

Welcome to the family! Marriage as business strategy in the Roman economy

Introduction

In every society, fiction has established a powerful bias against monetary considerations in social relationships. It is a recurring theme in countless songs, movies and books, from the classic 'Sense and Sensibility' and the less equivocal 'How to marry a millionaire' to the 'Spiderman'-saga, that at some time, one must choose between wealth on the one hand and beauty or honesty on the other. Both apparently never occur in one and the same person, a remarkable feature which cleverly remains unexplained, and the lesson is invariably clear: one must reject base wealth in favor of higher personal qualities. Why exactly fictional society frowns upon marrying for money is never made clear, for to a rational mind the benefits of marrying into an affluent family are obvious. One possible explanation (apart from the unrealistic yet endlessly repeated 'good will always prevail') is that bride and groom are never the only people involved in the marriage.¹ Parents on both sides usually try to influence their child's choice, claiming that they know what is best for him or her. The result is often a conflict between non-economic pros, defended by the romantic and naive child, and economic cons brought up by the realistic and pragmatic parents. That authors and song-writers consistently side with the choice of the younger generation reflects the expected attitude of the target audience, which often to a large extent coincides with the people who face or will soon face similar choices.

In real society however, the victory of romantic love over wealth is less guaranteed, especially when the decisional power of the family, and the parents in particular, outweighs the involvement of bride and groom and the importance of preserving or augmenting family possessions is duly recognized. Time and again, one can see how marriages are usually contracted between partners who are each other's equals, both socially and economically, or who find a comfortable match between wealth and social status (i.e. impoverished aristocrats wedding nouveaux riches). The result of these considerations is a set of various marriage patterns and socially induced restrictions on partner choice, which can be traced in virtually every society. For Rome, these aspects of marriage have been thoroughly analyzed, in particular for the equestrian and senatorial elite. The importance of marital ties in forging political alliances or pooling and transferring wealth has received considerable attention.² On the other hand, marriage patterns among non-aristocratic Romans, and the economic consequences of affiliation in particular, remain less well explored.³ This is no doubt to be related to the very tacit nature of the sources through which these Romans and their families appear before us, viz. epigraphical records. Inscriptions never explicitly reveal why exactly these two people decided to get married. Love and affection obviously must have played a (major?) role, but as with the prearranged marriages between aristocrats for political and economic motives, one cannot exclude similar, less romantic intentions.

This assumption in particular applies to the marriages of merchants, artisans and other businessmen. Extensive analysis of business communities in other pre-industrial societies has shown how important marriage could be in advancing business improvement.⁴ With the family as a dynamic and fluid construct, continuously changing as members enter, leave and introduce outsiders, each alteration presents opportunities to augment the family's resources, including tangible assets such as money, labor, production units and property, but also virtual capital, status and access to credit. Moreover, creating kinship linkages provides members entrance to different networks, in which commercial information can be circulated and dishonest behavior is strongly discouraged.

Businessmen identified these possibilities and often carefully selected, or were forced to do so by their family, those partners who would be able to support their economic ambitions. Obviously, the wealthier and more powerful a merchant family was, the more heavily the obligation lay on finding a suitable partner.

This paper will argue that Roman businessmen, in the same way as their colleagues in medieval and early modern Europe did, profoundly grasped the economic rationale of marriage and used various strategies to accumulate wealth, create new trading opportunities and make business organization more efficient. Before analyzing the nature of these marriage patterns, we will first shortly consider the difficulties of tracing the 'economic value' of husbands, wives and their families. The second section will then analyze the economic advantages of marriage for a single family. Marriage as a tool to connect the interests of two merchant families will be discussed in the third part. The fourth section will explore the marital ties between merchants and aristocratic families.

Invisible wives in the economy

A straightforward analysis of Roman marriage as a business strategy is hampered by multiple shortcomings of the sources available. As we will mainly focus on epigraphy, most difficulties can be reduced to the particular nature of inscriptional evidence.

First, inscriptions are heavily biased against the visibility of female economic activity. Paucity of occupational inscriptions is a problem economic historians are faced with for both sexes, but in particular limits the information available for the activities of married women. As for most societies up until the early 20th century, Roman women are far more often mentioned by their marital status instead of the profession they hold. Their participation in the economy, wide-spread though it may be, is often not reflected by the use of female occupational titles.⁵ Moreover, in the Roman empire as in most pre-industrial societies, women's careers often lacked the formal structure in which men developed their trade: prolonged apprenticeship, membership in professional associations and hence the creation of an occupational identity were usually a male privilege.⁶ Historical records thus mostly cloud women's professions, because contrary to the publicity of male labor, female activities are thought to belong to the private sphere of domesticity.⁷ Consequently, labor division within a single household usually remains invisible.

Secondly, once we leave the better-documented equestrian and senatorial marital scene, detailed information on the true motives for marriage is virtually non-existent. Inscriptions usually tacitly pass over the professions of husband and wife, so whether they (or their families) were active in similar trades and tried to consolidate cooperation by matrimony or merely married out of love, totally eludes us. Moreover, it is equally complicated to ascertain the possible economic consequences of weddings. While intermarriage between merchant families may point to prolonged cooperation and the cementing of business relationships, inscriptions only inform about the marriage itself, not about what happened after the families were united. Comparative evidence however can help to identify recurring marriage patterns, detect the implicit economic motives of marital alliances and assess the probability of mutual benefits.

