Insulting Cornelia*

ABSTRACT
Plutarch records calumny directed at Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, though offers no detail as to its content. This article speculates that Cicero’s reference to rhetorical misgivings concerning her marriage offers a clue. References by Pliny and Solinus to the ominous nature of Cornelia’s postnatal condition, prompt the further speculation that enemies of the Gracchi were able to claim that both her marriage and the birth of her children had run counter to divine injunction.

Illustrating an argumentum remotum, Cicero has recourse to Ennius' adaptation, in his Medea Exul, of the opening from Euripides' Medea:

*Utinam ne in nemore Pelio securibus*  
*caesae accidissent abiegnæ ad terram trabes*

* When we were first invited to contribute to “Culture, Identity and Politics in the Ancient Mediterranean World: A Conference in Honour of Erich Gruen”, it was suggested that a series of papers was being sought that would each reflect one of the areas of special interest to Professor Gruen (as witnessed by his many publications). We chose Roman Politics and the Criminal Courts, 149–78 BC (1968). Hence a paper on Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, and the politics of invective. The verbal violence unleashed in the criminal courts went beyond that arena. It was a hallmark of Roman oratory.

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This paper had been accepted when our attention was drawn to the valuable contribution of M.B. Roller, ‘Cornelia: on making one’s name as mater Gracchorum (May 2012 version)’, <http://classics.jhu.edu/directory/roller-matthew>. We have, with the author’s permission, cited his work-in-progress on four particular occasions below. It repays attention.
Would that no beams of fir had fallen to earth struck by axes in Pelion's forest ...  

Ennius *Medea TRF* [3], p. 49; *ROL* i, p. 312

In oratorical practice, such laments were attractive. Cicero had already offered a historical example:

*quodsi non P. Scipio Corneliam filiam Ti. Graccho collocasset atque ex ea duos Grachos procreasset, tantae seditiones natae non essent.*

'If Publius Scipio had not given his daughter Cornelia in marriage to Tiberius Gracchus and if through her Gracchus had not sired the two Gracchi, such great seditions would not have been born.' 

(Cicero *de Inventione* 1. 91)

Enemies of the Gracchi were many; and there is no reason to think that they did not find such a rhetorical conceit useful. Verbal assaults on Roman statesmen often embraced the target's associates and family. The extent to which Cornelia 'mother of the Gracchi' became an icon of virtue cannot obscure, even from this distance, the fact that she was herself the target of contemporary political abuse. That this was

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1 [Auct.] *ad Herenn. 2.34; Cicero, de Inv. 1.91*. Cicero has perhaps misremembered the line; *caesae accidissent* should probably be *caesa accidisset* (as at Varr. *de LL* 7.33 and Prisc. *Gramm. 2.320.15ff*.; H.D. Jocelyn, *The Tragedies of Ennius* (Cambridge 1967) 352.

2 In a pedagogical context pundits might regard such arguments as tenuous (*Cic. loc. cit.; cf. Quintil. 5.10.84*), although Cicero seems, like others, to have been much taken with that particular strategy — and, in oratorical practice (as noted above in the text), such a feint was obviously found useful (both Crassus and Cicero using it in their defences of Caelius in 56); Crassus, *Cael. frag. 12 Malc.* = *Cic. Cael. 18*. For a discussion, R.G. Austin, *M. Tulli Ciceronis pro M. Caelio oratio* (Oxford 1960) 68. For Cicero's fondness for Ennius, *Gell. NA 12.2.6*.

3 St Jerome was also taken with the line (again, in the context of discussing prominent women): *Ep. 127.5*.

public (and wounding) is evidenced by Gaius Gracchus' angry public response to such targeting, samples of which are preserved in Seneca and Plutarch (we provide, in our translation below, the second and third of those items within the context in which Plutarch sets them).  

Tu matri meae maledicas, quae me peperit?

ORF$^3$, frag. 65a Malc. = Sen. Dial. 12.16.6

‘Would you speak ill of my mother, the woman who bore me?’

σὺ γὰρ Κορνηλίαν λοιδορεῖς τὴν Τιβέριον τεκοῦσαν;

ORF$^3$, frag. 65b Malc.

‘τίνα δὲ ἔχων παρρησίαν συγκρίνεις Κορνηλίᾳ σεαυτόν; ἔτεκες γὰρ ὡς ἔκεινή; καὶ μὴν πάντες ἱσσαί Ῥωμαῖοι πλέιῳ χρόνον ἐκείνην ἀπ᾽ ἄνδρος οὕσαν ἢ σὲ τὸν ἄνδρα’

ORF$^3$, frag. 66 Malc.

And there are remembered many things which Gaius said about [Cornelia] in rhetorical and forensic mode when he was attacking one of his enemies. "Do you", he said, "abuse Cornelia who gave birth to Tiberius?" And since the abuser had been accused of effeminacy, "By what licence", he said, "do you compare yourself with Cornelia? For have you borne children as she has? And indeed all Romans know that she has been for a longer time without a man than you, [supposedly] a man, (have)."

(Plutarch CG 4.3-4)

In those surviving three fragments, Gracchus demands respect for his mother’s reputation and, in the last, vilifies the anonymous attacker as a pathicus.

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4 The information that Gaius’ salvo was produced in contione is provided by Seneca (Dial. 12.16.6); cf. Plut. CG 4.3: ἤθοσωμός καὶ ἔγοραίος.

5 For these fragments, see also N. Häpke, C. Semproni Gracchi Oratoris Romani Fragmenta Collecta et Illustrata (Munich 1915) 97–98.
We see four principal ways in which Cornelia might have been attacked. Firstly, her ambition for her sons' advancement is known to have been the object of criticism. Secondly, there is evidence that she was accused of providing improper political support for her son Gaius. Thirdly, her personal morality might have been called into question. Though no evidence exists to show that it was, oratorical practice suggests that any woman’s reputation was fair game (and given the nature of Gracchus' response, both insisting upon the continence of her long widowhood and insinuating the lack of such discipline on the part of her critic, this would at first sight seem a highly plausible explanation of Gracchus' outburst). Before advancing to the fourth (which we favour), let us review those first three options.

A number of anecdotes testify to the supposed strength of Cornelia's ambition for Tiberius and Gaius. Her celebrated (if perhaps practiced) apophthegm, "My sons are my jewels" will come immediately to mind (Val. Max. 4.4. prae., citing the liber collectorum of Pomponius Rufus, a 'Gracchan' source). Pride in her sons was thus part of the ‘friendly’ tradition. Plutarch, however, tells us that many blamed her for...
the pressure that she put on the aspirations of Tiberius and Gaius, demanding that they outstrip her unloved son-in-law.\(^\text{10}\) It is also possible that her pride in itself was seen as overweening. In his sixth Satire (166–171), Juvenal depicts her *supercilium* as based upon her father's achievements (a dowry of triumphs, the victory over Syphax, the victory over Hannibal, 'the whole Carthaginian caboodle'). But he may imply more.\(^\text{11}\) A comparison with Niobe, whose pride is denounced—and whose terrible punishment is registered—in the following lines (172–77), seems to have suggested itself (if the suggestion had not been previously made by someone before Juvenal).

Niobe boasted of the *quantity* of her children, an equal number of boys and girls. Ovid, like Euripides and Apollodorus, gives Niobe seven sons and seven daughters.\(^\text{12}\) The oldest surviving source for the story, however, as found in the *Iliad* (a version familiar to the circles of the Gracchi and their opponents), gives Niobe six of each (and thus makes her an obvious parallel). Juvenal's diatribe against Cornelia runs on immediately from Cornelia's pride in her ancestry to Amphion's anguished but futile plea to the murder-bent Apollo and Artemis: "Put up your arrows; it is not the children's fault but the mother's" (*Sat*. 6, 172–4).

It is difficult to believe, however, that a pride in lineage would be the subject of a slur in the second century BC such as would provoke an angry response of this nature from Gaius.\(^\text{13}\) Nor would any attack on Cornelia’s haughty demeanour (even if linked

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\(^\text{10}\) For criticism of her ambition (prompting her sons to unhealthy competition with their cousin and brother-in-law, Scipio Aemilianus), see Plut. *TG* 8.5.

\(^\text{11}\) We observe that Peter Green had also noticed this in passing; *Juvenal. The Sixteen Satires* (Harmondsworth 1967) 155 nn. 13–14; cf. Roller (cited in the introductory note), offering further references.

\(^\text{12}\) There is, perhaps, something of a formula at work here. A scholiast on *Medea* 264 reports that Parmeniskos preserved a tradition that claimed that Medea had seven sons and seven daughters who were killed by the Corinthians; E. Schwartz (ed.), *Scholia in Euripidem* 2 (Berlin 1891) on *ad loc*. [p. 159].

\(^\text{13}\) Such cynicism with regard to aristocratic pride seems better to belong to Juvenal’s epoch; cf. John Henderson, *Figuring Out Roman Nobility. Juvenal’s Eighth Satire* (Exeter 1997). From surviving examples of first-century oratory, it is clear that the rhetoric of diminution might embrace a ridiculing of an opponent’s pride in and deluded dependence upon, the *imaginæ* (e.g., *Cic. de lege Agr*. 2.1; *Pis*. 1; cf. Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp, ‘Self-Serving Sermons: Oratory and the Self-Construction of the Republican Aristocrat’, in C. Smith and R. Covino
to an unfortunate influence on the dangerous aspirations of her sons) have drawn from Gaius the highly personal type of attack that he levels at the *maledictor*.

