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INDEX

Siegfried Jäkel	Die Tücke der Faktizität in den Epitrepontes des Menander	5
Mika Kajava	The Name of Cornelia Orestina/Orestilla	23
Klaus Karttunen	Κυνοκέφαλοι and Κυναμολγοί in Classical Ethnography	31
Bengt Löfstedt	Zu Smaragdus' Kommentar der Benediktinerregel	37
Teivas Oksala	Zum Gebrauch der griechischen Lehnwörter bei Vergil. I. Interpretationen zu den Bucolica	45
Tuomo Pekkanen	Petroniana	65
Leena Pietilä-Castrén	The Ancestry and Career of Cn. Octavius, cos. 165 BC	75
Olli Salomies	Beiträge zur römischen Namenkunde	93
Timo Sironen	Markas osco nel lupanare di Pompei	105
Heikki Solin	Analecta epigraphica LXXXVI—XCIII	113
Ronald Syme	Statius on Rutilius Gallicus	149
Toivo Viljamaa	Quintilian's "genus grammaticum" of Figures	157
De novis libris iudicia	169

THE ANCESTRY AND CAREER OF CN. OCTAVIUS, COS 165 BC

Leena Pietilä-Castrén

Only in the person of Caesar Augustus did his family, the gens Octavia, which originally belonged to modest rural gentry, attain great glory. The gentilicium itself was not uncommon as it was derived from the ordinal and as such attested in several different areas, sometimes accompanied by a cognomen which often referred to the domicile.¹ However, the most prominent Octavii appeared, in an even later period without a cognomen, which indeed can be taken as a sign of municipal origin.²

The family of Caesar Augustus was closely related to an elder branch of the same gens, which flourished from the last decades of the third century all the way to the first half of the first century BC. The glory of this branch reached its peak in the person of Cn. Octavius, cos 165 BC, one of the few *homines novi* of the second century; he was, in fact, the first consul of the Octavii.³

The Octavii, like many other plebeian families, became known during the First Punic War. Suetonius tells us in his biography of Augustus: *Primus ex hac magistratum populi suffragio cepit C. Rufus. Is quaestorius Cn. et C. procreavit, a quibus duplex Octaviorum familia defluxit, conditione diversa. Siquidem Cn. et deinceps ab eo reliqui omnes functi sunt*

¹ RE XVII, 1801, for instance Reatinus, Ligus, Marsus. L. R. Taylor, *The Voting Districts of the Roman Republic*, Roma 1960, 239.

² P. Castrén, *OpusCIRF* (1981) 16.

³ T. P. Wiseman, *New Men in the Roman Senate 139 BC—AD 14*, London 1971, 1. According to Wiseman, the term *homo novus* was more often interpreted as a senator whose family had not previously entered the senatorial class, remaining in the status of *equites*. Here I understand the expression in the more unusual way, where the forefathers of the new consul have reached only the praetorship. M. Dondin-Payre, *Historia* 30 (1981) 40—43.

*honoribus summis. At C. eiusque posteri, seu fortuna, seu voluntate, in equestri ordine constitere usque ad Augusti patrem.*⁴

Two modest finds from the Late Republic in Rome itself can be connected to this statement of Suetonius about the early Octavii: from the Piazza Bocca della Verità, not far from the peristyle of the Temple of Hercules Olivarius, numerous, not accurately defined sherds of pottery were found towards the end of the nineteenth century.⁵ Among these objects was a little clay lamp with rude letters CN OCTAV[...] painted on the bottom in black.⁶ Another interesting lamp found at the Monte della Giustizia bears the graffito BARNAEUS OCTAVI S(ERVUS).⁷ Gatti's comparison with the Esquiline material would justify the dating especially around 180—150, as reference is obviously made to the sc. "tipo biconico dell'Esquilino". It is true, however, that in these lamps, the name of the owner was usually on the wall of the reservoir, not on the bottom.⁸ In any event, these two lamps are a link to the urban Cn. Octavii.

Furthermore, Suetonius mentions the quaestor C. Octavius Rufus as the forefather of the Octavii.⁹ His praenomen is regarded, however, as a mistake either of Suetonius or of a later copier.¹⁰ This is why the praenomen is changed by Drumann to Gnaeus because of the almost regular custom of naming the eldest son after the father. Thus it is taken for granted that the quaestor Rufus was the grandfather of the consul of 165. His filiation in the *fasti Capitolini* is, in fact, Cn. Octavius Cn.f. Cn.n. According to Drumann the problem of the filiation of the consul of 165 is resolved and the quaestorship of Rufus dated around the year 230.

⁴ Suet. Aug. 2,2.

⁵ G. Gatti, NS (1895) 458.

⁶ CIL I² 526 = CIL XV 6927.

⁷ CIL I² 2366 = CIL XV 6336.

⁸ I thank my colleague Carlo Pavolini for his valuable help concerning these two lamps. See also A. Schiavone—A. Giardina (ed.), *Società romana e produzione schiavistica II: Merci, mercati e scambi nel Mediterraneo*, Bari 1981, 144, 149.

⁹ Suet. Aug. 2,1—2. RE XVII, 1853, No 79.

¹⁰ W. Drumann—P. Groebe, *Geschichte Roms IV*, 2. Aufl., Leipzig 1908, 236, No 1. D.C. Earl, *Latomus* 19 (1960) 657—658, follows Drumann's version.

