

Social Network Analysis as a Form of Source Criticism in Plutarch

Creating social networks based on Plutarch's Roman Lives reveals important evidence of Plutarch's approach to biography and his biases. This paper will present social network graphs (called sociograms) made from Plutarch's Lives from the late Roman Republic (Lucullus, Pompey, Crassus, Caesar, Cato, Cicero, Brutus, and Marcus Antonius). Plutarch emphasized non-Roman figures like Mithridates and Cleopatra, diminished the social connections of people like Crassus and Lucullus, highlighted foreign wars, and emphasized the connections each figure had to Octavian and the Julio-Claudians. While most historical network analysis published about ancient Rome looks at questions of political activity and social norms in Rome, this presentation will use social network analysis to look at ancient historiography and source analysis.

This presentation will highlight three different networks: a network of all connections discussed in the lives listed above shows the greatest extent of Plutarch's network. A network with the protagonist connections removed (that is: a network including connections from the Life of Cicero that did not include Cicero himself) reveals the influence Plutarch's protagonists had on his research and reveals the hidden leaders in his accounts. The final network compares Plutarch's Life of Caesar to Suetonius's, allowing us to compare the types of relationships both authors emphasize. By comparing these different graphs, the presentation will demonstrate the ways in which Plutarch's protagonists affected his depiction of ancient social networks and how his protagonists' networks were skewed by his interest in the eastern Mediterranean and the Julio-Claudians.

Ultimately, social network researchers must be wary of relying on ancient sources to give accurate views of ancient social networks. Plutarch highlighted relationships that furthered his

biased accounts of his protagonists and relied on sources that did not always highlight the importance of his protagonist in the city of Rome. This shows that historical network analysts must include strong source criticism in their research and account for author bias when discussing the social networks they pull from a source. Likewise, developing social networks from ancient authors can be a strong tool for source criticism.

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