

Soror Augusti: The Literary Lives and Afterlives of Octavia Minor

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
under the Executive Committee  
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2022

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## **Abstract**

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In this dissertation, I trace the different lives and afterlives of Octavia Minor, Augustus' sister. I offer a comprehensive study of the ancient literary representations of Octavia; through the course of four chapters and an epilogue, I demonstrate how she occupies a defining space in the public imagination of the early principate. The purpose of this dissertation is to make the literary lives and afterlives of Octavia more visible and to examine how such representations may relate not only to Octavia's time but also to the times of the sources, from antiquity to the Renaissance.

In Chapter 1, I start by pointing out how late Republican customs of marriage and female alliances influence Octavia's life and its representations and monitor the influence that Octavian had on his sister, and vice versa. Here as throughout the dissertation, I examine how different authors represent Octavia, her widowhood, and her betrothal at the Treaty of Brundisium. In Chapter 2, I trace Octavia's travels through Greece and the Hellenistic influences in representations of her. This chapter concludes with how she is presented in treatments of the Treaty of Tarentum, where she grows into her role either as mediator or political pawn, according to which sources are followed. Chapter 3 begins with the honours of 35 that both Octavia and Livia receive. Thereafter, I argue for Plutarch's Octavia as the subject of a mini-parallel life as Cleopatra's foil. After her divorce with Antony, the literary Octavia seems to negotiate the boundaries between the public and private sphere habitually: we will trace this

phenomenon in depictions of Augustus' victorious return, Octavia's mourning of Marcellus, and, ultimately, in her own state funeral. In Chapter 4, I examine the different ways in which Octavia's continuing influence is felt and expressed through the different areas in her life, such as lineage, education, and culture, in what I call "the Octavia Factor." The epilogue recognizes the historical Octavia as a point of intertextual reference in the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia* and explores the possibilities of future work on renaissance reception of Octavia. It is in this way that I shed new light on the development of "the Octavia narrative" in the literary sources.

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	v
Dedication.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
A Biography of Octavia.....	4
The Material Octavia.....	9
Overview of Scholarship on Octavia.....	10
Framework.....	12
Chapter Overview.....	14
Chapter 1: The Literary Octavia in Rome: Moving towards the Middle.....	17
Introduction.....	17
1.1 Octavia’s Betrothal(s) and Marriage to Marcellus.....	20
1.2 Octavia and Tanusia at the Proscriptions; Octavia, Julia, Fulvia with Hortensia.....	20
1.3 Octavia’s Widowhood and its Aftermath.....	24
1.4 Octavia at Brundisium.....	25
1.4.1 Virgil’s Brundisium.....	26
1.4.2 Livy’s Brundisium.....	30
1.4.3 Velleius Paterculus’ Brundisium.....	31
1.4.4 Plutarch’s Brundisium.....	32
1.4.5 Appian’s Brundisium.....	35

1.4.6 Dio's Brundisium.....	36
Conclusion .....	38
Chapter 2: Octavia Beyond Rome .....	40
Introduction: Brundisium's Aftermath and its Coinage.....	40
2.1 Octavia in Greece .....	43
2.1.1 Seneca.....	44
2.1.2 Plutarch.....	47
2.1.3 Appian .....	48
2.1.4 Pausanias: Octavia in Corinth.....	49
2.2 Octavia in Tarentum .....	51
2.2.1 Plutarch's Tarentum.....	52
2.2.2 Appian's Tarentum .....	58
2.2.3 Dio's Tarentum .....	65
Conclusion: Tarentum's Aftermath .....	69
Chapter 3: Octavia in the Mixed Spheres at Rome.....	71
Introduction.....	71
3.1 The Honours of 35 BCE .....	72
3.2 Antony's Choice: Octavia versus Cleopatra in Plutarch.....	74
3.3 Octavia's Divorce in 32 BCE .....	83
3.3.1 Livy.....	84
3.3.2 Plutarch.....	85
3.3.3 Dio .....	88
3.3.4 Eutropius.....	88
3.4 Octavia between 27 and 23: Horace <i>Carm.</i> 3.14 .....	89
3.5 Octavia's Loss of Marcellus in 23 BCE.....	93

3.5.1	Pseudo-Ovid <i>Consolatio ad Liviam</i> .....	93
3.5.2	Propertius .....	96
3.5.3	Velleius Paterculus .....	100
3.5.4	Seneca the Younger .....	101
3.5.5	Tacitus .....	106
3.5.6	Dio .....	107
3.6	Octavia’s Public Funeral in 12/11 BCE .....	108
3.6.1	Livy .....	108
3.6.2	Suetonius .....	109
3.6.3	Dio .....	110
	Conclusion .....	112
Chapter 4: The Octavia Factor .....		113
4.1	Unearthing the Octavia Factor .....	113
4.1.1	Virgil’s <i>Epicedion Marcelli</i> at the end of <i>Aeneid</i> 6 .....	114
4.1.2	Suetonius’ <i>Vita Vergili</i> on Octavia’s Presence at the Recital of <i>Aeneid</i> 6 .....	118
4.2	Octavia and the Octavian Blood and Lineage .....	121
4.2.1	Crinagoras of Mytilene (first centuries BCE and CE) .....	123
4.2.2	Valerius Maximus (active during the reign of Tiberius) .....	128
4.2.3	Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE) .....	130
4.2.4	Tacitus (56-117 CE) .....	131
4.2.5	Suetonius <i>Aug.</i> 63.1 .....	134
4.2.6	Plutarch’s <i>Life of Marcellus</i> .....	135
4.3	Octavia’s “Child Supervision” and Marriage Arrangements in Plutarch’s <i>Life of Antony</i> .....	136
4.4	Octavia and Cultural Engagement .....	145
4.4.1	Strabo (64/3—24 CE) .....	146
4.4.2	Vitruvius (80/70-15 BCE) .....	149
4.5	Octavia in the Concrete Roman Landscape .....	150

4.4.1 Ovid (43 BCE-17/18 CE) .....	154
4.4.2 Velleius Paterculus (19 BCE-31 CE; during Tiberius' rule).....	156
4.4.3 Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE).....	157
4.4.4 Suetonius .....	164
4.4.5 Sextus Pompeius Festus, <i>De Verborum Significatione</i> 188 (approximately second and third century CE) .....	165
4.6 The Octavia Factor? Octavia and Cosmetic Influence .....	166
4.6.1 Scribonius Largus (1-50 CE).....	167
4.6.2 Priscian (approximately 6 <sup>th</sup> century CE).....	168
Conclusion .....	169
Epilogue: Octavia's Afterlives.....	171
5.1 The Octavia Minor Figure as a Model for the <i>Octavia Praetexta</i> .....	175
5.1.1 The Octavias as Mourning Figures: Marcellus and Britannicus .....	177
5.1.2 Soror Parallel with a Difference .....	181
5.1.3 The Octavias as Abandoned by Unfaithful Husbands.....	182
5.1.4 Uxorial Virtues and Foils .....	183
5.1.5 Family Titles and Dynastic Politics.....	185
<i>The Significance of Octavia Minor in the Octavia?</i> .....	187
5.2 A Future for the Literary Octavia: Octavia in the Renaissance .....	188
Conclusion .....	191
Bibliography .....	193
Appendix.....	225



## Acknowledgments

As the typical dissertation adage goes, how do I even begin to thank all those who have helped me with this dissertation and my doctoral degree as a whole? I must begin by thanking most emphatically my co-sponsors, Katharina Volk and Gareth Williams. Katharina and Gareth, I do not know how to thank you adequately for all the help, guidance, and support that you have so generously and patiently given to me in these past six years—I could not have done this without you. Gareth, you have guided my scholarly development since the first day I set foot in the Latin survey class; thank you for the countless conversations and words of encouragements. Katharina, I could not have wished for or imagined a better *Doktormutter* and exemplar and will always cherish our (whether or not socially distanced) coffee/tea meetings and hope that many more will follow.

I would also like to thank the other committee members: Kristina Milnor, Caitlin Gillespie, and Joseph Howley. Furthermore, many thanks are due to Carmela Franklin (for guiding me in my first teaching endeavours and for the continuous support); Ute Wartenberg (for going above and beyond as a mentor); Nancy Worman (for working with me on my Greek MPhil paper and for helping me explore my initial interest in sisterhood); and Marcus Folch and Alan Ross (for their continuous support and mentoring). Additionally, but certainly not unimportantly, on the logistical side: I would hate to forget to thank you, Selena, Juliana, and Shante (for all the department related matters), and the Columbia University Libraries (with special thanks to Jeffrey Wayno and my trusty carrel in Butler Library).

Moreover, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues from the Classics department and beyond at Columbia ever so much. I single out my dearest Emma: thank you for bringing out the best in me both whilst working and travelling together—it is in no small part thanks to you

that I have come this far academically and mentally ever since the Classics department had the great fortune of recruiting you. Our activities have brought us from vibrant Rimini to Epidaurus (the practical joke) to awe-inspiring DC and wholesome Montauk, and you have taught me more about sisterhood than a lifetime of literature ever could. But I also have you to thank—Jesse, Erin, and Charles, my closest (near-)cohort mates—for the many years of comradery and support in and outside the classroom. Just as importantly, I would like to thank Jamie, Jose Antonio, and Helen, not only for being such lovely and true friends but also for patiently looking at many a draft of this project. *Dank u wel*, Barbara, & *grazie mille*, Giovanni and Francesco, for your friendship during these six transformative years. And Ashley, may you rest in peace.

I could not have reached this point in my doctoral degree, were it not for my family back in Belgium: *dank u wel, mama en papa, voor de onvoorwaardelijke steun (vooral tijdens deze zware laatste loodjes en om me keer op keer te zeggen dat ik het wel ga kunnen)*. *Duizendmaal dank aan mijn zusjes Lore en Hanne; aan mijn lieve grootouders Oma, Opa, en Bomma; en aan mijn beste vrienden Dindy, Chelsee, Lukkie, en Kirstentje*. Here in the city, I would like to give heartfelt thanks to Dr. Biscoglio and the wonderful Elly and Elliott Jacobson.

And lastly, for their sweetness and patience, and for never failing to make me smile: Edvard and Brel (but especially Brel, naturally).

## **Dedication**

Voor mijn liefste bompa.

## Introduction

“The amiable and gentle Octavia gives us ... an Example of all those Graces and Embellishments, worthy the most refined Female Character. The dignity she preserved, and the delicacy of her Manners, became her elevated Station, and were an Ornament to the Political Court. She patronized the Learned, and was of a truly *Roman* Spirit, in sacrificing her private to the public Good. Nor did this Heroine shine with less Lustre in personal than in public Virtues. She was a sincere Friend, an affectionate Sister, a faithful Wife, and both a tender and instructive Parent. Such was the accomplished Character of Octavia!”<sup>1</sup>

It is with this lavish praise that Sarah Fielding introduces Octavia the Younger to her patroness, the Duchess of Pomfret. Fielding’s Octavia comes to life in the 1757 novel *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia*: to Fielding, she is the ultimate exemplar of female virtue in both private and public life. Fielding praises Octavia as if she were speaking of a dear friend, whom she remembers with intimate fondness. But has Octavia always been seen in this light? How does this eighteenth century Octavia compare to the classical Octavia? How has/have her story/stories changed? And how do these depictions fit in with contemporary Roman times, authors, and audiences? These are just a few questions that I aim to investigate in this dissertation.

Even today, the general public is hardly as familiar with Octavia as with, say, Cleopatra VII, that famous Ptolemaic queen, Antony’s lover, and Octavia’s counterpart in Fielding’s novel. Livia, Augustus’s influential spouse, has also consistently received closer scrutiny in the

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Fielding, *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia*, 1757, Ed. Johnson 1994: 41.

scholarship of the last century. Yet, in parallel with these notorious figures ran the life of Octavia Minor, Augustus' elder and only full sister. Hence my dissertation offers a comprehensive study of the ancient literary representations of Octavia; through the course of four chapters and an epilogue, I demonstrate how she occupies a defining space in the public imagination of the early principate.

The purpose of this dissertation is to make the literary lives and afterlives of Octavia more visible and to examine how such representations may relate not only to Octavia's time but also to the times of the sources, from antiquity to the Renaissance. I hope to shed new light on the development of what can be termed "the Octavia narrative," something that previous studies have—to my knowledge—not addressed: they mostly aim to reconstruct the historical Octavia herself, despite the scarce reliable material that we have. Ultimately, what is at stake here is how high-profile women like Octavia (but also, say, a Queen Elizabeth I or a Princess Diana) are depicted in contemporary texts and other diverse media and how these narratives take on lives of their own. At first glance, the literary representations and reception of an elite woman who lived towards the end of the first century BCE concern those who are interested in the intersection between representation and sex and gender in the early Roman principate. Beyond this relatively limited audience, however, my dissertation may interest anyone who is curious about (female, elite) representation in the rapidly changing late Republican and Augustan times.

Unlike the few extant books and theses on Octavia, I do not aim to excavate the "real" or "historical" Octavia Minor. Verifiable material about her life often falls short—both in amount and reliability—with the result that we can only rely on sources that are filtered through various lenses and are driven by different agendas. Her brother Augustus, the roughly contemporary sources, and the reception thereof are responsible for crafting Octavia as a symbol and literary

character. I will thus not attempt to answer issues concerning her actual biography, which have previously been debated. By now, there is little doubt that Octavia was the “whole” sister of Octavian, as opposed to Plutarch’s incorrect assumption that she was his half-sister (Plut. *Ant.* 31). Similarly, I will not dispute any speculations regarding her birth date, as our sources offer no such clarification, but I shall instead focus on the *representations* that we have of Octavia. To that end, I will work with a birth date ca. 69 BCE, as accepted by Singer and Fischer 1999: 69 (they derive this range from her wedding date with Marcellus). Furthermore, I will not attempt to establish whether Octavia had always been *sui iuris* or whether Caesar could have been her *tutor* (as, e.g., Fischer 1999: 68-9).

In short, this dissertation is not meant as a biographical exploration or elucidation, since both Fischer 1999 and Garcia 2013 have embarked on such projects. While I will not always be able to distinguish fact from fiction, I will work with the sources that we do have instead and consider why Octavia may be represented in certain ways. To set up a framework, I start with the story—the very incomplete narrative—of Octavia’s life according to the extant sources. On offer in these pages is the story of the different Octavias—one that compares the different literary Octavias while Fulvia and Cleopatra, though noteworthy characters in the story, come and go. Ultimately, our story begins and ends with Octavia and her different afterlives.

## A Biography of Octavia<sup>2</sup>

The beginnings of Octavia's life are shrouded in uncertainty. Suet. *Aug.* 4.1 claims that Octavia Minor was born ca. 69 BCE and that she was the eldest daughter and child of C. Octavius and Atia. I personally do not see any issue with Suetonius' date; some scholars question this proposed birth date (and opt for a later date like 66 BCE); but ultimately, Octavia's exact birthdate does not affect how we approach the literary representations.<sup>3</sup>

Octavia's family situation is complicated enough to have confused Plutarch (ironically, we will see that Plutarch seems to have been most invested in Octavia): we must be careful to distinguish Octavia Minor from her older half-sister, as Singer 1948 demonstrates.<sup>4</sup> Octavia Maior was Octavius' daughter from his previous marriage to Ancharia. We do not know when or how C. Octavius' first marriage ended and when he married Atia—remarriage was common in that tumultuous first century BCE.<sup>5</sup> We do know that Atia and her children survived C. Octavius after his death during his return from Macedonia in 58 BCE, after which Atia remarried Philippus in 57 BCE.<sup>6</sup> Other than Octavia Maior's parentage, we also know that she married Sextus Appuleius with whom she had two sons (the Younger Sextus Appuleius and M.

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<sup>2</sup> For other biographies, see Cosi 1983: 255-72; Landy 1975; Fischer 1999; and Garcia 2013. For the most recent biography (to my knowledge), see Moore 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Moore 2017: 8-11 finds 69 BCE a "somewhat problematic" birth date for Octavia because she would have been twenty-seven by the time she had Marcellus (which Moore deems "late"); she also argues that a smaller age gap between herself and her brother would make their close relationship more plausible, but I am not convinced by either of these arguments.

<sup>4</sup> Plutarch confuses the two half-sisters in *Ant.* 31: we will regard this passage in Chapter 1. Tacitus, in *Ann.* 4.44.2 and 12.64.2, similarly confuses the two Antonias, the two daughters of Octavia by Antony. Suetonius, in *Aug.* 4.1, correctly identifies Octavia Maior as a half-sister and recounts Octavius' sudden death after his return from Macedonia (*Aug.* 3).

<sup>5</sup> See Doer 1968: 23-4. On frequent re-marriage in the wake of the civil wars, see Clark 1996: 46-8; Severy 2003: 63; Wheeler-Reed 2017: 8-10. See also Dixon 1992: 77; Treggiari 1993; Hope 2009: 143.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. CIL VI.41023; Suet. *Aug.* 63.2; see Fischer 1999: 67-8. For more on Philippus as the stepfather of the Octavii, see Syme 1939/2002: 128, van Ooteghem 1961, Gray-Fow 1988: 186-8, and Garcia 2013: 24-5.

Appuleius, who became consul in 29 BCE and 20 BCE respectively).<sup>7</sup> In short, we know even less about Octavia's senior half-sister than we do about Octavia's early life.

Of Octavia's early life, we know little. Like any girl of her era and standing, the young Octavia spent her youth under the care and supervision of her mother Atia.<sup>8</sup> Suetonius records that, although Octavia was already the wife of C. Claudius Marcellus, Octavia's great-uncle Caesar still tried to marry her off to Pompey to consolidate the alliance between these two rivals.<sup>9</sup> There seems to have been some resistance (did it come from Octavia's or Pompey's side?); Octavia and Marcellus had been married since at least 54 BCE. Though Octavia did not marry Pompey, Marcellus seemed a viable alternative for forming an alliance between the Pompeians and the Caesareans, since this Marcellus, consul in 50 BCE, was an ally of Pompey and opposed Caesar in his Gallic campaigns.<sup>10</sup> Their marriage resulted in a pair of sisters—the Marcellae—and a son, M. Marcellus, who were all born by the late forties BCE.<sup>11</sup>

Octavia's position grew even more complicated after her great-uncle Caesar was assassinated. In the summer of 43 BCE, Octavian marched on Rome, which forced Octavia and Atia to seek shelter in the Temple of the Vestal Virgins.<sup>12</sup> After the Battle of Philippi in 42 BCE,

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<sup>7</sup> See Singer 1948: 271, deduced from *IGRP 4.323* = *OGIS 2.462* = *ILS 2.2.8783*, an inscription found in Pergamum.

<sup>8</sup> Tac. *Dial.* 28.6 includes Atia in the list of prominent mothers, such as Cornelia and Aurelia, the mothers of the Gracchi and Caesar, who directed their children's education and rearing.

<sup>9</sup> See Suet. *Jul.* 27.1 and Dio 40.59.4 for Caesar's attempted marriage arrangement for Octavia, his sister's granddaughter, and Suet. *Jul.* 29 for Marcellus' consulship. For secondary sources on the initially proposed betrothal to Pompey and the presumed marriage date to Marcellus, see Syme 1989: 143; Bauman 1992: 91-2; Flower 2000: 49. We will revisit this topic in Chapter 1.

<sup>10</sup> See Dio 40.59.4 for Marcellus' consulship. See also Smith 1891 on Plutarch, *Marcellus Claudius* 14 for Marcellus' opposition against Caesar and the latter's pardon of Marcellus; Fischer 1999: 69-74 and Garcia 2013: 24-5.

<sup>11</sup> See Fischer 1999: 74-6 and Moore 2020: 367 for more on the inscriptions (Marcus Claudius Marcellus: *PIR II* (2), 213-15, no. 925. Claudia Marcella Major: *PIR II* (2): 264-5, no. 1102. Claudia Marcella Minor: *PIR II* (2): 265-6, no. 1103). Tansey 2013: 426 n. 8 notes that "the author of the anonymous treatise on the domus Augusta claims that Octavia bore C. Claudius Marcellus (cos. 50) four sons and four daughters – though only one son and two daughters are otherwise attested (Lampros, S.P., 'Ανέκδοτον ἀπόσπασμα συγγραφῆς περὶ τοῦ Καισαρείου γένους', *Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων* 1 [1904], 148)."

<sup>12</sup> See Appian *B. Civ.* 3.92.



in which Octavian and Antony avenged Caesar, the first fissures of the relationship between the triumvirs started to show. In 40 BCE, Octavia's husband Marcellus died suddenly.<sup>13</sup> In part due to the increasing hostility between Octavian and Antony (himself a recent widower), the widowed and simultaneously pregnant Octavia entered a marriage pact with Antony. Her expedited betrothal to Antony was an important part of the Pact of Brundisium,<sup>14</sup> where the triumvirs and their associates convened to redistribute the Roman territories (Antony took the East; Octavian the West; Lepidus Africa; and Sextus Pompey Sardinia and Sicily<sup>15</sup>). This betrothal, motivated as it was to prevent an outbreak of war, was also a first instance of the senate's interference in Octavia's private arrangements. In order to marry Antony, Octavia received permission from the senate to curtail the customary mourning period for the recently deceased Marcellus.<sup>16</sup> In just one year, Octavia passed through the roles of expecting mother, young widow, and new bride.

After the pact of Brundisium, Octavia and Antony (and their respective offspring) settled in the Carinae but resided for long stretches in the East.<sup>17</sup> In the winters of 39/38 and 38/7 BCE at least, Octavia accompanied her husband on his travels around Greece, where they mostly stayed in Athens and welcomed their first daughter, Antonia Maior.<sup>18</sup> Though Antony emerged

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<sup>13</sup> See Plut. *Ant.* 31.3; Vell. Pat. 2.78.1. See also Fischer 1999: 81 n. 341.

<sup>14</sup> The main historiographical accounts include Livy, Plutarch, Appian, and Dio (discussed at length in Chapter 1); the Pact is also believed to have been the subject of Virgil's Fourth *Eclogue*.

<sup>15</sup> See Appian, *B. Civ.* 5.64-6; Dio 48.28; Plut. *Ant.* 30.3-4.

<sup>16</sup> Liv. *per.* 127.6, Vell. Pat. 2.78, Tac. *Ann.* 1.1, Dio 48.31.3-4.

<sup>17</sup> Vell. Pat. *Historia Romana* 2.78.1. For the significance of the Carinae on the Esquiline as an important, yet elusive junction in Rome, according to Ziðłkowski 1996, who calls the neighbourhood "one of the most enigmatic districts of the city of Rome," which was "cited as the laudae Carinae in the famous passage of the *Aeneid* in which Evander, while leading Aeneas to the Pallanteum, shows him around the future city of Rome (8.361)" and was "called a *celeberrima pars urbis* (2.18.4) by Florus."

<sup>18</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 33.3.

as an avid philhellenist,<sup>19</sup> he frequently left to tend to his Eastern campaigns. Meanwhile, Octavian gained more influence in the West.

In the spring of 37, though Antony and Octavian formed an alliance in Tarentum, Octavian broke his promise of sending Antony the troops that he had pledged for Antony's campaign in Parthia. Both parties met eventually in Tarentum, where Octavia demonstrated her diplomatic deftness as she reconciled brother and husband in a process that led to the Treaty of Tarentum.<sup>20</sup> After the triumvirs finally reached an agreement, the two parties parted peacefully: Antony departed for Syria, but sent Octavia and her children to Rome.<sup>21</sup> In spite of their more frequent separations and Antony's continued involvement with Cleopatra (with whom he was already involved in 41 BCE, according to *Ant.* 26.1-3), Antonia Minor was born in 36 BCE.<sup>22</sup>

The following year witnessed another turn for the worse.<sup>23</sup> The move to Rome in 35 BCE coincided with the extraordinary honours that Octavian allowed the senate to bestow on his sister and wife Livia: they both became entitled to public monuments, liberation from tutelage, and sacrosanctity.<sup>24</sup> In 32 BCE, Antony officially divorced Octavia: she and their children were ejected from Antony's house in Rome, and Octavia took on the care of their children (both daughters by Octavia, and also Antony's children by Fulvia, who were already in her care).<sup>25</sup> Octavia lived on as a rare embodiment of the rhetorical trope of the *bona noverca*;<sup>26</sup> we shall

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<sup>19</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 33, 35, 57 and Appian *B.Civ.* 5.8.76. For Antony at Athens, his philhellenism, and its literary and numismatic evidence, see Raubitschek 1946: 146; Syme 1960: 219; Huzar 1985-6: 105; Swain 1990: 152; Kokkinos, Millar, Vartuca 2002: 6; 17; Galinsky 2005: 156; Barrett 2006: 129; Osgood 2006: 240-1; Ager 2013: 148-9; Bielman-Sanchez 2018: 128.

<sup>20</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 35.1-5, Appian *B. Civ.* 5.10.93-5 ; *Dio* 48.54.1-6.

<sup>21</sup> Dio 48.54.5 mentions that Octavia was sent from Corcyra to Rome.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. PIR: *Crinagoras ep. 12 R=Anth. 6.345.*

<sup>23</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 53.25, Dio 49.33.3-4, Appian *B.Civ.* 5.95.

<sup>24</sup> Dio 49.38.1 For interpretations of Octavia and Livia's exceptional honours, see Bartman 1999: 62; Bauman 1992: 93; Kleiner 1996: 28-36; Wood 1999: 32; Barrett 2002: 119, Kunst 2008: 81; Horster and Schuller 2014: 159; Osgood 2014: 75; Cid Lopez 2018: 307; Harlow and Laurence 2019: 169.

<sup>25</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 57.2-3 and Appian *B.Civ.* 5.8.76.

<sup>26</sup> Watson 1995: 197-206 evaluates Octavia's role and reputation as stepmother and questions her exemplarity on account of her and her brother's political motives. See also Martin and Woodman 1989: 204.

consider such examples in Chapter 4. We cannot gauge the extent to which Octavia herself arranged the children's education and marriages; her attention to their care and formation has received considerable attention through the years.<sup>27</sup> Octavian made use of this rift between his sister's and his exemplary Roman values and Antony and Cleopatra as the quintessential Eastern pair: this dichotomy enabled him to frame their conflict as a foreign war (as opposed to the much dreaded but *de facto* civil war).

In 23 BCE, Octavia experienced yet another loss with the premature death of her son Marcellus.<sup>28</sup> Marcellus showed great promise (as we will see in Chapter 3) but died before he could live up to these expectations. His death had considerable consequences for the Augustan dynasty.<sup>29</sup> Marcellus' widow, Julia, Augustus' daughter, re-married Agrippa who was already married to Marcella Maior. Octavia, no longer enjoying the prestige of the heir's mother, became less prominent among the senior members of her brother's dynasty: it was now Livia who rose in status.<sup>30</sup> Livy and Dio record Octavia's death in 11 BCE; Suetonius, rather, places her death in 12-10 BCE.<sup>31</sup> Augustus and Drusus honoured her with a public funeral—another measure of her exceptional status.

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<sup>27</sup> Syme 1986: 347, for instance, makes much of Octavia's "supervision of a whole kindergarten," while Severy 2003: 63 links the rewards for child rearing to the imperial family members' duty to set the right example.

<sup>28</sup> cf. PIR: Anno 731=23; Tac. *Ann.* 1.3.

<sup>29</sup> Fertik 2019: 40 summarises the dynamics of the *domus* in a way that is worth citing in full: "Under the principate, *domus* replaced *familia* as the preferred term for the aristocratic family unit. Augustus emphasized the *domus* rather than the *familia* in order to include relations through his sister Octavia and his daughter Julia in his family group, a valuable asset since he fathered no sons himself. The membership and hierarchy of the *domus* Augusta was always in flux: by arranging marriages and adoptions, or by exiling family members who displeased him, the princeps could assert some control over who was in and who was out."

<sup>30</sup> I follow and amplify both Barrett's and Bauman's claims proposing an equally important role for Octavia, especially in the earlier years. Livia may thus have risen in significance, but Barrett 2002: 28 acknowledges that Octavia was, at least during the thirties BCE, the *de facto* First Lady of the early principate.

<sup>31</sup> Liv. *Per.* 140.3, Suet. *Aug.* 61.2, Dio 54.35.4-5.

## The Material Octavia

While this dissertation focuses on Octavia's textual representations, there is further important evidence for her life and career in the form of coinage, portraiture, and architecture, which I acknowledge below for completeness.<sup>32</sup> Octavia was associated with buildings in Rome and beyond: these include the *Porticus Octaviae* in Rome and a temple dedicated to her in Corinth (possibly the so-called "Temple E"). The *Porticus* demonstrates Octavia's significance as an architectural patron and her physical presence within the cityscape.<sup>33</sup> The *Ara Pacis*, built just a few years after Octavia's death, may not explicitly portray Octavia (or at least not to the modern eye), but the building illustrates relevant propagandistic strategies that Augustus employed: most notably, the appearance of women and children for the first time on a state monument.<sup>34</sup> The sources differ as to whether we can place Octavia in Corinth and Cyrene in the framework of her imperial cult worship in the Eastern part of the empire.<sup>35</sup> Octavia's likeness also appeared in portraits and busts, which Wood 1999: 27-74 diligently surveys,<sup>36</sup> as well as in

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<sup>32</sup> See Moore 2020 for a survey of the material culture that relates to Octavia and her patronage; see also Cupello 2009 for a focus on Octavia's imagery.

<sup>33</sup> The *Porticus* will play a prominent role in Chapter 4.

<sup>34</sup> Notably, Hölscher 2018: 227 interprets Augustus' position and representation on the *Ara Pacis* as an illusion created by the manipulation of the emperor's height and the focalization on three planes (as opposed to the traditional two planes). See also Kleiner 1978: 772-76, Kampen 1991, 218-19, Bartman 1999: 86-92 for the significance for the inclusion of women and children on the *Ara Pacis*, since they would usually not appear on public monuments.

<sup>35</sup> See R.A Fischer 1999 and Bartman 1999: 71 n. 99, who notes that *IGRR* 4.39b indicates that Octavia, along with Augustus and Livia, received honours in Mytilene (the birthplace of Crinagoras, the poet who became associated with Octavia and Antonia Minor).

<sup>36</sup> For Octavia's depiction with this hairstyle and the general trends of her appearance in portraits and on coins, see Erhart 1980: 125-6, de Chaisemartin 1983: 36-7; 47-8, Walbank 1989: 368, Kleiner 1992: 359-6 and 1996: 38, Rose 1997: 121, Hekster 2004: 159; 162-4, Ager 2013: 148-50, Valério 2019: 256-7. Wood 1999: 51-63 complicates Octavia's sculptural portraits because of the ubiquity of the *nodus* coiffure, which was "a very popular fashion that appears on funerary busts of many private individuals. The presence of this fashion is not by itself, therefore, sufficient evidence to associate any sculptural portrait with either Octavia or Livia; some external support, such as the existence of at least several true replicas, or its discover in the context of an imperial family group, is necessary before any such object can be taken as an imperial rather than a private portraits." For this reason, Wood 1999: 52 identifies the bust of Velletri and fragmentary marble head of Smyrna as the "most convincing identifications of Octavia in sculpture." For the similarities between Octavia and Livia, see Bartman 1999: 11, 62, 67, 74, 79-80, 213-

various inscriptions.<sup>37</sup> Lastly, as we will see in Chapter 2, Octavia played a significant role in the numismatic development of women at the junction between Republic and Empire.

## Overview of Scholarship on Octavia

The “real” Octavia Minor remains a mystery. Modern scholars have focused on recurring—at times highly dramatized—life events in Octavia’s representation that are more difficult to verify or evaluate in their validity. Previous studies have attempted to reconstruct her historical character and public persona. Singer 1945 provides a historiographical survey of Octavia alone in her dissertations, whereas Moore 2017’s MA thesis places Octavia’s biography within its socio-political context. Fischer 1999 writes at length about the material evidence that exists on Fulvia and Octavia;<sup>38</sup> Garcia 2013 juxtaposes Cleopatra and Octavia and writes from a more philological point of view but also lingers on historical questions and hypotheses about her life. Alternatively, Octavia appears in monographs on Livia, Cleopatra, or Fulvia, often as a

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5, who includes an appendix of Octavia’s portraits in her study of Livia’s portraits; she mentions both the coins and the portraits such as the Bust of Velletri and notes that Livia’s association with Octavia helped the former rise in reputation. The similarity between Octavia and Livia is often attributed to the so-called Augustan gloss. For an early remark on this phenomenon of artistic idealism, see de Chaisemartin 1983: 46. Kleiner’s definition (2005: 212) of the Augustan gloss goes as follows: “Youth and comeliness were de rigueur for Augustus’ family and all members were depicted as interchangeable.”

<sup>37</sup> See PIR p.480. R.A. Fischer, 1999: 18; 120 thoughtfully lists the inscriptions that feature Octavia ranging from Mytilene to the Mausoleum Augusti (MARCELLVS C.F. / GENER [AVG]VSTI CAESARIS and OCTAVIA / C.F. SOROR AVG[VSTI CAESARIS]).

<sup>38</sup> Fischer 1999 juxtaposes Fulvia and Octavia in what reads as a biographical approach; he looks at strictly historiographical sources, numismatics, and inscriptions. In his analysis of Fulvia, he concludes that the main sources (Appian and Cassius Dio) represent her as “Antithese zur matrona romana” (53) and posits that these negative representations that focus on “Eifersucht” (57) and “Machtbesessenheit” may be a result of anti-Antonian/Fulvian propaganda (60). Fischer 1999: 125-8 observes that Octavia’s representation in historiographical sources is consistently on the opposite side of the spectrum: she is the “Idealbild der Römerin” incarnated. Fischer tracks her appearances in Appian, Plutarch, and Cassius Dio and notes that the “Berücksichtigung” for her ends prematurely.

female figure who offers a comparative foil for the other women in the lives of Octavian/Augustus and M. Antony.<sup>39</sup> On the whole, modern studies mostly present Octavia in relation to Octavian/Augustus and Antony or in contrast with the women such as Fulvia, Cleopatra, and Livia. This dissertation, however, seeks to examine the literary representations of Octavia alone.

Octavia has also been adduced as a totemic example of the experience of Roman women or the Augustan *domus* in monographs such as Treggiari's *Women in the Time of Augustus* (2005); Harder's *Suavissima Soror* (2008); Cid Lopez's *Octavia. La Noble Matrona de la Domus de Augusto* (2016); Rohr Vio's *Le Custodi Del Potere* (2019); and various entries in *Leadership and Initiative in Late Republican and Early Imperial Rome* (2022). While Osgood 2006 focuses on the emotional side of the civil war and its major pawns, he pays more attention to Octavia's specific position in his 2014 book on *Turia*, where, among other things, he sheds light on the changed social atmosphere which resulted in a state funeral for the emperor's sister.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Treggiari's *Servilia and her Family* (2019) compares Servilia's activities and honours to other notable women such as Octavia. Bauman's *Women in Politics in Ancient Rome* (1992: chapters 8 and 9 on women in the triumviral period) attributes a novel status to Octavia: "Although by no means ignored by the sources, [Octavia] has, in general, a much lower profile than Livia, but as far as the 30s are concerned Octavia is the more important figure of the two."<sup>41</sup> Bielman Sanchez 2019: 124; 180 presents Octavia as a vital participant in the "power throuple" that was formed between herself and her brother and husband with high social hopes, but one which disintegrated

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<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Fischer 1999; Barrett 2002; Treggiari 2005; Kunst 2008; and Garcia Vivas 2013. For recent treatments of both Fulvia and Cleopatra, see the monographs by Schultz 2021 and Capponi 2021, respectively.

<sup>40</sup> On Octavia's funeral, see Barrett 2002: 216; Woodhull 2003: 33, Galinsky 2005: 141; Boatwright 2011: 128; Osgood 2014: 128; Hemelrijk 2015: 7.

<sup>41</sup> See Bauman 1992: 98. For more recent remarks on Octavia's influence, see Harlow and Laurence 2019: 169.

nonetheless. In short, the dearth of evidence and sources is one element that prevents us from treating Octavia as a clearly or well-defined historical figure.

## Framework

In order to study the representations of Octavia, I will employ the framework that Ginsburg 2006 used for her study of Agrippina the Younger. Gruen 2006: 5-8, in the book's introduction, explains how Ginsburg "refrains from historical reconstructions that have occupied researchers for most decades." While I do not focus as much on visual material as Ginsburg does with the multiple Agrippina "portraits," I similarly look at the literary sources themselves and the representations of Octavia that arise from them. Like Ginsburg, I will not be looking for any "historical truth;" instead, I will acknowledge certain traditions of dubious historical validity and proceed from the literature. One such instance is Octavia's swoon when she heard Virgil eulogizing Marcellus at the end of *Aeneid* 6. What matters for my purposes is not whether she did faint or not, but the fact that she is remembered as such. Like Ginsburg, I intend to complicate the stereotypes by looking instead for literary significance and symbolism in the available narratives.

Since we cannot engage with Octavia's own testimony—a point dealt with in Richlin's *Arguments with Silence* (2014)—readings of literary and material representation will be vital for this dissertation. Gruen 1990: 395, 415-6 makes a point about Augustan ideology that will be helpful to this dissertation's framework: "But the difference between rhetoric and reality is a

central feature of the Augustan years, and of Augustan imperial policy.”<sup>42</sup> Augustus’ own self-fashioning is equally relevant for Octavia’s sisterhood and its significance.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to these approaches, I combine the existing lenses of a) Roman gender studies and family/sibling studies in general and b) scholarship on Augustan ideology. It is in this framework that I will locate the literary representation of Octavia as a late republican sister, wife, and mother. The last two decades of the twentieth century saw a rise in attention to the Roman family and household, as seen in, for instance, Gardner and Wiedemann 1991, Saller and Weaver 1992, and Dixon 1992, the latter of whom provides a seminal study of the Roman Family.<sup>44</sup> In general, divorce and remarriage rates rise in the late Republic.<sup>45</sup> Frequent divorce and remarriage were commonly used as a means of forging political alliances in the triumviral period; and so, too, does remarriage play a large role in the middle part of Octavia’s life and its representations. First century BCE divorce was an easy and expediently fulfilled request.

The fragility of marriage and the frequency of divorce meant that sisters and brothers played important parts in each other’s lives; Treggiari 1993 as well as Dixon 1992: 77 interpret the fact that spouses seemed easily replaced as a sign that marital bonds were not as strong as sibling bonds.<sup>46</sup> In addition, Roman families appeared keen to foster children, stepchildren, and other dependents and to allow a heightened flexibility of the family institution.<sup>47</sup> This socio-cultural phenomenon, too, will become relevant for representations of Octavia’s.

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<sup>42</sup> For Augustus’ influence on his successors, see Sumi 2009: 167.

<sup>43</sup> Zanker’s 1987 work on the power of Augustan images, too, will be useful for this dissertation’s framework.

<sup>44</sup> Saller and Weaver 1999: 2 use “structure and sentiment” as a framework for the study of the *domus*, which they prioritise for the fashioning of the Roman identity.

<sup>45</sup> See Dixon 1992: 32-4.

<sup>46</sup> Treggiari 1993 notes that “literature of consolation for the death of a child or sibling” for their parents and siblings was more common whereas “similar lists for brave widows and widowers are lacking.”

<sup>47</sup> See Dixon 1992: 162.



Syme's *Augustan Aristocracy* (1989) is an indispensable study of how the Julio-Claudians appropriated their family members for dynastic and socio-political purposes. The chapters on the Two Nieces of Augustus and Nero's Aunts have especially informed my understanding of the intricate web of kinship ties that the Augustan women were required to negotiate. Scholars have studied the position of the family in the Augustan era from a variety of perspectives. Grubbs 2002 considers Augustus' imperial ideology from a purely legislative standpoint and examines the *lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* and the *lex Iulia de adulteriis* of 18 BCE and the *lex Papia Poppaea* of 9CE.<sup>48</sup> Severy 2003 offers an important reading of the influence of the family in the transition from republic to empire and oligarchy to monarchy. Milnor's 2005 study of gender and domesticity in the Augustan era is naturally indispensable for the framework of this dissertation. I will apply not only her methodology of the "study of representation rather than reality" but also her judiciously chosen scope of this aspect of gender in an age so characterised by transition (2005: 31, 40-3).

## Chapter Overview

Over the course of four chapters and an epilogue, I will trace the different lives and afterlives of Octavia. The chapters are ordered based on the chronological timeline of Octavia's life, and they will lengthen gradually in form and content. In Chapter 1, we will see how late Republican customs of marriage and female alliances influence Octavia's life and its

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<sup>48</sup> For other acute and stimulating observations on the intersection between gender and Augustan legislation, see Milnor 2007: 15, 23; Wheeler-Reed 2017; Caldwell 2015; and Severy 2003.

representations. We will also monitor the influence that Octavian had on his sister, and vice versa. At the end of this chapter, close attention will be given to how different authors represent Octavia, her widowhood, and her betrothal at the Treaty of Brundisium. In Chapter 2, we start with Brundisium's aftermath and trace Octavia's travels through Greece and the Hellenistic influences in representations of her. This chapter concludes with how she is presented in treatments of the Treaty of Tarentum, where she grows into her role either as mediator or political pawn, according to the respective sources. Chapter 3 begins with the honours of 35 BCE that both Octavia and Livia receive. Thereafter, I argue for Plutarch's Octavia as the subject of a mini-parallel life as Cleopatra's foil. After her divorce with Antony, the literary Octavia seems to negotiate the boundaries between the public and private sphere habitually: we will trace this phenomenon in depictions of Augustus' victorious return, Octavia's mourning of Marcellus, and, ultimately, in her own state funeral. In Chapter 4, we will monitor the different ways in which Octavia's continuing influence is felt and expressed through the different areas in her life. Octavia both shares and transmits the Augustan blood line and becomes an ancestor with whom her descendants readily claim an association. She provides for the education not just of her and Antony's children, but also of his children by Fulvia and Cleopatra, for whom she arranged marriage pacts. Octavia had connections with prominent figures across the empire (for instance in Tarsus, where she championed tutors) and embarked on other intellectual pursuits such as her patronage for Vitruvius' project on war artillery. Her presence was also felt in the concrete Roman landscape, on the monumental scale with the Porticus Octaviae (and Marcellus' library and adjacent theatre). Towards the end of this dissertation, we shall return to Sarah Fielding, the starting point of this introduction. The epilogue recognizes the historical Octavia as a point of intertextual reference in the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia* and explores the possibilities of future

work on renaissance reception of Octavia. But the main task at hand is the following: tracing how the ancient sources may have shaped Sarah Fielding's perception of "the accomplished Character of Octavia."

# Chapter 1: The Literary Octavia in Rome: Moving towards the

## Middle

### Introduction

Plutarch, however fond of the literary Octavia he may have been, tells us that our Octavia was Octavian's half-sister. When he first introduces Octavia in the *Life of Antony* (*Ant.* 31.1), he conflates Octavia Minor and her own half-sister Octavia Maior.<sup>49</sup> Recent scholarship, on the other hand, agrees that Octavia was a “whole” sister of Octavian.<sup>50</sup> Plutarch's confusion may come as a surprise—might we not expect more caution from Plutarch when he was writing about a woman who seemed to interest him and even received much praise from him? Of all our sources, Plutarch grants the most attention and significance to Octavia, so why is just he the one author to confuse the two half-sisters? Regardless of whether Plutarch thought that this Octavia was Octavian's whole sister, he claims that Octavian loved her tremendously: ἔστεργε δ' ὑπερφυῶς τὴν ἀδελφὴν, χρῆμα θαυμαστόν, ὡς λέγεται, γυναικὸς γενομένην (but he was *exceedingly* fond of his sister, who was a wonder of a woman, as they say).

Plutarch's ὑπερφυῶς suggests that Octavian must have been extraordinarily, almost *strangely* fond of Octavia. Since Plutarch believed that they were not in fact full siblings, it makes sense that he uses this adverb. Yet, in combination with ἔστεργε, this use merits additional attention. Elsewhere, Plutarch uses ἔστεργε to describe affection between siblings, though he later repeats this same verb when describing Octavia's relationship to her husband (στερχθεῖσαν in *Ant.* 31.2-4). Octavia's introduction ends with another peculiarity when we once again look at

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<sup>49</sup> Ὀκταουία γὰρ ἦν ἀδελφὴ πρεσβυτέρα μὲν, οὐχ ὁμομητρία δὲ Καίσαρι· ἐγγόνει γὰρ ἐξ Ἀγχαρίας, ὁ δὲ ὕστερον ἐξ Ἀτίας. “For Octavia was Caesar's elder sister, but she was not born from the same mother. For she was born from Ancharia, and Caesar from Atia instead.”

<sup>50</sup> Singer 1944 provides a solid examination of the confusion between the Octavias. See also Fischer 1999 and Harders 2008: 274.

ὑπερφυῶς (*Ant.* 31.1); right afterwards, Plutarch describes her as χρῆμα θαυμαστόν ... γυναικὸς. From the very start, he seems to have found much dramatic potential in Octavia as a character and symbol: he employed Octavia's character as a foil for Cleopatra, who embodied all the wiles and vices that Octavia so emphatically rejected.<sup>51</sup> Of course, the key male figures of this dissertation's period (roughly the fifties until the twenties BCE)—Octavian and Antony—were depicted as anomalous and idiosyncratic (to say the least), so dramatizing the contrast between Octavia and Cleopatra is not necessarily out of place.

Indeed, Plutarch offers the most intimate—but also the most diverging—insight into Octavia's reputation and life at the early imperial court between Octavian and Antony. At the same time, the biographer's agenda in representing Octavia as such may have influenced much of what we now regard as true about the characters in *The Life of Antony*. Although an assessment of the sources and methods that Plutarch may have used is of important utility, we may benefit more from looking at Plutarch's methods of treating his material in order to achieve his own desired character representation.<sup>52</sup> To make this point, Pelling 1980: 127, 139 is especially helpful, as he considers Plutarch's "literary devices in order to streamline his material" so as to navigate its "unevenness and irregularities."<sup>53</sup> The impact of Plutarch's imagination may at times indeed surpass the sources in function of the narrative and the message that it seeks to convey. Critics have identified Plutarch's interest in virtue, moral instruction, and *paideia* within the *Lives* in general.<sup>54</sup> Essential for our purposes will be the crossing of genres in Plutarch's

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<sup>51</sup> I treat this discussion in Chapter 3.

<sup>52</sup> For Plutarch's presumed historiographical sources, see Smith 1940: 6, 10 and Pelling 1979: 74-6. For Plutarch's use of (predominantly Greek) poetry, see De Wet 1988: 15-20. Moles 1992: 245-7 deals specifically with Plutarch's possible use of epistolary sources (even originating from Antony) for *Ant.* 31.3, whereas Plutarch has been believed to refrain from this practice in general.

<sup>53</sup> See Pelling 1980: 127, 130, 134-8.

<sup>54</sup> For Plutarch's trope of education, see Duff 2008, Fulkerson 2012. See Harrison 1987: 273 for Plutarch's use of rhetoric. For Plutarch's treatment of Ἀνδρεία for his Roman characters and particularly Antony, see Asirvatham 2019: 160-1.

account on Antony's *Life*: scholars starting from de Lacy 1952 and Griffin 1985 have identified tragic and elegiac elements in the *Lives*, and Swain 1992 has viewed the *Life of Antony* specifically through the lens of a "love story," inspired by the interplay between the ancient novel and pantomime.<sup>55</sup> Plutarch is not only a fitting illustration of how one should proceed with vigilance when dealing with these biographical sources. Viewing Plutarch in this way also demonstrates how, long before any of the modern treatments that we will now consider, Octavia's very existence had gone through various filters, often so as to fit various authors' narrational plans. Even though we do not fully know Plutarch's sources for his literary Octavia, her significance is unlikely to have been merely accidental. There must have been something that prompted Plutarch to use Octavia as a rhetorical instrument in his narrative. But what *was* it about Octavia? How did the sources treat the progression through her life and beyond?

In this first chapter, I situate the literary Octavia during the period that leads up to (and includes) her marriage agreement with Antony at the Treaty of Brundisium. On first glance, we get the sense that the beginning of the life of Octavia—the real or the literary—is of little interest. It follows that the literary Octavia was not thought to have deviated from traditional Late Republican women in her situation. As often in the lives of Roman Republican women at the time, Octavia did not seem relevant until she came of marrying and reproducing age.

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<sup>55</sup> Swain 1992: 76, 81 joins Pelling in his argument for the "theatrical imagery" in Plutarch's tale but also adds the influences of the Greek novel of the Second Sophistic as well as pantomime. Gibson 2007: 57 describes parallels between Plutarch's *Antony* and Propertius' elegiac persona.

## 1.1 Octavia's Betrothal(s) and Marriage to Marcellus

Suetonius reminds us that Late Republican marriage arrangements and associations could be fleeting: so, too, for Octavia—though she was already married to C. Claudius Marcellus, her great-uncle Caesar still tried to arrange a betrothal between Octavia and Pompey.<sup>56</sup> Octavia and Marcellus had three children together: a pair of sisters—Marcella Maior and Minor—and a son, M. Marcellus, who were all born by the late forties BCE.<sup>57</sup>

## 1.2 Octavia and Tanusia at the Proscriptions; Octavia, Julia, Fulvia with Hortensia

As it turns out, Octavia is also represented in alliances with other women. Indeed, during Octavian's march on Rome in the Summer of 43 BCE, Octavia and Atia were not to be found. In *B. Civ.* 3.13.91, Appian claims that, since no one of the Caesarians would yield them over,

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<sup>56</sup> See Suet. *Iul.* 27.1: *ad retinendam autem Pompei necessitudinem ac uoluntatem Octauiam sororis suae neptem, quae Gaius Marcello nupta erat, condicionem ei detulit sibi que filiam eius in matrimonium petit Fausto Sullae destinatam*. This Marcellus is not to be confused with the Marcellus of Cicero's *Pro Marcello* who died in 45 BCE. He and Octavia had been married since at least since 54; Marcellus was consul in 50 BCE. See Suet. *Iul.* 29 for Marcellus' consulship. For scholarship on the initially proposed betrothal to Pompey and the presumed marriage date to Marcellus, see Syme 1989: 143; Bauman 1992: 91-2; Flower 2000: 49. Through the course of the Roman republic, such marriage pacts occurred frequently to keep the peace between certain statesmen. For triumphal marriages and the importance of *adffinitas*, see Harders 2008: 275-8 and 2010: 33-4 and 47; Treggiari 2019: 270; and Cornwell 2020: 165-8.

<sup>57</sup> See Kienast 1990: 70 for Marcellus, his presumed birthdate (42 BCE), and relevant inscriptions (such as PIR<sup>2</sup> C 925 and PIR<sup>2</sup> O 66).

Octavian's kinswomen must have been hidden.<sup>58</sup> After Octavian returned to the city, it appeared that they had been hiding in the Temple of the Vestal Virgins.<sup>59</sup>

In this section, we consider two instances in which Octavia returns a similar favour:

Tanusia enlists Octavia to persuade her brother to clear her proscribed husband's name; Octavia sides with Antony's mother against Fulvia when one thousand four hundred affluent women are taxed for war levies, which instigates these women's discontent and Hortensia's unusual speech.<sup>60</sup> In our first example, Dio recounts an event later in November or December 43 BCE in which Octavia emerges as an ally to Tanusia, whose husband was proscribed:<sup>61</sup>

τεκμήριον δέ, Τανουσία γυνή ἐπιφανής τὸν ἄνδρα Τίτον Οὐίνιον ἐπικηρυχθέντα τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἐς κιβωτὸν παρὰ ἀπελευθέρῳ τινὶ Φιλοποίμενι κατέκρυψεν, ὥστε καὶ πίστιν τοῦ τεθνηκέναι αὐτὸν παρασχεῖν· μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο δημοτελῆ ἑορτήν, ἣν συγγενῆς τις αὐτῆς ποιήσειν ἔμελλε, τηρήσασα, τὸν τε Καίσαρα διὰ τῆς Ὀκταουίας τῆς ἀδελφῆς ἐς τὸ θέατρον. μόνον τῶν τριῶν ἐσελθεῖν διεπράξατο, κἀνταῦθα ἐσπηδήσασα τό τε πραχθὲν ἀγνοοῦντί οἱ ἐμήνυσε, καὶ τὴν κιβωτὸν αὐτὴν ἐσκομίσασα ἐκεῖθεν τὸν ἄνδρα ἐξήγαγεν, ὥστε τὸν Καίσαρα θαυμάσαντα πάντας μὲν αὐτοὺς ἀφείναι ἔκαι γὰρ τοῖς συγκρύψασί τινα θάνατος προεῖρητό, τὸν δὲ Φιλοποίμενα καὶ ἐς τὴν ἰπάδα κατατάξαι. (Dio 47.7.4-5)

As proof, there was Tanusia, a distinguished woman. At first, she **hid** her proscribed husband Titus Vinius in a chest at the house of a certain Philopoemen, a freedman, to provide evidence that he had died. After this, observing a public festival, which a relative of hers was going to organise, she brought it about—**through Octavia, Octavian's sister**—that Octavian would enter the theatre alone of the triumvirs. Then, she rushed to him and disclosed her deed to him, of which he was unaware, and brought in the chest herself, from which she brought out her husband, so that Caesar, astonished, discharged

<sup>58</sup> τὴν δὲ μητέρα Καίσαρος καὶ τὴν ἀδελφὴν οὔτε φανερώς οὔτε λάθρα ζητοῦντες εὔρισκον. ἐθορυβοῦντο οὖν αὐθις ὁμήρων μεγάλων ἀφηρημένοι· καὶ τῶν Καισαριανῶν οὔπω σφίσις ἐπικλωμένων, ὑπὸ ἐκείνων αὐτὰς ὧδε ἀκριβῶς ἐνόμιζον ἐπικρ-ύπτεσθαι. "But they were unable to find Octavian's mother and sister, even though they looked for them openly and in secret. So they were disturbed at again being deprived of important hostages. As the Caesarians were no longer cooperating with them, they believed that it was by them that the women were being hidden so carefully."; App. *B. Civ.* 3.376 in McGing 2020: 172-3.

<sup>59</sup> ἡ δὲ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀδελφὴ ἐν τῷ τῆς Ἑστίας ἱερῷ μετὰ τῶν ἱερῶν παρθένων ἡσπάζαντο. "His mother and sister embraced him in the temple of Vesta in the company of the Vestal virgins." (Appian *B. Civ.* 3.380 in McGing 2020: 174-5). See Treggiari 2019: 267 and García Vivas 2013: 28-9 n. 14; 34-8 n. 20.

<sup>60</sup> Rohr Vio: 2019: 153-4 includes Tanusia in her chapter "Mediare e Costruire Intese per i Familiari"; Webb 2022: 172 focuses on notable female interventions in Late Republican Rome.

<sup>61</sup> For how Vinius managed to hide in a chest thanks to his freedman Philemon, see App. *B. Civ.* 4.44; note that Appian does not mention Tanusia's presence at all (or Philopoemen's promotion to the equestrian order, for that matter), cf. Gowing 1992: 257. See also Suet. *Aug.* 27.2 and Wardle 2014: 208 for the confusion of the names Philopoemen and Philemon.



them all—death was also deemed a suitable punishment for those who helped concealing anyone—and he even appointed Philopoemen to the order of knighthood.<sup>62</sup>

First, Dio's Tanusia is a woman with a plan; Appian's account does not mention Tanusia's involvement in any such rescue plot.<sup>63</sup> For this reason, it is worth citing Treggiari 2019: 267: "this dramatic incident cannot be historical, but it is interesting that Dio thought it plausible that a wife might go to a triumvir's sister for help and that the sister might be in a position, either by speeding up her brother's entry or by delaying that of [Antony] and of Lepidus, to set the scene." Although the history of Tanusia's intervention seems doubtful (it is only mentioned in Dio's version of the incident), what matters is how she is *represented*: she takes the initiative, and she puts her plan into action.