Let us next consider the allegations of her political support for her sons. Plutarch tells us that she actually hired some muscle to help Gaius out in his last desperate months—sending in mercenaries to Rome, dressed up as harvesters. Not everyone believed that; it was moot (with ‘evidence’ advanced to support alternative assertions). And some even implicated her in the supposed ‘murder’ of Scipio Aemilianus, the earlier mentioned "unloved son-in-law". But it is difficult to believe that Gaius’ vitriolic attack on the personal morality of his mother’s traducer, as inflamed as it was, was a response to an insinuation of her involvement in a homicidal enterprise.

Had Cornelia’s personal morality been besmirched? No anecdotal tradition carries suggestions of immorality—but perhaps (we might allow, for argument’s sake) it was suggested that the proud dowager, an elegant widow and famous patroness, had received too many guests—and to a villa on the Bay of Naples no less. Her villa

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14 Plut. *CG* 13.2 (cited above). The ‘letter of Cornelia’ preserved by Nepos (see below, n. 66) would have been evidence adduced to refute the allegation. The vexed issue of its authenticity is not one that needs to be addressed here. These ancient allegations are viewed with reserve by Burckhardt and von Ungern-Sternberg ([n.7], 109–120).

15 References cited above (n.6). J.P. Hallett (*Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society. Women and the Elite Family* [Princeton 1984] 45–6) highlights the fact that an ancient source would credit this example of “the intensity of a virtuous and nurturant Roman mother's attachment”; cf. Hallett, ‘Introduction: Cornelia and Her Maternal Legacy’, *Helios* 33.2 (2006) 119–147, at 127–128 (again referring to this tradition). Burckhardt and von Ungern-Sternberg ([n.7], 100) dismiss the allegation itself as an absurdity. Eventually, they observe, someone will believe anything (or, rather, everything will find a believer); *Alles findet freilich irgendwann Glauben* (100 n.11).

16 For no less than Carneades as perhaps one of those guests, see Jer., *Comm. in Sophoniam prophetam, Prologus, PL 25.1337c [= 655 Adriaen].
was more specifically on the northwestern extremity of the Bay of Pozzuoli—but it was just a few kilometres from Misenum to Baiae (and that name said it all).\textsuperscript{17} Again, however, we reiterate that no scandal of that nature has survived in the tradition.\textsuperscript{18} In spite, then, of the concessions that we were willing to make above (to the effect that Roman calumny was quite capable of embracing allegations which pushed the boundaries of the credible—and that the elite women of Rome were not immune from such detraction), we do not find this a satisfactory explanation of the heated exchange (as plausible as it remains as speculation), if a better explanation is available.

In this exercise, we are interested in a putative fourth line of attack upon Cornelia (especially given the emphasis in all three fragments on her child-bearing). The allusion to the misfortune of Cornelia’s marriage to Tiberius Gracchus the Elder, preserved by Cicero in the \textit{de inventione} (and quoted above), by bringing into focus the distant origins of the crises of 133 and 123–121 (the \textit{argumentum remotum}),

\textsuperscript{17} The area’s reputation for luxury and excess is too well established to require extensive reference here. Cicero referred to Baiae or perhaps the whole Bay of Naples as \textit{Cratera illum delicatum} (\textit{Att.} 2.8.2). A mere reference to \textit{illa vicinitas} was sufficient; Cic. \textit{Cael.} 47; cf. 27 (for an example). For Cornelia’s villa (and steady stream of guests), Plut. \textit{CG} 19.1-2; cf. Oros. 5.12.9 (dating her withdrawal to Misenum to after, and—implicitly—in response to, Tiberius’ death. Cornelia would thus have been at Misenum from 133/132).

\textsuperscript{18} Tony Corbeill, as we have noted (n.7), suggests that she was "slandered for having adulterous relations". That is not impossible—but there is certainly no evidence for it (either that she was slandered in that way or that she had had illicit affairs). Unless, of course, it was suggested, when Ptolemy Physkon sued for her widow’s hand (Plut. \textit{TG} 1.4), that she had led the man on. (That, we had better say, we offer by way of humour.) For modern discussions of that episode, see L.-M. Günther, ‘Cornelia und Ptolemaios VIII’, \textit{Historia} 39 (1990) 124-128; W. Huss, Die römisch-ptolemaischen Beziehungen in der Zeit von 180 bis 116 B.C.’ in \textit{Roma e l’Egitto nell’antiquità classica. Atti dell’ I congresso internazionale italo-egiziano} (Rome 1992) 206 n.102; Burckhardt and von Ungern-Sternberg (n.7) 97-132, at 105–106 (expressing doubts as to the historicity of the event on the grounds that this rejected contact with royalty would fit so well into anti-Gracchan propaganda, contrasting the honoured mother with the untoward aspirations of her eldest son). Cf. S. Dixon, \textit{Cornelia. Mother of the Gracchi} (London and New York 2007) 7; 66 n.17 (attracted to Günther’s argument that the episode was a hostile fabrication).

We do, indeed, explore the possibility that the hostile insinuation to which Gaius responded was of a highly personal nature (and with regard to Cornelia’s intimate life), but it is of an altogether different kind. See below.
might—in its original form—have been intended to give the Gracchan advent a profoundly ominous dimension. Cicero, indeed, found such an argument unsatisfactory and therefore ineffective because it was unconvincingly ‘remote’. It reflects, we would suggest, neither the retrospective musings of a later age nor an invention of Cicero (by way of proffering a hypothetical example of a trope), but the recall of contemporary polemic (sc. the polemic of the 120s). We believe that the unfriendly suggestion that it would have been better for Rome if such a marriage had never taken place—or had remained unfruitful—might have been a trigger for Gaius Gracchus' anger. We shall suggest (given the nature of Gracchus' attack on the bad-mouthed) that the disparager went one step further, and suggested that Rome’s fortunes might better have been served if Cornelia had abstained from productive sexual activity altogether. We need not dwell for the moment on the clear synkrisis of the maledictor and Cornelia in Gaius' sharp riposte (and the implication therein that the synkrisis had been invited by his opponent), though we shall return to that (as it is of the essence). It is unlikely that the man, as a critic of Cornelia (ὁ λοιδορηθείς), had made a direct comparison between his own qualities and those of his target; it must have been implicit. In the two shorter quotations from Gaius’ outburst, it is,

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20 E. Valgiglio (*Plutarco. Vita dei Gracchi* [Rome 1957] 124) rightly notes that Gaius has turned on what he (sc. Gaius) casts as the effrontery of his adversary (in comparing himself to Cornelia to establish some degree of superiority) and created in return a contrast that lies at the heart of his ‘biting acrimony’, the verism of the counter-charge and the effectiveness of its delivery highlighting the weakness of the slanderer and the virtue of the slandered.

21 It might be speculated (and it would be pure speculation) that he spoke of himself as a stern parent who knew how to discipline his children (an allusion to Cornelia’s alleged encouragement of dangerous aspirations). Perhaps he spoke of his own full attention to patriotic officia. (We return to this below—though we feel we have already offered a more compelling explanation of the exchange in the argumentum remotum.) It is not impossible that the attack was related to the context of Gaius’ revocation of the law against M. Octavius, the *lex Sempronia de abactis*, and Cornelia’s intervention with regard to same, since it is at this point in his narrative that Plutarch offers the item (though Plutarch does not emphasise the contextual connection). In this case, the critic may have vilified Gaius’
note, Cornelia's child-bearing which is central, and that appears in the third item as well.²² Fragments 65 a and b might represent the same line in Gracchus' original (imperfectly remembered by either Seneca or Plutarch or by both) or, more probably, suggest a form of anaphora (if delivered in immediate proximity). *Tu matri meae maledicas, quae me peperit? Tu [enim] Corneliae maledicas, quae Tiberium peperit?*²³ Cornelia's fertility, Gaius Gracchus would assert, was a gift of which she might be proud.

²² ἔτεκες recalls τεκοῦσαν, as Valgiglio (n. 20) notes (124)—and both words pick up on parere (in the Senecan fragment).

²³ In the forceful repetition was a twist; at the personal level, "Do you dare insult my mother?"; and then, at a level of communal resonances, "Do you dare insult the mother of Tiberius Gracchus?" R.A. Bauman (*Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* [London and New York 1992] 44), taking his cue from Plutarch’s report, suggests that, by using Cornelia's name rather than saying ‘my mother’, her son "has almost elevated her to a concept". But Gaius could have had it both ways. There is no need to abandon either fragment.
But if, as Gracchus asserts in fragment 66, ‘all Romans’ knew of Cornelia's personal history, they also knew that death had stalked her family. The catastrophe of her eldest son's tribunate in 133 tends to overshadow the more sustained tragic history of the Gracchan family to that date (a history that was fuel perhaps for its detractors). By the time that Gaius Gracchus is likely to have been speaking, ten of Cornelia's twelve children had predeceased her, all (barring one) without surviving (male?) issue.\(^{24}\) And the marriage of her last surviving daughter (that of Sempronia to Scipio Aemilianus) had proved fruitless.\(^{25}\)

Moreover, Cornelia’s child-bearing itself had perhaps been delayed—and possibly under ominous circumstances. There is agreement neither with regard to Cornelia's birth-date nor with regard to the date of her marriage; the surviving evidence seems to offer pieces that were not made to fit the same puzzle.\(^{26}\) A conclusion with regard to these data is not essential to the overall argument of this paper; nevertheless, we

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\(^{24}\) Valgiglio ([n.20] 124) observes that both Cornelia and her eldest son now stood on pedestals:

> La fama di Cornelia cominciava a brillare della nuova luce, che doveva man mano fare impallidire su di essa i riflessi della gloria degli Scipioni. ... In meno di dieci anni, dunque, Tiberio si era già sollevato nella luce degli eroi, la cui memoria sarebbe stato sacrilegio oltraggiare. In some quarters, at least.

