

Sectrix proscriptionum: Sulla's Women and the Proscription Auctions

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Women, Wealth, and Power in the Roman Republic
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1. Cicero, *De Officiis* 2.29: “Nor will the seed and cause of civil wars be lacking, while corrupt men remember that bloody auction spear and hope for another, as Publius Sulla, since he had brandished the spear when his relative was a dictator, likewise did not shrink from an even more criminal spear thirty six years later.”

Nec vero umquam bellorum civilium semen et causa deerit, dum homines perditam hastam illam cruentam et meminerint et sperabunt, quam P. Sulla cum vibrasset dictator propinquo suo, idem sexto tricensimo anno post a sceleratiore hasta non recessit.

2. Cicero, *Ad Familiares* 15.17 = 214 “Here, since I will write something to you after all, we have the fact that Publius Sulla the elder has died: some say by bandits, others by indigestion; the people don’t care, since it is agreed that his body has been burned. You will bear this with a calm mind on account of your philosophy; nevertheless, we have lost a ‘face of the city’. People think Caesar will be upset, fearing that his auction spear will flag; Mindius Marcellus and Attius the paint-seller are overjoyed that they have lost a rival bidder.”

Nos hic, ut tamen ad te scribam aliquid, P. Sullam patrem mortuum habebamus: alii a latronibus, alii cruditate dicebant; populus non curabat, combustum enim esse constabat. Hoc tu pro tua sapientia feres aequo animo; quamquam πρόσωπον πόλεως amisimus. Caesarem putabant moleste laturum verentem, ne hasta refrixisset; Mindius Marcellus et Attius pigmentarius valde gaudebant se adversarium perdidisse.

3. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 36.116: “Gaius Curio, who died in civil war among the partisans of Caesar, could not surpass Scaurus in the funeral games of his father in riches and magnificence - For where could he find Sulla as a stepfather and Metella as a mother, that auctioneer of the proscriptions (*proscriptionum sectrix*)? Where could he find Marcus Scaurus as a father, so often the first citizen of the government and the pocket of the provincial thefts of Marius’ friends? When Scaurus himself was no longer able to equal himself, he had at least this gift from the fire which destroyed so many things brought from around the globe – that no one afterward could be equal to his insanity.”

C. Curio, qui bello civili in Caesarianis partibus obiit, funebri patris mundere cum opibus apparatuque non posset superare Scaurum - unde enim illi vitricus Sulla et Metella mater proscriptionum sectrix? unde M. Scaurus pater, totiens princeps civitatis et Mariani sodalicium rapinarum provincialium sinus? cum iam ne ipse quidem Scaurus sibi par esse posset, quando hoc certe incendi illius praemium habuit convectis ex orbe terrarum rebus, ut nemo postea par esset insaniae illi.

4. Cicero *Philippics* 2.64-65: “Caesar returned from Alexandria, fortunate, as he thought, but in my opinion, whoever is unfortunate for the republic cannot be fortunate. The auction spear was

set up in front of the temple of Jupiter Stator and the goods of Gnaeus Pompeius... were subjected to the most bitter voice of the auctioneer... While everyone was awaiting who would be so impious, so out of their minds, such an enemy to gods and men who would dare to approach that crime of the *sectio*, no one was found except for Antony, although there were so many around that spear who would dare anything else: one man alone was found who would dare to do this which the boldness everyone had fled from and shuddered at. Therefore did such stupidity oppress you or, to say more accurately, such madness, that you did not realize that if you were a *sector*, born from such status, especially when you were a *sector* of the property of Pompeius, that you would be execrated by the Roman people, hated, that all the gods and men would be your enemies forever?"

Caesar Alexandria se recepit, felix, ut sibi quidem videbatur, mea autem sententia, qui rei publicae sit infelix, felix esse nemo potest. Hasta posita pro aede Iovis Statoris bona Cn. Pompei... voci acerbissimae subiecta praeconis... Exspectantibus omnibus quisnam esset tam impius, tam demens, tam dis hominibus hostis qui ad illud scelus sectionis auderet accedere, inventus est nemo praeter Antonium, praesertim cum tot essent circum hastam illam qui alia omnia auderent: unus inventus est qui id auderet quod omnium fugisset et reformidasset audacia. Tantus igitur te stupor oppressit vel, ut verius dicam, tantus furor ut primum, cum sector sis isto loco natus, deinde cum Pompei sector, non te exsecratum populo Romano, non detestabilem, non omnis tibi deos, non omnis homines et esse inimicos et futuros scias?

