁷⁰ While some tried to save their relatives, others sought to condemn them, and Rome descended into a state of *stasis* worthy of Corcyra.⁷¹ Through devotion and courage shown by wives and children in attempting to hide their loved ones, they too suffered death alongside those whom they had tried to save.⁷²

For nearly a century the female elite had suffered due to the ambition, cruelty, and relentless behaviour of would-be autocrats and state sponsored violence. This environment forced women to take unprecedented public action as groups and as individuals, demonstrating elite women's capability for agency to the observer of history.

64 App. *B Civ.* 4.2–3; Cass. Dio 46.54–55: in November 43 BCE. Official title: *tresviri reipublicae constituendae*.

65 On the framework of the triumvirate *r.p.c.*, see Vervaeke (2020).

66 App. *B Civ.* 4.8–11: recounts the full length of the proscription edict: *B Civ.* 11 explicitly states that any who abets, saves, or colludes with a proscribed will in turn be proscribed themselves. This included women.

67 App. *B Civ.* 4.6–48 treats several *matronae* who were impacted by proscriptions in detail. The scope of this chapter does not allow for an extensive investigation of these women here.

68 App. *B Civ.* 4.6.

69 App. *B Civ.* 4.17.

70 On severed heads and the proscriptions, see Lange (2020).

71 Thuc. 3.69–85.

72 App. *B Civ. Civ.* 4.15.

Feminae Principes and Authoritarianism

The proscriptions did not yield the desired wealth from the confiscated properties the triumvirs so sorely needed. They instead sought to impose a war tax on the so-called *ordo matronarum*.⁷³ This was a blatant attack by the triumvirs, and Appian equates this with proscription of the *matronae*.⁷⁴ Like Sulla before them, the triumvirs looked at the *matronae* and saw an untapped well of wealth, both in the form of physical property and in monetary and portable wealth. When the triumvirs imposed the war tax on the *ordo*, the *ordo* in turn mobilized. The famous Hortensia speech in 42 shows women in concert and protesting Triumviral taxation.⁷⁵ The speech does, however, indicate that elite Roman women were not a homogenous group with shared goals. As the tax was imposed, the *ordo matronarum* received it as an affront to their status and their inherent impartiality as *matronae* of the Republic and sought to put up a (rare) united front. They therefore went to the female relatives of the triumvirs to seek their support.⁷⁶ All supported the cause of the *ordo*, being members themselves, but Fulvia. The lack of support from a single *femina princeps* crippled the efforts to pursue the traditional behind-the-scenes intercession and caused the women to alter course and instead confront the triumvirs directly. Fulvia could have had several reasons for refusing to aid the *ordo*. Fulvia stood to gain by the tax, likely being exempt herself, and she had nothing to gain by opposing her husband. Quite the opposite. Like women in the Sullan proscriptions, Fulvia had undoubtedly gained property and wealth through the proscriptions and benefitted from the present regime.⁷⁷ Without the support of Fulvia, the *matronae* elected Hortensia their spokeswoman and confronted the triumvirs in the Forum. Hence the autocratic taxation forced the women to take direct action against the triumvirs in a public political (male) space.⁷⁸ Unanimous support from all of the immediate female relatives of the triumvirs were not needed in order to sway the triumvirs in private and behind-the-scenes mediations, yet they nevertheless chose to confront the triumvirs in a public setting. Why? The women of the elite were well educated and understood politics and, most importantly,

73 App. *B Civ.* 4.32. Coincidentally, this piece also suggests that at least 1400 *matronae*, likely the bulk of the female elite, were married *sine manu* and to an extent *sui iuris*. They would have to own their own property and manage their own wealth in order to be eligible for taxation. See Steel and Webb (forthcoming) on women, wealth and power in the Republic; In the same volume, on restrictions and *tutela* regarding women and their wealth, see Morrell (forthcoming).

