**Cornelia: on making one’s name as *mater Gracchorum***

I. Introduction

In his *Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus*, Plutarch discusses the motivations that may have spurred Tiberius Gracchus to propose his agrarian law immediately upon entering office as Tribune of the Plebs in 133 BCE. Tiberius may have been incited by Diophanes the rhetorician and Blossius the philosopher, who were his friends and teachers (§8.6); or by rivalry with another ambitious aristocrat called Spurius Postumius (§8.8); or by his own observation of the condition of the Tuscan countryside (§8.9); or by the direct urging of the people themselves (§8.10). Plutarch also reports (§8.7) that some writers say that his mother Cornelia spurred him on, by constantly reproaching her sons that the Romans still addressed her as the mother-in-law of Scipio (Aemilianus), and not yet as the mother of the Gracchi.\(^1\) In a perceptive discussion of this passage, Burckhardt and Von Ungern-Sternberg observe that it is premature for Tiberius’s mother to demand great things of her elder son. Any contemporary aristocrat would have lodged hopes for making a great name not in the lowly tribunate, but in the higher magistracies, above all the consulship with its accompanying military commands.\(^2\) Tiberius, about 30 years old in 133, was at

\(^1\) Plut. *Gracch.* 8.7: ἐνιοὶ δὲ [sc. λέγουσι] καὶ Κορνηλίαν συνεπαιτῶνται τὴν μητέρα, πολλὰς τοὺς υἱοὺς ὀνειδίζουσαν, ὅτι Ῥωμαῖοι Σκιπίωνος αὐτὴν ἐτι πενθεράν, οὔπω δὲ μητέρα Γράγχων προσσημένουσιν.

\(^2\) Burckhardt and Von Ungern-Sternberg 1994: 111-12. This is why Cornelia’s daughter Sempraonia’s marriage to the much older, highly successful general and politician Scipio Aemilianus (*RE* Cornelius (335): cos. 147, 134; vanquisher of Carthage in 146 and Numantia in 133; twice triumphator) could seem to be Cornelia’s most important current connection, as she is made to imply here (Petrocelli 2001[1994]: 64). This passage is unique in giving her connection to Scipio Aemilianus such prominence: typically the connection that matters (besides her sons) is her father, Scipio Africanus. Here the point may be that she is prodding her sons by comparing them unfavorably to their sister Sempraonia: by her marriage she has done better for me, says Cornelia, than you have so far done by your own native genius.
least a decade from being eligible to stand for the consulship; his brother Gaius, nine or
ten years his junior (for note that Cornelia’s reproach is directed at both sons: πολλάκις
tοὺς υἱοὺς ὁνειδίζουσαν) was two decades away. Cornelia’s reproach, then, on the eve
of Tiberius’s entry into the tribunate, seems to imply her foreknowledge that her sons—
both of them—would make their names precisely and most unexpectedly as tribunes, one
of them in the upcoming year, and the other a decade later. From a sociohistorical
viewpoint, such a reproach, directed at even her elder son (let alone both) in 134 or 133
BCE, is utterly improbable.

The rhetoric of this reproach may provide a hint as to what is going on. The
Roman discourse of exemplarity sometimes defines a characteristic attribute or quality of
a person and projects it onto other aspects of her or his existence, thereby organizing a
consistent image of the person’s life around that attribute. Here, Cornelia is eager to
become known as “mother of the Gracchi” (µήτηρ Γράγχων = mater Gracchorum), her
chief exemplary attribute in the later tradition, as we shall see. Yet she cannot assume
this identity until both her sons—one is not enough—come into their own exemplary,
traditional figuration as “the Gracchi” (plural), which they will do via the tribunate.
Cornelia demands that her sons hurry up and become what they “really are,” or must be,
in the sense of inhabiting their eventual, timeless exemplary identities, so that she can
come into her own timeless exemplary identity as mater Gracchorum. Thus the

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3 E.g., Fabius Maximus is reduced to a set of characteristics defined by his nickname cunctator (Roller
2011), and Cicero is reduced to being the nomen eloquentiae by declaimers of the triumviral and Augustan
eras (Kaster 1998: 261-63).

historically implausible claim that Cornelia reproached her son(s), at this time and in these terms, makes sense within the logic of exemplary discourse.

In this article I examine how the “mother of the Gracchi” is constructed and characterized in texts and other monumental forms, and I consider the exemplary uses to which this figure is put. As the example above shows, to examine Cornelia’s construction as mater Gracchorum is by no means to write a biography in the sense of recovering actualities of the historical Cornelia’s real life. No doubt she was the mother of the famous tribunes Gaius and Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, and the daughter of P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus, the victor over Hannibal; no doubt she married Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, a leading general and politician of the first half of the second century BCE. But her visibility to subsequent generations is attributable to the towering social and political importance of her sons, and particularly to Gaius’s remarks, in speeches and other texts, about her influence upon himself. It also has to do with a statue of her that was on public display from at least the Augustan age onward, and with some letters that reportedly circulated under her name in the first century BCE. These sources of information, insofar as they survive for us to evaluate, are all implicated in a discourse of motherhood, one grounded in Cornelia’s maternal relationship to her extraordinary sons. I contend that this discourse has molded, via selection and transformation, almost every aspect of the Cornelia legend as it developed in the generation or two following her sons’ deaths; scarcely a trace survives of a Cornelia who is not always already constituted

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5 RE Sempronius (53): Consul 177 and 163 BCE; censor 169 BCE; twice triumphator.

as the exemplary and legendary “mother of the Gracchi.” Insofar as biographically true information survives in the Cornelia tradition—and some assuredly does—it was selected and transmitted precisely when it was already consistent with the discourse of motherhood that governs the overall construction of this figure.7

In particular, Cornelia’s exemplary status is constructed around the component words of the tag mater Gracchorum. For one problematic addressed in surviving texts and monuments is that her offspring are “the Gracchi,” figures whose massive impact upon the res publica is evaluated in the tradition in profoundly conflicting ways. And another problematic is that she is their mother—one who in part exhibits stereotypically or socially expected maternal behaviors toward her sons, and who is in some degree credited with or held accountable for their actions. In what follows, I examine how a kind of “life story” is organized for her around the role of mater Gracchorum (part II); I then examine some overtly exemplary deployments of this figure, as she is invoked in various texts and other monumental forms as a canon of maternal, spousal, and more generally moral virtue (part III).

II. Cornelia’s “Life Story”

A. Not yet mater Gracchorum

7 So Von Hesberg-Tonn 1983: 70: “Cornelia stellt … einen Frauentyp dar, der in erster Linie dazu verwendet wird, sittlich-moralische Wertvorstellungen zu verkörpern.” Hänninen 2007: 84 mistakes the discursive construct for biography when she writes “[m]otherhood really made Cornelia immortal.” It is not that (a notionally biographical) Cornelia was simply most famous in her maternal role, but that the discourse of motherhood has constructed virtually every aspect of the “Cornelia” known to us. Only a few glimpses may survive of a Cornelia who is not the legendary “mother of the Gracchi.” The story of the snake prodigy (see below) may belong to a Sempronian family tradition that is not decisively stamped by the “mother of the Gracchi” legend (Rieger 1991: 48-49, Santangelo 2005: 208-9). I conjecture likewise for the story of Cornelia’s betrothal, whose origins may lie among the tales of Scipio Africanus and his adversaries in the 190s BCE. Yet even these stories can be told in ways that bring them into the “mother of the Gracchi” tradition, as we shall see.
The *mater Gracchorum* figuration can be pushed back to the very beginning of Cornelia’s life. In a brief discussion of human teeth (7.68-72) the Elder Pliny records some peculiarities of dentition in infants. He remarks that it was considered a bad omen when a girl called Valeria was born with teeth; following a consultation with the *haruspices* the baby was banished from the city (69). He then adds—parenthetically, as the matter does not involve teeth—that for an infant girl to be born with her genitals grown together is also an unpropitious omen, as Cornelia the mother of the Gracchi proves (*quasdam concreto genitali gigni infausto omine Cornelia Gracchorum mater indicio est*, 7.69). He then returns to teeth, without further explanation. The identification of the infant who suffered this birth defect as *Gracchorum mater* implies that the bad omen had something to do with her reproductive capacity, and specifically with the famous sons she would eventually bear.\(^8\) Now Pliny, writing in the 70s CE, presumably got this information about Cornelia’s birth from one of his sources, which suggests it was already part of the “mother of the Gracchi” tradition before Pliny’s own time. What might be its point? Solinus, writing about 150 years after Pliny, repeats Pliny’s information and offers an explanation: Cornelia expiated the portent, he says, by the unfortunate deaths of her sons the Gracchi (*feminis perinde est infausta nativitas, si concretum virginal fuerit, quo pacto genitalia fuere Corneliae, quae editis Gracchis ostentum hoc piavit sinistro exitu liberorum*). On this interpretation, the portent simply foretells the tragedy of their deaths. But this need not be the only explanation, nor even the most plausible one. Romans of the late Republic and early Empire who regarded the Gracchi as disruptive, destructive forces could have interpreted the omen as

\(^8\)See also Köves-Zulauf 1972: 222-24, with further discussion of Pliny’s logic.
foretelling their ill effects upon the commonwealth. Indeed, given the vagina’s dual function as sexual organ and birth canal, its closure makes best sense as a sign that Cornelia should not conceive or bear these sons at all, not merely that they would die unfortunate deaths. In any case, this portent projects the “mother of the Gracchi” tradition back to the moment of Cornelia’s birth: she is always already, from the earliest possible moment, all “about” being mater Gracchorum, with the intimation of domestic and/or civic tragedy that this role entails.

The next moment in the “life story” of the mater Gracchorum concerns her betrothal. Her father, Scipio Africanus, reconciled a longstanding quarrel with his rival Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus—a younger man, and regarded as the most distinguished noble of his generation—by giving him his daughter in marriage. The story is narrated or mentioned in passing in six surviving texts, one of which is a passage late in book 1 of Cicero’s De Inventione. Composed probably in the mid 80s BCE, this text shows that the tradition of “the Gracchi” (represented as disturbers of the republic) and of Cornelia, daughter of Scipio Africanus, as “mother of the Gracchi” (hence in some way responsible for them) was already in place within about a generation of Gaius’s death in 121 BCE: indeed, the figures and their roles are presumed comprehensible to the reader, without

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10 Livy 38.57.2-8, Val. Max. 4.2.3, Sen. Cont. 5.2.3, Gell. 12.8.1-4, Dio fr. 65, as well as Cic. Inv 1.91 discussed here.

11 Achard 1994: 5-10 provides evidence and detailed argument; he dates the work to 84-83 BCE.
elaboration. Now, in this passage Cicero discusses defective arguments and how to refute them. One defective type, which he calls the genus argumentationis remotum (1.89), involves placing responsibility too far back in the causal sequence leading to the case at hand—or, as he puts it, drawing an argument from further away than the matter requires (remotum est quod ultra quam satis est petitur, 1.91). Cicero illustrates this defect as follows: “If Publius Scipio had not given his daughter in marriage to Tiberius Gracchus, and from her had not begotten the two Gracchi, such great discord would never have arisen; hence this misfortune seemingly should be blamed on Scipio” (quods i non P. Scipio Corneliam filiam Ti. Graccho collocasset atque ex ea duos Gracchos procreasset, tantae seditiones natae non essent; quare hoc incommodum Scipioni adscribendum videtur, 1.91). Along the same lines, he says, the poetic lament “Would that trees had never been felled on mount Pelion…” (citing Ennius’s Medea exul, translated from Euripides) lays the blame for Medea’s murdering her children further back than the matter requires (longius enim repetita est quam res postulabat). To blame Scipio Africanus for the turmoil caused by the Gracchi, then, is just as fallacious as to ascribe Medea’s crime to the timber from which the Argo was built. An additional absurdity in the Gracchan case, which may further tar the argument as fallacious, is that the victor over Hannibal—the quintessential savior of the res publica—is being blamed for seditio. But this absurdity is only implied; the primary fallacy, as Cicero presents it,

12 Knowledge of the Gracchi’s ancestry (Scipio Africanus, Ti. Sempronius Gracchus père) was widespread in their own day as well as later, and was flaunted by the Gracchi themselves: e.g., C. Gracch. ORF2 fr. 47.

13 The awkwardness that Scipio is grammatically the subject of procreasset is addressed by Madvig’s conjecture of Gracchus for Gracchos. However, construal ad sensum is easy and recent editors (Stroebel, Achard) retain Gracchos.

14 So Rieger 1991: 159-60.
involves not content but distance (hence its name, *remotum*). And if we ask at exactly what distance this argument displays its defect, it is not, I think, in holding Cornelia responsible for “the Gracchi,” but rather in pushing the responsibility back another generation. Scipio Africanus may be their grandfather, but he incurs none of the blame or credit for them as *avus Gracchorum* that Cornelia incurs (as we shall see) by virtue of being *mater Gracchorum*.

A third key moment in the “life story” of the *mater Gracchorum* involves the snake portent that led to her husband’s death. Six versions of this story survive, each with distinctive emphases and details that relate it to its immediate context. The Elder Pliny’s version is remarkable for integrating it into the *mater Gracchorum* tradition. At *Naturalis Historia* 7.121-22, Pliny offers a series of exemplary instances of *pietas*—dutifulness toward family, community, and gods. Among these is the following (Plin. *Nat.* 7.122):

*Gracchorum pater anguibus prehensis in domo, cum responderetur ipsum victurum alterius sexus interempto: “immo vero,” inquit, “meum necate, Cornelia enim iuvenis est et parere adhuc potest.” hoc erat uxori parcere et rei publicae consulere; idque mox consecutum est.*

When the father of the Gracchi caught snakes in his house, and when the response [sc. from the *haruspices*] was given that he would live if the snake of the other

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sex was killed, he said, ‘on the contrary, kill mine—for Cornelia is in her prime and can yet give birth.’ This was both to spare his wife and to have regard for the commonwealth: and the outcome soon followed.

Pliny’s narrative is elliptical and seems to presuppose knowledge of a “fuller” version: that Tiberius caught two snakes, one male and one female; that the haruspices specified that one must be killed and the other must live; and that each spouse was to share the fate of the snake of the same sex. Now, Cornelia reputedly bore her husband twelve children, of whom three survived to adulthood: Tiberius, born probably in 163 BCE, Gaius, born in 154 or 153, and daughter Sempronia, certainly older than Gaius.¹⁶ No information about the others survives. The story of the snake prodigy implies that Tiberius père died no more than nine months before the youngest child’s birth; Gaius, being the youngest datable child, therefore gives a terminus post quem of 155-54 for his father’s death.

Carcopino astutely observed that Tiberius père’s words (as given by Pliny) make especially neat sense if Gaius is regarded as the last of the twelve, and Cornelia is imagined at the time of the prodigy to be pregnant with him—hence Tiberius speaks of her capacity to give birth yet. In this case, Pliny’s approbative statement “this was to spare his wife and have regard for the commonwealth”—both actions exemplifying pietas, hence justifying Tiberius’s inclusion in this exemplary list—means concretely that, by granting Cornelia her life, he enabled her to bear Gaius, who would benefit the

¹⁶ Scholars accept the birthdates implied for the sons at Plut. Gracch. 22.2 = Gaius 1.2, where Tiberius is said to have died just short of age 30 (in 133 BCE, hence was born in 163-62), and Gaius is said to be nine years younger (likewise Gracch. 3.1; hence born in 154-53). Sempronia, according to Plutarch (Gracch. 4.5), was already married to Scipio Aemilianus during the assault on Carthage in 147. With marriage for elite Roman women usually coming in the early to mid teens, on this information she could have been born as late as about 160 BCE, though more likely in the several years preceding. See Moir 1983: 140-41, with further references on the vexed question of women’s age at marriage.
state. Indeed, Pliny stresses Tiberius’s *pietas*—his service to his family that enables the legendary figures of the tradition to emerge—by labeling him only relationally as *pater Gracchorum*, and not supplying his proper name. For one further son needs to be born to bring “the Gracchi” (plural) into being, and the predicate *pater Gracchorum* indicates its subject’s instrumentality to that birth. This label also patently recalls the more familiar tag *mater Gracchorum*, which Tiberius here enables Cornelia to become via the grant of life and future offspring. To name Tiberius by his proper name, hence bring into view his glorious *res gestae* in the civic and military spheres, would only muddle Pliny’s message.

Whether Gaius was, historically, the youngest of the twelve children, and whether his father died before or shortly after his birth, is uncertain. But Pliny’s account

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17 Carcopino 1928: 80, followed by Burckhard and Von Ungern-Sternberg 1994: 104. Citroni Marchetti 2008: 47 argues that Tiberius *père* is thinking of children Cornelia might bear to subsequent husbands. But this interpretation is far less pointed and accords poorly with the *univira* element that is stressed elsewhere in the *mater Gracchorum* tradition (see below). Note, too, that the view of the Gracchi implied in *rei publicae consulere* is approbative, or at least not overtly condemnatory: cf. Plin. *Nat.* 7.69, discussed above, where the infant Cornelia’s closed genitals seem to imply a negative valuation of her future offspring’s civic activities. Thus we already see how the Cornelia tradition engrosses both positive and negative judgments on the Gracchi: see also Cic. *Har. Resp.* 41, Vell. Pat. 2.7.1, Sen, *Marc.* 16.3, App. *BCiv.* 1.2(17), *Serv. in Aen.* 6.842.

18 An inversion of the pious Tiberius *père* may appear in Juv. 6.161-71. Cornelia is adduced as an example of a virtuous woman who, the satirist insists, would be unbearably arrogant to have as one’s wife. The parodic divorce formula *tolle tuum precor Hannibalem victumque Syphacem / in castris et cum tota Carthagine migra* (170-71) tells Cornelia to take her dowry (the victories bequeathed by her father) and move out. Thus the satirist, in the guise of a comic Tiberius, not only does not sacrifice his life for Cornelia, but sends her packing for being insufferable. For more on this Juvenalian locus see sec. IIB and n. 22.

19 Compare how Tiberius *père* is named in the account of the snake portent at Cic. *Div.* 1.36. Quintus, the interlocutor who is credulous of divination, introduces him as *Ti. Gracchus P. filius, qui bis consul et censor fuit idemque et summus augur et vir sapiens civisque praestans*. This identification aims to stress his credentials as a towering military, religious, and civic figure, in support of Quintus’s argument. For if such a man consulted *haruspices*, acted in light of their recommendations, and suffered the death they predicted, then divination must be valid. But in the Plinian passage, where only his concern for his family matters, he is identified exclusively by his relationship to children and wife, and not in terms of his civic identity and achievements.

Elsewhere too Tiberius *père* has “pater Gracchorum” or the like predicated of his name, but only to distinguish him from his homonymous son: e.g., Cic. *de Or.* 1.211; Gell. 6.19.6 (= Nep. fr. 13 Marshall), 12.8.1-4; Plut. *Gracch.* 4.4; Florus 1.33.9. In these passages he is given his own name before being distinguished by the appositional *pater*. Thus Pliny’s withholding of the name is the more striking.
of the snake prodigy seems to project this backstory, which brings these events compellingly into the *mater Gracchorum* tradition.