Octavia's supposed role in Tanusia's stratagem is remarkable: enlisting Octavia for such a perilous venture presupposes considerable trust in Octavia's discretion and judgement on Tanusia's part. At this point, Appian's account of Octavia's hiding in the Temple of the Vestal Virgins in his Third Book comes to mind. Here, of course, the situation is different: in Dio, Tanusia hides her proscribed husband, whereas Octavia and her mother were the ones hiding when Octavian was marching on Rome. Still, one might see how Octavia could have empathised with Tanusia's situation. Perhaps Octavia had a reputation for being merciful (an early inspiration for Augustus' later appropriation of *clementia*?) and for being able to influence her brother. Tanusia regards Octavia as the key to her plan to free her husband: Tanusia had hopes that she could approach Octavia to help persuade at least one triumvir. This passage

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<sup>62</sup> Translations are my own, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>63</sup> See Gowing 1992: 256-8 on Appian's take on the proscriptions: "what distinguishes Appian from other sources is that he focuses more on the victims of the proscriptions than on the proscribers... Appian is less interested in the political motivations or consequences of events than in their social implications." Gowing 1992: 257-8 reminds us that Appian repeats this story with variations that do not include Tanusia or Octavia; Gowing also notes that Dio and Suetonius do not mention Tanusia either. For more accounts on Tanusia's rescue intervention, see Hallett 1984: 171 and Treggiari 2019: 267.

demonstrates Octavia's influence over her brother (and his colleagues) at an early stage.<sup>64</sup> The stratagem succeeded. Octavian acted even more mercifully than Tanusia had requested: not only did he pardon her husband Vinus, but he also elevated the other accomplice to the equestrian order. It turns out that Octavia's support was enough to spare lives despite Tanusia's illegal practices.

Octavia emerges in another such instance of female collaboration and solidarity in Appian's Fourth Book of the *Civil Wars*.<sup>65</sup> Octavia and Antony's mother form one front when Hortensia and her fellow financially wronged women successfully beseech Octavian's sister and Antony's mother, whereas Fulvia is characteristically less pliant.<sup>66</sup> In Appian, we read about the discontent of one thousand four hundred of the wealthiest women when the triumvirs demand that these women surrender a portion of their property to fund the war.<sup>67</sup> In response, these women resolved to enlist the women of the triumvirs for help. Again, Octavia and, in this case, Antony's mother seemed receptive of the women's pleas, in stark contrast with Fulvia's so-called ὕβρις. This disagreement prompted the speech of Hortensia, who represented her fellow women at the tribunal in her address to the triumvirs.<sup>68</sup> Though the triumvirs were reportedly

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<sup>64</sup> See also Garcia Vivas 2013: 38 n. 20; Fromentin and Bertrand 2008: 66-7; Welch 2019: 456-7.

<sup>65</sup> Notable treatments of Hortensia and the tax situation in Appian include Hallett 1984: 233-4; Fischer 1999: 39; Osgood 2006a: 84; Welch 2015: 311-2; Steel 2020: 201 but especially Osgood 2006b: 540-2.

<sup>66</sup> Later Appian considers Antony's view on motherhood and sisterhood: upon discovering that his mother gave shelter to her brother Lucius, he reproaches her for being an "unreasonable" mother yet conceded that she acted as a good sister: ὁ δὲ αὐτὴν ἐπιμεμπάμενος ὡς ἀδελφὴν μὲν ἀγαθὴν, μητέρα δὲ οὐκ εὐγνώμονα; *B. Civ.* 4.158 in McGing 2020: 252-3).

<sup>67</sup> Καὶ τοῦτο ἐς τὸν δῆμον εἰπόντες προύγραφον χιλίας καὶ τετρακοσίας γυναῖκας, αἱ μάλιστα πλοῦτω διέφερον· καὶ αὐτὰς ἔδει, τὰ ὄντα τιμωμένας, ἐσφέρειν ἐς τὰς τοῦ πολέμου χρείας, ὅσον ἐκάστην οἱ τρεῖς δοκιμάσειαν. ... τῆς μὲν δὴ **Καίσαρος ἀδελφῆς** οὐκ ἀπετύγχανον, οὐδὲ τῆς μητρὸς Ἀντωνίου· Φουλβίας δέ, τῆς γυναικὸς Ἀντωνίου, τῶν θυρῶν ἀπωθούμεναι χαλεπῶς τὴν ὕβριν ἤνεγκαν. "They told the people of this and published a list of one thousand four hundred women who were particularly conspicuous for their wealth. These were required to have their property assessed and contribute to the expenses of the war the sum approved by the triumvirs for each individual. ... The women decided to make an appeal to the female relatives of the triumvirs and were successful with **Octavian's sister** and Antony's mother. When turned away, however, from the doors of Fulvia, Antony's wife, they were offended by her insulting behaviour"; *App. B. Civ.* 4.137-6 in McGing 2020: 242-3.

<sup>68</sup> Welch 2015: 311-2 notes how this passage is an "inversion of Roman society and politics," especially because of the "emphasis on the silence of the men."

appalled by such insolence—for women to disobey and to gather a public meeting to voice their discontent!—and though they attempted to drive the women away, they ultimately decided to reconsider the issue and reduce the number of taxed women to four hundred.

In short, already towards the end of the decade, Octavia seems to have had a reputation for clemency and empathy. In these two instances, the women who do not see another solution for their problems (whether they be a proscribed husband or war taxes) decide to solicit relief from Octavia and/or her associates. In both instances—though to varying degrees—Octavia saves the day. In contrast to the allegedly intractable Fulvia (whom Octavia just years later would succeed as Antony’s wife), she appears as a benefactor for these women because of her position as a persuasive triumviral sister.

### 1.3 Octavia’s Widowhood and its Aftermath

Yet Octavia herself, too, had her share of hardship. In 40 BCE she lost her husband Marcellus, after a fruitful ten-years union that brought forth two daughters and a son.<sup>69</sup> Because of Marcellus’ early death in this tumultuous era, she did not live up to the ideal of remaining an *univira*—“a woman who had had only one husband throughout her life—or married only once”—though the existence of this specific term suggests that being an *univira* was not in fact the norm at Rome.<sup>70</sup> Eventual remarriage was common and expected, since spouses necessarily

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<sup>69</sup> Although the anonymous *Περὶ τοῦ Καισαρείου γένους* recorded eight children in total (Lampros 1904: 148); see above.

<sup>70</sup> See Wheeler-Reed 2017: 11; Kokkinos 2002: 164 notes that Octavia’s daughter, Antonia Augusta, was able to retain her status as *univira*.

came to be deemed replaceable during the civil war period.<sup>71</sup> Still, per senatorial decree, a certain hiatus between marriages was to be observed. Becoming a widow proved to be a pivotal moment in Octavia's life: her early widowhood resulted in a series of extraordinary—and in some cases unprecedented—consequences, starting with the Treaty of Brundisium in 40 BCE.

#### 1.4 Octavia at Brundisium

Let us now turn our gaze to Brundisium, the port city on the Adriatic, to which all roads seemed to lead in 40 BCE (even for Horace in *Sat.* 1.5.104: *Brundisium longae finis chartaeque viaeque est*).<sup>72</sup> The stakes were high. From the aftermath of the Battle of Philippi until the Treaty of Brundisium, the “ranking” of the triumvirs seemed as follows: Antony came in first place without a doubt, followed by the young Caesar, with a neglected Lepidus closing the list.<sup>73</sup> As Antony and Ahenobarbus became more powerful in the Adriatic, Antony and Octavian grew increasingly hostile to one another. As a result, in 40 BCE, an altercation at Brundisium took place: Octavian's army denied entry to Antony, who besieged Brundisium in turn.

Peace negotiations were the most desirable solution for either party after this stalemate. The most prominent players agreed to distribute the different regions of the empire amongst themselves. Scodra on the Adriatic became the general demarcation between the empire's parts. Antony obtained the East; Octavian the West; Lepidus Africa; and Sextus Pompey—still in the picture, but of even less weight than Lepidus—Sardinia and Sicily.<sup>74</sup> Because of this partition of

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<sup>71</sup> See Dixon 1992:77; Treggiari 1993; Hope 2009: 143.

<sup>72</sup> For thorough treatments of Brundisium, see Gowing 1992: 185-191, Lange 2009: 29 (and n. 46)-49 and 2020: 132-47 (though I am not quite certain why he regards the pact as “almost forgotten” since the scholarship on Brundisium suggests otherwise.)

<sup>73</sup> Huzar 1978: 137-9; Richardson 2012: 51-3.

<sup>74</sup> See Appian, *B. Civ.* 5.64-6; Dio 48.28; Plut. *Ant.* 30.3-4.

the territories, Octavian gained on Antony in influence and rank. The coinage that both triumvirs commissioned around this pact reflects their power negotiations; both Octavian and Antony strove for the top position by means of numismatic propaganda.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to these political changes in 40 BCE, the two triumvirs faced their own personal tragedies: Antony lost his second wife, Fulvia, while Octavian's brother-in-law Marcellus perished in the same year.<sup>76</sup> This is where Octavia comes in: her betrothal to Antony placed her right between her brother and new husband, creating a buffer between the two vying triumvirs. Lange 2009: 29 views the marriage between Octavia and Antony as “the cornerstone in the relationship between the triumvirs to come” since “the agreement [of Brundisium] was cemented” by this marriage. Though there remains some confusion whether the wedding took place during or after the peace treaty itself, it appears that the marriage served as an extra means to strengthen the triumvirs' bond. In short, Octavia's presence at the Treaty of Brundisium was notable.<sup>77</sup> I agree but divert from this prior consensus and argue that the Treaty of Brundisium manifests how the private and “professional” boundaries of the literary Octavia become blurred. I will demonstrate Octavia's shifting representations by using six extant sources on the Treaty of Brundisium, which range from poetry to historiography.

#### 1.4.1 Virgil's Brundisium

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<sup>75</sup> We will dive deeper into Octavia's presence on coins in Chapter 2.

<sup>76</sup> For more on Octavia's loss and Fulvia's death, see Singer 1947: 173, Notes 2-3. See also Berkowitz 1972: 24-5, n. 18 and 29; Huzar 1978: 137-9; Richardson 2012: 51.

<sup>77</sup> Bengston 1977: 20 notes the importance of the marriage at Brundisium; he calls it “eine Verbindung von eminent politischer Bedeutung” and „das Unterpfand des Paktes von Brundisium ... durch die Vermittlung des Asinius Pollio und des Maecenas.” See also Lange 2009: 29. See Mountford 2019: 47-8 for Maecenas' presence at Brundisium.

Before we turn to the explicit sources of Octavia's presence at Brundisium and its aftermath, we start with a more suggestive example: Virgil's possible treatment of the Treaty of Brundisium and the mystery child's identity in *Eclogue* 4. A 1907 collection of three essays on the Fourth *Eclogue* catalysed a significant output of articles that investigate the *parvus puer's* identity.<sup>78</sup> Garrod 1908: 150 believes himself the first to propose that Octavia and Antony would make good candidates for the role of (step-)parents to the future child, though Marcellus would technically have been the biological father in this scenario.<sup>79</sup> Slater 1912: 114-5 concurs and applies a reading of *Catullus* 64 to Octavia and Antony: in his interpretation, Octavia becomes a second Thetis who is to conceive a new Achilles. If we accept these readings of the *Eclogue* and its connection to Brundisium, it is Octavia and Antony's *nova progenies* (*Ecl.* 4.7), on whom so much hope depended.<sup>80</sup> The poem's dedication to Pollio, his consular role at the Brundisium, and the prophecy of his consulship as the start of a new Golden Age serve as the main arguments for this reading.<sup>81</sup> Even so, a century later, *Eclogue* 4 continues to mystify.<sup>82</sup> The final lines (*Ecl.* 60-4) evoke Octavia's presence as the mother of the highly expected child:

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<sup>78</sup> Conway 1907: 14; 22 discusses the "Messianic Idea" and stresses the presence of Pollio, the consul of 40 BCE. Fowler 1907: 52-3; 82 elaborates on the identity of the child and reinforces the importance of Pollio and Brundisium in the context of the *Eclogue*. Mayor 1907: 87-137 confirms upfront that the Brundisium link has been accepted (and places both Pollio's son and Octavia's Marcellus among the contenders) but elaborates on the sources ranging from the Sibylline Verses to the Jewish Old Testament. Kerlin 1908: 449-51 reports on the disagreement between Fowler and Ramsay 1907 regarding the "child motive," and instead suggests that the child is Augustus and Scribonia's. Both Coleman 1977: 16, 154 and Clausen 1994: xxii date the composition of this *Eclogue* sometime between 40 BCE (precisely because of the allusion to Pollio's consulship) and 38 BCE. For recent treatments of *Ecl.* 4 and its relation to Brundisium, see Cucchiarelli 2015: 102-5; 237-79 and Lange 2009: 39-41; 46.

<sup>79</sup> Garrod 1908: 150 links Octavia's unusual succession of roles (pregnant widow to bride) to the peculiar wording in the poem: "Octavia was at this time pregnant by her former husband Marcellus. The child subsequently born would, I imagine, unless definitely repudiated, be in law a child of Antony. But he would belong more really to the family of Augustus. [re: line 49] *suboles, magnum Iouis incrementum*... Now, the peculiar thing about the parentage of Castor and Pollux is that they were, *logo men*, children of Tyndareus, *ergo de*, children of Jupiter. Just similarly Octavia's child would be, *logo men*, the child of Antony, *ergo de* the child of someone else. This perhaps explains Virgil's adoption of the strange word *incrementum*."

<sup>80</sup> See Morwood 2008: 11 and Clausen 1994.

<sup>81</sup> See especially Berkowitz 1972. For the dedication in question, see *Eclogue* 4.10-1: *Teque adeo decus hoc aeui, te consule, inibit / Pollio*...

<sup>82</sup> Carus 1918 and Coleman 1977: 134 champion the son of Pollio as the mystery child because of the explicit allusion to Pollio in *Ecl.* 4.12. Coleman 1977: 150-4 dedicates some time to the "endless debate" on the

Incipe, parve puer, risu cognoscere **matrem**;  
(**matri** longa decem tulerunt fastidia menses).  
incipe, parve puer. qui non risere **parenti**,  
nec deus hunc mensa dea nec dignata cubili est.

Begin, little child, to recognise your mother with a smile;  
Ten months bore long qualms for your mother.  
Begin, little child. Those who have not smiled at their parent,  
no god has honoured him with his table nor any goddess with her bed.

Here, the poet encourages the child to smile to show that he recognizes his mother and muses on honours that the child may receive when he grows up.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps the smile may also allude to Venus, whose imagery we encounter frequently in sources on the *Porticus Octaviae*—yet this suggestion may be a bit of a stretch.<sup>84</sup> In order to tie the poem’s other links to Octavia together, let us look at possible presences of the principal triumvirs in this *Eclogue*. Octavian’s and Antony’s respective divinities announce their presence in the poem. Apollo is prominent throughout the *Eclogue*: after the poetic voice alludes to the god and his rule in *Ecl.* 4.5 (*magnus ... saeculorum ordo*, see Coleman 1977: 130-1 and Cucchiarelli 2015: 247-8), Apollo appears explicitly in *Ecl.* 4.10 (*regnat Apollo*) and *Ecl.* 4.57 (*lino formosus Apollo*). It is no secret that Octavian started to align himself with Apollo: a theme that will re-appear repeatedly throughout

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“identification of the Child.” He lists one of Pollio’s sons as a plausible candidate as well as Augustus himself or a child of his first wife Scribonia or Jesus Christ. Although Coleman suggests that a child of Antony by Cleopatra could be a possibility, he is quick to disregard this hypothesis; such a prophecy would have had problematic implications (Cleopatra’s offspring to rule Rome). The following two suggestions in Coleman’s commentary both relate to Octavia as the mother of the child, either by Marcellus or Antony.

<sup>83</sup> See Coleman 1977: 148-50 and the nuanced interpretation by Courtney 2010: 37-8: “So Vergil, still projecting himself into the future (the near future here), imagines that the ten months of pregnancy have come to an end and the baby has just been born. Normal babies, according to ancient belief, did not recognize their mother or smile until they were forty days old ... But this child, as was recorded of some other outstanding individuals, is exhorted to recognize his mother ... at once, as the context clearly implies; for those who do not do so never achieve in apotheosis the things which characterize Heracles, who is not named but clearly identified by the allusion to *Od.* 11.602-603.” See also Cucchiarelli 2015: 276-9.

<sup>84</sup> Cairns 2008: 55-6 criticizes DuQuesnay’s 1976 arguments pro Octavia and Antony as the parents, for instance, that the smile may also allude to “laughter-loving” Venus and reminds us that Octavia and Antony’s child ended up being a girl: Antonia Maior (yet this confuses the chronology of Octavia’s being pregnant before the pact and betrothal to Antony).

this dissertation.<sup>85</sup> This Apollo oversees the new age's future rulership, a function that Octavian himself was to embody in the years after the Treaty of Brundisium. During the transition to the principate, Octavian evokes Apollo's rule more often than he does Jupiter's.

Antony also makes a symbolic appearance with his Bacchic imagery. Ivy (*Ecl.* 4.19: *errantis hederas ... baccare*) is one of the main attributes associated with Bacchus, whom Antony claimed as one of his two household gods.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, Coleman 1977 sees a connection between the *Eclogue's* parent-child relation and the relation between both Bacchus and Hercules and their respective parents in *Ecl.* 4.49 and 62 (*parentis*, 26; *deum suboles*, *magnum Iovis incrementum*, 49; *incipit parue puer; qui non risere parenti*, 62). As such, Antony's two "signature" gods, who themselves have the same father, emerge. *Nec deus hunc mensa dea nec dignata cubili est* (*Ecl.* 4.63), the *Eclogue's* final line, again recalls Hercules and may be another possible link to Antony.<sup>87</sup>

Whoever this child may have been—if we are indeed to assign one identity to the famous new-born—in the poem, we can find a link with the Treaty of Brundisium and the allusions to Octavian and Antony with their respective divinities. These allusions then accumulate in a concluding paragraph that focuses on the *mater*, or Octavia in our reading. In the end, what matters is that Octavia emerges as a viable contender for this *mater* position: the fact that she is even in the running for the mystery mother's role in this *Eclogue* suggests that the literary Octavia already was gaining significance. While Octavia's possible appearance in *Eclogue* 4 is

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<sup>85</sup> For Augustus' identification as son of Apollo and appropriation as personal deity: see Hoff 1992: 225-8 and note 11; Bauman 1992: 96; Gosling 1992: 509; Miller 2004: 165-180; Cairns 2008: 85 n. 32; Varner 2008: 186; Levick 2010: 14-15. Notably, Cucchiarelli 2011: 157-8; 173 reminds us that, whereas Antony's identification with Dionysus became standard, Antony also experimented with Apollo imagery.

<sup>86</sup> See Cucchiarelli 2015: 256-7. Antony's "hometown gods" were Bacchus and Hercules (Gorrie 2007: 15). Antony issued a number of coins with this Bacchic iconography: for relevant numismatic material, see Huzar 1985-6: 105; Kleiner 1992: 357-65; Kroll 1997: 125; Fischer 1999: 175-6; Hekster 2004: 160-2; Ager 2013: 148-50 (using Crawford 1974 and Newman 1990); Cucchiarelli 2011: 157-6; Valério 2019: 249-57.

<sup>87</sup> See Cucchiarelli 2015: 278-9.



the most speculative and metaphoric of the accounts that deal with Brundisium, this exercise in speculation and representation may prove helpful in the considerations of the literary Octavia that follow.

#### 1.4.2 Livy's Brundisium

The account of Livy (59 BCE-17 BCE) would have been illuminating for our understanding of fifties and forties BCE until right before the turn of the century, the period during which Octavia flourished. Regrettably, his Books 127 through 140 do not survive.<sup>88</sup> The surviving material in the late antique *Periochae*, however, outlines historical facts and dates pertaining to her lifetime, such as her marriage to Antony (*Per.* 127.6), her subsequent divorce (*Per.* 132.7), and lastly her death (*Per.* 140.3)<sup>89</sup> The *Periochae* not only give us a summary of these lost historical records, but they also show us the priorities that this late antique source placed upon certain events and monuments in the preceding centuries. The imminent war between Antony and Octavian is one such event:

Parthi ... in Syriam inruperunt victoque Decidio Saxa M. Antonii legato totam eam provinciam occupaverunt. M. Antonius cum ad bellum adversus Caesarem gerendum ...<sup>90</sup> uxore Fulvia, ne **concordia[e]** ducum obstaret, pace facta cum Caesare **sororem** eius **Octaviam** in matrimonium duxit. (*Per.* 127.6).

The Parthians invaded Syria, and they, after Decidius Saxa the legate of Marcus Antonius was defeated, occupied that whole province. Marc Antony ... to wage against Caesar ... his wife Fulvia, lest there be any obstacle to harmony among the leaders, married Caesar's sister Octavia, after having made peace with Caesar.

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<sup>88</sup> See Kraus 1997: 54 for the chronological and historical make-up of the work.

<sup>89</sup> Begbie 1967: 334; 338 examines the relationship of the *Periochae* and the *Ab Urbe Condita*; see Balmaceda 2017: 118 for the "connection between Livy's account of women's actions in politics in his *AUC* and important women acting in Livy's own times" such as Octavia and Antony's other two wives.

<sup>90</sup> The text is incomplete here, which complicates the translation. Schlesinger 1959 notes that there is a lacuna in the text here and offers the following solutions: *gerendum... uxore* H. J. Müller: *gerendum uxore* MSS: *gerendum incitaretur ab uxore* R, Gronovius: *gerendum profectus esset, mortua* E. Schwartz.

Whereas the abridged version does not include the Treaty of Brundisium explicitly, we do have an allusion to the peace agreement (*pace facta*), closely followed by the marriage arrangement between Octavia and Antony. We learn about Antony's situation as a new widower, yet, whereas both Plutarch (*Ant.* 31) and Appian (*B. Civ.*5.7) mention the death of the elder Marcellus, Livy (or the *epitomiser*) omits Octavia's late husband from the narrative. In this way, Marcellus' omission erases Octavia's liminal position between two husbands. Instead, both in the sentence structure and the order of the two main actors in the marriage agreement, Octavia appears in the middle between Antony and Octavian.

### 1.4.3 Velleius Paterculus' Brundisium

Velleius Paterculus (19 BCE-31 CE) provides another account of this high-profile marriage associated with Pact of Brundisium. Velleius discusses the wedding alliance and interlaces roles and themes of war and "love": he swiftly follows the marriage arrangement with various military campaigns of Pompey and Antony in the East and West:

Hoc tractu temporum, **Octauiam**, sororem Caesaris, M. Antonius duxit uxorem. Redierat Pompeius in Siciliam, Antonius in transmarinas prouincias quas magnis momentis Labienus, ex Brutianis castris profectus ad Parthos, perducto eorum exercitu in Syriam interfectoque legato Antonii concusserat. (*Historia Romana* 2.78.1)

During this time, Marcus Antony wed Octavia, the sister of Caesar. Pompey had returned to Sicily, and Antony to the provinces across the sea, which Labienus had alarmed because of his great movements he had set on foot; having departed from the camp of Brutus to the Parthians, having led their army all the way through Syria, and having assassinated Antony's legate.

The military campaigns follow the wedding celebrations in quick succession. Velleius moves quickly in the text from marriage agreement to campaign: the speed, though, is not necessary because the author is not constrained to an abridged genre like the *Periochae*. Instead, the text's

abrupt successions mirror the sense of urgency that governed this extraordinary match's arrangement between the triumvir's sister and another triumvir. Velleius projects an interest in the duality of the strife between Octavian and Antony (under whose "tyranny," he claims, the state "languished" without any opposition until Octavian decided to step up, cf. *Hist. Rom.* 2.61.1). The temporary amends between Octavian and Antony—placated by Octavia—seemed significant enough for Velleius Paterculus to precede the military campaigns that were to change the contours of the Roman empire.

#### 1.4.4 Plutarch's Brundisium

Plutarch depicts his Octavia at Brundisium as dramatically as ever because of the function that the writer had carved out for Octavian's sister. Plutarch introduces Octavia to the triumviral stage in *Ant.* 31.1, a key passage in this dissertation. Here, Plutarch represents both the political and personal situation of either party at the inception of the Treaty of Brundisium:

αὕτη, Γαίου Μαρκέλλου τοῦ γήμαντος αὐτὴν οὐ πάλαι τεθνηκότος, ἐχίρευεν. ἐδόκει δὲ καὶ Φουλβίας ἀποικομένης χηρεύειν Ἀντώνιος, ἔχειν μὲν οὐκ ἀρνούμενος Κλεοπάτραν, γάμῳ δὲ οὐχ ὁμολογῶν, ἀλλ' ἔτι τῷ λόγῳ περὶ γε τούτου πρὸς τὸν ἔρωτα τῆς Αἰγυπτίας μαχόμενος. τοῦτον ἅπαντες εἰσηγοῦντο τὸν γάμον, ἐλπίζοντες **τὴν Ὀκταουίαν ἐπὶ κάλλει τοσοῦτῳ σεμνότητᾳ καὶ νοῦν ἔχουσαν**, εἰς ταῦτον τῷ Ἀντωνίῳ παραγενομένην καὶ **στεργθεῖσαν**, ὡς εἰκὸς τοιαύτην γυναῖκα, πάντων πραγμάτων αὐτοῖς σωτηρίαν ἔσθαικαὶ σύγκρασιν. (Plut. *Ant.* 31.2-4)<sup>91</sup>

She was a widow, as her husband Caius Marcellus had died not long ago. And so, it seemed that Antony, as Fulvia had perished, was likewise a widower, yet he did not deny that he was involved with Cleopatra, but he would not acknowledge any type of marriage. But as far as this was concerned, his reason remained in strife with his passion for the Egyptian. All kept trying to propose this marriage, hoping that Octavia, who, in addition to such great beauty possessed dignity and reason, if at the side of Antony and loved by him, as befits a woman of such a calibre, would be the cause of deliverance and harmony.

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<sup>91</sup> For close readings of Plutarch, I use Pelling 1988's paragraph numbering.

This Octavia is a full-fledged literary character in the Plutarchan narrative: she makes her entrance emphatically up front (αὐτή)—Marcellus’ position diminishes because of the word order and because of the subordinate clause of the genitive absolute. Plutarch compares Octavia’s marital situation to that of Antony through the polyptoton (ἐχάρευσεν and χηρεύειν), but also starts to set up the foil dynamic between Octavia and Cleopatra—one of the guiding principles in the Plutarchan narrative. While there is an officially sanctioned betrothal of Octavia, by contrast, Cleopatra’s relationship to Antony is not legitimised in the least. Yet, the nature of the affection between Antony and the two women could hardly be more different. When Plutarch describes Antony’s love for Cleopatra, the sensuality of ἔρωτα and μαχόμενος evokes infatuated lust and passion.

Octavia, instead, is the more level-headed love interest, which also casts her as the more lukewarm option in this narrative. Plutarch not only praises her beauty but also her embodiment of propriety and reason (σεμνότητα καὶ νοῦν ἔχουσας). Most remarkably, Plutarch represents the relationship between Octavia and her new husband with precisely the same term that he used for her rapport with her brother just sentences before. The use of στεργθεῖσαν (typically applied to brotherly love, cf. Octavian in *Ant.* 31.1<sup>92</sup>) to qualify Antony’s love for Octavia adds to the drama of sororal or spousal love. Plutarch may have meant this comment as reported speech, just as in, Pelling notes, the inferred judgements of Octavia’s dignity and wisdom.<sup>93</sup> This literary Octavia represents a sanctuary as it were, one that binds the two men with her “good calibre” in the middle. Plutarch thus concludes the paragraph with the anticipated benign influence that

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<sup>92</sup> See LSJ: for στεργθεῖσαν: less freq. of the *love* of husband and wife, *Hdt.*2.181, 7.69, *Soph.Trach.*577, *Aj.*212; “ἄλλην τιν’ ἐνὴν” *Eur. Andr.*907, cf. 468 (lyr.); “πόσιν στεργοντ’ ἔχειν” *Id.Fr.*1062; of brothers and sisters, *Id.*IA502.

<sup>93</sup> Pelling 1988: 202 provides the extant coin-portraits and goes on to say that Octavia’s “beauty is an over-statement,” which I, for one, find a bit preposterous to include in a scholarly commentary.

Octavia was to have on Antony, as if to say that, with a love like that, Antony should have been glad.

The Senate's curtailing of the mourning period illustrates the unusualness of Octavia's situation. Plutarch reports on the Senate's intervention and the alterations to the laws that allow widows to rewed legitimately:

ὥς οὖν ἔδοξεν ἀμφοτέροις, ἀναβάντες εἰς Ῥώμην ἐπετέλουν τὸν Ὀκταουίας γάμον, οὐκ ἔωντος μὲν νόμου πρὸ δέκα μηνῶν ἀνδρὸς τελευτήσαντος γαμῆσθαι, τῆς δὲ συγκλήτου δόγματι τὸν χρόνον ἐκείνοις ἀνείσης. (Plut. *Ant.* 31.3)

And thus, when it seemed reasonable to both men [Octavian and Antony], they went up to Rome and celebrated Octavia's marriage, although the law and custom did not allow a woman to marry before the ten-month mark of her husband's death. But for them, the Senate, by decree, relaxed the timespan [for re-marriage].

Octavia's role and identity are in flux. At one moment, she is wife to Marcellus, then suddenly widowed, only to enter another union with Antony soon after whilst still carrying Marcellus' child.<sup>94</sup> Just before, Plutarch comments on the simultaneous widow(er)hood that set up Octavia and Antony as a convenient match. Plutarch's record of the decree that altered Octavia's mourning period to legitimise her wedding to Antony (*Ant.* 31.3) places Octavia in the middle. Octavia is isolated from her status as Marcellus' wife and subsequently from her brief status as widow: because of the coincidence (?) of Fulvia's illness, Octavia moves along to her role as Antony's bride—for now.

We may note how the decision is entirely placed into the hands of the two triumvirs and how their reciprocity is emphasised (ἀμφοτέροις). The two generals are the ones who are represented as rejoicing at Octavia's marriage; in the marriage's wake they would appear

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<sup>94</sup> Bengston 1977: 174 on the unclear nature of the sources on Octavia's pregnancy at this time: "Sie scheint übrigens von ihrem ersten Mann schwanger gewesen zu sein, doch ist die Überlieferung hierüber nicht ganz eindeutig."

together on coins with Octavia in the middle.<sup>95</sup> And it is the Senate who decides that Octavia's lot is indeed sanctioned, as they take the extraordinary measure of modifying the rules regarding remarriage for widows: Octavia's modified mourning period—which she spent pregnant no less—merely becomes a Senate decree. Plutarch's depiction of this union, then, is one of unseen precedents and necessary adjustments both in public and private, which places Octavia in the middle.

#### 1.4.5 Appian's Brundisium

Appian's account of the betrothal at Brundisium brings out the remarkable investment that the mediators and soldiers of both parties allegedly had in the union between Octavia and her future husband. His account is another example of how Octavia's presence allows the narrative to cross the boundary between the private and the public, or the (pseudo-)amatory and the military spheres. Appian's retelling of Brundisium emphasises the meticulously forged union between Octavia and Antony:

τὰ μὲν ἐγκλήματα αὐτῶν ἐπέσχον ὡς οὐ κρῖναι σφίσιν, ἀλλὰ διαλλάξαι μόνον ἡρημένοι, σφίσι δ' αὐτοῖς προσελόμενοι Κοκκήιον μὲν ὡς οἰκεῖον ἀμφοῖν, ἐκ δὲ τῶν Ἀντωνίου Πολλίωνα καὶ Μαικήναν ἐκ τῶν Καίσαρος, ἔγνωσαν Καίσαρι καὶ Ἀντωνίῳ πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀμνηστίαν εἶναι τῶν γεγονότων καὶ φιλίαν ἐς τὸ μέλλον. ὑπογύως δὲ Μαρκέλλου τεθνεῶτος, ὃς τὴν ἀδελφὴν Καίσαρος εἶχεν **Ὀκταουίαν**, ἐδικαίουσιν οἱ διαλλακταὶ τὴν **Ὀκταουίαν** Ἀντωνίῳ τὸν Καίσαρα ἐγγυῆσαι. καὶ ὁ μὲν αὐτίκα ἐνηγγύα, καὶ ἡσπάζοντο ἀλλήλους, καὶ βοαὶ παρὰ τοῦ στρατοῦ καὶ εὐφημίαι πρὸς ἑκάτερον αὐτῶν ἦσαν ἅπανστοι δι' ὅλης τε τῆς ἡμέρας καὶ ἀνὰ τὴν νύκτα πᾶσαν. (Appian *B.Civ.* 5.7.64)

[Octavian's soldiers] refrained from any reproaches since they had been selected, not to contend against one another, but only to exchange enmity for reconciliation. Having appointed Cocceius, friendly with both, Pollio from Antony's party and Maecenas from Caesar's [to join their selection], they judged that there was to be amnesty between the two for the past and friendship for the future. Since Marcellus, who was then married to Octavian's sister Octavia, had recently died, the mediators decreed that Caesar was to

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<sup>95</sup> See Mangiameli 2015: 122-3 for more on relevant coin emissions between 40 and 39 BCE.

betroth her to Antony. And he did betroth her at once, and [Octavia's brother and husband] embraced each other. Then there were shouts and good omens offered from the army to each of the two, never ceasing from [the celebrations], throughout the entire day and night.

Here, the author continues to intermingle the military and amatory spheres; he swiftly manoeuvres from the judgements of the soldiers to the arrangements of Caesar and Antony involving Octavia and back to the soldiers' jubulations. Further, the rhetoric in the passage centres on the desired harmony and reciprocity between the two parties. We may note the closely repeated Ὀκταουίαν as well as the polyptoton of ἐγγυῆσαι and ἐνηγγύα and the different reciprocal personal pronouns (ἀλλήλους and πρὸς ἑκάτερον αὐτῶν). Although Marcellus' death is grammatically confined to a genitive absolute, Octavia's first husband's death stands right next to the subsequent betrothal in the very same sentence; this stylistic construction suggests the intertwining and overlapping of Octavia's becoming widow and bride in quick succession. The passage deceptively ends with mutual harmony and propitious omens that seem incessant, yet the knowing reader is suspicious of this idyllic picture, since Cleopatra looms in the background.

#### 1.4.6 Dio's Brundisium

Dio's account provides a fleeting glimpse into the triumviral marriage arrangement at Brundisium in Book 48, which positioned Octavia in the middle between Antony and Octavian.<sup>96</sup> Here, I regard this passage through the lens of Octavia's separation from her spousal role in relation to her first husband:

οἱ δὲ ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ, [...] οὐκέθ' ἠσύχαζον [...] ἀλλ' ὅσον ἐπὶ ταῖς τοῦ Ἀντωνίου καὶ τοῦ Καίσαρος καταλλαγαῖς, ὡς καὶ σφετέρας εἰρήνης τῆς ἐκείνων ὁμονοίας οὔσης, ἤσθησαν,

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<sup>96</sup> See Markov 2019: 69 for the breakdown of Book 48 and its treatment of 40 BCE; see also Madsen 2019: 288-9 for how Dio uses the Treaty of Brundisium to "empathise the specific behaviour of military leaders": Madsen regards Dio's observation of these trends as an "explanatory model that determines what the author focuses on when writing about civil discord."

τοσοῦτον ἢ καὶ πλεῖον ἐπὶ τῷ πρὸς τὸν Σέξτον σφῶν πολέμῳ ἤσχαλλον. ἐν δ' οὖν τῷ τότε ἐπὶ τε ἵππων αὐτοὺς ὥσπερ ἐν ἐπινικίοις τισὶν ἐσαγαγόντες, καὶ τῇ νικητηρίᾳ στολῇ ἐξ ἴσου τοῖς πέμψασιν αὐτὰ κοσμήσαντες, τὰς τε πανηγύρεις ἐπὶ τῶν ἀρχικῶν δίφρων θεωρεῖν ποιήσαντες, **καὶ τὴν Ὀκταουίαν τὴν τοῦ Καίσαρος ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα τῷ Ἀντωνίῳ, ἐπειδὴ ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς ἐτετελευτήκει, καὶ κούσαν προμνησάμενοι**, τσσαύτη μεταβολῇ ἐχρήσαντο ὥστε τὸ μὲν πρῶτον κατὰ συστάσεις γινόμενοι ἢ καὶ ἐπὶ θέαν τινὰ ἀθροιζόμενοι παρεκάλουν σφᾶς εἰρηγήσαι καὶ πολλὰ ἐπὶ τούτῳ ἐπεβόων, ὡς δὲ οὐκ ἐπέιθοντο, ἠλλοτριώθησάν τε αὐτοῖς καὶ πρὸς τὸν... Σέξτον ἀπέκλιναν. (Dio 48.31.1-5)<sup>97</sup>

The people in Rome [...] no longer kept silent [...] but as much as they were pleased to hear about the reconciliations between Antony and Caesar, as they deemed harmony between those two men peace for themselves, were all the more vexed because of their war against Sextus. But at that time before, they had led them [Octavian and Antony] in on horses just as if at triumphal celebrations; they had equipped them in the same triumphal dress equal [to the dress] of those in a triumphal procession; they had brought it about that they could watch the festivals from their magistrate seats, and **[they had courted] Octavia, Caesar's sister, to become Antony's wife, seeing that her husband was dead, although she was pregnant at the same time**—[but presently,] they behaved with a great change. [So much so that,] at first, meeting at assemblies or gathering for some spectacle, they would encourage Antony and Caesar to make peace, with many shouts for this purpose, but, since the triumvirs were not persuaded, the people estranged themselves from them, and [5] were favourable disposed to Sextus instead.

This manipulation of a typically private event into a more public one is not the only instance in which separate spheres intermingle. Octavia's widowhood and subsequent betrothal to Antony overlaps with her pregnancy with the late Marcellus' child, as Dio mentions explicitly. Octavia, as Tanusia earlier, appears in the context of public festival and enters a liminal position among the soldiers and, especially, between the two men: she is still attached to her dead husband through her pregnancy yet is about to be bound to Antony. Octavia becomes an expecting mother, widow, and wife over a single year. Whereas her maternal and conjugal identities fluctuate, her role as sister of the *princeps* remains constant as her brother appropriates the liminal space between mortal and divinity for himself and his relatives.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> For text and transmission, see Freyburger and Rodaz 2002: 31-2 and 88-90.

<sup>98</sup> As in Pandey 2013, 2018: whereas Octavian/Augustus is technically mortal during her lifetime, his dogged propaganda and self-presentation and subsequent deification and immortalisation (e.g., in *Met. 15*) perpetuate his existence and relation to his sister.



Dio makes a lot of the influence of the Roman people (“those at Rome”). In the beginning of 48.31.1, he recounts how the Roman *populus* reacts, since they already struggled on account of the capture of Sardinia, the pillaging of the coast, the cut-off grain supply, and the resulting famine. The Roman people knew what was at stake in the conflict between Antony and Octavian: concord of two could result in the peace of many. Dio especially focuses on how enthusiastic and persuasive the people were when they wooed Octavia to wed Antony. They beseeched and pled; they kept trying to appease the two men in vain. Notably, Dio reports Octavia’s pregnancy during her widowhood and re-marriage. This combination not only places her right in between her deceased husband, whose child she was carrying, and her new husband Antony, but also between this same new husband and Octavian, her brother and Antony’s colleague. Dio highlights the unusual situation: the betrothal becomes a spectacle with a wide audience (ὥστε τὸ μὲν πρῶτον κατὰ συστάσεις γιγνόμενοι ἢ καὶ ἐπὶ θέαν τινὰ ἀθροιζόμενοι παρεκάλουν σφᾶς εἰρηνηῆσαι). Prospects of Octavia’s wedding—conventionally a private occasion—are publicly broadcast, as it were, among the gathered masses who viewed the union between her and Antony as a security for themselves. Here again, Octavia is placed in the middle—both publicly among the betrothal’s audience, as well as privately between the two estranged triumvirs.

## Conclusion

To conclude this first chapter, the sources on Brundisium agree on a basic level: the Treaty of Brundisium was a fitting occasion for a pacifying wedding between Octavia and Antony. Virgil’s roughly contemporary account is difficult to pin down; although the identity of

the child remains a mystery, the *Eclogue*'s hopeful tone is unmistakable, and Octavia's presence in it is not unlikely. The explicit historiographical sources mention that both Octavia and Antony happened to have lost a spouse and that therefore such a wedding was not undesirable. The main difference between the accounts lies in the texts' tone, ranging from Plutarch's personal and sensational account to Appian's influence of the soldiers of either party, to Dio's focus on the plight of the Roman people at large. In short, the few accounts on Octavia's early days at Rome show the beginnings of Octavia's influence and her penchant for female alliances, affirmed by the cases of Tanusia and Hortensia. Octavia's complicated position between brother and betrothed; public and private, I aimed to show, is present, yet still within the traditional framework of marriage and alliances. In Chapter 2, we will explore this literary Octavia further as she traverses the East.

## Chapter 2: Octavia Beyond Rome

### Introduction: Brundisium's Aftermath and its Coinage

If the renewed peace at Brundisium was not enough reason to celebrate, the wedding of Octavia and Antony helped to keep the party going. And so, the proud groom had a series of coins commissioned to commemorate their new union. These coins were a premiere in themselves: after Fulvia, Octavia Minor is thought to have been the second living Roman woman to be represented on a coin—on an aureus no less.<sup>99</sup> Rowan 2019: 79-81 observes that the Second Roman Triumvirate was a time characterized by “an unprecedented public role played by women,” and so, “the appearance of a living woman on a coin should be seen as part of the increasing public role and legal freedoms granted to women in this period.” Octavia’s appearance on contemporary coinage reflected the numismatic propaganda of Octavian and Antony; theirs was a mission to project an image of political, and now, familial harmony. In this context, the appearance of Octavia on this aureus in 40 BCE is often read as a “culmination of more ambiguous experimentation.”<sup>100</sup>

We can thus regard the symbolic language and communication that coins offer in parallel with Octavia’s literary appearances (though Octavia and her entourage likely had more say in how the mints were struck than in how the authors represented her). For context, I summarise

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<sup>99</sup> See Newman 1990: 44-9 for the catalogue of coins featuring Octavian and Antony from 40 until 37 BCE). See Zehnacker 1973: 624-5 and 1078-80 for Octavia’s appearance on this coinage and Fischer 1999: 81; 171-3 n. 103-7 on „die Hochzeitsemission, die das frischvermählte Ehepaar Antonius und Octavia zeigten, ein absolutes Novum in Rom, denn das wunderbar ebenmäßige Porträt Octavias war die erste Abbildung einer weiblichen Individualperson auf einer römischen Reichsprägung.“ See also Harders 2008: 279-80 on “die Münzmission nach Brundisium auf die Darstellung der Schwester und Antonius-Gattin.”

<sup>100</sup> As in Ager 2013: 148: “The numismatic advertising of political partnerships was far from restricted to blood or marital kin: most significant is the triumviral coinage, where Antony and Octavian, from 43 B.C.E. on, appear together (on obverse and reverse) of each other’s issues.” See Newman 1990: 63 for the numismatic dialogue and self-justification of the coins of Antony and Octavian at that time.

points of Lucia Carbone’s recent lecture, which featured a crisp overview of the appearances of women on Roman coinage.<sup>101</sup> Carbone connects Mark Antony’s coinage of the forties to Hellenistic and Ptolemaic numismatic practices and interprets this linkage to Antony’s assimilation of Eastern dynastic policy; he was the first to bring women of his house into his coinage. She provides a context of the appearance of Roman women on coinage. Her first example is Fulvia: she was the first living Roman woman to appear as Nike/Victoria on a silver denarius in 43 BCE and an aureus in 41 BCE, in a fashion inspired by a denarius from 46 BCE, which also features a draped Victory.<sup>102</sup> When Fulvia dies in 40 BCE and Octavia succeeds her as Antony’s wife, Antony carries on the practice that he started with Fulvia.<sup>103</sup> In a series of triumviral coinage of 40-38 BCE (which includes a jugate of the three triumvirs), Octavia’s bust appears (albeit as a smaller version with a bronze denomination) with a bee on the reverse—a symbol of Ephesus that emphasizes, according to Rowan 2019: 88, the connection between Roman power and the local culture. Carbone interprets the assimilation of Octavia as another face of power alongside the triumvirs because she appears as a part of this series.

Carbone 2022 points out that Antony changes the iconography of the early *cistophoroi*<sup>104</sup> by including Octavia on a *cista mystica* in 39-8 BCE in Ephesus. Fischer 1999: 173-4 also discusses this *cistophorus* that features an ivy-clad Antony in his capacity of *neos dyonisos* and

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<sup>101</sup> See also Carbone 2020 and especially 51-2 for Octavia on this coinage.

<sup>102</sup> Carbone 2022 regards the denarius of the Vestal Virgin Aemilia, brought about by triumvir Marcus Aemilius Lepidus in 61 BCE, as the first Roman coin with an historical female portrait. Fulvia again appears as Victory on an aureus in 41 BCE; this coin showed her association with Eumenia in Phrygia. Antony imports this practice from Seleucid/Ptolemaic customs, where Arsinoe II already appeared as the first royal female on a silver octobol in Ephesus around 288-80 BCE.

<sup>103</sup> Fischer 1999: 171 provides a meticulous survey of the coinage and inscriptions that involve Fulvia and Octavia. While I defer to Fischer’s expertise for a detailed discussion of these coins, I will summarise some major points here for context. Fischer 1999:171-2 discusses the so-called Berliner aureus that has Antony on the obverse and Octavia (with her signature “Nackknoten”) on the reverse, although the latter had been a point of contention.

<sup>104</sup> Carbone 2022 explains that these so-called early *cistophoroi* of 160-133 BCE appeared throughout Asia and specifically in Ephesus and had a distinctive design that showed a serpent emerging from a half-open lid on the obverse and snakes surrounding the *cista mystica* on the reverse.

Octavia—with her typical hairstyle and surrounded by two snakes—in religious context.<sup>105</sup> It is unclear whether this coin was issued in the context of their worship in Ephesus or Pergamon, and whether the coin can be dated to 39 BCE.<sup>106</sup> What we do know, though, is that the coin served as material proof for the couple’s influence and Dionysian worship in Ephesus, as well as in Athens, where a symbolic marriage between Antony and Athena took place and where Octavia may have been worshipped as Athena herself.<sup>107</sup> Another Dionysian cistophorus from Ephesus ca. 39 BCE (Fischer 1999: 175-8) features a double portrait of Antony and Octavia; this is one of the instances where Octavia and Antony resemble one another, whereas we have just seen instances where Octavia and Octavia are assimilated.<sup>108</sup>

After Brundisium, Marc Antony strikes again, but this time with the so-called Fleet Coinage, struck by his fleet’s prefect. For the first time, we see a *sestertius* in bronze in 38 and 37 BCE, and with this premiere came a jugate portrait of bare-headed Marc Antony and draped Octavia in Achaëa on the obverse and two standing figures (Octavia and Marc Antony?) in a quadriga on the reverse.<sup>109</sup> Carbone 2022 reminds us that this is a clear iconographic way to create a compatible language to converse with the Eastern regions. The Fleet Coinage also included a bronze *tressis* with the bust of Octavia facing those of Antony and Octavian on the obverse and three ships on the reverse and a bronze *dupondius* that also includes a bust of

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<sup>105</sup> See Rowan 2019: 83-4 for this Cistophorus from Ephesus. See Fischer 1999: 178-181 for a discussion of the Dionysian theme and this theme’s connection with Cleopatra and the Isis-Osiris-tradition with which the two lovers were associated.

<sup>106</sup> It is worth noting that the coins which Antony issued between 40-35 BCE are difficult to date. See Fischer 1999: 185-198 for an extended discussion of “die imperatorischen Akklamationen des Antonius.”

<sup>107</sup> See Rowan 2018: 102-3: for Antony’s coinage and benefactions in the East, his worship as New Dionysus in Athens; his marriage with Athena; and the Antonian Panathenaia.

<sup>108</sup> See also Rowan 2019: 83-4 for this jugate coin (Cistophorus RPC 2202).

<sup>109</sup> Carbone 2022 believes that Marc Antony imported the jugate fashion to Rome from the Eastern practice of Arsinoë II and Ptolemy II’s jugate portraits. Rowan 2019: 86 also discusses the Fleet Coinage and Octavia’s appearance on bronze coins in eastern provinces and notes that each region would have different experiences with the triumvirate and their ideologies. Rowan 2019: 88 also notes that silver cistophoroi were meant for regional use whereas bronze served local needs.

Octavia, with her signature style (a refined face, slim neck, the high hairstyle, slightly proportionally big ear with earring). Like Carbone, Rowan 2019: 83-4 notes that this coinage marked a “noticeable change” in numismatic practices: traditionally, these coins did not include “portraits” or “references to the emperors.”<sup>110</sup> The highest number of remaining Octavia-Antony coins was found in the East where M. Antony’s influence was more felt: many of these coins continued to circulate even after Antony’s divorce defeat all the way up to Hadrian’s time.<sup>111</sup>

In this chapter, I will demonstrate that a similar type of ambiguity can be applied to Octavia’s literary representations at Athens, and, especially, at Tarentum. Once they were united in Rome after the Treaty of Brundisium, the happy couple looked for a place to enjoy their domestic bliss. Their eye fell on a house that used to belong to Pompey, in a fashionable area on the Esquiline known as Carinae.<sup>112</sup> Marcellus’ widow and Fulvia’s widower merged their respective families: Octavia brought her three children by Marcellus with her; Antony brought three children by previous wives: his daughter Antonia from his first wife Antonia and M. Antonius Antyllus and Iullus Antonius from his latest wife Fulvia.<sup>113</sup>

## 2.1 Octavia in Greece

The newlyweds did not stay in Rome for long: they spent at least the winters of 39/38 and 38/37 BCE in Greece. Antony issued coinage during their honeymoon period in Athens:<sup>114</sup> these

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<sup>110</sup> See Harders 2008: 281.

<sup>111</sup> Rowan 2019: 85; 94 notes that Cleopatra’s coinage already was being struck in 36 BCE, even though Antony did not divorce Octavia until 32 BCE.

<sup>112</sup> See Fischer 1999: 81 n. 341 and Garcia Vivas 2013: 73-79 on “el invierno ateniense de Marco Antonio y Octavia.” For Antony in Athens, see Habicht: 1997: 357-367 and Tatum 2020: 453-4 and 467.

<sup>113</sup> According to Fischer 1999: 342.

<sup>114</sup> Harders 2008: 279-80 focuses on the appearance of Octavia with her characteristic *nodus* and her likeness to her brother; she also notes Antony’s „Darstellung als Pathosformeln hellenistischer Herrscherportraits” mixing „Römischen Bildtraditionen“ and „sein hellenistisch-inspiriertes, propagandistisches Bildepertoire.”

coins represented Antony's being worshipped as the New Dionysus and the couple's honours as *theoi eurgetai*.<sup>115</sup> Scholars point to the propagandistic message of these coins, which served to consolidate Antony's influence in Greece and Octavia's popularity in these areas. Now that we have established numismatic evidence of Antony and Octavia around Greece, we turn to various accounts of Antony's behaviour and Octavia's presence in Athens, and to Pausanias' account of possible material evidence of Octavia in Corinth.

### 2.1.1 Seneca

In Seneca's first *Suasoria*—"Alexander Debates Whether to Sail the Ocean"—Seneca depicts Athenians who show jocular irreverence towards Antony and his multiple marriages.<sup>116</sup> The rhetorical exercise in *Suas.* 1 explores whether Alexander should cross the ocean to expand his influence after his Eastern conquests. Ultimately, the exercise warns its readers to take note of and learn from Alexander's hubris. One may wonder how Antony's stay in Athens is relevant in the sixth and seventh paragraphs.<sup>117</sup> One possible explanation is that Alexander and Antony both appropriated the ancestry and imagery of Hercules and Bacchus and their Eastern associations.<sup>118</sup> During the winters of 39/38 and 38/37 BCE, the Athenians welcomed Antony with much pomp and circumstance, hailing him as the new Liber and taking the spectacle a bit too far:

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<sup>115</sup> For Antony's worship as Dionysus and its dating to the winters of 39/38 and 38/37, see Kroll 1993: 84-5 and Haug 2008: 410. Kroll 1993 and Rowan 2019: 102-104 provide the most thorough treatments of these coins.

<sup>116</sup> The publication date of Seneca the Elder's (54 BCE—39 CE) *Suasoriae* most likely falls into the period around 20 CE until around 34 CE, as conjectured by Edward 1923: xxvi; Winterbottom 1974 does not seem to address dating issues in his introduction. See Dinter and Guérin 2020 for a recent introduction.

<sup>117</sup> For the connection of Alexander and Antony in Greece and Athens in particular, see Alcock 1993: 132, 197 and Habicht 1997: 357-62.

<sup>118</sup> See Edward 1928: 84, Alcock 1993: 197, and Feddern 2013: 185-6. For Seneca the Younger's account of Alexander's connection with both Hercules and Bacchus and being offered citizenship in Corinth, see Sen. *De Ben.* 1.13.1-2.

they offered him Athena in marriage.<sup>119</sup> By now, he was aware of the advantages that such a betrothal could bring and decided to use this strategy against the Athenians. The Elder Seneca recounts how Antony gained financially from this betrothal with Athens' patron goddess and its customary dowry:

... et accideret tale aliquid quale accidit Atheniensibus, cum publicae eorum blanditiae non tantum deprehensae sed castigatae sunt. Nam cum Antonius uellet se Liberum patrem dici et hoc nomen status subscribi iuberet, habitu quoque et comitatu Liberum imitaretur, occurrerunt uenienti ei Athenienses cum coniugibus et liberis et Διόνυσον salutauerunt. Belle illis cesserat, si nasus Atticus ibi substitisset; set dixerunt despondere ipsos in matrimonium illi Mineruam suam et rogauerunt ut duceret. Antonius ait ducturum, sed dotis nomine imperare se illis mille talenta. Tum ex Graeculis quidam ait: κύριε, ὁ Ζεὺς τὴν μητέρα σου Σεμέλην ἄπροικον εἶχεν. huic quidem impune fuit, sed Atheniensium sponsalia mille talentis aestimata sunt. quae cum exigenterentur, complures contumeliosi libelli proponerentur, quidam etiam ipsi Antonio tradebantur, sicut ille, qui subscriptus statuae eius fuit, cum eodem tempore et Octaviam uxorem haberet et Cleopatram: Ὀκταουία καὶ Ἀθηνᾶ Ἀντωνίῳ' res tuas tibi habe. (Sen. *Suas.* 1.6-7)

... And something similar may happen as what occurred to the Athenians, when their public flatteries were not only discovered but also punished. For when Antony wanted to be called Father Liber and ordered this very name to be inscribed on the base of statues to him, and when he imitated Liber in his dress as well as his company, the Athenians with their wives and children met him as he arrived and saluted him as Dionysus. It would have been better for them if their Attic wit had stopped there: but they claimed that they were offering their Minerva in marriage to him and asked him whether to marry her. Antony said that he would do so, but that, in the name of a dowry, he said that he was demanding from them a thousand talents. Then one of the *Graeculi* said: "Lord, Zeus took your mother Semele without a dowry." That *Graeculus* went unpunished, but [the cost of] the Athenians' betrothal was estimated at one thousand talents. When these payments were being exacted, multiple insolent pamphlets were published, and some were even handed over to Antony himself, such as the one, which was written on the base of his statue, because he had both Octavia and Cleopatra as wife: "Octavia and Athena to Antony: take your property."

