

“*per sororis commendationem servasti*”:

Octavia Minor’s Cultural Influence in the Roman Principate

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Part 1: Octavia’s involvement in the arts and sciences (Vitruvius, Ovid, and Strabo)

1.1 Vitruvius (*De arch.* 1. Pr. 2)

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.

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.

1.2 Ovid (*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,
A work rich in foreign marble.

1.3.A Strabo (Geogr. 14.5.14)

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.

These [aforementioned] men were Stoics; but Nestor, my contemporary—the teacher of Marcellus, son of Octavia the sister of Caesar—was an Academician. 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.

1.3.B Plutarch (Plut. Publicola 17.5)

τοῦτον τὸν ἄνδρα Μούκιον ὁμοῦ τι πάντων καὶ Σκαιόλαν καλούντων Ἀθηνόδωρος ὁ Σάνδωνος ἐν τῷ πρὸς Ὀκταουίαν τὴν Καίσαρος ἀδελφὴν καὶ Ὀψίγονον ὠνομάσθαι φησίν.

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.

Part 2: The Plutarchan “Octavia’s” imagined *Suasoria* at Tarentum

2.1 Appian and Dio on Tarentum

2.1.A “Antony supplied to Caesar 120 ships, 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, begging from Antony, sent to her brother ten three-banked phaseli as a gift**—a mixture of war-ship and merchant vessel — and Caesar gave Octavia a thousand selected men as a body-guard in return, which Antony may select.”

(Appian. *B. Civ.*10.95)

2.1.B “At this same period Antony came back to Italy from Syria. The reason he gave was that he intended to bear his share of the war against Sextus because of Caesar’s mishaps; he did not, however, stay by his colleague, but, having come to spy upon his actions rather than to accomplish anything, he gave him some ships and promised to send others, in return for which he received heavy-armed troops and departed, stating that he was going to conduct a campaign against the Parthians. **Before he left, they presented to each other their mutual grievances, at first through their friends and then personally; and since they had as yet no leisure for war with each other, they became reconciled in a way, chiefly through the instrumentality of Octavia.** (Cass. Dio 48.54)

2.2 *The suasoria: context and overview (based on Bloomer 2001)*

- ❖ “The Suasoria was **deliberative** in form and **addressed a great man at some critical period in his career**; thus, in response to a historical fantasy such as ‘Alexander deliberates whether or not to cross the ocean,’ the speaker would offer **Alexander advice on his course of action, speaking of him in the third person and occasionally addressing him directly.**”
- ❖ “A mode of **deliberative oratory, ethical meditation, and biographical dramatization**”
- ❖ “These brilliant performances of the leading teachers, and indeed even of equestrian Romans (c.20 bce to 40 ce), show a culture of **wit, literary allusion, and high stylization**, and so provide a **fundamental insight into the literature of the Julio-Claudians.**”
- ❖ “Cestius (first century bce) recognized that the *Suasoria* constituted a useful exercise in the **choice and practice of tone**: giving advice to a **tyrant** required a tone different from giving advice to one's imagined peers in the senate hall or perhaps in the **family** council where one might set the exhortation to old Cato to marry.”
- ❖ “The *Suasoria* can then be seen (rather like the letter writing of Pliny and Seneca) as a **literary mode of ethical address and training for oneself and one's friends.**”

2.3 Plutarch

1. Plut. Ant.35.3-4

ἡ δὲ ἀπαντήσασα καθ' ὁδὸν Καίσαρι, καὶ παραλαβοῦσα τῶν ἐκείνου φίλων Ἀγρίππαν καὶ Μαικίηναν, ἐνετύγχανε πολλὰ ποτνωμένη καὶ πολλὰ δεομένη μὴ περιδεῖν αὐτὴν ἐκ μακαριωτάτης γυναικὸς ἀθλιωτάτην γενομένην. νῦν μὲν γὰρ ἅπαντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς αὐτὴν ἀποβλέπειν, αὐτοκρατόρων δυεῖν τοῦ μὲν γυναιῖκα, τοῦ δὲ ἀδελφὴν οὖσαν·

Then meeting Caesar on her journey and having taken with her his friends Agrippa and Maecenas, Octavia pled lamenting much and begging much not to permit her, having been the happiest woman, become the most wretched one. For, now, [Octavia continued,] all the individuals were regarding her as belonging to two rulers, being the wife of one and the sister of the other...

2. Plut. Ant. 35.5-7

“εἰ δὲ τὰ χεῖρω κρατήσειεν” ἔφη “καὶ γένοιτο πόλεμος, ὑμῶν μὲν ἄδηλον ὅτω κρατεῖν ἢ κρατεῖσθαι πέπρωται, τὰ ἐμὰ δ’ ἀμφοτέρως ἄθλια.” τούτοις ἐπικλασθεῖς ὁ Καῖσαρ ἤκεν εἰρηνικῶς 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.

She said, "if the lesser person should prevail and war should occur [between you two], it is unclear for you 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 those 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.

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