B. *Becoming mater Gracchorum*

The Gracchi and their mother were produced, one might say, by a process of distillation. There is a reduction in the quantity of parents and children, but a corresponding concentration or enhancement in the quality of the individuals and intensity of the relationships that remain. Pliny informs us that Cornelia bore twelve children via a somewhat obscure claim about their “alternating” birth order, perhaps implying six of each sex.²⁰ Plutarch also mentions twelve, adding that all died young save Sempronia, Tiberius, and Gaius.²¹ The tradition of twelve children may also be alluded to in Juvenal’s *Satire 6*. Here the satirist adduces Cornelia *mater Gracchorum* together with Niobe as exempla of women who display overweening pride in their ancestry, virtues, and fecundity, and he describes the trouble that this pride may cause for such a woman’s husband. He indicates Cornelia’s motherhood only by providing her epithet *mater Gracchorum*, without offering a detailed accounting of her offspring. Yet the comparison with Niobe is telling, for she too is said to have borne six or seven

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²¹ Plut. *T. Gracch.* 1.5-7: ἐὰν ὑστερον οὐ πολλῷ χρόνῳ τελευτήσαι [sc. Tiberius père], δεκαδύο παιδαὶ ἐκ τῆς Κορνηλίας αὐτῷ γεγονότας καταλιπόντα. Κορνηλία δὲ… χαρεώνοισα τοὺς μὲν ἄλλους ἀπέβαλε παιδας, μίαν δὲ τῶν θυγατέρων, Ἡ Σκιπίων τῷ νεωτέρῳ συνώκησε, καὶ δύο υἱοὺς περί ὧν τάδε γέγραπται, Τιβέριον καὶ Γαίον, διαγενομένους… ἔξεβρεπεν. This apparent claim that the other children all died *during her widowhood*—implying that all twelve survived their father, yet nine subsequently died while still young enough to be excluded from the category of “survivors,” διαγενομένους—is implausible and should probably not be taken literally (cf. Moir 1983: 144).
children of each sex, and likewise saw many or all die (Juvenal speaks of her burying “throngs of children,” without specifying a number).  

The earliest surviving references to Cornelia’s twelve births with few survivors are in the younger Seneca, and these passages further assert that the surviving sons were of special value. The passages in question occur in a pair of consolations addressed to women. In the Consolatio ad Marciam Seneca says that Cornelia “recalled her twelve births by the same number of deaths; and regarding the other children, whom the state did not notice in being born or dying, it did not matter, but Tiberius and Gaius, who will be admitted as great men even by one who denies they were good men, she saw murdered and left unburied to boot” (duodecim illa partus totidem funeribus recognovit; et de ceteris facile est, quos nec editos nec amissos civitas sensit: Tiberium Gaiumque, quos etiam qui bonos viros negaverit magnos fatebitur, et occisos vidit et insepultos, 16.3). Seneca implies that the latter two deaths caused their mother greater pain than the others, since their impact upon the civic community was greater. He tropes the same idea in the Consolatio ad Helviam, though with a different accounting of the children. He says, “Fortune reduced Cornelia from twelve children to two; should you wish to count Cornelia’s deaths, she lost ten; should you wish to appraise them, she lost the Gracchi”

22 Juv. 6.167-69, 175-77: malo Venerinem quam te, Cornelia, mater / Gracchorum, si cum magnis virtutibus adfers / grande supercilium et numeras in dote triumphos. …[sc. Amphion] extulit ergo greges natorum impsumque parentem, / dum sibi nobilior Latonae gente videtur / atque eadem scrofa Niobe fecundior alba. Hom. II. 24.604 attributes six children of each sex to Niobe, and Ov. Met. 6.182-83 gives seven of each; these intertexts are likely to be the most familiar and authoritative for Roman imperial readers (cf. Apollod. Bibl. 3.5.6 for other numbers). Residents of the city would also have known the sculpture group of Niobe and her children in the temple of Apollo Sosianus (Plin. Nat. 36.28). Is the satirist suggesting that Cornelia’s children’s deaths constitute divine punishment for her pride, as with Niobe? Discussion of parallelisms and implications at Nadeau 2011: 116-20, Rieger 1991: 58-60; see also n. 77 below.

23 Seneca fails to account for Sempronia, who long outlived her brothers, whether from ignorance or to simplify the accounting: cf. n. 27.
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(Corneliam ex duodecim liberis ad duos fortuna redegerat: si numerare funera Corneliae velles, amiserat decem, si aestimare, amiserat Grachos, 16.6). Apparently Tiberius and Gaius are among the ten who died, leaving the identities of the two survivors unclear (Sempronia and another?). For current purposes, the weighing of the two sub-classes of dead children is what matters. For Seneca says one can “count the deaths,” *funera numerare*, by which reckoning she lost ten; or one can “assign a value to the deaths,” *funera aestimare*—this is Seneca’s preferred reckoning—by which reckoning Tiberius and Gaius so outweigh the rest that Seneca can deem their deaths to be the “only” ones (of significance, at any rate), and leave the others entirely out of the accounting.24

In other passages, too, we find stated or implied that the two boys were especially valuable, and/or were made so by their surviving parent’s special efforts. These ideas are combined in the passage of Plutarch mentioned earlier, where details about their rearing are provided (Plut. *Gracch.* 1.7):

[sc. Κορνηλία] μίαν δὲ τῶν θυγατέρων, ἥ Ἡσιπίων τῷ νεωτέρῳ συνώκησε, καὶ δύο υἱοὺς περὶ ὧν τάδε γέγραπται, Τιβέριον καὶ Γάιον, διαγενομένους οὕτως φιλοτίμως ἐξέθρεψεν, ὡστε πάντων εὐφυεστάτους Ῥωμαίων ὀμολογουμένως γεγονότας, πεπαίδευσθαι δοκεῖν βέλτιον ἤ πεφυκέναι πρὸς ἀρετήν.

Cornelia raised one surviving daughter, who married the younger Scipio, and two sons about whom this work is written, Tiberius and Gaius, so ambitiously that, although they were agreed to have been the noblest born of all Romans, they

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24 For Cornelia’s exemplary function in the Senecan *consolationes*, see sec. IIIA below.
nevertheless seemed, in their disposition toward excellence, to have been better educated than born.

While Sempronia is grammatically included among these “ambitiously raised” children, the brothers are mentioned second and more prominently, and the logic and meaning of the adverb “ambitiously” (φιλοτίµως) applies better to males than females—25—the sense is “with an eye toward competing successfully for civic offices.” A simile invoking the Discourii, which immediately follows this passage (Gracch. 2.1), confirms that the discussion is by now only about the two brothers. A similar concentration of value is alleged in one of the epistolary fragments ascribed to Cornelia (discussed in greater detail below). In one passage Cornelia is made to reproach Gaius for failing in his filial duty to keep her old age free of care. She says that this duty is owed by all her children, but must be discharged by Gaius alone.26 She does not expressly say that the other children are dead, but this seems to be implied in her declaration that their collective obligation devolves to him. Indeed, as we shall see, the “dramatic date” of this text is 124 BCE, when only Gaius and Sempronia (who is entirely neglected by the speaker) would still have been living.27 At any rate, Gaius alone is presented here as the vehicle for the collected value of all his siblings.

25 So Moir 1983: 144.

26 Nep. fr. 59b Marshall: [sc. te, i.e., Gaius] quem oportebat omnium eorum, quos antehac habui liberos, partis eorum tolerare, atque curare ut quam minimum sollicitudinis in senecta haberem. Detailed discussion of this text in section IIIC below.

27 Perhaps Sempronia is neglected to sharpen the rhetoric of obligation, or because sons alone are pertinent to the kind of obligation invoked here: Moir 1983: 144 remarks how female children can be overlooked, since upon marriage they produce heirs for their husbands and do not transmit their father’s line. Possibly telling against this suggestion, though, is that Cornelia says he incurs the obligations of all her children (liberi), not just her sons. Alternatively, if this letter was composed by someone other than Cornelia, its author may not have known of Sempronia’s existence (see sec. IIIC on the “authenticity” question).
One further text suggests the two sons’ extraordinary value. Valerius Maximus relates an anecdote in which Cornelia is visited by a wealthy Campanian matron who shows off her spectacular jewelry, the loveliest of the time. Cornelia protracts the conversation until her children return from school, and then declares, “these are my jewels” (Cornelia Gracchorum mater, cum Campana matrona apud illam hospita ornamenta sua pulcherrima illius saeculi ostenderet, traxit eam sermone dum e schola redirent liberi, et ‘haec’ inquit ‘ornamenta sunt mea,’ 4.4.pr.) Valerius does not expressly say which of Cornelia’s children he means, or how many. But he has identified her by the tag mater Gracchorum, which elsewhere, as we have seen, usually presupposes and contains the legendary identity of Tiberius and Gaius; it seems safe to assume that these (and only these) are the children in question. If so, however, the anecdote cannot possibly be historically true: rather, as Martin Bloomer shows, it is a chreia on the theme of the value of children and education.\footnote{Bloomer 2011: 29, 209n25, noting similar stories in other texts that suggest its conventionality. In our case, the anecdote throws up at least three major historical problems: (1) When could Tiberius and Gaius have gone off to school together? For if Gaius went out at the earliest usual school-entering age of seven (Bonner 1977: 35), then Tiberius was already sixteen, the age at which he began military service under his brother-in-law Scipio at Carthage (Plut. Gracch. 4.5, with Scholz 2011: 223), hence had finished his formal schooling. (2) Why would Cornelia, who had procured choice Greek tutors for her sons (see below), send them to an outside school in the first place, as the anecdote suggests? (unless we regard the schola, anomalously, as a facility inside Cornelia’s house). (3) How could Cornelia, a scion of the loftiest Roman urban aristocracy, have jewelry inferior to that of a municipal noblewoman from Campania? But to ask such questions is to press the anecdote too hard: the boys’ actual age difference is neglected because they are already imagined in their legendary guise as an equal and matched pair (n. 92); their absence and return is a dramatic device by which Cornelia’s riposte is framed and underscored, to point up the value of motherhood and education; and the guest is Campanian because of that region’s association with (vaguely Greek) wealth and luxury, thereby positioning Cornelia as a representative of old Roman values that despises foreign frippery and embraces virtuous poverty (so Bloomer 2011: 29-30): On Cornelia’s “poverty” and the rubric de paupertate (Val. Max. 4.4), see sec. IIIA and n. 76.} For the anecdote not only ascribes exceptional value to the children, but it hints that this value, this “jewel-like” quality, derives precisely from the education they have been receiving while away from home. It gains its effect partly from engaging the moralizing discourse that links women
with jewelry. Valuing jewelry is potentially vicious and dangerous, as in the legend of Tarpeia who betrayed the citadel in exchange for the beseigers’ gold torques; and shunning it may instantiate great civic virtue, as in the legend that during the Gallic seige the matrons contributed their jewelry to remedy a fiscal crisis.\(^{29}\) Cornelia, in despising both the jewelry and values of her guest, and locating value rather in her children and their education, is on the right side of this discourse and displays “correct” matronly values, while the guest is on the wrong side.

Cornelia herself is also presented in the tradition as having special value as (sole surviving) parent to the children. Plutarch notes that her husband’s decision to die in her stead, by releasing the female snake, was seen to be justified when people observed Cornelia’s self-control, generosity, and devotion to her children.\(^{30}\) He goes on to say (in the passage just quoted, \textit{Gracch.} 1.7) that she brought about the remarkable result that the boys seemed better raised than born by tending so carefully to their education. Cicero, in the \textit{Brutus} (104), supplies further details about Cornelia’s pedagogical supervision of Tiberius. She saw to it that he was well-educated from boyhood (\textit{a puero doctus}), and had the choicest teachers from Greece—above all Diophanes of Mytilene, the most eloquent in Greece at that time—for rhetorical training.\(^{31}\) We may infer her equal

\(^{29}\) Tarpeia and her lust for gold: e.g., Livy 1.11.6-9. Matrons contributing their gold for the civic good: Livy 5.25.8, 5.50.7-8, 34.5.9; Diod. Sic. 14.116.9, Plut. \textit{Cam}. 8.3-4; see Hänninen 1999: 47-50. Cf. “Laudatio Turiae,” \textit{CIL} 6.37053 = 41062, col. II.1-4, where the wife gives up her jewelry to support her exiled husband; and Sen. \textit{Helv}. 16.3, where the addressee’s contempt for gems and riches, and delight in her fertility, locates her in the same realm of antique virtue as the “jewels” anecdote does for Cornelia.

\(^{30}\) Plut. \textit{Gracch}. 1.6: Κορνηλία δ’ ἀναλαβοῦσα τοὺς παῖδας καὶ τὸν οἶκον, οὕτω σώφρονα καὶ φιλότεκνον καὶ μεγαλόψυχον αὐτὴν παρέσχεν, ὡστε μὴ κακῶς δόξαι βεβουλεῦσθαι τὸν Τιβέριον ἀντὶ τοιαύτης γυναικὸς ἀποθανεῖν ἐλόμενον.

\(^{31}\) Cic. \textit{Brut}. 104: \textit{fuit Gracchus diligentia Corneliae matris a puero doctus et Graecis litteris eruditus. nam semper habuit exquisitos e Graecia magistros, in eis iam adolescens Diophanem Mytilaeum Graeciae temporibus illis discretissimum.}
attention to Gaius’s education, as Cicero says that he too was well-educated from boyhood (again *doctus a puero, Brut.* 125), and elsewhere mentions one Menelaos of Marathos (*Brut.* 100) who seems to have been Gaius’s tutor in rhetoric.\(^{32}\) And in the “these are my jewels” anecdote, it bears repeating that the children are said to be returning *from school*: this detail underscores that Cornelia’s special concern for them is educational. Finally, in Tacitus’s *Dialogus*, Messalla approvingly cites Cornelia, along with the mothers of Caesar and Augustus, for overseeing the upbringing and education of their distinguished offspring (28.5). Messalla portrays child-rearing in the good old days as an exclusively female activity, involving nurses, elderly relatives, and mothers, with no male participation apparently expected (28.4-5)—though it is striking, as scholars have noted, that the women he mentions were widowed when their sons were of school age; other instances can also be adduced.\(^ {33}\)

Indeed, Cornelia exemplifies the Roman matronal ideal of the *univira*—a woman who marries only once, and does not remarry upon her husband’s death. This ideal is neatly consistent with the claim that Cornelia concentrated her efforts on her sons: for she

32 Gaius may also have enjoyed the services of Tiberius’s tutors Diophanes and Blossius: they died in the wake of Tiberius’s murder in 133 (Scholz 2011: 132-33), but by then Gaius was 20 or 21 and had finished his formal schooling. The historical Cornelia probably came by her Greek connections and interests honestly: historians plausibly locate her in a refined, Hellenizing milieu from her earliest years in the house of her father, Hellenophile as he was, and extending to her “retirement” and old age in her villa at Misenum, surrounded by philosophers and writers (so Plut. *Gracch.* 40 = *Gaius* 19). These milieux imply and presuppose that she herself received a fine literary and rhetorical education, which is consistent with the traditions that she cared for her sons’ education and that her own letters displayed her eloquence. See Dixon 2007: 40-48, Hemelrijk 1999: 64-69 (and her chapter 3 *passim* on the ideals of female aristocratic education), Bloomer 2011: 50-51.

33 On these women as widows responsible for their sons’ education, see Hemelrijk 1999: 67-70, Bonner 1977: 14-15, with further references; on Cornelia’s value as sole parent see Burckhardt and Von Ungern-Sternberg 1994: 108-109. Dion. Hal. 8.51.3 likewise presents Veturia as a young widow devoted to rearing her son Coriolanus: she declares that she functions not only as his mother, but as father, nurse, and sister to boot (see below). In the Republic this maternal role cannot have been unusual, for demographic studies suggest that between a quarter and a third of children lost their father by age fifteen (Scholz 2011: 94-96)
was not distracted by the opportunities and obligations that might come with a new husband, nor did she allow any stepfather to dilute the concentrated, focused mother-son relationships resulting from Tiberius père’s death. In particular, Plutarch says that she declined a marriage proposal from “king Ptolemy,” who wished to share his rule with her (ἡ γε καὶ Πτολεμαῖον τοῦ βασιλέως κοινουμένου τὸ διάδημα καὶ μνωμένου τὸν γάμων αὐτῆς ἤρνησατο…, *Gracch.* 1.7). Plutarch introduces this information with a limitative γε, “at any rate,” which indicates that this refusal illustrates the general virtues ascribed to her in the previous sentence—especially, it seems, her virtue of being φιλότεκνος, “fond of her children”: for Plutarch immediately goes on to say that, as a widow, she took control of her children’s education (καὶ χηρεύουσα… δύο υἱοὺς …φιλοτίμως ἐξέθρεψεν, etc.) 34 The logic and order of Plutarch’s narrative thus suggests that “Ptolemy’s” proposal came shortly after her husband’s death, and that she rejected it precisely so that the obligations of being a queen would not interfere with the task of child-rearing. Regardless whether this story is historically true, its presence and location in Plutarch’s narrative reminds the reader of the longstanding relations between Cornelii and kings, and of Cornelia’s status and desirability as a marriageable widow. 35 It also presents her as resolved not to allow anything to divert her from gaining the only fame

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35 Plutarch’s “king Ptolemy,” as Günther 1990: 128 observes, may have the semantic value of “an oriental king” tout court. But if we press the historical context—accepting that Tiberius père died around the time of Gaius’s birth, and taking Plutarch’s report of the marriage proposal as indicating that it came shortly after Tiberius’s death—then the ruler in question is probably Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II Physkon, who at this time ruled Cyrenaica while his brother Ptolemy VI Philometor ruled in Alexandria. He indeed visited Rome ca. 154, and could perhaps have pursued (or been imagined to want to pursue) a dynastic marriage with an aristocratic Roman woman, to enlist Roman support for his efforts to overthrow his brother: see Carcopino 1928: 77-79, with Günther 1990.
she desires—that of bringing the (legendary) “Gracchi” into existence, and so constituting herself as mater Gracchorum.

A few texts hint that Cornelia’s educative role was in certain respects paternal. Writers of the late Republic and empire project upon the middle Republic the ideal that a father should take personal charge of a son’s education. Perhaps best known is Plutarch’s description of the elder Cato administering his son’s education in fighting, riding, athletics, literature, and law (Cat. Mai. 20.6-7). Other texts also allege direct paternal tutelage of young sons in the good old days—bringing them to the senate to learn statecraft and discretion; bringing them to convivia to teach social deportment; crafting them into social replicas of themselves.36 Even in the late Republic we find Horace’s father dispensing sensible advice to his son (itself part of an idealizing representation of this father), and Cicero addressing oratorical and philosophical treatises to his son Marcus. Whether he did so in earnest—believing Marcus needed direction—or as a rhetorical device to express the broader pedagogical aim of these treatises, makes little difference to my argument here.37 Another passage in Cicero’s Brutus shows that the “father as ideal educator” is part of the ideological backdrop to Cornelia’s own pedagogical role. Noting the importance of experience at home in forming a boy’s oratorical capabilities, Cicero writes (Brut. 210-11),

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36 Plutarch hints that the elder Cato’s practice was old fashioned even in his own time: for he reports that Cato had a clever slave called Chilo who taught other children, and suggests that Cato made the conscious decision not to entrust his own son’s formation to a slave (Cat. Mai. 20.5). On Cato’s educational practice see Bloomer 2011: 27-31 and Scholz 2011: 98-99, with 96-106 more generally on the father’s educative and acculturative functions. For sons attending the senate with their fathers, see Gell. 1.23.4-5, part of an anecdote explaining why this practice ended; for fathers bringing young sons to convivia, Plut. Mor. 272C; for a father replicating himself through his son, Livy 5.18.5 with Walter 2004: 408-9 (and passim).

Curio… Latine non pessume loquebatur usu credo aliquo domestico. nam litterarum admodum nihil sciebat; sed magni interest quos quisque audiat cotidie domi, quibuscum loquatur a puero, quem ad modum patres paedagogi matres etiam loquantur. legimus epistulas Corneliae matris Gracchorum: apparent filios non tam in gremio educatos quam in sermone matris.