Rufus is one of the few early members of the gens who has a cognomen. The same cognomen Rufus appeared again in the family as late as during the reign of Diocletian, perhaps *ad maiorem gentis gloriam*.¹¹

Münzer for his part is not willing to change Suetonius' text.¹² Giving the father's praenomen to the eldest son was by no means without exception.¹³ According to Münzer one person otherwise unknown to us must be added to the line of the forefathers of the consul of 165. That is a fourth generation, which most likely had obtained the curule aedileship.¹⁴

Thus a complete series of magistracies appears in the *cursus honorum* of the family: C. Octavius Rufus was a quaestor, +Cn. Octavius was an aedilis curulis, Cn. Octavius was praetor in 205 and Cn. Octavius consul in 165. As the praetor of 205 is known for certain, the addition of another generation before him would also shift the quaestorship of Rufus into the 250's.¹⁵

Cn. Octavius, pr 205

The career of praetor Cn. Octavius was remarkable for a person coming from a new family. The first information about him comes from an account of the battle of Cannae, where he, according to Frontinus, fought extremely bravely together with an elder colleague, tribunus militum P. Sempronius Tuditanus.¹⁶ The parallel stories in Appian and Livy do not, however, refer to Octavius. Neither do these authors give similar numbers of fugitive soldiers.¹⁷ The information given by Frontinus, can still,

¹¹ CIL VIII 1646.

¹² RE XVII, 1853, No 79.

¹³ Nowadays we do not possess full knowledge of the real family ancestry, as the eldest son having the same praenomen as his father might, for instance, have died young. This issue has been widely discussed by O. Salomies in a recent, not yet published thesis of University of Helsinki.

¹⁴ RE XVII, 1853, No 79.

¹⁵ Speculating on this problem, R. M. Geer, AJPh 55 (1934) has entered a jungle of difficulties, as he stubbornly wants to interpret the word *proavus* as great-grandfather instead of the quite suitable ancestor, 338 n. 4. See the family tree on the page 91.

¹⁶ Front. strat. 4,5,7.

¹⁷ App. Hann. 26; Liv. 22,50,6—12.

I think, be accepted. Consequently Octavius was *tribunus militum* in 216.¹⁸ He was *aedilis plebis* in 206 with Sp. Lucretius and praetor with the same colleague in 205, when he was allotted the province of Sardinia.¹⁹ At this time he must have been at least 40 years old.²⁰

In 204—203 Cn. Octavius still had command of 40 ships for the defence of the Sardinian coast. He was also responsible for army transports to Africa.²¹ In 202 he participated in the battle of Zama.²² His praetorship and command of the fleet were prolonged until 201.²³ It looks as if Scipio, for all those years, benefitted from Octavius' services at will, which certainly is a sign of friendly relations between the two. Scullard, in fact, calls Octavius Scipio's legate after 203, Broughton is somewhat more cautious in describing the relationship between them.²⁴

In 200 Cn. Octavius was again working with Sp. Lucretius when they acted as legates with C. Terentius Varro in Africa. At that time they had diplomatic missions in Carthage, with Vermina²⁵ and Masinissa.²⁶ While each of them had a ship at his disposal, they most likely shared the tasks. If it was Sp. Lucretius who visited Carthage, Cn. Octavius might in this case have taken care of Masinissa, given the friendship between the Numidian king and Scipio.²⁷

Further reliable information about Cn. Octavius' political activity appears as late as the end of the 190's. He could also have been in Greece as

¹⁸ R. T. Ridley, *Latomus* 34 (1975) 162—163.

¹⁹ Liv. 28,38,11.13. According to Drumann, the praetorship of Octavius was gained "gegen die Regel", Drumann 236, No 2.

²⁰ In 205 there was also a *tribunus militum*, C. Octavius, in Sicily. He was doubtlessly one of Augustus' forefathers. Suet. Aug. 2,2. RE XVII, 1805, No 13. See also Geer 339.

²¹ Liv. 29,13,5; 29,36,1—3; 30,2,4.

²² Liv. 30,36; App. pun. 41.44.49.

²³ Liv. 30,41,6—8; 30,44,13.

²⁴ RE XVII, 1810, No 16. H. H. Scullard, *The Roman Politics 220—150 BC*, Oxford 1951, 95 n. 4, 208. R. S. T. Broughton, *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic I*, New York 1951, 317, 321. See also Th. Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht II:1*, Leipzig 1888, 206—207.

²⁵ He was the eldest son of Syphax. Liv. 30,36,7; 30,40,3; App. lib. 33,59.

²⁶ Liv. 31,11,4—18; 31,19,1—6.

²⁷ E.g. Polyb. 14,4; Liv. 28,35; RE XIII, 1658, No 13. RE XIV, 2155.

early as 197 as a member of a senatorial commission led by T. Quinctius Flamininus. In the lists of the ambassadors he is, however, not mentioned, perhaps because he was a member of minor importance.²⁸ In any case, Octavius was now quite an experienced diplomat and his participation in the mission in Greece is understandable enough.

