

PLINY HN 7. 57 AND THE MARRIAGE OF TIBERIUS GRACCHUS*

item alii aliaque feminas tantum generant aut mares, plerumque et alternant, sicut Gracchorum mater duodeciens, Agrippina Germanici noviens.

Mommsen, writing in 1866,¹ dated the marriage of Tiberius Gracchus and Cornelia to 165/4 on the basis of this passage, understanding it to mean that their twelve children came in an alternating series of boys and girls. Tiberius, with his father's *praenomen*, would then be either the first or second child of the marriage, and as he was born in 163/2,² Mommsen concluded that the marriage must have taken place not much more than two years before that date.

This interpretation of 'plerumque et alternant' is adopted by the Loeb and Budé translators – 'usually the sexes come alternately'; 'la plupart alternent' – though such an alternation of the sexes would be far from the usual experience of the parents of large families, and does not fit Pliny's reference to Agrippina, who had six boys followed by three girls, as Mommsen himself demonstrated in an article written in 1878.³ Strangely, his findings then did not lead him to reconsider his earlier interpretation of our Pliny passage. Instead, he tried to explain away the fact that Agrippina's family at least did not consist of an alternating series of sons and daughters by suggesting in a footnote that Pliny had made a mistake in citing her as an example of 'plerumque et alternant';⁴ and he allowed his earlier article to be re-published in 1879 without any comment as regards Agrippina.⁵

Yet Pliny must have known the pattern of Agrippina's family, and if he could use it as an example of the situation he was writing about, we are forced to ask whether he did not have something similar in mind for Cornelia, too, rather than the improbable series of sons and daughters envisaged by Mommsen and others. Nevertheless, those who take this view of the meaning of 'alternant' here seem to be supported to some extent by the big dictionaries. The idea of an alternating series goes back to Stephanus at least.⁶ He quoted this passage down to 'alternant' as the first example of his basic definition of 'alternō' – 'e duobus modo unum modo alterum facere: et quasi alternis vicibus variare'. Forcellini⁷ also understood 'alternant' in this sense, though he suggested that the boys and girls might have appeared in groups of two or more. He too quoted the passage only as far as 'alternant', but he claimed in his preface never to have used an example that he had not seen in its context, so he had probably observed the difficulty about Agrippina and was trying to meet it. His suggestion does not really solve the problem, but might be accounted for by the fact that, if he had read Suetonius'⁸ summary of Agrippina's children without proceeding to chronological investigation, he would indeed have found them listed in three groups of three, with the girls in the middle.

The *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*⁹ sets our passage among other transitive uses of

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¹ T. Mommsen, 'Die Scipionenprocesse', *Hermes* 1 (1866), 203 ff.

² Plut. *C. Gracch.* 1. 2.

³ 'Die Familie des Germanicus', *Hermes* 13 (1878), 245 ff.

⁴ op. cit. 251 n. 1.

⁵ *Römische Forschungen*, ii, pp. 489 ff.

⁶ *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (Paris, 1532), s.v. 'alternō'.

⁷ *Lexicon Totius Latinitatis* (Padua, 1771, 1825²), s.v. 'alternō'.

⁸ *Calig.* 7.

⁹ *TLL* s.v. 'alternō'.

'alternò' involving the idea of a series of changes from one of two things to the other, but draws attention in connection with it to another passage from the *Natural History*,¹⁰ 'primos quosque mares pariunt, in ceteris alternant'. Perhaps the compiler was doing no more than suggest that 'alternant' in our passage also might after all be intransitive, as indeed I hope to show that it is; but the subject-matter of the two passages is similar and the meaning of the second is worth consideration for our purposes. Pliny, discussing bitches and the varying size and character of their litters, makes this statement about the order in which he believed the sexes to appear. Does he mean simply that the first-born in each litter is a male and after that the sexes appear alternately? If so, we are still tied to the idea of an alternating series of males and females, the meaning retained by the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*¹¹ for *HN* 7. 57. But 'primus quisque' can sometimes mean 'in succession',¹² and it seems just possible that Pliny is claiming that bitches bring forth all the male puppies in each litter first, and then change over (to producing females) in the case of the rest. If this interpretation were accepted, the passage would be an example of 'alternò' referring to only one change-over, and this turns out to be its true sense in 7. 57 when we compare the passage in Aristotle¹³ from which it is drawn.