Curio did not speak badly, I suppose because of his home experience—for he knew nothing whatsoever about literature. But it matters greatly whom each person hears every day at home, with whom he speaks from boyhood on, how fathers and pedagogues and even mothers speak. I have read letters of Cornelia the mother of the Gracchi: it is patent that her sons were raised less at their mother’s breast than in her speech.

The rhetorical (de)crescendo patres paedagogoi matres etiam presents mothers as the least likely to matter in their children’s oratorical formation. Cornelia’s appearance here thus seems to presuppose the absence of a father and a pedagogue, allowing her to assume the leading role. The sons’ oratorical virtuosity is then attributed to her speech, and Cicero finds in her letters confirmatory evidence that her sermo was of high quality.38 Note too that Cicero credits her with the formation of both sons (filios): that Tiberius père might have contributed to the early education of Tiberius fils, as the former

38 In Cic. de Or. 1.38, Scaevola compares Ti. Gracchus père’s eloquence unfavorably with that of his sons: omnium mihi videor… eloquentissimos audisse Ti. et C. Sempronios, quorum pater, homo prudens et gravis, haudquaquam eloquens… fuit. Such a position makes room to credit the sons’ eloquence to their mother, as we see at Brut. 211. See Scholz 2011: 94-96 on the mother’s role in the absence of the father, and 91-96 generally on early education in the home.
lived at least until the latter was nine or ten, is clearly not considered.\textsuperscript{39} Quintilian (\textit{Inst.} 1.1.6) substantially repeats Cicero’s information, though substituting a nurse for the Ciceronian pedagogue and giving her first importance. Only secondarily does he assert the desirability of learned parents, not only the father but also the mother (hence giving the father priority among parents); and here he echoes Cicero in citing Cornelia’s influence on the Gracchi, noting the eloquence attested in her letters. Thus Quintilian sharpens the sense that Cornelia assumed a specifically paternal role, even as he relegates parents in general to secondary importance behind the nurse.\textsuperscript{40}

A final testimony to Cornelia’s modestly gender-bending parental role may be visible in an oratorical fragment of a Gracchus (probably Gaius), and an epistolary fragment of (perhaps) Cornelia, preserved by the late antique grammarian Charisius. The grammarian is discussing the gender of the noun \textit{parens}. He cites these fragments as containing the phrases \textit{suos parentes} and \textit{tuus parens}, with the noun in each case modified by an unambiguously masculine adjective. In both cases, however, \textit{parens} apparently refers to a mother.\textsuperscript{41} Thus Charisius concludes that the noun is always

\textsuperscript{39} Cornelia is consistently credited with both sons’ formation: Plutarch’s phrasing at \textit{Gracch.} 1.7 (“as a widow she raised her surviving daughter and two sons”) attributes both to her, as does the “these are my jewels” anecdote (Val. Max. 4.4.pr.); likewise Cic. \textit{Brut.} 104 (discussed above), crediting Tiberius \textit{fils} exclusively to Cornelia. The tradition is entirely silent on the father’s relationship to this son, as if there were none.

\textsuperscript{40} Quint. \textit{Inst.} 1.1.4, 6: \textit{ante omnia ne sit vitiosus sermo nutricibus… in parentibus vero quam plurimum esse eruditionis optaverim, nec de patribus tantum loquor: nam Gracchorum eloquentiae multum contulisse accepimus Corneliam matrem, cuius doctissimus sermo in posteros quoque est epistulis traditus.}

\textsuperscript{41} Charis. pp. 102-103 Keil: \textit{sed Gracchus ‘suos parentes amat’ cum dicit in significatione matris * et in alia epistula ‘tuus parens sum’ ait, cum de se loqueretur.} Lost in the lacuna after \textit{matris}, it seems, is clarification of what mother or mothers Gracchus is referring to when he says \textit{suos parentes}. Also lost is the subject of \textit{ait} (conjecturally Cornelia; at any rate a mother). This gender-bending is also found in the longer fragment of the “letter of Cornelia” (Nepos fr. 59 Marshall), where “Cornelia” refers to herself as Gaius’s \textit{deum parentem}. 
masculine, regardless of the sex of the parent in question. But his generalization is false: when *parens* refers to a father or to either parent indiscriminately, it takes a masculine modifier (as here, *suos parentes*); but when it refers exclusively to a mother, it almost always takes a feminine modifier, at least in Classical Latin.\(^{42}\) Thus *tuus parens sum*, uttered by a mother, is indeed anomalous. But if Cornelia speaks these words, her usage may signal the unusually paternal character of her own parental role, rather than a general characteristic of the word *parens*.

C. *Being mater Gracchorum*

Scholars have long noted Cornelia’s “political” role—her seemingly high visibility in the era of her sons’ prominence, and her alleged interventions on their behalf. Appian reports rumors, following Scipio Aemilianus’s death (129 BCE), that Cornelia and Sempronia engineered his demise—even though he was Sempronia’s husband—for fear he would persuade a popular assembly to abrogate Tiberius’s laws.\(^{43}\) And Plutarch says that some of Cornelia’s letters refer, obliquely, to her sending thugs to provide Gaius with muscle in his looming confrontation with the consul Opimius (121 BCE)—though other people, Plutarch says, contested this, claiming that Cornelia opposed her son’s

\(^{42}\) Charis, p. 102 Keil: *heres parens homo, etsi in communi sexu intellegantur, tamen masculino genere semper dicuntur*. Cf. *TLL* s.v. *parens*, col. 354.31-66, where most usages of *parens* referring to a mother are indeed clearly feminine when modified by adjectives whose endings are diagnostic for gender. Farrell 2001: 59-65 sees a chronological development, with *parens* masculine (as Charisius suggests) in the Latin of the Gracchan period, but developing a common gender in classical Latin. More generally, Farrell examines the authoritative, quasi-paternal claim Cornelia is making in her use of the term *parens*.

efforts. That such rumors circulated (or could be said to have circulated) indicates that Cornelia was thought, at least by some, to wield great influence with her sons, and to be capable of materially assisting them. Yet these interventions are only reported as “rumored,” and doubt is expressed about their credibility: they are, after all, surreptitious, and do not show Cornelia acting openly and accountably in the civic sphere to support her sons. In what follows, I argue that being mater Gracchorum does not principally entail making material interventions such as these stories allege: rather, she “mothers” her adult son(s) through her rhetorical virtuosity, her powers of verbal persuasion.

Our surviving texts portray Cornelia as an accomplished rhetorician who employs her formidable powers of persuasion upon her adult son Gaius. Persuasive rhetoric is necessary to the maternal role. While a father can (notionally) simply demand, by virtue of his patria potestas, that a son or other member of his familia desist from some course of action, a mother has no such sociolegal authority, but must offer compelling arguments. Paradoxically, then, the mother who seeks to influence an adult son must resort to rhetorical means that her husband (at least in theory) need not deploy, even though he is more likely than she to possess formal rhetorical training. The mother of the Gracchi, however, does possess rhetorical means, and is represented as “motherly” in just this way.


45 On the mother’s and father’s differing legal status vis-à-vis a son, see Dixon 1988: 179-81, and numerous scholars subsequently. Detailed discussion of the distinction between patria potestas and a mother’s more informal authority in Evans 1991: 177-95.
The persuasive rhetoric of the mater Gracchorum is most fully displayed in two epistolary fragments addressed to one or both of her adult sons (Nepos fr. 59 Marshall). These texts were excerpted from a lost work of Cornelius Nepos, appended to his surviving work, and transmitted in that manuscript tradition. In principle, it is unsurprising that a written trace left (or allegedly left) by Cornelia takes epistolary form, nor that it displays a high degree of rhetorical sophistication. For aristocratic women are well attested as writers and receivers of letters during the late Republic and early Empire. Epistles addressed to absent family members or close friends, dealing with domestic matters or civic matters impacting the domestic sphere—the “proper” domain of engagement for an elite Roman woman—provided a socially acceptable vehicle for literally and rhetorically polished written expression by women. The fraught question of these fragments’ authenticity, which has received lengthy and rather sterile discussion, is irrelevant for current purposes. For I am interested in the image of the mater Gracchorum that these texts project. Either they contain actual words (or something like them) written by the historical Cornelia to her adult son(s), which Nepos or his source selected and transmitted because of the light they cast on the mother-son relationship and on Cornelia’s formidable powers of expression; or they are compositions by a later writer—perhaps Nepos himself, or one of his sources—representing how Cornelia might have addressed her son(s), and employing rhetorical forms and devices deemed

46 The fragments are introduced as follows: verba ex epistula Corneliae Gracchorum matris ex libro Cornelii Nepotis de Latinis historicis excerpta. It is difficult to understand where these fragments would have had a place in Nepos-style a biography of a Latin historian. The obvious transmission channel is a biography of Gaius (one fragment is clearly addressed to him), but Gaius is unattested as a writer of history.

47 On women’s letter writing from the late Republic to high Empire, see Hemelrijk 1999: 188-206 (192-96 on Cornelia’s letters in particular).
“Cornelia: on making one’s name as *mater Gracchorum*”

appropriate to this situation.\(^48\) In either case, these texts project for Nepos’s (or his source’s) readers a particular image of the *mater Gracchorum*, one intended to ring true to the legendary figure she had already become when Nepos (or his source) wrote his works, in the generation or two after the Gracchan period. In other words, these fragments contain the words of the *mater Gracchorum* of legend, regardless whether the historical Cornelia wrote them. It is this maternal image, and the rhetoric that defines it, that I investigate here.\(^49\)

The rhetoric of the *mater Gracchorum* is indeed dazzling. In the second and longer fragment—the first is discussed later—we find Cornelia attempting to dissuade Gaius from standing for the tribunate. Thus the fragment dates or purports to date to 124 BCE, the year of his election. The epistolary form seems to imply Cornelia’s absence from Rome (where Gaius presumably is), and a Roman reader familiar with the “story” of the Gracchi might imagine that she writes from her villa at Misenum, where she is said to have spent much time following the younger Tiberius’s death.\(^50\) The fragment is filled with claims, express and implied, that Gaius is seeking office contrary to her wishes,

\(^{48}\) The bibliography on these fragments, and on the question of their authenticity, is large. Especially noteworthy are landmark studies by Cugusi 1970: 1.2.65-73, arguing that their language is acceptable for the late 2\textsuperscript{nd} century BCE (meaning that Cornelia herself, or an historiographer contemporary with or slightly later than the Gracchi, could have written them); Instinsky 1971, showing that their rhetoric includes elements resembling anti-Gracchan discourse of a later period (meaning later composition cannot be ruled out); and Horsfall 1987, arguing that the usual practice of historiographers militates against these letters being directly and faithfully quoted from any extraneous source: while they could be reworked versions of some “authentic” document, they could also be free compositions, *prosopopoeia*. See also Hallett 2010 and 2006, Dixon 2007: 26-29, Hänninen 2007: 82, Hemelrijk 1999: 188-206, Rieger 1991: 42-48. López 1998: 104-8 collects a partial list of older scholars opining one way or the other.

\(^{49}\) Hemelrijk 1999: 196 and Hallett 2006: 124 also note the irrelevance of the authenticity question for inquiries about the kind of image the text projects.

\(^{50}\) So Orosius 5.12.9, describing the death of Gaius: *caput Gracchi excisum consuli adlatum est, corpus ad Corneliam matrem Misenum oppidum de vectum est. haec autem Corneliam, Africani maioris filia, Misenum ut dixi prioris filii morte secesserat*. Also Plut. *Gracch.* 40 = Gaius 19 and sec. IV below on her later years at Misenum.
which he should honor, and that he is therefore neglecting the duties owed by a son
(e especially this son) to his mother. It opens as follows:

verbis conceptis deierare ausim, praeterquam qui Tiberium Gracchum necarunt,
neminem inimicum tantum molestiae tantumque laboris, quantum te ob has res,
mih traddisse; quem oportebat omnium eorum, quos antehac habui liberos, partis
eorum tolerare atque curare ut quam minimum sollicitudinis in senecta haberem…

I would venture to swear a formal oath that, apart from those who killed Tiberius
Gracchus, no enemy has imposed so much trouble and tribulation on me as you
have on account of these matters [i.e., standing for election]—you who should
have assumed the duties of all those children I previously had, and seen to it that I
suffer the least possible worry in my old age…

The language is emotionally charged: the oath at the beginning, the accumulation of
rhetorically extreme “all or nothing” statements (neminem, tantum . . . tantumque
. . . quantum, omnium eorum, quam minimum), the assertion that Gaius has inflicted
suffering upon her comparable to what some of their enemies have inflicted, the pathetic
invocation of her bereft old age, and the recollection of all her (presumably dead)
children whose burden Gaius should be shouldering—these are all recognized devices for
conveying indignation and stirring pity in a listener, as analyzed and systematized in the
our earliest surviving Latin rhetorical treatises from the 80s BCE.51

51 The Rhetorica ad Herennium probably dates to the mid-to-late 80s BCE, like Cicero’s de Inventione
(see n. 11): Achard 1989: vi-xiii. On the rhetorical devices for arousing pity, see Rhet. Her. 2.50, 3.24 and,
in greater detail, Cic. Inv. 1.106-9; on arousing indignatio, Rhet. Her. 2.48-49 and Inv. 1.100-5 (along with
Braund 1988: 1-6). That these devices are recognized and discussed in these early treatises means that
nothing in the rhetoric of the fragments obviously militates against composition in the late 2nd – early 1st
century BCE, whether by Cornelia herself or by a roughly contemporary historiographer.
In the sequel, Cornelia spells out Gaius’s current obligation more clearly:

…utique quaecumque ageres, ea velles maxime mihi placere, atque uti nefas haberes rerum maiorum adversum meam sententiam quicquam facere, praesertim mihi, cui parva pars vitae restat.

…and [sc. seen to it] that, whatever things you do, you aim for them to please me above all, and that you think it an abomination to do anything of significance contrary to my opinion—especially for me, to whom only a wretched little portion of life remains.

A general obligation of children toward an aged mother is implied here: they should obey and keep her free from worry. Why? Presumably, to repay her for tending them as children—an aspect of maternal rhetoric to which we will return. In presenting this argument, Cornelia sustains the heightened emotional register of the earlier part of the sentence: the pathetic reference to her old age; the “all or nothing” language *maxime* and

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That Tiberius Gracchus is named as such, in a letter ostensibly written by his mother and addressed to his brother, seems overly formal: the praeonem + cognomen combination is standard public nomenclature, appropriate to the civic sphere and for address or reference by someone not closely related. Within the family circle one would expect a more intimate designation—the praeonem alone or modified by an affective adjective (*Tiberium, Tiberium nostrum*), or a kinship term (e.g., *fratrem tuum*). Three possible explanations occur to me. (1) By using this nomenclature Cornelia stresses Tiberius’s civic rather than merely familial profile (so Cugusi 1970: 1.2.67, and perhaps Courtney 1999: 137), so as to elevate the value of his death and augment Gaius’s transgression. This is the converse of using intimate, affective language and nomenclature in public speeches to enhance pathos (e.g., C. Gracch. *ORF* 2 fr. 17, *Tiberium fratrem meum optimum;* fr. 61, *fratris sanguine, matrem miseram lamentantem … et abiectam*). But such a rhetorical move seems at odds with Cornelia’s broader strategy, described below, of foregrounding familial *pietas*-obligations. (2) Perhaps *Gracchum* is an intrusive gloss on an original, more appropriately “intimate” *Tiberium / Tiberium nostrum*. (3) If the letter is a *prosopopoia* composed by a later historiographer, *Tiberium Gracchum* could be a slip in the focalization, where the author momentarily steps out of Cornelia’s viewpoint as a concession to the “real” external audience (i.e., the historiographer’s own readership), which needs to be reminded who is being spoken of. For a perfectly “in character” Cornelia, addressing an “internal” audience consisting of Gaius alone, would use a more intimate designation. On the relative formality / informality or intimacy / distance of various configurations of names, see Adams 1978 on Cicero, with Shackleton Bailey 1996: 11-12 (though Ciceronian naming practices may not be identical to those of the Gracchan period). Cf. Dickey 2002: 263-69 on forms of address from parents to children (which may not work the same way as forms of reference).
quicquam; the hint of religious prohibition in nefas. New here is the strong self-assertion: meam preceding its noun sententiam is highly emphatic, and the syntax-free mihi in the last clause is probably best understood as another instance of indignant self-assertion, suggesting that Cornelia’s passion has swamped her ability to order words logically.\(^52\) Though not expressly named, the moral category pietas is in play here. This category includes discharging one’s reciprocal obligations to family members, the civic community, and the gods. Cornelia accuses her son of failing in his pietas-obligations to herself as his mother, to his dead siblings, and perhaps even to the gods (nefas). The pathos of her language presumably reflects the gravity of his infraction. In what follows, she raises the pietas-stakes still further by suggesting that his inattention to her wishes also damages the civic community: “Can’t even this brief span [sc. until I die] grant relief from your opposing me and ruining the state?” (ne id quidem tam breve spatium potest opitulari, quin et mihi adversere et rem publicam profliges?) Ruining the res publica is a bad habit of their family, as she indicates in a crescendo of five rhetorical questions whose gist is, “when will we stop our mad habit of disturbing the state and causing ourselves problems?”\(^53\) Thus domestic impiety is also civic impiety: in neglecting his obligations to his mother, Gaius also neglects his obligations to the community.

If he will not desist on principle, however, Cornelia offers (ironically) a compromise: “But if this is totally out of the question, once I am dead, go ahead and seek

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52 See Courtney 1999: 137 on syntax and emphasis. He proposes reading praeertim cum mihi parva; Cugusi 1970: 1.2.68 explains mihi as an anacolouthon, characterizing Cornelia as an old woman whose request to her son is presented more vehemently than logically.

53 denique quae pausa erit? ecquando desinet familia nostra insanire? ecquando modus ei rei haberi poterit? ecquando desinemus et habentes et praebentes molestis desistere? ecquando perpudescet miscenda atque perturbanda re publica?
the Tribunate. Do whatever you want, for all I care, when I am beyond feeling.” (sed si omnino id fieri non potest, ubi ego mortua ero, petito tribunatum; per me facito quod lubebit, cum ego non sentiam.) Here again she forcefully asserts herself and her own wishes, twice deploying the emphatic pronoun ego. She sustains the heightened emotional tone with the “extreme” omnino and the pathetic references to her death; the two short, sharp imperatives are stylistic indicators of anger or indignation. Then, returning to her opening claim that Gaius’s current actions are contrary to his familial obligation, she invokes more starkly the specter of her own death:

ubi mortua ero, parentabis mihi et invocabis deum parentem. in eo tempore non pudebit te eorum deum preces expetere, quos vivos atque praesentes relictos atque desertos habueris? ne ille sirit Iuppiter te ea perseverare, nec tibi tantam dementiam venire in animum!

When I am dead, you will tend my cult and call upon me as your divinized parent. At that time won’t you be mortified to pray for the assistance of those divinities whom you abandoned and left behind when they were alive and present? May great Jupiter not allow you to continue on this path, nor let such madness come into your head!

This salvo seems to presuppose that Gaius continues with his plan to stand for the Tribunate immediately. Were he to wait, thus acceding to her wishes, he could not be characterized as deserting and neglecting her in old age. Thus a further failure of familial

54 Though the gist of the passage is clear, the exact meaning and interpretation of the phrases deum parentem invocare and eorum deum preces expetere—hence the specifics of what Gaius is or is not doing correctly, in this projected post-mortem environment—are uncertain: see Cugusi 1970: 1.2.70-72, Courtney 1999: 138.
reciprocity is foreseen: while he disregards her expressed wishes now, after her death he will perform ancestor cult and invoke her assistance as divinized parent; she hints darkly that she may then disregard his prayers in turn. Thus she invokes the spectre of a destructive, hostile reciprocity in place of the amicable reciprocity that this exhortation seeks to secure. The prayer to Jupiter to ward off such a mad result caps the emotive rhetoric of the passage. The fragment concludes with a rhetorically anticlimactic sentence, in which she warns Gaius that, if he perseveres in this course, he may bring so much trouble upon himself that he will never satisfy himself (any more than he satisfies her).