And by 123/122, only Gaius and, it seems, one ‘boy’ (often taken as the one surviving son of Tiberius) were left alive; C. Gracchus, \textit{ORF}\(^3\) frag. 47 Malc. [= Schol. Bob. \textit{in Cic. Sull.}, 81 Stangl], where Gaius, speaking at the time of his tribunician office, claims that he and an unspecified \textit{puer} were the only descendants left to the houses of P. Africanus and Ti. Gracchus (presumably the Elder). This, of course, may not take into account girls. Cf. Sempronius Asellio \textit{apud} Gell. \textit{NA} 2.13.1–2 (on Tiberius’ sole surviving son [in 133]); Val. Max. 9.7.2 (elaborating on the fate of Tiberius’ three sons); Plut. \textit{CG} 15 (on Gaius’ ‘child’ \textit{paidion} in 121). Our colleague Patrick Tansey would strongly argue that Gaius’ reference above is to his own son. For a discussion (and references to earlier discussions), see Dixon (n.18) 25; 70 n.32; 71 n.53 (and see below [n.66]). Whatever the answer, a tenuous link to posterity.

The fruit of the original marriage (that of Gracchus the Elder and Cornelia), as remembered by Jerome (\textit{Ep.} 54.4), who honoured the latter, was one that brought her anything but \textit{laetitia}.

\(^{25}\) App. \textit{BC} 1.20.83.

\(^{26}\) The question remains vexed; cf. Burckhardt and von Ungern-Sternberg [n.7] 102–3, for references to earlier discussions (adding to that bibliography, the discussion by Petrocelli [n.19] 38–43); Dixon (n.18) 7 (for despair). The problem is further discussed in the Appendix.
believe that she was born around 195-190; married around 183-176; and that, although she bore twelve children in a relatively short space of time, it is possible that she did not begin to have children before around 173—and possibly as late as ca 165.\textsuperscript{27} If her child-bearing was delayed (and that might have seemed particularly to have been the case had she been married in the late 180s), any number of natural explanations might suffice (not least her husband's absence abroad in the years 180-178 and 177-175 and her comparative youth),\textsuperscript{28} but popular rumour may have

\textsuperscript{27} See again the fuller discussion in the Appendix.

The number of children borne by Cornelia (reported by Pliny [\textit{NH} 7.57] and Seneca [\textit{Cons. ad Helv.} 16.6]) is doubted by Dixon (n.18), unnecessarily we think. True, as we have observed above, there was an almost formulaic quality to the way in which the quantity of large broods was remembered, but Dixon is too pessimistic here: “[the] authors who insist on the number of births are not only late but often inaccurate about detail” (7). (As a methodology this would rule out much of what we think we know about the ancient world. Caution is always warranted, but is arbitrary when no evidence to the contrary urges scepticism, and when the sources are not making incidental remarks.) These sources do not ‘insist’, they record. And Pliny’s interest is academic, not political. To categorize Pliny’s work in passing as “his encyclopedia of marvels” is rhetorical and also unwarranted. For a fairer appraisal of Pliny’s purpose, the integrity of which it is important to establish here (in the light of the argument to follow), see M. Beagon, \textit{The Elder Pliny on the Human Animal}. Natural History Book 7 (Oxford 2005) 11–38. At the same time, Dixon’s suggestion that the datum might be an exaggeration embracing the record of her stillbirths and/or miscarriages need not be dismissed out of hand. If that were to be the case, it would not affect the argument to be adduced below (and would indeed enhance it)—though it requires rejecting Plutarch’s observation that all the children were alive at the time of their father’s death. D.C. Earl (\textit{Tiberius Gracchus. A Study in Politics} [Brussels 1963] 58), also having recourse to such a theory, without acknowledging the rejection of Plutarch’s evidence, suggests (interestingly in the context of the present discussion) that the early death of so many of Cornelia’s children points to “some congenital disturbance”.

\textsuperscript{28} For references to Tiberius’ military service, see \textit{MRR} I, 388; 393; 395–96; 398; 401; 402. It will be clear from the Appendix that we are not prepared to offer any simulations of certitude with regard to Cornelia’s birth-date. But in 180, three years after her father’s death (by which time we would think of Cornelia being married), Cornelia may have been around fifteen years old (or younger). Tiberius Gracchus will have been around forty. (For his birth-date, probably 220, see G.V. Sumner, \textit{The Orators in Cicero’s Brutus: Prosopography and Chronology} [Toronto 1973] 38–39.) If the marriage is to be dated later (see the Appendix), Cornelia is still likely to have been in her early teens and Gracchus will have been in his mid-forties. (In itself,
supplied another. (Even if there was no remarkable delay in this respect, hostile witnesses may have supplied a reason for her tragic domestic history.)

Pliny and Solinus, almost certainly drawing on a common source, record an unlucky omen of her birth: she was born with 'fused genitalia'.

*quasdam concreto genitali gigni infausto omne Cornelia Gracchorum mater indicio est.*

That certain women with fused genitals have been born under an unlucky omen Cornelia the mother of the Gracchi serves as the evidence.

(Pliny *NH* 7.69)

*feminis perinde est infausta nativitas, si concretum virginal fuerit, quo pacto genitalia fuere Corneliae, quae editis Gracchis ostentum hoc piavit sinistro exitu liberorum.*

In like manner, it is an unlucky birth for women if the vagina will have been fused; as in such a manner were the genitals of Cornelia, who, the Gracchi having been begotten, appeased this portent with the unlucky deaths of her children.

(Solinus 1.67)

It was apparently seen, if Solinus is followed, as an omen requiring expiation (though Cornelia plainly escaped that at the time of her birth). The nature of the problem and the circumstances of its detection might be debated (see below), but we believe we have a clue to Cornelia's later vulnerability to attack—or, at least, an indication of one of the ways in which she was vulnerable. We see no reason to reject this item out of hand. No scepticism—or suggestion of malicious gossip—attaches to this tradition in

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29 Many scholars familiar with the shortcomings of Solinus will assume that these two citations represent a single piece of evidence (which they probably do), with Solinus drawing directly from Pliny. In a separate paper, Hillard will argue that so much of the *prosopographia* to be found in both these sources was derived from a common source from which both authors were prepared to draw in a quasi-verbatim manner. The source is likely to have been a Late Republican one, possibly Varro. If so, the item gains in stature.
antiquity (as it is retailed). Modern sceptics are inclined to doubt its authenticity simply on the grounds of its extraordinary nature (and the fact that it would have been grist to an anti-Gracchan mill). But while they are undoubtedly right to suspect that the omen was amplified in unfriendly sources, such accounts were not the only media which would have preserved the datum. When they occurred within the great houses, omens were of public interest. Nobilitas ensured that few things remained private; it was in the very nature of the lives of Rome’s elite that those personal lives were public. Cicero and Sallust liken nobilitas, in effect, to living in a goldfish bowl (Cic. de off. 2.44; Sall. Iug. 85.23); with fame or distinction, whether inherited or the consequence of circumstance, everyone's eyes are upon the noble who is "in a bright light": "No word, no action ... can remain in darkness.” And the extended Scipionic-

30 For what it is worth, for instance, Pliny does not record that this was rumoured of Cornelia. (See, by way of example, the use of such formulae as ferunt at 7.79 or even in acta ... relatum est as at 2.147.) He offers Cornelia as the proof that women are born with this problem—and that it is a bad omen. The fact, in her case, is not in doubt for Pliny. (It has to be acknowledged that such certitude regarding the data that comes his way is characteristic of Pliny.) Roller (cited in the introductory note) also refers to the ominous nature of Cornelia’s medical complaint and interprets the likely Roman reaction in much the same way that we do, registering other discussions not cited here.

31 It is rejected, as noted above, by Burckhardt and von Ungern-Sternberg [n. 7], 101, who suspect that the item (the plausibility of which they acknowledge) is the product of hostile fabrication:

... [Cornelia] is supposed to have been born with fused genitalia. Such cases are gynaecologically possible (and can be surgically corrected) and should therefore not be excluded ab ovo in Cornelia's case. The point of the story is, however, too good to be true (Die Pointe ist indes zu schön, um wahr sein zu können). The mother of the Gracchi was accordingly by nature unable to bear children, a bad omen per se (omen infaustum) in the spirit of Roman 'omenology’, which would have had immediately to be eliminated. No wonder that she brought disaster on her family (which died out in the second or third generation) and on the Roman state. Here an embittered opponent of Gracchan reforms tracked the evil back as far as its—alleged—roots. (our italics)
Gracchan family upon which we are focussed here was, it might be said, particularly concerned with the observation of omens; a number are recorded.32

Nor is there anything intrinsically incredible about the report. Depending on the diagnosis, the condition would have been observed early—or late. In the case of Cornelia, the ancient report seems to suggest the observation at her birth that she lacked (or appeared to lack) a vaginal orifice. This may in fact have been simply fusion of the labia, which in the neonatal period is not uncommon. Such a fusion usually resolves spontaneously during childhood or at puberty when the oestrogen levels rise. It may be, however, that Pliny and Solinus (despite their suggestion that the sign was visible at birth) have transmitted what was in fact a more worrisome diagnosis, the symptoms for which will probably not in that case have been observed until a good deal later in Cornelia's life, that she suffered from some obstruction to the vaginal canal, a rare condition but one known to gynaecological science, such as an imperforate hymen or a transverse vaginal septum (that is, a membrane stretching across the vagina). Such obstructions, where they occur, generally are found in the vicinity of the hymen, though, rarely, a portion—or even the whole—of the vagina may be absent; or the cervical canal might be missing. Treatment requires surgical incision. Following the incision of an imperforate hymen and the drainage of old blood, most women would have normal reproductive function. However, some may have irreversible damage to the uterus and tubes. Surgical correction of vaginal atresia (as opposed to the treatment of an imperforate hymen) is quite complex—and thought, by our modern consultants, to have not been possible in Roman times. (Women who undergo such surgery often have difficulty with sexual intercourse and frequently remain infertile. If they do conceive, they would almost certainly require Caesarian section to deliver the child.)