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<sup>119</sup> Kroll 1993: 103 has a hypothesis that links texts and coinage on this betrothal of Antony and Athena: "The precipitous drop in the weight of the Athenian AE 1 emission ... may reflect the Athenians' difficulties in raising the exorbitant dowry that Antony demanded for his wedding to Athena. Dio (48.39) and Zonaras (10.23-4) give the amount as one million drachms, Seneca (*Suasoriae* 1.6) a thousand talents (six million drachms). The AE 4 issue, which pairs the head of Dionysus and the bust of Athena, may have been designed to commemorate the marriage of Antony to Athena, like the "wedding" aurei, with the head of Anthony on the obverse and the bust of Octavia on the reverse, struck in 39 and 38 to celebrate Antony's marriage to Octavia.... Indeed, if Raubitschek 1946 is right in supposing that the Athenians honoured Octavia as Athena Polias, the references may extend to Octavia-Athena as well as to Antony-Dionysos."



The Athenians' obsequious worship of Antony as Bacchus became an expensive joke: Antony used this marriage jest to extort more money from Athenians. The passage also shows the political dimension in the betrothal of Athena to Octavia's husband.<sup>120</sup> The Athenians, made to pay for their banter, struck back. One of these *little Greeks* takes the joke a step further and makes use of Antony's self-identification as Dionysus to ridicule his demands.<sup>121</sup> The Greeks were made to pay a hefty price, which varies from one million drachmas in both Dio and Zonaras to six million drachmas in Seneca. Seneca, who claims that the dowry was six times the amount claimed by the other sources, records the Greeks' provocative counter-reaction: a taunting inscription on the base of Antony's statue. *res tuas tibi habe* is a customary divorce formula.<sup>122</sup> The Athenians loyally join Octavia and Athena as allied victims of Antony's negligence: they imagine them both as ordering Antony to "gather his belongings" and leave.<sup>123</sup>

Instigated by this passage in Seneca, scholars have tried to make a case for Octavia being worshipped as another Athena. Raubitschek 1946 suggests that Octavia was not only linked to but even placed on an equal footing as Athena: he attempts to tie both the text and the material evidence together by invoking the following inscription:<sup>124</sup>

[A]ντωνίου καὶ Ὁ-  
[κτ]αίας δυν̄ν θε-  
[ῶν Ε]ύργετῶν

<sup>120</sup> O'Sullivan 2008: 295-9 examines Poliorcetes' passage that recounts the Athenians' betrothal of Pallas to Demetrius, to whom Plutarch links Antony in his *Parallel Lives*, and interprets Pallas as "an incarnate [sic.] of the wife of the ruler." Through this analogy, then, she argues that Octavia can also be seen as another Athena.

<sup>121</sup> Cicero seems to have been the first to use this term to condescend the Greeks in *Pro Flacco*: see Isaac 2004: 389-90. Although *Graeculus* could often be used in a demeaning and xenophobic way, it seems like its use here is to highlight the *levitas* of the Greeks, as in Isaac 1987: 24-7 and 2004: 393.

<sup>122</sup> For this divorce formula, see *Dig.* 24.2.2.1: *Gaius 11 ad ed. provinc.: In repudiis autem, id est renuntiatione comprobata sunt haec verba: "tuas res tibi habeto," item haec: "tuas res tibi agito."* The other *verbatim* use of this exact phrase: Sen. *Controversiae* 2.5.9.11.

<sup>123</sup> Their time spent in Athens was recorded as a generally harmonious one (according to Raubitschek 1946: 146, "Antony could show chivalry upon occasion," and Kokkinos, Millar, and Vartuca 2002: 17 even go so far as to call it "the most romantic part of their married life together").

<sup>124</sup> *Agora Inv.* no. 3071 in Raubitschek 1946.

Raubitschek 1946: 146 argues that this inscription is evidence of Octavia and Antony's joint worship at Athens, and what is more, that Octavia was worshipped as Athena as a counterpart to Antony's New Dionysus.<sup>125</sup> However suggestive this fragment may be, it does not seem possible to verify that Octavia indeed became Athena's equivalent in Athens. What matters most for now, however, is Octavia's representation as a possible Athena figure. Whether she was indeed the New Athena or not, the Greeks of Seneca's passage associated her with their patroness at the very least. Additionally, the Hellenistic customs that Antony often copied (as mentioned in Raubitschek 1946, Lozano 2002, O'Sullivan 2008, and Heijnen 2018) suggest that it would not have been preposterous if Octavia, as Antony's wife, would receive similar worship, possibly as Athena. Now, we turn to sources attesting to Antony's reception in Athens: Plutarch and Appian correspond in their accounts on Antony and Octavia's Athenian winters.

### 2.1.2 Plutarch

Throughout the *Antony*, Plutarch tracks Antony's travels to and fro the East and West. In *Ant.* 33.3-4, we witness one relevant trip on which Octavia accompanies her husband in, presumably, 39/38 BCE: ἀπῆρεν ἐκ τῆς Ἰταλίας, ἐγχειρίσας Καίσαρι τὰ οἰκεῖα· τὴν δὲ Ὀκτ-

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<sup>125</sup> “Antony officially received in Athens the designation Θεὸς Νέος Διόνυσος he was, moreover, connected with Athena, as indicated by the inscription. Yet the position occupied by Octavia remains uncertain. The answer to this problem can be found in the assumption that Octavia was identified with Athena Polias and therefore, also received divine honours. The account given by Seneca suggested this assumption, and it is supported by the text of an inscription which was found in the Agora Excavations.” Kantiréa 2007: 38 continues this assumption and concludes the following regarding this epigraphical document : « cette expression, qui est exactement la même appliquée dans l'appellation honorifique des Ptolémées, renforce la supposition laissée par le passage de Sénèque qu'Octavie était assimilée à une divinité, selon toute vraisemblance à Athéna Polias. » For more on Octavia's possible connection with Athena and Antony's status as New Dionysus in Athens, see Lozano 2002: 15-6 and Heijnen 2018: 90-1 who remarks that “the dedication to Octavia stands in line with [the following] tradition [Roman women, most of them wives of the governors, were almost exclusively honored in combination with their husband in the Greek in the East]. Yet none of these dedications honor Roman women explicitly in a divine way. Therefore, Octavia was the first Roman woman to be honored with a divine status in the Greek East.”

**αουίαν** ἄχρι τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐπήγετο θυγατρίου γεγονότος αὐτοῖς. “He departed from Italy, after putting his private affairs in the hands of Caesar; and he took Octavia with him as far as Greece (she had borne him a daughter<sup>126</sup>).” Next, in *Ant.* 33.4, we learn how Antony used to spend his time during these winter holidays. According to Plutarch, he celebrated Publius Ventidius’ victories over Parthia with the Athenians, acted as a gymnasiarch, and clothed himself in Greek garb. We know that Antony left to settle matters in Syria but returned to Athens afterwards (*Ant.* 34), though Plutarch does not mention what Octavia does or where she is during this time.

In any case, Plutarch informs us in *Ant.* 35 that Octavia came straight from Greece with Antony when he travelled to Tarentum to meet Octavian, and that she mediated between her husband and brother. It is uncertain for how long she stayed in Athens after Tarentum, but we can conclude from *Ant.* 57 that Octavia seems to have left quite an impression on the Athenians: she became popular enough to make Cleopatra jealous.

### 2.1.3 Appian

Appian describes Antony’s habits in Athens in a way similar to that of Plutarch: when in Athens, Antony would dress in the Attic fashion and live a private life that he spent in the company of public teachers at lectures and discussions. Appian gives us an outline of Antony’s philhellenism, whereas Octavia only plays a supportive role during their winter holidays:

... ἐχείμαζεν ἐν ταῖς Ἀθήναις **μετὰ τῆς Ὀκταουίας**, καθὰ καὶ ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ μετὰ τῆς Κλεοπάτρας ... καὶ τὸ δεῖπνον ἦν Ἑλληνικὸν καὶ μεθ’ Ἑλλήνων ἢ γυμνασία πανηγύρεις τε σὺν θυμηδία **μετὰ τῆς Ὀκταουίας**. πολλὸς γὰρ καὶ ἐς τήνδε ἐρρῶη, ταχὺς ὢν ἐς ἔρωτας γυναικῶν. (*B. Civ* 5.8.76)

... He spent the winter at Athens **with Octavia** just as he had spent the one before at Alexandria with Cleopatra ... He took his meals in the Greek fashion, passed his leisure

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<sup>126</sup> See Fischer 1999: 82-3 for the birth of Antonia Maior and the family’s travels hereafter; see also Doer 1968: 27.

time with Greeks, and enjoyed their festivals **in company with Octavia, whom he loved very much—he was quick to fall in love with women.**

Before we delve deeper into this passage, we should recall the following remark of Tatum 2020 454: “Appian’s account of 39/8 is very close to Plutarch’s – there is no New Dionysus, for instance [as in Dio. 48.39.1-3<sup>127</sup>] – although his orientation is different. The two passages are clearly related, perhaps because each derives, ultimately, from the same source, or perhaps because Appian is adapting what he found in Plutarch.” With this caveat on source material in mind, we can look more closely at Appian’s version. This passage does two remarkable things for our representation of Octavia and her relationship with Antony. Appian compares Octavia to Cleopatra in her (Octavia’s) role as Antony’s companion during his winter holiday: in this juxtaposition, Octavia is aligned with Athens, Cleopatra with Alexandria. One thing to keep in mind is the different roles that these women would have assumed during Antony’s travels: Octavia would, just like her husband, have been a “tourist” in Athens, whereas Cleopatra would have had the upper hand as the resident local in Alexandria. Furthermore, Appian claims to have an insight into Antony’s inner love life: he was a man quick to fall in love—perhaps an explanation as to why Antony exchanged the two women so swiftly. Regardless, this passage suggests that Octavia spent time with her husband in the public sphere of the festivals during those early years in Athens.

#### 2.1.4 Pausanias: Octavia in Corinth

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<sup>127</sup> Ἀντώνιος αὐτὸς μὲν ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας ἐπανελθὼν ἐνταῦθα ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἐνεχρόνισεν, τὰς τε ἐπιθυμίας ἅμα ἀποπιμπλὰς καὶ τὰς πόλεις κακῶν, ἵν’ ὅτι ἀσθενέσταται τῷ Σέξτω. παραδοθῶσι. καὶ ἄλλα τε ἐν τούτῳ πολλὰ ἔξω τῶν πατρίων ἐξεδιητήθη, καὶ Διόνυσον ἑαυτὸν νέον αὐτὸς τε ἐκάλει καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων ὀνομάζεσθαι ἠξίου· ἐπειδὴ τε οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι πρὸς τε τοῦτο καὶ πρὸς τὰ ἄλλα τὴν Ἀθηναίων αὐτῷ κατηγορήσαν, δέχεσθαι τε τὸν γάμον ἔφη καὶ προῖκα μυριάδας ἑκατὸν παρ’ αὐτῶν ἐξέπραξεν.

Pausanias (110-180 CE)<sup>128</sup> records that there was a temple dedicated to Octavia in Corinth. We must consider the following when engaging with Pausanias, whose work was subject to fierce criticism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Insults like “forger and liar” come to mind—although, thanks to excavations and research verifying his trustworthiness, Pausanias has been “cleared effectively of all accusations” (Habicht 1985: 221-3). Still, Pausanias’ writing and travelling during the Second Sophistic inevitably coloured his work, rich as it is in “manipulation and reinterpretation,” which may influence some of his observations and conclusions. One characteristic of the Second Sophistic is the employment of an “archaising trend in order to highlight the Greek identity” of the places where he travelled, and where he was at times “misled by guides with nationalistic or chauvinistic agenda.”<sup>129</sup> The mixture of Greek and Roman identity becomes clear in his account of Octavia’s temple in Corinth:<sup>130</sup>

ἐν μέσῳ δὲ τῆς ἀγορᾶς ἐστὶν Ἀθηνᾶ χαλκῆ· τῷ βάθρῳ δὲ αὐτῆς ἐστὶ Μουσῶν ἀγάλματα ἐπειρασμένα. ὑπὲρ δὲ τὴν ἀγορὰν ἐστὶν Ὀκταβίας ναὸς ἀδελφῆς Αὐγούστου βασιλεύσαντος Ῥωμαίων μετὰ Καίσαρα τὸν οἰκιστὴν Κορίνθου τῆς νῦν. (Paus. 2.3.1)

In the middle of the marketplace is a bronze Athena. On her pedestal there are sculptured images of her Muses, and above the marketplace is the temple of Octavia, sister of Augustus, ruler of the Romans behind Caesar, the founder of Corinth now.

Pausanias tells his readers that the Athena statue was located close to the temple of Octavia, which could have evoked associations for the visitors of the marketplace. As we have seen before, Octavia and Athena appeared together in Seneca’s narration of Antony’s betrothals, and some scholars like to link the imperial sister and the goddess based on the surviving coinage. It is crucial to note that scholars disagree about the passage’s implications regarding Octavia’s

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<sup>128</sup> See Arafat 2009 for a general introduction. For the date of his work around 160-180 CE, see Habicht 1985: 220, Elsner 1992: 3, Pretzler 2004: 199-200; Arafat 2009: 8 believes that the work is written between the 130s and 175-80s CE.

<sup>129</sup> See Abbenes 2015: 578, 580 n. 43 and 44. Elsner 1992: 3-27 comments on Pausanias’ narratives’ possible subjectivity that was influenced by his Greek identity in the second century CE as well as the dichotomy between the secular and sacred, thus calling Pausanias “a Greek pilgrim in the Roman world.”

<sup>130</sup> See also Moreno 2018: 189 for Pausanias’ visit to Corinth.

implied worship at Corinth and its correspondence to material evidence. Pawlak 2013: 155 takes this passage as definite proof of Octavia's worship: "Another interesting phenomenon was the divine worship of Octavia ... in Corinth. She was never deified, but a temple was erected for her in Corinth, and she was clearly included in the imperial cult. This practice can be interpreted as a local, Greek version of the imperial cult, which is explained by the role Octavia played in Roman politics."<sup>131</sup> Hupfloher 2008: 154-5 does not question Pausanias' statement about Octavia's temple and considers a local cult dedicated to Octavia possible, even though she was never deified in Rome. Walbank 1989: 361-93, however, strongly denies the existence of any such worship of Octavia in Corinth.<sup>132</sup> Ultimately, since we are concerned with literary representations of Octavia, it is not our priority whether or not there was a cult at Corinth. What matters is that Pausanias attributes this temple to Octavia, which at least offers an insight into how Pausanias, writing in the second century, regarded the imperial sister and her status.

## 2.2 Octavia in Tarentum

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<sup>131</sup> See Kantiréa 2007: 129-31 for a thoughtful summary of the debate on the Temple of Octavia and the *gens Julia* at Corinth and Pausanias' reference to Octavia (Pausanias 2.3.1: ὑπὲρ δὲ τὴν ἀγοράν ἐστὶν Ὀκταβίας ναὸς ἀδελφῆς Αὐγούστου); she concludes: "cet.... édifice sacre ... vu le contexte identifié au monument dit sud-est, qui se trouve à côté de la basilique julienne... Dans cette hypothèse, qui nous semble la plus probante, la vénération d'Octavie, datant de la fin du Ier s. av. J.C., annonça le développement du culte impérial à Corinthe, et elle finit par être assimilée, voire supplantée par celle de la *gens Julia* dans le deuxième quart du Ier s. apr. J.-C." See Imhoof-Blumer 1887: 22 for Octavia and the *gens Julia*.

<sup>132</sup> Walbank 1989: 93 especially takes issue with arguments that unconvincingly link the coinage, Pausanias' temple of Octavia, and the so-called Temple E: "The numismatic evidence used to support the identification of Temple E as Pausanias' 'Temple of Octavia' is invalid. Another solution has been offered for the problems posed by Pausanias' commentary; he was referring to a part or to the whole of the precinct, and not to the temple contained within it. There is no longer any reason to assume the existence of an otherwise unsubstantiated cult of Octavia at Corinth nor to think that Temple E was dedicated primarily to Octavia." For detailed treatments of Corinth, Temple E, and Roman religious practices, see Williams 1987 and 1989.

Before we turn to the ‘literary’ Octavia at Tarentum, we need some context about the events leading up to this Treaty.<sup>133</sup> In the spring of 37, Antony and Octavian formed an alliance in Tarentum. Octavian, though, did not fulfil his end of the deal: since he thought that he had enough ships, he did not find it necessary to meet Antony in Tarentum to reciprocate. Still, Antony remained at Tarentum and demanded that Octavian join him to supply the troops he had promised, because Antony needed them for his Parthian campaign.

Three authors discuss the Treaty at Tarentum: Plutarch (46-120 CE), Appian (the presumed date of the *Civil Wars* is 133-5 CE)<sup>134</sup>, and Cassius Dio (155-235 CE). Since these authors wrote at least one century after the actual events, we ought to be cautious about the historical validity and personal agendas of these accounts. For one thing, Octavia’s *manner* of mediating differs across the three accounts that recount the events at the Treaty of Tarentum. All three accounts suggest that Octavia was in fact present at Tarentum; by contrast, we do not seem to have a way of knowing if Octavia was there at Brundisium during the eponymous peace treaty three years earlier. Octavia acts as the main mediator between the two *duces* (though not like a stereotypical *dux femina*, unlike her foils Fulvia and Cleopatra).<sup>135</sup> For the specific depictions of Octavia at Tarentum, we now turn to Plutarch, Appian, and Dio.

### 2.2.1 Plutarch’s Tarentum

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<sup>133</sup> For various treatments of the Treaty at Tarentum, see Meyer 1988: 58; Gowing 1992: 192-7; Hemelrijk 1999: 108; Harders 2008: 281-8; Buszard 2010: 97; Garcia Vivas 2013: 80-91; Mountford 2019; Treggiari 2019: 269.

<sup>134</sup> See Bucher 2000: 412; Gowing 1992: 2-3.

<sup>135</sup> For various discussion on the trope of the *dux femina*, see L’Hoir 1994: 5-12; Ginsburg 2006: 112-3.

Plutarch pays special attention to Octavia’s presence at the Treaty of Tarentum. Since Plutarch is especially interested in the ‘literary’ Octavia, his thorough narrative on Tarentum need not surprise us. Yet, Plutarch’s narrative on Tarentum is especially remarkable because his Octavia *speaks*.<sup>136</sup> Plutarch’s episode on the Treaty of Tarentum starts with a dramatic reiteration of the previous enmity between the triumvirs, which prompts Antony to confront Octavian by sending Octavia to Italy:

αὐτὸς δὲ πάλιν ἔκ τινων διαβολῶν παροξυνθεὶς<sup>137</sup> πρὸς Καίσαρα ναυσὶ τριακοσίαις ἔπλει πρὸς τὴν Ἰταλίαν· οὐ δεξαμένων δὲ τῶν Βρεντεσινῶν τὸν στόλον εἰς Τάραντα περιώρμισεν. ἐνταῦθα τὴν Ὀκταουίαν (συνέπλει γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἑλλάδος) αὐτῷ δεηθεῖσαν ἀποπέμπει πρὸς τὸν ἀδελφόν, ἔγκυον μὲν οὔσαν, ἤδη δὲ καὶ δεύτερον ἐξ αὐτοῦ θυγάτριον ἔχουσαν.<sup>138</sup> (Plut. *Ant.* 35.1)

But Antony himself, once again provoked against Caesar by some slander, sailed with three hundred ships to Italy; as the people of Brundisium would not receive his fleet, he came to anchor towards Tarentum. He sent Octavia hither, for she sailed with him from Greece, to her brother as she herself was requesting this. She was pregnant, expecting a second child by Antony.

The passage’s tone is instantly dramatic: the reiterative adverb πάλιν stresses that Octavian is hardly vexing Antony for the first time—this time, Antony is not pleased because he did not receive the equipment that Octavian had promised to the people of Brundisium. Brundisium directs our gaze back to the Treaty that had taken place there just three years before. It is not just the allusion to Brundisium that links the two passages: a pregnant Octavia again plays a crucial role between Octavian and Antony. Even so, her husband ordered Octavia to sail to Tarentum to visit her brother: her pregnancy does not seem to have restricted travels between Hellas and Italy. Additionally, their siblinghood receives further emphasis: Plutarch first identifies Octavian by name (Καίσαρα), after which the writer refers to him in terms of his kinship to Octavia (τὸν

<sup>136</sup> Buszard 2010 examines speeches of female characters in Plutarch.

<sup>137</sup> Plutarch uses the same participle in *Themistocles* 31.4 (οὔτε δι’ ὀργὴν τινα παροξυνθεὶς κατὰ τῶν πολιτῶν) when recounting another clash between East and West, but this time between King Xerxes and Themistocles.

<sup>138</sup> For this use of ἔχω, see LSJ A.II.4: of a woman, to be pregnant, *Hdt.* 5.41, *Hp. Epid.* 4.21, *Arist. Pol.* 1335b18.



ἀδελφόν). Plutarch finally adds her pregnant state, which—unlike Dio—he omitted when he wrote about the Treaty of Brundisium. Octavia’s clearly stated pregnancy is a crucial point: it could be read as another liminal state, as she is in between the states of conceiving and birthing the child—whilst still travelling by sea.

In what follows, Plutarch provides an emotional interpretation of Octavia’s conversation with the two most prominent men in her life at that time. Notably, Plutarch’s survives as the only account that depicts the encounter to this extent with *pathos*-laden indirect speech for the otherwise silent Octavia:

ἡ δὲ ἀπαντήσασα καθ’ ὁδὸν Καίσαρι, καὶ παραλαβοῦσα<sup>139</sup> τῶν ἐκείνου φίλων Ἀγρίππαν καὶ Μαικήναν, ἐνετύγχανε πολλὰ ποτιωμένη καὶ πολλὰ δεομένη<sup>140</sup> μὴ περιιδεῖν αὐτὴν ἐκ μακαριωτάτης γυναικὸς ἀθλιωτάτην γενομένην. νῦν μὲν γὰρ ἅπαντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς αὐτὴν ἀποβλέπειν αὐτοκρατόρων δυεῖν, τοῦ μὲν γυναῖκα, τοῦ δὲ ἀδελφὴν οὔσαν... (Plut. *Ant.* 35.2)

Then facing Caesar along the way, and having won over his friends Agrippa and Maecenas, Octavia pleaded imploring much and begging much not to permit her, having been the happiest woman, to become the most wretched one. For now, Octavia continued, everybody was looking upon her as belonging to two rulers, being the wife of one and the sister of the other...

Plutarch represents Octavia as an active mediator: one aorist participle (*ἀπαντήσασα*) describes her interactions with her brother; the other (*παραλαβοῦσα*) states that she persuaded his friends Agrippa and Maecenas. The interactions at Tarentum move between the private and professional spheres: Plutarch highlights her personal status between the two generals in this military and political enterprise. Although the main clause represents an Octavia who pleads actively, she gradually loses control, both in grammatical form and narrative content. The dramatized Octavia argues that this precarious situation could cause her to vacillate from one extreme to another. The

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<sup>139</sup> In *Alc.* 26.2, Plutarch uses this verb to express the power of the so-called Five Thousand (*ἐπεὶ δ’ ἴσχυσαν καὶ παρέλαβον τὰ πράγματα οἱ πεντακισχίλιοι λεγόμενοι, τετρακόσιοι δὲ ὄντες*).

<sup>140</sup> Also used in Plut. *Ant.* 84.2 of Cleopatra, Octavia’s foil.

situation suggests theatricality: Plutarch's Octavia has an audience (ἅπαντας ἀνθρώπους) that is uncomfortably privy to her precarious state between brother and spouse. New Comedy may come to mind as one genre because of Octavia's complicated situation between the two families.<sup>141</sup> The two participles that indicate her state of being and becoming (γενομένην and οὔσαν) may also function as a meta-theatrical hint by which Octavia-qua-character defines her roles within her personal tragedy. The crossing of genres within Plutarch's account of Antony's life has been well-attested: while elegiac elements are certainly present, Plutarch includes tragic and comic properties as additional layers within the narrative.<sup>142</sup>

Even more unusual for a woman during the triumviral period, Plutarch's Octavia receives a fictionalised speech. Here, she supplicates her brother—nowhere else in the extant accounts of Octavia do we find a narrator who claims to quote a direct version of her speech:

εἰ δὲ τὰ χεῖρω κρατήσειεν, ἔφη, καὶ γένοιτο πόλεμος, ὑμῶν μὲν ἄδηλον ὅτω κρατεῖν ἢ κρατεῖσθαι πέπρωται, τὰ ἐμὰ δ' ἀμοτέρως ἄθλια. τούτοις ἐπικλασθεὶς ὁ Καῖσαρ ἤκεν εἰρηρικῶς εἰς Τάραντα, καὶ θέαμα κάλλιστον οἱ παρόντες ἐθεῶντο, πολὺν μὲν ἐκ γῆς στρατὸν ἡσυχάζοντα, πολλὰς δὲ ναῦς ἀτρέμα πρὸς τοῖς αἰγιαλοῖς ἐχούσας, αὐτῶν δὲ καὶ φίλων ἀπαντήσεις καὶ φιλοφροσύνας. (Plut. *Ant.* 35.3)

She said, "if the worst should happen and war should occur between you two, it is unclear which one is destined to conquer or to be conquered, but wretchedness will befall me in either case." Having wept in answer to these words, Caesar came to Tarentum in peace. Then the persons who were present witnessed a most beautiful wonder: a large share of the land army resting from war, and many ships staying by the shore without any motion, while the commanders and their friends met and were kindly disposed.

Plutarch's fictive address to Octavian draws on conditionals and comparisons between the *duces*: this Octavia has keen insight into her tragic situation. Impartiality remains key as she entreats her brother: she refrains from uttering any definite verdicts (she calls the aftermath of the dreaded

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<sup>141</sup> See Xenophontos 2012: 607 for Plutarch's use of comic stereotypes such as abuse and criticism in *Demetrios* and *Antonius* and 611-6 for the comic hero's passivity and *miles* figure and its function of providing "constructive criticism on the role of both the moral agent and his surroundings" in *Antony*.

<sup>142</sup> Griffin 1985 and Gibson 2007 identify these different genres in Plutarch.

war ἄδηλον, unclear) and provides the alternatives by means of a polyptoton (κρατεῖν ἢ κρατεῖσθαι). Yet, as for herself, she is certain that either situation will be detrimental. Plutarch records Octavian's reaction (ἐπικλασθεὶς): even the usually cool Octavian is said to have shed a tear because of Octavia's emotional performance.

And indeed, Plutarch presents the whole ordeal as a spectacular performance: bystanders (οἱ παρόντες) gather 'round to witness the generals decide to preserve the peace. The use of θέαμα recalls χρῆμα θαυμαστόν, from Plutarch's earlier description of Octavia's betrothal to Antony in *Ant.* 31.1. Moreover, Plutarch uses similar diction when he describes the interference of the Sabine women during the battle between the Sabines and the Romans.<sup>143</sup> θέαμα, then, places Octavia in a much earlier tradition of peaceful female interference in battle. Additionally, Plutarch links the commanders to Octavia by repeating ἀπαντήσεις, which he had just earlier used for Octavia, when she encountered her brother. In short, then, as with the Sabines and the Romans, (feigned?) harmony ultimately takes the upper hand. Even though war seemed inevitable because of the escalating rivalry of Octavian and Antony, personal affiliations overcome the dispute, at least temporarily. Given the theatrical undertones, we cannot know to what extent we should take Octavia's efforts at mediation at face value. What is clear, though, is that Plutarch opts for a highly emotional Octavia, who may or may not use persuasive acting skills to manipulate her kinsmen.

Plutarch connects Octavia's emotional interference with the negotiations that her mediating had brought about. Here, Plutarch explains how the two parties exchange troops and equipment:

εἰστία δὲ Ἀντώνιος πρότερος, καὶ **τοῦτο τῇ ἀδελφῇ Καίσαρος** δόντος. ἐπεὶ δὲ ὠμολόγητο Καίσαρα μὲν Ἀντωνίῳ δοῦναι δύο τάγματα πρὸς τὸν Παρθικὸν πόλεμον, Ἀντώνιον δὲ Καίσαρι χαλκεμβόλους ἑκατόν, Ὀκταουία τῶν ὠμολογημένων χωρὶς

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<sup>143</sup> See *Rom.* 19.1: ἐνταῦθα δ' αὐτοὺς ὥσπερ ἐξ ὑπαρχῆς μάχεσθαι παρασκευαζομένους ἐπέσχε δεινὸν ἰδεῖν **θέαμα**.

ἤτήσατο τῷ μὲν ἀδελφῷ παρὰ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς εἴκοσι μυοπάρωνας, τῷ δ' ἀνδρὶ παρὰ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ στρατιώτας χιλίους. (Plut. *Ant.* 35.4)

Antony entertained Caesar first, and he [Caesar] granting it for his sister's sake. And after it had been agreed that Caesar would give to Antony two legions for the Parthian war, and Antony to Caesar one hundred bronze-beaked vessels, Octavia, apart from these agreements, obtained twenty light sailing vessels from her husband for her brother, and one thousand soldiers from her brother for her husband.

Although Antony appears first in the word order, it is Octavian who first has his part of the negotiation fulfilled. Octavia, via τοῦτο τῇ ἀδελφῇ, is placed in the middle between her husband and brother: the sentence structure illustrates the position in which Octavia finds herself.

Octavia's status as sister carries the most weight: here, as in Appian's account, Antony is the first to concede. Still, Octavian and Antony agree upon an exchange of military units and equipment.

Whereas the impersonal passive ὁμολόγητο obfuscates the precise agent of the agreement, Octavia's subject position suggests that she herself brought about the next set of agreements between her brother and husband. The chiasmus of Octavia's extra negotiations for vessels and soldiers mirrors the previous exchanges—Octavian's soldiers for Antony and Antony's ships for Octavian. And so, the Plutarchan Octavia's direct involvement takes centre stage.

Plutarch's account of Tarentum shows the two *duces* parting in different directions—foreshadowing the eventual, final chasm between them. This separation—and return to the military sphere—concludes Octavia's entangled position:

οὕτω δὲ ἀλλήλων διακριθέντες<sup>144</sup> ὁ μὲν εὐθὺς εἶχετο τοῦ πρὸς Πομπήϊον πολέμου, Σικελίας ἐφιέμενος, Ἀντώνιος δὲ Ὀκταουίαν μετὰ τῶν ἐξ ἐκείνης καὶ τοὺς ἐκ Φουλβίας παῖδας αὐτῷ παρακαταθέμενος<sup>145</sup> εἰς τὴν Ἀσίαν ἀπεπέρασεν. (Plut. *Ant.* 35.5)

Thus, parting from one another, Caesar immediately began the war against Pompey, aiming for Sicily, but Antony—after entrusting Octavia to Caesar, together with Antony's own children by Octavia and Fulvia—crossed over into Asia.

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<sup>144</sup> According to LSJ, this passive use is, in addition to simply meaning “parting from one another,” used specifically of divorce (A.b: *Pass.*, to be divorced, *Leg. Gort.* 2.46): either a foreshadowing of Octavia and Antony's divorce in 32 BCE or a dramatic conflation of the three protagonists of Tarentum?

<sup>145</sup> At times particularly ominously used as “to expose to risk,” cf. *Aeschin.* 3.180.

After their agreement, Octavian and Antony part in different directions. Octavia is left with her brother, despite his impending war in the West, whereas Antony makes for Asia. This situation evokes a sharp contrast with the allegedly harmonious time in Athens two years earlier. Like the staggering sentence structures in this paragraph, the family structure becomes fractured and confused. Octavia becomes simultaneously a mother and stepmother who is under the charge of her brother instead of her husband. Although the Treaty was designed to appease the two sides, their political alliance disrupts the intertwined private and familial sphere. Again, for Plutarch, Octavia's sisterhood determines where she is to stay with her children and stepchildren. In short, in Plutarch's Tarentum episode, we see a mediating Octavia, an emotional Octavia, and an Octavia who is ultimately relegated to the political background once she has served her mediating role in this pressing time of crisis.<sup>146</sup>

### 2.2.2 Appian's Tarentum

We ought not to underestimate the challenge that Appian faces in representing the dynamic between Octavia, her brother, and her husband at Tarentum. Elsewhere, Appian employs narrative tropes and stereotypes to further particular views within the text.<sup>147</sup> Appian's interest in representing the dichotomy between East and West and its underlying cultural

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<sup>146</sup> See Buszard 2010: 113 for a conclusion on Plutarchan women who speak in at extraordinary times only: "Plutarch is not a social revolutionary, then, but a traditionalist. He is willing to admire female initiative, but only when the speaker is a member of the elite, driven to extremity by some personal or public crisis, and acting on behalf of her male relatives, who have either caused the crisis or have somehow failed to resolve it as they should. He no doubt recognized the potential for independent female action in the more autonomous women of his day but remained sufficiently conservative to restrict its proper expression to the domestic sphere except in certain very specific and uncommon circumstances."

<sup>147</sup> See Hekster 2004: 76-9 for Appian's interest in the reversal of fortune; and Bucher 2005: 52-4 for Appian's account in relation with Caesar and Lucan, Bucher 2005: 61-3 for his penchant for repetition and emphasis in order to enforce the theme of "encirclement," and Bucher 2005: 64-7 for his treatment of battle scenes and the recurrent theme of "lacking discipline."

differences predominates and shapes part of his narrative.<sup>148</sup> Additionally, earlier authors, such as Plutarch, likely influenced Appian when he attributes a large part of Antony's demise to his folly and susceptibility to flattery and influence by others.<sup>149</sup> As for Octavia, Appian represents her with less tragic emotion than Plutarch does, but with more calculation in the negotiation.

Appian's lengthy account on the Treaty of Tarentum is worth quoting in full. Since Appian arranges his books according to the narrative's most prominent generals, the direct, binary opposition between Octavian and Antony is significant.<sup>150</sup> Appian's narrative starts in the beginning of the spring of 37 BCE, the season of change and renewal—what better time for Antony to pursue new plans?

ἀρχομένου δ' ἤρος ὁ μὲν Ἀντώνιος ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν ἐς Τάραντα διέπλει ναυσὶ τριακοσίαις, τῷ Καίσαρι συμμαχήσων, ὡς ὑπέσχητο, ὁ δ' ἐνήλλακτο τὴν γνώμην καὶ ἐς τὰς ἔτι γινομένας αὐτῷ ναῦς ἀνεβάλλετο. καλούμενος δὲ αὐθις ὡς ἐπὶ ἔτοιμα καὶ ἀρκοῦντα τὰ Ἀντωνίου, ἐτέρας ἀσχολίας προύφερε καὶ δῆλος ἦν ἢ αὐθις ἐπιμεμφόμενός τι τῷ Ἀντωνίῳ ἢ τῆς συμμαχίας διὰ τὴν εὐπορίαν τὴν οἰκείαν ὑπερορῶν. χαλεπαίνων δ' ὁ Ἀντώνιος ἐπέμενεν ὅμως καὶ αὐθις αὐτὸν ἐκάλει· τῇ τε γὰρ χορηγία τοῦ ναυτικοῦ κάμων καὶ στρατοῦ χριζῶν ἐπὶ Παρθυαίους Ἴταλοῦ, Καίσαρι τὰς ναῦς ἐπενόει διαλλάξαι, εἰρημένον μὲν ἐν ταῖς συνθήκαις ἐκάτερον ξενολογεῖν ἐκ τῆς Ἰταλίας, δυσχερὲς δ' ἐσόμενον αὐτῷ Καίσαρος τὴν Ἰταλίαν εἰληχότος. (*B. Civ.* 5.10.93)

When the spring had begun, Antony sailed from Athens to Tarentum with 300 ships to serve as ally to Caesar, as he had been promising. But Caesar had changed his mind and delayed matters for the purpose of getting ships for himself. Having been summoned again, since Antony's forces were at hand and strong enough, Octavian alleged that [there were] other reasons for relaxation; and it was clear then that he was again somewhat offended by Antony, or that he overlooked the alliance between them because of his own abundance [of supplies]. Although provoked, Antony remained in place nonetheless, and summoned Caesar again. For after exhausting the supplies of his fleet, he was in need of an Italian army for his campaign against the Parthians, and he had in mind to exchange some ships with those of Caesar, for, as it had been ordered in their treaties that each could enlist foreign troops from Italy, but the latter would be difficult for him if Octavian were to obtain Italy.

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<sup>148</sup> For Appian's interest in the East-West dichotomy and Antony's position therein, see Bucher 2000: 421-4; on Appian's *B. Civ.* 1.6.24; Bucher 2005: 50-2; 58-60.

<sup>149</sup> For Appian's assumed use of Plutarch, see Bucher 2000: 453, following especially Pelling, see n. 106. For Appian and the similar dynamic that he represents to that of Plutarch in *Ant.*, see Hekster 2004: 77.

<sup>150</sup> See Bucher 2000: 436 for Appian's use of *stasis* as an organisational technique.

The two generals are stranded in an impasse despite their previous agreements, which were meant to benefit both parties. Appian's Octavian has the upper hand: his change of mind encumbers Antony, which does not please the latter in the least. Antony cannot proceed without the nautical supplies that his alleged ally had promised to him. To resolve this situation, a new figure appears in the narrative:

**Ὀκταουία** οὖν ἐχώρει πρὸς Καίσαρα διαιτήσουσα αὐτοῖς. καὶ ὁ μὲν ἐγκαταλελειφθαι τοῖς κινδύνοις ἔλεγε τοῖς ἐν πορθμῷ καταλαβοῦσιν, ἡ δὲ ἐκλελύσθαι τοῦτο διὰ Μαικίηνα. ὁ δὲ τὸν Ἀντώνιον ἔφη καὶ Καλλίαν ἀπελεύθερον ἐς Λέπιδον ἐκπέμψαι, συντιθέμενον τῷ Λεπίδῳ κατὰ Καίσαρος, ἡ δὲ συνειδέναι Καλλίαν περὶ γάμων ἀπεσταλμένον· βουλευθῆναι γὰρ Ἀντώνιον πρὸ τῶν Παρθυικῶν ἐκδεδόσθαι τὴν θυγατέρα τῷ παιδί Λεπίδου, καθάπερ ὠμολόγητο. καὶ τάδε μὲν ἡ Ὀκταουία, Ἀντώνιος δὲ καὶ τὸν Καλλίαν ἔπεμπε, ἐς βάσανον τῷ Καίσαρι διδούς· ὁ δὲ οὐκ ἐδέξατο μὲν, ἀφίξεσθαι δὲ ἔφη καὶ συμμίξειν Ἀντωνίῳ μεταξὺ Μεταποντίου καὶ Τάραντος, μέσον ἔχων ποταμὸν τὸν ἐπώνυμον. (*B. Civ.* 5.10.93)

Thus, Octavia approached Caesar in order to reconcile them to one another. While one of them—Caesar Octavian—said that he had been abandoned by Antony to the dangers that had befallen him in the straits, she in turn said that issue had been resolved through Maecenas. He then said that Antony had sent his freedman Callias to come to terms with Lepidus against Caesar himself, whereas she replied that she was aware of Callias' departure about a marriage [arrangement]. For she said that Antony, before his Parthian campaign, had wished to offer his daughter in marriage to the son of Lepidus, just as had been agreed. Octavia thus spoke these things, but Antony sent Callias to Octavian, giving him up for trial by torture. But he would not receive him and said that he would come and have an interview with Antony between Metapontum and Tarentum, having the eponymous river between them.

Appian's Octavia directs the mediation: it is she who approaches her brother and takes on the role of mediator. Her mediating position flows through the passage: imagery suggestive of her middle position recurs with the mutual interview between the generals (συμμίξειν Ἀντωνίῳ), their meeting location between two places (μεταξὺ Μεταποντίου καὶ Τάραντος), as well as the position of the river Tarentum (μέσον ἔχων ποταμὸν τὸν ἐπώνυμον). Could we connect Octavia's fluctuating position between brother and husband, on the one hand, and, on the other, the river Tarentum? This river functions as the physical mediation spot between the two generals, one that

mirrors Octavia's symbolic position. Appian had used this narrative technique before: when recounting the raid of Palmyra in 41 BCE (*B. Civ.* 5.9) and employed the Euphrates as a symbol of the border of civilisation.<sup>151</sup> Appian's Octavia seems to assume the symbolic implications of Tarentum—after all, Appian tends to use natural markers as symbols. We can compare two techniques that Plutarch and Appian use to describe different characters: whereas Plutarch uses the reaction of others to describe his Octavia's personality, Appian blurs the line between individual and nature by aligning Octavia with the river. Just as a river flows to the sea, his Octavia eventually follows the current of whichever triumvir temporarily prevails.

The negotiations between Octavia and her brother places her in a maternal position, in which she presumes seniority over both Octavian and Antony in their quarrels. Whereas Octavian blames Antony for abandoning him in his own hour of need, Octavia rationalises with him and explains that Maecenas—as at Brundisium and in Plutarch's narrative—had already resolved the issue. When her men quibble about Callias the freedman, Appian's Octavia provides a fresh, reasonable perspective. Whereas the mind of Octavian, the general, instantly veers towards conspiracy and strife, Octavia wonders if a betrothal could have been the reason for freedman Callias' errand. Her reasoning suggests her empathy—she herself lived through the same experience only three years earlier at Brundisium. Since both men seem unable to rein in their anger, a calm voice of reason and perspective is necessary to keep the peace—albeit temporarily.

Appian's Octavia continues to rebut her brother's arguments successfully and so persuades him to face Antony in person, a meeting that turns into a boyish contest:

κατὰ δαίμονα δ' ἀμφοτέρων προσιόντων τῷ ρεύματι, Ἀντώνιος ἐκ τῆς ἀπήνης  
καταθορῶν ἔς τι τῶν παρορμούντων σκαφῶν ἐσήλατο μόνος καὶ ἐπέρα πρὸς τὸν

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<sup>151</sup> For Appian's symbolic use of the Euphrates and the importance that he attaches to both Palmyra and the same river in the Proem of *Historia Romana*, see Hekster and Kaizer 2004: 78-9.



Καίσαρα, πιστεύον ὡς φίλῳ. καὶ ὁ Καῖσαρ ἰδὼν ἀντεμμεῖτο, καὶ ξυμβάλλουσιν ἀλλήλοις κατὰ τὸ ρεῦμα καὶ διήριζον, ἑκάτερος ἐκβῆναι βουλόμενος ἐς τὴν ὄχθην τοῦ ἐτέρου. ἐνίκα δὲ ὁ Καῖσαρ, ὡς καὶ πρὸς τὴν Ὀκταουίαν ἦξων ἐς Τάραντα, ἐπὶ τε τῆς ἀπήνης Ἀντωνίου συνήδρευεν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν Τάραντι ἐς τὴν καταγωγὴν αὐτοῦ παρήλθε τε ἀφύλακτος καὶ τὴν νύκτα ὁμοίως ἀνεπαύετο χωρὶς δορυφόρων παρ' αὐτῷ. τὰ δ' ὅμοια καὶ παρ' Ἀντωνίου τῆς ἐπιούσης ἐπεδείκνυτο. οὕτως αὐτοῖς ἦν συνεχῆς ἢ μεταβολή, πρὸς τε τὰς ὑπονοίας διὰ φιλαρχίαν καὶ ἐς τὰς πίστεις ὑπὸ χρείας. (*B.Civ.* 5.10.94)

When, by chance they both approached the stream [simultaneously], Antony leapt from his chariot alone into one of the skiffs anchored there, and passed through towards Octavian, trusted as a friend, as it were. Caesar, seeing this, followed his example, and they met in the stream and contended with each other, each wishing that the other would disembark to the bank of the other. But Caesar prevailed because he had come to Tarentum to meet Octavia. They then sat together in council in Antony's chariot, and Octavian arrived at his residence at Tarentum, unprotected, and he similarly took rest there all by himself separated from his guards. On the following day Antony displayed the same behaviour. Thus, for the two of them there was a continuous change from suspicion—on account of their lust for rule—to trust, following from their own needs.

Appian represents the friends/enemies as two sides of the same coin—at times literally, as we will see—and stresses several coincidences in the changing fortunes. Their simultaneous arrival at the stream indicates the coincidence (κατὰ δαίμονα), but readers of Plutarch's *Antony* may also recall the episode in which the seer warns Antony that his δαίμων is weaker than Octavian's.<sup>152</sup> This reader of Plutarch may also notice the foreshadowing quality of the use of δαίμων: we can already expect Octavian and his δαίμων to get the upper hand. But, in the meantime, the two generals appear to be moving on equal planes—both in the rhetoric and narrative (e.g., ἀμφοτέρων, ἀλλήλοις,<sup>153</sup> the compounds ξυμβάλλουσιν and συνήδρευεν, the construction ἑκάτερος ... ἐτέρου). Eventually, Antony (and/or his weaker δαίμων?) gives in: he

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<sup>152</sup> See *Ant.* 33.2-3: ἦν γάρ τις ἀνὴρ σὺν αὐτῷ **μαντικὸς** ... λέγων τὴν τύχην αὐτοῦ **λαμπροτάτην** οὖσαν καὶ μεγίστην ὑπὸ τῆς Καίσαρος ἀμαυροῦσθαι, ... ὁ γὰρ σὸς, ἔφη, **δαίμων** τὸν τούτου φοβεῖται.

<sup>153</sup> The last paragraph of the Preface puts the same reciprocal pronouns upfront when introducing the triumvirs and their mutual conflicts instead of their alliance: αἱ δὲ λοιπαὶ τῶν ἐμφυλίων βίβλοι δεικνύουσιν, ὅσα οἱ τρεῖς ἐς **ἀλλήλους** τε καὶ Ῥωμαίους ἔδρασαν, μέχρι τὸ τελευταῖον δὴ τῶν στάσεων καὶ μέγιστον ἔργον, τὸ περὶ Ἄκτιον Καίσαρι πρὸς Ἀντώνιον ὁμοῦ καὶ Κλεοπάτραν γενόμενον, ἀρχὴ καὶ τῆς Αἰγυπτιακῆς συγγραφῆς ἔσται. “The remaining books of the civil wars show those waged by the triumvirs against each other and the Roman people, up to the uttermost and the greatest point of these factions, namely, the battle of Actium fought by Octavius Caesar against Antony and Cleopatra together, which will be the beginning of the Egyptian history”; *B.Civ.* preface 1.6.

hops off his chariot and embarks on the skiff to make overtures. Though one might interpret Antony as the more active force, Appian's Antony concedes his power.

Even so, Appian's Octavia seems to have had some impact, since Octavian makes at least some effort to preserve the illusion of amiability between himself and his brother-in-law. For a moment, Octavian and Antony align their actions as they move closer to negotiate. We may draw a parallel between these mirrored actions and the imitation that we see in the triumviral coinage of the time.<sup>154</sup> Octavian and Antony's doubleness fleetingly exists in this moment. Octavian makes an overture of trust and meets Antony without his guard (χωρὶς δορυφόρων παρ' αὐτῷ. τὰ δ' ὅμοια). The day after, Antony reciprocates by showing a similar sort of trust, but these symbolic gestures do not suffice: ultimately, neither party can avoid the constant shifting from strife to alliance—not even with Octavia's influence.

This disagreement at Tarentum could be interpreted as a symbolic micro-representation of the struggle for power between both leaders on the imperial level. Critics have identified Appian's penchant for using sieges or battles to represent a reversal of fortune, an example of the contrast between Appian's accounts of Antony's siege of Palmyra and Octavian's battle in Perugia.<sup>155</sup> This passage may, then, represent a similar dynamic, in the alternation of "lust for rule" and "alliance," with which Appian concludes the passage and looks back to one of the themes laid out in the work's Preface.<sup>156</sup> One might even interpret this minor victory of Octavian

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<sup>154</sup> Pollini 1990: 356 views Octavian's employment of assimilation and imitation in function of creating autocracy.

<sup>155</sup> A specific example by Hekster 2004: 76 on this specific narratival trope may illustrate the analogous dynamic at play here: "Needlessly attacking a city becomes even more a metaphor of a reversal of fortune when it is counterbalanced by an effective siege on an important city by one's greatest opponent. The easy, irrelevant, and ultimately unsuccessful sack of Palmyra [of Antony] took place just a year before Octavian's difficult but important fight at Perugia in BC 41. In his extensive description of that battle, Appian is noticeably more positive towards Octavian than other ancient authors."

<sup>156</sup> See *B. Civ.* 1.6 for themes such as faction, the lust of rule, and the development towards monarchy: ὧδε μὲν ἐκ στάσεων ποικίλων ἢ πολιτεία Ῥωμαίοις ἐς ὁμόνοιαν καὶ μοναρχίαν περιέστη· ταῦτα δ' ὅπως ἐγένετο, συνέγραψα καὶ συνήγαγον, ἀξιοθαύμαστα ὄντα τοῖς ἐθέλουσιν ἰδεῖν φιλοτιμίαν ἀνδρῶν ἄμετρον καὶ φιλαρχίαν δεινὴν καρτερίαν τε ἄτρυτον καὶ κακῶν ιδέας μυρίων. "In this way, out of manifold civil strifes, the Roman state came

as a symbol for the outcome of the events leading up to Actium.<sup>157</sup> After Actium, Octavian indeed becomes the face of single rule.<sup>158</sup>

Appian's Octavia is still present in this triumviral strife. Since Appian tends to structure his books in the *Civil Wars* according to the work's different generals, Octavia's prominent position between the two of them may suggest something else about the development towards monarchy—a keen interest of Appian's. Octavian, Appian writes, prevails because his reason for coming to Tarentum was to visit Octavia (ένικά δέ ό Καΐσαρ, ώς και πρός την Όκταουίαν ήξων ές Τάραντα). Octavian exploits their close sibling relationship effectively: the text implies that Antony was the one who manoeuvred over the river in the end because of the argument involving Octavia. And, during the actual negotiations that allegedly led to the Treaty, Octavia plays a significant role. In *B. Civ.* 10.95, we see the various directions of promises and transactions between the three players in the treaty:

τόν μέν οὖν επίπλουν τόν επί Πομπήιον ό Καΐσαρ ές νέωτα άνεβάλλετο· ό δ' Αντώνιος επίμένειν διά Παρθυαίους οὐ δυνάμενος, άντέδοσαν όμως άλλήλοις, Καΐσαρι μέν ό Αντώνιος ναῦς έκατόν είκοσιν, άς αὐτίκα πέμψας εις Τάραντα παρέδωκεν, Αντωνίω δέ ό Καΐσαρ δισμυρίους Ίταλοὺς όπλίτας, οὗς επίπέμψειν ύπισχεΐτο· έδωρήσατο δέ και Όκταουία τόν άδελφόν, αίτήσασα παρ' Αντωνίου, δέκα φασήλοις τριηριτικοίς, επίμίκτοις έκ τε φορτίδων νεών και μακρῶν, και την Όκταουίαν ό Καΐσαρ χιλίους λογάσι σωματοφύλαξιν, οὗς επίλέξαιτο Αντώνιος. έπει δέ ό χρόνος αὐτοίς έληγε της άρχής, ή τοίς τρισιν έψήφιστο άνδράσιν, έτέραν έαυτοίς ώριζον πενταετίαν, οὐδέν έτι του δήμου δεηθέντες. οὕτω μέν οὖν διεκρίθησαν άπ' άλλήλων, και ό Αντώνιος εὐθὺς ές την Συρίαν ήπείγετο, την Όκταουίαν παρὰ τῶ άδελφῶ καταλιπών μετα θυγατρὸς ήδη γενομένης αὐτοίς. (Appian *B. Civ.* 10.95)

Nevertheless, Caesar delayed his sailing for his expedition against Pompey until the next year. But as Antony was not able to wait on account of the Parthian war, they nevertheless gave each other things in return: Antony supplied to Caesar 120 ships,

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round to concord and monarchy. How these things came to pass, I composed and compiled here, [a work] being “wonder-worthy” for those who wish to know the ambition of men—beyond measure, their terrible lust of rule, their indefatigable perseverance, and a myriad shapes of evil.”

<sup>157</sup> For Appian's emphasis on the importance of Actium, as “the final and greatest event of the civil wars” as expressed at the end of the Preface in *B. Civ.* 1.6, see Bucher 2000: 421 and 439.

<sup>158</sup> Appian grants much attention to the interplay between the *stasis* of the Civil Wars and the concord of monarchy (Bucher 2000: 424, 434-9). For Appian's interest in Octavian's sole rule and reinstatement of a disguised monarchy, see Bucher 2000: 447.

which, after he had sent them to Tarentum at once, he handed over, in exchange for which Caesar supplied 20,000 Italian hoplites, which he promised to send to him. **Octavia**, asking Antony, sent to her brother ten three-banked *phaseli* as a gift, and Caesar gave Octavia a thousand selected men as a bodyguard in return, which Antony might select. And since the time of their rule was coming to an end, the [period of rule] which was voted for the three men, they determined another five-year period for themselves, without having asked anew for the favour of the people. Thus, they parted from one another, Antony making haste to Syria and leaving Octavia with her brother, and also a daughter already born to them.

This passage captures the bi-directional, mutual transactions between Octavian and Antony. The recurring pronouns (ἀλλήλοις, ἀλλήλων) demonstrate the reciprocal nature of their conflict.<sup>159</sup>

But Octavia should not be excluded: on the one hand, Octavia functions as the negotiating force between her brother and husband (αἰτήσασα παρ' Ἀντωνίου). On the other hand, she distributes the resources that the two men exchange (ἔδωρήσατο); Octavia appears as the sentence's subject, as opposed to her brother's accusative—an order which is then reversed for the second part of the exchange. As does Plutarch, Appian records the exchange of ships and soldiers between Antony and Octavian. But here, too, Octavia is represented as procuring additional forces for brother and husband.

As such, Appian's Octavia is involved in managing the different troops and vessels. At the very end of the paragraph, however, Octavia's position as a pawn in the game for power over Rome becomes clear again. As soon as the two men have determined for how long they can prolong their triumviral command (διεκρίθησαν ἀπ' ἀλλήλων), her husband deserts Octavia in pursuit of the East, whereas she and their new-born daughter, Antonia Minor, remain in the care of her brother in the West.

### 2.2.3 Dio's Tarentum

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<sup>159</sup> Roller 2001: 141-2 identifies the importance of reciprocation and commodities at treaties such as Misenum and Tarentum.

Dio—like Plutarch and Appian—spends considerable time on the Treaty of Tarentum. When we compare the accounts of Appian and Plutarch with Dio’s, we can conclude that the authors vary in pathos. Harrington 1977 identifies three implied purposes with which Cassius Dio wrote his historiography: to appease Septimius Severus; to achieve his own personal glory by writing a popular historical account for the ages; and—as a self-proclaimed “man of action and affairs”—to fulfil his quest for accuracy in historical events.<sup>160</sup> Dio claims to have striven for both an accurate and a popular historical work, but we must also keep in mind his attitude towards the development from republic to empire that coincided with the strife between Octavian and Antony. Reinhold 1986: 214-5 remarks that Dio is interested in the military side of how the republic gradually deteriorated (“not because of political, economic, and moral decay but through a decisive military victory, at Actium and in Egypt”).<sup>161</sup> For Dio, this struggle for power is the main catalyst of the Treaty of Tarentum, for which all relevant characters—including (and perhaps chiefly) Octavia—emerge as mere cogs for this larger movement.

Dio focuses closely on Antony’s military preparations against the Parthians up front. Yet, before too long, we learn that Octavia helps with her brother and husband’s reconciliation:

...καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς Πάρθους στρατεύσων ἀπῆρε. πρὶν δὲ ἢ ἀποπλεῖν αὐτὸν ἠτιάσαντο ἀλλήλους, πρότερον μὲν διὰ τῶν ἐταίρων, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ δι’ ἑαυτῶν· καὶ οὐ γάρ πω σχολὴν πολεμῆσαί σφισιν ἦγον, συνηλλάγησαν τρόπον τινά, τῆς Ὀκταουίας ὅτι μάλιστα τοῦτο πρᾶσσούσης. (Dio 48.54.3-4)

... stating that he was going to embark on a campaign against the Parthians. Before sailing away, they brought charges against one another, at first through their friends and then through one another; and since they had as yet no leisure for war with each other, they became reconciled in a way, after chiefly Octavia had brought this about.