Finally, even though inscriptions can inform us about some aspects of the economic rationale of marriages between merchant families, others will continue to escape us. One major problem is the absence of evidence concerning dowry exchanges.⁸ In patrilocal societies as Rome, women moved into a new household. As the labor they provided to the new family not always matched with that of a male, dowries were meant to balance the expenses of the newcomer. Anthropological research on the economics of dowries has shown that in business communities, dowries can be used in essentially two ways. Parents can either offer high dowries to attract sons-in-law of higher status, who belonged to families with better commercial networks and assure future business opportunities,

or to assure the loyalty of a lower-status son-in-law, especially when the parents have a family business but no son of their own to follow in their footsteps.⁹ Dowries thus always involve some kind of financial transfer, an economic aspect of marriage most interesting to ambitious businessmen, especially since legally, nothing prevented the husband to use the dowry to finance trading ventures.¹⁰ Yet, evidence to substantiate the very likely assumption that among Roman merchant families dowries were being used as a major asset in constructing marital networks, is missing.

Equally invisible are the economics of inheritance. Demographic patterns of Roman society, with often low levels of survivability, produced early succession in business and lower ratio of direct succession, and enhanced the importance of widows as head of a family business and the propensity for re-marriage.¹¹ Emancipated daughters and widows may have inherited ships, merchandize, production facilities and business contacts which could be useful for future partners, but we lack detailed family histories to assess whether or not female relatives of late Roman businessmen were attractive marriage partners precisely because of their inheritance. Comparative evidence from early modern Europe however confirms the frequency with which merchants' widows married business agents, partners and other associates to secure continuity and preserve the family business.¹² This strategy has also been traced in ancient Greek financial business, with bankers such as the famous Pasion arranging marriages between their widows and managers of the bank.¹³ We may expect similar strategies to have been employed in the Roman business world, but to the best of my knowledge, clear evidence so far is absent.

In conclusion, due to the nature of the epigraphic evidence, we will evidently never be able to assess the comparative impact of love and economic considerations in marital alliances. We can however try and visualize the economic potential of Roman marriages by relying on the abundant analyses of matrimonial strategies in other pre-industrial societies. Whenever possible, we will adduce comparative evidence to elucidate the scanty information provided by Roman epigraphy and trace various patterns suggesting how merchant families tried to sustain wealth, property and connections through marriage.

Division of labor in household economies and family businesses

As in every pre-industrial society, the Roman family matrix was central to the economic organization of the household. Every single marriage traditionally allowed a very basic division of labor. Until very recently, the most pervasive and historically persistent division is that between men hunting, farming, trading, producing objects for the market and providing services, and women taking care of the children and domestic needs. For Roman women, much of the day was spent seeing to a variety of domestic activities which belong to the economic performance of the household, but do not constitute a separate profession: overseeing expenses and managing the domestic budget, supervising servants, directing small-scale production (mainly textiles, as indicated by the presence of loom weights in most Pompeian houses) and perhaps gardening.¹⁴ These female household activities usually remain invisible in non-elite families, but allowed male family members to concentrate on professions outside the house or in adjacent workshops.

Yet, this biologically motivated division of labor was supplemented by a purely economic division, in which the labor force participation by female partners also included non-domestic activities and closely resembled their husbands' professions. This occupational organization allowed the creation of family businesses with husband and wife participating in a common profession. Various forms of labor division can be distinguished here.

First, we find several instances in which both marital partners specialized in the same trade, shared occupational titles and appear to have been responsible for very similar professional tasks. However, these marriages usually do not reflect an economically rational decision to wed someone with the

same occupation to start a small-scale family business, but are rather motivated by the social background of both partners. Most of these marriages were concluded between freed artisans belonging to the same family. Both partners had probably met during serfdom in the same house, where they had been taught the same commercial specialization by their master and may even have worked together side by side in their master's shop. They apparently continued their trade after manumission, but it seems very likely that the couple kept working for their patron as freed representatives instead of independent artisans, an agreement which must have been advantageous for both parties. The freedmen were allowed to continue the trade in which they had already acquired some expertise and were as dependent agents presented with infrastructure, tools and some level of job security. The patron on the other hand could carry on his particular business as before. He was familiar with his freedmen's trustworthiness and business acumen and had no need to buy and train new slaves. Moreover, the fact that his former slaves were now officially wedded solidified agency relationships as the marriage of two of his agents was likely to ensure the patron the continuing presence of a reliable labor force. We can therefore imagine that Roman businessmen tried to encourage inner-family marriages between freedmen with the same specialization as some kind of guarantee for prolonged cooperation.

The economic rationale of these marriages is nicely illustrated by an inscription from Rome, documenting the activities of the Veturii in the purple trade.¹⁵ A certain Veturia Flora dedicated a tomb for herself, her husband and *colibertus* Nicepor (sic), their patron Diogenes and Philargyrus, the former slave she and her husband had previously owned. All of them had been working as *purpurarii* in the same shop. It is very likely that Flora and Nicepor were introduced to this trade by Diogenes during their serfdom, continued working for their patron after manumission and even had their own slave specialize in the same occupation. It is remarkable however that Flora does not denote her marriage to Nicepor in the most common way, viz. using the word 'husband' (*coniunx* or a synonym), but opts for the expression 'lived with me' (*vixit mecum*). If more fellow ex-slaves who had later married left out standard references to matrimony, then numerous other inscriptions in which a freed man and woman appear, sharing the same *gentilicium* and occupational title, may hide a similar marriage pattern. The male and female clothes-dealers (*vestiarii*) belonging to the *gens* Avilia, the jewelers (*gemmarii*) Babbia Asia and Babbius Regillus and workers in gold-leaf (*brattarii*) Septicius Apollonius and Septicia Rufa, may all have been marital partners because of a shared serfdom in their master's workshop and a continuing occupation as dependent agents.¹⁶

Secondly, various inscriptions again present both partners specializing in the same business, but with slightly different responsibilities, because the nature of the trade demands a gender-based division of labor.