The ancients were familiar with atresia on which Soranus wrote a chapter (4 [XVII], now lost [the title only preserved]), heir as he was to considerable Greek thought on the subject; Soranus records that in cases of atresia the obstructing (abnormal) membrane is sometimes found in the accessible parts of the labia, sometimes in the middle of the vagina, and at other times in the middle of the uterine orifice.33 In some

32 On the Scipiones and Sempronii in this regard, see Burckhardt and von Ungern-Sternberg [n.7] 105 n. 31. The apparently extraordinary focus might, of course, be the result of the unusually close attention this family grouping received in the surviving source tradition.

33 Soran. Gyn. 1. [III] 17; cf. Hippoc. Gynaikéion ['Diseases of Women'] 1.20; Aristot. Gen. Anim. 4.4.773a; Hist. Anim. 10.4.636b; Soran. Gyn. 3. [I] 7; 9. This is complicated by the
cases, the condition was thought to be congenital; in other cases, the result of disease. A vaginal blockage was understood, once diagnosed, to be treatable by surgical intervention. As straightforward as the latter surgery might be, the detection of such a malady was treated as no light matter; sometimes it was, according to Aristotle, irremediable, and surgical intervention sometimes had fatal consequences. More to the point (in this paper), whereas the Greek medical tradition saw a malady, the Roman encyclopaediac one saw a portent.


Aristotle (*Hist. Anim.* 10.4.636b) believed this to be in some cases congenital and in others a pathological condition where the *os uteri* had grown together; cf. A.E. Hanson, 'Talking Recipes in the Gynaecological Texts of the Hippocratic Corpus', in M. Wyke (ed.), *Parchments of Gender. Deciphering the Bodies of Antiquity* (Oxford 1998) 71-94, 88 for references and a discussion of the remedies thought potent against closed or deviant uterine mouths.


One of the anonymous readers, taking a cue from modern studies exploring the gender-roles that might be inferred in the famous ‘letter’ of Cornelia (we leave aside here the much debated question of the authenticity of that document and the accompanying bibliography of pertinent items), suggested that Cornelia was perhaps criticized for appropriating masculine modes of conduct (and that this criticism might have been served by claims that she had been born deformed and ‘unwomanly’); cf. (on the gender issue) J.P. Hallett, 'Matriot Games? Cornelia,
Whatever the precise nature of Cornelia’s malformation, it was clearly something which, once detected, yielded to treatment (or righted itself). Any confident diagnosis is not possible from this distance. The important point is that ancient tradition with regard to Cornelia—as retailed by both sources (that is, Pliny and Solinus)—recorded the complaint as congenital. This suggests to us that Cornelia’s problem was the relatively less serious one—medically-speaking—of fused labia, which would have been externally visible (at birth), but that must remain speculative. Whatever the

Mother of the Gracchi, and the forging of family-oriented political values’, in F. McHardy and E. Marshall (eds), Women’s Influence on Classical Civilization (London and New York 2004) 26–39, see esp. 30–34; 36–38; and ‘Absence Roman fathers in the writings of their daughters: Cornelia and Sulpicia’, in F.R. Hübner and D.M. Ratzan (eds), Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity (Cambridge 2009) 175–191, see esp. 181–182. See also the other studies by Hallett on this subject cited in n. 46. We take a very different tack, and leave that as an article for another to write.

We have contemplated an even greater range of possibilities, including endometriosis (which is typically a late-onset complaint [i.e., post-pubertal]) and hermaphroditism (from which the new born child would have been unlikely to survive the demands of the haruspices in terms of expiation; cf. L. Brisson, Sexual Ambivalence. Androgyny and Hermaphroditism in Graeco-Roman Antiquity [1997, Eng. trans. J. Lloyd, Berkeley and Los Angeles 2002] 7–40).

It is unlikely, however, that the omen (if an imperforate hymen or suchlike obstruction) was recognized at birth. As our gynaecological consultants inform us, with an imperforate hymen, the external genitalia usually have a normal appearance. Likewise as far as vaginal atresia is concerned, these women also are likely to have normal external genitalia. The Romans might exercise attentive post-natal inspections (see, e.g., Obseq. 40, with regard to an examination of newborn twins in 108 BC), but unless such inspections were extremely thorough, these were not problems that were likely to be detected until puberty. Even today, such defects are rarely recognized until the onset of menses, when the retention of mucus and blood will lead to amenorrhea, pelvic pain and/or a palpable abdominopelvic mass.

precise nature of the malady, if it was detected at the time of her birth, it was summarily attended to (or self-corrected)—though the *infaustum omen* will have dogged her like a baleful spectre throughout her childhood as the harbinger of an uncertain future.

It could easily have been claimed that Cornelia had never been intended to have children. The gods had so ordained.\footnote{41} Gaius might well have bridled at such a suggestion.\footnote{42} But the disparager seems to have gone further—and this brings us to the

\footnote{41}{Th. Köves-Zularf (*Reden und Schweigen. Römische Religion bei Plinius Maior*) [Munich 1972] 273–4) ingeniously points to the relevance in this regard of the dire omen which preceded the death of Gracchus the Elder; cf. Burckhardt and von Ungern-Sternberg (n.7) 103–105. The story is well known. Two snakes, a male and a female, were found in the marital bed, and the *haruspices*, summoned to interpret the sign, announced that one of the serpents must be killed and that the sex of that reptile would correspond to the imminent death of either Gracchus or Cornelia, upon which Gracchus ordered that the male snake be killed on the grounds that his wife was young and might still bear children (Cic.* de Div.* 1.36; 2.62, citing a letter written by C. Gracchus to M. Pomponius; Val. Max. 4.6.1; Pliny *NH* 7.122 [offering the only surviving Latin version of Gracchus’ utterance: *Immo vero, inquit, meum necasse, Cornelia enim iuvenis est et parere adhuc potest*]; Plut. *TG* 1.2-3; *de viris illustribus* 57.4). (Note, in passing, the emphasis in this context on Cornelia’s child-bearing.) In the second Ciceronian notice, Cicero professes a certain degree of bafflement; why not let both snakes go free? Plutarch answers that: the soothsayers had ordained that *one* snake was to be killed. The haruspical response is startling; the two reptiles most aptly, one would think, signify the *genius* of Gracchus and the *iuno* of Cornelia (cf. Corradi [n.19] 14; Burckhardt and von Ungern-Sternberg [n.7] 105, esp. n.30) and therefore marital union. Köves-Zularf (273 n.515) highlights the fact that the *haruspices’* finding presupposes the end of the married couple’s coexistence, that the marriage was not meant to be, not sanctioned, and must be ended (*daß die Ehe des Sempronius Gracchus mit Cornelia gar nicht als richtige Ehe galt und deswegen nicht geschützt, sondern vernichtet werden sollte*). For a discussion of the practicalities of the haruspical response, see Köves-Zularf, 270–78 (cf. 283; 287–8 n.556); he cogently, in our opinion, links this to Cornelia’s birth-omen (n.515; for his earlier discussion of which, see 222–4)—though Burckhardt and von Ungern-Sternberg (105 n.31) remain wary. All the more so, if we accept the hypothesis—put forward by Carcopino (n.27) 82; Burckhardt and von Ungern-Sternberg (n.7) 104—that Gracchus the Elder, in observing that Cornelia might still bear a child (*parere adhuc potest*; see the note above), was not enjoining his wife to marry again (and have children to a second husband) but alluding to the fact that she was

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precision of the third fragment and Plutarch’s commentary—perhaps merely his
gloss—that the man who offered his offending thoughts was open to a charge of
malakía, or softness (CG 4.3-4).43

carrying a child—and that Gaius was the one in utero at the time of his father’s
pronouncement and self-sacrificial offer.

43 The charge, in Gaius’ mouth, ran beyond mollitia to its sometime cognates. The man, we
might imagine Gaius had alleged, was a cinaedus (a word borrowed from Greek and probably
initially indicating an effeminate dancer [see, e.g., D. Halperin, How To Do the History of
Homosexuality (Chicago 2002) 164], and a term undergoing something of a transitional
development in second-century Rome [cf. Halperin, 35–6; 72]). (For the difficulties of
modern definitions utilizing the term cinaedus, see C. Williams, Roman Homosexuality

Something of the flavour of the allegations that Gaius turned back upon his opponent might be
found in the roughly contemporary abuse levelled by Scipio Aemilianus at P. Sulpicius Galus
(ORF3, frag. 17 Malc. [= Gell. NA 6.12.5]). (Gellius encases the fragment in a discussion of
chiridotae [long-sleeved tunics] which were considered ‘unmanly’. Sulpicius Galus is
introduced by Gellius [ibid., 4] as a homo delicatus.)