Pliny has been following Aristotle in noticing that the partners in a childless marriage sometimes have children with other partners – like Augustus and Livia, the Roman writer adds.

est quaedam privatim dissociatio corporum, et inter se steriles, ubi cum aliis iunxere, gignunt, sicut Augustus et Livia.

Aristotle then goes on to say that some couples produce only girls or only boys, another situation which may change with a change of partners. This point Pliny reproduces more briefly.

item alii aliaque feminas tantum generant aut mares.

Aristotle next refers to a third group of parents, those who have children of one sex while they are young and of the other when they are older.

καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν δὲ μεταβάλλουσιν· νέοι μὲν ὄντες μετ' ἀλλήλων θήλεα γεννῶσι, πρεσβύτεροι δ' ἄρρενα· τοῖς δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τούτων συμβαίνει τοῦναντίον.

This is clearly the situation to which 'plerumque et alternant' refers. Pliny does not describe it in detail. Instead he mentions two well-known Roman families which his readers would recognize as examples of it; but he must have had the Greek in mind, and it seems obvious that 'alternant' represents μεταβάλλουσιν.

We may then translate 'plerumque et alternant' by 'often, too, they (that is, parents) change over', taking 'plerumque' in its weaker sense¹⁴ and recognizing Pliny's habit of using 'et' standing second to introduce a further point.¹⁵

What about 'duodeciens' and 'noviens'? Pliny can never have intended these adverbs to modify 'alternant', as the Loeb translator imagined. It is common throughout Latin to find the verb omitted where an adverb or an adverbial phrase makes clear what verb would be required, though in the majority of examples the verb to be supplied seems to be a part of 'fieri', 'evenire', 'accidere', etc. used impersonally. One of several examples of this from Pliny is found in *HN* 17. 144 'reficiturque ex sese vetere harundineti exstirpato, quod utilius repertum quam castrare, sicut antea'

¹⁰ 10. 178.

¹² Kühner-Stegmann II. i. 647 d.

¹⁴ OLD s.v. 'plerumque', 2.

¹⁵ J. Müller, *Der Stil des älteren Plinius* (Progr. – Innsbruck, 1883), pp. 13 ff.

¹¹ OLD s.v. 'alternò'.

¹³ *Hist. Anim.* 7. 6. 585 B.

(sc. 'fieri solebat').¹⁶ But there are passages where the verb to be understood is not impersonal, such as 34. 19 'et in iis non nisi a divo Augusto seiuges, sicut elephantī' (sc. 'in usu erant') or 11. 29 'nihil horum stato tempore (sc. 'faciunt') sed rapiunt diebus serenīs munia'; or 10. 101 'id quidem et coturnices Trogus et gallinaceos aliquando' (sc. 'pati' from previous sentence). Similarly we may insert 'generavit' or – perhaps better – 'genuit' (from 'gignunt' above) in 7. 57, and translate 'in the way in which Cornelia produced a child twelve times' – i.e. 'produced her twelve children'.

It might be suggested, in Mommsen's defence, that as we have no evidence other than this passage of Pliny for the pattern of the sexes in Cornelia's family, it is possible that Pliny really was following a tradition that the boys and girls in it had appeared alternately and that he then recalled confusedly that there was something odd about the pattern of Agrippina's family also and, without checking, used her as a second example.