The “maternal” rhetoric of this fragment, then, consists of an appeal to reciprocal obligation (i.e., pietas), involving claims about what a son owes his mother and other family members, presented in a heightened, emotive style that seeks to convey indignation and arouse pity. The mother’s inferior social and legal position and informal authority relative to an adult son, as described above, provide the conditions that enable such a rhetoric. This is not to deny that her rhetoric also has a “political” dimension, for scholars have long emphasized the unease Cornelia expresses about the civic impact of her family’s actions. In particular, this fragment contains traces of anti-Gracchan rhetoric as known from later periods, spurring some scholars to conclude that these words

55 et si perseveras, vereor ne in omnem vitam tantum laboris culpa tua recipias, uti in nullo tempore tute tibi placere possis.

56 This is not to suggest that there a characteristically female way of speaking Latin: attempts to locate systematic gender differences in Latin speech more generally have reached (cautiously) negative conclusions (e.g., Hemelrijk 1999: 192-98). Adams 1984, a study of female and male speech in Latin comedy, finds gendered differences in the frequencies of certain oaths, interjections, polite expression, and so on, but cautions against generalizing these patterns beyond the generic bounds of comedy or over a broader temporal span (esp. 75-77).
were anachronistically placed in Cornelia’s mouth by later anti-Gracchans who sought to show that not even the mater Gracchorum approved of the Gracchi’s political aims and methods (hence the fragment is “not authentic”).\(^{57}\) Yet I would emphasize that, in this fragment, even these “political” elements are subordinated to the maternal rhetoric just described. Cornelia’s critique of Gaius’s plans foregrounds his domestic pietas-obligation, and the harm his actions may inflict upon her and the family. Only secondarily does her critique include his civic pietas-obligation, his harming or benefiting the res publica; and even then, her point is that these obligations are perfectly aligned.

When will our family stop its insanity? When will we stop doing and suffering harm? When will we finally grow ashamed of upsetting the state? Thus the Cornelia who speaks in this fragment, whether she is the “real” Cornelia or has been given words by others, is always already mater Gracchorum, the exemplary Cornelia of legend. We can thank the discourse of exemplarity, with its expectation of a certain combination of “Gracchanness” and “motherliness,” for the preservation or invention (as the case may be) of this letter fragment, which displays a perfect mixture of these elements.\(^{58}\)

\(^{57}\) The key “political” passage is the quadruple ecquando-question, quoted in n. 53 above. On the politics of this language, see Instinsky 1971: 186-88, Hemelrijk 1999: 192-98.

\(^{58}\) Other instances of “maternal rhetoric” (as described here) also involve mothers who confront adult sons they deem recalcitrant or negligent. In such cases the same rhetorical strategy is on display: adducing the son’s obligation in return for the mother’s prior services, in an emotionally heightened register. The speech Livy gives to Veturia, the mother of Coriolanus (2.40), is strikingly comparable to Cornelia’s letter. Veturia inquires whether Coriolanus is her son or an enemy (cf. Cornelia assimilating Gaius to Tiberius’s killers); she laments that her old age has seen her son exiled (hence not fulfilling his obligation to support her, as Gaius too is not doing); she describes the awkwardnesses confronting her survivors once she herself dies (likewise Cornelia); and concludes that, even with all she is suffering, her son himself will suffer more (the same move Cornelia makes at the end of the longer fragment, n. 55 above; see Hallett 2006: 129-31 on the rhetoric of the Livy passage). Dionysius of Halicarnassus’s Veturia adduces her services to Coriolanus from infancy on, and his consequent obligations to her, at much greater length (8.47.5, 51-52); likewise for Plutarch’s Veturia (esp. Cor. 36.1 on his ingratitude for benefits received from her). The Veturia in Dio fr. 18.7-10 exposes her belly and breasts, making the same argument in an even more emotive, graphic manner. At Val. Max. 5.4.1, Coriolanus says that he grants the patria as a donum to his mother’s uterus—i.e., “I grant her request to spare our fatherland, because she bore me.” (On Cornelia and Veturia see...
A second example of Cornelia’s maternal rhetoric is tied to a specific event during Gaius’s tribunate, as narrated by Plutarch (Gracch. 25.1-3 = Gaius 4.1-3):

(25.1) τοιούτοις λόγοις προανασείσας τὸν δήμον ... δύο νόμους εἰσέφερε, τὸν μὲν, εἰ τινος ἀρχηγὸς ἀνυρήτῳ τὴν ἄρχην ὁ δήμος, οὐκ ἔώντα τούτῳ δευτέρας ἄρχης μετουσίαν εἶναι ... (2) τούτων τῶν νόμων ἀντικρυς ὁ μὲν Μάρκον Ὀκτάβιον ἦτίμου, τὸν ὑπὸ Τιβέριου τῆς δημαρχίας ἐκπεσόντα ... (3) ... τὸν δ’ ἔτερον νόμον Γάιος αὐτὸς ἐπανείλετο, φήσας τῇ μητρὶ Κορνηλία δεηθείσῃ χαρίζεσθαι τὸν Ὀκτάβιον.

(1) Having agitated the people with such words, ...he proposed two laws: one providing that, if the people abrogated the power of some magistrate, that person was forbidden from holding a second magistracy…. (2) Of these laws, the first patently dishonored Marcus Octavius, who was ejected from the Tribunate by Tiberius. …(3) …[this] law Gaius himself withdrew, saying that he was granting Octavius as a favor to his mother Cornelia, at her request.

In Plutarch’s narrative, these events take place fairly soon after Gaius enters office as tribune in 123 BCE. Octavius, who as tribune in 133 BCE had vetoed Tiberius’s agrarian

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Hänninen 2007: 81, Hallett 2004: 33-34). Other mothers: Tacitus reports (Ann. 14.8) that Agrippina the younger told her murderer to aim his sword at her womb, thus transforming the death-blow into a rhetorically pointed demonstration of her son Nero’s inappropriate reciprocation for her service of bearing him. Also, Tacitus’s Tiberius departs from Rome in 26 CE in part because he cannot bear his mother recalling to him how he owes his ruling power to her—though this is an unusual maternal service (Ann. 4.57; cf. 5.3 on his obsequium to her; Suet. Tib. 51 and SCPP 113-15 for examples of this). Perhaps the best evidence that arguments in terms of (failed) reciprocity and obligation were regarded as stereotypically maternal is that declamatory mothers sometimes argue with adult sons in such terms (e.g., Sen. Cont. 7.4.1 (Albucius), [Quint.] Decl. Min. 300.6); adding social and rhetorical stereotypes is a declaimer’s stock-in-trade. However, indisputably “real” mothers also argue with an adult sons in this way in letters on papyrus from Herakleopolis (BGU 3.948, 4th-5th c. CE, quoted by Hemelrijk 1999: 351n45; Bagnall and Cribiore 2006: 224-25) and Berenike (P.Berenike 2.129, 1st c. CE; Bagnall and Cribiore 2006: 169-70). Hallett’s analyses of the rhetoric of the Cornelia letters are helpful: Hallett 2006: 126-29 and ff.; ead. 2010: 354-61, both with further parallels and discussion.
law, was subsequently deposed from office by a plebiscite at Tiberius’s instigation (e.g., Plut. Gracch. 10-12). Though Octavius’s veto was thus defeated, the precedent-breaking ejection of a sitting tribune from office damaged Tiberius’s cause. The law Gaius promulgated ten years later in the concilium plebis is presented as an attempt to avenge his brother further, and hence fulfils a fraternal pietas-obligation. In due course, however, with the law under debate or perhaps already passed, Gaius withdrew it, saying that he did so as a favor (χαρίζεσθαι) to his mother, at her request (δεηθείσῃ). Scholars have remarked that Cornelia here enters civic discourse for the first time (as far as we know), being spoken of by name before a popular assembly and being presented as decisively influencing the political actions and agenda of a Roman magistrate; more on this below. For the moment I am interested in the persuasive powers that are here ascribed to her, and their relationship to the familial dynamics that appear to be driving the operations of government. For Gaius presents himself, in his magisterial role, as confronting a conflict between familial pietas-obligations: his effort to avenge his brother has met with displeasure from his mother, to whom he also owes an obligation. He

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59 E.g., Burckhardt and Von Ungern-Sternberg 1994: 112-14, Dixon 2007: 21-22, Kreck 1975: 79-85. Dio fr. 83.8 says that Tiberius fils “often” brought his mother and children to public assemblies (καὶ πενθόμεν ἐσθῆτα πολλὰς ἕνεκυπτο, τήν τε μητέρα καὶ τὰ παιδία ἐς τὸ πλῆθος παρῆγε συνδεόμενα), presumably to weep at critical moments and to arouse sympathy. These alleged public appearances by Cornelia predate Gaius’s words in the passage under discussion, but also place her in an entirely conventional role (Von Hesberg-Tonn 1983: 67 on such deployments of women and children in courts and elsewhere). But Dio may have misunderstood his apparent source, Plut. Gracch. 13.4: τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐπὶ μᾶλλον ὁ Τιβέριος παροξύνων μετέβαλε τὴν ἐσθῆτα, καὶ τοὺς παιδὰς προσεγγίσας ἕδει τὸν δήμον τούτων κήδεσθαι καὶ τῆς μητρός, ως αὐτὸς ἀπεγνωκὼς ἑαυτὸν. The mother mentioned here is evidently the children’s mother, Tiberius’s wife. Simply switching the order in which mother and children are mentioned, then, transforms Tiberius’s children’s mother (Plutarch) into Tiberius’s own mother (Dio). Also, while Plutarch has Tiberius speak of his wife publicly, it is not clear that she is presented in public along with their children. (Meanwhile Sempronius Asellio, a contemporary of the Gracchi, says only that Tiberius brought one son out, without mentioning a mother at all: Gell. 2.13.5 = fr. 7 Peter = fr. 8 Beck/Walter = fr. 8 Chassignet; likewise App. BCiv. 1.2.14; on Tiberius’s sons, but omitting possible daughters, see Val. Max. 9.7.2.) That Dio could make such mistakes in reading Plutarch (if such he made) is probably due to, and attests, the prominence Cornelia had achieved in the Gracchan legend: any mother mentioned in relation to the Gracchi could be (mis)understood to be her!
adjudicates this conflict in favor of the maternal claim. Having initially enlisted the assembly to support his efforts on behalf of his brother, he now abandons these efforts in deference to his mother’s wishes. Thus the instruments of government are commandeered as a means not only to pursue interpersonal rivalries with other aristocrats, but to fulfill obligations within the immediate family. This is not only Plutarch’s construction: Diodorus Siculus also briefly relates Gaius’s abandonment of his legislation against Octavius, saying that he claimed he was granting his mother a favor; and Cicero portrays Gaius as seeking to avenge his brother out of concern for fraternal pietas. These texts show that, already by the middle of the first century BCE, it was part of the Gracchan legend that Gaius’s actions as a magistrate in the civic sphere were influenced by considerations of familial obligation and reciprocity.60

What kind of argument might Cornelia have made, and in what medium, to support her request and obtain this favor? The texts that narrate this episode, Plutarch and Diodorus, give no hint. However, Plutarch’s readers might assume, based on his descriptions of her earlier interventions, that these persuasive words were expressed orally at home or in a letter, the appropriate avenues for maternal intervention. And indeed, the first and shorter epistolary fragment attributed to Cornelia in the manuscripts of Nepos may be directed at such a situation:

60 Diod. Sic. 34/35.25.2: ὅτι ὁ Γράκχος ἐπὶ τοσοῦτο προέβη δυναστείας καὶ ἐβρεως, ὡστε τῶν ὀχλῶν κρινάντων ἐξαλείψαν τὸν Ὀκτάινον ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἄφηκεν αὐτόν, εἰπὼν τῷ δήμῳ διότι ταύτην χάριν δίδωσι τῇ μητρὶ προεντετευγμένος υπ’ αὐτής. Note the explicit language of favor-granting (χάριν δίδωσι) in response to her intercession (προεντετευγμένος υπ’ αὐτής). On the power of the fraternal obligation in the Gracchan tradition see Cic. Har. Resp. 43; Brut. 103, 125-26; also Flor. 2.3.1, with Bannon 1997: 127-35. Thus, abandoning the fraternal claim in favor of the maternal one is a major concession. Burckhardt and Von Ungern-Sternberg (1994: 113) note the pietas-dynamics of Gaius’s concession to his mother, but do not mention the equally crucial fraternal dimension.
dices pulchrum esse inimicos ulisci. id neque maius neque pulchrius cuiquam atque mihi esse videtur, sed si liceat re publica salva ea persequi. sed quatenus id fieri non potest, multo tempore multisque partibus inimici nostri non peribunt atque, uti nunc sunt, erunt potius quam res publica profligetur atque pereat.

You will say that taking vengeance on your enemies is a glorious thing. There is no one to whom it seems greater and more glorious than to me—but only if one can accomplish it without detriment to the commonwealth. But seeing as this cannot be done, it will be far preferable that our enemies not be destroyed and be as they now are for a long time, than that the commonwealth be overthrown and destroyed.61

Here, as in the longer fragment analyzed above, Cornelia seems to address primarily a domestic matter. Her mention of inimici nostri indicates that she is speaking to a family member. And although her thought is expressed in generalizations, its ready applicability to the Octavius matter as related by Plutarch and Diodorus has prompted some scholars to suggest that this is (or purports to be) Cornelia’s argument to Gaius to spare Octavius.62

If this connection is correct, then Cornelia is approving, at least in principle, Gaius’s attempts to take vengeance on the family’s enemies. Harboring no grievance about his

61 For the translation of multo…peribunt I follow the suggestion of Courtney 1999: 137.

62 Münzer, RE 17.1822 (1937), López 1998: 108n279; Dixon 2007: 28. On this view, the two fragments cannot be (or purport to be) from the same letter, as the longer fragment ostensibly dates to 124 and the shorter to 123. The view that they derive from the same letter is based on the editorial phrase eadem alio loco, which links the second fragment to the first in the manuscripts of Nepos. Some scholars take this to mean “the same letter (eadem epistula) in a different place.” But eadem could just as well refer to Cornelia: “The same woman, in a different place.” Cugusi 1970: 1.2.66 likewise doubts the two fragments come from the same letter.
familial piety, she deploys none of the extreme language and other rhetorical devices for conveying indignation that saturate the longer fragment. Nevertheless, she sets the limit at which the pietas-obligation owed to family must yield to the one owed to the commonwealth; she implies that he has reached that line. This interpretation of the fragment is attractive, but not necessary: for in the generality of its rhetoric, it could just as plausibly be addressed to Tiberius during his tribunate (133 BCE), arguing against ejecting Octavius from office in the first place; or it could fittingly be addressed to either son on any number of other occasions. In any case, here as in the longer fragment Cornelia brings up her son’s obligation to the res publica only in the context of evaluating his familial obligations. She does not give civic claims categorical and absolute priority under all circumstances, but only beyond a certain limit; within that limit, she authorizes her son (whichever it is) to pursue family vendettas to his heart’s content. The “maternal” quality of Cornelia’s rhetoric consists in her beginning with, and being most concerned about, the domain ruled by familial obligations: appropriately for a mother, she focuses upon the family and what it is owed.

III. Monumentality and exemplarity

Because their participation in civic affairs was limited, few female figures of the Republican era enter into exemplary discourse. Though regularly engaged in public cult practice, women were excluded from the military, judicial, and governmental activities that were especially valued, and that furnished most of the performances (valor in battle, success as advocates, discharging magistracies) for which men were praised.

commemorated, and monumentalized. Female figures who do enter exemplary discourse have either transgressed gender boundaries to perform a “manly” deed, or—more typically—have produced a stereotypically female performance in the domestic or religious sphere, but under exceptional circumstances that render that performance consequential for the civic community. Cornelia falls, broadly speaking, into the latter category, apart from a very modest degree of gender-role transgression as discussed above. As we have seen, the legend credits her with forming, educating, and fostering her sons into “the Gracchi,” a feat that is represented as transcending the domestic sphere to assume civic consequence. It is acknowledged and praised as such by a valid judging audience, is granted monumental commemoration, and enters exemplary discourse as a model for other actors to emulate or as a canon for evaluating others’ performances.64 Several particular dimensions of her mothering are thus recognized: the sheer fact of having borne two great men; the role she played in rearing and educating them; miscellaneous virtues associated with motherhood; the fortitude with which she endured their deaths; and her success in persuading Gaius to back down regarding Octavius. The monuments by which these dimensions of her mothering are commemorated take at least three forms: a pattern of nomenclature, an honorific statue, and a variety of texts that narrate or refer to her mothering and also cross-reference the nomenclatorial and plastic monuments.

A. *Mater Gracchorum as name and exemplum*

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64 On exemplary discourse in general, Roller 2004: 1-7; on Cloelia as a gender transgressor (or not), *ibid.* 38-50; on the exemplarity of Quinta Claudia, Flower 2002: 171-72; on early Roman women presented as exemplary in Livy 1, Stevenson 2011.
First for nomenclature. The predicate “mother of the Gracchi” (\textit{mater Gracchorum}, \textgamma ητηρ Γράκχων, or with the words reversed) functions monumentally, behaving like an honorific cognomen of the sort that decorated the names of some middle- to late-Republican aristocratic males. Honorific cognomina were typically taken up by their bearers as monuments to their success as military commanders, and designate the people defeated or land subdued: Africanus, Hispanus, Asiaticus, Macedonicus, Numidicus, Creticus, Achaicus, Cimbricus, Isauricus, and the like. Such names summon the bearers’ valorous achievements to conscious recollection, and make them available for exemplary comparison with others. Functioning similarly are other added names that commemorate some notable performance, office, or personal quality of the bearer: Torquatus, Corv(in)us, Cunctator, Augurinus, Sapiens, Pius, Felix, Magnus, and Augustus, for example. These latter names, and probably also the former, originated as nicknames employed by soldiers, friends, or the community at large, but eventually entered wide use and took on a more or less regular status as an element of nomenclature—meaning they are found regularly in texts referring to the bearer. The epithet \textit{mater Gracchorum}, I suggest, functions like a member of this second, more heterogenous group of honorific names.\textsuperscript{65} It is impossible to determine just when this epithet entered wide usage. Its earliest surviving occurrence is in Cicero’s \textit{Brutus}, dating to 46 BCE. And its \textit{terminus post quem} is Gaius’s emergence as a political figure similar enough to his brother that they can be spoken of as “the Gracchi” (plural), as if a single, homogeneous force in contemporary political culture—perhaps as early as the mid 120s

\textsuperscript{65} So Rieger 1991: 49, speaking of “die fast schon beinamenartig verwendete Bezeichnung mater Gracchorum.”
Cornelia: on making one’s name as *mater Gracchorum*

BCE. At any rate, the secondary, “derived” character of Cornelia’s monumental name and fame entails that she can assume her exemplary figuration only after her sons achieve their own monumental stature and exemplary figuration as “the Gracchi.”