In craft-centered professions requiring heavy manual labor, this division regularly coincides with a distinction between production on the one hand and the organization of sales and accounting on the other. In Torino for instance, an epitaph had been dedicated by Cornelia Venusta for herself and her husband P. Aebutius.¹⁷ Both are cited as nailers (*clavarii*), but as the profession of a smith seems to be better suited for male laborers, it seems plausible that Venusta was only organizing sales in a shop, while Aebutius was responsible for the production of merchandize. The same division of labor can explain the presence of two female Fanniae among a list of blacksmiths (*ferrarii*) in Rome.¹⁸ This assumed labor division, invisible in inscriptional evidence, can be substantiated by pictorial evidence. A famous mid-second century relief of a butcher's shop presumably shows the husband on the right, boning meat on a chopping block, and his wife on the left, writing on tablets and apparently managing business accounts.¹⁹ This scene perfectly resembles a popular 18th-century German porcelain figurine entitled 'The merchant's wife', showing a woman making entries in an account book and recording her husband's business transactions.²⁰

Itinerant merchants and shop-owners equally benefitted from this kind of labor division. Raising children and taking care of the household evidently limited the possibilities of women to engage in a trade which required constant travelling, but participation in those aspects of the family business which could easily be done at home provided an easy alternative. We can definitely imagine that

whenever a merchant travelled to distant markets, his wife stayed behind to manage the shop, collect outstanding debts, lend money and continue business transactions. Traces of these activities can be found in the small dossier of early 2nd-century papyri relating to the businesswoman Berenice.²¹ Together with her husband Pasion, she appears to have been involved in wine trade, running the family business during his trading voyages. She was capable of continuing the trade after the death of her husband, which implies she had at least some experience in organizing commercial transactions. Moreover, one of the documents was an account of income and expenses written by Berenice herself, suggesting she was quite acquainted with commercial book-keeping. Shopkeepers too could no doubt rely on their wives to assist in sales and present the merchandize. A 2nd-century relief, found in Arlon and called the “Pilier du cultivateur”, illustrates exactly this kind of support. One can see a sale scene with a couple behind a counter loaded with fruit and vegetables. The man presents a piece to the customer while the woman arranges the merchandize.²² Investing time and effort in these aspects of commerce resulted in wives becoming specialized representatives and must have caused increasing returns.²³ Although many wives of merchants and shopkeepers must have been assisting their husband on a daily basis, their specific activities remain invisible in occupational epigraphy, for professional titles usually only identify the head or supervisor of the economic unit without mentioning his assistants or employees.²⁴ This focus on male labor is aptly illustrated by an inscription with relief from Salona.²⁵ The text only refers to Asidonius Agatopus as candlestick-maker (*ceriolarius*), but the relief shows the couple together at work. Quite exceptionally, the inscription here explicitly hints at the cooperation between husband and wife, by stating that ‘they worked together well’ (*qui in se bene lavoraverunt* [sic]), but nevertheless only presents the man with an occupational title. This exemplary document clearly suggests how many merchants’ wives must have been helping their husband in his trade but yet continue to escape our attention. Only a handful of inscriptions break the overall pattern and state only a profession for the female partner and not for the husband. This mostly involves occupations in which women tend to dominate, such as cooking, small-scale trade in victuals in booths and stalls and specialized textile trade.²⁶

Marriage as the connection between merchant families and networks

From the economic benefits of marriage within a single family, we now shift the focus to Roman merchant families who used marriage as a strategy to link common interests. In most pre-modern societies, it was usual for merchant families to create marital alliances with colleagues in business to ensure close cooperation, facilitate the spread of information and training and thus reduce common trading risks.²⁷ Marriages very often initiated a sequence of commercial partnerships between merchant families, in which a clear division of labor was respected. The son-in-law was presented with business training and an introduction to new commercial networks and initially only plays a subordinate role by managing the practicalities of trading ventures, such as travels, payments and transport. His family-in-law on the other hand was responsible for the organizational side of business operations, such as deciding on new purchases, maintaining correspondence with partners abroad and accounting.²⁸ This strategy proved to be a real success. Ågren for instance has shown how in 18th-century Stockholm, merchants aligned to other business families ended up far more prosperous than those who had been married to families without commercial interests.²⁹

This section will argue that even though the lack of merchant letters and archives will never allow us to present a picture of ancient trade in the same detail as has been done for medieval and early modern Europe, Roman businessmen nevertheless essentially relied on very similar techniques to forge efficient and profitable networks. We will distinguish between marital connections created on a local and interregional level and analyze the various motives for establishing these ties.

Local family networks

In most Roman cities, merchants must have formed various local economic networks inside the town, with the surrounding hinterland and neighboring towns as well. This set of connections was utilized to spread information and knowledge, facilitate transactions and mobilize capital. While networks can be construed in a variety of different ways, strategic marriages belonged to the most important strategies to strengthen previous relationships or expand the already existing connections. Two main motives for commercial marriages can be discerned.

First, most strategic matrimones took place between families with similar trading interests and of corresponding status in the local community. They primarily served the accumulation of wealth, the concentration of contacts and hence the consolidation of a dominating position in the business world. These alliances can be traced in both commerce and crafts.

A good example from the first economic sector is the marital connection between the Apronii and Helvii, two elite families engaged in trade and transport in late 1st, early 2nd-century Lyon. C. Apronius Raptor, a citizen and council member of Trier, had settled in Lyon to become a prime member of the local associations of wine merchants (*negotiatores vinarii*) and barge skippers on the Saône (*nautae Ararici*) and eventually was elected patron of both *collegia*.³⁰ Two inscriptions from the neighboring city of Grenoble show that a female member of this family, Apronia Casata, had been married to P. Helvius Masso, a council member in Vienne.³¹ Masso was no doubt related to L. Helvius Frugi, who likewise had a seat in the Vienne city council, but, more importantly, also belonged to the same association of barge skippers as Apronius Raptor and was elected patron as well.³² It seems very likely that these two aristocratic merchant families, whose wealth and social prominence is exemplified by Raptor and Frugi being elected patrons, cemented their cooperation and supremacy in the wine trade by intermarriage. The Apronii may even have continued this strategy during the 2nd half of the 2nd century, as suggested by a very fragmentary funerary inscription from Lyon mentioning a certain Toutia Aproniana.³³ Her *cognomen* may have been derived from her mother's *gentilicium*, Apronia, while her own, very rare name Toutia can link her to Toutius Incitatus, a Lyonese grain merchant and again barge skipper on the Saône.³⁴ This small dossier clearly suggests that the Apronii tried to interconnect with several families active in the same trade.