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<sup>160</sup> Harrington 1977: 160-1, in his evaluation of Dio as a military historian, identifies three characteristics in his writing, including thoroughness of research and material, “a popular writing style (Attic),” but, most importantly, accuracy: “Accuracy became Dio’s watchword. ... Dio’s great desire to set down popular, but accurate, history leads the modern observer to the conclusion that he was as critical as he saw he had to be to please his readers. His attitude toward and knowledge of military affairs manifests itself through a study of military policy, discipline, the power of the soldiers, military strategy and tactics and battle descriptions.”

<sup>161</sup> Markov 2019: 288-9 notes trends of “specific behaviour of military leaders in times of civil war” and uses the Brundisium account in 48.29 as an example.

Here, as in Appian, Dio sets up the dispute via the reciprocal ἀλλήλους, and the charges become increasingly personal: they progress from indirect messages (διὰ τῶν ἐταίρων) to direct contact (δι' ἑαυτῶν). Mutual inconvenience is one of the reasons why both generals desire to resolve the conflict, yet Dio does not neglect Octavia's involvement in the reconciliation (expressed through the active participle πρᾶσσοῦσης and the intensifying μάλιστα). The additional arrangements of the Treaty recall the successful precedent of the Treaty at Brundisium—through which Octavia and Antony's marriage linked their respective families. The Treaty at Tarentum resulted in two wedding arrangements, in the hope of securing a lasting connection between the two parties. Dio records the arrangements as follows:

καὶ ὅπως γε πλείοσι τοῖς τῆς συγγενείας συνδέσμοις συνέχοντο, ὃ τε Καῖσαρ Ἀντύλλῳ τῷ τοῦ Ἀντωνίου υἱεῖ τὴν θυγατέρα, καὶ ἐκεῖνος τῷ Δομιτίῳ, καίτοι τοῦ Καίσαρος σφαγεῖ τε γενομένῳ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀπολουμένοις ἐκτεθέντι, τὴν ἑαυτοῦ τὴν ἐκ τῆς Ὀκταουίας οἱ γεννηθεῖσαν ἠγγύησε. (Dio 48.54.4-5)

And in order that they might be secured by more bonds of kinship, Caesar betrothed his daughter to Antyllus, Antony's son, and Antony betrothed his daughter, born to him by Octavia, to Domitius, although he was one among those who had killed Caesar and one of those who had been chosen to die [i.e., on the proscriptions].

Though it seemed enough that both leaders lacked “leisure for war” and that Octavia succeeded to keep the peace between the two parties, the triumvirs arrange another marriage pact for additional security. Dio mentions Octavia here again, but instead of acting as a mediator between the two triumvirs, she mainly represents the bloodline that joined Octavian and Antonian family roots. Because of these marriage arrangements, the familial branches of both sides are mingled and entwined even further.

Dio reveals his interpretation of the real motives behind the agreements soon after. The narrative voice has little faith in the promises made during the Treaty—the author assumes that self-interest underlies the motives of either side:

ταῦτά τε ἅμα πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐπλάσσοντο· οὐ γάρ που καὶ ποιήσῃεν τι αὐτῶν ἡμελλον, ἀλλ' ἐς τὴν χρεῖαν τῶν παρόντων σφίσι πραγμάτων ὑπεκρίνοντο. ἀμέλει καὶ τὴν Ὀκταουίαν αὐτὴν εὐθὺς ἐκ τῆς Κερκύρας ὁ Ἀντώνιος ἐς τὴν Ἰταλίαν, ἵνα δὴ μὴ συγκινδυνεύσῃ οἱ τοῖς Πάρθοις πολεμοῦντι, ἀπέπεμψεν. (Dio. 48.54.5-6)

These [agreements] were merely pretended by both parties; for they were not in any way intending to fulfil any of them, but they were playing for the need of the present circumstances for themselves. And so, of course, Antony immediately sent back Octavia herself from Corcyra to Italy, lest she might share danger with him while he was waging war against the Parthians.

Dio interprets the agreements on either side of the treaty as insincere upfront; he states explicitly what was implied in both Plutarch and Appian. Mutual pretences and cunning representation are key in this passage, as the rhetoric suggests: Dio suspects that both sides (again ἅμα πρὸς ἀλλήλους) of feigning (ἐπλάσσοντο) as well as of play-acting (ὑπεκρίνοντο). Dio, much like Plutarch's treatment of Antony's life, suggests that much of the Treaty involved a theatrical side. Immediately after questioning both sides' integrity, Dio mentions that Antony sent Octavia (who apparently also spent some time in Corcyra around that time) to Rome. Since Dio follows the former statement of pretences so quickly, might he hint that we are to doubt Antony's excuse of the Parthian war as well? It would, after all, only be a matter of time until Cleopatra would re-enter the narrative.

To conclude "Octavia at Tarentum," then, I reiterate that, although Octavia inhabits the same mediating function, the three authors' depictions of Octavia at Tarentum differ to a larger extent when compared to her more passive representations at Brundisium. Plutarch's Octavia is the most emotionally loaded of the three extant Tarentum versions: the episode abounds with the drama of the tensions between Octavian and Antony, Octavia's pregnancy, and her interaction with Maecenas and Agrippa. Most notably in Plutarch, however, Octavia is an active supplicant, who urges her brother to consider her tragic position within the conflict. Ultimately, she not only manages to convince the triumvirs to negotiate, but she is also able to obtain extra forces for each

party. Plutarch represents Octavia as removed from her role of wife, when she stays with her brother instead. Secondly, Appian's narrative largely corresponds to that of Plutarch when it comes to the outline of the diplomatic events at Tarentum, such as the exchange of soldiers and ships. The main difference from Plutarch, however, is his portrayal of Octavia: Appian's Octavia is presented with less *pathos* but with more diplomatic deftness and calculation. This Octavia forestalls escalations between brother and husband and plays an autonomous role in the exchanges of the military equipment. Appian's account also ends with the parting of Antony from the West, where Octavia remains with her brother and child. In this instance, we see that Octavia's presence and location, like the river Tarentum, take on symbolic qualities: Octavia and Antony are not just separated by geographical distance. Thirdly, when discussing Tarentum, Dio reveals the hypocrisy of Octavian and Antony: their agreement only exists on the surface. The narrator insists that none of the promises were to be taken seriously; each party was simply playing a part—a theatricality that suggests a possible Plutarchan influence. As for the agreements, these were merely pretences that would provide temporary calm before the ultimate calamity of another civil war. Dio reiterates the hunger for power that all three authors diagnose to varying degrees. Ultimately for Dio, Octavia's presence and ties of kinship continue to play a part in the dynamic of the two triumvirs, each of whom goes his own way with Octavia, sister of the one and wife of the other, abandoned and, ultimately, stuck in the middle.

### Conclusion: Tarentum's Aftermath

The three authors agree that Octavia travels back to Rome after the Treaty at Tarentum, whereas Antony remains in the East for his Parthian campaign: the chasm between the two



parties widens. Her complicated position between her brother and husband manifests itself in the fact that she is sent back to her brother's realm, whilst still living in her husband's house and refusing to leave it. Her return to Rome, however, need not mean a return to the traditional life of a Late Republican matron. The blurred borders which she necessarily navigated in the East seem to have helped to break down the barrier between the private and public sphere: the times they were a-changing. Together with Livia, Octavia received unprecedented honours in 35 BCE, which helped elevate the positions and influences of the two respective women, as we will see in the next chapter. Using his sister as major leverage in his conflict with his brother-in-law, Octavian started to bring Octavia more into the foreground.<sup>162</sup> Octavia's changed roles, influences, and representations set a precedent for the "new" Julio-Claudian woman. As private matters such as marriage and adultery become part of the public domain in the wake of Augustan legislation, family affiliations become increasingly public to ensure the future of the burgeoning dynasty. And this is precisely the point: so too does Octavia the Character confound and defy the bounds and separations that previously had been set. The 'literary' Octavia is malleable in a similar way: we see these variations of Octavia at play only by looking at the different surviving accounts of Octavia at Athens and Tarentum.

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<sup>162</sup> See Severy 2003 for the changing visibility of Augustan women during his lifetime.

## Chapter 3: Octavia in the Mixed Spheres at Rome

### Introduction

When we last saw the literary Octavia in the aftermath of Tarentum in Chapter 2, she returned to Italy. Antony headed East towards the Parthians (and Cleopatra). Though our sources suggest that Octavia mostly resided in Rome after her Greek sojourn, Appian (*B. Civ.* 5.14.138) indicates that Octavia still spent at least the winter of 35 BCE in Athens—without her husband.<sup>163</sup> Simultaneously, the rift between Octavian and Antony continued to grow: clinging ever more ardently to the Roman identity, Octavian continued to alienate the increasingly Eastern-minded Antony.<sup>164</sup> The precarious state of Octavia and Antony's marriage coincides with the triumvirs' troubles: it is in this context that Octavian grants remarkable political power to his sister and his wife. The years to follow involved Octavia's eventual divorce from Antony in 32 BCE, her loss of Marcellus in 23 BCE, and her own death in 12/11 BCE. All these personal events had implications that quickly spread beyond the border of the private sphere: this merging of spheres characterises Octavia's final decades and sets the tone for her representations that follow.

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<sup>163</sup> Appian still has Octavia handling troops for her husband: ἐπόθετο ἕλην ἰππέων Ἰταλικὴν ἐς Ἀντώνιον χωρεῖν, ὑπὸ Ὀκταουίας χειμεριζούσης ἐν Ἀθήναις ἀπεσταλμένην: “they learned that a company of Italian horsemen was advancing to Antony, dispatched by Octavia, who was spending the winter in Athens.”

<sup>164</sup> For this East-West dichotomy in the conflict between Antony and Octavian, see Hekster 2004: 76-7; Lange 2009; Welch 2015: 215-6, 285-90.

### 3.1 The Honours of 35 BCE

In 35 BCE, Octavia and Livia receive three different honours—highly unusual for women of their era—henceforth, they could accept public monuments, could act freely without tutelage, and were protected by sacrosanctity.<sup>165</sup> Dio of all people (“female power made Dio anxious”)<sup>166</sup> records the honours that Octavia and Livia receive from the senate when he discusses Octavian’s plunder of Pannonia and the Siege of Siscia (a city in modern-day Croatia).<sup>167</sup> The senate intended to celebrate these victories with a triumph, but Octavian declines and allows the senate to honour his sister and wife instead:

...τὰ μὲν ἐπινίκια ψηφισθέντα οἱ ἀνεβάλετο, τῇ δ’ Ὀκταουία τῇ τε Λιουία καὶ εἰκόνας καὶ τὸ τὰ σφέτερα ἄνευ κυρίου τινὸς διοικεῖν, τὸ τε ἀδεῆς καὶ τὸ ἀνύβριστον ἐκ τοῦ [ὁμοίου τοῖς δημάρχους ἔχειν ἔδωκεν.] (Dio 49.38.1)

The triumph which had been voted to him he deferred, but he did grant to Octavia and Livia [the right of public] statues, [the right of] administering their own affairs without a guardian, and the same impunity and inviolability as the tribunes have.

Though Dio associates these rights with those of the tribunes and not of the Vestal Virgins, their privileges offer the closest parallel for women possessing such honours.<sup>168</sup> This is not Octavia’s first association with the Vestal Virgins (loose as it may be): in Chapter 1, we saw that Octavia and her mother Atia found protection in the temple of the Vestal Virgins when Octavian marched on Rome. Cornelia, the mother of Gaius and Tiberius Gracchus, offered another notable

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<sup>165</sup> See Purcell 1980: 84-6; Gruen 1990: 402; Christ 1993: 143-5; Kokkinos 2002: 163; Fantham 2006: 42; Foubert 2015: 193.

<sup>166</sup> See Swan 2004: 6. This attitude would account for the juxtaposed portrayal of Octavia and Cleopatra in Dio 51.12-1-13.1 and the threatening portraits that Dio paints of Livia and Julia Domna in the years to come.

<sup>167</sup> See Dio 49.37 and Freyburger and Roddaz 2002: 144-5.

<sup>168</sup> See Freyburger and Roddaz 2002: 146 and 186 n. 309 for the standard right of *sacrosanctitas* of the Vestal Virgins and for Cornelia’s exceptional honours. See also Reinhold 1988: 72

precedent roughly one century earlier: Octavia herself would come to share numerous associations with Cornelia, whose statue resided in the Porticus Octaviae.<sup>169</sup>

Octavian elevates these two high-profile matrons mainly for his own political advantage.<sup>170</sup> Even so, in this rapidly changing world plagued by both civil and foreign battles, Octavia and Livia gain more freedom to act in their personal and public affairs. As we know by now, Dio generally gives but little attention to Octavia. Given his attitude towards women, Dio's attributing agency to Octavia at all is significant, even more so his recording of these extra honours. In a later context, Dio again omits Octavia: whereas Plutarch (*Ant.* 83.6) claims that Cleopatra attempted to ply Octavian with jewellery as peace offerings for both Octavia and Livia in hopes for their intercession (ἀλλ' ὅπως Ὀκταουία καὶ Λιβία τῆ σῆ μικρὰ δοῦσα δι' ἐκείνων ἴλεώ σου τύχοιμι καὶ πραοτέρου), Dio (51.13) records that only Livia crossed Cleopatra's mind when Octavian confronted after he defeated her at Actium.

Octavia and Livia start to appear together habitually by the mid-thirties. In text and image, they are portrayed with similar hair- and portrait styles (though this aesthetic may have confirmed to a larger typology for women at this time); they both had their own porticoes and engaged in public worship.<sup>171</sup> Inevitably, these shared attributes and activities set them up for comparison. Time and again, Octavia and Livia are compared, a dynamic which reaches its highest intensity in the representations of both women's lamentations for their sons, as we will see. Although most scholars focus on Octavia and Livia's rivalry in their relation to Octavian,

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<sup>169</sup> See Chapter 4 for Cornelia's public presence and her associations with Octavia; see also Kleiner 1996: 32; 36.

<sup>170</sup> Freyburger and Roddaz 2002: 186 n. 309 claim that Octavian's intentions are clear. See also Scardigli 1982: 61-4.

<sup>171</sup> Kleiner 1992: 78 observes the distinctive hairstyle in which both Octavia and Livia are represented but attributes it first to Octavia. Erhart 1980: 124 also links the similar material styles in her contemplations of Octavia's "Getty Portrait." Octavia's representation in the Roman landscape seems to influence Livia's in *Ov. Fast.* 6.637-48. For their public engagement and worship, see Woodhull 2003; McHardy and Marshall 2004: 80; Boatwright 2011.

Dio's account is one example where Octavian's kinswomen are lifted together, rather than being pitted against one another.

### 3.2 Antony's Choice: Octavia versus Cleopatra in Plutarch

Plutarch shapes yet another dichotomy between women: Octavia and Cleopatra's rivalry is one of the main impetuses of the later part of *The Life of Antony*. Plutarch not only traces how Octavia and Antony grow farther apart as Cleopatra draws Antony in, but also sets up Antony's women as foils of one another. The Plutarchan Octavia becomes Cleopatra's direct opposite. But before Plutarch introduces Octavia in the middle of the *Life*, the Plutarchan Cleopatra parallels Fulvia, Antony's wife at the time:

οὐ θαλασίαν οὐδὲ οἰκουρίαν φρονοῦν γύναιον, οὐδὲ ἀνδρὸς ιδιώτου κρατεῖν ἀξιοῦν, ἀλλ' ἄρχοντος ἄρχειν καὶ στρατηγούντος στρατηγεῖν βουλόμενον ὥστε Κλεοπάτραν διδασκάλια Φουλβία τῆς Ἀντωνίου γυναικοκρατίας ὀφείλειν, πάνυ χειροήθη καὶ πεπαιδαγωγημένον ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἀκροᾶσθαι γυναικῶν παραλαβοῦσαν αὐτόν. (Plut. *Ant.* 10.5-6)

Fulvia was a woman who cared nothing for spinning or housework and was not interested in having power over a husband who was just a private citizen but wanted to rule a ruler and command a commander—and consequently Cleopatra owed Fulvia the fee for teaching Antony to submit to a woman, since she took him over after he had been tamed and trained from the outset to obey women.<sup>172</sup>

As soon as we encounter Cleopatra, Plutarch positions her as a parallel for the domineering Fulvia.<sup>173</sup> It is her, Plutarch claims, whom Cleopatra ought to thank for Antony's submissive nature. Cleopatra, too, would soon be represented as his captor, and Plutarch frequently reuses the diction of Antony's captivity. Under Cleopatra's spell, Antony is transformed from

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<sup>172</sup> Translations modified from C.B.R. Pelling 1988.

<sup>173</sup> In the first third of the *Life*, Fulvia appears as Cleopatra's Roman parallel: she bore the blame for the war (ἐπυθάνετο τοῦ πολέμου τὴν Φουλβίαν αἰτίαν γεγονέναι, *Ant.* 30.2). For recent treatments of both Fulvia and Cleopatra, see the monographs by Schultz 2021 and Capponi 2021, respectively.

prominent Roman general into an effeminate boy.<sup>174</sup> Fulvia wages both a war in Rome and a metaphorical fight with Cleopatra for the affection of Antony—until Fulvia abruptly falls ill. The end of Fulvia’s life, running parallel with that of Cleopatra up to this point, opens a vacancy for a successor: nothing seemed to stand in the way for Cleopatra. But along comes Octavia, and the rest is history.

We have considered the events of Brundisium and Tarentum at length in the first two chapters, so let us accelerate to Plutarch’s assessment after Tarentum. Plutarch claims that, despite Octavia’s mediations, Cleopatra is still very much in control of Antony’s passions. His dormant passion for Cleopatra—labelled ἡ δεινὴ συμφορὰ—blazes up again before too long.<sup>175</sup> In what follows, Cleopatra’s power over him grows stronger yet. Antony gifts her a considerable portion of the East (from Phoenicia to Cilicia); Cleopatra bears him twins, Alexander Helios and Cleopatra Selene (*Ant.* 36.6).

But what of Octavia and her children in the meantime? Plutarch swiftly outlines the goings-on in the crucial phase of 35-33 BCE, years characterised by “[Plutarch’s particularly hurried] treatment of politics” and events “moving rapidly and inexorably towards war.”<sup>176</sup> The attention shifts abruptly to Octavia. Back in Rome, she wishes to join her husband in the East. Ever the virtuous sister, she requests her brother’s permission and enters the public/military

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<sup>174</sup> Throughout his *Lives*, Plutarch demonstrates his interests in gender propriety and what exactly masculinity entails: not only do we see how his *Ant.* negotiates Antony’s gender deviance, but we also see how Plutarch depicts Alexander and Pyrrhus as exemplars of ancient masculinity. For Plutarch’s use of Pyrrhus as a model of masculine behaviour, see Leon 2019. Similarly, Carney 2019 considers Alexander’s “conventional Hellenic understanding of masculinity” and his (inaccurate) moderation in his drinking and sexuality—a contrast with the way of living that Plutarch attributes to Antony’s downfall. For more on Plutarch, effeminacy, and gender bending, see McInerney 2003 and Warren 2018: 83 and especially 86.

<sup>175</sup> εὔδουσα δ’ ἡ δεινὴ συμφορὰ χρόνον πολὺν, ὁ Κλεοπάτρας ἔρωσ, δοκῶν κατευνάσθαι καὶ κατακεκληῖσθαι τοῖς βελτίοσι λογισμοῖς, **αὐθις ἀνέλαμπε**; *Ant.* 36.1.

<sup>176</sup> See Pelling 1988: 243 on Plutarch’s narrational strategy and concentration on Octavia and Cleopatra acting as foils.

sphere once again. This boundary is not the only one she crosses: she physically crosses the Roman *pomerium* and the sea to reach Antony in the East:

ἐν δὲ Ῥώμῃ βουλομένης Ὀκταουίας πλεῦσαι πρὸς Ἀντώνιον, ἐπέτρεψε Καῖσαρ, ὡς οἱ πλείους λέγουσιν, οὐκ ἐκείνη χαριζόμενος, ἀλλ' ὅπως περιυβρισθεῖσα καὶ καταμεληθεῖσα πρὸς τὸν πόλεμον αἰτίαν εὐπρεπῆ παράσχοι. γενομένη δὲ ἐν Ἀθήναις ἐδέξατο γράμματα παρὰ Ἀντωνίου κελεύοντος αὐτόθι προσμένειν καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν ἀνάβασιν δηλοῦντος. (Plut. *Ant.* 53.1-2)

But at Rome, **Octavia** wished to sail to Antony, and Caesar allowed it, as most say, not to humour her, but so that she would provide a decent cause for war if she was wantonly treated and neglected. As Octavia arrived at Athens, she received letters from Antony who ordered her to remain on the spot,<sup>177</sup> and set forth the circumstances of his expedition.

By now, any manoeuvres between the camps of Octavian and Antony are fair game for propaganda: Octavian allows his sister to visit her husband, only because he anticipates that he could use this visit against his political rival.<sup>178</sup> Or at least ὡς οἱ πλείους λέγουσιν: we cannot verify the source of this gossip, and, as Plutarch may well have invented this claim for the sake of his narrative.<sup>179</sup> Still, Plutarch makes it seem as if the relationship of Octavia and Octavian received quite some attention, since their travels apparently became fodder for speculation. Given Octavian's strategy and its perception, might we then infer that Antony's neglect of Octavia became the subject of widespread gossip?

In 35 BCE, if Octavia dared to hope for anything like her Athenian winters of leisure with Antony in 39/38 and 38/37 BCE, she was set for disappointment. Antony allowed his wife

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<sup>177</sup> Pelling 1988: 244-5 compares Plutarch's treatment to that of Dio. 49.33.4 and speculates that "perhaps Dio is simply exaggerating; but P. is elaborating the clash between Cl. and Octavia ..., and possibly distorting here, for if Octavia were already to return home Cl. would have nothing to fear." In Plutarch's narrative, the juxtaposition of Octavia and Cleopatra indeed takes the centre stage, especially towards the latter part of paragraph 53.5-9 and Cleopatra's scheme to secure Antony for herself once and for all.

<sup>178</sup> Pelling 1988: 245 alludes to the Romans' disgust at Antony's treatment of Octavia.

<sup>179</sup> For the transmission of these sources, see Pelling 1988: 244: "the interpretation is unfavourable to [Octavian], and if it really stood in written sources (cf. ὡς οἱ πλείους λέγουσιν), these were authors who wrote with spirit, perhaps Dellius and/or Pollio. But P. may owe the point to oral tradition (λέγουσιν may be a genuine 'say') or be giving his own view with spurious authority by ascribing it to a tradition."

to visit because he needed her to transport troops for his Eastern campaigns. It is worth noting that Cleopatra, just a few paragraphs earlier (*Ant.* 51.3-4 in Pelling 1988), is also said to have furnished Antony's army. Octavia allegedly brought more items than Cleopatra, as we will see. Additionally, it was believed that Antony himself provided the goods Cleopatra brought along; she did not gift them and only supervised their transportation. The geographical distance between the couple—Octavia in Rome, Antony in Athens—illustrates the personal rift between the Octavii and Antony. Even Octavia's eastwards trip could not close this gap.

Octavian's assumptions about Antony seem to have been valid: Antony did leave for another expedition even farther into the East as soon as Octavia reached Athens with his military equipment. Saddened but staunch, the Plutarchan Octavia focuses on the task at hand:

ἡ δέ, καίπερ **ἀχθομένη καὶ νοοῦσα** τὴν πρόφασιν, ὅμως ἔγραψε πυνθανομένη ποῖ κελεύει πεμφθῆναι τὰ **κομιζόμενα** πρὸς αὐτόν. **ἐκόμιζε** δὲ πολλὴν μὲν ἐσθῆτα στρατιωτικὴν, πολλὰ δὲ ὑποζύγια καὶ χρήματα καὶ δῶρα τοῖς περὶ αὐτόν ἡγεμόσι καὶ φίλοις· ἐκτὸς δὲ τούτων στρατιώτας ἐπιλέκτους δισχιλίους εἰς στρατηγικὰς σπεύρας κεκοσμημένους ἐκπρεπέσι πανοπλίαις, ταῦτα Νίγρος τις Ἀντωνίου φίλος ἀποσταλεὶς παρ' αὐτῆς ἔφραζε, καὶ προσετίθει τοὺς ἀξίους καὶ **πρέποντας ἐπαίνους**. (Plut. *Ant.* 53.2-4)

Although Octavia was grieved at this and was aware of the alleged cause [of Antony's departure], even so, she wrote back to her husband inquiring about the place to which her provisions should be sent. For she was transporting along a lot of military attire, many beasts of burden, money, and gifts for his commanders and allies. Beyond these things, two thousand selected soldiers for the praetorian cohort equipped with conspicuous armour. A certain Nigros, a friend of Antony's dispatched by Octavia, declared the latter, and added well-deserved and suitable praises.

The Plutarchan Octavia is hurt by his behaviour (*ἀχθομένη*), yet sober enough to realise why Antony left and allowed her to visit (*νοοῦσα τὴν πρόφασιν*). She resorts to the only area where she can connect with her estranged general-husband: she writes back to ask where she should send the military items instead. In spite of her sadness, the Plutarchan Octavia continues staunchly with her mission. *κομιζόμενα* specifies the provisions that she brought: military attire,



yoke animals, money, and gifts as well as additional troops. She thus oversaw the transportation of these items that Antony needed for his extended campaign in the East. Although Plutarch first focuses on her emotional distress, he gradually increases her agency. She appears as the subject of the active verbs (ἔγραψε and ἐκόμιζε, suggesting a polyptoton after κομιζόμενα, which strengthens the connection between Octavia and the provisions); her agency is fully highlighted by the παρ' αὐτῆς construction. In short, her involvement at Tarentum (Chapter 2) was apparently not a one-time occurrence, nor were her interactions with her husband's friends: she dispatched their mutual friend Nigros, who witnessed and praised how she managed this operation.

It was not just Nigros who noticed Octavia's excellence: Plutarch informs us that Cleopatra allegedly felt threatened by Octavia's unwavering co-operation and virtue:

**αἰσθομένη** δὲ ἡ Κλεοπάτρα τὴν Ὀκταουίαν **ὁμόσε χωροῦσαν** αὐτῇ, καὶ **φοβηθεῖσα** μὴ τοῦ τρόπου τῆ σεμνότητι καὶ τῆ Καίσαρος δυνάμει προσκτησαμένη τὸ καθ' ἡδονὴν ὁμιλεῖν καὶ θεραπεύειν Ἀντώνιον, **ἄμαχος** γένηται καὶ **κρατήση** παντάπασι τοῦ ἀνδρός (Plut. *Ant.* 53.5)

Cleopatra noticed that Octavia was coming to close quarters with her and was afraid that if she added to Octavia's dignity of character and Caesar's power the pleasure of her [Cleopatra's] company and her attentions to Antony, she would win Antony for herself, and that she would become invincible and that she would conquer her husband in all regards.

Cleopatra noticed Octavia's success (αἰσθομένη) enough to make her anxious (φοβηθεῖσα).

Plutarch's Cleopatra mimics the author's own penchant for comparing characters. In this Cleopatra's mind, she and Octavia have entered the arena for a battle "at close quarters." The use of ὁμόσε χωροῦσαν, ἄμαχος, and κρατήση (compare to Octavia's κρατεῖν ἢ κρατεῖσθαι in *Ant.* 35.3) places the two women in a military context. Not only are they represented as transporting equipment (*Ant.* 51 and 53), but, at least in Cleopatra's view; they also join the fight against one another. Cleopatra's power over Antony is apparently waning.

And so, the Plutarchan Cleopatra puts on a show: she pretends (ἐρᾶν αὐτὴ προσεποιεῖτο), manipulates (πραγματευομένη δὲ πολλάκις ὀφθῆναι δακρύνουσα ταχὺ τῶν δακρῶν ἀφήρει καὶ ἀπέκρυπτεν), and schemes to keep Antony under her power. In this charade, Cleopatra's κόλακες support her and attempt to soothe her jealousy. Through a Plutarchan comparison, they explain how Antony's affection differs:

Ὀκταουίαν μὲν γὰρ πραγμάτων ἕνεκα διὰ τὸν ἀδελφὸν συνελθεῖν καὶ τὸ τῆς γαμετῆς ὄνομα καρποῦσθαι· Κλεοπάτραν δὲ τοσοῦτων ἀνθρώπων βασιλεύουσιν ἐρωμένην Ἀντωνίου καλεῖσθαι. (Plut. *Ant.* 53.9-10)

For they said that Octavia had united with him on account of state affairs and for the sake of her brother, and that she profited from the name of spouse; but Cleopatra, who was queen of so many individuals, was called Antony's beloved.

In the flatterers' view, Octavia's status as wife is purely a ceremonial appearance for diplomatic purposes (συνελθεῖν has, according to LSJ A II.2 and 3, a military or political connotation, but is here used of their marriage); according to them, Cleopatra is the true object of Antony's desire. Plutarch presents the motives behind the union of Octavia and Antony, as well as the tension between the appearance and reality of the women's roles and titles. καρποῦσθαι (applied to Octavia) stands in parallel construction with Cleopatra's καλεῖσθαι: whereas Octavia's description evokes an economical sense of profit, Cleopatra's takes a more affectionate position. Not only is she more powerful as queen of many, but Antony's love for her is also stronger—or so they claim.<sup>180</sup> Ultimately, Cleopatra persuades Antony—afraid that Cleopatra may take her own life (τέλος δ' οὖν οὕτω τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐξέτηξαν καὶ ἀπεθήλυναν, ὥστε δείσαντα μὴ Κλεοπάτρα πρόηται τὸν βίον)—to put his campaign in Parthia on hold and to return to Alexandria.

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<sup>180</sup> We may also regard this distinction between the two women in elegiac terms. Pelling 1988: 247 notes “the contrast between an *amica* and *uxor* [...] in Roman elegy, where life with an *amica* is naturally passionate, rewarding, and fragile, while married life is cold and flat. But in love-elegy the contrast normally centres on the woman's dual role—*amica* to one man, *uxor* to another...).

In the meantime, a mistreated Octavia returns to Rome, where she resists her brother's orders to leave Antony's house:

**Ὀκταουίαν** δὲ Καῖσαρ ὑβρίσθαι δοκοῦσαν, ὡς ἐπανῆλθεν ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν, ἐκέλευσε καθ' ἑαυτὴν οἰκεῖν. ἡ δὲ οὐκ ἔφη τὸν οἶκον ἀπολείψειν τοῦ ἀνδρός, ἀλλὰ κάκεινον αὐτόν, εἰ μὴ δι' ἑτέρας αἰτίας ἔγνωκε πολεμεῖν Ἀντωνίῳ, παρεκάλει τὰ καθ' ἑαυτὴν ἔαν, ὡς οὐδὲ ἀκοῦσαι καλόν, εἰ τῶν μεγίστων αὐτοκρατόρων ὁ μὲν δι' **ἔρωτα** γυναικός, ὁ δὲ διὰ **ζηλοτυπίαν** εἰς ἐμφύλιον πόλεμον Ῥωμαίους κατέστησε. (Plut. *Ant.* 54.1)

As it seemed that Octavia had been maltreated, Caesar ordered her to stay in her own house after she returned from Athens. She, however, said that she would not abandon the house of her husband, but she encouraged [her brother himself] to allow her to stay there by herself, unless he declared war against Antony because of other causes, and since it would not make for a good reputation if the greatest imperators plunged the Romans into civil war, either out of love for a woman or out of envy for her.

Octavian brings his sister into the foreground in his conflict with his brother-in-law. Even so, it soon becomes clear that their hostility goes beyond the personal level.<sup>181</sup> Plutarch expands on the theme of reputations and appearances (through *δοκοῦσαν* and *ἀκοῦσαι καλόν*): Octavia's maltreatment and her brother's reaction to it take precedence. The Plutarchan Octavian interferes with his sister's domestic distress; he orders her to leave her husband's house. Such a motion would strengthen the connection between the Octavii and establish an even starker physical rift between them and Antony. Plutarch claims that Octavia resists her brother's orders; she seems to have had considerable autonomy. At first glance, her refusal to leave her marital home may seem a defiant act of loyalty to her husband, yet Plutarch's Octavia shows keen insight in this political situation. She emerges as a deft political interpreter: more is at stake than a dissolving marriage alone. She again assumes the role she inhabited at Tarentum (Chapter 2) through the calculated arguments that she presents to her brother (*παρεκάλει τὰ καθ' ἑαυτὴν ἔαν*). She cares about the optics of a quarrel between the two rulers because of her and pleads for peace instead. In

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<sup>181</sup> Pelling 1981: 248 notes the link between Octavia's neglect and propaganda and the link between Octavia's refusal to become a Helen figure, as alluded to in *Ant.* 6.1.

Octavia's inclination to preserve the harmony and to eschew conflict, we see another contrast with Cleopatra's stereotypical depiction as a destructive, power-hungry tyrant.

Octavia's complicated position between her brother and husband manifests itself through her return to her brother's realm during her continued stay in Antony's house:

ταῦτα δὲ λέγουσα μᾶλλον ἐβεβαίου δι' ἔργων. καὶ γὰρ ὄκει τὴν οἰκίαν, ὥσπερ αὐτοῦ παρόντος ἐκείνου, καὶ τῶν τέκνων οὐ μόνον τῶν ἐξ ἑαυτῆς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἐκ Φουλβίας γεγονότων, καλῶς καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς ἐπεμελεῖτο· καὶ τοὺς πεμπομένους ἐπὶ ἀρχᾶς τινας ἢ πράγματα τῶν Ἀντωνίου φίλων ὑποδεχομένη συνέπραττεν ὧν παρὰ Καίσαρος δεηθεῖεν. ἄκουσα δὲ ἔβλαπτε διὰ τούτων Ἀντώνιον· ἐμισεῖτο γὰρ ἀδικῶν γυναῖκα τοιαύτην. (Plut. *Ant.* 54.3-5)

Having said these things [i.e., her plea to Octavian in 54.1-2], she confirmed these words even more through her deeds. For she kept living in her home, just as if he were at home, and she kept taking care of his children, not only the ones that were born from her, but also those born from Fulvia—in a noble and magnificent manner. She also kept welcoming those friends of Antony who were sent to Rome for the purpose of office or business and kept helping them to procure what they needed from Caesar. Without meaning to, however, she was damaging Antony through these deeds; for he was hated for wronging so noble a woman.

Her deeds match her words: she lives at her and Antony's home as if he were present, whilst taking care of their children (and his children by Fulvia) and receiving Antony's friends. As to Octavia's other qualities, Plutarch again highlights her nobility with allusions to Octavia's first introduction (καλῶς καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς and γυναῖκα τοιαύτην; cf. *Ant.* 31.3). Amidst her times of domestic trouble, the Plutarchan Octavia still emerges as a diplomatic mediator with apparent selflessness, and she continues to function as a foil to Cleopatra's scheming and lustful reputation.

Plutarch informs us that Antony was not only unpopular because he neglected Octavia, but additionally because he distributed Alexandria among his children by Cleopatra; he also organised a theatrical coronation during which Cleopatra coined herself the New Isis (*Ant.* 54.9). In the meantime, Octavian and Antony kept quarrelling about the distribution of other territory.

Octavian deposed Lepidus and claimed that he would distribute his land acquisitions accordingly, once Antony shared Armenia with him. In response, Antony dispatched Canidius and made for Ephesus with Cleopatra, who helped him furnish his navy (*Ant.* 56.1). It was in Ephesus that Cleopatra sets her mind on competing with Octavia again:

Ἀντώνιος δὲ πεισθεὶς ὑπὸ Δομιτίου καὶ τινων ἄλλων ἐκέλευε Κλεοπάτραν πλεῖν ἐπ’ Αἰγύπτου κάκει διακαραδοκεῖν τὸν πόλεμον. ἡ δὲ **φοβουμένη τὰς δι’ Ὀκταουίας** πάλιν αὐτοῦ διαλύσεις ἔπεισε πολλοῖς Κανίδιον χρήμασιν Ἀντωνίῳ διαλεχθῆναι περὶ αὐτῆς, ὡς οὔτε δίκαιον ἀπελαύνεσθαι τοῦ πολέμου γυναῖκα συμβολὰς τηλικαύτας διδοῦσαν. (Plut. *Ant.* 56.2)

But Antony, persuaded by Domitius and some others, ordered Cleopatra to sail to Egypt and to expect anxiously the war over there. But she, fearing that Octavia would again settle [this war], persuaded Canidius with large bribes to reason with Antony on her behalf—that it was not just to drive away a woman from the war who had made such large contributions.

Several matters stand out in this paragraph. First, whereas the Plutarchan Octavia has voiced anti-war sentiments repeatedly, Cleopatra now *fears* a peace settlement; Plutarch again applies φοβουμένη to Cleopatra in relation to Octavia (cf. φοβηθεῖσα in *Ant.* 53). Plutarch represents Octavia consistently as a harmonizer; Cleopatra, instead, goes through the narrative as a force of destruction (Brenk 2012 juxtaposes this behaviour with the harmonizing role of the female, as in Plutarch’s *Isis and Osiris*). Secondly, Cleopatra again brings supplies for Antony’s fleet, but is now sent home just as was Octavia earlier in *Ant.* 53. While Antony uses the same excuse for both women, Octavia obeys, but Cleopatra protests: a woman who has bestowed such gifts should not be driven away. The Plutarchan Cleopatra did not seem to take issue when Antony sent Octavia away. Or is this Cleopatra’s critique of Antony’s treatment of Octavia earlier?

The latter is unlikely. When Antony travels to Athens, Cleopatra is again jealous of Octavia—this time, because of Octavia’s continuing popularity in Athens:

αὐτὸς δὲ πλεύσας εἰς Ἀθήνας πάλιν ἐν παιδιαῖς ἦν καὶ θεάτροις, **ζηλοτυποῦσα** δὲ Κλεοπάτρα τὰς Ὀκταουίας ἐν τῇ πόλει τιμάς ἠγαπήθη γὰρ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀθηναίων ἢ Ὀκταουία μάλιστα πολλαῖς ἀνελάμβανε φιλοτιμίαις τὸν δῆμον. (Plut. *Ant.* 57.1-2)

And he sailed to Athens and was once more engaged in sports and theatres; Cleopatra was jealous of Octavia's honours in the city—Octavia was especially beloved among the Athenians—and tried to win over the demos with many honours.

Cleopatra strikes back: she competes with Octavia and attempts to bribe the Athenians into liking her. Her scheme seems to work, at least with Antony, who dispatches his minions to eject his estranged wife. The Plutarchan narrative thus juxtaposes Octavia and Cleopatra as it traces the gradual disintegration of Octavia's marriage to Antony.<sup>182</sup>

### 3.3 Octavia's Divorce in 32 BCE

Even without the political dynamics of an arranged marriage, Octavia and Antony's romance had little chance for success. For one thing, Antony was reputed to be excessively fond of women and to be persistently devoted to Cleopatra.<sup>183</sup> Antony was known for his debauchery, profligacy, and frequent gender-bending. Authors ranging from Cicero to Plutarch represent Antony in a similar light. Cicero played a significant role in defaming Antony as early as the mid-44 BCE: in his *Philippics*, he did not mince words when slandering his political rival.<sup>184</sup> Tacitus, too, sketches Antony's roguish and scheming nature.<sup>185</sup> And Plutarch, ever the

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<sup>182</sup> In his biography of Antony, Bengston 1977: 209; 217; 219; 223 gives a succinct progression of the gradual estrangement between the couple, as seen, for instance, in their increasingly rare interaction either through letter or in person.

<sup>183</sup> Bengston 1977: 67 on Antony's amorous whims: "in seinem Herzen war Raum für Viele, von der Monogamie hielt er nichts."

<sup>184</sup> For Antony and his sexual deviance especially in *Phil.* 2.44-5, see Langlands 2006: 305-10 and Krenkel, Bernard, and Reitz. 2016: 484.

<sup>185</sup> *post Antonium, Tarentino Brundisinoque foedere et nuptiis sororis inlectum, subdolae adfinitatis poenas morte exsolvisse.* (Tac. *Ann.* 1.10).

enthusiast when possibilities for narrational drama arise, gives us ample insight into Antony's alleged arrogance and hatred for children—which is not too difficult to believe: his frequent Eastern campaigns did not exactly facilitate being a present father.<sup>186</sup>

### 3.3.1 Livy

Octavia's divorce from Antony marks the third and last time that we encounter her in Livy's *Periochae*. The paragraph below displays the connection between Octavian's campaign against an external enemy, the Dalmatians (34-33 BCE), and his conflict with Antony, his former ally and kinsman, with Octavia's divorce in the middle of the two conflicts in 32 BCE.

Caesar in Illyrico Dalmatas domuit. Cum M. Antonius ob amorem Cleopatrae, ex qua duos filios habebat, Philadelphum et Alexandrum, neque in urbem venire vellet neque finito IIIviratus tempore imperium deponere bellumque moliretur, quod urbi et Italiae inferret, ingentibus tam navalibus quam terrestribus copiis ob hoc contractis **remissoque Octaviae sorori Caesaris repudio**, Caesar in Epirum cum exercitu traiecit. Pugnae deinde navales et proelia equestria secunda Caesaris referuntur. (*Per.* 132).

Caesar conquered the Dalmatians in Illyricum. Since Antony, because of his infatuation for Cleopatra, by whom he had two sons—Philadelphus and Alexander—did not want to return to the City and to give up power when his time as Triumvir had come to an end, he set in place a campaign for him to inflict on Rome and Italy, and after he assembled enormous forces, naval as well as terrestrial, for this campaign, and when he dissolved his marriage with Octavia—Caesar's sister—Caesar himself passed over to Epirus with his army. Hereafter, naval battles, and cavalry combats, which were in Caesar's favour, are described.

The paragraph condenses and intertwines different degrees of conflict: from the external (Octavian's foreign battle in Illyricum) to the internal with Octavia's family drama with Antony, which then escalates into civil war between Antony and Octavian. Battle and divorce follow one another quickly: they are placed relatively close to one another (the ablative absolutes for both

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<sup>186</sup> See, for instance, Plut. *Ant.* 54.3: ἐμισήθη δὲ καὶ διὰ τὴν διανέμησιν ἣν ἐποιήσατο τοῖς τέκνοις ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ, τραγικὴν καὶ ὑπερήφανον καὶ μισορρώμαιον φανεῖσαν.

the gathered troops and the finalised divorce facilitate to reach this effect). This paragraph in the *Periochae* mentions his sons by Cleopatra and his divorce from Octavia. Antony's foreign attachment highlights his physical distance from Rome, his attack against his own city, and his unwillingness to adhere to its triumviral laws.

The passage thus sets Antony up as decidedly anti-Roman—and distanced politically and personally from Octavia. The use of *amor* for Antony and Cleopatra's liaison forms a contrast with characterisations of his marriage to Octavia elsewhere. This summary omits Antony's two daughters by Octavia, whereas it does mention Antony's extramarital offspring by Cleopatra; their connection diminishes even more—only the divorce of Octavia and Antony remains in the version that has been transmitted to us. Hereafter, the epitomator moves on to Octavian's military success at once. And so, Octavia's sororal association with Octavian is the one that lingers in the memory at the conclusion of the passage.

### 3.3.2 Plutarch

As we have seen in Chapter 1, Octavia's liminal role of Marcellus' widow and Antony's bride received much literary attention. By contrast, she is never exactly represented as Antony's widow—this role is reserved for Cleopatra. Pelling 1988: 323 draws attention to the dramatic effect that Plutarch achieves by the “elaborate” continuation of Antony's life “beyond the moment of death” and his subsequent historical restoration. Pelling remains sceptical about the detailed and sympathetic account that Plutarch hands down to us about Octavia, one that at times differs significantly in detail and dramatics from other accounts. In the previous section, we have seen how Plutarch traces how Octavia and Antony's marriage dissolves gradually until they officially divorce in 32 BCE:



ἀπελθεῖν δέ φασιν αὐτὴν τὰ μὲν τέκνα πάντα Ἀντωνίου μεθ' ἑαυτῆς ἔχουσαν ἄνευ τοῦ πρεσβυτάτου τῶν ἐκ Φουλβίας ἑκεῖνος γὰρ ἦν παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ, κλαίουσαν δὲ καὶ δυσφοροῦσαν εἰ δόξει μία τῶν αἰτιῶν τοῦ πολέμου καὶ αὐτὴ γεγονέναι. Ῥωμαῖοι δὲ ὄκτειρον οὐκ ἐκείνην, ἀλλ' Ἀντώνιον, καὶ μᾶλλον οἱ Κλεοπάτραν ἐωρακότες οὔτε κάλλει τῆς Ὀκταουίας οὔτε ὥρα διαφέρουσαν. (Plut. *Ant.*57.3)

They say that she left her house, taking all Antony's children with her except his eldest son by Fulvia, who was with his father; and that she was weeping and vexed in case that she herself would be deemed as one of the causes of the war. But the Romans did not pity her as much as they pitied Antony, and especially those who had seen that Cleopatra was neither in beauty nor in (graceful)<sup>187</sup> youthfulness superior to Octavia.

Here, Plutarch revisits Octavia's continued care of Antony's children (except for Marcus Antonius Antyllus) but depicts her as less calm: she appears more like the emotional yet diplomatically measured Octavia of the Treaty of Tarentum (*Ant.* 35: κλαίουσαν δὲ καὶ δυσφοροῦσαν εἰ δόξει μία τῶν αἰτιῶν τοῦ πολέμου καὶ αὐτὴ γεγονέναι). As we know, Plutarch likes his comparisons: they are at fullest force here. On the one hand, we see another instance of "characterisation by reaction" in the Romans' collective pity for Antony, because of Octavia's superiority over Cleopatra. On the other hand, this passage again echoes the vocabulary of Octavia's poise and beauty, which has become characteristic of the Plutarchan Octavia by now.<sup>188</sup>

Even upon being ejected from the house she shared with Antony and her children, the Plutarchan Octavia emerges with exceptional dignity. Plutarch emphatically repeats her exemplary attitude as a *noverca* on different occasions throughout his work.<sup>189</sup>

εἰς δὲ Ῥώμην ἔπεμψε τοὺς Ὀκταουίαν ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας ἐκβαλοῦντας. ἀπελθεῖν δέ φασιν αὐτὴν τὰ μὲν τέκνα πάντα Ἀντωνίου μεθ' ἑαυτῆς ἔχουσαν ἄνευ τοῦ πρεσβυτάτου τῶν ἐκ Φουλβίας ἑκεῖνος γὰρ ἦν παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ, κλαίουσαν δὲ καὶ δυσφοροῦσαν εἰ δόξει μία **τῶν αἰτιῶν τοῦ πολέμου** καὶ αὐτὴ γεγονέναι. Ῥωμαῖοι δὲ ὄκτειρον οὐκ ἐκείνην, ἀλλ'

<sup>187</sup> LSJ B.II.2-3 notes that the use involves traits of the bloom of youth, beauty, and elegance, hence my suggestion to add "graceful" to the translation.

<sup>188</sup> Pelling 1988: 258-9 comments on the comparison between Octavia and Cleopatra as "smooth transition: the move to Athens leads to Cl.'s jealousy of Octavia, and that to the divorce and Octavia's reaction: that returns us to Rome."

<sup>189</sup> Watson 1995: 197-206 evaluates Octavia's role and reputation as stepmother and questions her exemplarity on account of her and her brother's political motives.

Ἀντώνιον, καὶ μᾶλλον οἱ Κλεοπάτραν ἐωρακότες οὔτε κάλλει τῆς Ὀκταουίας οὔτε ὄρα διαφέρουσιν. (*Ant.* 57.4-5)

Meanwhile, he sent men to Rome to throw Octavia out of his house. They say that she left her house, taking all Antony's children with her except his eldest son by Fulvia, who was with his father; and that she was weeping and vexed in case that she herself would be deemed as one of the causes of the war. But the Romans did not pity her as much as they pitied Antony, and especially those who had seen that Cleopatra was neither in beauty nor in (graceful)<sup>190</sup> youthfulness superior to Octavia.

The Plutarchan Octavia is once again juxtaposed with Cleopatra. Plutarch revisits Octavia's allegedly incessant care of Antony's children (except for Marcus Antonius Antyllus, that is) but depicts her as less calm and more like the emotional Octavia of Tarentum whom we encountered in the previous chapter. Even so, the Plutarchan Octavia is distressed for the most noble of reasons: she does not want to be the cause of a war (unlike Fulvia, who became the cause of war in *Ant.* 30.2 with the same word use).

While Plutarch depicted both a Fulvia and a Cleopatra as more than keen to start a fight, the dynamic of contrast reaches its full force with the Plutarchan Octavia who actively resisted any responsibility for any war. Her attitude benefitted her reputation: although the *populus* surely felt for her, they pitied Antony more. Here we not only have another example of Plutarch's signature "characterisation by reaction" (because the Romans think her unsurpassable, she must be), but also another comparison between these two women of Antony with parallel positions. Yet there is a difference: Octavia bested Cleopatra in all regards, but Octavia's beauty and youth especially outshone Cleopatra's qualities. Even so, these attributes did not suffice to prevent a divorce and subsequent break of the alliance.

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<sup>190</sup> LSJ B.II.2-3 notes that the use involves traits of the bloom of youth, beauty, and elegance, hence my suggestion to add "graceful" to the translation.

### 3.3.3 Dio

Dio chronicles the crumbling marriage of Octavian and Antony; for this narrative, the beginning of Book 50 is of much consequence, because the book records the official divorce between Octavia and Antony in 32 BCE:

καὶ αὐτὰ ὁ Ἀντώνιος ἀκούσας βουλήν τέ τινα ἐκ τῶν παρόντων ἤθροισε καὶ λεχθέντων ἐφ' ἑκάτερα πολλῶν τὸν τε πόλεμον ἀνείλετο καὶ τὴν τῆς Ὀκταουίας συνοίκησιν ἀπέειπε. (Dio 50.3.2)

And Antony, having heard these things, had gathered some advice from some of those who were present, and after multiple conversations, the matter of war was taken up on either side, and he renounced his marriage with **Octavia**.

Dio does not veil the reality of the marriage and explicitly mentions Octavia and Antony's divorce. The paragraph's beginning suggests unrest with the consideration of war and the division of the camps (ἐκάτερα πολλῶν τὸν τε πόλεμον ἀνείλετο). In the same sentence, the narrative turns from war to divorce. The use of συνοίκησις suggests cohabitation, which was scarcely applicable by 32 BCE, as we have seen. ἀπαγορεύω not only means "forbidding," but also denotes a type of resignation out of listlessness or weariness. For Dio, the cracks between Octavia and Antony continued to grow after Tarentum. If there was any lingering doubt regarding the cause of the divorce, Dio soon reveals that Cleopatra is still in the picture; *she* then becomes the assumed cause of the divorce.

### 3.3.4 Eutropius

Eutropius (360 AD) mentions Octavia and Antony's divorce in 32 BCE almost in the same breath as Sextus Pompey's death in 35 BCE. In this way, he combines reference to the two main

political adversaries whom Octavian bested to become the sole sovereign in the latter half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE:

Interim Pompeius pacem rupit et navali proelio victus fugiens ad Asiam interfectus est. Antonius, qui Asiam et Orientem tenebat, **repudiata sorore Caesaris Augusti Octaviani** Cleopatram, reginam Aegypti, duxit uxorem. (*Eutr.* 7.6)<sup>191</sup>

In the meantime, Pompey broke the peace, and having been defeated in the naval battle, escaping to Asia, he was murdered. Antony, who controlled Asia and the East, after the sister of Octavian Augustus was divorced, wed Cleopatra, queen of Egypt.

We should keep in mind that Eutropius' genre, the *breviarium*, likely accounts for the abrupt movement from Pompey to Antony.<sup>192</sup> Additionally, Eutropius' work has been interpreted to favour Octavian's side of the story.<sup>193</sup> Antony's link with the East, Egypt, and Cleopatra is also emphasised, whereas he is distanced from Octavia and Octavian.<sup>194</sup> In short, this abridged, late imperial account of the end of the 30s BCE establishes Octavia's divorce as one of the main events—*soror Caesaris Augusti* becomes Octavia's lasting role.

### 3.4 Octavia between 27 and 23: Horace *Carm.* 3.14

Eight years later in 24 BCE, Augustus (whom I will call by the title that he had acquired in 27 BCE) returned to Rome from his Spanish campaign. Horace (65-8 BCE) celebrates

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<sup>191</sup> See Ratti 1996: 181-3; 187: on «la détérioration des relations ente Octave et Antoine peut être datée de 33, soit un peu de temps avant ce divorce (mai-juin 32). »

<sup>192</sup> For the genre, see Müller 1995: 5-8; Gasti in Bordone 2014: xiv-xliv; Bleckmann 2018: 3-42. Gasti in Bordone 2014: xvii also compares the work to Livy's *Periochae*. For comparisons of the source material in this specific passage of Book 7 with Livy (*Per.* 130-131.1), Velleius 2.79.5, and Plut. *Ant.* 38.2-40.5); see also Ratti 1996: 24-45 (including the *Res Gestae*) and Bordone 2014: 301. For a specific passage on the sources including Livy and Suetonius, see Müller 1995: 911.

<sup>193</sup> For anti-Antonian interpretations, also regarding the divorce, see Müller 1995: 226-7, Ratti 1996: 170-1, and Bordone 2014: 301, n. 28.

<sup>194</sup> Müller 1995: 227, Ratti 1996: 187-8, following Chamoux 1986, and Bordone 2014: 301, n. 31 focus on the Egyptian angle in this passage. Ratti 1996: 188 draws attention to the anti-Antonian propaganda and justification of Augustus' victory and subsequent rule.

Augustus after the emperor's *adventus* with a panegyric and highlights the event's ritual sphere, the *supplicatio*, and the female participants.<sup>195</sup> Fittingly, Horace features Octavia prominently in the ritual celebration of her brother:

**Herculis ritu** modo dictus, o plebs,  
morte venalem petiisse laurum,  
Caesar Hispana repetit Penatis  
**victor** ab ora.

Unico gaudens mulier marito  
**prodeat** iustis operata sacris  
et **soror cari**<sup>196</sup> **ducis** et decorae  
supplice vitta  
virginum matres iuvenumque nuper  
sospitum.  
[...]  
(Horace *Carm.* 3.14.1-10)

O Roman people, in Herculean fashion  
Caesar returns, victorious, to his Penates  
from the Spanish shores,  
Caesar, who was reported but lately to have sought a  
bay-crown at the cost of his life;

The wife glad rejoicing in her incomparable husband—  
let her come forth [from the palace], performing rightful sacrifices<sup>197</sup> for the gods,  
and sister of the cherished leader: let her come forth, too  
and, seemly in their suppliant ribbons, the mothers  
of virgins and youths, just recently unharmed.<sup>198</sup>

Octavia, *soror cari ducis*, appears right next to Livia, *gaudens mulier*: Octavia's sister role takes precedence. Scholars have often observed the poem's mixture of the public, patriotic sphere with

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<sup>195</sup> For the national celebration, the ritual atmosphere, and the women's roles, Liv. 27.51.9 is helpful according to Nisbet and Rudd 2004: 180.

<sup>196</sup> Nisbet and Rudd 2011 point out that one side of the MS tradition shows *clari*, "which would be more usual: cf. Cic. *Marc.* 30, Sen. *Tro.* 255 *clari ducis*..." But I choose to follow their interpretation because of their reasoning concerning "the affectionate *cari* [which] provides a better parallel to *unico ... marito*; for the unexpected collocation with *ducis* cf. 1.1.2 *dulce decus meum*, which also combines the public and private spheres."

<sup>197</sup> *iustis operata sacris* taken according to the suggestion of Nisbet and Rudd 2011.

