

## XIII.—Scribonia and Her Daughters

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On the basis of Suetonius' statements (*Aug.* 62.2, 69.1) Scribonia, the first wife of Octavian, is dismissed by historians as a disagreeable individual.<sup>1</sup> We know that she was the mother of the noble Cornelia (*Prop.* 4.11) by an earlier marriage as well as of the licentious Julia, the daughter of Octavian. It seems not unfitting, therefore, to consider all the scattered references to her in the literature and the inscriptions in order to form a more equitable idea of her personality and to obtain some explanation of the divergence in the characters of her daughters.

Octavian's motives for contracting a marriage with Scribonia were largely political. He desired an alliance with the party of Sextus Pompey, whose nearest kinswoman, unmarried at the time, was his wife's aunt, Scribonia (*App. BCiv.* 5.6.53; *Suet. Aug.* 62.2). If Octavian were seeking a woman who had not only connections prominent in contemporary politics but also an aristocratic republican background,<sup>2</sup> Scribonia met the requirement (*Prop.* 4.11.31). Every Roman realized it as he entered the Forum from the Via Sacra, passing the monument known as the Puteal Libonis or Puteal Scribonianum.<sup>3</sup> Her mother, as we know from an inscription, was a Sentia, one of whose ancestors had been director of the mint.<sup>4</sup>

Scribonia is described by modern historians<sup>5</sup> as much older than her husband, on the basis of Suetonius' statement that she had already been married twice and had children of her second marriage (*Suet. Aug.* 62.2). One son was consul in 16 B.C. (*Prop.* 4.11.66). By that time, however, the minimum age of forty was no longer a requirement for candidacy for the consulship, so that he may have been born later than 56 B.C. If his mother were not much over fifteen at the time of his birth, she herself may have been born about

<sup>1</sup> R. D. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1939) calls her "morose" (219), "a tiresome character" (229), "unlovable" (378).

<sup>2</sup> Syme, *op. cit.* 368.

<sup>3</sup> G. Lugli, *Monumenti minori del Foro Romano* (Rome 1947) 46.

<sup>4</sup> *Röm.Mitt* 6 (1891) 137; *CIL* 6.31276.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. M. Hadas, *Sextus Pompey* (New York 1930) 87 and notes.

the year 70 and so have been not much more than seven years older than Octavian, whom she survived by at least two years (Sen. *Ep.* 70.10). Since Roman girls were often married at twelve,<sup>6</sup> a second marriage for Scribonia at the age of about fifteen at a time when matrimonial alliances changed with kaleidoscopic rapidity is entirely probable. The fact that her brother's daughter was already married in 40 B.C. is no indication that she herself was well advanced into middle age by that year, the year of her marriage to Octavian, since she need not have been much older than her niece.

Suetonius relates that when Octavian divorced Scribonia, he gave as his reason that he could not endure her contrary disposition (*morum perversitatem*, *Aug.* 62.2). We are told also that she nagged him about the woman she referred to as his "mistress" (*paelicis*, Suet. *Aug.* 69.1). If Octavian made no attempt to conceal his infatuation for the then eighteen-year-old Livia (Aur. Vict. *Caes. Epit.* 1.23), we can hardly blame Scribonia for nagging. Yet he waited for the birth of an heir and, as the infant proved to be a girl, Julia, he sent his wife the notice of divorce without waiting another day (Dio Cass. 48.34.3).