Very similar considerations must also have motivated the marital connections between two craft families from Rome. Several inscriptions indicate that family members of the Durden(i)i specialized in the production and sale of metal vessels. A certain P. Durdenus Eros erected a tomb for his brother, a *vascularius*.³⁵ The freedmen P. Durdenius Acutus and Durdenia Prima must have been active in the same trade as well. Even though the epitaph commemorating their death fails to cite their profession, the stone was decorated by small vessels, suggesting the couple was also working as *vascularii*.³⁶ The importance of marital connections for this family of artisans is finally shown by the epitaph dedicated by the freedwoman Durdena P.I. Cytheris and her husband L. Maelius L.I. Thamyrus, who was also operating as a *vascularius*.³⁷

Secondly, we also have to consider marriages between families with different, yet somehow interrelated professions. The main motive of this kind of alliances is not an increase in scale or ascendancy in a single trade, but the creation of useful connections which can mutually support each family's business interests.

This category first contains marriages between merchant families active in trade and families managing transport facilities. The small dossier of the Gallic *gens* Maspetia shows how marriages were used to forge links between families engaged in various trades and riverine transport.³⁸ In Lyon, two epitaphs mention the marriage of a Maspetia with a local businessman. The first inscription was dedicated by Maspetia Silvina to the memory of her husband Valerius Messor, 'who was doing business in the Canabae district' (*qui gessit in Canabis*).³⁹ Given Lyon's central place in the Gallic wine trade, Messor may have been active as a resident wine merchant in the city's commercial quarter.

The second inscription was erected by Q. Maspetius Severianus for his son-in-law L. Hilarianus Cinnamus, an oil merchant and barge skipper on the Rhône (*negotiator olearius* and *nauta Rhodanicus*).⁴⁰ Moreover, the marital ties between the Maspetii and Hilarianii seem to have been cemented by a second matrimony, this time between Maspetia Sabina and L. Hilarianus Martidius.⁴¹ This couple however was living in Arles and we can imagine that Martidius was assisting in Cinnamus' business by organizing commercial transactions in the harbor, before the merchandize was shipped along the Rhône to Lyon. Thus, even though we have no further indication of the Maspetii's involvement in commerce, the marriages they concluded with merchants and shippers operating along the Rhône suggest they heavily invested in trade and transport. With the Hilarianii's specialization in the import of Mediterranean merchandize (oil) and presence in a Mediterranean harbor, and with Cinnamus' shipping facilities and Valerius Messor's presence in the Canabae, providing a connection to the Lyonese market, the Maspetii must have been able to monitor maritime and riverine trade and transport. Yet, this strategy was not only used in riverine commerce. Connections between families engaged in maritime commerce and others organizing land transport proved to be equally efficient. The economic rationale of these matrimonial ties is obvious: shippers importing merchandize to a port city benefit from a network connecting them to those people responsible for the further distribution to markets and customers inland. The connections between the Censorinii and Capitonii can illustrate this strategy. Q. Capitonius Probatas, a Lyonese shipper (*navicularius marinus*), was doing business between Gaul and Italy.⁴² As clearly indicated by the fact that he was elected *sevir augustalis* in both Lyon and Puteoli, an honorary religious function often awarded to wealthy merchants and artisans, he must have had commercial interests in both cities and was no doubt shipping merchandize purchased in Puteoli to markets in Gaul and beyond.⁴³ The *gentilicium* Capitonius is fairly rare but was nonetheless encountered a second time in Lyon, in an epitaph dedicated by L. Capitonius Pius to his late wife Censorinia Supera.⁴⁴ Her name is otherwise unknown in Lyon, but can be related to L. Censorinius Ibliomarus, a citizen from Trier and member of an association of *utriclarii*.⁴⁵ This *collegium* was responsible for transporting wine and other liquids from southern Gaul to the northern provinces, by storing the merchandize in hides and packing these on mules.⁴⁶ Ibliomarus erected his dedicatory inscription in Bard-le-Regulier, a small town located approximately half-way between Lyon and the region of the Treveri. We can imagine that Capitonius Probatas relied on this marital connection to have his merchandize transported from Lyon to customers living in the German provinces.

Next, we also find marital ties between families with land-based commercial interests and others organizing land transport to distant markets. Three families from Grenoble, the Atisii, Devillii and Iulii, whose marital patterns have been analyzed by Wierschowski, present a remarkable example.⁴⁷ All these families, which were most likely exporting wine to Italy and beyond, married their daughters to families living in the neighboring regions of the Alps. They may have wished to establish close connections with families engaged in local land transport across the mountainous regions of south-east Gaul and northern Italy, to have their merchandize safely and cheaply transported to Mediterranean markets. It has indeed previously been argued that part of the wealth generated by the elite families of this region was based on their close involvement with the *negotiatores Cisalpini et Transalpini*, who specialized in transporting merchandize through the Alpine region.⁴⁸

Thirdly, economically motivated connections can also be forged between families supplying the same markets, but with a focus on different merchandize. Marital ties can then facilitate the spread of information on particular demands and the trustworthiness of customers frequenting this specific market. An example can be found in the manufactures destined for the military markets along the northern frontiers. The constant demand for military cloaks (*saga*) encouraged many Gallic businessmen to specialize in this trade and even caused the creation of a professional organization of *sagarii* with a seat in Lyon.⁴⁹ Two of these cloak-dealers, C. Rusonius Secundus and C. Rusonius Myron, were fellow-freedmen and belonged to a family only rarely occurring in epigraphy.⁵⁰ Yet, an epitaph discovered in Reims mentions a certain Rusonia Nonna, married to Maianus, who was a helmet-maker (*cassidarius*).⁵¹ He was no doubt supplying the same military markets as the Rusonii

from Lyon, so his decision to marry Rusonia may partially have been motivated by common business interests.