<sup>198</sup> Translation of this paragraph modified from Morgan 2010: 240-1.

the private, domestic realm, which is more often associated with the feminine.<sup>199</sup> The “public/private dichotomy” and its mixture is a trope that has repeatedly been applied to Octavia before at Brundisium, Athens, and Tarentum.<sup>200</sup> Both Octavia and Livia’s interaction with Augustus here similarly mixes the spheres; so too does the *Ode*’s inclusion of the children (*o pueri et puellae*), who are powerfully pictured just a bit later on the Ara Pacis—one of the most powerful material vehicles of the Augustan dynastic ideal. Marks 2008: 85 identifies the two opposite directions among the different spheres on the Ara: Augustus enters the private sphere whereas his female relatives venture outwards, across thresholds and borders. In the previous chapters, we have seen that Octavia has already displayed a fair share of venturing outwards during her travels—this tendency has become standard by now.

The verses themselves still carry intimacy: the hyperbaton in line 5 visualises the physical embrace (the separated *unico* and *marito* are preceded by the alliterative *mulier*). As with the extraordinary honours with which we began this chapter, Octavia and Livia appear as the joint subjects of *prodeat*, which depicts their forward movement to celebrate the public *adventus*. This crossover between spheres also manifests itself in the movements of the women themselves, as they are each summoned from the privacy of the imperial palace to the public sphere. Line 9 also includes an allusion to the two groups to which both Octavia’s Marcellus and Livia’s Julia belong. This youth and young woman get married one year later in 25 BCE, a bond that further ties together the already tight kinship connection.<sup>201</sup> Here we may note the

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<sup>199</sup> On the poem’s play with the public and private, see Porter 1987: 180-1, Mankin 1992: 379, Nisbet and Rudd 2004: 181, 185-6; Marks 2008: 85. Hutchinson 2016: 255-6 adds the lens of gender on the performative, metapoetic level of “female song and lyre-playing.”

<sup>200</sup> Morgan 2011: 41 expands on this theme of domesticity by pointing out that Augustus’ destination is privately specified as his own *Penatis* (line 3) as opposed to the more global city of Rome.

<sup>201</sup> See Nisbet and Rudd 2011: 185 for their interpretation of the line: *virginum matres iuvenumque nuper sospitum*.

matrilineal associations that commonly appear in relationships between Octavia's bloodline and the Augustan offspring, which we will revisit in Chapter 4.

Although seven years have passed since Actium, Antony and Cleopatra lurk beneath the surface of this poem. Cleopatra has appeared in Horace before: in *Carm.* 1.37.7, he refers to Cleopatra as the *regina* who leads her band of inebriated henchmen; instead, he keeps Antony, himself notorious for his heavy drinking, unnamed.<sup>202</sup> Here, a similar oblique reference to Antony may be in play. *Herculis ritu* evokes the dual appropriation of Hercules, since both Augustus and Antony linked themselves with this mythical ancestor.<sup>203</sup> I propose an additional connection between Horace's 3.14 and the following intertexts based on the loaded *victor* and *ducis* in a web of family titles. For instance, we may link Horace's *victor* and his female relatives with the overlap of the *victor* and *coniunx* Cleopatra's appearance on Aeneas's shield:

hinc ope barbarica variisque **Antonius** armis, / **victor** ab Aurorae populis et litore  
rubro, / Aegyptum virisque Orientis et ultima secum / Bactra vehit, sequiturque  
(nefas) **Aegyptia coniunx**. (*Aen.* 8.685-8)

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, we see another *dux* in the same form, connected with the reversed *coniunx Aegyptia*:

**Romanique ducis coniunx Aegyptia** taedae (*Met.* 15.826),

which we then see repeated closely in the Pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*:

hausit cruorem incesta **Romani ducis / Aegyptus** iterum (*Oct.* 522-3).

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<sup>202</sup> For Antony's widely recorded drunkenness, see Hor. *Carm.* 1.37.9-12, Cic. *Phil.* 2, Plut. *Ant. passim*. See also de Wet 1990: 93) with special attention to incorporations of Cicero's *Second Philippic*; Gibson's reference (2007: 64) to Pliny the Elder's assessment of Antony's alcohol consumption and Antony's non-surviving *De Sua Ebrietate* in Pliny *N. H.* 14.148; and lastly, Galinsky 2012: 46-7.

<sup>203</sup> For Augustus and comparisons with Hercules in literature, see Nisbet and Rudd 2004: 182: "Hor. 3. 3. 9 n., 4. 5. 36, Virg. *Aen.* 6. 801, Dio 56. 36. 4, the funeral oration ascribed to Tiberius." For both Augustus' and Antony's appropriation of and comparisons with Hercules, see Flory 1995: 47-52; Habinek and Schiesaro 1997: 160-1; Segal 2001: 89; Osgood 2006 240-1; Gorrie 2007: 15; Varner 2008: 1990, Levick 2010: 14-15.

Whereas the Horatian *ducis* undoubtedly refers to Augustus, the Ovidian and Pseudo-Senecan *ducis* refer to Augustus' former brother-in-law instead. Through Horace's use of *ducis*, the two men between whom Octavia mediated merge, within a poetic web that we can trace through loaded titles such as *dux* and *victor*.

### 3.5 Octavia's Loss of Marcellus in 23 BCE

In 23 BCE, Marcellus died in his early twenties: Octavia lost not just her young son but also her influential status as the mother of the presumptive heir.<sup>204</sup> This loss could explain why Octavia becomes more obscure within the Augustan family; Livia now assumes the role of the most influential female Augustan relative. The sources grow more silent as well: we only barely know of her own death roughly two decades later. What we see with the death of Marcellus, though, is a fairly consistent series of praises for Marcellus, whereas, for Octavia, we see two directly opposed accounts of her lament.

#### 3.5.1 Pseudo-Ovid *Consolatio ad Liviam*

Ovid (43 BCE—17/18 CE) alludes to Octavia once in the *Ars Amatoria* (*Ars Am.* 1. 69-70). He does not name her but calls her *mater* when he guides his readers past the Porticus Octaviae (a substantial portion of Chapter 4). Suggestively, the narrator mentions the Porticus Octaviae just before the portico of Livia, who is named (*Nec tibi vitetur quae, priscis sparsa tabellis, / Porticus auctoris Livia nomen habet, Ars Am.* 1.71-2). Is this order of appearance simply

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<sup>204</sup> We will revisit Marcellus and the Augustan lineage in Chapter 4.



reflecting the geographical chronology of the two buildings; or is a more deeply imagined rivalry between the sisters-in-law at play here? Knowing Ovid, we cannot exclude such cunning play with words and order.

If not in the *Ars Amatoria*, in the *Epicedion Drusi* or *Consolatio ad Liviam*, a piece in the *Appendix Ovidiana*, Octavia and Livia are starkly juxtaposed.<sup>205</sup> The text shows numerous similarities to the Senecan *consolationes* (especially *EpicDrusi*. 441), yet the *Consolatio ad Liviam* portrays Octavia as an exemplary mourning figure, whereas Seneca the Younger exhorts Octavia to emulate Livia's way of mourning.<sup>206</sup> McIntyre 2013: 233-5 importantly observes that this consolation intertwines both the public and the private nature of mourning and focuses on Augustus' use of his imperial family in the public/private dichotomy.<sup>207</sup> Schoonhoven 1992: 22-3 connects the funeral of Drusus in 9 BCE to that of Marcellus in 23 BCE. Octavia's exemplary mourning shines most brightly in *EpicDrusi*. 59-76 (Witlox 1934: 43-6 and Schoonhoven 1992: 105, Fraschetti 2016: 97-103), and *EpicDrusi*. 299-300 (Witlox 1934: 111 and Fraschetti 2016: 20-3 and 153 on the presence of Antonia Minor), and *EpicDrusi*. 441-4 (Witlox 1934: 451, Schoonhoven 1992: 195, and Fraschetti 2016: 187-8).

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<sup>205</sup> For the most recent (yet brief) treatment, see Hexter 2020: 390-424 and 494-500. The date of this text has been disputed: Schrijvers 1988: 383 believes that the text was composed and recited "comme pièce politique et publicitaire au cours de l'année 20 à la suite de la mort de Germanicus." See Schlegelmilch 2005: 165-178, who notes the similarities between this *consolatio* and *Tristia* 4.2 and Seneca's *Dial.* 6 and therefore proposes a date from 33 until 38; see also Peirano 2013: 208-14 for "the suspicious resemblance to Ovid's late poetry, written after his exile in AD 8"; the resemblance ignites the "authenticity debate" an authentic, Augustan date seems preferred. Thrans 2011: 375-7 notes the similarities between the *Consolatio* and Ovidian works such as the *Trist.*, *Pont.* and *Amores*; Thrans 2011: 383-7 argues for a date shortly after the beginning of Hadrian's rule and even proposes Suetonius as a possible author.

<sup>206</sup> Mountford 2019: 11-17 examines the *consolatio* mainly to depict Maecenas as Livia's consoler.

<sup>207</sup> Markus 2004: 127 notes the stark difference between this depiction of Livia (negatively portrayed as another Niobe) and that of Seneca the Younger: this Livia's *luctus publicus* is dramatic and excessive, rather resembling Seneca's emotional Octavia. Purcell 1986 explores the importance of Livia in Rome especially around Drusus' funeral and the related honours such as statues and familial privileges for women with three or more children.

The public nature of the imperial family's mourning stands out immediately. When the narrator turns to the Augustan *domus* and a catalogue of Augustus' misfortunes, the narrative extends beyond Augustus alone by including not only his family but also his subjects:

Ille vigil, summa sacer ipse locatus in arce,  
Res hominum ex tuto cernere dignus erat,  
Nec fleri ipse suis nec quemquam flere suorum  
Nec, quae nos patimur vulgus, et ipse pati;  
Vidimus erepta maerentem stirpe sororis:  
Luctus, ut in Druso, publicus ille fuit;  
Condidit Agrippam quo te, Marcelle, sepulcro,  
Et cepit generos iam locus ille duos;  
Vix posito Agrippa tumuli bene ianua clausa est,  
Percipit officium funeris ecce **soror**.  
(*EpicDrusi*. 61-70)

[the emperor himself], our guardian, set consecrated on top of the citadel, was deserving to overlook the matters of humankind from a safe place, and not to be wept for by his family members, nor to weep for any of his own family, or to endure himself what we, the plebs, endure: we have seen him mourning for his sister's offspring snatched away: that grief, as in Drusus' case, was shared publicly; he buried Agrippa, and in the same tomb as you, Marcellus, and that place already contained his two sons-in-laws; barely was the door of the tomb entirely closed when Agrippa was laid to rest, when—behold—his sister [already] receives her own funerary service.

This first appearance of Octavia coincides with the public nature of her brother's grief in which her own mourning is implied: the plural subject of *patimur* and *vidimus* with *vulgus*<sup>208</sup> in apposition turns her lament into a spectacle—a by-now frequently used trope. When Octavia appears explicitly, she is no longer her son's mourner but is now the one who receives the funerary rites—an allusion to her unique public funeral. In the beginning of the *consolatio*, Augustus is the

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<sup>208</sup> A sentiment echoed in *EpicDrusi*.203: *omnis adest aetas, maerent iuuenesque senesque*. For the speaker's relation to the *Publikum*, see Schlegelmilch 2005: 153-4. Ursini 2014: 93 considers the two previous lines *omnibus idem oculi ... adsumus omnis eques*, in terms of the narrator's status as *eques*; here again the all-encompassing nature of the public becomes apparent.

exemplar who gracefully bears his sorrow. Towards the end of the *consolatio*, the narrator rhetorically asks what the purpose is of repeating such old anecdotes:

Prisca quid huc repeto? Marcellum Octavia flevit  
Et flevit populo Caesar utrumque palam.  
(*EpicDrusi*. 441-2)

Why do I repeat old-fashioned stories here?  
Octavia wept for Marcellus,  
and Caesar wept for them both openly in front of the people.

The reluctance to repeat *prisca* is somewhat ironic since this public mourning facilitates the commemoration of the deceased family members (cf. Marcellus' library in the Porticus Octaviae in *Ars Am.* 69-70).<sup>209</sup> This *repeto* construction recalls *referam* from *Quid referam de te, dignissima coniuge Druso / Atque eadem Drusi digna parente nurus?* (*EpicDrusi*. 299-300<sup>210</sup>); the two passages become connected and gently assert Octavia's status as the mother of Antonia, Drusus' mourning wife. Here, we get a reversal of the earlier passage: Octavia appears first as the active mourner of her son, and Augustus then follows—in chiasmus—to mourn them both: both subjects appear with the emphatic repetition of *flevit*. Again, the narrator makes a point of the public nature of this mourning (*populo*). What matters for our purposes is that in this version, Octavia is the one who emerges as the positive foil, whereas the narrator faults Livia with improper mourning. It well illustrates the delicate side of the private/public dichotomy and how easily the comparison between the two matrons can be reversed.

### 3.5.2 Propertius

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<sup>209</sup> The public commemoration is further materialised by the sepulchre of *EpicDrusi*. 59-76.

<sup>210</sup> See Witlox 1934: 111 and Peirano 2013: 234-6 for the exemplary function that Antonia, just like her mother Octavia, performs. Ficca 2014: 141 examines the myths that feature in the *Consolatio* and notes the powerful effect of this near-realistic and near-contemporaneous appearance of Octavia and the evocation of Marcellus' death.

Propertius eulogizes the young Marcellus at the end of his third book of elegies.<sup>211</sup> Gone are the longings for Cynthia: Propertius uncharacteristically enters the public realm with his new subject. The narrator does not immediately mourn Marcellus: for the first ten lines, the scenery of gloomy Baiae, where Marcellus died, unfolds:<sup>212</sup>

**Clausus** ab umbroso qua ludit pontus **Auerno**,  
fumida stagna tepentis aquae,  
qua iacet Euboica tubicen Troianus harena,  
et sonat **Herculeo** structa **labore** uia,  
hic ubi, mortalis dexter cum quaereret urbes,  
cymbala Thebano concrepuere deo.  
at nunc, inuisae magno cum crimine **Baiae**,  
quis deus in uestra constitit hostis aqua?  
(Prop. 3.18.1-8)

Closed off from the shadowy Lake Avernus, the sea, where it plays  
with Baiae's steamy pools of warming water;  
where Misenus, the Trojan trumpeter, lies in the sand,  
and the road built by Hercules's work resounds;  
here, where, when he [the Theban god], propitious, aimed for mortal cities,  
the cymbals rattled for the Theban god.  
but now, Baiae, hateful with this great crime,  
what hostile god has stood fast/settled in your water?

Personified Baiae becomes notorious as the setting for Trojan Misenus' death,<sup>213</sup> a Herculean labour, and Bacchic revelry. Propertius works hard to establish Baiae's mythology in the opening lines, but what he also implies is Baiae's historical reputation: the *portus Iulius* instantly gives the elegy a political flavour and activates the Julian family connection.<sup>214</sup> The allusions to

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<sup>211</sup> Wallis 2018: 164 offers a thorough overview of the Marcellus tradition.

<sup>212</sup> The mythical precedents and volcanic imagery in the first four lines give away that Baiae is the setting. See Falkner 1977: 13-16 for Baiae as the location for Marcellus' death. Wallis 2018: 167 examines the delay of the announcement of Marcellus' death and the elegiac significance of Baiae in the epicedium. Ziogas 2017: 461-2 emphasises the link between Misenus' burial in *Aen.* 6.222-4, and notes that "the scansion of both names is identical."

<sup>213</sup> Ziogas 2017: 461-3 emphasises the link between this passage and Misenus' burial in *Aen.* 6.222-4 and interprets *more parentum* in this Virgilian passage as the custom of the ancestors and the pain of the actual parents and points out that the audience is affected "on two levels" since the *Aeneid* passage depicts the presence of parents at the funeral and brings "the *energeia* before the audience's eyes."

<sup>214</sup> See Wallis 2018: 168 for the confrontation of Sextus Pompey and Agrippa in 37 BCE. Wallis 2018: 180 stresses: "it is significant that Propertius opens with a striking reference to the naval station that Octavian had named ... in honour of the family of his adoptive father."

Hercules and Bacchus may recall how both Augustus and Antony appropriated these figures,<sup>215</sup> but does not give us enough reason to make a connection to, say, Octavia, until we discover that her son is indeed the elegy's subject. So far, the poem may bring to mind the Julian family and Agrippa's military achievements through the *portus Iulius*.

If the death of Misenus—a possible counterpart for Marcellus—offers the first hint of a gesture towards *Aeneid* 6 and a young man's burial, Wallis 2018: 180-5 observes that the elegy's very first word *clausus* evokes Marcellus: after all, we meet him by his “gentilicial name *Claudius*” in the parade of heroes at the end of the same book.<sup>216</sup> While Propertius initially only hints at Marcellus's presence, the unfortunate youth explicitly makes his entrance at last:

hic pressus Stygias uultum demisit in undas,  
errat et inferno spiritus ille lacu.  
quid genus aut uirtus aut optima profuit illi  
mater, et amplexum Caesaris esse focos?  
aut modo tam pleno fluitantia uela theatro,  
et per maturas/maternas<sup>217</sup> omnia gesta manus?  
(Prop. 3.18.10-16)

Here, overpowered, he [Marcellus] has sunk his head into the Stygian waves,  
and his spirit wanders on the infernal lake.  
Of what use has been his progeny, or his excellence, or  
his noblest mother to him, and his having embraced the hearths of Caesar  
Or even the sails fluttering recently in such a crowded theatre,  
and all the things achieved by his precocious/ his mother's hands?

Now we know that Marcellus, unnamed in this version, becomes yet another ghost in the gloomy ground of Baiae. Propertius represents Marcellus as a youth of great promise; his achievements

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<sup>215</sup> Falkner 2011: 15 identifies the role of Hercules in this poem as Augustan propaganda. Cairns 1992: 92, 100 observes that both Hercules and Bacchus are re-instituted on account of Antony in the post-Actium era.

<sup>216</sup> Wallis 2018: 176-9 uses the *gens Romana* and *gens Julia* to connect Propertius and Virgil, as we will see: “Marcellus ends *Aeneid* 6 as at once a Claudian but yet a (dead) son in Rome's first dynastic family” versus opposite in Propertius 3.18: focus on the maternal line and nihilistic approach as opposed to Virgil's climax. Wallis 2018: 182; 185 notes that Claudius connects Propertius to *Aen.* 6 but also to the underworld that this passage evokes.

<sup>217</sup> According to Heyworth and Morwood 2011, the corruption of *maturas* to *maternas* in some manuscripts can be attributed to the close presence of Marcellus' *mater* just a few lines above. Wallis 2018: 180-1 n. 47 approves the emendation to *maturas* as “precocious” by Heyworth and Morwood “precisely because the transmitted adjective is ‘repetitious,’ and ‘unsuited to the encomiastic context’.”

as an aedile were already impressive.<sup>218</sup> The wistful *quid...profuit illi?* construction explains that neither his lineage nor his mother ultimately could prevent his premature death. Octavia explicitly inhabits her maternal role (to a varying degree, see note 216): *mater* and Marcellus appear in a parallel position, but the lines mimic their inevitable separation. The enjambment through the hyperbaton *optima ... mater* achieves another separation, which keeps the reader in suspense for just a little longer.<sup>219</sup> The elegy's lines continue to be severed: *Caesaris ... focos* are separated; a *caesura* and corresponding *et* break the flow of the verse further and shift the attention to Augustus instead. Heyworth and Morwood 2011 interpret the embrace and the hearth as metaphorical but concede that the plural of *focos* can also be read as a “conventional plural for singular” as the merging of households of which Marcellus was a member through Octavia. Wallis 2018: 180 identifies Augustus’ “dynastic move” and draws the attention to the explicitly matrilineal influence. Here, I aim to focus on Marcellus’ death itself; in Chapter 4, we will re-examine this elegy from the angle of the consequences on the Julio-Claudian bloodline.

Wallis 2018: 167-2; 183 poignantly observes the symbolic and thematic metapoetics of the epicedium for Marcellus; this last poem of the book is a programmatic shifting point for Propertius’ material to come. The allusions to Baiae and Hercules that recur from *carm* 1.11 generate the expectation of another private poem to Cynthia, but Propertius instead fashions a touching tribute to Marcellus and hereby enters an uncharacteristically public realm.<sup>220</sup> The poem not only represents a family’s private loss but also weaves in the public regard for this youth.<sup>221</sup> The impact of this elegy, then, resembles Octavia’s experience and time: as the

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<sup>218</sup> Pliny the Elder (*NH* 19.24.2) also records Marcellus’ adding sails to cover the theatre as one of his merits as an *aedile*. The theatre may also open a connection with the theatre later dedicated to Marcellus; see Chapter 4.

<sup>219</sup> See Wallis 2018: 180 for more about the pentameter and the context of the “praise of the maternal family.”

<sup>220</sup> Wallis 2018: 167-72 argues that 3.18 offers “a glimpse of the kind of oblique presentation of Roman symbols that appears eventually in Propertius’ fourth book,” thus functions as an “important juncture within the generic trajectory of Book 3.”

<sup>221</sup> For this mixture of spheres and operating on multiple levels, see also Leonard 2015: 146.

principate progresses, the private experiences of the imperial sister transcend the traditional public-private dichotomy and become exponentially public.

### 3.3.3 Velleius Paterculus

Velleius Paterculus places Marcellus' death among the various conspiracies that irked Augustus but were not the only threats to his rule. Since illnesses continued to plague the emperor as his rule progressed, he needed to rely on symbols and entities larger than himself to consolidate his power.<sup>222</sup> A picture-perfect dynasty with an exemplary sister and her promising son would serve a similar purpose. For this reason, Marcellus' death was not merely a cause of personal hardship, but also had serious public consequences:

Ante triennium fere quam Egnatianum scelus erumperet, circa Murenæ Caepionisque coniurationis tempus, abhinc annos L, M. Marcellus, **sororis Augusti Octaviae filius**, quem homines ita, si quid accidisset Caesari, successorem potentiae eius arbitrabantur futurum, ut tamen id per M. Agrippam securi ei posse contingere non existimarent, magnificentissimo munere aedilitatis edito, decessit, admodum iuuenis, sane, ut aiunt, ingenuarum uirtutum laetusque animi et ingenii fortunaeque in quam alebatur capax. (*Historia Romana* 2.93.1)

About three years before the plot of Egnatius broke out, around the time of the conspiracy of Murena and Caepio, fifty years ago, Marcus Marcellus died, the son of Octavia, sister of Augustus. People believed that, if anything were to happen to Caesar, he would become his successor in command, and yet they did not suppose that this could befall him, carefree on account of Marcus Agrippa. Having displayed a magnificent public show for his aedileship, he died when he was only a youth. Certainly, as they say, he was a youth of noble character, with good cheer in spirit and nature, and fit for the lot for which he was being brought up.

Marcus Marcellus instantly emerges as Octavia's son for whom the emperor had high hopes. If

Marcellus died during his aedileship, the year must have been 23 BCE, yet Woodman 1983: 278-

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<sup>222</sup> Renucci 2003: 369-70 emphasises the paradox of his imminent mortality and projected immortality as emperor by regarding Augustus' health-related sacrifices.

9 doubts these assumptions, despite the ancient testimonies.<sup>223</sup> Velleius treats the assumption that Marcellus would succeed his uncle as undoubted public knowledge (the *homines* assumed as much). Octavia's decreased influence after his death may then not be surprising. The narrator, however, is quick to add that the people thought that Marcellus might succeed Augustus but that they were now counting on Agrippa as the successor. In any case, Marcellus' aedileship seems to have been well-received, and so was his character. In Chapter 4, we will see that Octavia had a reputation for being influential over her children's upbringing and education, and so implicit credit to Octavia may be due (passive *alebatur* may suggest as much). Eulogies for Marcellus attribute a generally spotless reputation to him—one that is reminiscent of the representations of the generally blameless Octavia.

#### 3.5.4 Seneca the Younger

I write “generally blameless,” because Seneca the Younger (4 BCE-65 CE) seems to be the only author to criticise Octavia in *Dial.* 6.2.2-3, otherwise known as the *Consolatio ad Marciam*.<sup>224</sup> In his attempt to console Marcia, Seneca evokes the familiar toolkit of exemplarity.<sup>225</sup> Octavia emerges as a negative exemplar of excessive, and thus improper mourning.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> “We know from Plut. *Marc.* 30 and Serv. *Aen.* 6.861 that Marcellus died during his aedileship, and from Plin. *NH* 19.24 that his aedileship fell in 23, the year implied also by Dio for Marcellus' death (53.30.4). It therefore seems undeniable that Marcellus died in 23; but how does this date square with the four indications of chronology given in V.'s text here?”

<sup>224</sup> Manning 1981: 1-24 proposes a date around 40 CE and identifies the influence of the Sextii on this *consolatio*.

<sup>225</sup> Manning 1981: 36 notes that, though rare in the literature of the early empire, Seneca tends to use roughly contemporary *exempla*. For the importance of exemplarity in Roman culture, see Bloomer 1992, and Roller 2010 and 2017, but especially female exemplarity in Ginsburg 2006: Chapter 3: The Power of Rhetorical Stereotypes: 106-29. See also Ziogas 2017: 451 on the danger that female grief can entail.

<sup>226</sup> For earlier parallels of proper grieving practices, see Cicero's *de amicitia* (paragraphs 8 until 11), where the consolatory advice is expressed through similar diction (*ferre moderate*). Although now lost, we know of Cicero's *consolatio ad se*, which he composed in the wake of the death of his prematurely deceased daughter Tullia.



Duo tibi ponam ante oculos maxima et sexus et saeculi tui exempla: alterius feminae quae se tradidit ferendam dolori, alterius quae pari adfecta casu, maiore damno, non tamen dedit longum in se malis suis dominium, sed cito animum in sedem suam reposuit. Octavia et Livia, altera soror Augusti, altera uxor, amiserunt filios iuvenes, utraque spe futuri principis certa... (Seneca *Dial.* 6.2.2 / *Consolatio ad Marciam* 2.2-3)

Two of the greatest examples of your own gender and era I will place before your eyes: the example of one woman who gave herself over to being carried away by grief; and of the other, who, despite being afflicted by a similar misfortune, and an even greater loss, nevertheless did not give her own sorrows long rule over herself, but quickly restored her mind to its former state. Octavia and Livia, the former Augustus's sister, the latter his wife, both lost their sons—mere youths, with each having certain hope of becoming *princeps*.

Seneca illustrates the “correct” mode of mourning by juxtaposing “two of the greatest examples” to whom Marcia can relate because they are women of the same generation.<sup>227</sup> Seneca unfavourably compares Octavia’s reaction to her son’s death to that of Livia.<sup>228</sup> Whereas Octavia and Livia initially receive the same honours in 35 BCE, they later come to exist as literary opposites, for instance, in the Pseudo-Ovidian *Consolatio*. But here in Seneca, the tables have turned: Livia is the “correct” example, while Octavia is retrospectively exhorted to emulate in moderating her own lament. Again, it is worth emphasising that “correctly performed lament served to commemorate the deceased”: Roman women and their mourning practices were important for their society.<sup>229</sup> Seneca praises Marcellus throughout his eulogy:

**Octavia Marcellum**, cui et auunculus et socer incumbere coeperat, in quem onus imperii reclinare, adolescentem animo alacrem, ingenio potentem, sed frugalitatis continentiaeque in illis aut annis aut opibus non mediocriter admirandae, patientem laborum, voluptatibus alienum, quantumcumque imponere illi avunculus et, ut ita dicam, inaedificare voluisset, laturum; bene legerat nulli cessura ponderi fundamenta... (Sen. *Dial.* 6.2.3/ *Consolatio ad Marciam* 2.3)

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<sup>227</sup> Langlands 2006: 37; 75-6 reminds us of Seneca’s high standards for feminine ideal behaviour: *pulcherrinma...forma, maximum decus...pudicitia* (*Dial.*12.16.4).

<sup>228</sup> For Octavia as a negative foil juxtaposed with Livia’s more suitable mourning, see Clark 1996: 48; Lavery 1997: 8-9; Barrett 2002: 28; Woodhull 2003: 32-3; Kunst 2008: 127; and Hemelrijk 2015: n. 116.

<sup>229</sup> Kubler 2017: 252, 257-9 attributes the cultural-political role of “guardians of memory” to Roman matrons: their lament was a type of preserving and commemorating for the generations to come. Ziogas 2017: 453 comments on Octavia’s attitude of refusing any reminders of her son, which was counterproductive to Marcellus’ commemoration, yet I believe that Octavia’s grief is a type of commemoration itself.

**Octavia** lost **Marcellus**, to whom both his father-in-law and his uncle had begun to turn for support, on whom the burden of the empire had begun to rest—a youth bright in spirit, powerful in character, but of frugality and temperance that are to be admired very much in a youth of his years and means, unyielding in his exertions, averse to revels, and willing to endure whatever his uncle might wish to assign to him, or I should I say, build on him. The uncle had chosen him well as the foundation, one that would yield to no burden whatsoever.

Seneca, as Velleius earlier, sketches Marcellus' noble qualities that stemmed from his *animus* and *ingenium*. Velleius lists Marcellus' aedileship among the youth's meritorious achievements, which set him up well to contribute his part to the imperial family. Seneca takes his own praise for Marcellus a step further and stresses his innate qualities and abilities, which would serve as the fundamentals of the Julio-Claudian *gens*. Marcellus' temperance recalls his mother's representations; for instance, when she patiently dealt with her brother and husband's conflicts. In other words, Octavia's influence may be implicit here, as in Velleius, as Roman mothers of the time dedicated themselves to their children's (but especially their sons') education. In Chapter 4, we will see just how involved Octavia was said to have been.

Even so, Seneca switches from Marcellus' praise to Octavia's blame. He claims that Octavia grieved so much and for so long that she affected her own well-being and that of those around her:

Nullum finem per omne vitae suae tempus flendi gemendique fecit nec ullas admisit voces salutare aliquid adferentis; ne avocari quidem se passa est, intenta in unam rem et toto animo adfixa. Talis per omnem vitam fuit, qualis in funere, non dico non ausa consurgere, sed adlevare recusans, secundam orbitatem iudicans lacrimas amittere. Nullam habere imaginem filii carissimi voluit, nullam sibi de illo fieri mentionem. Oderat omnes matres et in Liviam maxime furebat, quia videbatur ad illius filium transisse sibi promissa felicitas. (*Dial.* 6.2.4 / *Consolatio ad Marciam* 2.4-5)

Octavia never put an end to her weeping and mourning throughout her entire lifetime and never permitted any voices [that aimed to] bring any type of comfort; she never even allowed herself to be distracted, attentive to one thing alone and imprinted on this grief with her entire mind. So she was during her entire life, just as during the funeral. I do not say that she did not dare to rise up herself, but she was refusing to be alleviated in her sorrow, judging the loss of her tears as a second loss. She wished to have no image of her most beloved son, nor any mentioning of him to occur. She disliked all mothers and was

particularly infuriated with Livia because it seemed that the good fortune formerly expected for herself now had passed over to Livia's son.

According to Seneca, Octavia never modified the intensity of her mourning after the funeral (*per omnem vitam fuit, qualis in funere*), and she resisted when anybody offered consolation (*adlevare recusans*); she was exclusively absorbed by her sorrow for her lost son. Seneca does not think that she was unable “to rise up,” he stresses, but that she simply refused to do so, which Seneca may have deemed even more contemptible. He goes on to claim that Octavia would not bear to see or hear about her late son. Throughout his criticism, Seneca is given to exaggerated and generalised accusations (*per omne vitae suae ... nec ullas ... per omnem vitam ... nullam imaginem ... nullam mentionem ... omnes matres*). To add to these extreme accusations, Seneca claims that Octavia nourished a hatred for all mothers, but especially for Livia because her surviving son would now take Marcellus' place. Elsewhere, Dio informs us that Livia was accused of Marcellus' death in order to push her own agenda—that is, Tiberius' political advancement.<sup>230</sup> If Seneca is indeed alluding to this rumour, Octavia's fierce dislike of her sister-in-law may not come as a surprise. Manning 1981: 38 reminds us that this accusation is somewhat anachronistic since Tiberius did not ascend to the throne until 14 CE; Livia may not have poisoned her husband's nephew after all.

Seneca continues his reproach when Octavia's neglect for her brother comes to the forefront of Seneca's criticism:

Tenebris et solitudini familiarissima, ne ad fratrem quidem respiciens, carmina celebrandae Marcelli memoriae composita aliosque studiorum honores reiecit et aures suas aduersus omne solacium clusit. A sollemnibus officiis seducta et ipsam magnitudinis fraternae nimis circumlucentem fortunam exosa defodit se et abdidit. Adsidentibus liberis, nepotibus lugubrem uestem non deposuit, non sine contumelia omnium suorum, quibus saluis orba sibi uidebatur. (*Dial. 6.2.4 / Consolatio ad Marciam 2.5*)

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<sup>230</sup> Livia was accused of being responsible for Marcellus' death (by poison), according to Dio 53.33.4: **αἰτίαν** μὲν οὖν ἡ **Λιουία** τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ **Μαρκέλλου** ἔσχεν, ὅτι τῶν υἰέων αὐτῆς προετείμητο·

Most familiar to the shadows and solitude, she would not even pay attention to her brother; she rejected the poems which had been composed in order to commemorate Marcellus, and all the other honours paid him by literature, and closed her ears against all types of solace. In solitude and retired from her appointed duties, she—as it were—buried herself and removed herself, having exceeding hatred for the excessively flourishing prosperity of her brother. Although her children and grandchildren surrounded her, she did not put aside her mourning attire, not without offence to her own relations; she seemed bereaved to herself, even though they were alive.

Seneca's Octavia takes on ghostly attributes: she became most acquainted with shades (*tenebris*; reminiscent of Propertius' Baiae) and seclusion—and she even buried herself (*defodit se*), at least metaphorically.<sup>231</sup> Seneca reproaches her for not receiving the literature that paid tribute to her late son.

Overall, Seneca's criticism presupposes a certain set of expectations that were in place for the imperial sister. In addition to receiving honours and to making public appearances, Octavia seems to have been expected to perform certain unspecified duties—these she neglected as well. But, in Seneca's view, her greatest transgression was her behaviour towards her brother. The narrator's *ne ad fratrem quidem respiciens* carries an indignant tone: Octavia could not even bring herself to pay attention to her own brother, the ruler of the empire! Seneca adds that on top of being a neglectful sister, she was also rumoured to have acted as if her other children had passed away—a stark contrast with the picture of Octavia as a devoted child carer, which we will encounter in Chapter 4.

Ziogas 2017: 452 claims that “Seneca has his own agenda, namely, to console Marcia for the death of her son, and most likely exaggerates Octavia's grief for his own purposes,” but believes that “we can hardly dismiss this passage as his invention,” since “Seneca must have relied on a tradition about Octavia's excessive grief in order to maximize the effect of his

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<sup>231</sup> Ziogas 2017: 453 likens Octavia to the “fury Allecto or the Frenzied Amata,” and observes that Octavia's mourning turns her in a ghost as well, which gives rise to various connections to the underworld.

*exemplum.*” But are we *really* straightforwardly to believe Seneca’s criticism of Octavia, even though he is the only extant source with such claims? Seneca’s criticism complicates the generally spotless reputation of Octavia, but she still receives—as we will see—a public funeral. In Chapter 4, we see that Tacitus, Plutarch, and Suetonius record that she was involved in re-arranging the dynastic links: depending on the author, she agrees to (or effects by persuasion) a re-marriage between Agrippa—her son-in-law through Marcella the Elder—and Julia—the late Marcellus’ widow. Both publicly and privately, she seems to have been of enough consequence to generate criticism and cause offence in spite of her attempts to disappear into the background.

### 3.5.5 Tacitus

Whereas the previous authors mostly focused on Marcellus himself and the effect on Octavia, the texts to follow place Marcellus’ death in the larger dynastic picture. Like Velleius, Tacitus briefly mentions the younger Marcellus and his reputation of promise and precociousness, when Augustus attempts to solidify his dynasty by appointing possible heirs:

Ceterum Augustus subsidia dominationi Claudium Marcellum **sororis filium** admodum adulescentem pontificatu et curuli aedilitate, M. Agrippam, ignobilem loco, bonum militia et victoriae socium, geminatis consulatibus extulit, mox defuncto Marcello generum sumpsit. (Tac. *Ann.* 1.3.1)<sup>232</sup>

As for the rest, Augustus, as support to his hegemony, raised to the pontificate and curule aedileship Claudius Marcellus, his sister's son, although a mere youth, and Marcus Agrippa, humble with respect to his birth, a good soldier, and one who had shared his victory, to two consecutive consulships, and as Marcellus soon afterwards died, he also accepted him [i.e., Agrippa] as his son-in-law.

Tacitus informs us that Marcellus (although *admodum adulescentem*) receives exceptional treatment and preparation to follow in Augustus’ footsteps. Because of the young Marcellus’

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<sup>232</sup> See Koestermann 1963: 66-7.

premature death, Augustus needs to re-evaluate his succession arrangements; he opts to promote Agrippa within the dynastic hierarchy. Now that Julia has become Marcellus' widow, Augustus selects Agrippa to replace Marcellus as the imperial son-in-law. No one else but Agrippa seemed deserving and trustworthy enough to replace Marcellus and thus assume the closest possible place to the emperor. Our sources—Suetonius and Plutarch especially—differ in assessing Octavia's impact on this marriage re-arrangement; we will revisit this issue in Chapter 4.

### 3.5.6 Dio

Dio, by contrast, leaves no doubt concerning Augustus' succession plans. While Octavian has little hope of recovery for his illness (Dio 53.30.1-2), Dio maintains that Octavian did not officially appoint a successor, though it was expected that he would appoint his young nephew. To the public's surprise, no such arrangement came to pass (if anything, Agrippa received his ring). The freedman-physician Musa successfully restored the emperor to health after all, but Marcellus, who received the same treatment, did not recover:

... ὁ μὲν Αὐγουστος οὕτως ἐσώθη, ὁ δὲ δὴ Μάρκελλος νοσήσας οὐ πολλῶ ὕστερον καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν ἐκείνον ὑπ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ Μούσα τρόπον θεραπευόμενος ἀπέθανε. καὶ αὐτὸν ὁ Αὐγουστος δημοσίᾳ τε ἔθαψεν, ἐπαινέσας ὥσπερ εἶθιστο, καὶ ἐς τὸ μνημεῖον ὃ ὠκοδομεῖτο κατέθετο, τῇ τε μνήμῃ τοῦ θεάτρου τοῦ προκαταβληθέντος μὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ Καίσαρος, Μαρκέλλου δὲ ὀνομασμένου ἐτίμησεν. (Dio 53.30.4-6)

...on the one hand, Augustus had been saved in this manner, but, on the other, Marcellus fell ill not much later, and, although having been treated [like Augustus] by Musa, he died. Augustus granted a public burial, and, after having praised him as it is custom, he laid him to rest in the tomb that was being built, and as a memorial to Marcellus, Augustus honoured him by naming the theatre of which the fundamentals had been placed by Caesar, the Theatre of Marcellus.

Augustus seems to have been fond of his nephew: he granted him a public funeral, a resting place in the family's Mausoleum, and a theatre that bore Marcellus' name. The aftermath of Marcellus' death can also be traced throughout Books 34 and 35. In Book 53.1.2 we learn that

Agrippa was first married to Augustus' niece Marcella Maior, who divorced in order to facilitate Agrippa and Julia's remarriage (μετεπέμψατο αὐτόν, καὶ καταναγκάσας τὴν γυναῖκα, καίπερ ἀδελφιδῆν αὐτοῦ οὔσαν, ἀπαλλάξαντα τῇ Ἰουλίᾳ συνοικῆσαι; 54.6.5-6). Remarkably, Dio omits Octavia altogether: he does not mention her in the context of the re-marriage scheme, nor does he mention Marcellus' Library in the Porticus Octaviae. Unlike other sources, Dio does not even identify Octavia as Marcellus' mother: only Augustus mourns and commemorates Marcellus. Roughly a decade later, Augustus was to perform similar mourning practices when Octavia was granted a public funeral.

### 3.6 Octavia's Public Funeral in 12/11 BCE

#### 3.6.1 Livy

The abridged summary of Livy's work records Octavia's death. This passage, *Per.* 140.3, indicates the public nature of the imperial family's approach to Octavia's death:

Thracas domiti a L. Pisone, item Cherusci Tencteri Chauci aliaeque Germanorum trans Rhenum gentes subactae a Druso referuntur. **Octavia soror** Augusti defuncta, **ante amisso filio Marcello**; cuius monumenta sunt theatrum et porticus nomine eius dicata. [Livy *Per.* 140.3]

The Thracians were reported to have been vanquished by Lucius Piso and likewise the Tencteri, Chauci, and other German tribes across the Rhine, were reported to have been subjugated by Drusus. Octavia, the sister of Augustus, died, having lost her son Marcellus before; whose monuments are the theatre and colonnade dedicated in her name.

Octavia's death immediately follows the conquest of the Thracians, which must have been around 11 BCE, according to Dio 54.34. The abridged nature of the *Per.* itself may explain the paragraph's abrupt transition. Alternatively, we have noticed a trend in which Octavia's life events are often intertwined with military and political events. From this short paragraph, we may extract the most notable moments of Book 140: several conquests, Octavia's death, preceded by

Marcellus' (though not in the same year), and the dedication of Marcellus' theatre and Octavia's portico. Octavia is initially identified as *soror Augusti*, yet immediately thereafter, we learn that she had lost Marcellus before her own death (*ante amisso filio Marcello*). Though Dio records that Drusus gave a funeral oration for Octavia (as we will see), here he only appears in the context of the Thracian wars. The summary of Livy's account attributes to Octavia memorial structures (*monimenta*)—her memory in Livy's summary ends with a focus on her own patronage and her influence in preserving her son's life.

### 3.6.2 Suetonius

Suetonius records the deaths of Octavia and her mother Atia and the honours that they receive. Since Suetonius focuses on Augustus, all the characters contribute to Augustus' position as the narrative's focal point.<sup>233</sup>

Matrem amisit in primo consulatu, sororem Octaviam quinquagensimum et quartum agens aetatis annum. utrique cum praecipua officia uiuae praestitisset, etiam defunctae honores maximos tribuit. (Suet. *Aug.* 61.2)

His mother he lost during his first consulate, his sister during his fifty-fourth year. He offered extraordinary favours to them both alive, and he even bestowed the greatest honours to each of them once they had passed.

Suetonius mentions the dates of the deaths of Atia and Octavia in the same sentence. For the death of the emperor's mother, Suetonius lists Augustus' public, consular date, whereas

Octavia's death is related in terms of his own personal years.<sup>234</sup> Octavia is named, whereas Atia

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<sup>233</sup> The material position of Augustus in the centre of the Grande Camée de Paris is an interesting parallel, see Kokkinos, Millar, and Vartuca 2002: 137; Pandey 2013: 429; and Hölscher 2018: 103.

<sup>234</sup> For Suetonius on Atia and Octavia, see Louis 2010: 407: "Suétone utilise une phrase de transition qui permet le passage de la vie publique à la vie privée. Il choisit de suivre l'ordre chronologique ... Il énonce aussi [after mentioning his mother Atia's death] rapidement la mort d'Octavia la cadette... On remarque que Suétone fournit la date par la mention de son âge ... En utilisant les termes *praecipua officia et honores maximos*, Suétone laisse comprendre l'affection que ressentait Auguste à l'égard d'Atia et d'Octavie... ». Manning 1981: 38-9, too, questions Seneca's criticism of Octavia because Augustus granted a state funeral to his sister; he links it to Seneca's



is not. One wonders whether we can infer a difference between the levels of these two women's respective closeness to Augustus by these variations of expression. Even so, it remains true that they were both paid tribute to equally in the public realm with favours and honours. Both *praecipua* and the superlative *maximos* draw attention to these women, linked by *utrique*.

Suetonius presents this bond between sister and brother as close and seemingly lasting right up to the end of Octavia's life. This account then directly contradicts Seneca's suggestion about the siblings' rift after the death of Marcellus in 23 in his *Consolatio*, a decade before the latter's mother passed. Notably, Suetonius mentions none of Seneca's claims that the sister and brother did not get along as well because of Octavia's mourning for Marcellus. Most important for this section, however, is the reference to Octavia's lasting public presence, even after her death.

### 3.6.3 Dio

Dio 54.34 helps us date the event mentioned in the summary of Livy, because Livy's *Periochae* roughly put together Piso's submission of the Thracians and Octavia's death:

ἐν δὲ τῷ ἔτει ἐκείνῳ τὴν τε Ἰουλίαν τῷ Τιβερίῳ συνῶκισε, καὶ τὴν Ὀκταουίαν τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἀποθανοῦσαν προέθετο ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἰουλιεῖου ἡρώου, παραπετάσματι καὶ τότε ἐπὶ τοῦ νεκροῦ [χρησάμενος.] (Dio 54.35.4)<sup>235</sup>

But during that same year, Augustus betrothed Julia to Tiberius, and when his sister Octavia died, he had her body laid out in the shrine of Julius, furnished with a cover over her body at that time.

Dio includes an imperial funeral and an imperial betrothal of the next generation in the same sentence. The incorporation of Octavia's body in the Julian shrine contrasts the tension between sister and brother that Seneca the Younger pictured. The "cover" is perhaps another symbol of

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interpretation of "continuous mourning as insulting to one's surviving friends and kin [who were to be seen] as a natural source of comfort in bereavement."

<sup>235</sup> See Manuwald 1979: 249 and n. 525. See also Manuwald 1979 for the comparison between Dio and Livy.

the mixture of public and private that we thus far have encountered in Octavia's life: whereas the family shrine evokes public sentiments, the curtain evokes the sense of privacy that remains when dealing with early-imperial ladies.<sup>236</sup> Dio further informs us that both Augustus and Drusus eulogise Octavia in her state funeral:

χρησάμενος, καὶ αὐτός τε ἐκεῖ τὸν ἐπιτάφιον εἶπε, καὶ ὁ Δροῦσος ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος· δημόσιον γὰρ τὸ πένθος ἀλλαξαμένων τὴν ἐσθήτα τῶν βουλευτῶν ἐγένετο. καὶ τὸ μὲν σῶμα αὐτῆς οἱ γαμβροὶ ἐξήνεγκαν, τὰ δὲ δὴ ψηφισθέντα αὐτῇ οὐ πάντα ὁ Αὐγούστος ἐδέξατο. (Dio 54.35.5)

He himself made the funeral speech there at the shrine, whereas Drusus did the same from the rostra. For the mourning occurred as a state funeral, with the senators having changed their attire. Her sons-in-law carried her body, but Augustus did not accept all the [honours] having been voted for her.

It is chiefly the location of the delivery of the epitaph that differs in the respective presentations of Augustus and Drusus at Octavia's funeral. Perhaps the shrine here functions as the intermediary between the privacy of the covering in the previous paragraph and the more public nature of the *rostra*. Dio explicitly identifies this rare public funeral for a female member of the Augustan household. Unlike in 35 BCE, Augustus did not accept the honours that the senate voted for her upon her death.<sup>237</sup> Seneca the Younger makes us doubt the quality of the siblings' relationship in his *consolatio*, whereas Suetonius mentions only that Augustus bestowed this public funeral; we learn nothing about refused honours elsewhere. In any case, it is unclear if Augustus' refusal of these honours is related to any enmity that may have stemmed from Octavia's mourning for Marcellus: Augustus' refusal may simply have been another instance of political propaganda, even at his sister's funeral procession. What matters above all for now,

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<sup>236</sup> According to LSJ, the use of *παραπετάσματι* is rare, can be metaphorical, and has Eastern connotations in its material sense.

<sup>237</sup> Flory 1993: 305 questions whether Augustus indeed did curtail Octavia's honours, which I have not been able to identify up to this point, given the extraordinary occasion of her public funeral.

however, is that Dio still records how the senate was involved in Octavia's death and funeral—another mixture of the public and the private sphere in Octavia's life and death.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, then, we have traced how Octavia's position within the principate changed. Though two extraordinary honours—the ones she shares with Livia and her public funeral—frame this chapter, different Octavias emerge across the public/private dichotomy. On the one hand, Plutarch represents an exclusively virtuous Octavia as the foil of Cleopatra, for whom Antony allegedly left Octavia and her children. Different historiographical sources of different eras record her divorce as a prominent event of the thirties BCE. Whereas Horace depicts a celebrating Octavia next to Livia, different literary representations of Octavia's maternal grief set up a literary rivalry between Octavia and Livia. Though we have three accounts of Octavia's death and/or funeral procession around 12/11 BCE, Octavia mainly recedes to the background after Marcellus' death. While it is true that, after 23 BCE, we possess less documentation of any type pertaining to the “Historical Octavia,” in Chapter 4, we will see that the literary Octavia becomes more present with more varied representations and pursuits. In this chapter, we have already seen how lineage and pedigree affected Octavia's life to some extent; in Chapter 4, we return to this topic for a more thorough examination of Octavia and her impact.

## Chapter 4: The Octavia Factor

### 4.1 Unearthing the Octavia Factor

The year is 23 BCE: Augustus has been ruling for four years and now seeks to consolidate his dominion. He and his advisors believe that a strong succession plan will enable his burgeoning dynasty to thrive. Heirless himself—his daughter Julia was never eligible as his successor—Augustus turns his gaze to his male relatives. His nephew Marcellus emerges as a candidate with exceptional promise but falls ill and dies. The Augustan *domus* is in mourning, only to be surpassed in its grief by Marcellus' mother Octavia Minor. Distraught, Octavia recedes into the background. We hear little to nothing about her in sources on events between Marcellus' death in 23 BCE and her own death in 12/10 BCE. And yet, the literary Octavia does not disappear from our texts and sources by any means, as we will see.

One could take the material culture approach and regard Octavia's relevant appearances in numismatics, inscriptions, portraits, and other art forms such as the Porticus Octaviae: Fischer 1999 has done so in *Fulvia und Octavia –Die Beiden Ehefrauen des Marcus Antonius in den Politischen Kämpfen der Umbruchszeit zwischen Republik und Principat*. Instead, I focus on Octavia's literary appearances and the texts that *describe* such artifacts as opposed to the objects themselves. In this chapter, we will seek an answer to the following questions: can we explain the increase in sources that mention Octavia? What are the implications of this increase? Is Octavia present only in the sources that mention her explicitly? Two works set the scene. Treating Marcellus' death and Octavia's mourning from different vantage points: Virgil dramatizes Marcellus' sojourn into the Underworld, and Suetonius recounts how Octavia reacts to Virgil's recitation of this passage before the Augustan court.

#### 4.1.1 Virgil's *Epicedion Marcelli* at the end of *Aeneid* 6

When Aeneas visits the Underworld in *Aeneid* 6, he meets his father Anchises, who shows him how the Roman race will develop in its pursuit of glory. Notables such as the Alban kings, Romulus, and Caesar pass by in the so-called Parade of Heroes. Last but not least, Marcellus briefly steals the show in this *Heldenschau* in *Aeneid* 6.854—86: he marches together with his ancestor Claudius Marcellus, illustrious in his own right (*aspice, ut insignis spoliis Marcellus opimis / ingreditur victorque viros supereminet omnis; Aen. 6.855-6*).<sup>238</sup> Scholars have argued that the two Marcelli should be read in tandem: the elder and younger Marcellus may have lived centuries apart, but the elder Marcellus' influence is still evident in the traditions of the family of the younger Marcellus.<sup>239</sup> The connection between these two Marcelli comes to life when Aeneas asks Anchises about the younger Marcellus:

atque hic Aeneas (una namque ire videbat  
**egregium forma iuvenem et fulgentibus armis,**  
**sed frons laeta parum et deiecto lumina vultu)**  
“quis, pater, ille, virum qui sic comitatur euntem?  
**filius, anne aliquis magna de stirpe nepotum?**  
qui strepitus circa comitum! quantum **instar** in ipso!<sup>240</sup>  
sed **nox atra** caput tristi circumvolat umbra.”  
tum pater Anchises **lacrimis ingressus obortis:**

“o gnate, ingentem luctum ne quaere tuorum;  
**ostendent terris hunc tantum fata nec ultra**  
**esse sinent.** nimium vobis Romana propago  
visa potens, superi, propria haec si dona fuissent.  
quantos ille virum magnam Mauortis ad urbem

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<sup>238</sup> Horsfall 2013: 587 gives us a thoughtful introduction for the so-called *Epicedion Marcelli*.

<sup>239</sup> Zetzel 2019: 273 notes that the Underworld speech “juxtaposes early and very recent history” during the stroll of the third century Marcellus and the younger Marcellus, functions as a “reference to failed hopes, early death; and lack of obvious succession to Augustus.” Hardie 2019: 323 likewise connects the “endings of Book 6 and 12 as corresponding in grief” and “contemporary events versus remote legendary past.”

<sup>240</sup> Von Albrecht 2007: 84-5 notes the focus of size and greatness in this line and the corresponding passage of Pallas, a foil for Marcellus (etwa *maxime Palla: Aen. 11.97; quantum instar* über Marcellus *Aen. 6.865*).

campus aget gemitus! vel quae, Tiberine, videbis  
funera, cum **tumulum** praeterlabere **recentem!**  
**nec puer Iliaca quisquam de gente Latinos**  
**in tantum spe tollet avos, nec Romula quondam**  
**ullo se tantum tellus iactabit alumno.**

heu, **miserande puer**, si qua fata aspera rumpas,  
**tu Marcellus eris.** manibus date lilia plenis  
purpureos spargam flores animamque nepotis  
his saltem accumulem donis, et fungar inani  
munere.”

(Virg. *Aen.* 6.860-86)

And now, Aeneas asks (**for he perceived that  
a youth was walking together with Marcellus,  
a youth, distinguished in his beauty, with glittering weapons,  
but his countenance was hardly cheerful, and his eyes were downcast**):  
‘Father, who is the one who accompanies that man walking in that manner?  
**Is he his son or another scion out of his great lineage of descendants?**  
What murmuring round their attendants! What a great **presence** in him!  
But **gloomy night** with a sad shade flies round his head.’  
Then, his father Anchises began as tears sprang up:

“O son, do not ask about the great grief of your people;  
**The Fates will show such an eminent youth to the world, yet they will not allow him  
to exist beyond that point.** The Roman progeny would seem  
too powerful to you, gods above, if these gifts were perpetually lasting.  
What great lamentations of men that Field of Mars will  
stir up next to the great city! And what funeral processions  
will you see, Tiber, as you flow by his recently made tomb!  
Nor will any boy from the Ilian people exalt his Latin forefathers  
so much in promise, neither will Romulus’s  
land at any time take more pride in any of its sons.

Alas, boy who must be pitied, if you could only shatter adverse fates,  
**you shall be a Marcellus!** Bring lilies with full hands,  
so that I strew about bright-purple flowers and heap these offerings  
upon my scion’s spirit at least; and let me perform that burial service in vain.”

Anchises, as Virgil’s mouthpiece, eulogises Marcellus. Marcellus’ position this late in Book 6 is  
emphatic: he almost closes the middle book of this quintessentially Roman epic. The premature  
death of promising young men is a common trope in the *Aeneid*, but even so, the *Epicedion*

*Marcelli* is deeply moving and provocative.<sup>241</sup> Hardie 2019: 323-5 reads Anchises' funeral recital for Marcellus as a modified triumph and points out how tragedy pervades large portions of the *Aeneid*. The presence of Marcellus in this passage is a particularly illuminating instance of the latter theme. Moreover, Marcellus' shade opens opportunities for a looming Octavia figure, as I suggest.

Scholars have read Octavia into a Virgilian work before—for instance, as the unidentified mother of the Golden Age child in *Eclogue 4*.<sup>242</sup> So, why not apply this lens to this passage in which Marcellus, Octavia's only male child, plays a key role? We may not find any explicit references to the fallen hero's mother in *Aeneid 6* but this absence need not mean that Octavia is not present at all. For instance, Hallett 2020 has suggested that Octavia appears as another Venus figure because of their similarities as mothers whose childcare extends beyond their nuclear families.<sup>243</sup> In the case of *Aeneid 6*, then, I argue that we can further uncover Octavia's latent presence in Marcellus' eulogy.