Let us examine, then, the maternal roles with which Cornelia’s monumental nomenclature is connected, and the exemplary operations associated with this nomenclature—that is, how the *mater Gracchorum* is presented as providing a model for others to imitate, or as setting a standard against which others’ performances may be measured. First for her educative role. The monumental name, as just noted, has its earliest surviving occurrence in Cicero’s *Brutus* (§211). Here Cicero infers from the letters of “Cornelia the mother of the Gracchi” that her famous sons were “raised not so much at her breast as in her speech” (*non tam in gremio educatos quam in sermone matris*). Cornelia is adduced in this way to instantiate the preceding claim that a child’s interlocutors at home critically influence his or her oratorical ability. Cicero then cites another instance: Laelia the daughter of Gaius Laelius (the latter a contemporary of Cornelia) spoke with her father’s *elegantia,* as did her daughters the Muciae and

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66 Cic. *Brut.* 211: *legimus epistulas Corneliae matris Gracchorum.* For Cornelia’s efforts to monumentalize her sons after Gaius’s death—thereby contributing to her own monumentization—see sec. IV below. As argued earlier, the story in Plutarch (*Gracch.* 8.7) that she complained already in the mid-130s BCE that she was not yet known as “mother of the Gracchi” is an anachronistic retrojection of the later exemplary discourse.

67 There are few instances of name elements used monumentally in the plural, to refer to multiple members of a family who share a distinctive performance. I can think of (only) three parallels to “the Gracchi” in this sense: “the Decii,” referring to two, or in some versions three, members of the same family who “devote” themselves in battle; “the Fabii,” the 306 members of the clan who fell, save one, at the battle of the Cremera; and the *Scipiadae, duo fulmina belli,* referring in some texts to the brothers Cn. and P. who commanded and fell in Spain during the second Punic war, and in other texts to the two conquerors of Carthage. In these cases, the plural form of the name indicates some distinctiveness requiring explanation. Hence it functions as a monument, even without suggesting its own origins in the way that true honorifics typically do (“Africanus”).

68 In Cic. *De Or.* 3.45 Crassus dilates on Laelia’s eloquence, claiming that she, like many women, displayed an *antiquitas incorrupta* transmitted from her early learning and unsullied by contact with other
granddaughters the Liciniae. One of these Liciniae married a Scipio and bore a son, named Crassus upon adoption by his maternal grandfather, who is himself deemed eloquent; likewise for her other son Metellus Scipio (Brut. 211-12; these men are Cicero’s contemporaries). In providing this lineage, Cicero expands upon the example of Cornelia adduced just before. For the passing down of eloquence in this family line, with women providing the links in the chain of transmission, supports his general assertion that a person’s eloquence is decisively shaped by his or her home enviroment as a child. Indeed, Cicero has strikingly provided a matrilineal stemma: three generations of women, mothers and daughters all, are the heart of this family tree. The final link, where Licinia is implicitly credited with making her two sons eloquent (having inherited her father Crassus’s eloquence), with no indication that her husband Scipio played any role, recapitulates Cornelia’s formation of her own sons, and so exhibits the exemplary reproduction of the “mother of the Gracchi” educational ideal.69

Though Licinia appears to replicate Cornelia’s achievement, Cicero does not expressly declare Cornelia a model for her or the other women he names. Quintilian, however, in his reworking of the Ciceronian passage, takes this additional step and pronounces Cornelia normative. He declares that fathers and mothers should be as contemporary orators. Hence he imagines that her father and other ancestors, as the source of her speech, spoke similarly themselves. Combining this with Brut. 211, we might infer the following Ciceronian “theory” of female eloquence: women learn and faithfully reproduce their fathers’ eloquence, which they may then transmit to their own sons if circumstances allow (i.e., in their husbands’ absence).

69 Brut. 211-12: hanc [sc. Liciniam] vero Scipionis etiam tu, Brute, credo, aliquando audisti loquentem.—ego vero ac libenter quidem, inquit Bratus, et eo libertius quod L. Crassi erat filia. —quid Crassum, inquam, illum censes, istius Liciniae filium, Crassi testamento qui fuit adoptatus? —summo iste quidem dicitur ingenio fuisset, inquit; et vero hic Scipio, collega meus, mihi sane bene et loqui videtur et dicere. Cicero goes on to say (212-13) that the young Crassus received the eloquence of his grandfathers, great grandfathers, and great-great-grandfathers—his father, again, is omitted, while his mother Licinia was previously credited as the vector of this ancestral eloquence. Did exile remove his father from active parenting, as Cic. de Or. 3.8 may suggest? (Shackleton Bailey 1996: 28, s.v. P. Cornelius P.f.P.n. Scipio Nasica; cf. Münzer, RE 4.1497 (1901, s.v. Cornelius (351)), with additions and corrections in RE Suppl. 1 and 3). If he was absent, the parallel between Licinia and Cornelia is all the closer.
learned as possible, to imbue their children with eloquence. He invokes Cornelia to attest the benefits of the learned mother, supplying her monumental name clearly but in a fractured order.\footnote{Quint. Inst. 1.1.6: \textit{in parentibus vero quam plurimum esse eruditionis optaverim. nec de patribus tantum loquor: nam Gracchorum eloquentiae multum contulisse accepinus Corneliam matrem, cuius doctissimus sermo in posteros quoque est epistulis traditus.} Her monumental nomenclature is given in the form \textit{Gracchorum… Corneliam matrem} (though \textit{Gracchorum} is dependent upon \textit{eloquentiae}), and the normativity of this model is explicit in the optative subjunctive \textit{optaverim}: “As for parents, I would want them to have…, and I don’t mean just fathers: for to the Gracchi’s eloquence we are told that their mother contributed much.” Cf. n. 41.} He then repeats Cicero’s example of Laelia, whose speech (he says) displays her father Crassus’s elegance; and he adds a post-Ciceronian example of his own—Hortensia, Q. Hortensius’s daughter, who spoke before the triumvirs. Three instances, then, of children—a pair of sons, then a daughter, then another daughter—who display the admirable eloquence of one or the other parent; these instances illustrate the preceding claim about the desirability of parental eloquence, and are expressly marked as emulatable models.

Cornelia’s educative role is again presented as exemplary in Tacitus’s \textit{Dialogus}, where the Ciceronian locus is further reworked. In this text one speaker, Messalla, discusses the reasons for oratory’s (alleged) decline from its mid- to late-Republican apex to its current poor situation (§25.1-2). The dramatic date of the dialogue, hence the notional nadir of eloquence, is 75 CE. According to Messalla, the roots of any individual’s eloquence lie in the home environment. In the good old days, children were raised “not in the room of a purchased (slave-) nurse, but in the lap and at the breast of their mother, who sought praise above all for watching over the house and tending the children.” With the domestic pedagogical ideal so formulated, it is no surprise to find Cornelia leading the list of mothers who exemplified this ideal. Along with her, Messalla
cites Aurelia the mother of Caesar and Atia the mother of Augustus: all three “oversaw their sons’ educations and so produced children of the first rank,” presumably meaning in their oratorical capacities.\footnote{Tac. Dial. 28.4-6: \textit{nam pridem suus cuique filius, ex casta parente natus, non in cella emptae nutricis, sed gremio ac sinu matris educabatur, cuius praecepta laus erat tueri domum et inservire liberis.} \textit{sic Corneliam Gracchorum, sic Aureliam Caesaris, sic Atiam Augusti [matrem] praefuisse educationibus ac productisse principes liberos accepimus.} That Tacitus has Cic. \textit{Brut.} 211 in mind here is proven by the general context, the verbal echos (\textit{gremium, educatio, Cornelia Gracchorum}), and by Messalla’s explicit, detailed discussion of this Ciceronian treatise just two chapters later (§30.3-4; also Mayer 2001: 14-16 with further references).}

The order and formulation of the three mothers’ names—Cornelia Gracchorum, Aurelia Caesaris, Atia Augusti [mater]—presents the latter two mothers as successors and imitators of Cornelia. For not only is Cornelia named first, but she is granted her monumental nomenclature, on which model the other two mothers’ own designations are formulated: they imitate “Cornelia Gracchorum” in deed and name both.\footnote{In §28.6 \textit{matrem} is firmly attested in the manuscript tradition: hence we have the formula \textit{Cornelia Gracchorum… Aureliam Caesaris… Atiam Augusti matrem}, giving the first her full honorific nomenclature and conferring parallel honor on the latter two by extension of the formula. However, some editors bracket \textit{matrem} as an interpolation by someone who failed to recognize that the names in the genitive depend upon \textit{educationibus} (so Mayer 2001 \textit{ad loc.}). For the formulation \textit{Cornelia Gracchorum} (without \textit{mater}) see sec. IIIC below.} A further parallel, not stated here, is that Aurelia and Atia were widowed before their sons reached adulthood, perhaps giving these women extraordinary opportunities to impact their sons’ oratorical formation. Nowadays, of course (§29.1: \textit{at nunc…}), such ideally rigorous home practices are not maintained; for this and other reasons, morals and the quality of oratory have declined. It is unclear whether Cornelia can provide a model for today’s parents who wish to kindle a spark of antique virtue in their sons: Messalla concedes that many other preconditions of good oratory have also changed (§33.4-41.5).

Yet in an idealizing portrait of his father-in-law Iulius Agricola (b. 40 CE), Tacitus says that Agricola lost his father early, but received a rigorous moral upbringing and splendid
education under his mother Iulia Procilla’s oversight (Agr. 4.1-4). Though Cornelia is not expressly invoked here, the paradigm of the widow virtuously tending the education of a son bound for greatness is presented as still enactable in the reigns of Claudius and Nero, when Agricola was a youth; and still resonant as an ideal at the time of Tacitus’s writing, ca. 98 CE.73

Elsewhere Cornelia is commemorated by her monumental nomenclature for other virtues, specific or general, that are tied to motherhood. “Poverty” may seem an unlikely maternal virtue, but this is the category—*de paupertate*, “on small means”—to which Valerius Maximus assigns the “these are my jewels” anecdote (4.4.pr.) What makes Cornelia (introduced monumentally as *Cornelia Gracchorum mater*) exemplary under this rubric, as Valerius explains, is that “one who desires nothing possesses everything”: for ordinary possessions, the objects of ordinary desires, can be stripped away by the blows of fortune, while the possession of a good state of mind is impervious to fortune.74 Valerius is invoking, somewhat loosely, the Stoic distinction between “true goods,” which consist exclusively of (internal) states of mind and are the sole locus of “moral” value proper, and “false goods,” which are “external” to oneself—wealth, health, status, looks, etc.—and which, however desirable on other grounds, are not pertinent to the reckoning of moral value. In Stoic ethics, an individual’s moral status depends only on things entirely under his or her control, and mental dispositions alone qualify; all else can be capriciously bestowed or removed by fortune, hence is irrelevant to moral status or

73 See sec. IIB on mothers assuming the leading pedagogical role in their husbands’ absence.

74 Val. Max. 4.4.pr.: *omnia nimirum habet qui nihil concupiscit, eo quidem certius quam <qui> cuncta possidet, quia dominium rerum collabi solet, bonae mentis usurpatio nullum tristioris fortunae recipit incursum.* On the vulnerability of “externals” and invulnerability of “internals” to the blows of fortune in Roman Stoicism (particularly Seneca), see Roller 2001: 70-73, 273-80.
condition. The “jewels” anecdote, then, is presented as demonstrating that Cornelia did not (viciously) value objects external to herself, as her guest did, but (virtuously) maintained the correct mental disposition of non-desiring toward such objects, thereby exemplifying for her guest, and for posterity, the virtue in *paupertas*. And this virtue is monumentalized, in a roundabout way, by the tag *mater Gracchorum* as “explained” in this anecdote: it is by valuing her sons, and their education, that she demonstrates her virtuous non-valuing of jewels. Ergo, *paupertas* is a maternal virtue (or so Valerius seems to imply). In fact, however, Valerius’s argument is fallacious in Stoic terms. While an everyday moral agent might agree that valuing persons over objects is virtuous, orthodox Stoicism deems human connections to be “externals” no less than inanimate possessions like jewelry. Children, parents, and friends can die unexpectedly, swept away by adverse fortune. They are by no means “secure possessions,” in the Stoic sense of being internal mental states. In valuing her children as instead of jewels, then, Cornelia by Stoic standards does not display virtue, maternal or otherwise, but rather falls into the same error as her bauble-loving guest.

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75 Discussion of imperial Roman appropriations and elaborations of this longstanding Stoic position in Roller 2001: 66-77.

76 It is unlikely that Cornelia, a scion of the loftiest Roman urban aristocracy, could be less wealthy than a local noblewoman from Campania, or in any way exemplary of “small means.” But Valerius has already foreseen this objection: he assures us that the visitor’s jewels are *pulcherrima illius saeculi*, hence beyond anything Cornelia has. And as the words *illius saeculi* indicate, Valerius is also smuggling in the trope of “the virtuous poverty of the past,” where even the richest fall vastly short of modern standards of material wealth (further examples in 4.4.1-11).

77 For family connections as Stoic “externals” subject to capricious removal by fortune—a trope obviously at home in the genre of consolation—see e.g. Sen. *Marc.* 10.1-6, *Helv.* 1.1, 2.4-5.

Cornelia is invoked ironically as possessor of generic feminine virtues in Juvenal, *Sat*. 6.161-69. Responding to the interlocutor’s question “are there no women whom you would marry?”, the satirist imagines a woman possessed of many virtues, and concludes that she would be unbearably arrogant. His first example is Cornelia, adduced monumentally as “mother of the Gracchi.” See further nn. 18 and 22.
Seneca the Younger likewise considers how Cornelia values her sons via an exploration of her response to their deaths. Seneca’s two references to Cornelia occur in consolatory treatises—the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, addressed to a female friend grieving a son’s death, and the *Consolatio ad Helviam*, addressed, quite audaciously, to his own mother, who is grieving the loss of Seneca himself during his exile in Corsica. In these situations, an apt consolatory strategy is to adduce examples of women who bore the loss of sons bravely. In the *ad Marciam*, Seneca says he will produce “examples of women who bravely suffered the loss of their nearest and dearest” (*exempla... feminarum quae suos fortiter desideraverint*, §16.3). The adverb *fortiter* reveals that the virtue displayed by such women is *fortitudo*. The first example is Cornelia, monumentally named *Scipionis filiam Gracchorum matrem*. Her twelve births, he says, yielded twelve deaths, including the two great men whom she saw murdered and left unburied.78 Thus not only the deaths themselves, but also the mode of death—murder and corpse desecration—are miserable. Yet (Seneca continues), when people gathered to console her, she declared that, having borne the Gracchi, she would never call herself unfortunate (*consolantibus tamen miseramque dicentibus “numquam” inquit “non felicem me dicam quae Gracchos peperi, ”* §16.3). She is presented, then, as admirably courageous (*fortis*) for focusing on her good fortune in having borne such children, rather than, as her consolers expect, on her bad fortune in having lost them (a point developed more generally at §12.1-2). But there is a further point: Cornelia here speaks of her sons in their monumental guise as “the Gracchi,” the toweringly great men of their day (so Seneca describes them earlier: *quos etiam qui bonos viros negaverit magnos fatebitur*). She does not call them, for example,

78 See sec. IIB for further discussion of this passage.
by their praenomina, *Tiberium et Gaium*, as might be expected among family and friends, or by a kinship term such as *tales filios*. Thus the comfort she takes appears to derive partly from their having entered into a monumental and exemplary figuration as “the Gracchi”—which brings Cornelia into her own monumental formation as *mater Gracchorum*, as Seneca called her earlier.79 One might say, then, that Cornelia here declares herself “not unfortunate” because she has achieved all she ever wanted, namely to become “Mother of the Gracchi” in the fully monumental, exemplary sense of the phrase. Now, clearly she is being presented as a model of endurance for the addressee Marcia, who is grieving her own son’s death. Since Marcia’s son died too young to be a “great man” (§17.1, conventional praise notwithstanding), she can hardly share Cornelia’s comfort in being a “mother of….” But Seneca’s argument proceeds *a fortiori*: he declares that Marcia should find comfort in reflecting that even Scipios (and Caesars) have been struck by this same blow of fortune (§16.5).

In the *Consolatio ad Helviam*, Seneca places Cornelia into a moral category of women “whose admirable virtue ranks them among the great (male) heroes” (*feminas quas conspecta virtus inter magnos viros posuit*, §16.5).80 It is precisely in her endurance of her sons’ deaths, it seems, that she earns her place in this category. Seneca writes (*Helv*. 16.6):

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79 Thus her use of the civic, exemplary designation “the Gracchi” makes sense here, while the reference to “Tiberius Gracchus” (civic nomenclature) in the epistolary fragment addressed to Gaius makes no clear sense: see n. 51.

80 The hint of gender transgression here seems to turn on the etymological play that *viri* are the most likely to display *virtus*—though elsewhere, or in other moods, Seneca can deny that *virtus/virtutes* is/are a masculine preserve: e.g., *Marc*. 16.1-3.
Cornelia ordered those who stood around her weeping and bewailing her fate not to make complaints against the fortune that had given her the Gracchi for sons. This was the right mother to bear a man who could say, in a public speech, “you slander the mother who gave birth to me?” The mother’s utterance seems to me much more spirited: the son highly valued the birth of the Gracchi, while the mother highly valued their deaths as well.

Seneca’s point seems to be that both son and mother regard producing “the Gracchi” (again bearing their monumental, “great men” nomenclature) as proof positive of the mother’s high, even heroic, virtue. The son regards the virtue so demonstrated as placing her beyond criticism in the give and take of public oratory; hence here, in a contional speech, he rebukes an opponent who he alleges spoke ill of her, presumably in a contional speech of his own. Yet Seneca concludes, comparing the utterances he has ascribed to mother and son, that the mother’s is more courageous (animosior)—and in so saying, he defines the specific virtue (being animosus, loosely synonymous with displaying fortitudo) of which she provides an example to Helvia. It is easy, Seneca implies, for the son to speak while alive of how fine it is that his mother bore him. It

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[81] The son who speaks here is generally taken to be Gaius, who is named as the speaker in the similar Plutarchean passage (see below). But Seneca’s logic does not require us to choose one son or the other; either could be thought to speak the words deemed worthy of the mother’s preceding statement.
takes much more courage for the mother to affirm that same value after watching her sons die. Were she less courageous, she might, like her misguided consolers, have lamented her fortune, and regretted ever bearing children who would predecease her. These women exemplify the wrong attitude toward fortune—the loss of spirit—while Cornelia, in correcting them and bearing herself otherwise, exemplifies the correct attitude. Indeed, she presents herself here as a far better Stoic than the Cornelia in Valerius Maximus. Seneca’s Cornelia recognizes that her children are no less subject to the vicissitudes of fortune than any other (non-internal) possession; they are “externals” whose bestowal and removal at fortune’s whim should not shake her equanimity or cause her estimation of her own condition to change. If she is grateful for having been given the Gracchi, that gratitude is in no way diminished by their removal. This constancy in the face of shifting fortune is characteristic of the Stoic “wise man.”

82 I interpret mater [sc. magno aestimavit] et funera, “she highly valued their deaths as well,” to mean that she continued to be glad to have borne them even after seeing them die (similarly Duff 1915: 287; Meinel 1972: 202-203). This interpretation is difficult, assuming the text is sound, but renders the thought consistent with the statement Seneca has just ascribed to Cornelia, “not to complain of the fortune that had given (dedisset) her the Gracchi.” Bentley and Madvig conjectured ademisset (“took away”) for dedisset, seeking to make her words correspond better to the later claim that she “valued their deaths” (Duff 1915: 286) But this conjecture does not make the interpretation of that later claim any easier.