For one who daily perfumes himself and dresses before a mirror, whose
eyebrows are trimmed, who, walks abroad with beard plucked out and
thighs made smooth, who at banquets, when a youth (adulescentulus),
has reclined in a long-sleeved tunic on the inner side of the couch with a
lover (cum amatore), who is fond not only of wine but of men—does
anyone doubt that he does what cinaedi commonly do?

(trans. J.C. Rolfe [modified])

Accusations of effeminatio are problematic, and do not lend themselves to careless modern
stereotyping. To accuse a man of being effeminatus need not necessarily indicate that the man
was pathicus. Effeminati might pursue sexual relations with women (A. Richlin, The Garden
of Priapus. Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor [New Haven 1983] 222 [on
effeminacy as a veneer for excessive heterosexual activity]; C. Edwards, The Politics of
Immorality in Ancient Rome [Cambridge 1993] 81–84; Williams [above] 157–164; Halperin
[above]). An effeminate man might pursue aggressive masculine same-sex gratification; Cic.
de Orat. 2.277; cf. Corbeill, Controlling Laughter (n.7) 151–152. Scipio, in the fragment cited
above, begins with his target’s deviation from the expected social norms in dress and manner,
allowing these to suggest a perversion of nature. In the end, the accusation is unambiguous
(though the problematic term cinaedus is used as the virtual punch-line); cf. (on this passage
specifically), Corbeill (above) 146; Williams (above) 20–21; 237. There can be little doubt,
from what Plutarch preserves of Gaius’ attack, that he is characterizing his own opponent (and
By what licence do you compare yourself with Cornelia? For have you borne children as she has? And indeed all Romans know that she has been for a longer time without a man than you, [supposedly] a man, (have).

(ORF<sup>3</sup>, frag. 66 Malc.)

The angry specificity of that riposte might prompt the speculation that the anonymous detractor had let loose a second shaft. Putting aside the possibility that he had questioned Cornelia's personal morality (since, as we have observed above, no surviving evidence suggests that), it might be wondered, as we have also forecast above, whether the man, not content with lamenting the marriage, had lamented the fact that the famously affectionate couple (Tiberius Gracchus the Elder and Cornelia) had been unable or unwilling to keep their union unproductive. Had the λοιδορηθείς, in some fashion, contrasted Cornelia’s neglect of ominous warnings with his own readiness to put the communal wellbeing above his own advantage, perhaps even offering an instance of self-sacrifice or denial? If so, whatever personal qualities he stressed in self-praise cannot now be discerned. Gaius, however, we suspect, stepped laterally, attacking the man’s alleged sexual proclivities that were pertinent to a discussion of desirable unions.

Let us return, however, to the reviler’s putative lament. Had Cornelia and her husband taken cognizance of a putative divine warning that their union was ill-omened, and had they resolved to keep the union childless, how might that have been effected? Martial 'reports' that Cornelia, like Julia (the wife of Pompey) and Porcia (the wife of Brutus), offered her husband anal intercourse.

_Uxor, vade foras aut moribus utere nostris:_

...  
_Nec motu dignaris opus nec voce iuvare_  
_nec digitis, tamquam tura merumque pares:_

Cornelia’s detractor) as a _pathicus_. Cf. (on this passage specifically) Corbeill 148—though we disagree, as we have said earlier in the paper, with his assumption as to the allegation that prompted Gaius’ counter-attack. For extended discussions of effeminacy in Roman discourse (and associated invective), see Edwards 63–97; Corbeill 128–173. Gaius Gracchus, it might be added, professed a particular aversion to sexual incontinence; cf. Gracchus, _ad populum cum ex Sardinia reditii_, frgs 26–27 Malc. (= Gell. _NA_ 15.12); cf. Williams (above) 20–21; 39.
"Wife, adjust to my fancies, or get out of the house! ... You don't see any need to wriggle or cry out or use your fingers—It's as if you're performing a solemn rite of sacrifice [lit. proffering incense and pure wine]. The Phrygian slaves used to masturbate outside the bedroom door whenever Hector was straddled by his wife like a horse and even modest Penelope kept her hand on snoring Ithaca ... You don't let me bugger you, but this [opportunity] Cornelia used to give to Gracchus, Julia to Pompey and Porcia to you, Brutus; ... If you like to be staid and proper, you're welcome to be Lucretia all day, but I want Lais at night."

(Martial 11.104.1; 11–18; 21–22 [(trans. Dixon modified)]

The epigram was, of course, outrageous and intended to be. But let us explore whether the three historical exempla were not Martial’s invention (in this regard). Were lines 17–18 (dabat hoc Cornelia Graccho, Iulia Pompeio, Porcia, Brute, tibi)
based on some existing tradition (rather than being simply Martial’s own creation)? Most will see Martial as having simply used the names of three female paragons in such a context for their shock-value. Cornelia and Porcia stood on pedestals (the former literally, as could be seen by anyone walking through the Porticus Metelli—or, in Martial’s day, the Portico of Octavia which replaced it). And Porcia was remembered, by Martial amongst others, as a martyr to her devotion to Brutus. The epigram is clearly intended to be confronting. But that need not be the all of it. In

46 Judy Hallett, in presenting a paper at the University of Sydney, 23/8/99 (‘Talking Cornelias: The Mother of the Gracchi and the Dilemma of Roman Studies’), was able to offer an effective modern analogy that might jolt a modern British Commonwealth audience. In the interests of Anglo-American relations, we refrain from unauthorized retail. Her point was that Martial’s aim was simply to shock with which reading we are in accord (see the note above). Our suggestion, however, will be that Martial could rattle his readers simply with his temerity in putting such allegations on paper; the names may not have come as a surprise to readers familiar with scuttlebutt at one time in circulation.


48 Ep. 1.42.
Roman antiquity, anal intercourse might have served two chief purposes: i) the avoidance of procreation;49 and ii) the obliging service of a partner's sexual inclination. It should be open to speculation whether popular gossip had supplied reasons why allusions to Cornelia, Julia and Porcia were especially appropriate here; Julia, though loved by the populace as well as by her family, did not attain the same exemplary status as Cornelia and Porcia.50 That is all-important here. Julia was not a paragon in the sense that the other two women were. (The point is duly underlined by Seneca [frag. 79 Haase] when he chooses Cornelia and Porcia, along with Lucretia, as exemplars of pudicitia [the mulieris virtus], women whose pudicitia matched their menfolk’s virtus.51 Julia does not join that company.)52

50 On the popular feelings for Julia, Plut. Pomp. 53.4; Caes. 23.4.
51 Seneca does not explicitly register Lucretia as the first Brutus’ wife—but as his equal. (She was, of course, not the wife of Brutus.)
52 We owe a debt of gratitude to Kay (n.49) 281-82, for first drawing this Senecan reference to our attention—though Kay does not note the telling absence of Julia, seeing Seneca’s trio as something of a parallel. Kay merely suggests that although the two ‘modern’ exempla at Mart. 11.104.18 were perhaps not as revered as Cornelia, their stature allowed them to be “included for the same irreverently humorous reasons”. (That is the usual assumption; cf. H.P. Obermayer, Martial und der Diskurs über männliche “Homosexualität in der Literatur der frühen Kaiserzeit [Classica Monacensia 18, Tübingen 1998] 25 [also citing Seneca], where the women are seen as models of rectitude.) It is the anomalous inclusion of Julia that is of the essence here.

The point could be laboured. Aelian (Varia Historia 14.45.1) lists women to be singled out for praise: (amongst the Greeks) Penelope, Alcestis and Laodameia; (amongst the Romans) Cornelia, Porcia and Cloelia. Aelian implies that he has an embarrassment of numbers on the Roman side (and thus chooses from a range of exempla, no doubt as wide in type—hence Cloelia—as number). But had he expanded, would Julia have made the cut? Probably not. Jerome also grouped Lucretia, Cornelia and Porcia (perhaps in the debt of Seneca); in Iovinianum 1.49 (320)C; cf. Petrocelli (n.19) 61; Dixon (n.18) 61–62. It is Julia’s absence from these repertoires that prompts us to a different reading of Martial’s reference to her in 11.104.
All three (Cornelia, Julia and Porcia), like Andromache who precedes them in Martial's epigram, were famed for the affection they shared with their husbands;\(^5^3\) or, like Penelope who is coupled with Andromache here, for their loyalty. The three Roman women had something else in common. They were all much younger than their husbands. Even the widowed Porcia, when she came to Brutus' household, was "very young" (Plut. Brut. 13). Apuleius in his Metamorphoses (3.20) makes it clear that offering oneself to one's lover 'like a boy' could be seen as an act of affectionate compliance (albeit that Martial's evidence makes it equally clear that a woman aiming for respect might find it demeaning [and this seems more in accord with general Roman thinking]).\(^5^4\) We might see, then, in the offer of anal intercourse, simply the

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53 All three are included in Valerius Maximus' section de amore coniugali (4.6), examples calling for maxima veneratio (4.6 praef.). In Cornelia's case (4.6.1), this affection is only testified to implicitly—and inversely (in the willing self-sacrifice of her husband to preserve her life); but this is enough to have her enshrined, paradoxically, alongside Alcestis (see the previous note). Valerius Maximus draws attention to the same paradox; cf. Petrocelli (n.19) 41. Of particular interest here is that Julia is remembered for her vulnerability (4.6.4), Porcia for her courage, her spiritus virilis and fortitudo demanding the admiratio of all centuries (4.6.5).