First, I argue that Octavia is implicitly present through the passage's emphasis on the renowned lineage of the *Marcelli* and the resulting grief that Marcellus' demise has caused. Marcellus seems to have inherited his mother's characteristic beauty and excellence (*egregium forma iuvenem*, *Aen.* 6.861), and the focus on his illustrious lineage implies Octavia's

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<sup>241</sup> Von Albrecht 2007: 10; 127-8; 176-7 reads Marcellus' death, in the tradition of sacrifice during Aeneas' journey, as a binding theme among the books (cf. Aeneas' wife in Book 2, his father in Book 3, his lover in Book 4, his captain in Book 5 ... and the death of Marcellus at the very end of Book 6, "a significant midpoint"). In addition, he proposes that the connection with Icarus' death at the beginning of Book 6 comes full circle with Marcellus' death at the end. Moul 2019: 358-9 similarly remarks that there are verbal connections between the historical Marcellus and fictional Pallas (as Van Albrecht 2007: 84-5 above).

<sup>242</sup> I treat this text in Chapter 2.

<sup>243</sup> In "Augustan Maternal Ideology: The Blended Families of Octavia and Venus," Hallett 2020 justifies the absence of an explicit mention of Octavia in the *Aeneid* as follows: "Virgil's own, moving tribute to [Octavia's] only son in Book 6 of the *Aeneid* evoked a powerful emotional response from Octavia. But Virgil's portrayal of Venus in her complicated maternal role may be a tribute to Octavia herself. For it recognizes the challenges she faced in successfully managing a blended family [with both mothers having children by multiple fathers and the tension between Aeneas and Cupid] by transforming an amoral erotic divinity into a domestically amorous goddess, with Rome's political interests at heart."

reproductive qualities more than once (*Aen.* 6.864: *anne aliquis magna de stirpe nepotum?* and *Aen.* 6.875-7: *nec puer Iliaca quisquam de gente Latinos / in tantum spe tollet avos, nec Romula quondam / ullo se tantum tellus iactabit alumno.*). Hardie 2019: 333 reminds us that the continuation of the Octavian and Julian lineage (*omnis Iuli | progenies*, *Aen.* 6.789–90) was the priority, and not that of the general “Roman stock,” as *Aen.* 6.870 may suggest at first glance. Because of the emphasis on the pedigree of the Marcelli, the third century BCE Marcellus and the young Marcellus are situated in their respective historical and socio-political spheres. In this regard, the birth and marriage connections that Octavia would help forge in real life are essential for the Augustan plan: succession would become Augustus’ biggest concern.<sup>244</sup> Octavia herself becomes visible because of these instances of illustrious lineage. For Octavia inherits Venus and Aeneas as her ancestors from her great-uncle Caesar: it is indeed through her that Marcellus is a descendent of Anchises and Aeneas.

Secondly, I suggest that we can make more of the parent-son connection in Anchises’ lamenting address to Aeneas.<sup>245</sup> We could read Octavia into this passage as the reverse version of Anchises, as a surviving parent with high hopes, and as a counterpart for Anchises who mourns Marcellus in the epic itself. Moreover, the father-son dynamic between Aeneas and Anchises at the end of *Aen.* 6 is reversed in the case of Octavia and Marcellus. Whereas the living Aeneas visits his dead father in the underworld, Octavia survives and laments her young son. Alternatively, we can again read Octavia as the Venus *genetrix* figure, who remains unmentioned

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<sup>244</sup> Comparable diction attributed to Marcellus by Crinagoras and Propertius may also come to mind. Propertius’ gloomy Avernus atmosphere may evoke *Aen.* 6.866: *sed nox atra caput tristi circumvolat umbra*, and we can find the mention of the power of the Roman progeny in *Aen.* 6.870 in Propertius’ *genus profuit* in *Carm.* 3.18.11-2. As Horsfall 2013: 605 notes about the time lag between the identification of Marcellus and the explicit *Aen.* 6.883 *tu Marcellus eris*, we also see this delayed Marcellus mention in Prop. *Carm.* 3.18.

<sup>245</sup> See Ziogas 2017: 467 for Anchises’ apostrophe; for funeral imagery such as lilies as grave offerings for the “revived funeral,” see Brenk 1986 and 1990.



as mother of youths (whether they be Aeneas or Marcellus) in this lineage of exclusively male heroes.

Thirdly, further bolstering the presence of Octavia, the funerary imagery and language reflect a realm in which women such as Octavia played a key role. After all, Octavia's lament became emblematic in the literary representations that survive after this date. This language of lament (e.g., *campus aget gemitus!* in *Aen.* 6.873) may have inspired Octavia's later depictions of the mourning mother in *Ad Liviam/Epicedion Drusi* and *Ad Marciam*, which we have seen in Chapter 3.

We thus see Octavia's latent literary presence at the end of *Aen.* 6 through the emphasis on Marcellus' pedigree, the parent-child dynamic, and the recurring funerary language, imagery, and rituals. Virgil must have written this passage when he himself was only too conscious of Marcellus' death and thus also of Octavia's grief. The latter may be why Octavia never appears explicitly in the passage: the ties with the Augustan family may have called for discretion, especially since the devastation of a senior member of the dynasty was at stake.

#### 4.1.2 Suetonius' *Vita Vergili* on Octavia's Presence at the Recital of *Aeneid* 6

We can now connect Virgil's *tu Marcellus eris* to Suetonius' account of Octavia's reaction to this passage: overcome by grief, Octavia is reported to have fainted when she heard Virgil reciting his lines about Marcellus in the underworld. We read about this event in Suetonius' *Vita Vergili* 32, and Servius and Donatus preserve different versions of this anecdote

of Virgil's recitals circa 22 BCE.<sup>246</sup> We must remember, however, that scholars have doubted the episode's historicity.<sup>247</sup> Ultimately, what matters is not so much whether Octavia did or did not faint at the recital, but that Octavia is represented and remembered in this way. After Suetonius records how Augustus, even while away on his Cantabrian campaign, entreated Virgil to share his drafts from the *Aeneid* as a work in progress, Suetonius shifts the attention to Octavia:

Cui tamen multo post perfectaue demum materia tres omnino libros recitavit, secundum, quartum et sextum, sed hunc notabili Octaviae adfectione, quae cum recitationi interesset, ad illos de filio suo versus, "tu Marcellus eris," defecisse fertur atque aegre focolata est, dena sestertia pro singulo versu Vergilio dari iussit. (Donatus auctus: Suet. *Vita Vergili* 32)

But, not until much later when he had finally some material, Virgil at last recited three books in their entirety to Augustus—the second, fourth, and sixth—but the latter with a remarkable effect on Octavia, who, as she was present at the recitation, is reported to have fainted at those famous verses about her son, "You shall be Marcellus;" she was revived only with difficulty and decreed that ten thousand sesterces for each verse be given to Virgil.

Suetonius initially focuses on Virgil's meticulous writing process and Marcellus' death, after which Octavia's reaction to Virgil's recital takes on a life of its own. This literary moment inspired painters to depict the *tu Marcellus eris* moment, as Houghton 2019: 164 notes in a chapter on "Vergil in Art."<sup>248</sup> Suetonius' passage then opens possibilities for Octavia's literary

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<sup>246</sup> Ziogas 2017: 437-8 points out that "in Servius' version, Octavia and Augustus cannot stop weeping and are about to order Vergil to stop reciting": *et constat hunc librum tanta pronuntiatione Augusto et Octaviae esse recitatum, ut fletu nimio imperarent silentium, nisi Vergilius finem esse dixisset*. [And it is reported that this book was recited to Augustus and Octavia with such remarkable delivery that because of excessive weeping they would have ordered silence, if Vergil had not said that he had finished.] (Servius *ad Aen.* 6.861). Lindsay 2009 attributes this knowledge to a letter correspondence between Suetonius and Pliny the biographer in 105 CE, which states that Suetonius was hesitant to publish, so the publication date of this work must have been after 105 CE. See also Goold 1992: 111 for sources that deal with Donatus and Servius. Naumann 1981 contributes to the debate about the real writer of the work; some believe that Donatus wrote this biography.

<sup>247</sup> Horsfall 2013: 587-8; 595 is suspicious whether Octavia fainted or not: "Octavia's fainting is presented as a *fertur*-tradition (VSD 32; Companion) and there is good, textual reason (n. on 864 *magna...stirpe nepotum*) to suspect the accuracy of the whole passage." See also Farron 1993: 33; Tarrant 1997: 169 (on Virgil's occasional nod to the relationship between poet and the princeps' family and the triple triumph of 29); Fantham 2006: 31; Stok 2010: 107-8; Houghton 2015: 177, n. 6-7.

<sup>248</sup> The tale of Octavia's swoon would inspire painters centuries later, e.g., Taillasson in 1787, Kauffman in 1788, and Ingres in 1840.

presence in *Aeneid* 6. Although there is no explicit mention of Octavia at the end of *Aen.* 6, Suetonius here encourages us to connect Octavia to Anchises' eulogy for Marcellus, as the boundary between Virgil's characters and his audience is blurred through Octavia's intense reaction.<sup>249</sup>

Though Octavia's swoon is dramatic enough (Ziogas 2017 compares her to Andromache in *Iliad* 22/24), we must not neglect the fact that she paid Virgil at the very same moment. Although Ziogas 2017: 446-50 argues that this payment of Virgil would have been "anomalous and problematic": at first glance, Octavia seems to reward Virgil with this handsome sum, but upon examination, it becomes clear that "with the exception of Octavia, patrons never rewarded poems at the moment they were represented to them." In other words, Donatus represents this Octavia as debasing Virgil's poem with monetary compensation, though Donatus may have invented Octavia's payment deliberately to make it seem like she undermines the value of the *Aeneid* by paying 10,000 sesterces per line.<sup>250</sup>

This passage shows that Octavia was engaged with such cultural activities at the imperial court, since Suetonius represents Octavia as an invitee to the *Aeneid* recitals and as a friend of the arts in general. Hemelrijk 1998: 45, 108 discusses this specific recitation and comments that women who attended recitations were usually "female relatives of the poet-performer or of the host who put his house at the disposal of a friend or protégé to give a recitation of his work." Additionally, Hemelrijk includes Octavia's presence at the recital as an example of how imperial

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<sup>249</sup> Ziogas 2017: 442-4 discusses the blurred boundaries between the internal and external audience and compares the Suetonian Virgil's reaction to Octavia's fainting to Odysseus' self-interruption after the catalogue of women; see also Willis 2013 on Virgil's manipulation of time and audience. See Ziolkowski and Putnam 2008: 345 for Donatus' modifications: "Donatus auctus is a humanistic life, based on the *VSD* with many interpolations. Indeed, it may have been a deliberate falsification of the *VSD*. It is likelier that this life drew upon a variety of sources to fill gaps in the *VSD*. Some of these materials are familiar from many other vitae, but others are unparalleled and appear to be authentically late antique."

<sup>250</sup> See White 1993: 16, 148 for this direct payment from the reclusive Octavia.

women would pursue patronage, just as Octavia's daughter Antonia Minor later would be depicted by Crinagoras of Mytilene, as we shall see.

In short, Octavia's cultural influence and involvement—both as latent character and audience member—suggest a literary phenomenon that I will call the Octavia Factor from now on. In this chapter, I will demonstrate the following facets of the Octavia Factor in her literary representations: Octavia and the Octavian blood and lineage; her child care and marriage arrangements, and her cultural engagements that range from her associations with court scholars and artisans to the *Porticus Octaviae*, and, eventually, to alleged accounts of her beauty routine.

#### 4.2 Octavia and the Octavian Blood and Lineage

One side of the Octavia Factor is Octavia's status as a vital transmitter and caretaker of Julio-Claudian blood, a role greatly valued for Augustus' succession. It was through Octavia, after all, that her son Marcellus was counted among the candidates to succeed his Uncle Octavian.<sup>251</sup> Octavia's role as sister of the emperor and mother of the possible successor is present on multiple levels in different texts, as readings of Virgil's *Aeneid* 6 and Suetonius' account of its recital have shown. We may also think of Octavia's connection with family traditions of the Marcelli such as the *spolia opima*, which inspired Augustus to reinvent this rare military practice.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> For a thorough examination of Marcellus' possible succession, see Sawinski 2018: 21-3; 30; 37. Freudenburg 2017: 118 n. 3, however, reminds us of the unofficial nature of Marcellus' adoption.

<sup>252</sup> See Flower 2000: 49-54 on the *spolia opima* in *Aeneid* 6.

The importance of the genealogical narrative affects representations of Octavia.<sup>253</sup> This phenomenon is reminiscent of how impressive ancestral lines sprung from deities and how Roman patricians boasted their origins from other mythological figures.<sup>254</sup> For instance, Badian 2015: 11-15 traces the “origin of the Julii shrouded in myth deriving ancestry from Aeneas and Venus,” and notes how this claim only gradually made its way into the upper classes of late Republic by the family’s “sudden emphasis on the family legend tracing descent from Alba Longa,” from Venus, through Aeneas and Ascanius. We can read the emphasis on Octavia and the Octavian blood and lineage in a comparable way: we can compare this claim of descent from Octavia (a far more credible claim!) to that from Venus, and so these two maternal figures, famed for their desired pedigree, share yet another connection.

Propertius’ elegy for the young Marcellus also highlights the importance of being a scion of the Octavian lineage—the frequent lineage-related vocabulary of *Aen.* 6 comes to mind. Whereas the *Aeneid*’s narrator ventriloquizes through Anchises the extent to which Marcellus could have enhanced the Julian/Marcellan family, Propertius reverses this dynamic in *carmen* 3.18: he focuses on how even this illustrious *genus* was unable to benefit Marcellus, promising as he may have been.

quid genus aut uirtus aut optima profuit illi  
 mater, et amplexum Caesaris esse focus?  
 (Propertius *Carm.* 3.18.11-2)

What has been the use to him of his birth lineage or excellence or  
 his noblest mother, and the fact that he embraced the hearth of Caesar?

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<sup>253</sup> I wonder whether we might also compare Cornelia’s teknonymy as coined by Bettini 2013: 74 (and footnotes 42-3): “Cornelia was a woman whose existence was defined in terms of her sons, which is hardly surprising in the context of Roman culture. But in Cornelia’s case this tendency was carried out to the extreme. Ancient authors often emphasize her identity as the “mother of the Gracchi,” that is, of Gaius and Tiberius. In a sense, Cornelia “of the Gracchi,” took her name from her children.” Similarly, we often see authors refer to Octavia as the mother of Marcellus, although more often, we see the adelphonym “sister of Augustus.”

<sup>254</sup> As Freudenburg 2017: 136 notes on the parade of the Heroes and the readers’ experience of these so-called heroes: “Virgil lets us in on a dirty secret: that Roman heroes are ‘made’ rather than just ‘are’.”

The main verb *profuit*<sup>255</sup> ties together the subjects of the late Marcellus' lineage, virtue, and mother: the perfect tense denotes the past advantage that ultimately did not benefit the present. The virtual negative in the question posed by *quid* further weakens the Octavian *genus*' potency and suggests that death's blind potency ultimately prevails. The dramatic enjambment of *mater* emphasizes the role that Octavia is forced to give up when she loses her son. Whereas one would expect the Augustan *genus* to be advantageous, the Propertian elegy shows that even Marcellus' pedigree cannot conquer death.

#### 4.2.1 Crinagoras of Mytilene (first centuries BCE and CE)

Crinagoras, who divided his time between his native Mytilene and Rome in the first centuries BCE and CE, dedicates a fair share of his epigrams to the imperial family. These epigrams deal with contemporary events that range from the political-military sphere to personal experience and observation.<sup>256</sup> Topics include Marcellus' first shave (6.161 = 10 Ypsilanti 2018; to be dated ca. 25 BCE), Cleopatra-Selene's wedding, which was to unite the Libyans and the Egyptians and was arranged in part by Octavia (9.235 = 25 Ypsilanti 2018, ca. 20 BCE), Antonia's impending motherhood (6.244 = 12 Ypsilanti 2018, ca. 15 BCE), and Cleopatra-Selene's death (7.633 = 18 Ypsilanti 2018, ca. 5 BCE).

##### 4.2.1.1 Crinagoras' Epigram for Antonia

Hemelrijk 1999: 110 has suggested that Crinagoras may have been Antonia Minor's protégé, since he dedicated five books of poetry to the emperor's niece.<sup>257</sup> Octavia's daughter

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<sup>255</sup> Wallis 2018: 179 goes as far as to call Marcellus' consideration as a Julian heir a "failed political adoption."

<sup>256</sup> Ypsilanti 2018 supplies a thorough and insightful introduction to Crinagoras' poetry and times; all translations from Crinagoras are by Ypsilanti.

<sup>257</sup> See Ypsilanti 2018: 12; 102; 106.

may thus have exercised literary patronage: she followed her mother's example. Both mother and daughter—the one unnamed and the other named—appear in an epigram of Crinagoras that prays for a propitious delivery of Antonia's child:

Ἥρη Ἐληθιῶν μήτηρ, Ἥρη δὲ τελείη,  
καὶ Ζεῦ γιγνόμενοις ζυνὸς ἅπασι πάτερ,  
ὠδῖνας νεύσαιτ' Ἀντιθνή Ἴλαοι ἐλθεῖν  
πρηείας μαλακαῖς χερσὶ σὺν Ἠπιόνης,  
ὄφρα κε γηθήσειε πόσις μήτηρ θ' ἐκυρά τε·  
ἡ νηδὺς οἴκων αἶμα φέρει μεγάλων.  
(AP. 6.244 =12 Ypsilanti 2018)

Hera, mother of Eileithyiai, Hera Teleia, and Zeus, common father to all that are born, be gracious and grant that gentle pangs come to Antonia with the soft hands of Epione, so that husband, mother, and mother-in-law may rejoice. Her womb bears the blood of great houses.

In the epigram, motherhood and lineage appear both on the divine and dynastic levels.<sup>258</sup> The family links and titles in the poem are most significant on both the mortal and immortal planes. The family portrait of Zeus as father and Hera as mother activates, in the words of Ypsilanti 2018, the “context of a *family*” and “closes with the picture of the strong bonds of kinship of this imperial house.” Their human counterparts, Antonia's husband, mother, and mother-in-law fill the fifth line, and the last line illustrates the importance of these respective family members.

Though not named, Octavia implicitly features as Antonia's mother and as the future grandmother of the new-born—the beginning of a dynasty, indeed. Whereas this mother figure joins the family parade as Antonia's mother, the latter's father is understandably omitted from this poem. The Augustan propaganda would not have had much use for Antony, even though twenty years had passed since his demise. The only possible candidate for any sort of paternal

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<sup>258</sup> Ypsilanti 2018: 144 shows the progression from the divine to the human: Zeus and Hera, “the archetypal divine couple” appear in the first couplet; the second couplet represents the “human situation for which the heavenly couple's help is needed,” whereas “the last two lines ... carry us to the totally earthly environment of a human family whose magnificence, however, mirrors that of the gods mentioned in the first couplet.”

role in this poem may be Augustus himself as *pater patriae* and perhaps as Octavia's counterpart in the absence of a more suitable contender.<sup>259</sup> The Zeus and Hera imagery with which the poem so emphatically begins evokes the *soror et coniunx* connection that may imply Octavia's sister relationship with brother Augustus, although the *coniunx* part of the equation is obviously missing between the two siblings. Even so, the phrases "the blood of great houses" and "strong bond of the royal house" both refer to the Augustan *domus*.<sup>260</sup> It is the Julian lineage, after all, that makes Octavia so vital in the succession question. For this reason, as well, great anxiety and importance seem to be attached to Antonia's role as mother. If Ypsilanti's 15 BCE is the correct date, the child in question would have been Germanicus. Antonia Minor would indeed mother notable Julio-Claudians, such as Germanicus and the later emperor Claudius, and would thus become Caligula's grandmother.<sup>261</sup> And so Octavia's notability is carried through thanks to her own offspring who follow her example in serving the Octavian/Augustan bloodline.

#### 4.2.1.2 Horace's *Carmen* 3.14 Reconsidered: Links with *Crinagoras*

The parade of family members anticipating joy in *Crinagoras*' epigram may remind us of Horace's *carmen* 3.14, an ode that celebrates Augustus' return from Spain in 24 BCE. In both the poetry of *Crinagoras* and Horace, the verses abound with allusions to family titles, ritual prayer, and celebration. Additionally, senior members such as Octavia and Livia feature prominently in the ritual celebration of Augustus:

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<sup>259</sup> See Kienast 1990: 27 for more on the *pater patriae* title.

<sup>260</sup> Ypsilanti 2018: 153 interprets *aima* in the "sense of kinship" and the literal use of the Octavian blood; she reads *oikon* as "the idea of a royal house, cf. the 'houses' in tragedy... For the Augustan house, see Philo *Flacc.* 23.2, 49.3, 104.5; cf. *domus Augusta* or *Augusti*, *Ov. Pont.* 2.2.74, *Tac. Ann.* 6.51"

<sup>261</sup> For more context on Antonia Minor, see Fischer 1999: 110-111 and 111 n. 457-8.



Herculis ritu modo dictus, o plebs,  
morte venalem petiisse laurum,  
Caesar Hispana repetit Penatis  
victor ab ora.

Unico gaudens mulier marito  
**prodeat** iustis operata sacris  
et **soror cari**<sup>262</sup> **ducis** et decorae  
supplice vitta  
virginum matres iuvenumque nuper  
sospitum.

(Horace *Carm.* 3.14.1-10)

O Roman people, in Herculean fashion  
Caesar returns, victorious, to his Penates  
from the Spanish shores,  
Caesar, who was reported but lately to have sought a  
bay-crown at the cost of his life;

The wife rejoicing in her incomparable husband—  
**let her come forth** [from the palace], performing due ritual<sup>263</sup> for the just gods;  
and **sister of the cherished leader**: let her come forth, too  
and the mothers, seemly in their suppliant ribbons,  
of virgins and youths, just recently unharmed.

Whereas Crinagoras establishes Antonia as the focal point of the epigram and the imperial family members in it, Horace highlights the different dynastic titles that surround Augustus. Antonia is the subject of the epigram because of her personal travail and its hoped-for outcome. Indeed, child-birth—supplying soldiers for the *patria*, a principal element of the Augustan moral reform—could be interpreted as the female equivalent of Augustus’ military aspirations.<sup>264</sup> Thus Augustus, Antonia, and all Roman mothers are aligned as subjects of the poems and as (indirect and direct) contributors to the Roman military success. The epigram and the ode also display

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<sup>262</sup> Nisbet and Rudd 2011 point out that one side of the MS shows *clari*, “which would be more usual.” I choose to follow their interpretation because of their reasoning concerning “the affectionate *cari* [which] provides a better parallel to *unico ... marito*; for the unexpected collocation with *ducis* cf. 1.1.2 *dulce decus meum*, which also combines the public and private spheres.”

<sup>263</sup> *iustis operata sacris* taken according to the suggestion of Nisbet and Rudd 2011.

<sup>264</sup> Childbirth rates were important for the growth for the Roman empire and army; see Zanker 1990: 172-9, who links the *carmen saeculare* to “fertility...as a direct consequence of political policy; it calls for concrete realization (lines 17-20), [which] is tied directly to Augustus’ marital legislation.”

differences in time and space that call for comparison: Crinagoras expresses a forethought for which the family members need to supplicate the gods, while Horace thanks the gods after the expedition's successful conclusion. Now that I have suggested a certain echo at play between Crinagoras and Horace, I turn to another epigram by Crinagoras that deals with an imperial family member's private event.

#### 4.2.1.3 *Crinagoras' Epigram for Marcellus*

The epigram for Antonia is not Crinagoras' only creation that we can read in conversation with Horace's *carmen* 3.14. Crinagoras also celebrates Marcellus' homecoming together with the youth's first shave, an occasion that seems to call for equal celebration. In doing so, Crinagoras evokes themes such as victorious return, transience and transition, and individual members of the Augustan household:

Ἐσπερίου Μάρκελλος ἀνερχόμενος πολέμοιο  
σκυλοφόρος κραναῆς τέλσα παρ' Ἰταλίας  
ξανθὴν πρῶτον ἔκειρε γενειάδα. Βούλετο πατρίς  
οὕτως καὶ πέμψαι παῖδα καὶ ἄνδρα λαβεῖν.

Returning laden with spoils from the western war to the bounds of craggy Italy, Marcellus shaved his blond beard for the first time. This was what his homeland wanted, to send him out a boy and take him back a man. (AP. 6.161 =10 Ypsilanti 2018)

Ypsilanti 2018: 129 concentrates closely on the poem's "image of a man returning victorious from the war," reminiscent of Augustus' return in Horace above. Yet, this grand theme abruptly makes way for the personal moment of Marcellus' first shave that serves as a symbol for his entrance into manhood: we are privy to two significant moments on different levels for the young man.

Although Octavia may not be mentioned as Marcellus' mother (like Crinagoras did with Antonia's epigram), Ypsilanti 2018: 135 notes that Crinagoras modifies the epic trope in which a mother sends off a hero to war: the *patria* takes on this maternal role and receives Marcellus as her returning child in the last line. As in Virgil's *tu eris Marcellus* passage, Marcellus' great family history of the Claudii Marcelli is present through *σκυλοφόρος* and its evocation of the *spolia opima*.<sup>265</sup> These two epigrams by Crinagoras, then, treat similar themes with styles that resemble those of the Horatian *carmen*. The poems both intermingle the public and private sphere in surprising ways, in which Octavia and her Octavian bloodline play a significant part.

#### 4.2.2 Valerius Maximus (active during the reign of Tiberius)

The Octavian bloodline seems to have been valued so much that those not affiliated with their *domus* were willing to lie and scheme. Valerius Maximus preserves such an instance in his *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*, nine books of rhetorical *exempla* for declamatory instruction.<sup>266</sup> We encounter Octavia in chapter 15 of the work's final book. Valerius Maximus shares an anecdote that involves Octavia and the coveted Octavian bloodline in a chapter on social-climbing frauds. Octavia appears as an example of renowned pedigree and exemplarity. In this passage, "a lowly born individual" has claimed Octavia as his mother in hopes of advancing in social rank:

Ne diui quidem Augusti etiam nunc terras regentis excellentissimum numen intemptatum ab hoc iniuriae genere.<sup>267</sup> extitit qui **clarissimae ac sanctissimae sororis eius Octaviae** utero se genitum fingere auderet, propter summam autem inbecillitatem corporis ab eo, cui datus erat, perinde atque ipsius filium retentum, subiecto in locum suum proprio filio,

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<sup>265</sup> Ypsilanti 2018: 131-2 observes the "allusion to Jupiter Feretrius ['where Roman generals such as M. Claudius Marcellus in 222 BC, after his victory at Clastidium and his killing of Viridomarus, leader of the Insubres' would dedicate *spolia opima*' the Insubres' would dedicate *spolia opima*'] and the great Marcellus"; Ypsilanti similarly ties it to "the juxtaposition of the two Marcelli... which underlines the hopes of Augustus for his nephew."

<sup>266</sup> See Shackleton Bailey 2000: 2-3 for dating and context of this work.

<sup>267</sup> Book 9 Chapter 15's title is *DE IIS QUI INFIMO LOCO NATI MENDACIO SE CLARISSIMIS FAMILIIS INSERERE CONATI SUNT* or "of persons born in the lowers station who tried by falsehood to thrust themselves into illustrious families" (Shackleton Bailey 2000).

diceret, uidelicet ut eodem tempore sanctissimi penates et ueri sanguinis memoria spoliarentur et falsi sordida contagione inquinarentur. sed dum plenis inpudentiae uelis ad summum audaciae gradum fertur, imperio Augusti remo publicae triremis adfixus est. (*Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* 9.15.2.4)

Not even the most excellent power of divine Augustus still ruling the lands was left untried by this type of offence, as there was someone who dared to contrive that he was born from the womb of **his most illustrious and sacred sister, Octavia**, and who claimed that because of the extreme weakness of his body, he was afterwards kept by the person to whom he had been given as a son and that that individual's son was put in his own place, evidently, so that, at the same time, the most sacred *penates* would be despoiled of the memory of legitimate blood and polluted by the sordid contagion of falsehood. But while he [the inventor of the lie] was brought to the greatest degree of boldness by sails full of shamelessness, on Augustus' command, he was fixed against the oar of a public trireme. [i.e. the galleys, according to Shackleton Bailey 2000]

This passage suggests that Augustus, even at the height of his power, displayed significant sensitivity concerning his lineage: Valerius Maximus claims that the emperor meted out punishment to social climbers who dared to claim an affiliation with him. He goes on to report that these individuals aimed to meddle with the Augustan bloodline. Even (or especially) in its highest grandeur, then, the Octavian/Marcellan lineage remained susceptible to threats from social climbers. This insecurity betrays the actual fragility of the Augustan *domus* that the clan attempted to conceal. Here again, the value of an Octavia connection becomes clear: according to this passage, some individuals seem to have been willing to fabricate bizarre lies and to risk severe punishment in exchange for claiming ties with the *domus Augusta*.

As for the excellence and exemplarity that Valerius Maximus attributes to the Octavii, the first superlative that describes Octavia is reminiscent of Horace's use of *soror clari ducis* (*carm.* 3.14.7). Valerius joins sister and brother through the quantity of their virtues (compare Octavia's two superlatives to Augustus' *excellentissimum numen*). Maximus also describes Octavia as *sanctissima*, which may refer to her engagement in public cults and rituals across the Roman

empire.<sup>268</sup> Maximus does not use his superlatives sparingly: he uses and re-uses *summum* and *sanctissimi* in the lines above. This passage reveals the control that Augustus is willing to wield over his own and his sister's reputation: the importance of pedigree and the resulting exclusivity lie at the heart of this passage.

#### 4.2.3 Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE)

Although Pliny the Elder mostly places Octavia in the context of the arts—specifically concerning the art works in her *Porticus Octaviae*—he also briefly refers to Octavia's lineage in the *Naturalis Historia*. When Octavia appears in Pliny, it is often in conjunction with Marcellus, to identify the latter and to stress the desirability of the Octavian blood that elevates Marcellus' status. Pliny first mentions Octavia in *NH* 19, where he recounts Marcellus' projects, such as covering the forum with a sailcloth. Here, Marcellus is identified as Octavia's son—*Augusti sorore genitus* (Plin. *NH* 19.24.2). In *NH* 37, too, Pliny refers to Marcellus' illustrious parentage when he discusses Marcellus' ring and gem collection, a hobby that the youth seems to have shared with his great uncle Caesar:

... Caesar dictator sex dactylithecas in aede Veneris Genetricis consecravit, **Marcellus Octavia genitus** unam in aede Palatini Apollinis...  
(*Naturalis Historia* 37.11.8)

Julius Caesar, when he was a dictator, consecrated six cabinets of gems in the temple of Venus Genetrix; Marcellus, Octavia's son, dedicated one such cabinet in the temple of Apollo on the Palatine.

In this passage, Pliny mentions Octavia directly; the link to Augustus is evoked through the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine, which stored Marcellus' ring collection. Pliny initially uses

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<sup>268</sup> Wardle 2000: 482 attributes religious connotations to the adjective *augustus* and then sets up *sacer* and *sacratus* as synonyms to *augustus*, following Wagenvoort 1947: 13-4 in note 18. Valerius uses both for Octavia and her brother and other family members alike.

the *Marcellus Octavia genitus* construction to clarify the lineage in this example, but then shifts the manner of his references to Octavia as the books progress. Pliny calls her Augustus' sister in *NH* 19 (*Augusti sorore genitus*), but no longer adds this clarification in what survives from *NH* 37.

#### 4.2.4 Tacitus (56-117 CE)

Tacitus pays little attention to the first emperor's sister. His apparent lack of interest in Octavia is not entirely surprising. Octavia's generally spotless reputation may not have fascinated Tacitus, who was inclined to focus on controversial imperial women who undermine their husbands' authority.<sup>269</sup> In this case, Tacitus may have adopted the same tactic of selective emphasis that we have seen in the works of other historiographers.<sup>270</sup> Tacitus rarely calls Octavia by her name in *Annals* 4: he only names her to identify and to confer status on certain individuals within his historiography. Because Octavia both shares and transmits Augustan blood, an association with her legitimizes one's position within the imperial family.<sup>271</sup> For instance, in a series of obituaries for Gnaeus Lentulus and Lucius Domitius, Tacitus mentions the marriage and parentage of Antonia Minor,<sup>272</sup> Octavia's youngest daughter by Antony:

avus Pharsalica acie pro optumatis ceciderat. ipse **delectus** cui **minor Antonia, Octavia genita**, in matrimonium daretur.  
...obiit et L. Antonius, multa claritudine generis sed impropera. nam patre eius Iullo Antonio ob adulterium Iuliae morte punito **hunc admodum adulescentulum**, sororis

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<sup>269</sup> See L'Hoir 1994: 6-12 for Tacitus' view on ruling women and the *dux femina* trope.

<sup>270</sup> Syme 1981: 40-52 remarks how Tacitus shifts his focus to the lives of the imperial women after the Sejanus episode while he was relatively silent on the topic in his earlier books.

<sup>271</sup> For the significance of Augustan family ties in Tacitus, see Bastomsky 1992: 606-7. Ginsburg 2006: 75-6; 87-91; 100-4 situates the role of preserver of bloodlines in Agrippina's representations.

<sup>272</sup> Goodyear, Martin, and Woodman 1989: 203 note that this was in fact a mistake: "according to the Stemma, the Elder Antonia was married to L. Domitius Ahenobarbus, and not the younger as Tacitus believed." Jackson, in the Loeb edition, notes: "it is practically certain that both here and at XII.64, Tacitus' statement is erroneous, and that the elder married L. Domitius, and the younger, Tiberius' brother Drusus." It was not uncommon for authors (such as Plutarch) to err about the chronology of the female descendants.

nepotem, seposuit Augustus in civitatem Massiliensem ubi specie studiorum nomen exilii tegeretur. habitus tamen supremis honor ossaque tumulo Octaviorum inlata per decretum senatus. (Tac. *Ann.* 4.44.6-16)

[Domitius'] grandfather had fallen on the side of the Optimates in the battle-line of Pharsalia. He himself was selected as the one to whom the **daughter of Octavia** was to be betrothed: **the younger Antonia**. ... Lucius Antonius passed away as well, of a very famous yet unfortunate family. For, when his father Iullus was given a penalty by death because of his adultery with Julia, he was **merely a youth**, the grandchild of the sister. Augustus banished this Iullus to Massilia, "where the stigma of exile could be disguised by the appearance of scholarship" (Goodyear, Martin, and Woodman 1989: 204). His funeral, however, was celebrated with honour, and by a senatorial decree his bones were laid in the family tomb of the **Octavii**.

Octavia subtly occurs in the middle of the complex intertwining of the burgeoning dynasty; both the Marcellan and the Antonian sides are represented within the family tree of Lentulus and Domitius.<sup>273</sup> Members of the Augustan *domus* tended to marry within the family because of the socio-political risk that was associated with exogamy: finding trustworthy allies for a Julio-Claudian remained difficult, as Valerius Maximus suggested earlier.<sup>274</sup> On the one hand, we see this proclivity towards imperial endogamy; yet, on the other, Iullus Antonius himself is a cautionary tale of marriage within the family. This Antonius was the second son of the Antonius who committed the notorious adultery with Julia, Augustus' daughter, in 2 BCE.<sup>275</sup> Although she remains unnamed, Octavia's presence makes itself felt in her capacity as *soror* through *sororis nepotem*. In Tacitus, then, we see Octavia appearing on two distinct levels within the text: both implicitly through her lineage and explicitly by name. One may speculate why Tacitus chooses

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<sup>273</sup> This passage is rare and its Octavian kinship bonds are complex; so it is worth quoting Goodyear, Martin, and Woodman's commentary entry (1989: 203-4) in full: "This is a rare occasion on which T. provides three obituaries, and one of only three occasions where the recipient was not a consular senator (*TST* 80). Yet Antonius' life in exile offered a striking contrast with the active careers of Lentulus and Domitius, whose noble birth he equalled (*multa claritudine generis*): indeed Antonius' mother (Marcella *maior*) was half-sister to Domitius' wife Antonia *maior*, who was therefore his aunt ... and his father (Iullus Antonius) was son of Mark Antony (Antonia's father) by the latter's third wife, Fulvia."

<sup>274</sup> Syme 1960: 378 and Severy 2003: 63 write extensively on Augustan endogamy, marriage pawns, and the threat of social climbers to the stability of the empire.

<sup>275</sup> See Goodyear, Martin, and Woodman 1989: 204. For the supposed dynamic between Octavia as exemplary *bona noverca* and her second husband's son, see Watson 1995: 203-6.

this approach. Perhaps the author tried to convey the prominence of lineage by focusing on family ties wherever he saw fit: especially with Augustus' sister, who needed no further introduction.

Tacitus repeats this diction when he discusses the pedigree of Gnaeus Domitius, Tiberius' grandchild and Agrippina's betrothed; this Domitius boasted Octavia as *avia* and Augustus as *avunculus*:

in Domitio super vetustatem generis propinquum Caesaribus sanguinem **delegerat**; nam is aviam **Octaviam** et per eam Augustum avunculum **praeferebat**. (Tac. *Ann.* 4.75.5)

In Domitius, besides the long existence of his family, he had selected a blood-connection of the Caesars: for he was able to display Octavia as his grandmother, and, through her, Augustus as his great-uncle.

Both here and in the previous passage, Tacitus uses a form of *deligo*: here we find the pluperfect *delegerat* as opposed to the perfect passive participle *delectus* earlier. Selectivity comes to mind with *deligo*—to be expected in a passage about the exclusivity of the imperial family. The use of *praeferebat* suggests the weight that such a display of pedigree can carry. *Vetustas generis* presents Domitius and his family favourably; a link to the Caesars makes him even more eligible. Tacitus suggests that members of the Augustan blood, which Octavia carried, are quick to claim and to display a connection for their own advantage.

Elsewhere in Tacitus, Octavia appears as *soror et mater*; even though she is not named, her presence is clear. In *Annales* 1.3, Tacitus writes that her son Marcellus (although *admodum adulescentem*) receives special treatment as Augustus grooms his nephew to succeed him. Octavia may not play an enormous part in the Tacitean narrative. Even so, whenever Tacitus mentions her, the passage underlines the importance of the bloodline carried through Octavia to her offspring and their marriage alliances.



#### 4.2.5 Suetonius *Aug.* 63.1

Suetonius shows how Marcellus' unexpected death affected the imperial family not only in the *Life of Virgil* (where Octavia faints when she hears Virgil eulogize Marcellus) but also in the *Life of Augustus*. The consequences of his death show that marriages in the Augustan period were moveable and malleable: if anything, these alliances were meant to preserve the Augustan legacy. Octavia's role as mother and carrier of Julian blood is again significant when Suetonius treats the succession question and Augustus' daughter Julia's position in it—first as Marcellus' wife and then as the wife of Agrippa, who himself was initially the husband of Marcellus' sister:

Iuliam primum Marcello **Octaviae sororis suae** filio tantum quod pueritiam egresso, deinde, ut is obiit, M. Agrippae nuptum dedit **exorata sorore, ut sibi genero cederet**; nam tunc Agrippa alteram Marcellarum habebat et ex ea liberos. (Suet. *Aug.* 63.1)

First, he betrothed Julia to Marcellus, son of his sister Octavia, when he had barely departed from boyhood, and then, after Marcellus' death, he betrothed her to Marcus Agrippa, after his sister was persuaded by his entreaty to yield her own son-in-law to him; for at that time Agrippa was married to one of the Marcellas and had children from her.

In this passage, Suetonius shows how Augustus attempted to establish his dynasty and succession through switched marriage alliances.<sup>276</sup> Here again, we see how a link to Octavia could influence the family members' personal situations. Because of the death of Marcellus, the family needed to find another way to preserve the Octavian blood line. Now that Marcellus is no more, Octavia loses clout: all links with Augustus were to be prioritised. After Julia, Augustus' only child, became a widow, she married Agrippa, the former husband of Octavia's daughter. The family tree thus grew even more complex and intertwining branches, as marriages bloomed and withered.

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<sup>276</sup> Wardle 2014: 408-10 offers to clarify the situation in 24 and 23 BCE within the imperial family.

#### 4.2.6 Plutarch's *Life of Marcellus*

Like the previous sources, Plutarch represents Octavia as a prominent ancestor: she resurfaces in the final paragraph of the *Life of Marcellus*, that is, the third century Claudius Marcellus of the Parade of Heroes in *Aeneid* 6. Octavia functions as a notable bridge between the generations through her husband, the late Marcellus, and between her son Marcellus and her brother the *princeps*:

γένος δ' αὐτοῦ λαμπρὸν ἄχρι Μαρκέλλου τοῦ Καίσαρος ἀδελφιδοῦ διέτεινεν, ὃς Ὀκταβίας ἦν τῆς Καίσαρος ἀδελφῆς υἱὸς ἐκ Γαίου Μαρκέλλου γεγονώς, ἀγορανομῶν δὲ Ῥωμαίων ἐτελεύτησε νυμφίος, Καίσαρος θυγατρὶ χρόνον οὐ πολὺν συνοικήσας. εἰς δὲ τιμὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ μνήμην Ὀκταβία μὲν ἡ μήτηρ τὴν βιβλιοθήκην ἀνέθηκε, Καῖσαρ δὲ θέατρον ἐπιγράψας Μαρκέλλου. (Plut. *Marc.* 30.6)

And his illustrious race extended as far as Marcellus, the nephew of Augustus Caesar, who was a son of Caesar's sister Octavia by Caius Marcellus, and who died during his aedileship at Rome, having recently married Caesar's daughter. In his honour and to his memory Octavia, his mother, dedicated the library, and Caesar the theatre, naming it for Marcellus.

Like the *Life of Antony*, the work concludes with its subject's lineage and descendants' afterlife—though in a markedly shorter manner. Marcellus' γένος appears emphatically in the beginning of the sentence and represents the main theme of this passage. The use of διέτεινεν indicates the potency of Marcellus' valour: his virtue is so strong that it straddles the timespan between the third century BCE and the twenties BCE. Thus, the lustre of the Plutarchan Marcellus lives on to be activated in the first emperor's family lineage: and here, Octavia was the essential link.

The lineage's longevity suggests that its descendants are consistent, as we have seen in the representation of the younger Marcellus, who was reputed to be of the same excellent calibre as his mother. The Plutarchan Octavia's renown shows: Octavia appears first and in an active position when Plutarch turns to the library complex that she dedicated to her son, whereas he

attributes Marcellus' theatre to Augustus. The younger Marcellus' memory thus becomes cemented in the Roman landscape through Octavia's library complex and Augustus' theatre. Ultimately, Marcellus' name lives on, as it is the last word in his ancestor's *Life*. In short, a connection with Octavia distinguishes those who belong to her family: I regard her representations that focus on her impact on lineage as one side of the Octavia Factor.

#### 4.3 Octavia's "Child Supervision" and Marriage Arrangements in Plutarch's *Life of Antony*

The Octavia Factor is not limited to a focus on her reproductive qualities: Octavia's reputation as Antony's jilted wife or as Marcellus' ever-grieving mother are potent yet should not overshadow her many qualities. Scholars from Singer 1945 to Bielman Sánchez 2019 frequently mention how she emerges as the main caretaker of Antony's children—by herself and Fulvia—only to cast doubt on the generosity of her act. I instead suggest that we can interpret this extraordinary arrangement of mothering as a manifestation of her influential role in her brother's ideology and self-fashioning. I propose that her efforts in their children's development were not made for the benefit of Antony but are rather proof of Octavia's cultural significance and strengthened alliance with her brother and his political plans. Octavia's remaining influence remains legible and visible, not negligible and unseen.

Octavia's influence, however, was not restricted to her role as a caring (step-)mother: our sources represent her as diplomatically arranging and re-arranging marriages and cultural alliances.<sup>277</sup> Octavia's own experience at Brundisium in 40 BCE—recently widowed and

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<sup>277</sup> Rohr Vio 2020: 171-92 discusses instances of this strategy during the Triumviral Period.

immediately remarried—comes to mind when we consider her part in the marriage between Julia and Agrippa, recounted by Suetonius above. Plutarch, however, is more explicit in treating both Octavia’s “child supervision” and marriage arrangements as paramount in the narrative of the *Life of Antony*.

To evaluate Plutarch’s account of Octavia’s childcare and marriage arrangements, we should keep in mind certain caveats. First, while Plutarch attributes the official household surveyance and organization to Octavia alone, it is of course unclear what the exact extent of Octavia’s care was and how much of it was delegated to other household members or domestic assistants. Additionally, we should consider the impact of Octavian’s/Augustus’ interference and propagandistic agenda that undoubtedly colours any view of the Octavian and Antonian sides. And lastly but equally importantly, there is Plutarch’s own underlying agenda in his *Life of Antony*—Pelling 1988 claims that Plutarch was especially partial towards Octavia.

In *Plut. Ant.* 54, Octavia returns to Octavian’s house from Athens in the mid-thirties BCE, since her marriage with Antony continues to deteriorate.<sup>278</sup> More is at stake than a dissolving marriage. The Plutarchan Octavia finds herself in a complicated position between her brother and husband. On the one hand, her brother’s realm witnesses her homecoming, but, on the other, she is still living in her husband’s house and refuses to leave it. Using his sister as leverage in his conflict with his brother-in-law Antony, Octavian brings Octavia into the foreground. Although Octavian and Antony’s hostility first seems to be presented as a problem on account of Octavia, it soon becomes clear that the conflict plays on more levels than the personal alone. *Ant.* 54.1-2 represents Octavia as a noble matron who appears unfazed by her husband’s neglect. She therefore entreats her brother to ignore Antony’s behaviour in order to

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<sup>278</sup> For the main treatment of Octavia and Antony’s divorce, see Chapter 3.

avoid another outbreak of civil war. Octavia's maltreatment and her and her brother's reaction to it dominate the narrative:

ταῦτα δὲ λέγουσα μᾶλλον ἐβεβαίον δι' ἔργων. καὶ γὰρ ὄκει τὴν οἰκίαν, ὥσπερ αὐτοῦ παρόντος ἐκείνου, καὶ τῶν τέκνων οὐ μόνον τῶν ἐξ ἑαυτῆς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἐκ Φουλβίας γεγονότων, καλῶς καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς ἐπεμελεῖτο· καὶ τοὺς πεμπομένους ἐπὶ ἀρχᾷ τινος ἢ πράγματα τῶν Ἀντωνίου φίλων ὑποδεχομένη συνέπραττεν ὧν παρὰ Καίσαρος δεηθεῖεν. ἄκουσα δὲ ἔβλαπτε διὰ τούτων Ἀντώνιον· ἐμισεῖτο γὰρ ἀδικῶν γυναῖκα τοιαύτην. (Plut. *Ant.* 54.3-5)

Having said these things [i.e. her plea to Octavian in 54.1-2], she confirmed these words even more through her deeds. For she kept living in her home, just as if he were at home, and she kept taking care of his children, not only the ones that were born from her, but also those born from Fulvia—in a noble and magnificent manner. She also kept welcoming those friends of Antony who were sent to Rome for the purpose of office or business and kept helping them to procure what they needed from Caesar. Without meaning to, however, she was damaging Antony through these deeds; for he was hated for wronging so noble a woman.

The Plutarchan Octavia remains loyal despite her husband's abandonment—she seemingly projects autonomy in the matter, as she refuses to obey her brother. Octavia—almost stoically—carries on with her domestic duties “as if Antony were at home.” Her deeds match her words: she lives at her and Antony's home as if he were present, takes care of their children and his children by Fulvia, and still entertains and helps Antony's friends. Plutarch again highlights her nobility with echoes of the diction of Octavia's first introduction (καλῶς καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς... and γυναῖκα τοιαύτην... cf. *Ant.* 31.3). Though she finds herself in times of domestic trouble, the Plutarchan Octavia perseveres as a diplomatic mediator with apparent selflessness. Yet, by being so honourable, Octavia is said to have damaged her philandering husband's reputation unwillingly (ἄκουσα).

Plutarch's use of ἄκουσα is puzzling in this sentence; it is unclear just how Plutarch would have known Octavia's precise intentions. First, he does not mention any sources that confirm this claim. Plutarch incorporates this claim in a particularly emotionally loaded sentence that represents one of his favourite techniques, which Pelling 1988: 248 calls “characterisation

by reaction.” This narrative technique uses the “Roman” opinion to characterize both Octavia as universally liked because of her treatment of her exemplary reaction, whilst casting Antony in an unfavourable light. On the other hand, Plutarch may have used this ἄκουσα ironically:

throughout his narrative, he has displayed such a high opinion of his Octavia that it seems odd that she is now unaware of her actions—perhaps Plutarch points out that Octavia exactly knew what she was doing to Antony’s reputation for the Augustan cause. And so, this ἄκουσα should prompt caution: it may be a by-product of the anti-Antonian propaganda filter, but it may also be Plutarch asserting himself as an ironic commentator for his own agenda in the narrative.

The more popularity the Plutarchan Octavia gains both in Rome and in Athens—much to Cleopatra’s chagrin—the more Antony distances himself from his official wife: ultimately, he banishes Octavia from her own home. Even after being ejected from Antony’s house before their divorce in 32 BCE, the Plutarchan Octavia emerges with exceptional dignity:

ἀπελθεῖν δέ φασιν αὐτήν τὰ μὲν τέκνα πάντα Ἀντωνίου μεθ’ ἑαυτῆς ἔχουσαν ἄνευ τοῦ πρεσβυτάτου τῶν ἐκ Φουλβίας ἑκεῖνος γὰρ ἦν παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ, κλαίουσαν δὲ καὶ δυσφοροῦσαν εἰ δόξει μία τῶν αἰτιῶν τοῦ πολέμου καὶ αὐτὴ γεγονέναι. Ῥωμαῖοι δὲ ὄκτειρον οὐκ ἐκείνην, ἀλλ’ Ἀντώνιον, καὶ μᾶλλον οἱ Κλεοπάτραν ἑωρακότες οὔτε κάλλει τῆς Ὀκταουίας οὔτε ὄρα διαφέρουσαν. (Plut. *Ant.*57.3)

They say that she left her house, taking all Antony’s children with her except his eldest son by Fulvia, who was with his father; and that she was weeping and vexed in case that she herself would be deemed as one of the causes of the war. But the Romans did not pity her as much as they pitied Antony, and especially those who had seen that Cleopatra was neither in beauty nor in (graceful)<sup>279</sup> youthfulness superior to Octavia.

Plutarch revisits Octavia’s continued care of Antony’s children (except for Marcus Antonius Antyllus) but depicts her as less serene: she appears more like the emotional yet diplomatically measured Octavia of the Treaty of Tarentum (*Ant.* 35: κλαίουσαν δὲ καὶ δυσφοροῦσαν εἰ δόξει

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<sup>279</sup> LSJ B.II.2-3 notes that the use involves traits of the bloom of youth, beauty, and elegance, hence my suggestion to add “graceful” to the translation.

μία τῶν αἰτιῶν τοῦ πολέμου καὶ αὐτὴ γεγονέναι). As we know, Plutarch likes his comparisons: they are deployed with full force here. On the one hand, we see another instance of “characterisation by reaction” in the Romans’ collective pity for Antony, because of Octavia’s superiority over Cleopatra. On the other hand, this passage again echoes the vocabulary of Octavia’s poise and beauty, which has become characteristic of Octavia by now.<sup>280</sup>

Pelling 1988: 34, 42, 202, 208-9, 214-5, 246-9, 256-9, 325-6 doggedly maintains that Plutarch “makes a lot of Octavia,” claiming that her role is “exaggerated.” Pelling 1988: 35 classifies Plutarch’s depiction of Octavia as a “creative reconstruction” from his source material: “Octavia would of course be a worthy rival to Cleopatra, beautiful as well as dignified.” Throughout the second part of the narrative, Plutarch sets up the two women as foils to one another. The *Life of Antony* carries on after his death for about ten chapters: from then on, Cleopatra and Octavia steal the show. To explain this shift in the narrative after Antony’s demise, I propose that Octavia and Cleopatra serve as an instance of “microcosmic parallel lives” within Antony’s larger narrative. By granting heightened attention to Octavia (as compared to other historiographical accounts by Suetonius, Appian, and Dio), Plutarch adds layers of parallelism and juxtaposition between Antony’s surviving women. In sum, he creates two mini-lives of comparison and contrast between Octavia and Cleopatra, who are themselves flip-sides of each other.<sup>281</sup>

Scholars have noticed similar trends among the individual *Lives*: Duff 2005 discusses Plutarch’s narrative technique of “*synkrisis*” or “comparison” at length. Stadter’s 2010 reading of the *Lives* as “Parallel in Three Dimensions” investigates how “a single scene in one life of set

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<sup>280</sup> Pelling 1988: 258-9 comments on the comparison between Octavia and Cleopatra as “smooth transition: the move to Athens leads to Cl.’s jealousy of Octavia, and that to the divorce and Octavia’s reaction: that returns us to Rome.”

<sup>281</sup> For a comparison between Octavia and Cleopatra and their foil construction in Plutarch, see Chapter 3.

may trigger memories of and comparison with another, beyond the confines of one respective pair.”<sup>282</sup> Might we then construct a similar parallel construction among the women who surround the central protagonist of a given *Life*?<sup>283</sup> Plutarch, after all, has various works that shift the attention to female virtue. Chapman 2011, for instance, questions Plutarch’s reputation as a proto-feminist in *The Female Principle in Plutarch's Moralia*. In *Mulierum Virtutes*, Plutarch sets out to argue that women and men possess equal virtue and courage, yet fails to make a strong case, as McInerney 2003: 341 posits: “the inconsistency between Plutarch’s claims and the conventional stories he actually provides compels us to ask what the forces and anxieties were that prompted his rethinking of female virtue even as he reasserted traditional roles.” So why not apply this already established Plutarchan lens of gendered vice and virtue further to one particular pair of women in the same *Life*?

Plutarch’s *Life of Antony* carries on at length beyond Antony’s death. Pelling 1988: 16 294 notes that “the *Lives* often continue beyond the moment of death, but not so elaborate[ly] as this.” Whereas Cleopatra’s death in *Ant.* 78.5 dominates the narrative until the penultimate chapter (*Ant.* 86), Plutarch redirects the attention to Octavia in the *Life’s* concluding chapter. *Ant.* 87 demonstrates the lasting impact that Octavia’s bloodline activates: Octavia’s descendants dominate the Julio-Claudian household for the generations to follow, reaching as far as Nero, the last of the Julio-Claudians. In *Ant.* 87.1, Plutarch writes that Antony left behind descendants by three different wives—Octavia, Cleopatra, Fulvia, explicitly mentioned in this order:

Ἀντωνίου δὲ γενεὰν ἀπολιπόντος ἐκ τριῶν γυναικῶν ἑπτὰ παῖδας, ὁ πρεσβύτατος Ἄντυλλος ὑπὸ Καίσαρος ἀνηρέθη μόνος· τοὺς λοιποὺς δὲ Ὀκταουία παραλαβοῦσα μετὰ

<sup>282</sup> Stadter 2010: 200; 207-9 and 2014 identifies the four following intertextual concepts at play: conquest, politics, kinship, and tragedy. He applies the latter category of spectacle and spectatorship especially to the *Antony*; and he draws attention to the multiple links in the death scenes and how they ‘converse’ with one another (Pompey met his end in Egypt, just like Agesilaus and Antony, of whom the latter also was given an “improvised burial” and who, just like Pompey, was called *autokrator* for the last time before his death in *Ant.* 77.5).