According to Suetonius (*Aug.* 62.2) Scribonia's first and second husbands were of consular rank, and there were children of her second marriage. An inscription (*CIL* 6.26033) found near the Porta Capena reads: *Libertorum et familiae Scriboniae Caes. et Corneli Marcell. f. eius*. This inscription shows that Scribonia was the mother of a son also by her first husband,<sup>7</sup> Cn. Cornelius Lentulus Marcellinus, consul in 56 B.C. (Dio Cass. 39.16.3). Her second marriage was to a Cornelius Scipio, generally identified as the consul in 38 (*CIL* 1<sup>2</sup>, p. 65).<sup>8</sup> The young Marcellinus, though

<sup>6</sup> The legal age for the marriage of Roman girls was twelve. They were at times betrothed much earlier, as in the case of the infant Julia and Antyllus, cited below, p. 170. H. Blümner, *Römische Privataltertümer* 343, thinks that Roman brides were usually between the ages of thirteen and fifteen. As an instance of a Roman aristocratic girl who was to be married before the age of thirteen we have the inscription (*CIL* 6.16631) of Minicia Marcella, dead at the age of twelve years, eleven months, and seven days. This is the girl for whose wedding the younger Pliny says (5.16) that invitations had been issued before her last illness, and he implies that her illness was of some duration, so that she would have been a bride of twelve. On early marriages for political reasons see also M. W. Singer, "The Problem of Octavia Maior and Octavia Minor," *TAPA* 79 (1948) 271, note 11.

<sup>7</sup> *RE* 4.1388.

<sup>8</sup> Drumann-Groebe 4.620; *PIR* 2<sup>2</sup>.355. Cf. Syme, *op. cit.* (above, note 1) 229, note 7.

living in his mother's care after her marriage to Octavian, evidently did not reach maturity, for we have no further knowledge of him, and Suetonius was either ignorant of or unconcerned with his existence. The children referred to by the biographer are the illustrious Cornelia, celebrated by Propertius (4.11), and her brother, the consul of 16 B.C. Although, as we may infer from the Porta Capena inscription, Marcellinus remained in Scribonia's household, we do not know whether the children of her second marriage were brought up by her or by their father's family. In any case, Cornelia held fast to the dignity and character of the ideal matron of the Roman Republic (Prop. 4.11.44), a worthy daughter of both the Cornelii and the Scribonii. She is described by Propertius as a most devoted wife and mother, and if she had a tendency to any objectionable traits inherited from her mother, no evidence for it has been recorded. Her relation with her mother must have been cordial, or lines 55-57 would hardly have been included in his elegy by Propertius, who adds that the crowning glory that came to Cornelia at her death was the grief of Caesar, who declared her a worthy sister of his daughter Julia (58-60), a statement which seems ironical in view of Julia's subsequent career.

After the dissolution of her marriage to Octavian, Scribonia seems to have retired to live her own life. We have no record of a subsequent marriage. Four inscriptions have been found referring to her as the wife of Caesar.<sup>9</sup> Are we to conclude that all happen to be from the one year of her brief marriage or, more probably, was she still referred to by that title even after the divorce?

If Scribonia's children of the Cornelii Scipiones were not reared under her care, neither was Julia, at least after her earliest years. Octavian considered the infant girl so important a pawn in the political game that he betrothed her at the age of two to Antony's five-year-old son Antyllus in order to strengthen their wavering alliance (Dio Cass. 48.54.4). Some time later he considered Cotiso, king of the Getae, as a possible son-in-law, and others from time to time (Suet. *Aug.* 63.2; Tac. *Ann.* 4.39.5, 40.7-8). Julia was evidently a member of Augustus' house in childhood, especially after he no longer had any hope of an heir by Livia, for we know that he had her trained in the housewifely arts of spinning and weaving (Suet. *Aug.* 64.2, 73).

<sup>9</sup> *CIL* 6.7467, Scriboniae Caesaris vestificis; 26032, ex domo Scriboniae Caesar., and the inscriptions referred to above, p. 169 and note 4.