83 On the constancy of the Stoic “wise man” see especially Seneca’s De constantia sapientis. Plutarch’s account of Cornelia’s later years (sec. IV below) is consistent with Seneca’s representation; see Dixon 2007: 42-43 on Cornelia and Stoicism. Other authors imagine her having the opposite response. Gaius himself, in a contional speech delivered shortly before his death, paints a pathetic scene of his mother lamenting his fate: quo me miser conferam? quo vertam? in Capitoliumne? at fratris sanguine madet. an domum? matremne ut miser lamentantem videam et abiectam? (Cic. de Or. 3.214 = C. Gracch. ORF² fr. 61. Note that this speech envisions Cornelia waiting for Gaius “at home” in Rome, while Orosius transmits a tradition that his headless corpse was brought to her in Misenum: n. 50). Likewise the author of the tragedy Octavia, dating to ca. 70 CE, imagines Cornelia lamenting her sons: flevit Gracchos miseranda parens / perdidit ingens quos plebis amor (882-83), and much later Jerome questions whether Cornelia could possibly have been glad that she bore the Gracchi (Ep. 54.4).
presumably, should Helvia bear up under her own loss: she should thank *fortuna* for the
time she had with Seneca, rather than reproach it for taking him away.\footnote{Seneca makes this argument in general terms at *Marc.* 12.1-2: *si confessa fueris percepisse magnas voluptates, oportet te non de eo quod detractum est queri, sed de eo gratias agere quod contigit.* Cf. *Ep.* 98.11.}

Quite another aspect of Cornelia’s mothering receives exemplary commemoration
in words ascribed to Gaius by Plutarch (*Gracch.* 25.5-6 = *Gaius* 4.5-6):

(25.5) ἀπομνημονεύεται δὲ καὶ τοῦ Γαίου πολλὰ ῥητορικῶς καὶ ἀγοραίως
ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς εἰρημένα πρὸς τινά τῶν ἐχθρῶν “σὺ γάρ” ἐφη “Κορνηλίαν
λοιδορεῖς τὴν Τιβέριον τεκοῦσαν;” (6) ἐπεὶ δὲ διαβεβλημένος ἦν εἰς μαλακίαν
ὁ λοιδορηθεῖς, “τίνα δ’” εἶπεν “ἐξων παρρησίαν συγκρίνεις Κορνηλία
σεαυτόν; ἔτεκες γὰρ ως ἐκείνη; καὶ μήν πάντες ἵσασι Ῥωμαῖοι πλεῖω χρόνον
ἐκείνην ἀπ’ ἀνδρός οὖσαν ἢ σὲ τὸν ἀνδρα.” τοιαύτη μὲν ἢ πικρία τῶν λόγων
ἡν αὐτοῦ, καὶ πολλὰ λαβεῖν ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐστίν ὁμοία.

(25.5) Also, many statements about her by Gauis are recorded, spoken against one
of his enemies in the vulgar style of public assemblies: “You revile Cornelia,” he
said, “who gave birth to Tiberius?” (6) And since this reviler had been maligned
as being “soft” [i.e., sexually receptive to other men], Gaius said, “what cheek
you have, comparing yourself to Cornelia! Have you brought such children into
the world as she has? Besides, all Romans know that she has been without a
husband longer than you have, man though you are.” Such was the bitterness of
his words, and many similar examples can be taken from his writings.

Gaius invokes his mother by name in a speech addressed to an assembly (a *contio*), just
as he did in a passage shortly preceding this one (*Gracch.* 25.1-3 = *Gaius* 4.1-3; sec. IIC
above). His opponent has also mentioned her, it seems. Let us examine the particular exemplary mode(s) in which these adversaries bring her up. Gaius’s opening question—“you abuse Cornelia who bore Tiberius?”—is obviously a variant of the question recorded in Seneca’s ad Helviam: “You revile the mother who bore me?” In either version, this question can be seen as an inflection the monumental epithet mater Gracchorum, fitting it for expression by one of “the Gracchi” themselves. That is, the son is saying “you would insult the mater Gracchorum?”, but speaking as one of the Gracchi himself, inflects it as, “you would insult the mother who bore me / my brother?”

In any case, the implication is that the high quality of the (Gracchan) son should exempt that son’s mother from being dragged into the mudslinging of contional oratory. Yet it is remarkable that she is brought in at all: I can find no close parallel for an opponent’s mother being attacked, or mentioned at all, in extant deliberative or forensic oratory.

85 Burckhardt and Von Ungern-Sternberg 1994: 116-17 offer general comment on this passage, arguing that it shows how “public” a figure Cornelia had become.

86 Sen. Marc. 17.7 suggests that well-regarded sons may insulate their mothers from being spoken ill of, while ill-regarded sons are a curse (sc. to the mother) all by themselves. But Seneca may thinking of rumors and innuendo rather than attacks delivered in a formal speech in civic space. Bauman 1992: 44 senses an “official,” exemplifying quality to Gaius’s use of Cornelia’s nomen (Κορνηλία) rather than the kinship term “my mother” (as in the Senecan passage). But reference to a woman by her nomen is standard and unmarked, regardless of the context or relationship (Kajanto 1977, esp. 150-51 and Kajava 1994: 20-26; cf. Dickey 2002: 73-76 on forms of address to women, and 270-72 on address to mothers). That Gaius refers to his brother by praenomen only (Τιβέριος) is also unexceptional, as brothers routinely address and refer to one another in this way in intimate communication: Adams 1978: 147-48, 161-12; Dickey 1996: 59-60; ead. 2002: 266-67. Cf. n. 51.

87 Insults directed at “your mama” are widely diffused in some sectors of modern society. In “the dozens,” for example, an opponent’s mother may be attacked as sexually promiscuous, implying that the opponent does not know who is father is. Yet getting at one’s opponent by attacking his mother does not appear to be a Roman practice. The insults Cicero directs at Clodia Metelli in the pro Caelio and Sassia in the pro Cluentio—alleging that Clodia sleeps with her brother (Cael. 31-32) and that Sassia has been attempting to murder her own son Cluentius (Clu. 12-18, 176-78; on her characterization see Kirby 1990: 41-45)—are the only instances of substantial oratorical invective against matronae that I have discovered. Yet these are forensic, not deliberative, speeches; and neither Clodia nor Sassia is the mother of an opponent whom Cicero trying to tar through these attacks. So the parallel to the Plutarchean situation involving Gaius, his opponent, and Cornelia is not very close. Furthermore, in each case Cicero avers that he would never drag a Roman matron’s name through the dirt or implicate her in a crime without good reason (Cael. 32, tongue-
The next statement that Plutarch ascribes to Gaius helps illuminate the character of this attack. Gaius indignantly challenges his opponent’s statements about Cornelia—he has allegedly compared himself to her—and rebuts them by invoking the quality of her children. Whether this “comparison” (συγκρίνεις) is more systematic, or reflects more positively on Cornelia, than the “abuse” (λοιδορία) that the opponent was previously said to hurl at her, is unclear. But one struggles to imagine why an orator of this era would present himself as being in competition with a matrona in morals or achievements. Rather, Gaius may be polemically recharacterizing whatever words his opponent actually spoke regarding Cornelia as a “comparison” precisely to position himself to say that his opponent cannot measure up, in morals or achievements, to a matrona. For according to Gaius, Cornelia’s matronly achievements outstrip the opponent’s own efforts in two respects: first, the (male) opponent cannot rival Cornelia in the quality of the children each has borne; and second, she has been without a husband for longer than he has, male though he is. Cornelia is therefore “exemplary” for the opponent in that her sexual traffic with men (or rather: a man) was more fruitful and beneficial than his; and because she achieved these excellent results fairly quickly and has now taken a long hiatus from men (implicitly invoking the univira ideal), while the opponent has been at it continuously with other men, with little to show for his efforts. Although he falls so short of her standard, can he at least learn from her, and do better in the future? This is savage

in-cheek; Clu. 17-18). Such special pleading seems to imply a norm that matronae are generally exempt from oratorical invective.

88 The verb τίκτω in Classical Greek usually refers to the woman’s role in procreation, while the father’s role is indicated by γεννάω or φυτεύω (in Homer τίκτω refers equally to the father’s and mother’s role). I suspect that, in Plutarch, the word is marked for female procreative activity and its application to a man frames his sexual role as “womanly.” See Amigues 1982, esp. 39-40.
mockery, as Plutarch recognizes by remarking on the “bitterness” of these words. For Gaius is deploying Cornelia’s exemplary motherhood to depict his opponent as a *cinaedus*, an adult male who desires to be sexually penetrated by other men. Tarring one’s opponent as a *cinaedus* is a common invective trope in Roman oratory and satire of all periods, with a surprising number of contemporary parallels given the fragmentary survival of Latin literature from this era. However, Gaius here hurls the insult in a most inventive way: he presents his opponent as attempting, but failing, to measure up to the high standard Cornelia has set for how and when to have sex with men.  

A final excerpt from this passage of Plutarch shows how Cornelia’s exemplary mothering, presence in civic discourse, and monumental name all come together to create a new monumental form. The relevant passage immediately precedes the one just discussed, where we learn of how Gaius invoked his mother in his public speeches. More importantly, it immediately follows the passage in which Gaius announces in a public assembly that he is withdrawing his legislation against M. Octavius as a favor to his mother, at her request (sec. IIC). The current passage describes the reaction of the people assembled to hear this speech (Plut. *Gracch.* 25.4 = *Gaius* 4.4):

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89 On the bitterness and vehemence of Gaius’s oratory, see also Plut. *Gracch.* 2.5-6. For near-contemporary *cinaedus* accusations in oratory, explicit or implicit, see Cato *ORF* fr. 213, Scipio Aemilianus *ORF* fr. 17, 30; Koster 1980: 107, 111-12. In near-contemporary satire, Lucil. frs. 32, 1140 Marx.

In [Cic.] *In Sall.* 9, “Cicero” makes the same riposte to “Sallust,” who has attacked alleged sexual transgressions by Terentia and Tullia: *quaes facilius mulieres se a viris abstinuerunt quam tu vir* (cf. [Sal.] *In Cic.* 2). The *In Sall.* is undatable, so it is difficult to decide whether (1) the insult is authentically Gracchan (or generally ascribed to him), and was famous enough to become a commonplace that declaimers, historiographers, and others could appropriate and redeploy as needed; (2) the author of the *In Sall.* is copying Plutarch (or his source). On the *In Sall.* see Novokhatko 2009.
καὶ ὁ δῆµος ἡγάσθη καὶ συνεχώρησε, τιµῶν τὴν Κορνηλίαν οὐδὲν ἤττον ἀπὸ τῶν παίδων ἢ τοῦ πατρός, ἢς ἔγε καὶ χαλκὴν εἰκόνα στῆσας ύστερον ἔπέγραψε Κορνηλίαν μητέρα Γράγχων.

And the people marveled / were glad and assented (sc. to his request to withdraw the legislation), and honored Cornelia for her sons no less than for her father—at any rate, they later erected a bronze statue of her and inscribed it “Cornelia mother of the Gracchi.”

I noted earlier that Cornelia might have been assumed to make her request privately, in a domestic setting or via letter, as deemed appropriate to a mother. Furthermore, Gaius presents his climb down as a matter of filial piety, of deferring to his mother’s wishes. Yet he has brought this domestic transaction, and its familial rationale, into civic view by presenting it in the concilium plebis. What is the assembly to make of this dramatic familial transaction that has been thrust into its cognizance? As representative of the civic community, the assembly appropriately stresses the civic face of the transaction: it deems her intervention sufficiently beneficial to the community to merit a distinctively civic honor—a statue—granted by its own authority (i.e., via a plebiscite). This context points us to a specific rather than general interpretation of the “motherhood” for which she is honored. The point is not that she (merely) bore great men, but that she compPELLingly performed the maternal role in one particular situation: for she persuasively presented familial ethical imperatives to Gaius in a way that aligned with the public good.
This is how a mother’s “private” words to her son come within the assembly’s
cognizance to evaluate as a civic deed.\(^9\)

This commemoration also closes the challenge that Plutarch’s Cornelia issued to
her sons on the eve of Tiberius’ tribunate, the passage with which I opened (\textit{Gracch.}
8.6-10, sec. I above). There, Plutarch credits Cornelia with spurring Tiberius to seek the
tribunate by reproaching him (and Gaius) that that the Romans addressed her as mother-
in-law of Scipio, but not yet as the mother of the Gracchi (\textit{μητέρα Γράγχων}). Cornelia
is thus projected as imagining that she will gain her honorific nomenclature through her
sons’ achievements, through their own self-construction as “the Gracchi.” I remarked
that the plural “Gracchi” (\textit{Γράγχων}) is odd, as only Tiberius—and arguably not even he—could have been expected to achieve anything substantive in the near future. In the
current passage, after Gaius withdraws his legislation, the Roman people fulfill
Cornelia’s desire by granting a statue that bears precisely the nomenclature she
supposedly longed for eleven years earlier. Yet the grounds for this monumentalization
have shifted. Her sons indeed had to become “the Gracchi” before she could become
“mother of the Gracchi,” but she gains her title in recognition of her own performance of
motherhood via rhetoric.\(^9\) Also, the plural form \textit{Γράγχων} is as incongruous in the
current passage as in the former, for here Cornelia has rhetorically performed her
motherhood only in respect to Gaius. The plural seems to manifest a characteristic of

\(^9\) The relative clause \textit{ἧς γε καὶ χαλκῆν εἰκόνα στήσας (“at any rate, they set up a bronze statue and
inscribed it…..”), gives Plutarch’s justification for his claim that the people honored Cornelia specifically
for her sons: that is, Plutarch deduces the occasion for the honor from the inscription on the base. For this
“limitative” use of \textit{γε} see n. 34; also Holden 1885 \textit{ad loc}.

\(^9\) Perfect responsion of the current passage (\textit{Gracch.} 25.4) with \textit{Gracch.} 8.7 would require that the people
refer to her son-in-law (as she did) rather than her father (as they do). But the son-in-law is now dead,
hence perhaps the substitution. See n. 2 for further discussion.
exemplary discourse described earlier—that a social actor’s exemplary figuration is
synchronic, telescoping an entire “life story” into each individual moment in that story.
Each of the Gracchi is also at the same time the other (for they exist, in exemplary
discourse, largely as a duo); and to act as mother in respect to either one is automatically
to act as mother to both.92

B. Cornelia’s statue and the Porticus Metelli

Further dimensions of Cornelia’s monumentality and exemplarity emerge from
closer consideration of her statue and its changing topographical context. Let us consider
first the evidence for this statue’s appearance and location. As just discussed, Plutarch
says that a bronze statue, inscribed “Cornelia mother of the Gracchi,” was erected by “the
people” (i.e., legislated by the concilium plebis) to honor her “for her sons no less than
for her father” (Gracch. 25.4 = Gaius 4.4). The Elder Pliny also mentions the statue in
his discussion of metals, which includes the use of bronze in statuary (Plin. Nat. 34.31):

exstant Catonis in censura vociferationes mulieribus statuas Romanis in provinciis
poni; nec tamen potuit inhibere, quo minus Romae quoque ponerentur, sicuti
Corneliae Grachorum matri, quae fuit Africani prioris filia. sedens huic posita
soleisque sine ammento insignis in Metelli publica porticu, quae statua nunc est in
Octaviae operibus.

92 The idea that Gaius reproduces his brother’s example goes back to Gaius himself: pessimi Tiberium
fratrem meum optimum interfecerunt. em! videte quam par pari sim (C. Gracch. ORF 2 fr. 17). Likewise
Plut. Gracch. 22.7 = Gaius 1.7: Tiberius appears in a dream to his brother, urging him to canvass for the
Tribunate, and says, εἰς μὲν ἡμῖν ἀμφότεροις βίοις, εἰς δὲ θάνατος ύπερ τοῦ δῆμου πολιτευομένους
πέπρωται (cf. Cic. Div. 1.56, Val. Max. 1.7.6). On their sharing the same fate (literally consortes),
Bannon 1997: 127-28, 135. However, the brothers can also be distinguished when their differences are
deemed to confer greater explanatory or persuasive power: see Plut. Gracch. 2-3 for thoughts on precisely
this matter, along with a catalogue of their similarities and differences.
We know of loud complaints by Cato during his censorship (184 BCE), that statues were being erected in the provinces to Roman women; however, he was not able to prevent them from being erected at Rome itself, like the one to Cornelia the mother of the Gracchi, who was the daughter of the elder Africanus. In a seated posture, and notable for its strapless sandals, it was set up for her in the public portico of Metellus; the statue is now [i.e., 70s CE, the time of Pliny’s writing] in the edifice of Octavia.

The base of this statue survives: a large block of Pentelic marble, bearing an Augustan-era inscription *Cornelia Africani (filia) / Gracchorum*, was discovered in 1878 on the site of the porticus Octaviae, precisely where Pliny places the statue.\(^93\) It seems clear that Pliny and Plutarch reflect the wording of this inscription in their descriptions of the statue. When Pliny writes [sc. *statua*] *Corneliae Gracchorum matri, quae fuit Africani prioris filia*, he seems to be paraphrasing the inscription, though reversing the order in which the Gracchi and Africanus are mentioned and making the maternal relationship explicit by inserting *mater* in his paraphrase. And Plutarch’s statement that the statue “honored Cornelia for her sons no less than for her father” (τιμῶν τὴν Κορνηλίαν οὐδὲν ἦττον ἀπὸ τῶν παίδων ἢ τοῦ πατρὸς, *Gracch. 25.4 = Gaius 4.4*) seems likewise to describe the contents of the inscription. His subsequent statement that the inscription read *Cornelia mater Gracchorum* (ὁ δῆμος… ἐπέγραψε Κορνηλίαν μητέρα Γράγχων) is then not quite accurate, either in excluding Cornelia’s filiation or in including the word

\(^93\) *CIL* 6.10043 = 6.31610 (most recently discussed by Chioffi and Alföldy, *CIL* 6.8.3 p. 4772 (2000)) = Degrassi, *InscrIt* 13.3.72 = *ILLRP* 336 = *ILS* 68, now in the Capitoline museum; see below for further bibliography.
for “mother.” However, Plutarch likely did not know the monument at first hand, and received his information from an intermediate source; Pliny, by contrast, certainly did know the monument from autopsy.

There has been much scholarly debate regarding the historicity of alleged honorific statues of women in Republican Rome, at least in the city of Rome proper. To my knowledge, all scholars accept our sources’ assertions that statues were granted in 35 BCE to Octavia and Livia, who as wives of the triumvirs received parallel and extraordinary honors. But other, earlier alleged honorific statues for women—e.g., Cloelia, a heroine of the wars with Porsenna, and Quinta Claudia, who saved the ship bringing the image of the Magna Mater to Rome—are now usually thought to represent later misunderstandings of archaic statues of female divinities, or mis datings of statues erected long after the alleged heroic deed, or even outright fabrications by later sources. Cornelia is on the bubble. Some scholars hold that an honorific statue of a woman (or of this woman) is possible by the late 2nd century BCE, and that Cornelia’s honor paved the way for those granted to Livia and Octavia nine decades later. Others contend that her statue, like the earlier alleged statues for women, is a case of mistaken identity.

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94 See sec. IIIC for the significance of the non-appearance of the word mater in the inscription.

95 Coarelli 1996[1978]: 288-90, 296 suggests that Plutarch records a pre-Augustan inscription reading Cornelia Gracchorum (conjecturally the reading of an erased text on the surviving base: see below), which he would have gotten from a Republican-era literary source; only in the Augustan recarving, according to Coarelli, was the patronymic added. However, Plutarch does provide information (“honoring her no less for her sons than for her father”) that is consistent with the presence of the patronymic.