<sup>283</sup> Mossman 2010: 150, 153-4, 160 considers Plutarch’s construction of a rivalry between Parysatis and Stateira; the latter remains the “only positive influence in [Artaxerxes’] life.”



τῶν ἐξ ἑαυτῆς ἔθρεψε. καὶ Κλεοπάτραν μὲν τὴν ἐκ Κλεοπάτρας Ἰόβα τῷ χαριεστάτῳ βασιλέων συνώκισεν, Ἀντώνιον δὲ τὸν ἐκ Φουλβίας οὕτω μέγαν ἐποίησεν ὥστε τὴν πρώτην παρὰ Καίσαρι τιμὴν Ἀγρίππου, τὴν δὲ δευτέραν τῶν Λιβίας παίδων ἔχόντων, τρίτον εἶναι καὶ δοκεῖν Ἀντώνιον. (Plut. *Ant.* 87.1)

As Antony left behind a family of seven children by his three wives, Antyllus, the eldest, was the only one who was killed by Caesar; Octavia, having taken up the remaining six, raised them together with her own children. She gave Cleopatra [Selene], the daughter of Cleopatra, in marriage to Juba, the most charitable [?] of kings, and she raised Antony, the son of Fulvia, to such a great man, that, while Agrippa came first in honour in Caesar's opinion, after whom the sons of Livia came second, Antony seemed to be and indeed was third [in rank].

Octavia here emerges as the main caretaker of Antony's remaining children—not only her own, but also those by Fulvia and Cleopatra's daughter Cleopatra Selene. Moreover, Plutarch explicitly attributes the marriage arrangement between Cleopatra Selene and Juba to Octavia alone. Octavia thus fully inhabits the role of Cleopatra's replacement by overseeing the care and marriage arrangements of her remaining children.

Plutarch not only focuses on the different networks that Octavia brought about, but also on Octavia's late husband—and Antony's predecessor—Marcellus, Antony's stepchildren by him, and the young Marcellus:

ἐκ δὲ Μαρκέλλου δυεῖν αὐτῇ θυγατέρων οὐσῶν, ἐνὸς δὲ υἱοῦ Μαρκέλλου, τοῦτον μὲν ἅμα παῖδα καὶ γαμβρὸν ἐποίησατο Καῖσαρ, τῶν δὲ θυγατέρων Ἀγρίππα τὴν ἐτέραν ἔδωκεν. ἐπεὶ δὲ Μάρκελλος ἐτελεύτησε κομιδῇ νεόγαμος καὶ Καίσαρι γαμβρὸν ἔχοντα πίστιν οὐκ εὐπορον ἦν ἐκ τῶν ἄλλων φίλων ἐλέσθαι, **λόγον ἢ Ὀκταουία προσήνεγκεν ὡς χρή τὴν Καίσαρος θυγατέρα λαβεῖν Ἀγρίππαν, ἀφέντα τὴν ἑαυτῆς.** (Plut. *Ant.* 87.3-5)

From Marcellus, Octavia had two daughters, and one son, Marcellus. The latter, Caesar adopted as both his son and his son-in-law, and he gave one of the daughters to Agrippa in marriage. But Marcellus died when he was just a newly-wed, and it was not easily done for Caesar to select from among his other friends a son-in-law whom he trusted. **Octavia offered the proposition that it was necessary that Agrippa wed Caesar's daughter and divorce her own daughter** [Marcella the Elder].

This passage shows that the younger Marcellus had a prominent position within the developing imperial household. Marcellus' promising prospects stand out through Octavian's active interest

in his nephew: the emperor even went so far as to promote him in the family line.<sup>284</sup> Octavian's involvement with the civil life of his sisters' children did not stop there: he employed Marcella Maior to strengthen his connection with his newly chosen right-hand man Agrippa.<sup>285</sup> Marcellus' death not only affected Octavian as an uncle, but also derailed his political plans. According to Plutarch, Octavian trusted only Marcellus, his daughter's husband, and Agrippa sufficiently to incorporate them into the dynasty as sons-in-law. Because of Octavian's caution about Julia's new betrothal after Marcellus' death, Octavia's influence increases once again—this time as Marcella's mother and mother-in-law to Agrippa. And, in contrast to Suetonius' Octavia, the Plutarchan Octavia is the driving force behind the re-marriage.<sup>286</sup>

The end of this paragraph—*λόγον ἢ Ὀκταουία προσήνεγκεν ὡς ... ἀφέντα τὴν ἑαυτῆς*—suggests the magnitude of the sacrifice that Octavia is willing to make for her brother's dynastic plans, even if those plans involve annulling her own daughter's marriage. Plutarch takes Octavia's involvement further by depicting her as the main impetus behind this marital re-arrangement:

*πεισθέντος δὲ Καίσαρος πρῶτον, εἶτα Ἀγρίππου, τὴν μὲν αὐτῆς ἀπολαβοῦσα συνώκισεν Ἀντωνίῳ, τὴν δὲ Καίσαρος Ἀγρίππας ἔγημεν. ἀπολειπομένων δὲ τῶν Ἀντωνίου καὶ Ὀκταουίας δυεῖν θυγατέρων τὴν μὲν Δομίτιος Ἀηνόβαρβος ἔλαβε, τὴν δὲ σωφροσύνη καὶ κάλλει περιβόητον Ἀντωνίαν Δροῦσος, ὁ Λιβίας υἱός, πρόγονος δὲ Καίσαρος. ἐκ τούτων ἐγένετο Γερμανικὸς καὶ Κλαύδιος· (Plut. Ant. 87.5-8)*

And so, when first Caesar was persuaded, and Agrippa afterwards, she, after having taken back her own daughter, betrothed her to Antony, while Agrippa married Caesar's daughter. As two daughters—the ones by Antony and Octavia—remained, Domitius

<sup>284</sup> Pelling's notes (1988: 326-7) mostly aid with the identification of these Julio-Claudians in this increasingly complicated family tree.

<sup>285</sup> Compare Dio's 53.1.2 on Agrippa's marriage to Marcella: τὸν γὰρ Ἀγρίππαν ἐς ὑπερβολὴν ἐτίμα· ἀμέλει τὴν τε ἀδελφιδῆν αὐτῷ συνώκισε.

<sup>286</sup> Pelling 1988: 325 notes that "her role in arranging the children's marriages is not mentioned by our other sources, nor is the part she plays in Marcella's divorce and remarriage to Agrippa...: it again seems likely that P. is elaborating on her role (cf. 31.2n)." We have seen, however, that Suetonius did indeed mention this divorce and remarriage. The latter, Pelling 1988: 326 minimises: "no other source makes this Octavia's suggestion, and Suet. Aug. 63.1 apparently speaks of Augustus' 'winning her over' to the idea (*exorata sorore*).

Ahenobarbus married the one daughter, and Drusus, who was the son of Livia and the step-son of Caesar, married the other sister, Antonia—much talked of because of her beauty and discretion, From these parents, Germanicus and Claudius were born.

Plutarch attributes *πεισθέντος; ἀπολαβοῦσα;* and *ἔγημε* to Octavia, and so he does not shy away from presenting her as the main architect of these new family bonds. Because of the Plutarchan Octavia’s suggestion, Agrippa married Julia, and Marcella married Antonius, the late Antony’s child by Fulvia. The rhetoric in *ἀπολειπομένων* δὲ τῶν Ἀντωνίου καὶ Ὀκταουίας δεῦν *θυγατέρων* echoes Ἀντωνίου δὲ γενεὰν *ἀπολιπόντος* in *Ant.* 87.1 but turns the attention to Octavia and the two Antonias. Whereas we do not know who exactly arranged these marriages, both the previous paragraph and the general tradition suggest that senior members such as Octavia would have been involved. Octavia’s impact is visible in Plutarch’s character descriptions of Octavia’s offspring. Here, Plutarch’s Antonia seems to function as another Octavia, as mother and daughter share similar qualities of beauty and wisdom (*σωφροσύνη καὶ κάλλει*, as in *Ant.* 31, when we first meet Octavia, and in *Ant.* 57.3, where Plutarch compares Octavia and Cleopatra’s beauty). The similarities with Antonia further strengthen this contrast between Antony’s legal wife and daughter at Rome and his Egyptian lover. Octavia’s influence is thus amplified through her children’s representations. So, too, does the conclusion of this paragraph reiterate Octavia’s significance in the Augustan family tree through her own daughters’ offspring, that is, through key figures such as Claudius, Drusus, and Nero.

In short, for Plutarch, Octavia is an active agent in the care and marriage arrangements of the Julio-Claudian offspring, regardless of these children’s parentage or of how these parents may have treated Octavia. Of course, we must keep Plutarch’s agenda in mind: the juxtaposition of the virtuous Octavia and vicious Cleopatra is significant for the foil system that Plutarch imagined for his narrative and for the narrative’s techniques of “characterisation by reaction.”

Octavia thus seems to have connected different bloodlines and families in the private sphere, but, as we will see in the next section, the Octavia Factor is also increasingly prevalent in the cultural sphere.

#### 4.4 Octavia and Cultural Engagement

Our sources not only represent Octavia as involved in care and marriage arrangements, but also as engaged in cultural pursuits. I suggest that Octavia's representation and position as Octavian's/Augustus' sister pervades both the concrete and abstract cultural landscape. In my view, her cultural and educational involvement influenced her later literary representations.<sup>287</sup> Hemelrijk 1999: 108-16 proposes that women like Octavia and her daughter Antonia Minor escaped scrutiny for their educational engagement and patronage because they avoided public action and prestige, unlike later "Agrippina Minor ...who transgressed the boundaries imposed upon her gender by openly interfering in politics: she went so far as to receive embassies and attend a meeting of the senate." According to Hemelrijk 1999: 108, Octavia's cultural pursuits were accepted because of her "strict observance of traditional rules of female behaviour": therefore, matrons like Octavia could practice "patronage of literature and learning" and "exert power without incurring blame." Yet, Octavia herself was active in more conspicuous ways that transgressed the traditional gender spheres during the triumviral period. After all, Octavia

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<sup>287</sup> Moore 2020: 376 sketches the contradictions of Octavia's public presence: "Octavia's contact with the culture of the Eastern provinces, in combination with her awareness of traditional Roman virtues and values, enabled her to help promote her imagery and patronage in the "public but not civic" life of Rome, without offending Roman sensibilities, which had, until then, excluded women's imagery in public and women's contributions to the physical space of Rome."

fulfilled public and diplomatic roles as Antony's betrothed at the Treaty of Brundisium in 40, in her mediating position at the Treaty of Tarentum in 37 BCE, and in her handling of troops in competition with Cleopatra in Plut. *Ant.* 51-3.<sup>288</sup> She thus acquired considerable political insight and adroitness through these diplomatic and military engagements. Therefore, I posit that her educational and the political engagement intersect in these texts: her politics and *paideia* can go together, can be read as a pair, and can inform one another.

#### 4.4.1 Strabo (64/3—24 CE)

We can find one instance of Octavia's associations with *paideia* in Strabo's *Geographia*, incidentally one of the most closely contemporary sources to represent Octavia. In his *Geographia* 14, Strabo covers regions ranging from Ionia to Cyprus and devotes his fifth chapter to Cilicia. In sections 12-14, he comes to Tarsus and singles it out as a centre of education and philosophy that is said to have surpassed Athens and Alexandria with its multiple schools of rhetoric and philosophy, including Stoics and Academics alike. Octavia appears in relation to Nestor of Tarsus, whom she enlisted to tutor her son Marcellus:

οὔτοι μὲν στωικοὶ ἄνδρες· ἀκαδημαϊκὸς δὲ Νέστωρ ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς, ὁ Μαρκέλλου καθηγησάμενος, τοῦ Ὀκταουίας παιδός, τῆς Καίσαρος ἀδελφῆς. καὶ οὗτος δὲ προέστη τῆς πολιτείας, διαδεξάμενος τὸν Ἀθηνόδωρον, καὶ διετέλεσε τιμώμενος παρά τε τοῖς ἡγεμόσι καὶ ἐν τῇ πόλει. (*Geogr.* 14.5.14)

[The two Athenodoruses, associated with Antony and mentioned in *Geogr.* 14.5.13] were Stoics; but Nestor, my contemporary—the teacher of Marcellus, son of **Octavia the sister of Caesar**—was an Academic. This man was also at the head of the government [of Tarsus], having been appointed as the successor of Athenodorus, and he continued to be esteemed by the provincial governors as well as in the city.

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<sup>288</sup> For Octavia as mediator and part of the political alliance and propaganda in the public sphere, see Dettenhofer 2000: 39-49; Harders 2008: 53-4-7; 99-100; and Rohr Vio 2019: 100; 134-6; 140.

Strabo distinguishes Nestor the Academic from two Stoic philosophers (Athenodorus Cordylion and Athenodorus Cananites in *Geogr.* 14.5.13) and identifies him as Marcellus' mentor and teacher (καθηγησάμενος).<sup>289</sup> Strabo writes that Octavia was acquainted with this governor of Tarsus (οὗτος δὲ προέστη τῆς πολιτείας); we know that she travelled to the Eastern parts of empire, likely with Antony in the early thirties BCE. In turn, prominent philosopher-politicians such as this Nestor seem to have deemed a position of mentorship of Marcellus significant enough to leave their positions to be employed by the emperor's sister.

Curiously, Strabo's Tarsus passage gives us another connection to Octavia via Athenodorus Cananites, who was the pupil of Strabo's Athenodorus of Tarsus, the previous head of the government of Tarsus. Plutarch, in his *Life of Publicola*, claims that this Athenodorus Cananites dedicated a work to Octavia herself<sup>290</sup>:

τοῦτον τὸν ἄνδρα Μούκιον ὁμοῦ τι πάντων καὶ Σκαιόλαν καλούντων **Ἀθηνόδωρος ὁ Σάνδωνος** ἐν τῷ πρὸς Ὀκταουίαν τὴν **Καίσαρος ἀδελφὴν** καὶ Ὀψίγονον ὠνομάσθαι φησίν. (Plut. *Publicola* 17.5)

Whereas all other writers agree in calling this Mucius "Scaevola," Athenodorus, the son of Sandon, in his book addressed to Octavia, the sister of Augustus Caesar, says that he was named [by the surname] Postumus.

We may wonder why Athenodorus dedicated a book to Octavia—was she his patron?<sup>291</sup> But it may be even more puzzling how Mucius Scaevola/Postumus would have been relevant in a book addressed to Octavia. Cichorius 1922/1970: 278-82 suggests that Octavia may have been the addressee simply because Nestor of Tarsus was her son's tutor and thus connected the imperial mother and son with the court of Tarsus. We only know that Plutarch mentions that Athenodorus treated Mucius Scaevola in his work. Cichorius offers a more suggestive explanation for this

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<sup>289</sup> LSJ lists uses such as "act as a guide" or "instruct, teach" for **καθηγέομαι**.

<sup>290</sup> See Sihler 1923: 137 for a rather casual remark on the existence of a treatise with Octavia as dedicatee.

<sup>291</sup> For more on this Athenodorus, son of Sandon, see Whitehead and Blyth 2004: notes 26-7 and Graf 2009: 68.

remarkable connection: he proposes that the Stoic Athenodorus' text may have been a *consolatio* addressed to Octavia, after the loss of her son Marcellus in 23 BCE. In this context, Athenodorus may have reminded Octavia of how Scaevola staunchly and stoically bore his physical pain and have encouraged Octavia to follow Scaevola's example to bear the mental pain of her bereavement.<sup>292</sup> Later, the consolation genre would be taken up again in relation to Octavia in the pseudo-Ovidian *Ad Liviam* and the *Ad Marciam* by Seneca, another Stoic tutor of a Julio-Claudian scion, Nero, one of Antony's descendants.

There thus seems to have been an interconnected community of philosophers at the Augustan court. We may also consider how Cichorius 1922/1970 identifies a connection between Vitruvius and the Peripatetic philosopher Athenaeus, who addressed his *Περὶ μηχανημάτων*, a work on missiles and siege craft, to the younger Marcellus. Cichorius 1922/1970: 279-80 suggests that Vitruvius and Athenaeus may have used the same sources to write about these missiles, since Athenaeus knew the Peripatetic Nestor and thus also his student Marcellus, the work's addressee. Cichorius poignantly observes that Athenaeus addresses Marcellus as ὦ σεμνότετε Μάρκελλε, which recalls σεμνότητα in Plut. *Ant.* 31.2 (1922/1970: 276, n. 1-2). Whitehead and Blyth 2004: 18-20; 30-1 consider the preface dedicated to Marcellus and speculate that Athenaeus and Vitruvius were entangled in a rivalry that included shared sources and a race for depositing their respective treatises.<sup>293</sup> Let us then further investigate Vitruvius, who was thus associated both with Octavia and this Athenaeus.

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<sup>292</sup> Hemelrijk 2010: 106 doubts the inference that this book may have been a *consolatio* on two grounds: the date of the composition and Athenodorus' residence at Rome do not correspond and she names "the problem of [the philosophical treatise's] contents": "she is said to have closed her ears to all attempts to console her after his death [in *Ad Marciam*], and this may well have deterred Athenodorus from addressing a *consolatio* to her." See also Langlands 2017: 207 n. 6.

<sup>293</sup> For discussion of these "machines," see Whitehead and Blyth 2004 and Marsden 1971: 5, who speculates the following: "It may be that Athenaeus Mechanicus and Vitruvius, who seem most likely to have had the same patroness, Augustus' sister Octavia, found Agesistratus' treatise in the same collection of volumes, namely the library of one branch of the Claudii Marcelli."

#### 4.4.2 Vitruvius (80/70-15 BCE)

Vitruvius' preface to his architectural treatise (*De arch.* 1. Pr. 2) is incidentally the first contemporary reference to Octavia herself that is now extant.<sup>294</sup> In this preface, Vitruvius thanks Octavia for recommending him to her brother for prolonged tenure in all matters relating to artillery, which suggests that Octavia was the patroness of Vitruvius, as of the Athenaeus mentioned above:

Itaque cum M. Aurelio et P. Minidio et Cn. Cornelio ad apparationem balistarum et scorpionem reliquorumque tormentorum refectionem fui praesto et cum eis commoda accepi, quae, cum primo mihi tribuisti recognitionem, **per sororis commendationem servasti.** (*De arch.* 1. Pr. 2)

And thus, together with M. Aurelius and P. Minidius and Cn. Cornelius, I was put in charge of the construction and restoration of *ballistae* and *scorpiones* and other missiles, and with those men, I received emoluments. And when you first bestowed this recognition to me, you retained it through the recommendation of your sister.

Vitruvius' agenda in this preface is clear: he presents Octavia as one of the main benefactors.<sup>295</sup>

Octavia's recommendation appears to be valued regarding a book on the craft of artillery technology: Vitruvius writes that she effectively helped him to retain his artisanal projects thus far: *per sororis commendationem* expresses Octavia's agency. Vitruvius explicitly points to Octavia as his recommender to prolong his term: he directly addresses Octavian (*mihi tribuisti*, with this explicit second person singular to Augustus). Octavia appears again as a mediator in the cultural sphere—earlier she had appeared as a political mediator at the Treaty of Tarentum in 37 BCE. It

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<sup>294</sup> Interestingly, Vitruvius still calls the Octavia's building the Porticus Metelli in *De Architectura* 3.2.5.7, which suggests that the building was not yet transformed to the Porticus Octaviae at the time of writing. See Boyd 1953: 153 and 156 and n. 32.

<sup>295</sup> Baldwin 1990: 428, 434 spends some time on whether Augustus' "uterine sister" was meant and remarks on the albeit ambiguous passage's significance as an insight in Octavia's influence on her brother and speculates on the extent of Vitruvius' involvement in the building of Octavia's portico in 33 BCE (n. 57). For the sort of pay arranged by Octavia (probably a pension), see Masterson 2004: 391.



may also have been the case that Octavia was familiar with the reputation of Aurelius, 'Minidius', and Cornelius' expertise for this project, though we have no means of verifying her associations with these other craftsmen. Instead, we may recall Cichorius' note above: Vitruvius and the Peripatetic philosopher Athenaeus may have been connected, since Athenaeus wrote on similar missiles and addressed this work to the younger Marcellus, Octavia's son. We may compare the associations between Athenaeus and Vitruvius to those of the other court philosophers. The Academic Nestor, the Stoic Athenorodus, and the Peripatetic Athenaeus thus come together in this network of imperial philosophers of different schools, in which Octavia can be placed because of her enlistment of these tutors and her son's and her own status as dedicatees. In other words, both Strabo's and Vitruvius' passages suggest that Octavia engaged in a mixture of cultural pursuits, which range from securing tutoring to commissioning artisans. Octavia's cultural influence did not stop here: it also manifests itself in the concrete Roman cityscape. Vitruvius serves as a fitting meeting point between the abstract and the concrete artistic associations of Octavia.

#### 4.5 Octavia in the Concrete Roman Landscape

Octavia's cultural presence and influence above help us to pivot to the literary appearances of the public libraries within Octavia's porticus complex. The books themselves were destroyed by a fire during Titus' rule around 80 CE, according to Cassius Dio.<sup>296</sup> Before this fire, the library's store of bilingual knowledge was housed and preserved by the Porticus'

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<sup>296</sup> Dio 66.24.2: καὶ γὰρ τὸ Σεραπεῖον καὶ τὸ Ἰσεῖον τὰ τε σέπτα καὶ τὸ Ποσειδώνιον τό τε βαλανεῖον τὸ τοῦ Ἀγρίππου καὶ τὸ πάνθειον τό τε διριβιτώριον καὶ τὸ τοῦ Βάλβου θέατρον καὶ τὴν τοῦ Πομπηίου σκηνήν, **καὶ τὰ Ὀκταουεία οἰκήματα μετὰ τῶν βιβλίων**, τὸν τε νεὸν τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Καπιτωλίου μετὰ τῶν συννάων αὐτοῦ **κατέκαυσεν**. Dio also reports that Augustus funded its construction with the aid of his Dalmatian spoils (Dio 49.43.8).

physical presence in the evolving city.<sup>297</sup> The Porticus Octaviae itself continues to puzzle.<sup>298</sup> Let us first focus on what we can perceive. We still have the remaining foundations at the end of the Campus Martius—one of the first hints of the emerging *Forum Augustum*. The Porticus was said to have been flanked by the Temple of Juno Regina and Jupiter Stator, as well as the Theatre of Marcellus. Sources also locate the Porticus Philippi and the Temple of Apollo in its vicinity. Upon visiting the site of the Porticus Octaviae, the twenty-first century visitor encounters the remaining slightly ruddy propylaeum with a main bough-shaped gate and Corinthian columns—different from the venerable place of art and learnedness that the Porticus Octaviae was famed to have been.<sup>299</sup>

The main uncertainties can be distilled into the following questions:<sup>300</sup> Did Octavia or Augustus order the Porticus to be built? And who of the sister-brother pair was the official patron of the building? Was the Porticus Octaviae an original building or was it a refurbishing of a previous structure such as the Porticus Metelli of Q. Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus, who established his portico after his Macedonian victory in 146 BC?<sup>301</sup> In short, ample confusion remains about the porticus' building, its location, and its restoration.

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<sup>297</sup> Houston 2014: 31 writes about the possible acquisition of these public materials: “We cannot be sure what happened to Varro’s manuscripts, but it seems very likely that some or all of them were seized by Mark Antony, passed on Antony’s death to his wife Octavia, and were given by her to the library she helped found in the Portico of Octavia.” Houston 2014: 32 also mentions how the other artworks may have ended up at the Library.

<sup>298</sup> Richardson 1995: 317-8 and Platner and Ashby 2002: 426-7 both provide comprehensive surveys on the Porticus in their respective topographies.

<sup>299</sup> Boyd 1953: 152-3 describes the scene elegantly: “In the Via del Portico d'Ottavia at Rome, close by the Theatre of Marcellus, there still stands the propylaeum of the Porticus Octaviae, from which the street took its name. The inscription on the architrave records the restoration of the building by Septimus Severus and Caracalla in A.D but passes over in silence the previous history site. For that we are dependent largely on literary sources, chief among which passage of Velleius Paterculus, in which he records the building-activities of Q. Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus (cos. 143, censor 131 B.C.)”

<sup>300</sup> For the most recent overview of the debate on the Porticus, see Moore 2021: 381-2. Boyd 1953, though more dated, provides a particularly enlightening discussion of the textual sources.

<sup>301</sup> For more on Metellus Macedonicus himself and on the context of the Porticus Metelli, see Jex-Blake and Sellers 1977: 26 and Isager 1991: 160: “In all probability the Porticus Metelli is the first building to be constructed expressly to house Greek art brought to Rome as plunder. In 146 B.C. after his victory over Andriscus and the conquest of Macedonia Q. Caecilius Metellus (Macedonicus) began to construct a Temple of Jupiter in the Greek style *ex manubiis* ... The Portico of Metellus was succeeded by the Octavia buildings (*opera Octaviae*) that were

I offer an overview of the prevalent theories regarding these questions.<sup>302</sup> For instance, Gorrie 2007 asks the same question that occupied sources in antiquity: Did Octavia have the Porticus (re-)built, or was it her brother? Gorrie 2007: 5-6 follows the general belief that the Porticus Octaviae was a rebuilding of the Porticus Metelli and maintains that the restored building followed the general building plan and its reused materials: the rebuilding during Septimius Severus' time was nevertheless extensive and was meant to echo the Augustan values for the new emperor's own public image. When it comes to the art works that Pliny mentions, these seem to have been present at the colonnade since Metellus' time; but both Augustus and Severus repurposed the art and the building for their own propaganda (Gorrie 2007: 15-9).

Olinder 1974: 83-124 focuses on the confusion that exists between the Porticus Octaviae (associated with Octavia) and the Porticus Octavia.<sup>303</sup> Richardson 1976: 60-4 follows suit but believes that the Porticoes are one and the same; even so, he interprets Octavia's involvement with the rebuilding of the portico as both extensive and as associated with Marcellus' aedileship. Senseney 2011: 425-35 regards the Porticus Octavia as lost and attempts to unearth as much as possible about this porticus that celebrated the triumphant second century BCE Octavius in the Hellenistic tradition.

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begun in about 33 B.C. and finished in about 23 B.C.” Gorrie 2007: 4 believes that “the original Augustan construction of the Porticus Octaviae replaced a porticus built by Q. Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus in about 146 BC. This Metellus was a praetor who defeated the rebellious Achaeans and Macedonians; this victory earned him the *cognomen* Macedonicus. Spivey 2013: 285 on the transformation of the Porticus Metelli: “... it was typical of Augustus that he rebuilt the portico, in honour of his sister Octavia – and retained the statues with an insinuation that he was the second Alexander.”

<sup>302</sup> Lauter 1980 (a and b) provides a detailed study of the building's remnants and eagle/monument that shows associations between Hercules, Augustus, and possible cult practices (a certain “Personenkult”).

<sup>303</sup> This Porticus Octavia was dedicated to the naval hero of war with Perseus in 168-7 BCE: Cn. Octavius Cn. Filius. Olinder 1975: 85 informs us that this Octavius originated from another branch of the gens Octavia from Octavia and Octavian, since their family remained in the equestrian order until their father reached the rank of senator.

Inevitably, the Porticus Octaviae has played a vital role in theories on gender and space in the evolving Empire. Woodhull 2003: 27 stresses the cultural importance of the “web of historically significant women related to one another through their stories, virtue, or disloyalty [such as Venus, Cornelia, and Octavia]”; public spaces would invent and reinvent the “moral guidelines for anew Rome.”<sup>304</sup> McHardy and Marshall 2004: 80 use the Porticus as an example of how “women start to join civic donor lists as benefactors alongside their male counterparts [and how] Augustus’ own building program engaged the participation of women of the city’s first family.”<sup>305</sup> Boatwright 2011: 125 concludes about the presence and significance of early imperial women in public Rome: “Women clearly were important for Augustan and Julio-Claudian prominence and self-fashioning ... Yet the Roman Forum was not the chosen site for portrait groups and buildings featuring or associated with women. Rather, Livia, Octavia, and other imperial women, to a lesser extent, were linked with porticoes, temples, shrines, and other installation on Campus Martius, the Esquiline, and elsewhere.” In short, the Porticus Octaviae coincides with a gradual change in the gendered landscape of Rome. Octavia became visibly present in the Roman cityscape through the Porticus Octaviae in the Augustan Forum and was among the first women to do so. Now we have established the prevalent opinions regarding the building itself, we turn to the textual sources on the Porticus Octaviae that we do have—though we cannot even be certain about their reliability given the frequent inconsistencies among the ancient texts themselves.

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<sup>304</sup> See also Woodhull 2003: 122-30 on the Porticus and its function as a moment of “knowledge and memory.”

<sup>305</sup> According to them, the Porticus Octaviae was “counted among the earliest benefactions was Octavia’s portico (called porticus Octaviae) at the southern end of the Campus Martius: Here, the emperor’s sister renovated the republican colonnade of Metellus, a monument originally designed to accommodate war trophies.”

#### 4.4.1 Ovid (43 BCE-17/18 CE)

Ovid provocatively includes Octavia and her public presence in his *Ars Amatoria*, the *carmen* that is thought to have caused his exile. When the *Ars*' narrator embarks on a tour of locations fit for *amor* throughout *Roma*, he briefly lingers on the Porticus Octaviae. Pliny, as we will see, reports that the Porticus housed a vast art collection that boasted notable objects such as the statue of Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi,<sup>306</sup> with whom Octavia came to be associated. The complex also functioned as a public library of Latin and Greek literature.<sup>307</sup> Confusion surrounds who precisely launched the initiative of building the porticus, yet Ovid attributes the commission to Octavia herself in *ars. am.* 1.69-70: *Aut ubi muneribus nati sua munera mater / Addidit, externo marmore dives opus* (Or where the mother added her own gifts to those of her son, work rich in foreign marble). There is no doubt concerning the identity of Octavia and Marcellus, Hollis 1977 believes, but the narrator allows his reader to interpret the use of *muneribus* as either the Theatre of Marcellus or the library that Octavia dedicated to Marcellus—or both. Other than this dedication, the narrator only tells us about the building's material. Hollis 1977 remarks that the portico's foreign marble would have made the structure stand out among its neighbouring buildings and their signature Carrara marble look. Though the passing mention of the colonnade only informs us about its dedication and its building material, it is worth digging a bit deeper.

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<sup>306</sup> Hekster 2015: 114 and 112-7 explores public commemoration of women before the Principate as well as Cornelia's position in it.

<sup>307</sup> In Ovid's list, Octavia's Portico appears after Pompey's Portico. We should also note that the narrator places the reference to Octavia just before mentioning the *Porticus Liviae*. This order of appearance could be related to which building the guide encountered first on this tour. Or, more flippantly, could the returning trope of comparison between the sisters-in-law (in one instance, Seneca compares the lament of Octavia and Livia in his *Ad Marciam*) be at play here?

The library's status as a public library is the porticus' other claim to fame: Octavia's dual library complex is considered among the first public libraries in the city.<sup>308</sup> Ovid's use of Octavia and her Porticus has subversive undertones, as he repurposes the space into a backdrop for the instruction of the *praeceptor amoris* himself. Ovid credits the colonnade of Octavia, the paragon of matronly virtue, with making surreptitious dalliances possible. And so, he transforms her *schola*—Pliny's wording in his *Natural History*<sup>309</sup>—into one of the places where he can instruct his own craft.

We see more of Ovid's irreverence when we consider the intertextuality when we embark on another tour of Augustan buildings in *Tristia* 3.1. Alas, no longer able to guide us, the exiled poet sends his personified book as his ambassador to Rome. Once there, the book traverses Caesar's forum, the temple of Vesta, the temple of Jupiter Stator on the Palatine, and finally Apollo's temple—a tour comparable to the one in the *Ars* above. The book's efforts are in vain: during the tour, it learns that it and its *fratres* by their *pater* Ovid had been banned.<sup>310</sup> In short,

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<sup>308</sup> Clift 1945 not only identifies Octavia's libraries as one of the first three public libraries, but also speculates whether Virgil's minor poetry may have been housed here, which would have created another potential tie with Octavia or at least her Porticus. Clift 1945: 5, 21-5 remarks on the evolving nature of libraries and literary interests in Rome. See also Houston 2014: 31-2 for a survey of the rise of public libraries at Rome and Volk 2021: 43.

<sup>309</sup> See, for instance, *NH* 34.114.1 for Pliny's use of *schola*.

<sup>310</sup> For the intertextual links in *Tr.* 3.1.59-70 and *Ars*:

Inde tenore pari gradibus sublimia celsis  
ducor ad intonsi candida templa dei,

...

**Belides et stricto barbarus ense pater,**

quaeque **uiri docto** ueteres cepere nouique  
pectore, lecturis inspicienda patent.

Quaerebam **fratres**, exceptis scilicet illis,  
quos suus optaret non genuisse **pater**.

Quaerentem **frustra** custos e sedibus illis  
praepositus sancto iussit abire loco.

Altera templa peto, **uicino iuncta teatro:**

*haec quoque erant pedibus non adeunda meis.*

A comparison with *Ars. Am.* 71-4 makes this link even more poignant, especially with the repetition of the Belides phrasing in connection with becoming *doctus*:

Nec tibi vitetur quae, priscis sparsa tabellis,  
Porticus auctoris Livia nomen habet:

the figure of Octavia and her representation throughout the city can be used and appropriated—as possibly here by Ovid, who subtly pokes fun at the Augustan moral legislature and mindset.

#### 4.4.2 Velleius Paterculus (19 BCE-31 CE; during Tiberius' rule)

Velleius Paterculus also mentions the Porticus Octaviae and its surroundings, after he identifies the same Quintus Metellus Macedonicus whom we have encountered before as the Porticus' initial builder. The account of the building history and its relationship to the Porticus Octaviae is brief:

Hic est Metellus Macedonicus, qui porticus, quae fuerunt circumdatae duabus aedibus sine inscriptione positae, quae **nunc Octaviae porticibus** ambiuntur, fecerat. (*Hist. Rom.* 1.11.3-4)

This is Metellus Macedonicus who had previously built the portico, which was encompassed by two temples without inscriptions, and which are now surrounded by the portico of Octavia.

Velleius Paterculus mentions the link between Metellus' and Octavia's Porticus and adds more confusion because of the temporal difference between past and present (*nunc Octaviae porticibus*) as well as the inclusion of “two temples without inscriptions.” Later sources identify these temples as the Temples of Jupiter and Juno, which flanked the Porticus Octaviae.

Concerning the difference between past and present, though, I for one am not certain if the author indicates that there are two separate porticoes or if simply a renovation took place in the transition from the Porticus Metellus to the Porticus Octaviae. In any case, Velleius Paterculus resolutely designates Metellus as the builder of the porticus and strictly identifies the other or

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Quaque parare necem miseris patruelibus ausae  
**Belides et stricto stat ferus ense pater.**

renewed Porticus as Octavia's: he gives us no reason to believe that her brother Octavian was involved. And so, the credit goes to Octavia alone—Pliny the Elder seems to agree.

#### 4.4.3 Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE)

Pliny the Elder relatively frequently writes about the Porticus Octaviae, which housed a vast art collection in addition to Marcellus' bilingual library. The following references to Octavia focus on her patronage connected to her Porticus, named in various terms (e.g. *opera*, *portico*, *schola*, and *curia*), as well as on the nature of the artworks themselves. Pliny the Elder attributes the main patronage and ownership to Octavia alone in the extant sources.

Before we turn to the appearances of the Porticus in Pliny, let us briefly consider the significance that artworks in their designated places may have. Spivey 2013: 283-4 uses a striking example<sup>311</sup> in which Cicero enlists Atticus to find fitting artworks for specific spaces for his house and grounds. In other words, Roman art collectors are not thought to have filled their halls with haphazard paintings or sculptures. A careless art collection would be even more unlikely for associates with the Augustan court, because of the generally acknowledged "heightened sensitivity to the power of images in the age of Augustus (Spivey 2013: 286, and, of

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<sup>311</sup> Cf. *Epistulae ad Atticum* 1.9.1.1: *Signa Megarica et Hermas de quibus ad me scripsisti vehementer exspecto. quicquid eiusdem generis habebis dignum Academia tibi quod videbitur, ne dubitaris mittere et arcae nostrae confidito. genus hoc est voluptatis meae. quae γυμνασιώδη maxime sunt, ea quaero. Lentulus navis suas pollicetur. peto abs te ut haec cures diligenter.* For the demanded appropriateness of artworks, see also Leen 1991: 239: "Works of art must also be appropriate to the spaces they are meant to adorn, the second prerequisite of Cicero's collection. He is plainly delighted with the Hermathena Atticus has acquired for the Academy, "*quod et Hermes commune est omnium et Minerva singulare est insigne eius gymnasi*" (*Att.* 1.4.3). One expects to find such a statue in a gymnasium; like the other objects it has a functional value as a meaningful element in the overall decorative program. On the other hand, there is no spot suitable for the Bacchae (*Bacchis vero ubi est apud me locus? Fam.* 7.23.2). All the objects Cicero mentions are destined for specific, preselected spots at the Tusculan villa which were being redecorated or refurbished to the taste of the new owner."



course, Zanker 1987/8's *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder*<sup>312</sup>). We may then assume that art pieces would have served designated purposes and needed to be *just right*—or as Spivey 2013: 283 puts it: “a figure of Athena, or a portrait of Plato, is suitable for Cicero’s studious retreat, some scene from a Dionysiac *thiasos* is not.” And so, we will pay close attention to the specific artworks that Pliny connects to the different spaces in the Porticus. Doing so may shed light on the associations that a contemporary visitor may have made while admiring the treasure trove of art in Octavia’s colonnade.

Octavia’s Porticus first appears in *Natural History* 34.3. In this context, Pliny records how not even Cato’s declamations against statues of women in Rome and its provinces could exclude the statue of Cornelia of the Gracchi from the public colonnade of Metellus—and ultimately from Octavia’s Porticus (*quae statua nunc est in Octaviae operibus*).<sup>313</sup> Octavia’s inclusion of Cornelia’s statue is not the only instance of their association. This Cornelia statue, with its noteworthy lack of straps on the sandals (explained by Bettini 2013 as a reference to her exemplary motherhood), introduces the theme of Octavia’s colonnade’s function as a repository of notable artworks with propagandistic purposes.<sup>314</sup> Pliny gives us an idea of the colonnades’ history and exterior: he mentions the ornamental carvings of a lizard and a frog that commemorate Saura and Batrachus, the builders of Octavia’s Porticus.<sup>315</sup> Thus, Pliny’s account

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<sup>312</sup> Zanker 1988: 143-5 discusses the Porticus Octaviae as an example of how Augustus’ family—“a ubiquitous presence in Rome”—helped spread and fortify the Augustan message through their buildings such as Octavia’s and Livia’s Porticus.

<sup>313</sup> *NH.34.31.1-32.1*: ... *sicuti Corneliae Gracchorum matri, quae fuit Africani prioris filia. sedens huic posita soleisque sine ammento insignis in Metelli publica porticu, quae statua nunc est in Octaviae operibus*. For more on the context of this passage and the protest of Cato in 184 BCE against statues of women, see Jex-Blake and Sellers 1977: 26-7 and Isager 1991: 89.

<sup>314</sup> See Bettini 2013: 72-4 for Pliny’s entire “*argumentum* of the statue.”

<sup>315</sup> *Invenio et Canachum laudatissimum inter statuarios fecisse marmorea. nec Sauram atque Batrachum obliterari convenit, 2-qui fecere templa Octaviae porticibus inclusa, natione ipsi Lacones*. (*NH* 36.42). See Jex-Blake and Sellers 1977: 213 and Isager 1991: 162. Boyd 1953: 157 remains skeptical about these presumed architects and focuses on the essence of the passage instead, that is, the marble artwork: “The Elder Pliny ascribes the building of the two temples, as he knew them, to otherwise unknown Laconian Saura and Batrachus, whom he includes in his catalogue of *marmorarii*. Saura and Batrachus can at once be dismissed as aetiological figments, created to explain

helps us to form a picture of the colonnade, its contents, and their origins before the Porticus perished by fire.

Later, in *NH* 35.114.1, Pliny discusses the paintings of an Antiphilus in Octavia's *schola*. As for the use of *schola*, L&S (I.B.b) attribute the definition "art exhibition gallery" to *schola*.<sup>316</sup> And indeed, Pliny reports that one could find paintings of Hesione, Alexander, and Philippus with Minerva (*utraque Antiphilus. namque et Hesionam nobilem pinxit et Alexandrum ac Philippum cum Minerva, qui sunt in schola in Octaviae porticibus*).<sup>317</sup> We cannot tell the precise extent to which beholders of these artworks were expected to connect the subjects of the art to the patroness in question. Even so, in both figures, we can see Augustan links.<sup>318</sup> Additionally, the Alexander painting may be linked to the Lysippus statue group that adorned Metellus' colonnade and to Augustus' ambitions of conquest.<sup>319</sup> Lastly, Pliny lists Antiphilus' painting of Alexander's father (and thus Antony's claimed ancestor) Philip with Athena, who was also betrothed to Antony as a jest (recall Seneca's *suasoria* 1.6). These are just a few instances in which the Porticus seems to have evoked Actian links through the iconographical allusions to both Augustus and Antony. Indeed, Zanker 1988 believes that similar notions pervade the Ara

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the lizard and frog carved, so Pliny says, but the inclusion of them among the *marmorarii* does seem to indicate the temples in Pliny's day were, in some sense, of marble. This was, presumably, of the features of the Augustan reconstruction."

<sup>316</sup> See Volk 2021: 34 for the use of *schola*.

<sup>317</sup> For context on Antiphilus and the Hesione painting, see Jex-Blake and Sellers 1977: 144 and 146 n. 18.

<sup>318</sup> Hesione, as Trojan princess and the sister of the Trojan ruler Priam, shares similarities with Octavia. Hekster 2004 1-3 acknowledges the possible link between Hercules and Antony in the Porticus Octaviae but links it rather to the topography of the colonnade: "It may, thus, be possible that the general surrounding influenced the role of Hercules in the iconographic programme of the portico. Topographical necessity might well have outweighed the need to deal with an association between Hercules and Antony, which, in any case, had long run out of steam by the time of the battle of Actium." Hence, it may be the Augustan Hercules idea that is dominant here.

<sup>319</sup> For more on Lysippus' statue group, see Gorrie 2007: 4, Spivey 2013: 285, and Isager 1991: 160. Cf. *Hist. Rom.* 1.11: *quique hanc turmam statuarum equestrium, quae frontem aedium spectant, hodieque maximum ornamentum eius loci, ex Macedonia detulit. Cuius turmae hanc causam referunt Magnum Alexandrum impetrasse a Lysippo, singulari talium auctore operum, ut eorum equitum, qui ex ipsius turma apud Granicum flumen ceciderant, expressa similitudine figurarum faceret statuas et ipsius quoque iis interponeret*. Again, though more explicitly, we see a connection between Octavia's portico and the propaganda of Alexander the Great, who fashioned himself as the liberator and unifier of East and West. Could we read more into these allusions to Alexander the Great and what message these presences may send for this space?

Pacis and the Porticus Octaviae and its surroundings: a frieze found at or near the Porticus (Zanker 1988: 123-6) depicts a mixture of “sacred objects,” that are “mixed in with parts of ships: prow and stern, rudder and anchor [which] surely refer to the Battle at Actium.”

Another potential link between Hercules and Augustus appears just a few chapters later in the same book. Pliny mentions that a visitor to Octavia’s Porticus could find paintings by one Androbius that depicted Hercules’ apotheosis after his cremation on Mount Oeta, as well as the story of Laomedon’s dealings with Hercules and Neptune.<sup>320</sup> According to the myth, Hercules besieged Laomedon, the Trojan king and father of Priam and Hesione.<sup>321</sup> The literary connections between Hercules and the Octavians, Marcellus, and Antony—as depicted in Virgil, Horace and Propertius—may cause one to wonder whether one is to make more of the Herculean presence in Octavia’s Porticus. The ambiguity of Hercules within the literature as well as her Portico may present the following questions: are we to associate the demi-god’s appearance with Antony, Marcellus, or Augustus, thus fashioning Octavia, respectively, as wife, mother, or sister? This link would open various identities for Octavia herself as well: that of Megara, Omphale, Deianira or Hebe (and thus differing significantly in fortune and reputation); that of Alcmene (whose motherhood itself is complicated and duplicated); or one of Hercules’ half-sisters, either divine, such as Minerva, or mortal, such as Laonome. Omphale especially could be a compelling link, given the Actian and anti-Antonian connotations this imagery may bring.<sup>322</sup> In any case, any of these identities and roles are more fluctuating than fixed. Hercules’ divinely

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<sup>320</sup> *Herculem et Deianiram, nobilissimas autem, quae sunt in Octaviae operibus, Herculem ab Oeta monte Doridos exusta mortalitate consensu deorum in caelum euntem, Laomedontis circa Herculem et Neptunum historiam...* (NH 35.139.5).

<sup>321</sup> Hekster 2004: 1 n. 3 identifies *Apollod.* 2.5.9 as the source of “the story of king Laomedon of Troy, who refused to reward Heracles for saving his daughter Hesione.”

<sup>322</sup> For the association of Hercules and Omphale imagery with Antony and Cleopatra and the battle of Actium, see Polanski 2002: 237 and Zanker 1998: 58-62. Hekster 2004: 159-64 examines the use of Hercules and Omphale imagery in Octavian’s counter-propaganda but views their depictions as a “favourite motif of battle images” of mythology.

endorsed ascent into heaven could also hint at a link with Augustus' evolving position, although he was not yet *divus Augustus*, but instead the adopted son of the deified Julius Caesar.

Alternatively, this appearance of Hercules in Octavia's portico may recall the complicated position that Octavia held, placed in between Octavian and Antony, as suggested above with Omphale and Hesione. The presence of Neptune may also open up further Antonian imagery: Antony was at times associated with and depicted as this sea divinity, for instance, with a certain Neptune-Amphitrite coin that represented Antony and Octavia as these respective deities.<sup>323</sup> Still, these associations remain speculative, and it is impossible to confirm the viewer's experience of the art-work without any additional surviving testimonies about seeing these mythical figures depicted in the Porticus.

Pliny records the existence of additional statues of divinities in Octavia's Porticus, but we may note the emphasis on an original Venus statue by Phidias.<sup>324</sup> The inclusion of Phidias' Venus suggests that the Porticus Octaviae must have had some prestige, in that it housed a relatively valuable statue. Venus' status as mother of Aeneas also comes to mind.<sup>325</sup> For this reason, one may attempt to connect Ovid's inclusion of Octavia's porticus in line 69 with Venus' presence in *Ars. Am.* 1.59-62 only a few lines earlier: Venus stands staunchly (*constitit*) in her city.<sup>326</sup> In this way, the Octavia/Venus link would exist both in certain Augustan texts and in the

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<sup>323</sup> See Rowan 2018: 86-8 for this bronze fleet coinage by Mark Antony for the eastern provinces. In addition to three fleet prefects and Antony as triumvir, we also see Antony and Octavia depicted as Poseidon and Amphitrite, yet Octavian would also appropriate the Neptune motif.

<sup>324</sup> *et ipsum Phidian tradunt scalpsisse marmora, Veneremque eius esse Romae in Octaviae operibus eximia pulchritudinis.* (*NH* 36.15); see Jex-Blake and Sellers 1977: 188-9; and Davison, Lundgreen, and Waywell 2009: 510-5. Isager 1991: 150 on the link between Phidias, the Aphrodite, and Rome: "Phidias himself is said to have worked in marble and that the uniquely beautiful Venus (Aphrodite) in Octavia's buildings in Rome is said to be by him. Thus, in spite of the uncertainty of the attribution, the relationship of the subject to Rome has been established." See also Chapter 7 in Spivey 2013.

<sup>325</sup> Hallett 2020 has argued for Octavia's association with Venus in the *Aeneid*, as we have seen before

<sup>326</sup> For Venus' presence, see *Ars. Am.* 1.59-62:

Quot caelum stellas, tot habet tua Roma puellas:  
**Mater in Aeneae** constitit urbe sui.

artwork that Octavia's own porticus housed. A few chapters later in *NH* 36.22 Pliny mentions Cnidus' statues of Father Liber—a possible Bacchic Antony connection?—and Athena/Minerva—who appeared as Octavia's counterpart in *suasoria* 1.6.<sup>327</sup> But it is again the inclusion of Venus/Cupid that may activate another Octavia association, because of the notoriety of the art piece in question (it was involved in the Verrine controversy; see Spivey 2013: 281-3). In the context of a mention of Praxiteles' Venus, Pliny reports that a coveted Cupid by the same artist resides in Octavia's portico—the same Cupid, for which art enthusiasts would previously venture to Thespieae.<sup>328</sup> Pliny, however, also creates confusion concerning the location of the porticus and the temple, for he claims that the temple of Juno stood within the Porticus Octaviae.<sup>329</sup> After listing the above-mentioned famous sculptors and painters, Pliny indicates that there are several works in Octavia's portico whose artists are difficult to identify.<sup>330</sup> One such example is that of the maker of the Father Janus statue—another symbol of new beginnings—which was allegedly brought from Egypt as Actian loot. What matters here is the value attached to these statues of unknown origin, as well as the triumphant Augustus' imagery.

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Seu caperis primis et adhuc crescentibus annis,

Ante oculos veniet vera puella tuos...

<sup>327</sup> For more Father Liber in the Porticus Octaviae, see *N.H.* 36.34.5: ... *eodem loco Liber pater Eutyichidis laudatur, ad Octaviae vero porticum Apollo Philisci Rhodii in delubro suo, item Latona et Diana et Musae novem et alter Apollo nudus*. See Spivey 2013: 289 for the association between Latona, Niobids, Actium, and pro-Augustan propaganda. For more on these statues and Pliny's treatment of them, see Isager 1991: 159-62. See also *N.H.* 36.35.1: *eum, qui citharam in eodem templo tenet, Timarchides fecit, intra Octaviae vero porticus aedem Iunonis ipsam deam Dionysius et Polycles aliam, Venerem eodem loco Philiscus, cetera signa Praxiteles*.

<sup>328</sup> *NH* 36.22.5: *Liber pater Bryaxidis et alter Scopae et Minerva, nec maius aliud Veneris Praxiteliae specimen quam quod inter haec sola memoratur. eiusdem est et Cupido, obiectus a Cicerone Verri ille, propter quem Thespieae visebantur, nunc in Octaviae scholis positus*. See also Jex-Blake and Sellers 1977: 194-5 and Isager 1991:153-4.

<sup>329</sup> See *NH* 36.24.6: ...*et intra Octaviae porticus in Iunonis aede Aesculapius ac Diana*. Diana will reappear a few chapters later in the same book below. See Jex-Blake and Sellers 1896:196-7.

<sup>330</sup> See *NH* 36.29: *multa in eadem schola sine auctoribus placent: Satyri quattuor, ex quibus unus Liberum patrem palla velatum umeris praefert, alter Liberam similiter, tertius ploratum infantis cohibet, quartus crater alterius sitim sedat, duaeque Aurae velificantes sua veste*.

An additional possible Octavia-Venus/Cupid connection appears in Book 36, where one of Venus' sons, Cupid, is depicted in a Jove-like manner with a thunderbolt: *similiter in curia*<sup>331</sup> *Octaviae quaeritur de Cupidine fulmen tenente; id demum adfirmatur, Alcibiaden esse, principem forma in ea aetate* (NH 36.28).<sup>332</sup> Although this Cupid was meant to represent Alcibiades, we still have an association between Octavia and Cupid/Venus. The connection with Venus does not stop here, however, as Pliny also mentions the Venus of Praxiteles as well as a statue of the same goddess by Philiscus, which were also housed in the Porticus.<sup>333</sup> In addition, the presence of the Venus statue—Aeneas' and Cupid's mother, who has previously been linked to Octavia—is contrasted with the statues of Juno—the sister of the *pater* of gods and men—in the temple of Juno close by the Porticus Octaviae (or at least, the location on which scholarship seems to agree by now). In this way, we see these two goddesses with their differences juxtaposed in the same space.

To conclude, Octavia's representations in Pliny provide detailed descriptions of her cultural engagement at the height of her visibility. Whereas Pliny's first and last mentions of Octavia pertain to the deeds and peculiarities of her son Marcellus and thus her role as carrier of the Augustan blood, the middle books 34 and 35 treat the specific art works that one could find in Octavia's porticus. Through these references, we may shape an idea of the interior of Octavia's portico, as its inner appearance survives only through literary description. Pliny thus

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<sup>331</sup> The Porticus Octaviae was said to have been used as *curia* at least once in 7 BCE, as Boyd 1953: 156 and note 36 mentions, citing Dio 55.8.1 and Josephus *BJ* 7.4. In this way, the Porticus' associations with arts and politics are blurred.

<sup>332</sup> See Jex-Blake and Sellers 1977: 199 and Isager 1991: 156 and the problem of the statues' authorship that Pliny addresses.

<sup>333</sup> In *NH* 36.35.1-35.1, Pliny lists the statues of Liber, Apollo, Diana, and the Nine Muses, as well as Juno and Venus: *eodem loco Liber pater Eutychidis laudatur, ad Octaviae vero porticum Apollo Philisci Rhodii in delubro suo, item Latona et Diana et Musae novem et alter Apollo nudus. eum, qui citharam in eodem templo tenet, Timarchides fecit, intra Octaviae vero porticus aedem Iunonis ipsam deam Dionysius et Polycles aliam, Venerem eodem loco Philiscus, cetera signa Praxiteles*. See Isager 1991: 161-2 and Spivey 2013: 286.

helps us to understand what Octavia's cultural significance may have been, and with what divinities and mythological figures she was associated. So, what do we make of the individual artworks that Pliny records for us? Whereas the imagery frequently seems to point to Augustus' Actian triumph and hegemony, the recurring imagery of Venus may be another hint at Octavia's presence. Still, we get little clarity as to whether Octavia was the main patroness. But perhaps Suetonius can guide us towards a definite answer.

#### 4.4.4 Suetonius

Whereas other sources mention Octavia's involvement in the commissioning of the Porticus Octaviae, Suetonius does not seem to have any doubts. According to his account, the imperial sister's portico appears as just one of Augustus' many architectural achievements:

Quaedam etiam opera sub nomine alieno, nepotum scilicet et uxoris sororisque **fecit**, ut porticum basilicamque Gai et Luci, item porticus Liviae et Octaviae theatrumque Marcelli. (Suet. *Aug.* 29.6)

He also constructed some works in the name of others, namely for his grandsons, his wife, and his sister, such as the porticus and basilica of Gaius and Lucius; and similarly, the Porticus of Livia, the Porticus of Octavia, and the theatre of Marcellus.

Here, Suetonius reduces Octavia's individuality and agency with regards to the colonnade: the verb *fecit* and its application to Augustus' agency may have spelt out what his contemporary Romans assumed.<sup>334</sup> Octavia, instead, appears in this list without any special distinction among the other prominent family members to whom Augustus dedicated new buildings. Since Augustus is central to this passage, it is not surprising that Suetonius opts to identify Octavia as the imperial sister, as opposed to her status as Marcellus' mother. Still, Marcellus' Theatre at the

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<sup>334</sup> Similarly, the *Res Gestae* did not include the accomplishments of imperial women: "Livia, Octavia, and Julia are not mentioned in the written record of Augustus' principate" (Kleiner 1996: 30).

end of the list recalls Octavia's status as the mother of the former heir apparent. Despite Suetonius' complete dismissal of Octavia's involvement, her name is still associated with the Porticus, which, in turn, contained Marcellus' library.