At fourteen Julia was married to her cousin Marcellus, only about a year her senior, whom Augustus indicated as his heir (Suet. *Aug.* 63.1; Dio Cass. 53.27.5). The youth was delicate, probably tubercular, and died two years later.<sup>10</sup> Augustus then chose as his son-in-law and intended successor his old friend and general, Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa (Dio Cass. 54.6.5), a man one year his junior, hence, twenty-three years older than Julia. Agrippa's appearance<sup>11</sup> was not such as to arouse romantic feelings in the youthful widow, but his renown as a general and the fact that he was chosen to succeed Augustus gave a certain glamour to the marriage. The birth of her two sons, heirs apparent to the imperial power of Augustus, brought public attention upon Julia,<sup>12</sup> and her triumphal tour of the East with Agrippa from 17 to 13 B.C.<sup>13</sup> must have given her an unalloyed feeling of importance. At Rome, under the eyes of Livia, she had been brought up in the Spartan life on which Augustus prided himself (Suet. *Aug.* 72-73). In the East, on the other hand, she was entertained royally and even worshiped as a goddess.<sup>14</sup> It is this adulation which may have caused her to consider herself above the rules of conduct held obligatory for other Roman matrons (Vell. Pat. 2.100.3).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, after her return to Italy she had practically no responsibilities. Agrippa returned to his military campaigns, while Augustus took charge of the education of her children (Suet. *Aug.* 64.2). Consequently, Julia surrounded herself with a group of her contemporaries who seem to have dabbled in politics and literature, for she was clever, lively,

<sup>10</sup> Servius on *Aen.* 6.861. Marcellus fell ill in his sixteenth year (i.e. at the age of fifteen) and died at Baiae in his eighteenth year.

<sup>11</sup> J. J. Bernoulli, *Röm. Ikon.* 1 (Stuttgart 1882) 252-263 and Pl. xxii, Münztaf. v. 101-106.

<sup>12</sup> There are several issues of coins, struck when the boys were still children, showing Julia between her two sons. See H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum* 1 (London 1923) 21 and Pl. 4.3,5.

<sup>13</sup> Nic. Dam. in *FHG* 3.350, frag. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *JHS* 9 (1888) 243, no. 69 (from Cyprus); *BCH* 4 (1880) 517, where the editor conjectures that the inscription was erected after Julia's death because of the word *θεάων*, but this term was used also of the living. Cf. *LSJ* s.v.; *CIL* 3 Suppl. 7156; *REG* 5 (1892) 412.

<sup>15</sup> G. P. Baker, *Tiberius Caesar* (New York 1928) 16-17, describes Julia's temperament as due largely to her early marriage and incompatibility to Agrippa, disregarding the fact that Roman girls matured early and were legally marriageable at twelve, their husbands frequently being much older. Also, as late as the early nineteenth century we read of belles and brides of fourteen in the social history of England and the United States. Byron's "Maid of Athens" was twelve; cf. G. C. Brouzas in *Philological Papers* 7 (*West Virginia University Bulletin*, June 1949) 10.

and a bit vain, if we may judge from the bright and risqué repartee which has been attributed to her in the anecdotes of Macrobius (*Sat.* 2.5). In her coterie there was a certain Gracchus,<sup>16</sup> a descendant of that renowned family, a poet and cavalier who soon became her lover (*Tac. Ann.* 1.53.4). Julia's portrait of this time, as identified on the frieze of the Ara Pacis,<sup>17</sup> shows a very beautiful woman with a conspicuously bored expression standing behind Agrippa, who already appears as a man in failing health. He died the following year.

Scandalous reports state that before Agrippa's death Julia had made advances to Tiberius and had been repulsed (*Suet. Tib.* 7.2), with the result that they must have despised each other. Yet Augustus, with no regard for the feelings of the contracting parties and still believing Julia the model Roman woman, as he had declared a few years earlier, ordered a marriage between her and Tiberius (*Suet. Aug.* 63.2). The latter thus became the acknowledged guardian of her younger children.<sup>18</sup> Julia's sixth child, the son of Tiberius, died soon after birth (*Suet. Tib.* 7.3). Not much later Tiberius went into voluntary exile to the island of Rhodes. Dio (55.9.5) and Suetonius (*Tib.* 10.1) indicate that his reason may have been to avoid political conflict with Gaius and Lucius and that Julia's conduct was a secondary consideration, for he was at that time on most cordial terms with both Augustus and Livia (*Suet. Tib.* 10.2). Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.53.1) emphasizes his eagerness to rid himself of Julia, who remained at Rome and resumed the society of her former associates.

