

13th. Conference of the Fédération Internationale des Associations d'Etudes Classiques  
August 24<sup>th</sup> - August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009 - Berlin

a) Title of the paper:

**“Social and Political Meaning of Motherhood under Augustan Laws”**

b) Length of the paper (reading time): 20 minutes

c) Preferred panel:

**Social and Political Dimensions of Kinship: Family, Neighbourhood, City**

d) Outline of the content (Abstract):

In Rome, as in most societies, a woman's status was enhanced by motherhood. Expressions such as *matrona* and *materfamilias*, meaning an honourable married woman, were derived from *mater* on the assumption that marriage and motherhood went together. Moral reputation and inherited distinction of a mother conferred status to her children, just as their achievements, once grown, reflected on her. In fact, the mothers who won praise from the Roman biographers and moralists were those who taught the traditional civic and moral values to their children, particularly their sons. According to several literary sources, Roman censors traditionally enquired of married couples whether or not they had married for the purpose of having children (*liberorum quaerendorum causa*) and from time to time, they also put pressure on citizens about this issue.

However, the first active official encouragement of parenthood appeared at the beginnings of imperial rule, when Augustus enacted the *lex Iulia et Papia Poppaea*, with the explicit aim of inducing Roman citizens to marry and produce several children. Motherhood, as such, was then rewarded by general prestige and a sense of virtuous fulfillment, much as it had always been, but enhanced by the official imperial approval. This took the specific form of the *ius liberorum*, which carried social privileges such as liberation from *tutela*, the ability to accept legacies even beyond the limit imposed by the *lex Voconia*, and in the second century, more concretely, a limited right to succeed to one's own children in the event of their death intestate.

These initiatives, most commonly known as the Augustan marriage laws, have often baffled scholars for generations. Their broad spectrum and content, purpose and effects continue to be debated.

This paper concentrates on discussing the significance of such legislative measures for Roman women and reproduction, that is, motherhood and its official encouragement, within a social and political context.

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