74 App. *B Civ.* 4.5.

75 On the speech and its authenticity, see mainly Hopwood (2015).

76 App. *B Civ.* 4.32. *Femina Principes* of 42 BCE were Fulvia, Octavia and Julia according to Appian. Octavian's wife Claudia was likely too young to be considered so by the *ordo* and Appian alike.

77 Pliny *NH* 36.24; Plut. *Mar.* 34.2; App. *B Civ.* 4.29. Fulvia may have utilized the events to exact petty revenge on the *ordo*, see Finn (forthcoming) on Fulvia and revenge.

78 On gender and space and the public, see Trümper (2012); On the politics of public space, see Russel (2016); On women becoming visible in Rome, see Richlin (2021).

they understood their own role within politics. It was not Hortensia's speech, though famous and eloquent, that carried most weight with the populace, but the triumvirs' blatant disregard for the sanctity of the *matronae*, ordering them removed from the forum by force of the armed lictors.⁷⁹ The *matronae* counted on their near-sacred position in Roman society and their revered status rather than any oratory, and they used their social position, status and the popular opinion to force the triumvirs' hands.⁸⁰

The continued dynastic infighting could also impact a *matrona* for the better part of her life. No evidence portrays this as strongly as the so-called *Laudatio Turiae*.⁸¹ The husband had joined the Pompeian faction in Macedonia sometime in 49 and his great escape and comfortable living overseas was being financed by his wife, 'Turia'.⁸² Meanwhile, with Rome in chaos and in the husband's absence, their house on the Palatine was assailed by thugs of Milo, the former owner, and the wife had to defend their property and repel the attackers.⁸³ Finally, the wife interceded with Caesar to secure the safe return of her husband, and obtained the famous Caesarian clemency.⁸⁴ Thus, she was supporting her husband financially, protecting their property and lobbying the male political elite.

Come 44, Caesar lay dead and, with the triumvirs fresh out of the gate, the husband once again opted for the losing side. He was proscribed and aiding a proscribed man was potentially deadly. Nonetheless, the wife disregarded the proscription edict and hid her husband, got him out of Italy at her own peril and enlisted several friends to her cause.⁸⁵ Once again, the wife sought to redeem and restore her husband to Rome. This time she obtained a pardon from Octavian, but the edict was refused by

⁷⁹ App. *B Civ.* 4.34. The triumvirs readjusted the tax to be levied against six hundred women instead.

⁸⁰ See, Webb (2019) on elite female status in the Republic; see, Kunst (2016); Webb (2022) for female interventions in the Republic.

⁸¹ *CIL* 6.41062; Vell. Pat. 2.67.2; Val. Max. 6.7; App. *B Civ.* 4.11–23; On the *laudatio*, see Osgood (2014); Hopwood (2019). The husband and wife remain unidentified.

⁸² *CIL* 6.41062, 2.2–5af. This implies that ready portable currency was not at hand for the husband. Rather the wife was supporting his survival via her personal wealth, suggesting that women may have been more liquid than men in the Roman economy of the elite in the Late Republic, cf. Treggiari (2007) on Terentia during Cicero's exile. On women's economy in the Late Republic, see Dixon (1984); Culham (2014); On the Roman economy in the Late Republic, see Kay (2014); Cascio (2016); Beck, Jehne and Serrati (2016).

⁸³ *CIL* 6.41062, 9–10af: the wife likely armed the slaves and household to fend off the mob (cf. Cic. *Fam.* 14.18.2: Terentia taking similar measures during Caesar's march on Rome). She had defended property via law prior to the civil wars (*CIL* 6.41062, 10f., 18–23f).

⁸⁴ Following the traditional approach also pursued by Octavia during these years *vis-à-vis* her husband Marcellus, see Bagger (forthcoming).

⁸⁵ *CIL* 6.41062, 4–10f. This act brought herself in danger as well as any associates under the proscription edict (see above).