In 194 Cn. Octavius was one of the *IIIviri coloniis deducendis* at Croton setting up a citizen colony there with L. Aemilius Paullus²⁹ and C. Laetorius.³⁰ Octavius seems to have been the most distinguished member of the commission, as he is mentioned first by Livy.³¹

Indeed, it took as long as ten years after the occupation of Croton in the Second Punic War to establish the colony. The Romans had totally destroyed the old Greek city, and State resources did not suffice to found a new colony at an earlier date. Besides, communications through hostile regions were not suitable for new settlements.³²

Of course it was not mere chance that the new colony was founded exactly in 194, when Scipio Africanus was consul for the second time, as he was especially keen on organizing the new colonization.³³ Thus at least one of the *IIIviri* was Scipio's supporter, maybe all three of them. It is known that, in 209, Laetorius had already been *Xvir sacris faciundis* and in 205 a legate of P. Sempronius Tuditanus in Greece.³⁴ Therefore he must have been somewhat experienced in Greek affairs, too. Knowledge of Greek culture, at least, was a binding link between the triumvirs and perhaps a prerequisite for a mission on Magnagraecian soil.

There is another interesting fact about the founding of the colony of Croton which can, of course, be a mere coincidence. As consul, P. Sempronius Tuditanus, the colleague of Cn. Octavius at Cannae, had slain Hannibal in 204 precisely at Croton and had vowed to build a temple in Rome

²⁸ Scullard 107 n. 1. See also Polyb. 18,42,5; Liv. 33,24,7; 33,30,1; 33,35,1—2.

²⁹ RE I, 576, No 114. Cos. 182, II 168.

³⁰ RE XII, 449, No 2.

³¹ Liv. 34,45,3—5.

³² E. T. Salmon, *Roman Colonization under the Republic*, London & Southampton 1969, 98—99.

³³ Ibid. 97.

³⁴ Liv. 27,8,4; 29,12,5.

to Fortuna Primigenia.³⁵ Exactly ten years later, in 194, Q. Marcius Ralla, the *Ilvir* created for this purpose, dedicated the temple on the Quirinal Hill.³⁶

In 192 Cn. Octavius was doubtlessly an associate of T. Quinctius Flamininus in diplomatic missions in Greece shortly before the war with Antiochus III the Great broke out. When describing the presence of Octavius, Livy tells us that *non copiis modo sed etiam auctoritate opus erat ad tenendos sociorum animos*.³⁷ Livy emphasizes Octavius' personal qualities later: *et peropportune ad confirmandos Acarnanum animos Cn. Octavius missus a Quinctio.... Leucadem venit implevitque spei socios*. For his mission as legate, a few vessels were dismissed from the fleet of the praetor navalis for Octavius' use.³⁸

It is worth considering here on what grounds the senatorial members of the Roman commissions bound for the east on the one hand in general, and on the other hand, persons like Cn. Octavius were chosen. In 205—167, that is in a period which was utterly important for the future relationship between Rome and Greece, the choice of members was made very carefully. Eminence in Roman politics was possibly a more important factor than Philhellenic attitude.³⁹

This claim is, in my opinion, justified only where the most important members of the missions were concerned and cannot be automatically accepted when considering the less well-known members. Cn. Octavius was indisputably not a man of the first rank, *homo novus* as he was. He probably participated in these missions in Greece in the first place as an expert in Greek culture and only secondarily as a supporter of some specific party.

³⁵ Ibid. 29,36,8.

³⁶ RE XIV, 1581, No 87. According to Livy P. Sempronius Tuditanus later, as censor, made a contract to build the temple, Liv. 34,53,6. This information as such is controversial because Tuditanus was, exceptionally, censor in 209 before his consulship in 204. Nor was he ever called Sophus. Certainly Livy is wrong in the last point only, as it was not often that the consulship was preceded by the censorship.

³⁷ Liv. 35,23,5.

³⁸ Ibid. 36,12,9.

³⁹ J. Kaimio, *The Romans and the Greek Language*, Helsinki 1979, 102.

According to literary sources, Cn. Octavius thus had something in common, or he co-operated, with P. Sempronius Tuditanus, Sp. Lucretius, T. Quinctius Flamininus, Scipio Africanus, L. Aemilius Paullus Maior and Minor and C. Terentius Varro. The first-mentioned was also a plebeian, who seems to have been on intimate terms with Q. Fabius Maximus.⁴⁰ On the other hand, he is also regarded a Claudian.⁴¹ In 216 he was Octavius' colleague at Cannae and consul in 204, when Octavius' imperium was prolonged for the first time.

Sp. Lucretius, for his part, held three of the same offices as Cn. Octavius: in 206 aedilis plebis, in 205 praetor and in 200 legate in Africa.

Octavius was at least once, if not twice, on diplomatic missions in Greece with the famous philhellene T. Quinctius Flamininus, possibly in 197 and quite certainly in 192.

During the last years of the Second Punic War, Cn. Octavius co-operated repeatedly with Scipio Africanus. It is indeed generally accepted that the Scipios and the Octavii were closely related.⁴² In this way Cn. Octavius has also been connected with the elder L. Aemilius Paullus, though they met, as far as is known, only in 216 at Cannae.⁴³ With his homonymous son, L. Aemilius Paullus the Younger, Cn. Octavius was *Illvir coloniis deducendis* in Croton in 194. Taking for granted the relationship between the Scipios and the Aemilii Paulli, it is quite natural to associate the Octavii and the Paulli, too.