54 Compliance: S. Dixon, Reading Roman Women (London 2001) 40 (a discussion of male fantasy, 'dream lovers' and "female compliance with male preferences")—though Dixon follows Mart. 11.104 with a record of the 'straight' athleticism of Met. 2.17. The act of Photis at Met. 3.20, however, the item which should have been cited by Dixon here, is depicted as a tender offering, given in the context of her contrition for her part in the communal humiliation of her lover (albeit, note, that of a slave to her owner's guest). Familiarity has not staled their ardour—but it is followed by less lustful tenderness:

Tearing off our clothes we hurled ourselves stark naked into a Bacchic frenzy of love; and when I was worn out, Photis, by way of encore, generously and unprompted, offered herself to me like a boy. (trans. E.J. Kenney)

Not all women shared Photis' generosity—as Martial shows. His wife has to be badgered into it. And clearly finds it demeaning. (Martial 11.104. 21-22); cf. H.N. Parker, 'The Teratogenic Grid', in J.P. Hallett and M.B. Skinner (eds), Roman Sexualities (Princeton, N.J. 1997) 47-65, esp. 53: "The Roman created what we may call 'the scale of humiliation': vagina, anus, mouth."

It is not inappropriate here to remember Martial's disclaimer at Ep. 11.15.11-13 that his poems in no way mirror his own life (cf. 1.4.7-8; and Richlin's discussions of such apologiae; Richlin
compliance of a generous young wife (which, in the context of Martial's poem, he makes confronting by the choice of these particular women).

But was there more? As it so happens, evidence exists to suggest that popular gossip focussed on the intimate relationship between Julia and Pompey and on the latter's sexual tastes. Julia, so much younger than her husband, perhaps as young as fourteen-years old when she married the forty-seven year-old Pompey (but probably no more than eighteen), was said to be inordinately fond, so much so that Pompey was said to be an inappropriate object of her passion. Pompey, however, responded to her love compassionately, and was castigated for surrendering so much time to the satisfaction of her devotion (Plut. Pomp. 53.1-2; cf. 48.5): "Certainly the young wife's fondness for her husband was notorious." At the same time, popular abuse at public meetings, liked to imply that Pompey was 'lecherous' (akólastos)—perhaps 'intemperate' is a better translation. Pompey was 'unmanned' by his passion. Accusations of effeminacy surfaced, publicly. Popular chants were heard (or encouraged):

[n. 43] 2-13). To add to the air of unreality that suffuses the poem, let us remember that Martial was probably not even married (Kay [n.49] 276-77).

Apuleius' evidence might also be explained by way of the presumption that he is trying to titillate his audience with what he assumes—and expects his readership to assume—is at the risqué end of the sexual spectrum.


And for this paradox we refer back to the discussion in note 43 above.

"What man seeks a man? What man scratches his head with one finger?" (Plut. Pomp. 48.7).

The insinuation (that Pompey wanted a man) is particularly interesting in the light of the fact that Plutarch—clearly not drawing on a friendly source here—knew of no occasion on which Pompey was unfaithful to his wife (Plut. Pomp. 53.2)—commenting, more specifically, on the "chaste restraint of Pompey, who knew only his wedded wife." One might speculate, then, both these pieces of evidence considered, on what gossip made of the overly fond relationship between this couple.

On the relationship between Brutus and Porcia, nothing is known save that it was profoundly affectionate (and that the couple shared a bed for sleep). One other item is available: there was a celebrated statuette by the sculptor Strongylion which went by the name ‘Brutus’ boy’ (Plin. NH. 34.82: "[Strongylion] fecit puerum, quem amando Brutus Philippiensis cognomine suo inlustravit"). Translators are divided on whether this should be read as saying that the statue was famous because Brutus was famously fond of the boy (whom it represented), or because Brutus was famously fond of the statuette. Strongylion’s floruit, which Pliny omits (at 34.49–52) but which is known to have been the fifth century, means that only the latter can be

Cf. Plut. De cap. ex inim. utilitate 6 (= Mor. 89E), where it is made clear that such careful parting of the hair with a single finger was taken as a sign that a man was of a womanish nature and licentious (which, Plutarch feels the need to emphasise, was far from a reliable guide in Pompey’s case). For the timing of one such abusive demonstration, February 7th, 56 BC, Cic. ad Q.fr. 2.3.2 (where Cicero sanitizes the hostile script for his brother’s consumption); cf. Dio 39.19.1 (reporting that Pompey’s personal peculiarities were targeted). The account of the chanting in Cicero’s letter to Quintus follows a very different script. M. Licinius Calvus (apud Senec. Controv. 7.4.7) composed a similar taunt aimed at Pompey. For the intent of such a gibe, see Williams (n.43) 237.

On the familiar ‘Biblical’ euphemism for carnal knowledge (in koine Greek at least), see W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago 1957) 160b (s.v. gignósko [5]). Such a metaphor might have been lifted from a Latin source; cf. J.N. Adams (n.45) 190.

Plut. Brut. 13.3–11; cf. 13.2 (on the sharing of a bed).

H. Rackham (Loeb) for the former; H. Le Bonniec (Budé) and K. Jex Blake (in Blake and E. Sellers, The Elder Pliny’s Chapters on the History of Art [Chicago 1896/1976]) 68 for the latter.
More to the point here, however, is the fact that the statue’s fame was current in the Neronian and Flavian periods, and is used, almost proverbially—for diminutive beauty, thrice in Martial, who alludes to it simply as Bruti puer (2.77; 9.50; 14.171). In the third allusion, Martial makes the statue itself (Broútou paidíon Fictile: the title of the two-line epigram) ambiguously the object of Brutus’ aesthetic celebration and pederastic passion:

\[ \text{istiui pueri Brutus amator erat} \]

Of this boy Brutus was the lover

This in turn might indicate that Martial, in alluding to Brutus and Porcia at 11.104, was not plucking the illustrious couple out of thin air or from a playful imagination (and simply for the shock value of undercutting exalted exempla). As it was with Julia and Pompey, there may have been a pre-existing association in play. Was it so with Cornelia? This has nothing to do with the actuality of Cornelia’s life, and everything to do with the world of rumores, sermones and fama (a very real world in ancient Rome). Might we not speculate that gossip imagined another function for anal intercourse: mutual convenience founded on Cornelia’s abnormality? It is likely that the prodigy of Cornelia's abnormality was in the public domain during her lifetime, rather than the discovery of subsequent historical research. If the verbal assailant of Cornelia had made some remark regretting that Gracchus and Cornelia had abandoned anal intercourse (and was drawing upon contemporary gossip), Gaius Gracchus' outraged response makes immediate sense. Cornelia's productivity, Gaius was protesting, testified to the 'normality' of her relationship with her husband: "Have you borne children as she has?" That leads on to Gracchus' defence of his mother in terms of the chosen celibacy of her widowhood. She was aiming to die a univira. The self-imposed restrictions on Cornelia's private life led to an easy counter-charge from Gaius: "And indeed all the Romans know that she has been for a longer time without

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63 And on such emotional transference (though in a different context), see Julia Kindt, ‘The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic: Seeing, Touching and Knowing the Divine during the Second Sophistic’ (forthcoming).

64 We cannot rule out that the item was a malicious invention of subsequent hostile historical tradition; see above, note 31. But, as we have argued above, there is also no reason to assume that such an item was not broadcast at the time.
a man than you have, you excuse for one." There had been at least one alternative offer (in Cornelia’s case)—and she had rejected it. The detractor, Gaius Gracchus was asserting, had *not* rejected offers.

Cornelia had entered into marriage under a cloud of ill-omen. It would be strange if the enemies of the Gracchi had not worked upon the fact. The proposition that contemporary malediction targeted Cornelia's child-bearing is entirely plausible. It is strengthened by the observation that by the time of Gaius Gracchus' tribunates, ten of Cornelia's children had died. The family was in danger of extinction (see Gaius’ lament, cited above [n.24]). Here again attention might be drawn to the parallel that Juvenal seems to have drawn with Niobe (see above). It is not implausible that Cornelia's pride was linked to the unkindly way in which fate had cut down the majority of her offspring; and that their premature deaths were linked to divine displeasure at her fecundity. Solinus (1.67) speaks of the unlucky omen being...

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65 See above on the overtures of Ptolemy Physkon, n.18. S. Dixon (*The Roman Mother* [London and Sydney 1988], 22) plausibly assumes that there were others. (No evidence exists.) For the ideology of the *univira*, see Dixon, *loc.cit.* From this ideal there were probably dissentients at the time; divorce and remarriage were too common. It was certainly challenged in the Augustan period (G. Herbert-Brown, *Ovid and the Fasti* [Oxford 1994] 13, 147-48). But in Cornelia's day (and later; see Propert. 4.11), the sentiment no doubt won the approbation of many.