A fourth possible scenario involves connections between families responsible for the production and sale of a particular ingredient, necessary in another trade, and families dealing in the finished products. The former benefit from this alliance because they can expect regular sales to familiar customers, while the latter may perhaps anticipate price reductions, guaranteed quality products and other privileges in purchasing merchandize. An example of this marital strategy can be found in the Roman textile industry. In the capital, the purple dye industry and trade seems to have been dominated by freed members of the Veturii, who ran multiple shops in at least two different locations (*purpurarii*).⁵² One member of this family, a Veturia Deutera, was married to C. Cafurnius Antiochus, a woolen-draper (*lanarius*) who may have used the purple dyes in the production of his textiles.⁵³

A final pattern of commercial marriages, which closely resembles the previous one, connects families producing and/or distributing a particular kind of merchandize with families producing the containers in which these products are stored. The mutual advantages are very similar to the ones of the previous category and include the reduction of market insecurity and the creation of trust among business partners. For this strategy, the Spanish olive oil trade can offer an illustrative case. Around the middle of the 2nd century, the name of L. Aelius Aelianus is cited in several *tituli picti* on Dr. 20 oil amphorae, so we can safely assume he was shipping oil to Rome.⁵⁴ Yet, he is also known as a wealthy municipal aristocrat and benefactor in Sevilla, donating statues and public meals to his fellow-citizens.⁵⁵ Aelianus belonged to one of the major business families engaged in the Spanish oil export: Aelii frequently occur in *tituli picti* β and δ, documenting their involvement in the distribution and production of olive oil, and in stamps on amphorae, which attest their investments in the production of vessels.⁵⁶ As a member of the local elite in Sevilla, Aelianus no doubt possessed estates in the near vicinity of the city, which very likely were used to cultivate olive trees. It thus seems very likely that he was (partially) exporting own produce to the capital. So far however, none of the stamps on Dr. 20 amphorae corresponds to his name or initials, suggesting that he was not involved in the production of containers. His wife Egnatia Lupercilla, however, was the daughter of a M. Egnatius, whose initials were found on stamps, produced in a *figlina* in Alcolea del Río.⁵⁷ It seems at least possible that the marital ties between the Aelii and Egnatii facilitated Aelianus' export business, because he was not required to invest in amphora production himself, but could rely on the vessels manufactured in the workshops of his family-in-law.

Interregional family networks

In the following section, we focus on interregional commerce and the importance of marriage in the organization of business abroad. When travelling to distant markets, trading risks already existing in local business ventures evidently multiplied. For newcomers in business communities abroad, the difficulties of finding trustworthy resident trading partners and gathering reliable information on local commerce must have been enormous and the risk of being cheated may have deterred merchants from venturing into new markets. The best way to reduce these trading hazards and hence expand business abroad was finding, and above all, keeping a distinct place in the local business community.⁵⁸ One strategy immigrants could try to gain access to already existing commercial networks was creating marital ties with local merchant families. The social capital and credit constructed by matrimony were then likely to introduce them to reliable colleagues, to create new opportunities and eventually convert the family ties into business advantages.

We can again distinguish between two different versions of this strategy.

First, epigraphy shows how foreign merchants regularly settled in the markets they were supplying and tried to forge marital ties with local business families. This kind of marital alliances allowed an efficient division of labor, in which the foreign merchant organized the import of merchandize produced in his homeland, and his family-in-law took care of further distribution. The career and

professional mobility of P. Clodius Athenio, a mid-2nd-century merchant, may be a case in point. Athenio most likely originated from the Spanish city of Malaga, where he was known as a wealthy benefactor and *quinquennalis* of the local merchant association.⁵⁹ He was exporting one of the most famous Spanish victuals, salted fish products, to Rome (*negotians salsarius*) and at some point appears to have settled in the capital, as he was eventually buried there.⁶⁰ He married a certain Scantia Successa, who belonged to a family well-attested in Italian epigraphy, but completely absent in the Spanish provinces. During the 1st century, two Scantii were operating in Rome as merchants (*mercatores*).⁶¹ One can imagine that the Scantii continued their business during the 2nd century and married a female member to a wealthy Spanish businessman focusing on the Roman market. Merchants probably also stimulated (or forced) their intermediaries and agents to apply the same strategy in foreign markets. When merchant families were sufficiently large to monitor several representatives in harbors abroad, these agents may have used marriage with natives as a technique to promote quick integration in the local trading community. This strategy seems to be described in a fragment of the *Periplus maris Erythraei*, which refers to merchants from Muza sending shippers and agents to Rhapta, who then through intermarriage became acquainted with the area and its language.⁶²

Secondly, we can also trace how immigrant merchants settle in distant trading hubs and marry a partner belonging to another foreign business family. This particular technique has the obvious advantage that it tries to blend the benefits of two strategies: this way merchants are introduced in the other family members' local networks and the networks they cultivate in their homeland. Two variants can be distinguished.