Against this view three things may be said. Firstly, it seems unlikely that Pliny could have imagined that Agrippina's sons and daughters had arrived alternately. He was completing his studies in Rome during the reign of Caligula, and the emperor's three sisters must have been much talked of then and in the following years. Even to know that Caligula was the youngest of their brothers and older than they would be enough to prevent Pliny's imagining an alternating series of sons and daughters for Agrippina.

A second, and more impressive point is Pliny's use of 'plerumque'. Even in its weaker sense of 'often', it really could not be applied to the alternation of the sexes in large families. As family size increases, the number of possible combinations of the sexes increases geometrically, but however large the total number of these, the possible number of examples of an unbroken alternation of the sexes remains at two. Thus it is highly improbable that among the large families of Roman times, Pliny knew enough such examples for him to describe them as occurring 'often'. Large families where a run of one sex is followed by a run of the other are fairly unusual, too, but this pattern is fully ten times as likely as an alternating series to occur in a family of twelve. In smaller families, of course, it is relatively common. Half of all the families of three show it, and probably we all know slightly larger families in which this pattern appears; though it is proportionally less frequent as family size increases. Thus Pliny could reasonably have described this pattern as occurring 'often', which strongly suggests that it was the pattern his sources claimed for Cornelia's family.

The third, and perhaps most serious point against the idea of confusion on Pliny's part is the connection between Aristotle and the chapter of *HN* which we are considering. If the reference to Agrippina were a mistake, we should have to suppose that, after writing 'aut mares', Pliny abandoned Aristotle and began a consideration of his own about parents who have sons and daughters turn about, in the strict sense of 'alternant', quoting Cornelia's family as an example because he knew of a tradition to that effect. He then referred to the family of Agrippina, erroneously thinking that it, too, consisted of an alternating series of boys and girls. But for this second example he just happened to choose a family of exactly the pattern which Aristotle described in the next sentence after the point where Pliny had deserted him! It seems much more likely that Mommsen is the one who was mistaken.

A single change from children of one sex to children of the other is perfectly exemplified by what we know of Agrippina's family, and, if Pliny was following a sound tradition about Cornelia, her family will have formed a similar pattern. In her case

¹⁶ This and following examples from Müller, op. cit. pp. 78 ff.

the girls came first, for we know that, when her son Tiberius went to Carthage in 147 under the wing of Scipio Aemilianus, Scipio was already his brother-in-law,¹⁷ and if the daughters of the family had been born after the birth of Gaius in 154/3,¹⁸ none of them would have been old enough for marriage by 147.

This fresh interpretation of *HN* 7. 57 has obviously a bearing on the controversial question of the date of Cornelia's marriage with Tiberius Gracchus. We may accept, on the authority of Polybius, as cited by Plutarch,¹⁹ that the marriage was not even arranged before the death of Cornelia's father, Scipio Africanus, in 183.²⁰ It might have taken place between that date and the departure of Gracchus for Spain as praetor in 180,²¹ or after his return from his three campaigns there, when he celebrated a triumph dated by the *fasti triumphales*²² to 3 February 177. The Roman calendar was at that period seriously out of step with the seasons, and by Julian dating this triumph took place in autumn 178, probably in the second week of October.²³ Gracchus was elected consul almost at once and entered office a few weeks later, but he must have spent several months in or near Rome over the winter of 178/7 before setting out for his province of Sardinia. The Elder Pliny,²⁴ writing long after the calendar had been rectified, suggests that the seas began to be safe for sailing after the first week of February; but a general with large forces to transport a considerable distance by sea probably did not set out till spring weather was well established, perhaps in mid-March at the earliest. After two campaigning seasons in Sardinia Gracchus returned to triumph again at the Terminalia on 23 February 175,²⁵ i.e. in autumn 176. We do not hear of any other prolonged absences from Rome until his embassy to the east in 165. There is thus a choice of three periods during which he might have married Cornelia – 183–180, five months or more during the winter of 178/7, or after autumn 176. Earl²⁶ argues for at least a betrothal before 180, followed soon by marriage. Carcopino²⁷ proposed 175 or thereabouts, while Münzer in Pauly, perhaps following Mommsen, placed the marriage after Gracchus' censorship in 169. Any attempt to work out the most likely date must depend on the evidence we have about the famous family which the union produced.