66 ... nec quisquam de P. Africani et Tiberi Gracchi familia nisi ego et puer restaremus ... (CG, *de legibus promulgatis* frag. 47 Malc. [= Schol. Bob. *In Cic. Sull.* p. 81Stangl]): "nor does anyone remain to the houses of Publius Africanus and Tiberius Sempronius (i.e., the Elder) except me and [this] boy". (We are assuming that the lament focussed on male issue—but see above [n. 24].) Gaius conveniently omits consideration of the Scipiones Nasicae. This is rhetoric. Gaius also ignores, for the purpose of argument, his sister Sempronia, as indeed does 'Cornelia' (or whoever composed the letter published under her name); Cornelia P.f., *epistulae ad Caium filium* 4 [= codd. Corn. Nepotis *in fin.*] (P. Cugusi, *Epistolographii Latini Minores* [Turin 1970] 1, 112; cf. 2.67–68 [for a succinct commentary on the lines])—referring to Gaius as her last surviving child. (This is not the place to digress into the vexed subject of the letter’s authenticity, nor does the debate affect the observation being made here; a counterfeiter could be as alert to the appropriate convention.) In the case of Cornelia, where she is speaking of the personal support that Gaius, the last child, owes her in adversity, the omission is more striking. In Gaius’ lament, it is not remarkable. A woman was "both the source and the end of her own *familia*" (Digest. 50.16.195.5; cf. J. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* [London and Sydney 1986] 11).
propitiated by the deaths of her children. If the attack on Cornelia which Plutarch records postdated 129 (or even if delivered before), hostile claims might suggest that the curse had blighted also the childless house of Scipio.67

Domestic tragedies and public calamity. All went back, said the tradition which Cicero retailed, to Scipio Africanus' betrothal of his daughter to Ti. Sempronius Gracchus. With regard to the forging of the contract, no contemporary opposition to the union was reported, such as has survived in the record, other than concerns about its hastiness; Scipio’s wife Aemilia, according to some, thought that she ought to have been consulted—as was her due.68 Even that story was doubted (since a doublet

67 This would have been in addition to those claims that suggested that Cornelia actually had a hand in his rumoured murder.

A notion of the 'Gracchan blight' might underlie the highly negative portrait of Sempronia at App. BC 1.20—unless it was simply historical observation that Sempronia was "unlovable, misshapen and childless" (a highly unusual picture): ἥ τῷ Σκιπίωνι γαμουμένη διὰ δυσμορφίαν καὶ ἀπαιδίαν οὐτʼ ἐστέργετο οὐτʼ ἐστεργην. The childlessness of Scipio Aemilianus and Sempronia had, it seems, been a cause for concern in the 130s. Such concern possibly lay behind the incident (if it was historical) reported at Numantia in 134-3, from which Marius emerged with such kudos. Who would succeed to Scipio's position was a question asked by his entourage. To those invited to share his table, Scipio recommended Marius as a possible worthy heir (Val. Max. 8.15.7; Plut. Mar. 3.3). His succession was not to be along bloodlines.

68 Liv. 38. 57.5–8 (cf. the emendation suggested by C.F. Konrad, ‘Livy on the betrothal of Cornelia Gracchi (38.57.7)’, Philologus 133 [1989] 155–57 [and accepted in J. Briscoe’s Teubner edition (Stuttgart 1991) 602]). Far from any opposition, the story retailed by Livy (with some reservations as to its historicity [see the following note]), Valerius Maximus (4.2.3), and Gellius (NA 12.8.1–4) (the latter two without any reservation) was that ‘the Senate’, dining on that particular occasion on the Capitol (in conjunction with the epulum Iovi, say Valerius Maximus and Gellius, thus adding circumstantial detail), indeed urged the union (by way of bringing together Scipio and his one-time enemy Gracchus). See also, for this tradition, Grillius, Comm. in Cic. Rhet. 1.5 (p. 36 Jakobi). Gellius goes one step further: it was almost as if the gods themselves, arbitrating at this solemn religious occasion, had endorsed the union, sc. the new amicitia between Scipio and Gracchus (quasi diis immortaliis arbitrís in convívio Iovís Optimi Maximi dexteras eorum conducentibus)—the joining of the right hands, a formulaic gesture of good faith, conjuring also the matrimonial bond. Cf. Senec. Controv. 5.2.3; Dio 19, frg. 65.1 (basically endorsing this version). On the tradition that depicted this marriage as one of blessed effect, see also H.-F. Mueller, Roman
concerning the betrothal of Ti. Gracchus the Younger and Claudia circulated), and it was believed that Cornelia had been betrothed to Ti. Gracchus the Elder after her father’s death. Could the alternative tradition, which held that Scipio had died leaving his younger daughter unengaged and unpromised, reflect his reservations in the face of the infaustum omen? His kinsmen (oikei), if that was so, felt no such compunction or reluctance, and a connection to the house of Scipio was an opportunity that Tiberius Gracchus apparently felt was one he could scarcely refuse. Did, however, a possibly delayed child getting reflect hesitation on Gracchus’ part?

Any misgivings at the time of the marriage, if they had arisen at all, must have given way in the face of the bounty of the union. Yet when two snakes were found in the

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69 Livy (loc. cit.) places the anecdote amongst those which he describes as the greatly variant stories circulating with regard to Scipio—but which are all worthy of presentation (proponenda); 38.57.8: cf. 56.1 (for the context of unstable and untrustworthy traditions). Plutarch (TG 4.2–3) reports the doublet, observing that ‘some’ hold to the former story, but that ‘most historians’ hold to the latter, as he does. He furthermore cites Polybius as confirmation that Cornelia was betrothed after Scipio’s death and that the selection of her husband was made by Scipio’s relatives (oikei), Scipio having left Cornelia “unespoused and unbetrothed” (anékdoton kai anégguon). (In the surviving text of Polybius, no explicit statement to that effect remains; that does not rule out Plutarch having available a fuller text; cf. Polyb. 31.27 [32.13]. 1–3). Cf. Valgiglio (n.20) 34–35.

70 And any suggestion that Scipio Africanus died envisaging that his younger daughter would remain unmarried flies in the face of Polybius’ understanding (loc. cit. [n.69]) of the financial arrangements that Africanus had set in place for his daughters’ dowries; cf. S. Dixon, ‘Polybius on Roman Women and Property’, AJPh 106 (1985) 147–170.

71 A possible parallel has already perhaps sprung to the mind of readers. In 6th-century Athens, Peisistratus found a political union with the Alkmaionidai irresistible but the danger of religious contagion (i.e., the Alkmaionid ‘curse’) troubling. His solution is well known; he coupled with his wife katá nómōn (Herodotus 1.60.2–3; 61.1–2). That is as far as the musing mind can go. Tiberius Gracchus did not take that path. He procreated—perhaps after hesitation.

72 Indeed, the very statue erected in Cornelia’s honour may have symbolically represented a celebration of her fecundity. See above, n.47.
matrimonial bed, the reading was dark. This was a prodigy which the haruspices ordained could only be expiated by the sacrifice of one of the partners. Enemies of the Gracchan household would have taken unfriendly notice of that judgment; and unfolding events furnished material for ill-wishers to keep alive suggestions that the marriage of Cornelia and Ti. Gracchus had incurred divine displeasure.

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Appendix: Evidence Relating to the Dates of Cornelia’s Birth, Betrothal, Marriage and Child-Bearing (with reference to nn. 26–27)

As observed above, a solution to the way the often-contradictory evidence is read is not essential to the present study. A brief explanation of the dates offered above, however, is in order. It neither represents consensus nor presents uncontentious data. As Kirsteen Moir (‘Pliny HN 7.57 and the Marriage of Tiberius Gracchus’, Classical Quarterly 33 [1983] 136-145, at 144) says: “[the arguments in this regard] all belong to the realm of probability rather than proof.”

73 For the references, see above, note 41. Cicero’s source (Gaius’ friend Pomponius) obviously suggests that the incident was susceptible to a reading friendly to the Gracchan household. It is also clear that the surviving tradition (concentrating as it does on the elder Gracchus’ selflessness) is heir to that friendly interpretation. On the other hand, it seems a safe presumption that enemies of the Gracchi would have focussed not upon the heroic self-sacrifice of Gracchus but upon the inescapable severity of the divination. It is noteworthy that this tradition did not prevail—but that need not detract from the logic of a hostile interpretation of the omen.