According to the traditional view, also supported by ancient sources, the Paulli were not, however, on good terms with C. Terentius Varro, another *homo novus*. Cn. Octavius was also in office with him, at Cannae, when Terentius was the other consul and later, in 200, when they were both legates in Africa. Still, it is not sure whether they were representatives of rival parties, or whether they had any mutual interests, sharing similar origins.

As far as the life of Cn. Octavius is concerned, in general, it appears that in the battle field he was an excellent soldier, and it is clear that he

⁴⁰ RE IIA, 1444, No 96.

⁴¹ Scullard 94.

⁴² Ibid. 208. A. E. Astin, *Scipio Aemilianus*, Oxford 1967, 87, 199.

⁴³ Polyb. 3,116,9; Liv. 22,49,1—13.

was an expert in seafaring and able diplomat.⁴⁴ He probably died around 190 at the age of about 55 years and did not therefore seek the consulship. It is true that he was already praetor in 205. *Lex Villia annalis* stipulated 40 years as the minimum age of a praetor. However, this law was not passed until 180.⁴⁵ Perhaps Cn. Octavius, as a member of a new family, was satisfied with the praetorship and wished to guarantee the consulship for the next generation.

Cn. Octavius, cos 165

Reliable information about the career of the consul of 165 appears in the records of the year 172. Presumably he was quaestor around 180,⁴⁶ and most likely aedilis curulis in 172.⁴⁷ The office of a curule aedile was not obligatory in the *cursus honorum*, but as it was connected with public games and corn-supply, it was a useful phase in the career of any man who had political ambitions and very important for a new man.⁴⁸

In 172 C. Popillius Laenas was the plebeian consul. During those years, together with his brother, he had achieved a remarkable, though controversial, position in the Senate.⁴⁹ In 170—169 Cn. Octavius and Popillius were envoys in Greece. Their mission was a delicate one, as the war against Perseus had already broken out. The purpose of the mission was to pass over to the Greek states the decree that no one should give any war contribution to Roman officials except in accordance with a resolution of the Senate.⁵⁰ At the end of the story, Livy tells us that the consul A. Hostilius Mancinus, staying at Larisa in Thessaly, sent

⁴⁴ See also Geer 338.

⁴⁵ Liv. 40,44,1. RE VIII A, 2162, No 5. A. Afzelius, *ClMed* 8 (1946) 263—278. Dondin-Payre, 40—41.

⁴⁶ P. Willems, *Le sénat de la république romaine I*, Paris 1878, 356, No 298.

⁴⁷ Fest. 194(L). J. Seidel, *Fasti aedilicii*, Breslau 1908, 38.

⁴⁸ Cic. leg. 3,7.

⁴⁹ F. Münzer, *Römische Adelsparteien und Adelsfamilien* Stuttgart 1920, 217, 420. P. Charneux, *BCH* 81 (1957) 186—187.

⁵⁰ Polyb. 28,3—5; Liv. 43,17,2—10. J. Briscoe, *Historia* 18 (1969) 63. Charneux 190—192. G. Colin, *Rome et la Grèce*, Paris 1905, 435—437.

Popillius with one thousand soldiers to winter quarters at Ambracia, while he kept Octavius with himself.⁵¹

It appears that Octavius, who was no more than aedile, must have had some special qualities, since his presence was so important to Hostilius. An honorary inscription from Argos sheds more light on Polybius' and Livy's concise statements.⁵²

According to this inscription, Cn. Octavius was very popular among the Achaeans. The important diplomatic activity of his father in Greece, is reflected in the son's apparent inheritance of his diplomatic ability and propitious attitude towards the Greeks.⁵³

In 169 Cn. Octavius was elected a *Xvir sacris faciundis* after the death of M. Claudius Marcellus.⁵⁴ The principal task of this priests' corporation was to attend to and to consult the Sibylline Books and, moreover, to conduct the official religious ceremonies in accordance with Greek rituals. One of the main requirements for this priesthood was knowledge of Greek religion and customs.⁵⁵

In 168, Cn. Octavius was praetor *navalis* in Greece under the consul L. Aemilius Paullus. In this connection, it is worth noting that the praetor Octavius co-operated with Paullus' army in Macedonia⁵⁶ and captured King Perseus at Samothrace, bringing him as prisoner to the consul.⁵⁷

When the battles were over, Octavius passed the winter in Demetrias, in Thessaly, with his fleet, whence he went to Amphipolis.⁵⁸ There the ten commissioners assigned by the Senate and the leading citizens of

⁵¹ Liv. 43,17,10.

⁵² SEG XVI 255. L. Moretti, *Iscrizioni storiche ellenistiche I*, Firenze 1967, 97—100. E. Lanzillotta, *Miscellanea greca et romana* 27 (1978) 237—238. Charneux 183—184, 189.

⁵³ Lanzillotta 240, 245.

⁵⁴ Liv. 44,18,7. RE III, 2757—2758, No 223, No 224.

⁵⁵ Liv. 10,8,2; 31,49,5. Münzer 91. J. Marquardt, *Römische Staatsverwaltung* III, 2. Aufl., Leipzig 1885, 382—383.

⁵⁶ Liv. 44,19,4; 21,3; 22,16; 32,5—6; 35,8; 46,3; Zon. 9,23.

⁵⁷ Liv. 45,5—6; Vell. 1,9,5; Plut. Aem. 26,1—6; Pomp. Trog. 33,2—5.