In fact, when we re-examine this evidence, taking account of our new interpretation of *HN* 7. 57, we find that two possible schemes of dating emerge, neither of them wholly free from difficulties and neither obviously more secure than the other. We can only try to show how these alternatives are arrived at.

Some of the information we have about Cornelia's family is firm and uncontroversial. Young Tiberius was not yet thirty in the summer of 133,²⁸ so his birth-date was late in 163 (or early in 162). Plutarch tells us in the same passage that Gaius was nine years younger, and so he was born in 154 (or early 153). Tiberius died in 133 and Gaius in 121, but the sister who married Scipio Aemilianus was still alive in 101.²⁹ Seneca³⁰ claims that all Cornelia's children died before her. Perhaps he overlooked this Sempronia; but perhaps not, for we know that Cornelia lived to be very old,³¹ and

¹⁷ Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 4. 4.

¹⁸ Plut. *C. Gracch.* 1. 2.

¹⁹ *Ti. Gracch.* 4. 3.

²⁰ See F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* (Oxford, 1957–79), iii. pp. 235 ff. for a discussion of date.

²¹ See *RE* s.v. Sempronius 53 for Gracchus' career.

²² A. Degrassi, *Fasti Capitolini* (Torino, 1954), p. 103. Livy 41. 7. 1–3.

²³ P. Derow, 'The Roman Calendar, 190–168 B.C.', *Phoenix* 27 (1973), 345 ff.

²⁴ *HN* 2. 122.

²⁵ Degrassi, *op. cit.* p. 103. Livy 41. 28. 9.

²⁶ D. C. Earl, *Tiberius Gracchus, A Study in Politics* (Collection Latomus 66, Brussels, 1963), pp. 54 ff.

²⁷ J. Carcopino, *Autour des Gracques* (Paris, 1928¹, 1967²), pp. 47 ff.

²⁸ Plut. *C. Gracch.* 1. 2.

²⁹ Val. Max. 3. 8. 6.; 9. 7. 1.

³⁰ *ad Marci* 16. 3; *Helv.* 16. 6.

³¹ Plut. *C. Gracch.* 19.

she just might have been living quietly in her Campanian villa beyond the end of the century and the death of her last surviving daughter.

It is when we come to Plutarch's testimony about the fate of this family as a whole that there is scope for more than one interpretation. He has two things to say. The first³² is that when Gracchus died he left twelve children of the marriage for Cornelia to bring up. Carcopino,³³ who argued against Mommsen's alternating series of boys and girls on other grounds, took 'alternant' in Pliny to mean that the sexes appeared at random in Cornelia's case, as in most families; but wishing to place her marriage twelve years or so before 163, he was worried by the relatively late appearance in it of Tiberius who, with his father's *praenomen*, looked like the eldest son. Carcopino did indeed suggest in passing the possibility of a string of daughters before the birth of Tiberius, but not having observed any evidence for such an explanation, he was content to think that Plutarch was simply mistaken in claiming that all twelve were alive at their father's death, and supposed that in fact some sons had been born and had died before 163, leaving the paternal *praenomen* available for the future tribune; a solution in which he is followed by Earl.³⁴ This particular difficulty of course disappears in the light of our new interpretation of *HN* 7. 57, and Tiberius takes his place naturally enough as the first son after a number of daughters. There can be no other reason for rejecting Plutarch's evidence on this point, since most large families at Rome must have lost some members in infancy or early childhood, and a case where all survived till the birth of the last child would be exceptional and noteworthy and therefore unlikely to be wrongly reported.