That Augustus was unaware of his daughter's escapades is not entirely surprising. No inferior would have dared to inform him directly. Any member of the nobility or of the royal family who aroused his suspicions would himself immediately have been suspected of personal enmity toward Julia. If some rumors did reach

<sup>16</sup> On Gracchus see Teuffel-Kroll, par. 254.4; Schanz-Hosius 2.272.

<sup>17</sup> G. Moretti, *Ara Pacis Augustae* (Rome 1949) 1.229 and I. S. Ryberg, *MAAR* 19 (1949) 85. This identification is accepted by Professor Otto Brendel, as he stated in a lecture at the monument in 1951. For portraits of Julia see Bernoulli, *Röm. Ikon.* Pt. II, Vol. I (Berlin and Stuttgart 1886) 126-131. The head which had formerly been numbered 418 in the Museo Chiaramonti and had been identified as Julia, but questioned by Bernoulli, is now no. 15 in section 47 of the Museum and called an unknown woman of the Augustan period. The crude coin portraits of Julia, such as Bernoulli's Pl. xxxii, no. 15, cannot be considered as reliable likenesses.

<sup>18</sup> Syme, *op. cit.* (above, note 1) 416.

Augustus, he preferred to dismiss them (Dio Cass. 55.10.13), possibly because Julia's associates were younger men of the best families and included an Appius Claudius, a Scipio, Quinctius Crispinus, the poet Gracchus, and Iullus Antonius, son of the triumvir (Vell. Pat. 2.100.4-5). Doubtless others among them dabbled in literature, and Ovid's exile was probably due to some connection with the group, which, while drinking and carousing, was "mad enough to aspire to anything" and became involved in a conspiracy to overthrow the power of Augustus.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the report of her habitual orgies in the Roman Forum<sup>20</sup> must be a gross exaggeration, the type of salacious detail that comes into history from contemporary gossip. In the time of Augustus the side of the Palatine overlooking the Forum and the area along the Via Sacra on the slope of the Velia were occupied by private houses, to which the lights and noise of revelry by night near the Rostra would certainly have reached.<sup>21</sup> There must also have been *vigiles* to guard the great public buildings at night. It is more likely that one occasion on which the revelers overflowed Julia's palace in a noisy rout would have been enough to direct public attention to her and bring knowledge of it to Augustus. He took immediate and drastic action (Dio Cass. 55.10.14-16) after her associates had been questioned.<sup>22</sup>

During the years of Julia's triumph we have no evidence of her relations with her mother. The latter did accompany her daughter into banishment (Dio Cass. 55.10.14), possibly to furnish her companionship in an exile the hardships of which even the injured Tiberius tried to lessen, endeavoring to reconcile Augustus by several letters and allowing Julia to retain his personal gifts to her (Suet. *Tib.* 11.4). We need not, however, conjecture that Scribonia acted thus to spite Augustus. Julia's exile lasted fifteen years, the first five on Pandateria, the last ten at Regium (Suet. *Aug.* 66.3; Tac. *Ann.* 1.53.1). Probably Scribonia remained with her all that time (Vell. Pat. 2.100.5, *permansit*). As long as Augustus

<sup>19</sup> R. S. Rogers, *Studies in the Reign of Tiberius* (Baltimore 1943) 49-50, discusses the plots against Augustus. Cf. Syme, *op. cit.* (above, note 1) 427.

<sup>20</sup> Sen. *Ben.* 6.32; Plin. *HN* 7.149, 21.9; Dio Cass. 55.10.12; Hieron. *ab Abr.* 2012 = 2 B.C.