⁵⁸ Liv. 45,28,8. I wonder if Octavius was a good sailor after all, against my earlier suppositions, L. Pietilä-Castrén, *Arctos* 16 (1982) 134, as his father was without doubt an utterly experienced seafarer.

each Macedonian city met. The consul Aemilius Paullus announced the decisions of the Senate in Latin and his praetor *navalis*, Cn. Octavius, translated these announcements into Greek and conveyed them to the Macedonians.⁵⁹ The consul himself — philhellene as he was — also mastered the Greek language. This is quite apparent from an earlier passage in Livy's story: *Haec Graeco sermone Perseo, Latine deinde suis*.⁶⁰ In any event, Octavius must have known Greek very well. Their acting in this way, however, must be due to the fact that Paullus, as the official representative of Rome, was simply obliged to speak in his native tongue. Perhaps Paullus was motivated to some extent by pity and humanity, as noted by the ancient authors.⁶¹ The fact that Latin was the official language at Amphipolis and the drama of this particular situation were significant. In these circumstances, however, there was no official language. It was also exceptional to use an interpreter if all parties knew the language.⁶²

It is most likely that an honorary inscription from Olympia dates from the time of Octavius' praetorship in Greece.⁶³ Livy wrote that, after the battle of Pydna, Aemilius Paullus travelled around Greece visiting the famous places of cult worship. Octavius apparently did not form part of the small retinue.⁶⁴ He may have stayed all the time with his fleet in their winter quarters, or else he too made private excursions to monuments, such as Olympia.

The Olympian statue with the inscription could have been erected, naturally enough, during Octavius' *propraetorship*, or immediately after he crossed the Adriatic with his fleet.⁶⁵ A third possibility is that it was made already in 170—169, when he was legate in Greece with C. Popillius Laenas. One of the main reasons for dating the Olympian inscription to Octavius' *propraetorship* is the title *στρατηγός*.⁶⁶ Guarducci claims that

⁵⁹ Liv. 45,29,1—3; Vell. 1,9,4—5.

⁶⁰ Liv. 45,8,6.

⁶¹ Diod.Sic. 30,23; Val.Max. 5,1,8.

⁶² Kaimio 99—100, 102.

⁶³ SIG III.650.

⁶⁴ Liv. 45,27,8.

⁶⁵ As stated by the editor of the inscription, SIG III.650, p. 211.

⁶⁶ Lanzillotta 242. RE XVII, 1812, No 17.

this inscription, and the golden crown from Delos,⁶⁷ are both datable to the period 168—167, notwithstanding the title.⁶⁸

Another inscription found on the isle of Cos at the beginning of this century, though still unpublished, also relates to a longer presence in Greece.⁶⁹ The text is about a *medicus*, Athenagoras from Larisa, who was the personal physician of Octavius. This document can be dated either to the winter 170—169 or to 168—167. In both cases Octavius stayed in Thessaly: firstly, because the camp of A. Hostilius Mancinus was situated just in Larisa and, secondly, because Demetrias was the most important port of Thessaly.⁷⁰

The Romans, following the example of the Greek generals, adapted a procedure, common in the Hellenistic world, of keeping a personal physician in the battle-field.⁷¹

The activity of Cn. Octavius in the Third Macedonian War brought him a naval triumph as a praetor, which was always unusual and twice as exceptional for a new man.⁷²

In 167—165, that is during the period between his praetorship and consulship, Cn. Octavius led a politically quiet life. In those very years, however, he began his two big building programs, his famous house on the Palatine and the portico near the Circus Flaminius. It can be accepted as a fact that Octavius efficiently exploited them as a means of silent propaganda for future consular elections. These projects were, of course, financed from his war booty.

The House on the Palatine

Cicero describes Octavius' house as the house of a man of rank and station: *cuius finis est usus, ad quem accommodanda est aedificandi descriptio*

⁶⁷ Inscriptions de Délos, 1429, A I, 11—12.

⁶⁸ M. Guarducci, RPAA 13 (1937) 45,49. Charneux 193.

⁶⁹ Charneux 187—188. S. M. Sherwin-White, *Ancient Cos. An Historical Study from the Dorian Settlement to the Imperial Period*, Göttingen 1978, 134.

⁷⁰ Liv. 45,28,6.8.

⁷¹ J. Scarborough, *Roman Medicine*, London 1969, 67—68.

⁷² J. S. Richardson, JRS 65 (1975) 56—57. M. Crawford, *The Roman Republic*, Glasgow 1978, 80. W. V. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome*, Oxford 1979, 32.

*et tamen adhibenda commoditatis dignitatisque diligentia. Cn. Octavio, qui primus ex illa familia consul factus est, honori fuisse accepimus, quod praeclaram aedificasset in Palatio et plenam dignitatis domum; quae cum vulgo viseretur, suffragata domino, novo homini, ad consulatum putabatur; hanc Scaurus demolitus accessionem adiunxit aedibus.*⁷³

There are interesting points in Cicero's story: firstly, he stresses quite clearly the importance of the house of Cn. Octavius as an instrument of his political propaganda and secondly, he states the exact position of the house. We know that the house of M. Aemilius Scaurus lay in the area between the Sacra Via and Nova Via, at the east end of Atrium Vestae.⁷⁴ The house of Octavius was apparently situated in the same area, between the Forum and the Palatine, that is between the fourth and tenth city-regions. Nowadays the Palatine is assumed to have extended lower down to the Forum valley during the Republic than was previously thought, that is as far as the Sacra Via.⁷⁵

Around the year 115 the house of Octavius came into possession of M. Aemilius Scaurus, cos 115, as is clearly stated by Cicero: *Hanc Scaurus demolitus accessionem adiunxit aedibus. Itaque ille in suam domum consulatum primus attulit, hic, summi et clarissimi viri filius, in domum multiplicatam non repulsam solum attulit, sed ignominiam et calamitatem.*⁷⁶ The son mentioned by Cicero was M. Aemilius Scaurus, praetor in 56, who was sentenced of *ambitus* and sent into exile.⁷⁷

⁷³ Cic. off. 1,138.