Plutarch's second statement³⁵ about Cornelia's family runs as follows. 'She lost the other children during her widowhood, but one of the daughters, the one who married the younger Scipio, and two sons, Tiberius and Gaius, survived (*διαγενομένων*) and she brought them up (*ἐξέθρεψεν*) with such a thirst for honour that, though by common consent they had the greatest natural advantages of all the Romans, they seemed to owe their distinction more to education than birth.'

Taken at its face value, this seems to mean that the twelve members of the family were still children in their parents' care when their father died, and that all but three failed to survive into adult life. For Roman boys, the end of childhood was marked by the assumption of the *toga virilis*. The age at which this took place varied according to physical development and was sometimes as late as sixteen, though jurists later fixed fourteen as the point at which a boy officially came of age. They had long since fixed twelve years as the date at which a girl might legally be married, but not every girl married as young as that, and perhaps in a family setting the end of childhood for a girl was more naturally taken as the moment at which she actually left home as a bride, when she dedicated the symbols of her childhood to the household gods.

The question of the average age of Roman girls at marriage has been much discussed. Friedländer³⁶ concluded that most girls married between the thirteenth and sixteenth year inclusive. More recently Hopkins³⁷ has argued for fifteen and a half as the average age. An important piece of evidence is the collection made by Harkness³⁸ from *CIL* of epitaphs of women which show their age at marriage. The interpretation of these is not easy. We cannot be sure how representative the sample is or how relevant

³² Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 1. 2.

³³ op. cit. 74–5, 76.

³⁴ op. cit. 57–8.

³⁵ *Ti. Gracch.* 1. 3.

³⁶ *Roman Life and Manners under the Early Empire* (London, n.d. (1908–13)), i, 123 ff.; iv. Appendix 18, pp. 232 ff. (trans. L. A. Magnus and J. H. Freese).

³⁷ *Population Studies*, 18 (1964–5), 309 ff.

³⁸ *TAPA* 27 (1896), 35 ff.

to the second century B.C., and the inscriptions necessarily refer only to women whose relatives could afford to put up a tombstone. But for what it is worth, this collection shows a pattern in which rather more than half of the women commemorated had married before their sixteenth birthday and eighty per cent by the age of twenty; and these figures would be even higher if some of the oldest brides recorded were marrying for a second time, as is likely, since in framing his marriage laws Augustus seems to have considered twenty undesirably late. Moreover, the highest numbers of marriages per year occur in the years before sixteen, with sixteen examples at age twelve, eighteen at age thirteen, twenty-one at age fourteen and nineteen at age fifteen. Thus, though we shall take fifteen years as a working average for the purposes of this discussion, we have to keep in mind that the well-born, adequately dowered daughters of Gracchus and Cornelia are likely to have married before that age rather than after it.

Supposing, then, that the first of these daughters, still unmarried when her father died, was not more than fifteen at that time, and that she had been born, as seems likely, within a year of her parents' marriage, we can allow at most sixteen years for the duration of that marriage. We last hear of Gracchus as the progenitor of Gaius, which makes 155/4 the earliest possible date for the father's death, supposing Carcopino was right in his theory that Gaius was posthumous. Carcopino's arguments³⁹ for this date, fascinating as they are, fall short of proof, but whether or not we accept them, we can see that on our present interpretation a date not long after 154 is probable. Fraccaro⁴⁰ has argued that young Tiberius was very nearly old enough for the *toga virilis* when his father died, since as soon as he took it he was co-opted into the college of augurs⁴¹ and would there be filling the place recently vacated by Gracchus senior if he had died about 149/8. But in 148/7 Tiberius had his fifteenth birthday and, since his sisters were older than himself, most or all of them would undoubtedly have been married by then and could no longer be reckoned as still in Cornelia's care. If, however, Gracchus died in 154 when Tiberius was nine, or very soon after, there is room for several sisters without Cornelia's being involved in a vertiginous series of annual births. It is generally assumed that Gaius was the youngest child, but we have no proof of this, and it is always possible that one more son was born in his father's lifetime, which would bring the start of the family forward by a year or so; but in the absence of any evidence for this we may place the marriage of Gracchus and Cornelia about 170 at the earliest.