This strategy was first employed by merchant families who originated from the same area and both had settled in a major commercial center.⁶³ By using intermarriage as a means to connect the two families, they expand the available networks in their new home city but also intensify the commercial contacts in their homeland. A good example can be found in the marital ties between two small Celtic families, the Cotisii and Gesatii, who specialized in the same trade and supplied the same market. The commercial interests of the Cotisii are clearly indicated by a seal, discovered recently in a Roman villa in Le Castellet, a city in southern France, and engraved with the name *M(arci) Cotisi Bubali*, which probably identified the owner of the estate.⁶⁴ The object was produced in the shape of a ship, suggesting the family engaged in maritime trade. This hypothesis can be corroborated by the fact that the very rare *gentilicium* also appears in two *tituli picti* on Spanish oil amphorae, found in Rome.⁶⁵ The Cotisii were apparently supplying the capital with Baetican olive oil. The Gesatii specialized in exactly the same business, for *tituli picti* present the names of at least 3 Gesatii.⁶⁶ Both families seem to have encouraged family members to settle in Rome, evidently to organize local distribution of the imported oil.⁶⁷ More important however is a single epitaph found in Ostia, documenting the marriage between a Gesatia Macrina and M. Cotisius Alexio.⁶⁸ Given the extreme rarity of both *gentilicia*, we can hardly doubt that the inscription attests the marital alliance of two Gallic families, active in the same trade and focusing on a single market, who wished to merge commercial networks. The same strategy may have been used by other families supplying the capital with Spanish oil and may have motivated the connections between two of the most important families in this trade, the CC. Valerii and DD. Caecilii.⁶⁹ Both families had several members active in the export of Spanish oil and it may not be coincidental that an epitaph from Rome documents the marriage of the daughter of Valerius Onesimus, whose name features in the *tituli picti*, and a D. Caecilius, whose *cognomen* is sadly missing.⁷⁰ It is true that the *gentilicia* are far more common than those of the Gallic merchant families, which obviously complicates identification, but nevertheless, the marital ties connecting the Valerii and Caecilii would answer to the same economic rationale.

Next, we also find traces of merchant families who had travelled from completely different regions to a single trading hub and, once settled there, tried to interconnect the business networks existing in their native regions with the shared networks in the commercial center.⁷¹ This gives them the opportunity to progress business interests in the emporium they had settled in by relying on common business contacts, but also to explore new markets abroad and interact with a large variety

of colleagues in distant business communities by using the newly made connections. Several examples of this strategy can be found in the epigraphy of the Republican trading hub par excellence, Delos. Many Italian *negotiatores* who had settled on the island to organize the slave trade appear to have forged connections with Phoenician business families, also present in the same commercial quarter. A certain C. Seius Aristomachus for instance dedicated a statue to his mother Cleopatra, a citizen of Arados.⁷² The funerary monument of a daughter of Q. Furius and Artemisia was found among the epitaphs of a Tyrian family, suggesting Furius had married a member of a Phoenician merchant family.⁷³ It would be interesting to analyze the marital patterns of the children born from these 'mixed marriages'. Comparative evidence suggests that during the first generation, foreign merchants who had settled in distant ports tended to marry women belonging to other immigrant business families who often specialized in similar trades, a strategy also followed by Italian *negotiatores*. Later generations however increasingly opted for marriages with local families, to promote integration into local business networks which had been dominated by native merchant families.⁷⁴ So far however, Delian epigraphy does not allow us to trace marital patterns over several generations and verify whether similar techniques were being used by Roman businessmen.

Marriage as a socio-economic strategy or connecting wealth and status

After the analysis of strategic marriages with a purely economic motivation, this final section will explore how marriages with higher-status partners not only stimulated a merchant family's rise in society, but may also have had economic repercussions.

In societies with a clearly marked social stratification, as Rome undoubtedly was, marriage patterns tend to be rather conservative and closed, in the sense that status groups usually married each other, either to stabilize their privileged position by recycling dowries or because social mobility through marriage was impeded by superior elite families and peers. Nonetheless, we do find traces of businessmen and their families successfully engaging in marriages with social superiors, albeit the frequency of these cross-status marriages was obviously never so high as to actually blur class divisions. While in the majority of these marital alliances the socially inferior partners must primarily have sought to maximize prestige and gain access to the local aristocracy, upward social mobility also affected the professional life of the partners. For businessmen, marrying a member of the elite also facilitated the accumulation of wealth and the creation of new economic opportunities, as they are now introduced to a completely new network of potential customers and mediators who can offer assistance, credit and valuable relationships. Unfortunately, Roman inscriptions never allow us to reconstruct the variety of new opportunities opened up by marriage and the economic consequences of gaining access to a new status group. We can only rely on comparative evidence from better-documented pre-industrial societies and assume that Roman businessmen who were introduced to these elite networks somehow equally benefitted from their marital ties.⁷⁵ Here we will analyze two different strategies by which businessmen tried to gain access to Roman aristocracies.

First, successful businessmen who had gathered at least sufficient wealth and status to be deemed an acceptable marriage partner, sometimes managed to wed a woman belonging to the local and even imperial elites. P. Tullius Callifon for instance, a freed merchant and banker (*negotiator* and *stipulator argentarius*) from Milan, managed to marry Iunia Publicia C.f. Pomponia, a *femina stolata* and hence an individual of equestrian rank, whose family was probably living in Como.⁷⁶ He must have been a rather prominent figure in the city, for he was awarded the honorary function of *sevir* and elected patron twice. Whether these status markers were granted to him as a consequence of his marriage or merely enabled him to find a socially superior partner must remain uncertain. However, it is interesting to note that the inscription was dedicated by two of the couple's clients, a certain L. Romatius Valerianus and Vocatia Valeria. Romatius' rare *gentilicium* occurs, apart from this

inscription and a single document from Cingoli, exclusively in the epigraphy of Como.⁷⁷ It is thus obvious that the regulation of patronage relationships was the responsibility of Callifon's wife and her family's prestige, not that of the successful merchant. As Callifon was connected to the Publicii's clients by his marriage to a member of the *ordo equester*, we can assume he must have benefitted from the access to this network in Como. Maybe some of these clients were involved in the thriving transport business on lake Como, by which route merchandize was shipped from regions across the Alps to northern Italy.⁷⁸ Callifon may then have relied on his connections in Como to distribute the merchandize on the markets of Milan. This assumed economic connection between Como and Milan is further exemplified by the career of one of the Romatii from Como, who held the function of *sevir* in both Como and Milan and *sevir augustalis* in Como, an honorary office which, as already noted, was often granted to freedmen engaged in trade and industry.⁷⁹ It seems fairly certain he must have been one of the nodes in the commercial, marital and patronage network linking the equestrian Publicii from Como with Callifon's business in Milan.