Elsewhere, Suetonius provides an insight into the management of this very library. In *De Gramm.* 21.1-3, we learn that Gaius Melissus from Spoleto became a freedman because of his exceptional education; he was given to Maecenas as a slave (*ac Maecenati pro grammatico muneri datus est*) and thus introduced to Augustus, and eventually appointed as the manager of Octavia's library: *quo delegante, curam ordinandarum bibliothecarum in Octaviae porticu suscepit.*<sup>335</sup> Houston 2014: 222-4 employs this Melissus as an example of the workings of a public library in general, as Octavia's was among the first three public libraries in Rome.<sup>336</sup> Nonetheless, Suetonius resolutely attributes the building initiative to Augustus, which seems to leave little room for any debate. Or does it?

#### 4.4.5 Sextus Pompeius Festus, *De Verborum Significatione* 188 (approximately second and third century CE)

In the third century, we see Octavia pop up once again in Festus' glossary *De Verborum Significatu*.<sup>337</sup> In it, there is an entry on the Porticus in which Festus uses the same formula as Suetonius to indicate who had the Porticus built, but, this time, Octavia is the indisputable

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<sup>335</sup> *C. Melissus, Spoleti natus ingenuus, sed ob discordiam parentum expositus, cura et industria educatoris sui altiora studia percepit, ac Maecenati pro grammatico muneri datus est. Cui cum se gratum et acceptum in modum amici videret, quanquam asserente matre, permansit tamen in statu servitutis praesentemque condicionem verae origini anteposuit; quare cito manumissus, Augusto etiam insinuatus est. Quo delegante, curam ordinandarum bibliothecarum in Octaviae porticu suscepit.*

<sup>336</sup> For the extent to which Melissus had authority and the differences in administrative levels in these libraries, see Houston 2014: 223. See also Volk 2021:43.

<sup>337</sup> See Zetzel 2019: 4, 7-23, 92-6 for more context on this "large-scale encyclopedia", the "fragmentary third-century *De verborum significatu*," which was "Festus' great and partially surviving abridgement of Verrius Flaccus" of the Augustan period.



subject: *Octaviae porticus duae appellantur, quarum alteram, theatro Marcelli propiorem, Octavia soror Augusti fecit.*<sup>338</sup> He spells out that there were two different porticoes with the same name and so maintains the confusion between the Porticus Octaviae. So, what is the truth? What are the implications of Octavia or Octavian being the true builder? Do we believe Ovid, Festus, Pliny, and Plutarch or do we believe Dio and Suetonius? This passage brings us back to the beginning of this section. We are still uncertain about the commissioner of this colonnade and about the difference between the Porticus Octavia and Octaviae. Regardless, what truly matters is the fact that Octavia persists as a contender in this debate: late first century women have come a long way since Cato's ban on statues of women in 184 BCE. We can only speculate but perhaps it is precisely because the Roman landscape was and kept changing—especially regarding female presence—that there was so much confusion about the building, rebuilding, and patronage of the Porticus.

#### 4.6 The Octavia Factor? Octavia and Cosmetic Influence

By now, we know that ancient writers—and especially Plutarch—tend to mention Octavia's famed beauty. It so happens that we do have two sources that record Octavia's presumed engagement in beauty and cosmetics. These two accounts mention how Octavia took care of her appearance and achieved her signature look. The medical writer Scribonius Largus mentions Octavia's alleged endorsement of a toothpaste recipe, and Priscian recounts an anecdote in which Maecenas compliments Octavia's coiffure. In spite of these instances' brief and cursory nature, these two accounts suggest that the imperial sister's approval (or at least an

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<sup>338</sup> *Octaviae porticus duae appellantur, quarum alteram, theatro Marcelli propiorem, Octavia soror Augusti fecit; alteram theatro Pompei proximam Cn. Octavius Cn. filius.*

association) can have influence, since they cite her aesthetic expertise to endorse hairstyles and toothpastes. These textual sources supplement Octavia's portraits in the Introduction, which I mentioned to acknowledge Octavia's presence in material culture (we have seen that Octavia's particular *nodus* hairstyle became popular at the height of her influence during the forties and thirties BCE). In other words, her beauty may be seen as another part of the Octavia factor—albeit slightly less impactful than her participation in dynastic succession and the cultural landscape.

#### 4.6.1 Scribonius Largus (1-50 CE)

Scribonius Largus, Claudius' court physician, lists her as an authority in recipes of cosmetic dentistry. In his *Compositiones Medicamentorum*, Scribonius not only lays out his medical philosophy ranging from physicians' ethics and duties to pharmacology, but he claims that a certain type of *dentifricium* came well recommended by the emperor's sister.<sup>339</sup> Her epithet *Augusta* is noteworthy, linking the sibling pair by Augustus' sanctioned name, when identifying the specific type of toothpaste. The recipe for this wonder-product follows with specific instructions for achieving those coveted "splendid teeth."<sup>340</sup>

Dentifricii <Octaviae> compositio LIX  
Dentifricium [Octaviae] Augustae. aliud Messalinae LX)

Dentifricium, quod splendidos facit dentes et confirmat: farinae hordeaciae sextarium conspargere oportet aceto cum melle mixto et subigere diutius atque ita in globulos dividere sex; quibus dilatatis admiscere salis fossicii semunciam, deinde furno coquere, donec in carbonem redigantur. tunc terere oportebit eos globulos et admiscere spicae nardi quod

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<sup>339</sup> Baldwin 1992: 425-6 provides a general overview of the life and work of Scribonius, "hardly a household name."

<sup>340</sup> Singer and Singer 1950: 217-8 use this dentifrice as a starting point on its usage and practicalities in antiquity. Apparently, Scribonius namedrops female members of the imperial household once again when providing a variation used by Messalina in Compositions 60 and in 268.2 and 271.1 when he suggests a soothing salve against pain (*acopum*) used by Augusta and Antonia.

satis videbitur ad odorem faciundum; hoc **Octavia Augusti soror** usa est.  
(*Compositiones* 59.1)

The tooth powder, which strengthens the teeth and renders them shiny, requires to sprinkle a *sextarius* of barley flour with vinegar mixed with honey and to knead for an extended period of time and to divide it in six little balls; and once they have been flattened, mingle a half ounce of dug up salt, and hereafter to bake in the oven, until it is reduced into coal, and then it will be necessary to grind down those little balls and to mingle it with spikenard roots in order to produce the odour; **Octavia, the sister of Augustus**, has used this.

After listing detailed ingredients, ratios, and instructions, Scribonius concludes that this recipe must have been truly effective, since the imperial sister herself was thought to have used it. Just how he could have known this information remains unknown. Even so, one is led to believe that if one trusted this detailed list of ingredients and ratios of six (*sextarium; ita in globulos dividere sex*), anyone would be able to reach this dental splendour.<sup>341</sup> Scribonius' recipe suggests that Octavia must have had some credibility in the matter of cosmetics, since he—likely playfully—evokes her, as well as her daughter—as an authority. In short, the recipe exists on the blurred lines of the abstract and concrete associations with Octavia's beauty.

#### 4.6.2 Priscian (approximately 6<sup>th</sup> century CE)

Priscian, probably a native from Caesarea in Mauretania who wrote in Constantinople, mentions an obscure citation attributed to Maecenas in his *Ars Grammatica*.<sup>342</sup> This passage in the treatise on declensions (*Inst.* II.536) preserves Maecenas' remark about Octavia's hair-combing, which is used as an example of the following declined form: *pexisti*.<sup>343</sup> He allegedly

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<sup>341</sup> For a fleeting remark on Scribonius' use of Octavia's name, see Baldwin 1992: 76-7.

<sup>342</sup> See Harder 1889: 5-6 for a close discussion of Maecenas' fragments. See also Passalacqua 1992 for a general introduction on Priscian.

<sup>343</sup> Makowski 1991: 26 n. 3 demonstrates that Maecenas seems to have been a prolific writer in his own right with an output that includes "an autobiographical work entitled *De Cultu Suo* and an *In Octaviam*, which may have been (certainty is impossible), an *elogium* on the sister of Augustus." Hemelrijk 2004: 295, n. 43 does not mention this connection between Octavia and Maecenas or the origin of the Priscian's fragment: "Because of its diction and

told her the following compliment: *pexisti capillum naturae muneribus gratum* (“you have combed your hair such that it is pleasing by the gifts of nature”).<sup>344</sup> Although most likely fictional, the preservation of this citation provides us with, on the one hand, another reference to Octavia’s beauty, and, on the other, an additional source that mentions Octavia and Maecenas as at least acquaintances. We have seen other such instances in far less frivolous circumstances: both Plutarch and Appian record Octavia and Maecenas’ diplomatic interactions. In Scribonius, Octavia’s everyday dental ritual becomes an example for Scribonius’ reading audience. In Priscian, the author cites a possibly imagined conversation between Octavia and Maecenas about haircare. These “beauty depictions,” then, could be linked to, for instance, Crinagoras’ poems that talk of these imperial members doing ordinary things.

## Conclusion

Though Octavia would never become the mother of the new emperor, a different picture of the imperial sister emerges. Octavia’s depiction shifts: associations with her—either familial or cultural—hold remarkable power. What I have termed the “Octavia Factor” becomes visible, as we see in Octavia’s influence in the Octavian lineage and pedigree; her involvement in childcare and marriage arrangements; and her educational and cultural pursuits. But Octavia was also visible in the concrete Roman cityscape, for instance, through the Portico Octaviae with its vast art collection and library complex; and her “fashion” influence. In the first three increasingly longer chapters of this dissertation, I show how Octavia moves through the Roman

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rhythm, the line may have been taken from a poem praising Octavia’s beauty, or perhaps from a more general eulogy of her person written in rhythmic prose.”

<sup>344</sup> For the somewhat rare combination of *naturae muneribus*—applied to oratory and architecture—see Cicero, *De Oratore* 1.115.8, and Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 2 pr. 1.11. One wonders to what extent this *muneribus* can be connected to exactly the same form used by Ovid in *ars am.* to denote Octavia, Marcellus, her porticus, and his library.

empire and thus heightens her influence once she is back in Rome. In this fourth chapter, we saw Octavia's presence in multiple layers of the Roman society. Before we turn to the epilogue, I would like to point out that we have considered Octavia's literary lives in several sources without a verified author. In addition, we have far fewer contemporary sources on Octavia, which may suggest that writing about the imperial sister was in fact a tricky business during her and her brother's lifetime. This sense of caution may then explain why it took some effort to tease out the literary Octavia, as in, say, both Virgil's *Eclogue 4* and *Aeneid 6*. In short, I argue that there are indeed more Octavias than a first glance suggests.

In the epilogue, we will consider the different literary afterlives of Octavia. Her reception, I argue, starts with the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*, and extends beyond antiquity into renaissance drama. Octavia plays remarkably larger roles in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*; her presence truly builds on this momentum in renaissance drama and through the eighteenth century and beyond. This, we will see in the epilogue, where we will discover that the literary Octavia transcends both place and time, as she lives on.

**Octavius:** No, sweet Octavia,  
You shall hear from me still; the time shall not  
Out-go my thinking on you.  
*Antony and Cleopatra*, Act 3, scene 2, lines 72-4

## Epilogue: Octavia's Afterlives

On the first page of this dissertation, we met Sarah Fielding's version of Octavia from her 1757 didactic novel *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia*. Now, we revisit this passage, but with one major difference—here, Octavia appears in the company of Cleopatra, whom Fielding vehemently reviles right before she introduces Octavia as a foil:

*Cleopatra presents us with the abandoned Consequences, and the fatal Catastrophe, of an haughty, false, and intriguing Woman; whose only Views were to exert her Charms, and prostitute her Power, to the Gratification of a boundless Vanity and Avarice, without Regard to the Ruin of her Country, or the Sufferings of others. The amiable and gentle Octavia gives us, **on the reverse**, an Example of all those Graces and Embellishments, worthy the most refined Female Character ... Such was the accomplished Character of Octavia!*<sup>345</sup>

This description follows Fielding's direct address to the Countess of Pomfret, to whom she presents this pair as "perhaps, the strongest Contrast of any Ladies celebrated in History." Horejsi 2019: 125-65 has questioned just how sincere Fielding's work and intention were; she reads the novel as an ironic mock-parody. Gaden 1999: 523 has pointed out the novel's political implications; she believes that Fielding's work "exploits cultural fears of effeminacy, luxury, and moral corruption in an effort to claim a place for strong and active women in the republic of virtue." This novel and its intentions may be as enigmatic as the literary Octavia herself. What is undeniable, though, is that the work in some ways bears a striking resemblance to Plutarch's *Lives*.<sup>346</sup> Fielding refers to the two women's reputations in the conventional didactic

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<sup>345</sup> Ed. Johnson 1994: 41.

<sup>346</sup> It is uncertain whether Fielding consulted the *Lives* in Greek or a contemporary English translation. See Horejsi 2019: 137 for sources and translation material, and note that John Dryden, who would himself write a tragedy on this very same love triangle, "supervised a translation of the *Lives* between 1684 and 1688."

way, but she also activates a certain strain of “Parallel Lives” that can be teased out of the original Plutarchan work. By this “strain,” I mean that she incorporates the lens of Plutarchan virtue and vice.<sup>347</sup> Fielding’s moral lesson, however, may be read more as a reduction of, or an extrapolation from, Plutarch’s work due to Fielding’s arguably less nuanced characters.

Unlike Plutarch, Fielding shows great interest in Octavia’s first husband Marcellus, creating, as it were, an additional set of Parallel Lives by refashioning Octavia’s late husband as a prominent character. The historical sources have left us little to work with about this Marcellus; Fielding employs her authorial freedom to shape his character according to her own narrative purposes. Fielding (ed. Johnson 1994: 129) posits a like-mindedness for this couple, which establishes Marcellus as a compatible match for her Octavia, who praises their love: “this Affection was so perfectly mutual, between me and my Husband, that our Thoughts were known to each other, before the Tongue could express them.” On the reverse, Fielding has Cleopatra taunt Antony as follows: “I was sensible Antony was born to be a Dupe to Women...”; she compares Antony’s disposition towards herself with that which Antony showed his previous wife, Fulvia: “[Antony] had at once been as great a Dupe and Slave to her, as he was now to me...”<sup>348</sup> The contrast between the two women’s praise and blame of their respective husbands corresponds to their own characters; their foil construction is vital for the moral lesson (whether genuine or not) in this novel. Additionally, these contrasting portrayals may amount to Fielding’s commentary on what it means to be on the winning side of history. In short, this eighteenth century novel shows the creative possibilities that Fielding found in the ancient representations of Octavia and her counterparts. But how did we get to this point?

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<sup>347</sup> Duff 2005 examines the *Lives*’ moral programme and how it challenges and destabilises the ideal boundaries between virtue and vice.

<sup>348</sup> ed. Johnson 1994: 73; 81.

In this dissertation's first chapter, I established that multiple versions of the literary Octavia exist from her own time onwards. For instance, Plutarch conflates Octavia Minor and her half-sister Octavia Maior; despite his keen interest in Octavia, he treats these two women as the same person. Once Octavia is of marrying age, we see that Caesar wishes to employ her as a mediator by betrothing her to Pompey, but she marries Marcellus instead. We have also seen early versions of a mediating Octavia and witnessed her influence in her dealings with Tanusia and Hortensia. Notably, Octavia fulfilled multiple roles in a short span of time. When Marcellus died after some ten years of marriage, she was given but little time to mourn him and became a widow and new bride in quick succession, all whilst being pregnant. The various versions of her and Antony's betrothal (as a part of the Treaty of Brundisium in 40 BCE) further illustrate my point about the early versions of the literary Octavia, who occupies a liminal space between the private and the public spheres.

In Chapter 2, I considered the aftermath of Brundisium: Antony issued coinage that appropriated Octavia, a propagandistic action that opens distinctive new possibilities through this visual medium of communication. Octavia travelled beyond the confines of the Roman city: she and Antony spent at least the winters of 39/38 and 38/37 BCE in Athens. Simultaneously, Octavian and Antony's rivalry exacerbated Octavia's ambivalent position between brother and husband. Octavia necessarily rose to the occasion when the triumviral conflict reached its apex at the Treaty of Tarentum in 37 BCE; but again, this she did in ways differently reported from Plutarch to Appian to Dio.

In Chapter 3, we saw how Octavia's evolving position in the public sphere became legitimized when she and Livia received unprecedented honours in 35 BCE. Livia was not the only woman with whom Octavia was grouped together. In the sources that record Octavia and



Antony's eventual separation, Plutarch in particular crafts a narrative that juxtaposes Octavia and Cleopatra. For this reason, I argue for a mini- 'parallel life' between these women within the *Life of Antony*. When Octavia's son Marcellus died unexpectedly in 23 BCE, another parallel pairing emerged in the form of Octavia and Livia, given their parallel mourning practices. While the senate officially curtailed Octavia's mourning for her husband Marcellus, Octavia mourned her son at length. Though Seneca criticized her excessive period of mourning, this lament may have illustrated the broader liberties that Octavia was able to take by this time. As a senior member of the Augustan *domus*, she had been given this sort of licence since 35 BCE, and, even if the literary Octavia (voluntarily?) receded into the background, she still received a state funeral when she died around 12-10 BCE.

In Chapter 4, I re-evaluated the literary Octavia. Even though we know less about the latter part of her life after she lost Marcellus, we saw different configurations of the literary Octavia at play, in what I called "the Octavia Factor." I argued that Octavia is implicitly present at the end of *Aeneid* 6. When Virgil recited this book to her and her brother, she is said to have fainted, a swoon that took on a life of its own. Octavia's impact on the Julio-Claudian bloodline seeps through the epigrams of Crinagoras, a Horatian Ode, Valerius Maximus' collection of historical anecdotes and different historiographies such as Tacitus, Suetonius, and Plutarch. Plutarch in particular fuels the tradition according to which Octavia's reputation as an assiduous carer and educator of her children was widely promoted in Augustan propaganda. Octavia appears in a pedagogical context in Strabo, whose text opens links between Octavia and philosopher-educators such as Nestor of Tarsus, Athenodorus, and Athenaeus. The literary Octavia is present in the Roman landscape both as a recommender of Vitruvius' project and

concretely through her Porticus Octaviae with its double library and art collection, and, perhaps most bizarrely, in Scribonius and Priscian's attestations of her tooth paste and hair style.

In this Epilogue, I suggest that Octavia's different afterlives impact literature from antiquity to the Renaissance and beyond. The literary Octavia takes on a life of her own, and there is more to be done with the later receptions of this elusive figure. Before we turn to Renaissance renditions of the literary Octavia, however, we first consider post-Augustan drama.

### 5.1 The Octavia Minor Figure as a Model for the *Octavia Praetexta*

In this section, I argue that the literary Octavia leaves traces in the characterisation of Claudia Octavia in the eponymous *Octavia*, a Pseudo-Senecan *praetexta*. The women's overlapping names—Octavia Minor and Claudia Octavia—trigger an initial comparison between them and encourage a reading of the Octavia Minor figure as one of the play's implicit subtexts. The two Octavias appear in their representations in a manner that suggests that Octavia Minor functions as a model for her (partial) namesake and descendant in the *Octavia*. A glance at the ever so confusing Julio-Claudian family tree shows how the Augustan Octavia at the beginning of the dynasty and the Neronian Octavia at its end are connected.<sup>349</sup> In this section of the Epilogue, I will demonstrate various similarities between the two Octavias that make intertextual readings of their various storylines possible.

A short plot summary of the *Octavia* elucidates how the play alludes to Octavia Minor's storyline. This *praetexta* dramatises events at Nero's imperial court in 62 CE, when Nero divorces, exiles, and puts to death his wife Octavia. Since Octavia enjoys the *favor* of the people,

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<sup>349</sup> For a stemma of the Julia-Claudian dynasty, see Appendix (Kragelund 2015: 177, Table 10.2).

Nero provokes general disapproval and public riots; the character Seneca attempts vainly to restrain his tyrannical pupil. The *populus romanus* disapproves of Octavia's demotion; regardless, Nero's mistress Poppaea becomes his next wife, and so replaces Octavia in this so-called "bedroom drama."

While scholars agree that the play is incorrectly attributed to Seneca, uncertainty about its date (early in the Flavian era?) and authorship remains.<sup>350</sup> Within recent scholarship on the *Octavia*, the Augustan Octavia lurks suggestively, as if ready at any moment to be assimilated to her Neronian namesake. Caruggi 2018: 65, in her study of domestic violence in antiquity, describes the true-to-life situation of the Neronian Octavia in a way that can be applied to the fictionalised plot: "Octavia was praised as an ideal wife due to her exemplary virtues: tolerance, obedience, modesty, and chastity. However, her admirable virtues did not protect her from an abusive husband who soon grew tired of living with her." In *our* Octavia's case, we have encountered a similar description of such a disenchanting, dissolved marriage pact. Without any additionally provided context, one might assume that Antony, not Nero, is the neglectful husband in question. I will make a case for the Augustan Octavia's presence while using commentaries such as Boyle 2008 and monographs such as Kragelund 2015 and Ginsberg 2017.<sup>351</sup>

In spite of (or perhaps rather because of) the tragedy's dubious attribution to Seneca, its stylistic and thematic Senecanisms are explicit: previous scholarship has attested to the use of characteristically Senecan tragic features at length.<sup>352</sup> *Octavia*'s characters repeatedly appear in

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<sup>350</sup> For scholarship on *Octavia*'s date and attribution, see Whitman 1978; Barbera 2000:12-7; Ferri 2003; Boyle 2008; Kragelund 2015; Ginsberg 2017.

<sup>351</sup> The characters Seneca and Nero engage closely with the recent Augustan past and the triumviral civil wars. Ginsberg 2017: 25-43 points out parallels between the depictions of Octavia and Agrippina as "figures of loss" who are "recast as a shadow of Pompey the Great" from Lucan's *Bellum Civile* and argues that "once this marked literary and historical allusion is recognized," "additional thematic and contextual parallels" can be activated within the text.

<sup>352</sup> Boyle 2008 directs our attention to the numerous overlaps and intertexts throughout the Senecan corpus. *Phaedra* is an especially influential intertext as Octavia's entrance soliloquy suggests.

conversation with mythological figures from the Senecan corpus. As do the characters within the original Senecan canon, characters in the *Octavia* are often paired and compared and undergo similar experiences. These mythological counterparts suggest that the Senecan corpus recycles itself: characters and their personal histories are repeated and replaced in an almost cyclical fashion.<sup>353</sup> Characters mirror both mythological and historical doubles within the play: Octavia re-invents herself as the new Electra and the new Juno, and her plight is a different version of her mother Messalina's experiences. Furthermore, the play's structure itself mimics its mirroring characters: the playwright designs Octavia's (*Oct.* 1-272) and Poppaea's mirroring scenes (*Oct.* 690-761), in which they both have a conversation with their nurse in their respective bed chambers, as a double frame around the agonistic discussion between Nero and Seneca in the middle of the play (*Oct.* 377-645).<sup>354</sup> I concede that none of the characters—not even the insightful nurse or the Augustus-obsessed Nero—compares the Neronian Octavia *explicitly* with the Augustan Octavia, but I will lay out the parallels and intertexts in the sections that follow.

### 5.1.1 The Octavias as Mourning Figures: Marcellus and Britannicus

The very first lines of the play cast Octavia as a figure who ceaselessly mourns. We find Octavia alone in her bedroom at dawn while she mourns the loss of her mother, father, and brother Britannicus. This opening monody attests to her tendency to compare herself to mythological characters:

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<sup>353</sup> See Boyle 2008: 108-9, for “the representation of the house of Claudius as *exemplum* of Fortune’s vicious reversals,” as expressed by the Nurse in *Oct.* 34-56. See also Whitman 1975: 48; Ferri 2003: 125-6; Boyle 2008: 100-1: on *meorum causa malorum*: “*Octavia*’s playwright seems to want to import into his heroine’s plight the sense of a doomed family which we find in Seneca, e.g., in *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes*, but most especially in the mother-daughter circumstances of *Phaedra*.”

<sup>354</sup> For the parallelism and repetition of the structuring of these scenes, see Boyle 2008: 238-40 and Kragelund 2015: 176-8; 192; 196.

Iam uaga caelo sidera fulgens  
Aurora fugat,  
surgit Titan radiante coma  
mundoque diem reddit clarum.  
age, tot tantis onerata malis,  
repete assuetos iam tibi questus  
atque aequoreas uince **Alcyonas**,  
uince et uolucres **Pandionias**.  
grauior namque his fortuna tua est.  
(*Oct.* 1-9; trans. Boyle 2008)

Now heaven's gleaming dawn expels  
The vagrant stars.  
Titan rises crowned with light  
And restores bright day to the world.  
Come, burdened with such misery,  
Repeat your customary cries—  
Louder than ocean's halcyons,  
Louder than Pandion's birds.  
Your misfortune outweighs theirs.

Octavia tries to make sense of her situation; she compares herself to Alcyone, Pandion's daughters Philomela and Procne, and most notably Electra, a quintessential mourner and avenger.<sup>355</sup> Octavia's casting of herself as various mythological characters becomes a staple feature of her rhetoric in the play. If we work out these parallels—Alcyone mourns her husband, Philomela her son, and Electra her brother—we begin to see how the play's Octavia evokes Octavia Minor: the Augustan Octavia underwent a similar experience, losing marriages (first to Marcellus and then to Antony) and her only son Marcellus. Her grief for the latter is especially well documented: Seneca famously criticises Octavia for her limitless mourning after her son's death.

Octavia frequently casts herself in the role of Electra when she describes Agrippina's/Clytemnestra's schemes—*coniugis ... insidiis* (*Oct.* 30):<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Especially Barbera 2000 and Boyle 2008 have discussed the influence of the Electra figure on Octavia at length.

<sup>356</sup> Boyle 2008 identifies the various points at which the rhetoric about this Clytemnestra and the Senecan Clytemnestra overlap.

tulimus **saeuae iussa nouercae**,  
hostilem animum uultusque truces.  
illa, illa meis tristis Erinys  
thalamis Stygios praetulit ignes  
teque extinxit, miserande pater ...  
**coniugis**, heu me, **pater, insidiis**  
oppresse iaces seruitque domus  
cum prole tua capta tyranno.  
(*Oct.* 22-32)

I served a **vile stepmother's will**,  
Endured her hate and savage looks.  
That—that dire Fury's Stygian  
Torches lit my marriage chamber  
And quenched you, piteous father ...  
**A wife's treachery, poor father**,  
Crushed you: now your house and child  
Are captive slaves to a tyrant.

Though not calling him by name, Octavia frequently expresses her loyalty to her father Claudius, just as Electra does to Agamemnon.<sup>357</sup> In Octavia's speech, recurring family titles such as *noverca*, *pater*, and *coniunx* are favoured over the characters' proper names.<sup>358</sup> These periphrastic identifications encourage the audience to read other historical and mythological figures into the family titles – titles that seem to function almost as placeholders. Through evoking Clytemnestra's wily reputation in the description of Agrippina's schemes,<sup>359</sup> not only do these two characters become intertwined, but so too do their respective husbands, Claudius and Agamemnon.

The play targets additional members of the Augustan household: Britannicus soon becomes the Orestes to Octavia's Electra, but with a twist.<sup>360</sup> Whitman 1978: notes that “unlike

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<sup>357</sup> *Labentem ut domum / genitoris olim subole restituas tua* (*Oct.* 180) is another such example.

<sup>358</sup> As we will see below.

<sup>359</sup> Boyle 2008: 107 explains these analogies between Claudius and Agamemnon in *Oct.* 31: *coniugis ... insidiis* / A wife's treachery: “The focus on Agrippina's 'treachery' underscores the analogy between her and Clytemnestra (e.g., *Soph. El.* 125) and thus between Octavia and Electra.”

<sup>360</sup> For Britannicus' first appearance, see *Oct.* 45-8:

mox illa nati, cuius extinctus iacet  
frater uenenis. maeret infelix soror

Electra, [Octavia] lost her brother and that loss is her lament here.”<sup>361</sup> Octavia’s Electra is indeed not only conspicuous as a quintessential mourning figure, but also as a sister. Octavia especially fixates on Electra’s avenging collaboration with her brother Orestes (*licuit ... / scelus ulcisci vindice fratre*, *Oct.* 61-2), which is no longer an option for her and the deceased Britannicus (*fratrisque necem deflere vetat*, *Oct.* 67). This language of failed opportunity and the death of Octavia’s brother Britannicus recurs from this point onwards.<sup>362</sup> Nero, too, pairs the two siblings as he orders his wife’s execution: *invisa coniunx pereat et carum sibi / fratrem sequatur*. *Quidquid excelsum est cadat* (*Oct.* 470-1). Despite the intense closeness of the Octavia-Britannicus/sister-brother pairing, the evolving sibling relationship between Octavia and Nero will become central to the progression of the plot.<sup>363</sup> But it is in Octavia’s lament for Britannicus that we find a salient allusion to Marcellus.

Tu quoque extinctus iaces,  
 deflende nobis semper, infelix puer,<sup>364</sup>  
 modo sidus orbis, **columen augustae domus**,  
 Britannice, heu me, nunc leuis tantum cinis  
 et tristis umbra.

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eademque coniunx nec graues luctus ualet  
 ira coacta tegere crudelis uiri.

As then she to a son’s—from whose poisons  
 A brother lies dead. The poor sister-and-wife  
 Laments and cannot hide her heavy grief;  
 But a husband’s cruel wrath compels her.

See Whitman 1978: 52 for the context of the death of Britannicus and his “delicate health.”

<sup>361</sup> Instead, Octavia’s nurse acts as her closest confidante; a dynamic that is later mirrored by Poppaea in her respective bedchamber scene. Still, her yearning for her brother seems to dominate her subconscious, e.g., through the vengeful shade of her *germanus* (*Oct.* 115; or—according to Barbera 2000: 137 “Il pensiero di Ottavia si volge ora completamente al fratello.”).

<sup>362</sup> *Oct.* 102: *orbata fratre*, *Oct.* 112: *fata post fratris dolor / scelere interempti*, *Oct.* 115: *umbra germani*, *Oct.* 141: *fratris*, *Oct.* 178: *fratrem...restituatur*, *Oct.* 182: *dira miseri fata germani*, *Oct.* 224: *semper fratris extincti memor*, in addition, there is a reference to *Incesta Aegyptus* (*Oct.* 521); Boyle 2008 links this phrase to the sister-brother marriages of the Egyptian royal house, including Cleopatra’s successive marriages to her brothers Ptolemy XIII and XIV.

<sup>363</sup> Shifting from Electra, Octavia identifies herself more with Cassandra and Iphigenia towards the play’s end, when Octavia is exiled and executed.

<sup>364</sup> Whitman 1978: 53 illustrates the links between Electra and Orestes and Octavia and Marcellus: “Like Electra she witnessed the murder of her father by her mother (= stepmother) Agrippina. Like Electra she had a brother to whom she looked for solace and ultimate revenge.” Also note the repetition of *nati* which connects *Oct.* 45-8 and *Oct.* 166-, which introduces this passage.

(*Oct.* 166-70)

You, too, lie dead, misfortunate  
Boy, ever the fount of our fullest tears,  
The world's late star, pillar of Augustus' house,  
Ah! Britannicus, now only light ash  
And a mournful shade.

Whereas Ferri 2003: 175-6 does not look beyond the allusion to the Augustan *domus*, both Barbera 2000: 147 and Boyle 2008: 132 remind us that *Oct.* 166–73 evokes the presence of Marcellus, as we have seen at length in Chapter 3 (*deflende ... semper ... puer* (lit. ‘boy ever to be wept over’).<sup>365</sup> The Britannicus figure, then, evokes Octavia Minor’s presence through textual evocation and imagery; she appears between the lines as both the mourner (for Marcellus) and the loyal sister (for Augustus), two roles that the Senecan Octavia fulfils simultaneously.

### 5.1.2 Soror Parallel with a Difference

Octavia fills two types of sister roles in this play in yet another way: she appears both as Britannicus’ (full) sister and as Nero’s (adopted) sister and wife. Like her Augustan counterpart and great-grandmother, the Neronian Octavia is replaced in her position as imperial wife and becomes Nero’s *soror* once again. The principal difference, however, is that Octavia Minor shifts from being both Antony’s wife and Octavian’s sister to becoming just Octavian’s sister, whereas the Neronian Octavia sheds her position as Nero’s wife and (adopted) sister to become Nero’s sister alone. We can track this transformation from wife to sister through the plot: Octavia starts as *infelix soror / eademque coniunx* (*Oct.* 46-7), she is then *altera Iuno / soror Augusti*

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<sup>365</sup> See Boyle 2008: 132: for the Nurse’s parallels of “the lament for the young Marcellus at the end of Virgil, *Aeneid* 6 (872–86) ... [especially] in view of Britannicus’ description as *columen augustae domus*.”



*coniunxque* (*Oct.* 219-20)<sup>366</sup> and *Maxima Iuno / soror Augusti* (*Oct.* 281-3), and she gradually becomes *expulsa soror* (*Oct.* 910). The direct allusion to Juno follows soon in *Oct.* 46–8, with *soror ... coniunx / sister-and-wife*.<sup>367</sup> In addition to being a sister, she thus becomes the sister-wife—but not for long: towards the end of the play, she loses her identity of wife and transforms into sister alone. The Nurse uses direct comparison when she lists the *similes dolores* of the queen of the gods,<sup>368</sup> who is repeatedly betrayed by her philandering brother-husband. The Nurse then explicitly casts Octavia as another Juno: *tu quoque, terris altera Iuno. soror Augusti / coniunxque, graves vince dolores* (*Oct.* 219-21).<sup>369</sup> This Juno allusion is a fitting point of reference for the two Octavias, both of whom are all too familiar with the philandering ways of their respective husbands.

### 5.1.3 The Octavias as Abandoned by Unfaithful Husbands

The *Octavia* abounds with mythological allusions: many of the characters who are evoked along the way already exist in previous plays, and they recur as reincarnations of their own literary history. At various points, the tragic characters replace one another in pre-existing roles. So, e.g., Poppaea replaces Octavia as the imperial wife. The Claudian *domus* has seen this story before when Claudius replaced Octavia’s mother Messalina with Agrippina.<sup>370</sup> Octavia refers to Messalina’s fate in *Oct.* 10-17: with this result, we can already guess how the play is

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<sup>366</sup> Juno, Jupiter’s sister and wife, as *noverca* activates both the Juno and Hercules connections (e.g., *Oct.* 21: *saeuae iussa nouercae*; 151; 171; 645). Ginsburg 2019 suggests that the second Juno reference activates a dichotomy of virtue and vice that has been crucial to the foil construction of Octavia and Poppaea.

<sup>367</sup> See Barbera 2000: 125 for the use of this dual formula.

<sup>368</sup> *Oct.* 202: *regina deum*; *Oct.* 217: *maxima Iuno*; *Oct.* 535: *sortita fratris more Iunonis toros*.

<sup>369</sup> See Barbera 2000: 157 for this explicit connection between Juno and Octavia.

<sup>370</sup> For this dynamic between Messalina and Agrippina, see Whitman 1978: 47-50; Ferri 2003: 119-23. Boyle 2008: 96-7, on *Oct.* 1-33, calls the “thematic movement of the opening monody” “programmatic,” as illustrated by the Messalina-Claudius-Agrippina triangle that is to replace the Octavia-Nero-Poppaea triangle. For more on the specific background of Valeria Messalina and her execution in 48 CE by Claudius, see Boyle 2008: 100.

going to end. What happened to Octavia's mother Messalina is eventually bound to happen to her—it is, after all, impossible to escape the “Senecan family curse.” As soon as we activate these various marriage and re-marriage dynamics, we see similar plots arise: Octavia-Poppaea-Nero (itself mimicking Messalina-Agrippina-Claudius) runs parallel with Octavia-Cleopatra-Antony. In short, the *Octavia* plotline of crumbling dynastic politics is reminiscent of Octavia Minor's arranged marriage with Antony, and of his affair with a provocative mistress that led to a divorce and then to civil unrest.

#### 5.1.4 Uxorial Virtues and Foils

The way in which Octavia and Poppaea are mirrored is reminiscent of the opposition between Octavia Minor and Cleopatra, whom Plutarch juxtaposes extensively. The *Octavia* has two intertextual moments that link Poppaea and Cleopatra: first, in *Oct.* 131-3 through *pretium stupri* (cf. Prop. 3.11.31: *coniugii obsceni pretium*, of Cleopatra); and then in Nero's survey of Augustus' violent past (*incesta Romani ducis / Aegyptus iterum*, *Oct.* 521-2).<sup>371</sup> The playwright's uses of *paelex* and *coniunx*, instead of their proper names,<sup>372</sup> make these intertextual overtones even more tempting to consider.

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<sup>371</sup> Boyle 2008: 126 identifies a textual link with Cleopatra in *Oct.* 131-3: *pretium stupri* / “fee for fornication” recalls “Propertius' description of Cleopatra demanding the walls of Rome 'as the fee for a vile marriage', *coniugii obsceni pretium* (Prop. 3. 11. 31). The figuring of Poppaea as a kind of Cleopatra would add historical irony to Octavia's complaints.” We see another Cleopatra link through the Juno-Jupiter evocation that recalls Ptolemaian brother-sister marriages, see Boyle 2008: 139-40 on *Oct.* 201-21 (Whitman 1978; 66 calls the “man/brother sister/wife relationship as exemplified by Jupiter and Juno a familiar conceit” as in *HF 1* and *Apol.* 8). Ferri 2003: 188-9 (on *Oct.* 220), 311-2 (*Oct.* 658) identifies *soror Augusti coniunxque* as a Hellenistic honorific trope, but also notes the confusion that the bare use of Augustus may cause and the fact that Octavia and Nero were siblings only by Nero's adoption into the Claudian family. These allusions to Cleopatra are later reinforced by the mention of Antony, *superatus acie*, in *Oct.* 519 (Boyle 2008: 202) and *incesta ... Aegyptus* in *Oct.* 521-2 (Boyle 2008: 203).

<sup>372</sup> I recognise that this choice may have been because of metrical reasons but maintain that the playwright's emphasis makes further speculation worthwhile.

Two recurring motifs in the *Octavia* invite us to think further about these juxtaposed wives: the importance of marriage unions (evoked through marriage symbols, the lineages resulting from such unions, and their political implications) and the support of the *populus* for these marriages. Marriage symbols (such as the Stygian torches in *Oct.* 23-4 or the *fax* in *Oct.* 153-4) highlight both Poppaea's new marriage to Nero as well as Octavia's disintegrating marriage earlier in 53 CE.<sup>373</sup> Nero's preference for Poppaea coincides with the realization that Octavia merely functioned as a political pawn (*Oct.* 21-33; Ginsberg 2017: 143 calls her a "political allegory" in *Oct.* 373-88). This employment of an Octavia for a political purpose is not novel: we have encountered a different Octavia's political potential before when Octavia Minor married Antony as part of the Pact of Brundisium. The marriage connections of both Octavias were designed to remedy diplomatic problems. Octavia Minor was meant to preserve the peace between her brother and husband, whereas Claudia Octavia was to provide Nero with a Julio-Claudian pedigree and an heir (*Oct.* 536; 591; see Boyle 2008: 206-7; 217). Neither Octavia succeeded in these designs, as both Antony and Nero left their legal wives for their mistresses. This allusion, then, invites us to incorporate Octavia Minor into the play so as to balance the Octavia-Nero-Poppaea triangulation with its Octavia-Antony-Cleopatra counterpart.

The *favor/furor* of the *populus* is another recurring motif that distinguishes both Octavias.<sup>374</sup> The Nurse introduces the importance of the people's approval in *Oct.* 183 (*Confirmet animum ciuium tantus fauor*), but *fauor* also dominates the discussion between Nero

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<sup>373</sup> See Boyle 2008: 130 (who identifies this use in *Oct.* 23-4, 161-3, 262-4, 594, 722-3—and esp. 594-5 and 595-7) on the significance of the bridal torch = funeral torch = (sometimes the torch of the Furies), or, in the words of Kragelund 2015: 204-5, "the motif of inauspicious weddings" in the recurrent *thalamus* setting.

<sup>374</sup> Here we may recall the Plutarchan account of Octavia at Brundisium and Tarentum. As for the drama, Whitman 1978: 64 already notes how *favor* is crucial to the plot. Ferri 2003: 180 notes that popular support recurs throughout the play and that it may bear a parallel with Sophocles' *Antigone*.

and Seneca.<sup>375</sup> Both Octavias have public opinion on their side. Plutarch claims that Octavia's union with Antony was celebrated among the soldiers at Brundisium, and that she remained popular after her stay in Athens. When Antony kept favouring Cleopatra and neglecting Octavia, the Roman *populus* was also said to have sided with Octavia. In the *Octavia*, this public support manifests itself even more intensely through the riots of 62 BCE, which were associated with Nero's abandonment of Octavia and his preference for Poppaea. These motifs, significant in the representations of both Octavias, set up a configuration that invites us to compare and align the two women.

#### 5.1.5 Family Titles and Dynastic Politics

The playwright habitually avoids using specific names and so invites the audience to insert applicable characters beyond the actual protagonists of the play.<sup>376</sup> Family titles appear regularly: these repetitions suggest that the characters are conscious of and sensitive to these intrafamilial bonds. We see this tension in particular when we consider the role of female bearers

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<sup>375</sup> Boyle 2008: 136; 214 reads “the people's support, *fauor*, as “dominat[ing] the final section of the exchange between Seneca and Nero in the second act (572-85)” and, furthermore, as “the motor for action, when the Chorus of Roman Citizens is spurred by its support for her to initiate armed insurrection.” For the importance and close interplay of the *populus' furor* et *favor*, see Ginsberg 2017: 162-4. See also Kragelund 2015: 314-7 for the political implications of the riots of 62 BCE.

<sup>376</sup> Whitman 1976: 51 comments on the “highly elliptical passage” that “brings out artistically the complex interfamily relationship” in *Oct.* 45-7 (*mox illa nati, cuius extinctus iacet / frater venenis, maeret infelix soror / eadem coniunx*). Boyle 2008: 125; 128 identifies the juxtaposition of *parentem natus* in *Oct.* 125 as “a Senecan strategy [of] words expressing family relationships,” and links these relationships to the “the incestuous natures of Claudius' marriage and its dissolution of family structures.” Ferri 2003: 138 dismisses the constructions as “overload with too many ideas, often not strictly relevant.”

of the Augustan bloodline<sup>377</sup> and of the *nomen Augustum*.<sup>378</sup> Octavia emphasises her own importance in the Claudian line and its continuation throughout the play, as does the chorus:

**Oct. Nero insitiuus, Domitio genitus patre,**  
orbis tyrannus, quem premit turpi iugo  
morumque uitii **nomen Augustum** inquinat!

...

**Chorus** Quae fama modo uenit ad aures?  
utinam falso credita perdat  
frustra totiens iactata fidem,  
nec **noua coniunx** nostri thalamos  
principis intret, teneatque suos  
nupta penates **Claudia proles.**  
(*Oct.* 249-278)

**Oct.:** O, he must be made to pay for his crimes—  
**This grafted Nero, Domitius' son,**  
Tyrant of a world abased by his yoke.  
His vices befoul the **name Augustus.**

...

**Chorus:** What new rumour has reached  
Our ears? O pray that it's false,  
But empty talk unfit to trust!  
    **No new wife**  
Must enter our prince's chamber;  
House and marriage must remain  
    **With Claudius' child.**

This explicit use of *Claudia proles* (*Oct.* 278) is a telling designation.<sup>379</sup> At various times, the audience is reminded that Nero is in fact *insitiuus* and adopted into the *domus*, while Octavia is the rightful Claudian on whom Nero's position within the family depends. I propose that this

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<sup>377</sup> Octavia seems aware of her all-important role within the imperial house, whereas Nero depends on her since it was through their marriage that he was adopted into the Claudian gens and thus considered as a successor (*Oct.* 125: *superbam paelicem*, see Whitman 1976: 59-61 and Boyle 2008: 130 on *Oct.* 151-2).

<sup>378</sup> Octavia is said to fear for the dignity of *nomen Augustum* (*Oct.* 251; see Ferri 2003: 195-6 on the use of "title"; Boyle 2008: 147-8). The chorus, Octavia's ally, picks up the same rhetoric (cf. "Augusta" as a title for empress Agrippina in *Oct.* 327 and *nomen ... Caesaris* in *Oct.* 336-7). They resist the idea of a new emperor's wife (*utinam ... / nec noua coniunx / nostri thalamos principis intret* in *Oct.* 275-7) and apply the dual title *soror Augusti sociata toris* (*Oct.* 284-6; see Ferri 2003: 207-8 for another Octavia—Juno parallel) to Octavia.

<sup>379</sup> See Whitman 1978: 72 on the identification of Claudia and the "chiasmus for contrast" and Boyle 2008: 155 on *Oct.* 276-8 (*Claudia proles*): "the Chorus add a defining proper name to Octavia's earlier *proles* (33). It is—given Nero's 'grafted' status (249 *Nero insitiuus*; Boyle 2008: 147)—a phrase with political edge."

focus on nomenclature and family ties is connected to the characters' heavy reliance on the *domus Claudii exemplum* and the anxiety and precariousness that surround its survival, which doubles as a major theme and as a potent foreshadowing device in the play. Throughout this dissertation, but especially in Chapters 3 and 4, we have seen how greatly valued was Octavia's position in the Augustan bloodline; her prestige was reflected in the honours that she received and in her descendants' attitude towards her. In *Ant.* 87, Plutarch mentions this same Nero as the last in the line of Octavia and Antony. Thus, the Augustan Octavia famously served a similar purpose as this Claudian Octavia; Octavia Minor again appears as a precedent and intertext for Claudia Octavia.

#### *The Significance of Octavia Minor in the Octavia?*

But why should Pseudo-Seneca be interested in Octavia Minor in the first place, so much so that the Augustan Octavia becomes such a subtext in this play? The Claudian *domus* and its destruction are central to the conflict in the imperial family as portrayed in the *Octavia*: characters repeatedly glance backwards to Augustus, his *domus*, and his trademark *clementia* as *pater patriae*. Both Nero and Seneca use the first emperor as the main exemplar for Nero as a neophyte ruler, yet with opposing purposes. The more Seneca tries to steer Nero to ruling in the manner of Augustan *clementia* (*Oct.* 442; 835), the more Nero persists in invoking Augustus' violent past and the triumviral civil conflicts.

With this subtext, then, we see Augustus' inauguration and Nero's termination of the Julio-Claudian dynasty side to side. Whereas the early Augustan household dynamics are evoked—a scenario in which Octavia can leave her husband and return to her brother—the perversion of the Neronian *soror et coniunx* configuration makes this development impossible

because Octavia and Nero inhabit both roles simultaneously. For this reason, the family curse dictates that both sister-wife and brother-husband must die in order to restore the tragically perverted household structure. In short, with Octavia Minor's ghost looming over this play, the imperial sister continued to occupy a presence in the public memory.

## 5.2 A Future for the Literary Octavia: Octavia in the Renaissance

There is much more to be done with the Octavia figure—here, I offer some preliminary suggestions for a future project, in which I hope to expand on the many Octavias of the Renaissance. Renaissance drama sees a remarkable uptick in the interest in the Octavia figure, who projects virtue and stoicism as a prime exemplar for the Elizabethan woman. I suggest that Renaissance depictions of Octavia build markedly on the Plutarchan comparison and result in bipolar juxtapositions of, on the one side, Octavia (as champion of virtue and constancy) and, on the other, Cleopatra (that model of decadence and debauchery incarnate).

In Renaissance closet drama—a genre of play that was meant for small circles, possibly because of its political flavouring—Octavia becomes a figure of neo-Stoic virtue and restraint, in stark contrast to the ever-mourning Octavia of Seneca's *Ad Marciam*. Octavia's stoic disposition—modified by a contemporary Christian accent—may come as a surprise to readers of Seneca's *Ad Marciam*, where the author compares Octavia and Livia and criticizes Octavia's excessive grief for her prematurely deceased son. The Renaissance Octavia, however, exists at the opposite end of the spectrum: her ability to deal demurely with marital obstacles and political dilemmas survives and is praised instead. The political implications of these closet dramas add an extra layer of complexity to the reception of Octavia. Indeed, these plays, written privately in the context of the Pembroke Circle, used Ancient Rome as a lens through which to view the

political situation of contemporary England, with Queen Elizabeth I and Cleopatra closely aligned. In Samuel Brandon's *The Vertuous Octavia* (1598), the Octavia figure is a "foil to Cleopatra's own voluptuousness," since she "better exemplified the qualities of the ideal Tudor Englishwoman."<sup>380</sup> Even so, Octavia challenges the effectiveness of stoic constancy through the "deep divide between Octavia's outward constancy and her inward turmoil"<sup>381</sup> Like Brandon's Octavia, Samuel Daniel's Octavia of his "Letter From Octavia to Mark Antony" (1599) is not only stuck between husband and brother and between public and private desires, but also between "Christian virtue and Stoic Constancy."<sup>382</sup> In general, these Renaissance playwrights connect the theatrical and historical counterparts and place them in a meta-theatrical conversation with each other that resembles the rhetorical strategies of the Pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*.

Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (ca. 1607) coincides with the spirit and momentum of these Renaissance depictions of Octavia Minor, who emerges as a paragon of Roman virtue in this late Shakespearean play.<sup>383</sup> Shakespeare highlights Octavia's character development and her influence on the other characters; the Shakespearean Octavia is cast as a mediating figure who is described in paradoxically different ways, depending on the person who is beholding Octavia.<sup>384</sup> Even if the Shakespearean Octavia pales by comparison with a figure of grandeur such as a Cleopatra, Octavia inspires Cleopatra's shift in attitude towards the end of the play. Whereas

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<sup>380</sup> Bruce 2009: 49; elaborates on this ideal: "she valued her marriage, she was devout, she was chauvinistic," and "an ideal character upon which to work out the conflicts facing the Pembroke poets as they addressed issues of patronage, succession, and religious and civil war."

<sup>381</sup> Bruce 2009: 47-9 argues that Octavia demonstrates "that Stoic constancy is inadequate to smooth over the messy frailties of human nature. For her, constancy is primarily an action, not a state of mind—this is a crucial distinction between her Stoicism and the classical Stoic ideal." For more on Renaissance views of female stoicism and "the heroics of constancy," see Bruce 2009: 42; 45-6.

<sup>382</sup> See Bruce 2009: 51.

<sup>383</sup> See Braunmuller 2017: xxxiv.

<sup>384</sup> For Cleopatra and her Alexandrian court, she is "the Dull Octavia" (Act 5.2.65), whereas, to Agrippa and his Roman counterparts, she is, and remains, "the Admired Octavia" (Act 2.2.143).



Cleopatra continues to dominate and flaunt her power until her death, when Cleopatra's end approaches, she employs the role of the maternal matron, as already exemplified by Octavia. After Antony's botched suicide attempt and slow demise, Cleopatra becomes the sole focus of the play. Remarkably, she increasingly refers to her children and their care once she loses Antony as her lover. She now aims to rival the maternal role that Plutarch had reserved for Octavia.<sup>385</sup> The Shakespearean Octavia thus influences Cleopatra; her reputation and representation as a paragon of wifely and motherly virtue inspire contemporary political readings that cast her as an exemplar for the Elizabethan wife and mother.

By 1677, interest in the *Parallel Lives* (and especially Antony's Life) had not waned: John Dryden oversaw a translation and adapted its plot for the stage.<sup>386</sup> In *All for Love*, he creates an Octavia who meets and confronts Cleopatra.<sup>387</sup> Dryden himself addresses his authorial liberty in his Preface; he explains this plot change with remarkable compassion for Octavia's character: "The greatest error in the contrivance seems to be in the person of Octavia." [Preface 32].<sup>388</sup> While I will not expand on any of these seventeenth century plays at this point; my main point is that the literary Octavia remains very much present in the minds of the dramaturgs of the Renaissance.

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<sup>385</sup> In Act 5, scene 2, both Dolabella and Caesar start to mention her children to gain her favour. Cf. Caesar: "To lay on me a cruelty by taking / Antony's course, you shall bereave yourself / Of my good purposes, and put your children / To that destruction which I'll guard them from / If thereon you rely. I'll take my leave" and Cleopatra employs a maternal role in her theatrical suicide: "Dost thou not see my baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep?" (Act 5.2. 307-8).

<sup>386</sup> For more on Dryden's life, career, and the play's dating and situation in Dryden's work, see Andrew 1975: 1-3.

<sup>387</sup> In general, though, Dryden's Octavia is more vocal—Antony even attributes an Aristotelian "greatness of soul" to her (see Andrew 1975: 13 on Antony's utterance in III, 341, and Octavia's earlier "Your hand, my lord; 't is mine, and I will have it; III.266)—yet Andrew 1975 finds this Octavia still rather "moderate and temperate."

<sup>388</sup> Dryden justifies this change as follows: "This objection I foresaw, and at the same time contemned; for I judged it both natural and probable, that Octavia, proud of her new-gained conquest, would search out Cleopatra to triumph over her; and that Cleopatra, thus attacked, was not of a spirit to shun the encounter: And it is not unlikely, that two exasperated rivals should use such satire as I have put into their mouths; for, after all, though the one were a Roman, and the other a queen, they were both women." [Preface 33]

Before I conclude, it is worth mentioning that these plays were written during the reigns of Elizabeth I (herself a vexed topic of conversation and speculation when it came to controversies of succession and sisterhood, as she also was masqueraded as another Cleopatra counterpart in these closet dramas) and of James I, but also at a time when the latter habitually appropriated Augustan imagery. The *Aeneid*, and especially Book 6, came to play an important, panegyric role when James rose to the throne in 1603, as we can see in what is written about Sir John Harington's 1604 translation: "The death of Marcellus prompts one of the most revealing comments in Harington's text. In Harington's eyes, the death of the heir to Augustus is already one stage in the gradual erosion of faith in the Roman Empire... critics have read Harington's gift to King James and Prince Henry as a direct encomium of the new Stuart dynasty and the stability it would bring." The similarities between the promising Henry and Marcellus were closer than they can have anticipated: the death of this young prince, too, prompted a Succession Crisis in 1612-14.<sup>389</sup> It is at these moments that characters such as Octavia become all the more valuable and valued: though not mentioned explicitly and often understated, her presence looms.

## Conclusion

In this epilogue I hope to have shown that there are more Octavias present than a first glance may suggest, when it comes to Ancient and Modern representations alike. Octavia's afterlives range from Octavia's presence in the Neronian-set *Octavia*, to the Octavia of

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<sup>389</sup> "The sudden death of Henry, Prince of Wales from typhoid fever on 6 November 1612 sent shock waves through the Court of James VI and I. The unexpected death at the age of eighteen of the heir to the thrones of England and Scotland was a major blow to the Stuart dynasty," Thrush explains for The History of Parliament Trust.

Renaissance closet drama as the Elizabethan paradigm of wifely excellence, to the Shakespearean Octavia and her counterpart in Dryden. These various configurations of Octavia, then, suggest that her different identities can be used according to the needs of different authors, their times, and their agendas. So, too, for more recent times: David Malouf's Octavia in *An Imaginary Life* (1978) deserves some reflection. Malouf's narrator takes a cue from Octavia's brief appearance in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and imagines the Porticus Octaviae as a remarkably un-Augustan space of crude sexual activity. Malouf depicts a narrator who provokes the emperor by mentioning his sister and amorous pursuits in the same sentence. As such, the narrator, evoking the Ovidian exile, touches a raw nerve: the emperor's sister who became a lasting fixture in his own imperial propaganda. And so, the literary Octavia, who is already so widely encountered in the ancient sources, looms large in the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*, and her stories extend beyond antiquity into Renaissance drama, where the momentum of her narrative carries her different manifestations forward into our own times.<sup>390</sup> Although the Historical Octavia perished, I hope to have shown that the literary Octavia transcends both place and time so as still to live on.

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<sup>390</sup> Compare Octavia's character in the 2005-7 HBO/BBC Two series, who is described as "the beautiful but weak-willed sister of Octavian. Her mother's pawn, she hides simmering resentment beneath the guise of a dutiful daughter."

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# Appendix

Stemma of the Julio-Claudian Dynasty (source: Kragelund 2015: 177, Table 10.2)

