

The relationship between the Roman aristocracy and the elite of Italian communities is fundamental to our understanding of the nature of Roman hegemony in Italy through the middle republic until the Social War. Scholars have argued that in general local Italian elite and the Roman aristocracy were increasingly integrated both politically and culturally during the second century BC (Mommsen, Sherwin-White). In this view, local aristocrats were attracted to “superior” Roman culture and appreciated Rome’s military power and protection, while shared culture and military service over time forged Italian-Roman camaraderie (Badian). Others have argued that local aristocrats adopted Roman culture as a means to an end—that local elites held power because of military, political, or economic backing from Rome, and so saw their political power and legitimacy linked to their relationship with the Roman nobility (Gabba CAH<sup>2</sup> 8, 1989). However, recently Mouritsen (Italian Unification, 1998) has challenged the overall picture that the Italian elite sought cultural and political integration under the unifying hegemony of Rome. In particular Mouritsen questions whether Italian elite privilege and authority in the second century relied on Roman support, citing the relative lack of examples of Rome intervening on behalf of Italian nobles in the second century.

This paper will examine Roman-Italian aristocratic interaction and argue that Rome did provide external support for Italian aristocrats in the century or so before the Social War. The relative lack of second century *exempla* is misleading because the major narrative sources provide incomplete coverage of the second century and focus on Roman overseas expansion more than Roman-Italian relations. Meanwhile, scholars on both sides of the debate have failed to exploit the rich source material for the Second Punic War, when Italian loyalty was tested and Italian-Roman interaction comes to the fore. This evidence strongly suggests that local aristocrats saw their power linked to Rome. For example, Livy (23.1.1-3) reports that a certain aristocrat named Staius Trebius of Compsa contacted Hannibal after the battle of Cannae and promised to turn over his city should Hannibal come near. Trebius had been opposed by an aristocratic faction composed of members of the Mopsii, a family who held power because of the Romans (*factio Mopsiorum familiae per gratiam Romanorum potentis*). A similar dynamic was present in other Italian cities, such as Salapia, Nola, and Tarentum.

The implications are far-reaching. The evidence shows clearly that at least some Italian aristocrats’ power relied on Roman backing. It also shows that the Italian aristocracy was not uniform, but rather was divided by the same sort of factional and family rivalries as the Roman aristocracy. Indeed, it may have been that lack of uniformity that encouraged integration in the second century. That is, the Romans could exploit intra-aristocratic rivalries by backing one party, thus encouraging that party to maintain strong bonds with Rome. Also, during the second century when no alternative to Roman hegemony presented itself (such as Pyrrhus or Hannibal), opposing local aristocrats would have had little choice but to ingratiate themselves to the Romans in order to compete with their local rivals who already received Roman backing. Only with the Social War, when Roman abuses galvanized Italian resentment, did a legitimate alternative to Roman hegemony emerge, by which time Italian aristocrats were already to some degree culturally and politically integrated with their Roman counterparts.