5. Plutarch, *Life of Sulla* 6.10-12: "And returning to the city he was appointed consul with Quintus Pompeius, being fifty years of age, and he had a marriage of the highest honor with Caecilia, daughter of Metellus the Pontifex Maximus. On this topic the people sang many things about him and many of the leading men felt resentment, thinking that he was unworthy of the woman although worthy of the consulship... Nevertheless, [Sulla] honored Metella in all things, with the result that the Roman people, when they desired to bring back the Marian fugitives, when Sulla refused, called on Metella since they were in need."

καὶ παρελθὼν εἰς τὴν πόλιν ὑπάτος μὲν ἀποδείκνυται μετὰ Κοῖντου Πομπηίου, πενήκοντα ἔτη γ εγονώς, γαμεῖ δὲ γάμον ἐνδοξότατον Καικιλίαν τὴν Μετέλλου θυγατέρα τοῦ ἀρχιερέως. ἐφ' ᾧ π ολλὰ μὲν εἰς αὐτὸν ἦδον οἱ δημοτικοί, πολλοὶ δὲ τῶν πρώτων ἐν ἐνεμέσων, οὐκ ἄξιον ἠγοῦμενοι τῆς γυναικὸς ὃν ἄξιον ὑπατείας ἔκριναν... τὴν μέντοι Μετέλλαν ἐν πᾶσι θεραπέων διετέλεσεν, ὥστε καὶ τὸν Ῥωμαίων δῆμον, ὅτε τοὺς περὶ Μάριον φυγάδας ἐπεθύμει καταγαγεῖν, ἀρνούμενου τοῦ Σύλλα, δεόμενον ἐπιβοήσασθαι τὴν Μετέλλαν.

6. Plutarch, *Life of Marius* 34.3-4: "For near Misenum Marius had an expensive house, which had a softer and more effeminate furnishing than there should have been for a self-made man of so many wars and campaigns. It is said that Cornelia purchased it for seventy-five thousand drachmas, but when not much time had passed Lucius Lucullus bought it for two million five hundred thousand. So quickly did extravagance spring up, and the city took up such a great increase in luxury."

καὶ γὰρ ἦν ἐκεῖ περὶ Μισσηνοῦς τῆς Μαρίας πολυτελεῆς οἰκία, τρυφᾶς ἔχουσα καὶ διαίτας θηλυτέρας ἢ κατ' ἄνδρα πολέμων τοσοῦτων καὶ στρατειῶν αὐτουργόν. ταύτην λέγεται μυριάδων ἑπτὰ ἡμίσιους Κορνηλία πρίασθαι, χρόνου δ' οὐ πάνυ πολλοῦ <δια>γενομένου Λεύκιος

Λεύκολλος ὠνεῖται μυριάδων πενήκοντα καὶ διακοσίων· οὕτως ταχέως ἀνέδραμεν ἡ πολυτέλεια, καὶ τοσαύτην ἐπίδοσιν τὰ πράγματα πρὸς τρυφήν ἔλαβεν.

7. Valerius Maximus 4.2.7: “[Caelius Rufus] had ruined him in a public court, but when Pompeius’ mother Cornelia was not handing over estates entrusted to him in a will, Pompeius even begged Caelius’ help in letters, and Caelius was present for Pompeius’ interests while he was away: he even read Pompeius’ letter in court as an indicator of his utmost need, and by doing so subverted the unnatural greed of Cornelia.”

Cui a se publica quaestione prostrato, cum mater Cornelia fidei commissa praedia non redderet, atque iste auxilium suum litteris inplorasset, pertinacissime absentem adfuit: recitavit etiam eius epistolam in iudicio ultimae necessitatis indicem, qua impiam Corneliae avaritiam subuertit,

8. Suetonius, *Life of Caesar* 50.2.2: “But before all the others [Caesar] loved Servilia, the mother of Marcus Brutus, for whom he, in his first consulship, bought a pearl for six million sesterces, and to whom he also, in the civil war, beyond his other gifts, gave the richest properties for a minimal price at auction; when many people were marveling at the cheapness of the price, Cicero said most wittily: ‘So that you might know of a better bargain, one third/her daughter Tertia was deducted’; for it was thought that Servilia even pimped her daughter Tertia to Caesar.”

sed ante alias dilexit Marci Bruti matrem Seruiliam, cui et proximo suo consulatu sexagens sestertium margaritam mercatus est et bello civili super alias donationes amplissima praedia ex auctionibus hastae minimo addixit; cum quidem plerisque uilitatem mirantibus facetissime Cicero: 'quo melius,' inquit, 'emptum sciatis, tertia deducta'; existimabatur enim Seruilia etiam filiam suam Tertiam Caesari conciliare.

9. Cicero *Ad Atticum* 14.21.3 = 375: “To think that the villa of Pontius at Naples is possessed by the tyrannicide’s mother!”

Ponti Neapolitanum a matre tyrannoctoni possideri!