A second strategy successfully employed by wealthy merchants was not marrying into elite families themselves, but to marry off their children to members of aristocracies. In virtually all pre-industrial societies, marriages of this kind were often concluded between rich and ambitious business families and impoverished elites faced with insolvency.⁸⁰ They provided an adequate match between the wish for upward social mobility and the demand for hard cash to finance the lifestyle of the (formerly) rich and famous. In Roman society, this option may even have been more attractive to elites than the first, for it effectively increases the distance between direct engagement in commerce and the traditional values of the landed aristocracy, aversive as ever to close connections with the world of trade and industry. A suitable example of this strategy can be found in the business community of Narbonne, where the wealthy oil merchant and local aristocrat Sex. Fadius Secundus Musa managed to marry off one of his children to a person of senatorial rank.⁸¹ Several *tituli picti*, dated between 146 and 161 AD, identify Musa as a trader shipping Spanish olive oil to Rome.⁸² Moreover, a famous honorary inscription from Narbonne, carefully dated in 149 AD, describes how Musa had held all municipal offices, had been elected patron of a local carpenters' association and had made a very generous donation of 16,000 sesterces to the *collegium*.⁸³ The text also includes the transcription of a letter Musa had addressed to the association, in which he refers to his grandson Lucundus, a *clarissimus*. This title clearly suggests that Lucundus' parents, and hence one of Musa's children, belonged to the *ordo senatorius*. The economic consequences of this marital alliance are evidently never alluded to, but one can assume that a senator with obvious connections in the capital, precisely the market Musa was focusing on, could have promoted his father-in-law's business interests.

Conclusion

The analysis of marriage patterns among merchant families clearly suggests that these strategies really mattered in setting up a successful business. We are obviously unable to compute the real impact of marriage in economics because of the lack of financial records, but nonetheless, the recurrence of marital alliances between businessmen indicates that somehow marriage offered real benefits to merchants who interlinked with colleagues through marriage connections. Moreover, comparative evidence has been adduced to claim that Roman businessmen essentially relied on the same nuptial strategies traceable in all pre-industrial trading communities. Here, sufficient sources are available to confirm the importance of finding the right marital partner to create business opportunities, gain access to trading networks, reduce risks in a volatile trading world and eventually get a competitive advantage. All the similarities between ancient and early modern merchant networks forged by marital ties clearly prove that Roman businessmen were well-aware of the advantages strategic marriages had to offer.

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¹ Friedman 1986.

² Treggiari 1991; Rawson 1996; Cantarella 2005. For the economic consequences of aristocratic marriages, see Shatzman 1975.

³ Wierschowski 1992 is a notable exception.

⁴ Grassby 2001.

⁵ Drexhage 1992, 79. This invisibility of female economic activity hardly changes during the next 2 millennia. See Doe 2010, 86.

⁶ Female apprenticeship is documented in the papyri, but investments in education of women outside the home remains rare compared to the frequency of male occupational training. For apprenticeship contracts in the Egyptian papyri, see Bergamasco 1995 and van Minnen 1998a for women in particular. For a similar picture of women's virtual absence from formal training and participation in associational life in early modern society, see Zabin 2006, 296-297 with a discussion of female labor in 18th-century America.

⁷ Kampen 1981; Malaspina 2003; Berdowski 2007. For a comparable gender distinction in early modern Europe, see Sharpe 2001, 286.

⁸ For Roman law on dowries, see Treggiari 1991, 323-364.

⁹ Schlegel and Eloul 1988.

¹⁰ For dowries as starting capital for business in other societies, see Stanley 1990, 60 (ancient Greece) and Lane 1944, 183 (16th-century Venice).

¹¹ For very similar consequences of demography on succession in business in early modern Europe, see Mathias 2000.

¹² Rabuzzi 2001, 359 (18th-century Denmark); Beachy 2001, 316 (18th-century Augsburg).

¹³ Dem. 36.29-30 and 45.28. See Shipton 1997, 410.

¹⁴ Eichenauer 1988, 33-41; Bernstein 2008.

¹⁵ CIL 6.37820.

¹⁶ CIL 6.33920; 6.9435 and 6.6939 respectively.

¹⁷ CIL 5.7023. See Cresci Marrone 1994 for this inscription.

¹⁸ CIL 6.9398.

¹⁹ Zimmer 1982, 94-95.

²⁰ Rabuzzi 2001, 356.

²¹ P.Oxy 3.493; 6.985 and 22.2342. See Van Minnen 1998b. For comparative evidence, see Zabin 2006, 302.

²² Kampen 1981, nr. 44.

²³ Comparative evidence is abundantly available. See for instance Steinbrink 2006 for 15th-century Basel; Vickers and Walsh 1999 for 18th-century America and the various contributions in Vogel and Weckel 1991.

²⁴ For the invisibility of business employees in epigraphy, see Tran 2007, 124-125.

²⁵ CIL 3.2112-2113.

²⁶ CIL 14.3709: cook (*popinaria*); 6.9683: seller of grain and pulse in a booth (*negotiatrice frumentaria et legumenaria ab scala mediana*) and 6.9214: seller of gold-decorated clothing (*aurivestrix*).

²⁷ See for instance, among numerous other studies, Kuznesof 1980 (18th-century São Paulo); Bull 2002 (18th-century Trondheim); Ojala 1997 (18th-century Finland); Grassby 2001 (17th-century England).