96 Flory 1993: 287, 292-96 discusses the statues of Octavia and Livia of 35 BCE; ibid. 288-92 on earlier alleged honorific statues, including Cornelia’s; also Sehlmeyer 1999 on each statue. Hemelrijk 2005: 310-15 argues that all alleged statues for women prior to 35 BCE are later inventions, perhaps intended to provide specious precedents for those of 35. See also Roller 2004: 44-50 on Cloelia’s statue, and Flower 2002: 171-72 on Quinta Claudia’s.
I myself accept the “mistaken identity” thesis, but to justify this view requires a detailed discussion of the context. In 148 BCE the praetor Q. Caecilius Metellus defeated the Macedonian royal pretender Anddriscus, celebrated a triumph, and took the honorific cognomen Macedonicus. He brought a large quantity of booty back to Rome, including a spectacular masterwork by Lysippus, the so-called *turma Alexandri*—an enormous group of some 26 bronze equestrian figures, all apparently life-size, representing Alexander the Great and those of his companions who died in the battle of the Granicus. To provide a gallery and frame for this and other looted works of art, he erected in the Circus Flaminius an ample quadriporticus subsequently known as the porticus Metelli. The portico enclosed a preexisting temple of Iuno Regina; a matching temple of Iuppiter Stator seems to have been erected at the same time as the portico, standing immediately adjacent to Iuno and likewise enclosed by the portico. Velleius Paterculus (1.11.5) seems to imply that Metellus’s temple of Iuppiter was the first public building made of marble in the city of Rome; he deems it an example of *magnificentia* and *luxuria*. The whole complex was probably completed by the late 140s BCE, and certainly by the 130s.

Now, Cicero writes in his fourth Verrine oration, dating to 70 BCE, that one could go to the porticus Metelli (among a few other places) to see Greek sculpture of the kind and quality that Verres stole from Sicily for his purely private enjoyment. He mentions in

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98 On this complex Vell. Pat. 1.11.2-5, 2.1.2 is foundational; for the temple made of marble, see 1.11.5: *hie* [sc. Metellus] *idem primus omnium Romae aedem ex marmore in iis iipsis monumentis molius vel magnificientiae vel luxuriae princeps fuit*. Here *aedes* is taken to mean the temple of Jupiter, and *ipsa monumenta* to mean the whole porticus Metelli complex. Scholarly discussion by Coarelli 1997: 529-31; Viscogliosi, *LTUR* 4.130 s.v. porticus Metelli; *id. LTUR* 3.157-59 s.v. Iuppiter Stator ad circum; *id. LTUR* 3.126-28 s.v. Iuno Regina ad circum; Ruck 2004: 482-83, all with earlier bibliography.
particular a fine statue of Sappho that Verres removed from Syracuse (Ver. 2.4.126-27). This statement seems to imply that the portico contained a variety of Greek sculpture besides the turma Alexandri. Furthermore, the Elder Pliny mentions a number of Greek sculptures as being on display in the porticus Octaviae (Nat. 36.15, 22, 28-29, 35), which is the structure that succeeded the porticus Metelli on the same site. And Velleius says that, in his day, the turma Alexandri was likewise to be seen in the porticus Octaviae (1.11.3). Thus the turma was evidently carried over to the porticus Octaviae from the preceding porticus Metelli, and scholars generally assume that much of the Greek statuary mentioned by Pliny as standing in the porticus Octaviae was likewise already present in the earlier structure. Most of these works were probably looted from Macedonia, though some may have been purpose-made for this portico by Greek sculptors residing in Rome and working in Greek styles.99

The porticus Metelli, then, is the first context in which we must consider the seated bronze statue of “Cornelia” on its Pentelic marble base. As we just saw, Pliny reports that it was originally installed in this portico, and in his day was in the “buildings of Octavia” (Nat. 34.31, quoted above). This suggests that it was a carryover, like the turma Alexandri. The surviving base is framed by mouldings executed in a style typical of the 2nd century BCE.100 This block of Greek marble was necessarily imported to Italy either before or after carving. The stone bears traces of an erased inscription near the top

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99 For the assumption that the Greek sculptures mentioned by Pliny are holdovers from the porticus Metelli (whether originally Macedonian booty or made in Rome), see e.g. Viscogliosi, LTUR 4.132; Ruck 2004: 482-83. Scholarly controversy surrounds the family of 2nd-century Attic sculptors named Timarchides, Polycles, Timocles, and Dionysius; it is possible that one or more resided in Rome by mid-century and set up shop there, as there were many commissions to be had.

of the front face, just under the upper moulding—a typical location for 2nd century inscriptions, in contrast to the Augustan practice of centering the inscription on the stone’s face (as seen in the extant Augustan inscription). We can only guess at the original inscription’s contents. The seated posture of the bronze statue, meanwhile, may reflect any one of several attested Classical and Hellenistic types of seated female figure. The base’s shape, and the position of the anchorings for the statue in its upper surface, best accommodate seated types known for the goddesses Demeter, Cybele, and Hera; the base’s dimensions suggest that the female figure would have been slightly larger than life size. Now, Pliny reports that various images of goddesses stood in the porticus Octaviae (hence, probably, in the porticus Metelli): two statues of Iuno, one being the cult statue in the temple, and as many as four Venuses, all by different sculptors (Plin. Nat. 36.15, 35). Given the strong representation of goddess statues in this complex, as well as the types of female figure that could fit the surviving base, it seems not unlikely that the statue of Cornelia “originally” represented a goddess. It was either made in Greece and looted by Metellus, or in Rome by Greek artists using Greek styles and marble to enhance the decoration of the new portico.

In time, this statue came to be identified as Cornelia the mother of the Gracchi, in the monumentalized, legendary form that we saw was coming into focus in the course of

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103 On the statue’s possible origins, see Chioffi, LTUR 4.358 s.v. statua: Cornelia (1999); Chioffi and Alföldy, CIL 6.8.3 p. 4772 (2000); Ruck 2004: 483; also n. 99 for Greek sculptors working in Rome.
the first century BCE. In the Augustan age the base was reinscribed—the older inscription having been erased at this time or earlier—to indicate the woman that the statue was now identified as representing. How such a misremembering and reidentifying comes about is not entirely clear, but is paralleled at Rome in the probable reconstrual of an archaic statue of a female divinity seated on a horse as the legendary heroine Cloelia.\textsuperscript{104} It is also conceivable that a statue not previously identified as Cornelia was simply appropriated and reinscribed under Augustus, thus creating a statue of her \textit{ex nihilo} and thereby creating an exemplary model for Octavia and her own public statue (see below). Once identified as Cornelia, however, the statue was assumed to be honorific, and at this point the dynamics of exemplary discourse required an occasion for its erection and dedication. This is what Plutarch (or his source) provides, when he reports that the statue was Cornelia’s reward from the people for successfully intervening with Gaius regarding Octavius. Modern scholars suggest other occasions for the erection of an honorific statue of Cornelia. But if the reconstruction just presented is correct, the statue was not “originally” of Cornelia or honorific at all, and resulted from no such occasion. Nor need we puzzle over when and why her statue was placed in the portico erected by Metellus Macedonicus, who was a great enemy of her sons.\textsuperscript{105} Instead,

\textsuperscript{104} On the statue of Cloelia, Roller 2004: 45. For examples from the Greek east of preexisting statuary reinscribed to appear to be “portraits” of Roman aristocrats, see Ruck 2004: 487-88. Blanck 1969: 71-84 catalogues a number of statue bases from Greek cities, dating from Sulla to Augustus, from which earlier dedicatory inscriptions had been erased and new inscriptions were carved to honor Roman magistrates and their wives.

Plutarch’s account of the occasion for the creation of this statue reveals something even more valuable than the “historical truth”: it reveals what a Roman of the early empire imagined might be a suitable occasion for the erection of such a statue for a woman—or at least for this woman, the legendary Mother of the Gracchi. If Plutarch’s account is historically false, its very falseness provides rich insight into the values, expectations, and assumptions about the relationship of monumentality, memory, and gender among Romans of the first two centuries CE.

C. Octavia and Cornelia as exemplary matrons

In 35 BCE, according to Cassius Dio (49.38.1), Livia as wife of Octavian, and Octavia as wife of Antony (and sister of Octavian), simultaneously received grants of freedom from tutela, tribunician sacrosanctity, and public statues. The novelty of these grants to women in the Triumviral period cannot be overstated. The first gave them official and complete control over their own property, which in law if not in practice was unobtainable for women in this period (apart from the Vestal Virgins, whose extraordinary status in this respect these women now shared).106 The latter two had been reserved, respectively, for (male) office holders and for men who performed deeds deemed consequential for the community—provided we agree that the allegedly honorific statues known in the late Republic or early Empire as representing Cornelia, Quinta Claudia, Cloelia, and other early women in fact involve misunderstandings and reinterpretations of old statues whose original identity had been forgotten. Officially, these grants honored the wives of the triumvirs and protected them from outrage.

106 Gardner 1986: 5-29 discusses tutela mulieris in Republican and early Imperial law.
However, our sources allege that Octavian equally sought to make political hay out of his sister’s conspicuous loyalty to Antony and his children, and Antony’s contrasting mistreatment of her. For the only outrage notionally threatening either woman was Antony’s neglect of and insults against Octavia.\textsuperscript{107} The decision to name a portico for Octavia, probably taken in the 30s BCE (though the dedication probably took place in the early to mid-20s), can be understood as promoting these same aims, official and unofficial. After Antony’s defeat, the portico was enlisted to serve other purposes, as we shall see.

First for the creation of this portico, and its physical characteristics. Dio reports (49.43.8) that Octavian oversaw a complete rebuilding of the porticus Metelli and renovation of its temples, which he paid for out of his Dalmatian spoils (hence after 33 BCE). The older monument’s quadriporticus structure was retained, as was, probably, most of the sculpture: at any rate, the turma Alexandri and “statue of Cornelia” are said to have persisted, as we have seen. Behind the temples was built an exedra, which may have been used for extrapomerial meetings of the senate; Greek and Latin libraries were eventually added as well. Because Octavia was (at least officially) the work’s patron, the rebuilt portico received her name, and is referred to in subsequent texts as porticus Octaviae or Octaviae operae or the like; her image was also almost certainly installed in the building, presumably bearing the portrait type created in 35 BCE.\textsuperscript{108} Thus this


\textsuperscript{108} On the difficult question of identifying portrait sculptures of Octavia, see Wood 1999: 51-63, with further bibliography. Octavia’s coin portraits are on somewhat firmer ground: Wood 41-51. It is attractive to imagine that the Velletri-Smyrna portrait, almost certainly to be identified as Octavia (Wood 52-54 and plates 11-15), is the type created in 35 and that probably had its place in the porticus Octaviae.
portico became the first public building in Rome ever to bear the name of a female patron. The second such building, dedicated about two decades later (7 BCE) by Livia, was likewise a portico—in this case, however, built from scratch on a site previously occupied by a large domus.

There may be a reason for associating women’s names with porticoes in particular. Porticoes were “public” in the sense of open to all who wished to enter them, but not “civic” in the sense of being programmed for particular activities relating to government, the courts, cult practice, festivals, or the like. They are typically said to contain works of art and libraries, to be ideal for leisurely strolling, and—according to Catullus and Ovid—to be fruitful for soliciting sexual liaisons. They are thus coded as places of leisure, otium, and not as places of “serious” activity, negotia or officia (so also Vell. Pat. 2.1.1-2). This coding also has a gendered dimension, for the “serious” activities of government, advocacy, and the like were reserved for men, but activities associated with otium were open to both sexes. So if a woman’s name was to be associated with any type of public building, a portico may have seemed the most suitable: other possible types, such as temples, basilicas, and fora, were programmed (at least in part) for specific civic activities presided over by male magistrates, advocates, and priests. But there is more. The grants to Octavia and Livia in 35 BCE, as we have seen,

109 On the renovation, new construction, and renaming of this portico, see Viscogliosi, *LTUR* 4.141-45 (s.v. porticus Octaviae), Coarelli 1997: 534-37. On its decorative program see Macaulay-Lewis 2009: 8-11, Pape 1975: 185-87. Woodhull 2003: 23-25 weighs the difficult and contradictory reports regarding whether Octavia herself or Octavian / Augustus paid for the building and took the leading role as patron. There can be no doubt of Octavia’s substantial personal contribution: she allocated at least three freedmen to maintaining the libraries, as their epitaphs, from the columbarium of Marcella minor, indicate (*CIL* 6.4431-35). See also Hemelrijk 1999: 107.

110 Milnor 2005: 60-64 discusses the significance of Livia as official dedicator of this portico; in general see Panella, *LTUR* 4.127-29 (s.v. porticus Liviae) with further references.
conferred certain highly visible privileges and honors associated with holding magistracies and priesthods, but not the actual offices, powers, and responsibilities. Thus these two women took on a distinctively “public but not civic” role, the same quality manifested in porticoes as such. The connection of these women to porticoes then seems quite “natural,” coming about through a metonymic association between things manifesting the same quality. Furthermore, the very act of paying for and dedicating a portico manifests this quality. For such sponsorship and oversight confers public visibility, but does not require current or past tenancy of magisterial or priestly office.\footnote{On the decoration, uses, and gendering of porticoes, see Macaulay-Lewis 2009: 4-14; Milnor 2005: 53-64, esp. 59-60; Pape 1975: 46-47. In saying that porticoes admit of the innovation of being dedicated by and named for women, we must not lose sight of the fact that, prior to Octavia, all known porticoes were in fact dedicated by and named for men, just as every other public building was.}

We will shortly see that such an articulation of Octavia’s role, in particular, well served the ideological aims of Octavian / Augustus in the Triumviral and Augustan periods.

Specific features of the porticus Metelli may have made it appear suitable for reprogramming as the porticus Octaviae. Certain military elements from the former victory monument persisted in the remodeled structure, as the retention of much of Metellus’s war booty, and above all the thematically martial turma Alexandri, indicates. Yet we noted Metellus’s apparent interest in collecting and displaying statues of goddesses. Though probably war booty themselves, these statues likely made the space seem easier to “regender,” as viewers could focus on the subject of the art rather than its source. Metellus himself was associated with virtuoso fathering, a fact perhaps not irrelevant to the reprogrammed portico’s emphasis on bearing and rearing children (see
Beyond this, the Elder Pliny transmits a curious tale (Nat. 36.43) of the accidental switching of cult statues in the temples of Iuppiter and Iuno within the portico, such that the masculine decoration intended for former’s temple ended up surrounding Iuno, and the feminine decoration intended for the latter ended up with Iuppiter. The switch was deemed to be the gods’ choice, and the temples were dedicated to the gods they now contained. This story is difficult to make sense of historically. But if it reflects a widespread perception of the character of the temples’ decoration (a perception that perhaps spurred the creation of this tale as an aetiology), then the temples’ own gender-switching might make that of the portico enclosing them seem easier to accomplish, perhaps even divinely sanctioned. Finally, the presence of a statue regarded as commemorating Cornelia mater Gracchorum must have facilitated the project of making the portico be “about” Octavia rather than Metellus.

This leads us to reconsider the statue of Cornelia in its new Augustan context, within the porticus Octaviae. Its Augustan-era inscription is presumably contemporary with the period of renovation and reprogramming of the portico. Whatever this statue was previously thought to represent—and we do not know whether it was already identified as Cornelia, or how the original inscription read, or when it was erased—from Metellus bore four sons who later became consuls (which greatly impressed Cicero: e.g., Brut. 81, Phil. 8.14), and during uring his censorship in 131 BCE he delivered a speech “on increasing the number of children” (De prole augenda), to which Lucilius may have responded (George 1988), and which Augustus revived and read out in the senate in support of his marriage legislation (Suet. Aug. 89.2, Liv. Per. 59; also perhaps Gell. 1.6.1, 7 with author misidentified). It is tempting to see Metellus’s parenting as relevant to reprogrammed porticus Octaviae (Kajava 1989: 128). But it is unclear to what extent Augustan-era Romans in general would have been aware of this association, or might in any case have perceived a characteristic of the original dedicat or carrying over into the renovated and renamed structure.

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113 Plin. Nat. 36.43: in Iovis aede ex iis pictura cultusque reliquus omnis femineis argumentis constat; erat enim facta Iunoni, sed, cum inferrentur signa, permutasse geruli traduntur, et id religionem custoditum, velut ipsis dis sedem ita partitis. ergo et in Iunonis aede cultus est qui Iovis esse debuit. Detailed discussion and analysis of earlier opinions in Morgan 1971: 491-95.
the moment of reinscription onward a statue of the *mater Gracchorum* of legend unquestionably existed. And as a monument created in the Augustan age to commemorate a great figure from the past, this statue bears closest comparison to the *principes viri* in the Forum Augustum—marble statues, also somewhat larger than life size, purpose-made as decorations for the newly built forum, with each honorand identified by an inscription and *elogium* describing his *cursus honorum*. Cornelia’s bronze statue differs in material, in having preexisted (under whatever identity), and in receiving no *cursus* (a woman, after all, holds no magistracies) nor any narrative of her achievements—or none, at any rate, beyond what the nomenclature of the inscription implies.

And what, exactly, does the nomenclature *Cornelia Africani f. Gracchorum* imply? The evidence for women’s naming formulae from the middle Republic to the Augustan period casts some light on how to read this short text. Surviving funerary and dedicatory inscriptions suggest that women are most commonly identified by their *nomen gentilicum*, perhaps along with a *praenomen* if they have one. This name may then be expanded by an element indicating filiation: an appositional *filia* (usually abbreviated as *f*) with the father’s *praenomen* in the genitive (likewise usually abbreviated). Alternatively or additionally it may be expanded by a *gamonym*, which consists of some part of her husband’s name (usually his *gentilicum* or cognomen) in the genitive, positioned either immediately following the woman’s own *gentilicum* or following her filiation. Thus, completely unexceptional nomenclature for Cornelia would be *Cornelia*

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114 The bibliography on the *principes viri* of the Forum Augustum is vast; see most recently Geiger 2008 and Spannagel 1999: 317-44. Cornelia’s husband Ti. Sempronius Gracchus was demonstrably among these figures: Degrassi, *InscrIt* 13.3 nos. 25, 82; Geiger 2008: 123-26, 151-52 (with discussion of the new evidence for his statue from the archive of the Sulpicii).
P. f. Gracchi, “Cornelia, daughter of Publius, (wife) of Gracchus”—precisely the structure we find, for example, in the mid-2nd century epitaph from the Tomb of the Scipios, [P]aulla Cornelia Cn. f. Hispalli, “Paulla Cornelia, daughter of Gnaeus, (wife) of Hispallus.” Against such a standard, our inscription appears unusual in two respects. First, Cornelia’s father is designated not by his common praenomen Publius, but by his distinctive honorific cognomen, Africanus. This is easily explained: uniquely identifying her father helps to individuate her among the many possible Corneliae; also, the name’s grandiosity helps to elevate and monumentalize Cornelia herself, as the subject of this honorific statue. Second, and more strikingly, in the sedes of the gamonym stands not a genitive singular, but the genitive plural Gracchorum. Since the “monumental” name Cornelia mater Gracchorum was well-established by the Augustan era, any Augustan or Imperial-era reader of this inscription would have inferred (along with all modern scholars) that her two famous sons are implied in this plural. However, since the structure of the naming formula causes us to expect a gamonym in this sedes, I believe that those same readers were expected to understand that her husband, Ti. Sempronius Gracchus père, is also included in this plural. I discuss his relevance in the context of the porticus Octaviae below.