Lepidus, who had his lictors mistreat the wife in public.⁸⁶ The story of the so-called Turia offers a window into the life of a *matrona* during the trials of civil wars and proscriptions. Exactly because we cannot identify her with any certainty, and as nothing else is known of her, she comes to represent what was likely a very common experience of the civil wars and the plight suffered by the female elite.⁸⁷ The wife is synonymous with all the *matronae* we do not hear of in the narrative texts, and we can expect that she was amongst those protesting the triumvirs in 42, just as we can expect a large number of the women of 42 would have had similar experiences.⁸⁸

Unsurprisingly, we hear more of the immediate female family members of the dynasts during times of autocratic leadership. The two most prominent and continuous female co-stars in the Triumviral era are, without contest, Fulvia and Octavia.⁸⁹ Depicted by ancient authors as polar opposites, the two *matronae* have fascinated scholars through the ages. Interestingly, Fulvia became somewhat of a female autocrat in a world otherwise governed by men. As the wife of Antonius, she allegedly had men added to the proscription lists, refused to aid the *ordo* in 42, usurped the senate (and Lepidus) in 41 and led the military campaign against Octavian in Italy, ultimately failing as the ‘Fulvian’ forces at Perugia surrendered in 40.⁹⁰ That Fulvia played an active and very public role in the Perusine war is attested by the Perusine *glandes* bearing her name.⁹¹ Contrasting Fulvia, Octavia enters the Triumviral narrative in 39. As the sister of Octavian and by 39 the wife of Antonius, she too benefitted from the autocratic rule of her husband and brother, yet she is described as the ideal *matrona*, the ‘modern’ Cornelia and anti-Fulvia, supporting the *ordo*, aiding the proscribed, and ensuring internal *concordia* between the rival triumvirs.⁹² Octavia and Livia Drusilla further felt the benefits of being in the inner circle of an autocrat, when, in 35, they were granted public statues, freedom from tutelage, and the sanctity of the tribunes

⁸⁶ CIL 6.41062, 11–18f. This story is likely exaggerated, as Lepidus would hardly mistreat a *matrona* so harshly in public. It may reflect Augustan propaganda, which framed Lepidus as the lesser Roman as opposed to himself.

⁸⁷ At least some 1400 women according to Appian as told in the Hortensia story. The wife was likely among those who protested.

⁸⁸ App. *B Civ.* 4.15–4.48 provides several (positive and negative) stories of the experiences and actions of the *matronae* during the proscriptions.

⁸⁹ On Fulvia, see mainly Babcock (1965); Welch (1995); Fischer (1999); Rohr Vio (2013); Schultz (2021); Lange (forthcoming); On Octavia in the civil wars and Augustan era, see Bagger (forthcoming); Van Geel (forthcoming).

⁹⁰ Fulvia and Proscriptions: App. *B Civ.* 4.29 (cf. Val. Max. 9.5.4); Cass. Dio 47.8.2–5; Refusing the *ordo*: App. *B Civ.* 4.32; Usurping the senate: Cass. Dio 48.4.2–5; Perusine War: Vell. Pat. 74.2; Flor. 2.16; Plut. *Ant.* 26.1, 30.1–2; App. *B Civ.* 5.14, 5.33, 5.50, 5.52; Cass. Dio 48.5.1–5.

⁹¹ CIL 6721.5, 6721.14. Small lead projectiles used with slingshots at the siege of Perugia. On the *glandes*, see Hallett (1977).

⁹² Plut. *Ant.* 35.1–4; App. *B Civ.* 4.32, 5.93–95, 4; Cass. Dio 47.7.4–5, 48.54.3–4; cf. Bagger (forthcoming). By 36 Lepidus was dethroned by Octavian and now there were only two triumvirs.

by Octavian via a *senatus consultum*.⁹³ Notably, this was a clear move by Octavian, elevating ‘his’ women in status to reflect his current position as Master of Italy, as well as laying the foundation of the later imperial household.⁹⁴ For Livia, formerly married to the enemy, a *matrona* on the run from Octavian, this was a marked improvement in life.⁹⁵