<sup>21</sup> G. Lugli, *Roma Antica* (Rome 1946) 76 f., 409.

<sup>22</sup> The suicide of Julia's freedwoman, Phoebe (Suet. *Aug.* 65.2; Dio Cass. 55.10.16), was probably in order to avoid the pressures of an investigation as well as the disgrace, the reason for her act which Augustus praised.

lived, Julia may have had some hope of being restored to favor, but her father continued to be so unrelenting that he gave strict orders that she was not to be buried in the family mausoleum (Suet. *Aug.* 101.3).

There had been attempts by certain revolutionaries near the end of the rule of Augustus to free Julia and Agrippa Postumus, her only surviving son, who was also in exile at that time, and set them up in place of the aged *princeps* (Suet. *Aug.* 19.2; Plin. *HN* 7.149), but soon after the accession of Tiberius the death of Agrippa Postumus, from whatever cause,<sup>23</sup> and the execution of Gracchus (Suet. *Tib.* 22.1; Tac. *Ann.* 1.53.3-8), prevented their forming a conspiracy centering around Julia to oppose the new ruler. That the execution of Gracchus was political, although his personal enmity toward him was well founded, may be judged from the circumstance that Tiberius later even befriended Gracchus' son (Tac. *Ann.* 4.13.3).

When Julia learned of the death of these two, she lost all hope of reinstatement in a position of power or even of a return from exile. Our modern historians state that she starved herself to death,<sup>24</sup> but for this there is no evidence. Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.53.3) ascribes her death to *inopia ac tabe*, not to *inedia*, which was the word for starvation.<sup>25</sup> *Inopia* means a lack of anything, often of friends or hope, so that stricken by some illness, not necessarily a fatal one, the victim succumbs because of no further desire to live, a condition which the ancients recognized and to which Appian (*BCiv.* 5.6.59) actually attributes the death of Fulvia, the ex-wife of Antony. *Tabes* is a wasting disease, which may be the physical result of the psychic condition caused by *inopia*, though it is used for tuberculosis (Celsus, *Med.* 2.1, *passim*) and pulmonary ailments confused with it.

Scribonia survived her daughter. She had purchased and freed a slave, who became renowned as a grammarian (Suet. *Gram.* 19), and it may well be that she had encouraged him and possibly others as a patroness. In A.D. 16, when her grandnephew Libo Drusus conspired against Tiberius (Tac. *Ann.* 2.27), Scribonia

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Walter Allen, "The Death of Agrippa Postumus," *TAPA* 78 (1947) 131-139.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. F. B. Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius* (London 1931) 51, note 1.

<sup>25</sup> For *inedia* = starvation, see Plin. *Ep.* 3.7.1; Suet. *Tib.* 53.2 (of Agrippina the Elder); Gell. 3.10.15; Suet. *Aug.* 53.3 (of a senator). For *tabes*, see Cic. *Tusc.* 3.27; Plin. *HN* 2.156; Sall. *Cat.* 36.5.

seems to have been living in the family mansion at Rome (Sen. *Ep.* 70.10). With an admirable philosophy she advised the young Libo not to commit suicide but to await his fate, a course disapproved by Seneca, who relates the anecdote. This is the latest extant reference to Scribonia. In A.D. 16 she was over eighty-five and must have been near the end of her days. Had she lived many years longer, Pliny would hardly have failed to note the fact in his list of prominent long-lived women (*HN* 7.158) who attained to an age of ninety-three or more.

Scribonia's two daughters have come down in history as respectively the most virtuous and the most notorious Roman women of their generation. Cornelia chose to cling firmly to the republican ideal of the Roman matron, the devoted wife married but once, and mother. Julia seems to have been equally determined to pursue her own hedonistic life, with no regard for her obligations to her husband, her children, or the position of her father. Yet Scribonia under "the bludgeoning of chance" must have developed a philosophy of her own, so that she was able to live to a dignified (*gravis*) and ripe old age.