But how exactly does Cornelia, as represented by this statue with this inscription in this context, relate to Octavia? These figures display striking parallels. Each woman was given in marriage to the political rival of a close male blood relative, to bring about

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115 ILLRP 317 = ILS 10 = CIL 6.1294 (most recently discussed by Caldelli, CIL 6.8.3 pp. 4673-74 (2000)). The commemorand’s husband, Cn. Cornelius Scipio Hispallus, is probably the cousin of Scipio Africanus (cf. Kajava 1995: 178). The commemorand herself, otherwise unknown, is likely a distant relative of our Cornelia and of her own husband. See Kajava 1995: 19-26 on women’s naming formulae in the Republican period.
and betoken the antagonists’ reconciliation. Cornelia’s father betrothed her to his enemy Ti. Sempronius Gracchus, and so confirmed their reconciliation. For Octavia the relevant marriage was her second, to Marc Antony in 39 BCE, and its purpose was to declare and assure the recent agreement of cooperation between Antony and Octavian. Also like Cornelia, Octavia raised a large number of children—at least nine—largely without a husband present. Her three children by C. Claudius Marcellus (RE Claudius (216)) were probably or certainly born in the second half of the 40s BCE; these were Augustus’s heir presumptive M. Claudius Marcellus, along with two daughters, Marcella maior and minor. Octavia’s husband Marcellus died in 40. Marrying Marc Antony the next year, she bore him two daughters, Antonia maior and minor, before the couple separated in 37 (though legal divorce came only in 32). Antony’s younger son by his previous wife Fulvia, M. Antonius Iullus, born after 46, was raised by Octavia during Antony’s long sojourn in the east. And following Antony and Cleopatra’s deaths in 30 BCE, Octavia took in their three children: the twins Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene, born in 40; and Ptolemy Philadelphus, born in 36.116 Thus Octavia assumed responsibility for raising this clutch of children through the 30s and 20s BCE. These children’s fathers could not have been present beyond their first years, due to the timing of Marcellus’s death and Antony’s serial absences from both Rome and Alexandria. While not technically a univira like Cornelia, then, Octavia’s concern for all of Antony’s children, and her advocacy with Octavian on Antony’s behalf despite his insults and slights,

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116 On Octavia’s parental role see Plut. Ant. 87.1-3. Evidence for these children’s dates of birth is scattered and in some cases imprecise, but see Pelling 1988 on the relevant passages of Plutarch’s Life of Antony, esp. on 28.7, 54.7, 87.1-3; and RE articles on each person. Hemelrijk 1999: 67, 293n45 claims that Octavia raised 10 children, for she includes Marcus Antonius Antyllus, Antony’s older son by Fulvia. Antyllus may have spent some portion of the 30s in Rome with Octavia (Plut. Ant. 35.8), but is more frequently glimpsed during this period in Alexandria (Plut. Ant. 28.7-12, 57.4, 71.3, Dio 51.8.4).
suggests a loyalty approaching that which Cornelia showed to her own husband’s memory in refusing to remarry. A further similarity is that, among their many children, both women bore and raised sons who were destined for greatness but died young, arguably before achieving their full potential. In Octavia’s case, the “great” son Marcellus died in 23 BCE, aged 19, before entering upon the lofty station Augustus had slated for him. Each mother was then left to cultivate the memory of her son(s), and each was renowned—in contrasting ways, as we will see—for how she bore her loss. Finally, both women were not only highly educated themselves and took charge of their children’s education, but are said to have patronized philosophers, writers, and artists; Octavia’s dedication of Greek and Latin libraries inside the porticus Octaviae in memory of her son Marcellus is one way in which her educative and literary engagements were concretely monumentalized.¹¹⁷

A key aspect of Octavia’s monumentalization as an exemplary wife and mother is her association with Cornelia—the latter certainly, and the former most probably, represented with a statue—in the context of the portico bearing her name. These two figures work first to construct one another as exemplary models, and then together promulgate Augustan values. Octavia’s presentation as “ideal wife,” as noted, was particularly valuable to Octavian during his struggle with Antony in the 30s BCE, when the decision to create this portico with its particular program of decoration was taken. Following Antony’s defeat, and continuing into the 20s when the portico was completed and dedicated, the presentation of Octavia as “ideal mother” underpinned Augustus’s

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dynastic aims by honoring the parent of his designated successor. Regarding mothering, Octavia’s juxtaposition with Cornelia—represented in the portico as the mater Gracchorum of legend—spotlighted Octavia’s maternal performance, first in relation to her children with Antony, and then in regard to her “great” offspring Marcellus, Augustus’s heir. Conversely, Octavia’s wifely performance as Antony’s wronged but loyal spouse, so familiar to contemporary Romans, may have spotlighted or (re)activated the less prominent univira aspect of Cornelia’s legendary figuration. For Augustan purposes, Cornelia needed to be framed as a precursor to and imitable model for Octavia in the categories both of “loyalty to one’s husband” and of “service to one’s children.” It is this dual purposing or programming of Cornelia in the context of the porticus Octaviae, I suggest, that accounts for the studied ambiguity of the inscriptional formulation Cornelia… Gracchorum. For the plural form Gracchorum, as explained above, admits and indeed requires that her husband be understood no less than her sons—precisely what the Augustan program itself requires. It is also attractive (though entirely speculative) to imagine Octavia’s statue as a pendant to Cornelia’s: likewise seated, at a similar scale, and suitably inscribed. If so, formal resemblances would have underscored the alleged parallelism in their situations and achievements as mothers and wives.

After Marcellus’s death in 23 BCE, the figuration of Octavia and Cornelia as ideal wives and mothers found yet another kind of contemporary relevance. For in the Augustan marriage and adultery legislation of 18-17 BCE (with additions and revisions as late as 9 CE), the themes of chastity, loyalty to husbands, and valuing of procreation and child rearing took on a more articulated, wide-ranging, and intrusive form. Scholars have observed that these laws all but dissolved the traditional boundaries between the
domestic and civic realms. By requiring husbands to take legal steps if they discovered their wives committing adultery, and by stipulating social, legal, and financial rewards for marrying appropriately and procreating plentifully (and penalties for failing to do so), these laws declared that matters traditionally handled within families or households were of civic consequence and concern, and henceforth subject to state intervention.118

Cornelia and Octavia, now paired paragons of wifely and maternal achievement, work together to exemplify the values promulgated in the Augustan legislation. They provide a standard for other women to imitate, or by which other women’s maternal and marital achievements could be measured. In having their traditionally domestic virtues represented and celebrated publicly, these women, together with Livia, perfectly instantiate the unprecedented porosity of the boundary between the civic and domestic spheres that characterizes the Augustan legislation.119

Generations later, the topicality of the “ideal wife and mother” themes in Augustan Rome could easily have been forgotten, resulting in the misunderstanding and reinterpretation of these monuments. Thus, when the Elder Pliny and Plutarch supply the words mater/μήτηρ in their paraphrases of the inscription on the base of Cornelia’s statue, it is because they looked for Cornelia’s exemplarity in her maternal role, which remained central to her legend in their day, and not in her wifely role, which for them

118 The Augustan marriage and adultery laws have generated a vast bibliography; helpful overviews in English include, on the adultery laws, Treggiari 1991: 277-98 (legal perspective); Edwards 1993: 34-62 (cultural perspective), McGinn 1998: 140-215 (legal perspective); and on the marriage legislation, Treggiari 1991: 60-80 (legal perspective). Severy 2003: 51-56 notes the mutual intrusion of the civic and the domestic entailed by this legislation (cf. 134); she also notes (93) the usefulness of Cornelia to shaping Octavia’s public image as an exemplary mother.

119 Woodhull 2003: 26-27 discusses other respects in which the decoration of the porticus Octaviae underscored the Augustan formulation of proper matronal values and behavior.
was far less significant. Modern scholars have done the same, expressing perplexity at
the omission of *mater* in this inscription and sometimes even supplying it in their edited
texts.\(^{120}\) But to supply *mater*, which expressly precludes the possibility of understanding
the husband, is to do violence to the Augustan values with which the porticus Octaviae,
and the figures of Octavia and Cornelia together, were charged.

Later writers could consciously read these figures against the Augustan
ideological grain of the Porticus Octaviae. Earlier (sec. IIIA) we examined how the
younger Seneca presents Cornelia as exemplary for the courage she displayed in bearing
her sons’ deaths. In the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, Cornelia is not the only such figure:
Seneca presents other mothers too who lost promising sons as young adults. Receiving
praise for their fortitude and moderation in grieving are another Cornelia, the mother of
the tribune Livius Drusus (§16.4-5); and, earlier in the work, Livia the wife of Augustus,
who put reasonable bounds on her grieving for her son Drusus and took joy in his
memory (§3.1-2). The negative exemplum Seneca provides here is none other than
Octavia (§2.3-5). Marcellus, we are told, was indeed a promising young man, already
serving as a prop to Augustus and possessed of every virtue (§2.3). Following his early
death Octavia entered lifelong mourning (says Seneca), never ceasing to weep and
refusing all consolation. As she was at his funeral, so she remained for the rest of her
life. She could bear to see no images of her son, nor to hear any mention of him, and
resented other mothers, Livia most of all. Yet all this time she was surrounded by her

\(^{120}\) E.g. Dessau, *ILS* 68: “Matris vocabulum omissum esse plane mirum est”; Degrassi *ILLRP* 336: “Scil. *mater*”; Lewis 1988; *AE* 2004.196 (supplying *mater*). Kajava 1989: 130n30 correctly saw the logic of the plural, but her insight has never to my knowledge been taken up, or even acknowledged. Val. Max. 6.7.1 contains a possible parallel formulation: *Tertia Aemilia, Africani prioris uxor, mater Corneliae Gracchorum*, where the omission of *matris* after *Corneliae* may reflect the same naming logic as the inscription (if not the influence of the inscription itself); see also n. 72.
other children and grandchildren, whom she offended by deeming herself childless even as they all lived. Octavia’s deportment here is dramatically contrasted, point by point, with Livia’s as described in the next section (§3.2; explicit discussion of the pairing at 2.2, 3.3-4). But the contrast with Cornelia, at a greater remove, can also be felt: for Cornelia, in this version, is said to have seen all twelve of her children die, yet counts herself fortunate (felix) that she bore the Gracchi, and not, as her consolers may have assumed, unfortunate that she lost them. So if the Augustan programming of the porticus Octaviae equates Cornelia and Octavia as canons of female virtuosity in bearing and raising children and in loyalty to husbands, Seneca drives a wedge between these figures by focusing on maternal deportation following the deaths of children, and “great men” in particular.

Indeed, in this Consolatio Octavia and Cornelia stand at opposite ends of a moral spectrum of mourning—Livia is in between, though standing closer to Cornelia—within which Marcia must locate herself. If we may apply here the distinction Seneca makes in defining this spectrum Seneca does not expressly impute vice to Octavia, but at §3.3 says (speaking generally) that to show oneself unwilling to live in this situation is “utterly shameful” and “totally foreign to a spirit known (sc. to incline) toward the better” (turpissimum, and alienissimum ...animo...in meliorem noto partem)—implicit criticism of Octavia, whom he says hid herself away in darkness (tenebris et solitudini familiarissima ...defodit se et abdidit, §2.5); later he calls such conduct “monstrous” and “madness” (quae malum, amentia, §3.4). Shelton 1995: 174-76 discusses how Seneca handles Octavia in this passage. By contrast Cornelia, as we saw above, is expressly credited with the virtue of fortitudo at §16.3, and with “an equal (sc. to men) vigor and capacity for what is honorable” at §16.1 (virtues she shares with the other women here adduced as exemplary). Wilcox 2006: 81-87 examines the moral

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1 Sen. Marc. 2.4: nullum finem per omne vitae suae tempus flendi gemendique fecit nec ulla admisit voces salutare aliquid adferentis... talis per omnem vitam fuit qualis in funere... (5) nullam habere imaginem filii carissimi voluit, nullam sibi de illo fieri mentionem. oderat omnes matres et in Liviam maxime furebat... adsidentibus liberis, nepotibus lugubrem vestem non deposuit, non sine contumelia omnium suorum, quibus salvis orba sibi videbatur. One may suspect exaggeration, perhaps to construct the moral contrast with Livia (e.g., Hammond, RE 17.1864 (1937); contra Shelton 1995: 175). If so, Seneca’s version may be an elaboration of the famous anecdote that Octavia wept or fainted when Vergil recited the Marcellus passage from Aen. 6 (Serv. in Aen. 6.861; Donat. Vit. Verg. 109-112 Brummer). This anecdote could be the basis for Seneca’s specific claim that she could bear no mention of Marcellus’s name.

122 In defining this spectrum Seneca does not expressly impute vice to Octavia, but at §3.3 says (speaking generally) that to show oneself unwilling to live in this situation is “utterly shameful” and “totally foreign to a spirit known (sc. to incline) toward the better” (turpissimum, and alienissimum ...animo...in meliorem noto partem)—implicit criticism of Octavia, whom he says hid herself away in darkness (tenebris et solitudini familiarissima ...defodit se et abdidit, §2.5); later he calls such conduct “monstrous” and “madness” (quae malum, amentia, §3.4). Shelton 1995: 174-76 discusses how Seneca handles Octavia in this passage. By contrast Cornelia, as we saw above, is expressly credited with the virtue of fortitudo at §16.3, and with “an equal (sc. to men) vigor and capacity for what is honorable” at §16.1 (virtues she shares with the other women here adduced as exemplary). Wilcox 2006: 81-87 examines the moral
in the *Consolatio ad Helviam* (§16.6) between the number of deaths (*funera numerare*) and their value (*funera aestimare*), we may distinguish for each woman how many children she lost, and how many of these were “great men.” Octavia lost one of her own five children (not counting Antony’s other children whom she raised)—Marcellus, presented here as a “great man”—and never stopped grieving. Livia lost one of two, namely Drusus, who was likewise a “great man.” On either reckoning, Livia lost proportionally more than Octavia, yet bore her misfortune with greater dignity.\(^{123}\) Cornelia lost all twelve of her children (on Seneca’s counting at *Marc.* 16.3), among whom were two “great men.” On either reckoning she suffered most grievously of all, so is all the more admirable for her bearing in the face of such misfortune. On this spectrum, where does Marcia fall? She has lost two of four children: two sons are dead, leaving children of their own; two daughters and their children still live (*Marc.* 16.5-8). Neither dead son is a “great man,” despite Seneca’s praise of the more recently deceased youth (§23.3-24.4). When “counting the deaths,” then, Marcia’s loss is proportionally heavier than Octavia’s, equal to Livia’s, but much lighter than Cornelia’s; and when “valuing the deaths” (i.e., the “greatness” of the deceased son), Marcia’s losses are the lightest of all. So will she take the implicitly vicious path of Octavia, who allegedly grieved far out of proportion to her loss, or the virtuous path of Livia and Cornelia, who lost more yet grieved less, deeming themselves fortunate for what they had received?

The risk is that Marcia will do the former: for Seneca tells us that she has now spent three

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123 So Seneca seems to suggest: *pari...casu, maiore damno* (§2.2), which I interpret as meaning that the raw number is the same, but the proportional loss is greater (the whole being smaller). For other interpretations of *maiore damno*, see Manning 1981: 36, Wilcox 2006: 85-86.
years in mourning since the second son’s death, and he explicitly declares that such deep-seated grief needs to be vigorously attacked, like a deep-seated vice (§1.7). In thus arraying three exemplary figures along a moral spectrum, and using the resultant matched set to provide a graduated series of possible canons and models for his addressee, Seneca is using what contemporary scholars who study the ethics of art call a “virtue wheel,” a device that causes a reader to exercise his or her faculties of moral discrimination.

While this function is present to some degree in virtually any list of exemplary figures gathered under a single moral rubric, here in the ad Marciam the educational and persuasive force of the device is especially well developed, as Seneca lines up Octavia, Livia, and Cornelia to stand as moral signposts by which Marcia may be guided.

IV. Conclusion: having been mater Gracchorum

In the final chapter of his biography of the Gracchi (Gracch. 40 = Gaius 19), Plutarch turns his attention once more to Cornelia. He declares that she “bore her misfortunes nobly and with greatness of spirit” (τὰ τ´ ἀλλα τῆς συµφορᾶς εὕγενως καὶ μεγαλοψύχως ἐνεγκεῖν, §1), just as Seneca’s consolations say. For following Gaius’s death, Plutarch says, she spent her time in Misenum receiving and entertaining friends and guests, including Greek literary figures and even kings; and he says she described for her guests the life and habits of her father Africanus, to their great pleasure. “But she

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124 Marc. 1.7: tertius iam praeterit annus, cum interim nihil ex primo illo impetu cecidit… quemadmodum omnia vitia penitus insidunt nisi dum surgunt oppressa sunt, ita haec quoque tristitia… Note that Seneca compares Marcia’s grieving to a vice, without quite asserting that it is a vice: see Shelton 1995: 171-74 for the fine line Seneca treads in his handling of Octavia and Marcia.

125 E.g., Carroll 2002: 12-19. In fact there is an additional comparandum, as Shelton (1995: 185-88) shows: Marcia’s former self, who grieved more appropriately for her father’s death years earlier than she now manages to do for her son’s death.
was most amazing,” he continues, “in recalling her sons without grief or tears, and
narrating their sufferings and deeds, as though they were men of ancient times, to those
who inquired” (θαυμασιωτάτη δὲ τῶν παιδῶν ἀπευθής καὶ ἀδάκρυτος
μνημονεύουσα καὶ πάθη καὶ πράξεις αὐτῶν ὡσπερ ἄρχαίων τινῶν ἔξηγομένη 
τοῖς πυνθανομένοις, §3). She also declared that the temples in which her two sons were
killed made worthy tombs for the dead (καὶ περὶ τῶν ἱερῶν ἐν οἷς ἀνῃρέθησαν εἰπεῖν,
ὡς ἄξιοὺς οἱ νεκροὶ τάφους ἔχουσιν, §1).

What does Cornelia achieve by presenting her sons in this manner? Jan
Assmann’s distinction between “communicative memory” and “cultural memory” is
perhaps helpful in grasping the stakes of this presentation. “Communicative memory” is
a type of shared memory dependent on everyday forms of communication: recollection of
personal experience, conversations, jokes, and the like, exchanged among family and
friends. It is closely tied to individual memories, hence does not extend into the past
further than a single person’s lifespan. “Cultural memory,” by contrast, is the
crystallization of communicative memory into objective cultural forms (which I call
“monuments”): texts, tombs or other built structures, rituals, honorific names, and the
like. Transmitted through such means, this kind of memory transcends the everyday and
the single lifespan; its temporal horizon can reach deep into the past.126 Plutarch’s report
that Cornelia spoke of her sons “as if they were ancients”—even though she and many of
her visitors personally remembered them—and that she associated their deaths with
durable built monuments such as temples, shows her to be installing them in the realm of
cultural memory (in Assmann’s terms), locking “the Gracchi” into place as fixtures with

126 E.g., Assmann 1988 for a concise summary; elsewhere he develops the distinction more expansively.
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long temporal horizons. At the same time, Cornelia gains the knock-on benefit of installing herself in cultural memory as “mother of the Gracchi,” the figure responsible for forging these great men. Thus she attends to their (and her own) legendary formation, even as they all persist in communicative memory at the same time. Evidence of her success is that Plutarch, in a monumental text devoted to “the Gracchi,” those exemplary figures who lived 250 years before his own day—and what could possibly be more embedded in the realm of cultural memory than such a text?—gives the “mother of the Gracchi” the last word on her sons, just as (according to Plutarch) she gave herself the last word on them during her own lifetime. And that last word was that they and she should be installed in cultural memory via monuments of precisely this sort.127

127 If Plutarch’s final chapter suggests the triumph of cultural memory over communicative memory, under other circumstances the tables can be turned. In 102 or 101 BCE one L. Equitius claimed to be the son of Tiberius Gracchus. An ally of L. Appuleius Saturninus, this Equitius was invoking the cultural memory of “the Gracchi” as reformist tribunes and seeking to align himself with that legend so as to gain popular favor and empower himself (see Münzer, RE s.v. Equitius (3), for sources and discussion). In due course Sempronia, now 60 or older, was brought before a contio, and there disavowed Equitius as a member of her family (Val. Max. 3.8.6, Vir. Ill. 73.3-4, where she is called Sempronia soror Gracchorum). Thus this effort to mobilize the cultural memory of the Gracchi was undercut by information deriving from the communicative memory of a surviving family member.
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