After the capture of Alexandria and the deaths of Antonius and Cleopatra in 30, the Republic transformed.⁹⁶ Octavian took the name Augustus in the settlements of 27 and became the *de facto* absolute ruler of Rome, ushering in nearly two millennia of Roman and quasi-Roman Emperors who ruled the European continent.⁹⁷ Augustus sought to restore the moral sovereignty of the Roman state, in part by rebuilding the Roman elite. Through social legislation promoting marriage, encouraging childbearing, and enacting hefty fines and penalties for those choosing to stay unmarried or childless, Augustus implemented a wide range of incentives, highlighting traditional conservative female roles.⁹⁸ Among the incentives were the *ius trium liberorum*, granting women who had had three or more children freedom from tutelage. As benevolent as this might appear by the ‘good’ Augustus, the laws had initially caused such an affront to the elite, women and men alike, that they had rioted (*tumultus*) against them and forced Augustus to revise them.⁹⁹ One of the concessions was the *ius liberorum*. The opposition continued and in 9 C.E. Augustus gathered all the married and non-married men, praising those who had married as good citizens and lecturing those who had not for their lack of patriotism.¹⁰⁰ The resistance to the *leges Iuliae* continued under Tiberius where women had resorted to circumventing the law on adultery, by registering as prostitutes, thus forsaking their rights as *matronae* but also any punishment under the *leges Iuliae*. Milnor rightly observes that the *leges Iuliae* transferred the morality (*pudicitia*) of women from the private sphere and control of the *pater familias* to the control and interest of the state, and the elite strongly op-

⁹³ Cass. Dio 49.38.1; Livia Drusilla had married Octavian in 39/38; Octavian himself had obtained the inviolability of the tribunes in 36 and would later be granted the power of the tribunes. On the importance of the relationship between the tribunes, their powers and republican role, and a rising autocrat, see Lanfranchi this volume; On *tutela* in the late Republic, see Morrell (forthcoming).

⁹⁴ On the grants of 35, see Flory (1993); Hemelrijk (2005).

⁹⁵ On Livia Drusilla and her life, see Barrett (2004).

⁹⁶ For a discussion of the inevitability of Actium, see Lange (2009).

⁹⁷ Counting the Eastern/Byzantine Empire, the continuation of the Roman Empire under Charlemagne and his successors, and the Heiliges Römisches Reich.

⁹⁸ *RGDA* 8, Augustus styled the laws as *novae* but in accordance with the *mos maiorum*; Eck (2019) 80; See, Milnor (2005) 141 n. 2 for a bibliography on the social legislation of Augustus; Cass. Dio 56.3.6–8.

⁹⁹ Suet. *Aug.* 34: *Leges retractavit et quasdam ex integro sanxit, ut sumptuariam et de adulteriis et de pudicitia, de ambitu, de maritandis ordinibus. Hanc cum aliquanto severius quam ceteras emendasset, prae tumultu recusantium perferre non potuit nisi adempta demum lenitate parte poenarum et vacatione trienni data auctisque praemiis*. Milnor (2005) 140–154 touches on the gendered nature of the *lex Iuliae*; Eck (2019) examines the opposition to the Augustan social legislation.

¹⁰⁰ Cass. Dio 56.1–10.

posed such an encroaching set of laws.¹⁰¹ The transition into monarchy did not mean complete harmony between the socio-political elite and the ruler.

Ripples through Time?

As we have seen, being a woman and a member of the Roman elite did not protect the *matronae* from the fallout of the Late Republic's struggles with authoritarianism and these struggles did not end with the establishment of autocratic rule under Augustus. Women were at times directly targeted, often became victims indirectly, suffered physical, economical, and psychological hardships, and became an object for state control as a new regime took power. Yet, this was confined to the ancient world. Or was it?¹⁰² In the grim postscript of his book, *Auf Dem Weg Ins Imperium*, David Engels predicted that with the current challenges experienced in Europe and the western world, the only viable solution would be one akin to the establishment of the principate of Augustus.¹⁰³ That is, a radical authoritarian and conservative reform of our present society. Indeed, we have already seen frightening parallels to Augustus' laws and his views on women emanating from politicians and leaders from the 20th century and still see them to this day.

