

Leading Envoys: Maternal Diplomacy in Appian's and Cassius Dio's Narratives of the Triumviral Period

Roman mothers, as holders of agency straddling the line between insider and outsider statuses, emerge as key figures in the chaotic and paradigm destabilizing years of the triumviral period (44-30 BCE). The period violently upended Roman social and political *mores*, and authors that narrate this period emphasize the reversal in gender norms that occurred. Milnor (2005) and Osgood (2006) have both demonstrated the significance of the actions and representations of women in this time period and how authors express persisting anxieties concerning women via these representations. More recently, Rohr Vio (2022) has observed how women assumed powerful roles via traditional modes of behavior at the end of the Republic. In this paper, I analyze the figure of the elite mother during the triumviral period, focusing upon the representations of Julia, mother of Antony, and Mucia, mother of Pompey as diplomatic actors. I rely principally upon Cassius Dio and Appian and argue that the depiction of elite mothers from this period demonstrated deep concern with the failure of male networks, as these women were all involved in key political maneuverings precisely because they were excluded from official power networks.

I first examine two passages in which Julia is sent on quasi-diplomatic missions, both of which emphasize her role in reestablishing fractured relationships between opposing men. Cassius Dio narrates her arrival to Sicily to reestablish good relations with Sextus Pompey and notes that she led envoys with her (πρέσβεις ἄγουσα, 48.15.2), while Appian (*BC* 5.63) mentions Julia acting as diplomat at another critical juncture when she emerges the figure through which Octavian and Antony make amends. My discussion focuses on how the figure of the diplomatic mother allows both Cassius Dio and Appian to comment not only on the profound failure of traditional methods of diplomacy, but also on the Roman mother's ability to extend her status as a member of an elite family to act as conduit between dynasts.

I then examine Mucia, mother of Sextus Pompey, whom the people send to negotiate with Octavian. Appian (*BC* 5.69) includes the detail that the people threatened to burn down her house if she refused, emphasizing the impotency of elite, male networks and the desperation of the people in response. The people's vehemence vividly underlines the novel expectations that could be expected from elite women during this period. The representation of Julia and Mucia demonstrates both Appian's and Cassius Dio's preoccupations with how elite mothers revealed the precarity of the Roman social and political system during the triumviral period.

Works Cited

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