74 Enemies: reconciliation with Scipio Africanus, dramatic and unexpected, no doubt brought new enmities; Gracchus’ career had involved controversial decisions (Plut. Marc. 5.1–3; for further references, see MRR I, 442); and his eldest son is reported to have had deadly enemies at the very outset of his senatorial career (Plut. TG 6.2 and the reference to the young man’s echthroi). The careers of Gracchus’ two last surviving sons added exponentially to those ranks.
Calculations will often pivot on the death of Scipio Africanus in 183 (or 182). We believe the best evidence suggests that Cornelia was not married by that time (Polyb. 31.27 [32.13], 1–3), but that the weight of evidence indicates she had been betrothed with Scipio’s blessing (above, nn. 68 & 70). That might put Cornelia’s date of marriageability around 180 (and a birth-date around 195–190); hence we offer the range of years 183–176 for the matrimonial union of Cornelia and Tiberius Gracchus—though our colleague Patrick Tansey, after careful consideration of the data, would prefer to reduce that period to ca 178–176. The implication that Cornelia might not have been born until 189 or 188 (and might only have been around five years old at the time of her father’s death) would have the benefit of chiming with the description of Cornelia as still young at the time of her husband’s death which has to be dated after the conception of Gaius Gracchus in 155/154. If, for the sake of argument, Cornelia was born in 189, she was (when pregnant with Gaius) thirty-four or thirty-five. Should we countenance that she was older? According to Cicero (Div. 1.36), she was adulescens; according to Pliny (NH 7.122), iuvenis; according to Plutarch (TG 1.3), she was éti néas (Petrocelli [n.19] 43 points to an interesting Plutarchan parallel usage). J. Carcopino (Autour de Gracques [Paris 1967] 81) points out that Varro, according to Censorinus (de Die Nat. 14.2) took adulescentia up until the age of thirty, whilst Isidore of Seville (Etym. 11.2.4–5), also drawing on Varro, asserts that adolescentia ends at twenty-eight, but is followed by iventus which closed in one’s fiftieth year. But what of more quotidian conversation? Macrobius (Sat. 2.5.1–2) has Avienus say, with regard to Julia Augusta, that at the age of thirty-seven, one acknowledges, if sanity prevails, that one is nudging old age: tempus aetatis, si mens sana superesset, vergentis in senium. (For extended discussions of the Latin definition of the senex, see G. Herbert-Brown, ‘Jerome's dates for Gaius Lucilius, satyrarum scriptor’, CQ 49 (1999) 535-543; T.G. Parkin, Old Age in the Roman World [Baltimore and London 2003] 15–26; 95–96; 102.) Moir (art. cit., 143–44), drawing attention to Cicero’s broad usage of the terms adulescens and adolescentia as the ‘flowering age’, sensibly suggests that the reference within Tiberius Gracchus’ pronouncement that Cornelia was iuvenis (for which, see n.41) was a reference simply to her child-bearing period (which in Roman thought, taking one’s cue from Augustan marriage laws and Soranus, might indeed take her to the age of fifty); cf. Petrocelli (n.19) 43 (for the parallel cited above).

That observation brings us to an important turning point in this exploration of the data. Given the linguistic discussion above, and if the hypothesis adumbrated in n.42 is correct (and Cornelia was with child at the time of her husband’s self-willed death), the strict definition of her age was not of the essence at all (albeit that the debate
about her birth-date continues to have a bearing on any speculation as to the date of her marriage). She was simply ‘still capable of child-bearing’ in 155. What particularly interests us here is the question of any significant lapse of time between matrimony and procreation. Thus, a second associated debate remains of central interest to the present study (though resistant to confident resolution). When did Cornelia begin child-bearing? Only one absolute date is available in this regard; Tiberius, the eldest of her sons (if this is the logical implication of his reception of the paternal praenomen), was born between July 163 and July 162 (G.V. Sumner [n.28] 58). (For his sister Sempronia we have only a terminus ante quem: married by 147, she must have been born before 159 [and could have been born up to two decades earlier].) The implication, however, of Plutarch’s statement (TG 1.3–5) that all Cornelia’s children were in her care at the time of her husband’s death (and that she remained devoted to that office) favours (if it is correct) the belief that none of her children were above their teenage years—and that, in turn—would suggest that all those children had been born after ca 174 (if the hypothesis that Gaius was in utero at the time of his father’s death [see n.42] is accepted)—or after ca 171 (given the date traditionally assigned to the death of Cornelia’s husband).

The next clue, though read in a multiplicity of ways, is the much cited statement by Pliny that, while some women bear only boys or girls, Cornelia, in her twelve deliveries, and Agrippina, in her nine, illustrate the common phenomenon of women giving birth to children of alternate sexes (aliaeque feminas tantum generant aut mares, plerumque et alternant, sicut Gracchorum mater duodeciens, Agrippina Germanici noviens; NH 7.57). Theodor Mommsen, tackling this in his customarily authoritative fashion (‘Die Scipionenprozesse’, Hermes 1.3 [1866] 161–216, at 204–206 [= Römisches Forschungen (Berlin 1864–1879) II, 489–91], resolved that, Cornelia having given birth to alternating sexes in strict succession, and Tiberius Gracchus the eldest boy having been born by 162 (the oldest boy and therefore the first or second of Cornelia’s children), the marriage should be dated to around 165—and that the twelve children were born within the relatively tight period of 165–151 (a fourteen-year span). Mommsen’s calculations long held sway and are often cited, having been taken up by Münzer (RE IV, cols 1592–3 [Cornelius 407]; IIA 2, 1408–9 [Sempronius 53]). Those who have sought to render the rapid succession of pregnancies more credible by positing deliveries of multiple births (not implausible) or stillborn babies (see, e.g., Guarino [n.19] 53–56) must, in the second instance, reject Plutarch’s indication that all twelve children were alive (or, in the possible case of Cornelia’s last delivery, about to be born) at the time of their father’s death. (Mommsen, it should be noted, was no armchair-academic in this regard. At the age
of thirty-seven, having married the twenty-two year-old Marie Reimer [in 1854], he was greeted with his first child, a daughter, in the following year [1855]. His first son followed in 1857. Six of his ultimately sixteen children were born in the six successive years 1861 and 1866 (the years leading up to his publication on this matter), and another six in a similarly close time-span [1869–1874]. Indeed, the phrase used above [“rapid succession of pregnancies”] was the one used by Mommsen’s biographer of Mommsen’s marriage [einer raschen Folge von Schwangerschaften]; Stefan Rebenich, Theodor Mommsen: eine Biographie [Munich 2002] 196–7; cf. L. Wickert, Theodor Mommsen. Eine Biographie IV [Frankfurt am Main 1980] 242.) If that chronology is accepted, it has significant ramifications for the present study. It is extremely unlikely that Cornelia, even if her father Scipio Africanus had no part in her betrothal (which we would be reluctant to concede), was left unwed for eighteen years after his death. The scenario would rather be one of delayed child-bearing.

Jérome Carcopino (op. cit. above, 47–83) challenged Mommsen’s calculations, however, inter alia, on the grounds that Pliny was not putting Cornelia forward as a model of women who gave birth to alternating sexes with each birth (as her coupling with Agrippina shows). Moreover, the word plerumque suggests that most women (or women frequently) give birth to both boys and girls. It is patently unlikely that Pliny was saying most women commonly deliver alternating sexes birth-for-birth. This immediately opens the possibility that a number of female births preceded that of the younger Tiberius in 163/162. There is more. Kirsteen Moir (art. cit., 136-145), comparing Pliny’s observation to Arist. Hist. anim. 7.6.585B, which Pliny seems to be rendering more succinctly (and rather elliptically), suggests that Pliny is reporting that Cornelia gave birth to six girls and then six boys. This would mean that Cornelia gave birth to six children before 163/2. Moir posits two scenarios: one, that dated the marriage no earlier than 170 (respecting Plutarch’s statement that all Cornelia’s children were in her care at the time of her husband’s death)—though that calculation too could be down-dated if allowance was made for the birth of twins or more (cf. Guarino, art.cit.); and the other (abandoning Plutarch’s datum) that the marriage took place as early as 180, the date preferred by D.C. Earl, Tiberius Gracchus. A Study in Politics (Brussels 1963) 55, following Carcopino in broad outline.

Our colleague Patrick Tansey, who will produce a considerably fuller treatment of this problem in the future, points out to us that the premise for Moir’s reading of Pliny suffers from the same flaw as Mommsen’s. It can scarcely be believed that Pliny, with his use of plerumque, would be saying, when he adduced the examples of
Cornelia and Agrippina by virtue of their fecundity, that most women can be observed to give birth to offspring of one sex and then, after a time, to another. (Tansey thus suggests, as was left open by Carcopino, that we have no way of knowing how many girls and boys were born to Gracchus and Cornelia: at least three boys, Tansey suggests, since a second boy is likely to have been named Publius after his grandfather. That would mean that we have little indication at all when the births of Cornelia’s children are to be dated.)

One quick observation is apposite here. If Tansey’s concerns are vindicated, there is no substance to the tentative suggestion above that Cornelia was compared with Niobe. (The same comparison springs to the mind also of Guarino [art. cit.] though he does not draw upon the Juvenalian evidence we adduce.) On the other hand, if the Niobe-Cornelia connection is thought valid, it might underwrite the belief that Cornelia had the same number of boys and girls (whatever Pliny’s intended meaning).

In all fairness, another consideration might be added in favour of Moir’s upper date (sc. 180) for the marriage. We mentioned above that Sempronia must have been married by 147 (but possibly earlier). If she were Scipio’s first wife (and the marriage of cousins might suggest that it was a marriage of that kind), Scipio would have married sometime around 168, by which year he had certainly taken his toga virilis—and ought to have been married. If Sempronia married in 168, she was born by 180, close to the beginning of her parent’s marriage. Did the birth of a misshapen baby (n.67) give the parents pause? That remains another piece of speculation that cannot be confirmed; nor is it one we, while proffering it, would necessarily endorse. (If we take Plutarch’s evidence cited above [that Cornelia had all her children in her care at the time of her husband’s death] as correct, Sempronia was still unmarried by the mid 150s.)

Most of the calculations reviewed above share the assumption that the marriage date is to be tied to (as closely preceding) the birth of the first child. We would put forward the tentative hypothesis (only as a possibility) that the marriage remained childless for some significant time prior to its prodigious fecundity. Given the question mark that must remain over the date of Cornelia’s marriage and the date at which she was first delivered of a child, it is clear that no further argument can be based upon the speculation above. It remains an interesting possibility (and a possibility only) that there was a lapse of time after the marriage before the couple conceived a child.