⁷⁴ S. Platner—Th. Ashby, A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome, London 1929, 189.

⁷⁵ F. Coarelli, Roma, Bari 1980, 78—79, 87, 125. F. Coarelli, Il foro romano — periodo arcaico, Roma 1983, 27—31.

⁷⁶ Cic. off. 1,138. G. Lugli, Fontes ad topographiam veteris urbis Romae pertinentes, VIII:1, Roma 1961, 125.

⁷⁷ Cic. ad Q.fr. 3,2,3. Appian. b.c. 2,24. Thus it is quite clear, that the Octavian house was not bought by this son, as is stated by Platner—Ashby 189 and by RE I, No 141, 589. In 53, at the latest, the son M. Aemilius must have sold the house to P. Clodius, who died in this house a couple of months later, Ascon. Mil. 28; Lugli 131. The last owner of the house seems to have been C. Caecina Largus, cos 42 AD: *In ea parte Palatii, quae cum a sacra via descenderis et per proximum vicum qui est a sinistra parte prodieris, posita est* (domus M. Aemilii Scauri). *Possidet eam nunc Largus Caecina, qui fuit consul cum Claudio.* Ascon. Scaur. 23; Lugli 128.

From the year 75 there is an information regarding the consul L. Octavius and two of his fellow-magistrates: *Annonae intolerabilis saevitia. Qua re fatigata plebes forte consules ambo Q. Metellum, cui postea Cretico cognomentum fuit, candidatum praetorium sacra via deducentis cum magno tumultu invadit fugientisque secuta ad Octavi domum quae propior erat in caput Bubulum pervenit.*⁷⁸

Who was this Octavius, who owned a house so near the Sacra Via at this period? Was it the consul Octavius himself or does Sallust's passage refer to the well-known house owned by Augustus' father and situated near by, also *ad capita Bubula*, as Lugli suggests?⁷⁹ Many new families seem to have favoured the nice neighbourhood on the slopes of the Palatine. We know that Marius lived there and that Cicero's own house and that of his brother were situated near the house of Octavius/Scaurus, the former at the north-eastern corner of the Palatine, seemingly slightly higher up the hill. There he had an excellent view over the whole city, *in conspectu prope totius urbis domus est mea.*⁸⁰

Until the great Neronian fire of AD 64, quite near the Forum area, there were several private houses, which originally had been honorary gifts from the State.⁸¹ One of the most famous was that of Scipio Africanus on the site of the later Basilica Sempronia.⁸² It is, of course, only a hypothesis that Cn. Octavius' house, too, lay on such bestowed soil.

Porticus Octavia

The portico of Cn. Octavius was certainly a triumphal monument. It was suitably situated in the area which most of the victorious generals of

⁷⁸ Sall. Hist.frg. 2,45. This extremely corrupted passage has been interpreted in various ways. I follow here Maur's version *in caput Bubulum*, instead of *inde pugnaculum* suggested by Maurenbrecher in the Teubner-edition.

⁷⁹ Suet. Aug. 5,1. Platner—Ashby 95. Lugli 139.

⁸⁰ Cic. dom. 100. Platner—Ashby 175.

⁸¹ H. Jordan—Ch. Hülsen, *Topographie der Stadt Rom im Alterthum* I:2, Berlin 1885, 286. I. Shatzman, *Senatorial Wealth and Roman Politics*, Bruxelles 1975, 12. Coarelli, *Roma*, 125. D. R. Dudley, *Urbs Roma. A Source Book of Classical Texts on the City and its Monuments*, Aberdeen 1967, 162.

⁸² Liv. 44,16,9—11.

the second century chose for their triumphal buildings. It was here in the Circus Flaminius that the triumphal processions began.⁸³

The porticus Octavia was a double portico whose capitals, probably of Corinthian order, were made of bronze. It is, in fact, a possibility that this building was the first in Rome in which the Corinthian order was used.⁸⁴ In Pompeii, in the Temple of Apollo and in the Basilica of about the same date, an adapted Ionian capital was used, but there were already some Corinthian columns, too.⁸⁵ As in many other cases, Campanian centres were ahead of the Capital, and many new trends were adopted with less prejudice in the countryside.

Consequently, porticus Octavia was situated near the future theatre of Pompeius, either in the area of Circus Flaminius itself, or near by.⁸⁶ It was also called *porticus Corinthia*, either for the reason discussed above, or because the capitals were made of Corinthian bronze.⁸⁷

The exact date of the building is not known. It seems natural that Octavius started the construction immediately after his return from Greece in 167, remembering the approaching consular elections. Furthermore, he could exhibit his war booty in his portico.