In Nazi Germany, Hitler, with his plan for a great Aryan community, the *Volksgemeinschaft*, issued orders to the SS to father at least four children as part of the *Lebensborn* programme.¹⁰⁴ In the same spirit, the regime heavily advocated for the roles of mothers and wives as the ideal and chief achievements of women. The Reich needed children. Like Augustus, the regime offered incentives to have more children, here in the forms of financial support and special rights. As a substitute for the *ius liberorum*, mothers of four or more children were given the Cross of Honour of the German Mother. And, unsurprisingly, abortion was criminalized – a thing Augustus would have done too, no doubt.

The similarities do not end with Nazi Germany. Looking at its paramour, Fascist Italy, we see similar views on women. Coming out of the Great War, there was a strong, though misguided, sense that the women of Italy had 'invaded' the male sphere of employment – not unlike the views many ancient authors share of the Roman *matronae*. As a result, the Fascist movement strongly emphasised the maternal and domestic roles of women, advocating early marriages and encouraging having multiple children. The 'Problem of Problems', as the declining birthrate was styled,

¹⁰¹ Milnor (2005) 151–152: the *lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* also specifically made marriage and reproduction a matter of state control.

¹⁰² See De Dijn in this volume for a survey of populism and authoritarianism in modern history.

¹⁰³ Engels (2013).

¹⁰⁴ On the fall of the Weimar Republic and German democracy, see Alcade in this volume.

was countered with heavy propaganda, proclaiming women's duty to produce children, their role to stay in the home and raise a large number of children and take care of the family. Like the *leges Iuliae*, men too were penalized for not marrying! To emphasize and stress the importance of these female roles, organizations such as the *Figlia della Lupa*, *Le Piccole Italiane*, and the *Giovani Italiana* were formed to prepare Italian girls for their roles as mothers and wives.

Interestingly, early communist rule in Russia actually benefitted most women. A new Family Code was passed into law, which gave equal rights to women, recognized illegitimate children and gave them full rights, loosened the laws on divorce, and legalized abortion in 1920. Additionally, communal facilities were established with the express purpose of relieving women of household chores. As Stalin rose to power, however, he had many of the key laws in the Family Code reversed. He re-criminalized abortion, tightened the laws on divorce, emphasising family life as a virtue, and the rights of illegitimate children were revoked. As the final nail in the coffin, he closed the 'Women's Bureau' claiming that female emancipation had been achieved. Alas, the conservative leader had arrived. To this day we still see conservatism prevailing in Putin's Russia. On March 8, 2023, in a speech honouring women "who fulfilled their duty", Putin said: "In our country, the recognition of the merits of women working professionally is harmoniously combined with a deep understanding of the enduring importance of motherhood and traditional values."¹⁰⁵

We close on the United States. In the context of women, the overturning of *Roe vs. Wade* by the Supreme Court is most troubling. As of October 2024, 41 states had bans in place, with 13 states having total bans on abortion.¹⁰⁶ The reasoning behind this seems to me to be found in Christian conservatism. Interestingly, the polls suggest that the majority of the American population is for legalising abortion. As such the Supreme Court ruled against popular opinion but in line with the "ruling elite".

So, what can we take away from all of this? From the ancient to the modern world, women have been attacked, both intentionally and unintentionally, in times of rising authoritarianism. As an autocrat comes into power, conservative opinions prevail and a drive to re-establish a patriarchal structure, designating women as mothers and wives, emerges. We saw this happen in the ancient world, and we see signs of it happening today. But today, as in the ancient world, we see fierce opposition against such measures. The mechanics of the ancient world's authoritarianism are not that different from those of present day, as this volume firmly establishes, and the study of them may help present-day society to better understand and combat new autocratic regimes.

¹⁰⁵ The Moscow Times. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/03/08/putin-celebrates-russian-women-who-fulfill-their-duty-a80424> (seen 29.10.2024).

¹⁰⁶ The 2024 US elections may see several bans altered, lifted, or strengthened.

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