²⁸ Gelderblom 2003 (16th-century Amsterdam); Sheridan 1971 (18th-century London); Rabuzzi 2001 (18th-century Stockholm) and Van Gelder 2009, 110 (early modern Venice).

²⁹ Ågren 2006.

³⁰ CIL 13.1911 and 13.11179.

³¹ CIL 12.2243 and 12.2259.

³² CIL 13.1918.

³³ CIL 13.2285.

³⁴ CIL 13.1972.

³⁵ CIL 6.9952.

³⁶ AE 1994, 303. See Granino Cecere 1994 for this inscription.

³⁷ CIL 6.1818.

³⁸ Christol 2000.

³⁹ CIL 13.2016.

⁴⁰ CIL 13.1996.

⁴¹ CIL 12.851.

⁴² CIL 13.1942. See Rougé 1965; id. 1984 and Wierschowski 2001, 323-324.

⁴³ For the economic dimension of this office, see Duthoy 1974.

⁴⁴ AE 1976, 444.

⁴⁵ CIL 13.2839. See Wierschowski 2001, 377-378.

⁴⁶ Kneissl 1981 and Deman 2002.

⁴⁷ Wierschowski 1992.

⁴⁸ Walser 1991.

⁴⁹ Verboven 2007, 308.

⁵⁰ CIL 12.1898.

⁵¹ ILTG 355.

⁵² AE 1923, 59 (*purpurarius de vico lugario*) and CIL 6.37820 (*purpurarii a Marianeis*).

⁵³ CIL 6.9489. His trade specialization is highlighted by the relief on the left of the inscription, which shows a sheep. See Nonnis 2007, 394.

⁵⁴ CIL 15.3693-3694a-c.

⁵⁵ CIL 2.1191.

⁵⁶ Chic García 1993.

⁵⁷ Caballos Rufino and Eck 1992.

⁵⁸ For comparative evidence, see e.g. Rabuzzi 1995, 443 for 18th-century Stralsund.

⁵⁹ CIL 6.9677 and 2.1971. For these inscriptions, see Ricci 1992, 137-139. According to IG 14.2540, a Greek inscription found in Malaga, Athenio may also have been the patron of an association of Syrian and Asian businessmen, but the text is too fragmentary to permit secure identification.

⁶⁰ For the production of salted fish and fish sauce in Spain, see Curtis 1988.

⁶¹ CIL 6.9630.

⁶² *PME* 16.

⁶³ This technique can be traced in early modern Europe as well. See for instance Gelderblom 2003 for Antwerp merchants migrating and intermarrying in Amsterdam.

⁶⁴ AE 2005, 975.

⁶⁵ Rodríguez Almeida 1979, nr. 102 and CIL 15.3848.

⁶⁶ L. Gesatius Aegialus: Blázquez Martínez and Remesal Rodríguez 2003, nr. 67; T. Gesatius Frontinus: Liou and Marichal 1978, nr. 2-3; T. Gesatius Hermes: CIL 15.3877 and Blázquez Martínez and Remesal Rodríguez 2003, nr. 68-70. The Gesatii were also working together, for two *tituli* attest a *societas* of at least two family members

(CIL 15.3878 and Blázquez Martínez and Remesal Rodríguez 2003, nr. 71). For the Celtic origin of the Gesatii, see CIL 13.2076; ILN 3.232 and Liou and Marichal 1978, 116, nt. 17.

⁶⁷ AE 1991, 207 (Gesatia Primitiva) and RAC 1929, 27 (M. Cotisius Onesimus).

⁶⁸ CIL 14.1092.

⁶⁹ CC. Valerii in the *tituli*: CIL 15.4002-4013; 15.4015; 15.4021; 15.4023-4027; 15.4029 and 15.4035. DD. Caecilii: CIL 4.9480; 15.3751-3786; 15.3791-3792; 15.3795; Rodríguez Almeida 1979, nr. 35; Liou 1987, nr. 82; Blázquez Martínez and Remesal Rodríguez 2003, nr. 21-23.

⁷⁰ CIL 6.28191. C. Valerius Onesimus is mentioned as an oil merchant in the *titulus* CIL 15.4022.

⁷¹ For the same strategy used by early modern European families, see Ågren 2006 for 18th-century Stockholm and Zakharov 2012 on marital ties between English, German and Dutch merchant communities doing business in 18th-century Russia.

⁷² ID 2245.

⁷³ Le Dinahet-Couilloud 1997. See also Baslez 2002 for 'mixed marriages' on Delos.

⁷⁴ Pourchasse 2012 for 18th-century port cities in France.

⁷⁵ See for instance Lane 1944 for 16th-century Venice; Ruddock 1946 for 16th-century Southampton; Sheridan 1971 for 18th-century Antigua and Bull 2002 for 18th-century Trondheim.

⁷⁶ CIL 5.5892. Callifon's family must originate from Milan, for PP. Tutillii are only attested in this city (CIL 5.5832 and 5.6107). For *feminae stolatae*, see Holtheide 1980. CC. Publicii are frequently found in the epigraphic records of northern Italy, but in Como in particular (AE 1995, 612; CIL 5.5301; IRCOMO-In. 6).

⁷⁷ Cingoli: CIL 9.5693. Como: AE 2003, 742; CIL 5.5286; 5.5290; 5.5303; Pais 784 and Pais 1287.

⁷⁸ For transport in northern Italy, see Uggeri 1987; Bargnesi 1997 and Boscolo 2004-2005.

⁷⁹ CIL 5.5303. For the economic background of *seviri augustales*, see Duthoy 1974.

⁸⁰ These marriage patterns have been explored to great length for early modern Europe. See, apart from the literature cited in nt. 75, Thomas 1972 and Slater 1976.

⁸¹ For the career of this merchant, see Héron de Villefosse 1915 and Cels 1978.

⁸² CIL 15.3863-3873.

⁸³ CIL 12.4393.