Of the first phase, that is of Octavius' own construction, no contemporary information remains. At that time, tufa and peperino were still the predominant building materials. The ancient authors emphasize that the first building made completely of marble was the temple of Jupiter Stator in the porticus Metelli after 146.⁸⁸

⁸³ Strab. 5,3,8. Coarelli, Roma, 242—244.

⁸⁴ Mon.Ancyr. 4,2—4. Vell. 2,1,2. Plin. nat. 34,13. Platner—Ashby 426.

⁸⁵ M. de Vos—A. de Vos, Pompei Ercolano Stabia, Bari 1982, 31, 36.

⁸⁶ *ad circum Flaminius*, Mon.Ancyr. 4,2—4. Plin. nat. 34,13. *in circo*, Vell. 2,1,2. *alteram theatro Pompei proximam*, Fest. 194(L).

⁸⁷ The expressions *corinthius* and *aereus* were often identified and mixed up, which is quite understandable considering the enthusiastic attitude of the Romans to Corinthian bronze: Flor. 1,32,7; Petron. 31,50,52; Oros. 5,3,7; Plin. nat. 34,6,8.

⁸⁸ Coarelli, Roma, 276.

Political Relations

It is evident that Octavius' rapid progress in his political career was positively affected by the construction of the two magnificent buildings. Suitable allies were also of great importance. In that period of the 170's it seems that the careers of plebeians in general were advanced more easily, since the atmosphere was temporarily more democratic.⁸⁹

The traditional relations of the Octavii with the Aemilii Paulli and Cornelii Scipiones were, in my opinion, strengthened by the many official functions which both the father and the son Octavius shared with the members of these two families. According to the opposite view, simultaneous military commands as such do not imply political alliance. Octavius was in this case rather a supporter of the Fulvii, an old plebeian family, as he was connected with the Popillii and the Hostilii.⁹⁰ These claims, too, however, are based on shared offices.

In addition, the relationship between Sp. Lucretius and Cn. Octavius seems to have been inherited from their parents. The younger Spurius was also one of the praetors in 172, and most likely a legate in the war against Perseus in 169.⁹¹ In other words, he was in Greece at the same time as Octavius.

The Years 165—163

Obsequens tells us that the consular elections for 165 were conducted with excessive and corrupt practice in canvassing, *comitia cum ambitiosissime fierent*. In these elections, Cn. Octavius was elected with T. Manlius Torquatus.⁹² Despite the fact that he was known as a distinguished general and a zealous builder, it was remarkable to become consul only two years after holding the praetorship. As far as is known, apart from Cn. Octavius, Cicero was the only new man who gained the consulship in an analogous space of time.⁹³

⁸⁹ Münzer 217—218. J. Suolahti, *The Roman Censors. A Study on Social Structure*, Helsinki 1963, 385.

⁹⁰ Richardson 56. Earl 661. Briscoe 63—64. Münzer 238.

⁹¹ Liv. 44,7,1.12. RE XIII, 1658, No 14.

⁹² Obseq. 12; Cic. fin. 1,24.

⁹³ Earl, 653 n. 3, 658.

Cn. Octavius' last important diplomatic mission was in 163 when he was named legate with Sp. Lucretius and L. Aurelius Orestes. They were dispatched to Syria with orders from the Senate to burn the decked warships, to hamstring the legs of the war elephants and to cripple the king's power by any means. They were also ordered to go to Macedonia, Galatia and Cappadocia and to reconcile the kings of Alexandria.⁹⁴ These were no easy tasks.

The most unpleasant part of the commission, and what in the end proved fatal for Cn. Octavius, was the destruction of the Syrian warships and elephants. This brutal act enraged the populace to such an extent that a man called Leptines stabbed Octavius while he was anointing himself — according to the Greek custom — in the gymnasium of Laodicea.⁹⁵

The Descendants

Of the descendants of Cn. Octavius, Suetonius correctly tells us that *omnes functi sunt.... in honoribus summis*,⁹⁶ which must signify that in every generation of this branch of the Octavii there was at least one consul. Of the three known sons of Cn. Octavius, one (the eldest?) became consul as late as in 128.⁹⁷ His homonymous son, Cn. Octavius Cn.f. Cn.n., became consul in 87.⁹⁸ His contemporary, Cn. Octavius L.f., presumably a cousin of his and a son of the youngest son of the consul of 165, belonged to the tribus Aemilia.⁹⁹ This person is not otherwise known, but as a senator he is dated at about 80 and regarded as "nepos ex filio Lucio".¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Polyb. 31,2.

⁹⁵ App. syr. 11,46. Cn. Octavius' final act was quite normal in Laodicea. In Rome, however, public baths were not in use at the end of the second century.

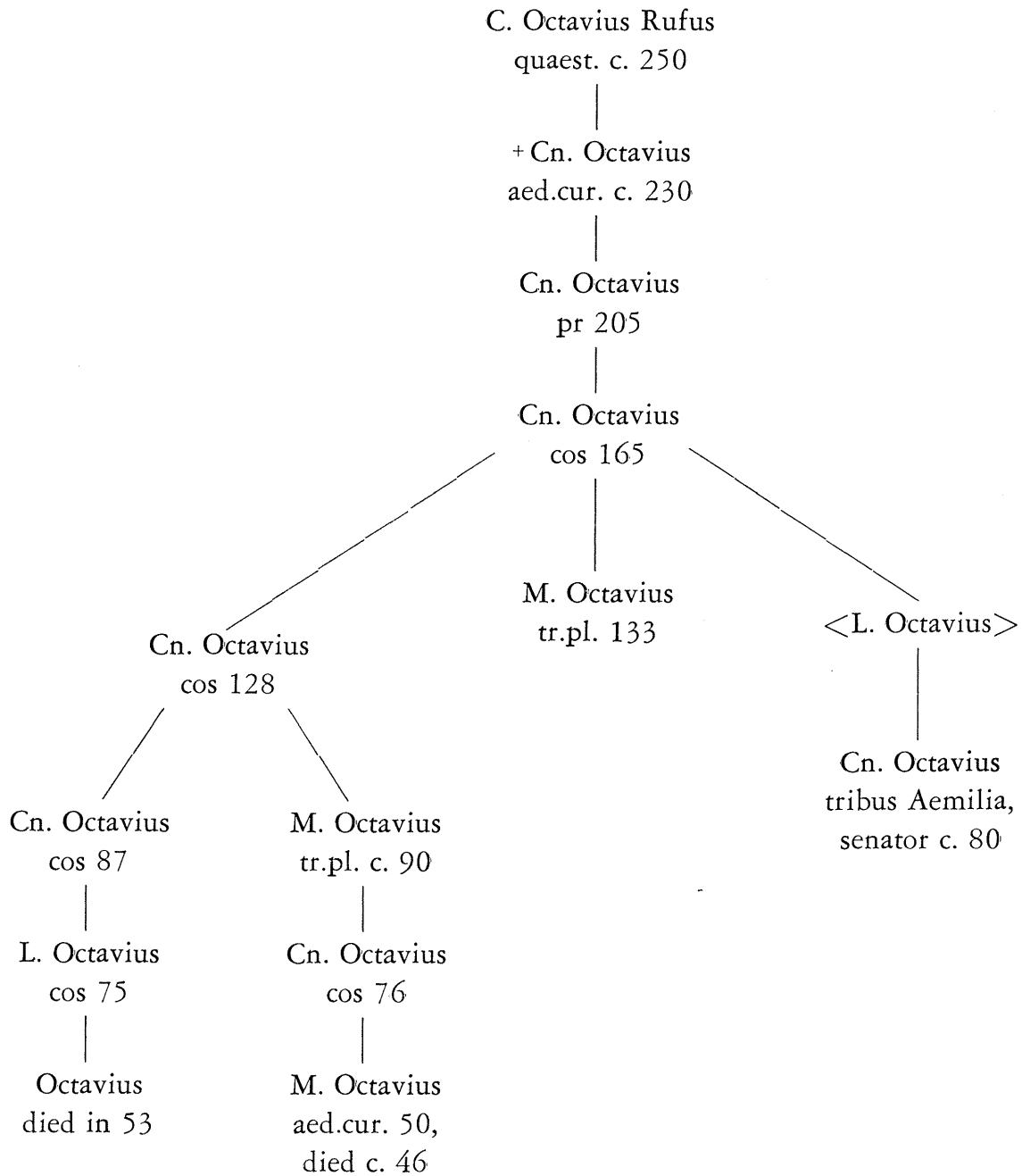
⁹⁶ Suet. Aug. 2,2.

⁹⁷ RE XVII, 1814, No 18. Drumann, 239, No 4.

⁹⁸ RE XVII, 1814, No 20. Drumann, 239—240, No 5.

⁹⁹ RE XVII, 1814, No 19. Drumann, 244, No 13.

¹⁰⁰ Ephem.epigr. IV, 219. Taylor, 239, regards him as a grandson, thus following Mommsen. The Scipionies had many good and old relationships with the tribus Aemilia: political alliances, marriages and adoptions. Taylor 45, 271, 307.



L. Octavius, the son of the consul of 87, became consul as early as in 75. This descent seems to be generally accepted in spite of the short difference in time.¹⁰¹ His (only?) son was probably the one who died young, in 53.¹⁰² A cousin of the consul of 75 was another Cn. Octavius M.f. Cn.n., a friend of Cicero,¹⁰³ who was made consul one year earlier, in

¹⁰¹ RE XVII, 1819, No 26. Drumann 240—241, No 6.

¹⁰² RE XVII, 1804, No 5. Drumann 242, No 10.

¹⁰³ Cic. fin. 2,93; Brut. 222.

76. He was a person of poor health and died already in 74 when on duty in Cilicia.¹⁰⁴ His son was M. Octavius Cn.f., M.n., who was an aedilis curulis in 50. He was apparently an eager Pompeian, and in the 40's an active participant in the Civil Wars, serving especially in the fleet. He died around 46, most likely at Thapsus.¹⁰⁵

Cicero wrote his Philippics in 44—43, mentioning *reddita est ei* (sc. Cn. Octavio, cos 165) *tum a maioribus statua pro vita, quae multos per annos progeniem eius honestaret, nunc ad tantae familiae memoriam sola restat.*¹⁰⁶ Consequently, the last heir of the Cn. Octavii seems to have expired around 46.

¹⁰⁴ RE XVII, 1818, No 22. Drumann 241, No 8.

¹⁰⁵ RE XVII, 1823, No 33. Drumann 241, No 9.

¹⁰⁶ Cic.phil. 9,2,5.