There seems to be no objection to this dating in anything we know about Gracchus. It is sometimes suggested that a brilliant match would have been more important to him at an earlier stage in his career, but in the run-up to the censorial elections of 169 he might well have been eager to enlist the support of Cornelia's relatives. He was then about fifty – I am not convinced by Carcopino's⁴² arguments for placing his birth as late as 208 B.C. – but we know that there was considerable disparity⁴³ of age in this marriage, a situation not uncommon at Rome. As for Cornelia, to give birth to twelve children in about fifteen years would have been a strenuous feat indeed, but not unparalleled in Roman high society. That other great lady, for instance, whom we have already mentioned, Agrippina the wife of Germanicus, had nine – and possibly ten⁴⁴ – pregnancies within about twelve years;⁴⁵ though in her case three of the

³⁹ op. cit. 77 ff. ⁴⁰ *Athenaeum* 9 (1931), 310 n. 19 = *Opuscula* ii, p. 68 n. 19.

⁴¹ Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 4. 1. ⁴² op. cit. 70.

⁴³ Cic. *de Div.* 1. 36; Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 1. 2; Pliny *HN* 7. 122.

⁴⁴ Mommsen, op. cit. *Hermes* 13 (1878), 256 ff.

⁴⁵ *PIR*², pp. 223, 674.

children died before the family was completed,⁴⁶ and her fecundity was considered exceptional.⁴⁷

This dating of Cornelia's marriage has the merit of appearing to stick closely to Plutarch's testimony, but it is not without problems. We have to remember that fifteen as the age at which the eldest daughter married is mere conjecture based on a debatable average figure. She might have left home as a bride a year or two before she was fifteen, which would set her parents' marriage date that much later and give her mother a correspondingly shorter period in which to produce the twelve children. This would make Cornelia's achievement even more extraordinary than that of Agrippina, and would also raise a serious question about the date of her own birth. It is unlikely that a daughter of Africanus, with a dowry of fifty talents,⁴⁸ remained unmarried beyond the mid-teens, and it is perhaps generous to assume that she was as much as fifteen at her own marriage with Gracchus. But we know that her own date of birth cannot have been later than 183 (or perhaps early 182 if she was posthumous, which nobody reports), and the scheme of dating which we have suggested seems to involve an uncomfortably tight fit. Indeed, even supposing that both Cornelia and her eldest child did not marry before the age of fifteen, and keeping 170 as the date of marriage, we still have to place Cornelia's date of birth only about two years before her father's death, that is, a good twenty-five years or more after the first child in the already widely spaced family of Africanus and Aemilia.

It is true that Valerius Maximus⁴⁹ describes the future Africanus as 'caelebs' at the time of his interview with a Spanish chieftain whose fiancée the Romans had captured, but the accounts⁵⁰ in Polybius and Livy of Scipio's reactions to the beautiful captive do not say Scipio was still unmarried and it is doubtful if they imply it. In any case, we have a solid reason for believing that Cornelia's parents were married before her father left for Spain, for they had a son old enough for military service in 192/1.⁵¹ This son was called Lucius,⁵² and the Publius we hear of seems to have been noticeably younger, born perhaps in 205. We are told that Publius was *flamen Dialis* and died tragically young,⁵³ seemingly after 179⁵⁴ when he adopted a son of Lucius Aemilius Paullus, but perhaps before 174 when one Gnaeus Cornelius took over the flaminiate of Jupiter.⁵⁵ Publius was made an augur in 180,⁵⁶ and Livy usually records the deaths of augurs, but there are gaps in our text of his account⁵⁷ of the year 175, and this seems a likely place for the early death of Publius to have been recorded. A later date would only advance his date of birth. Now it was common at Rome to give the father's *praenomen* to the eldest son, though we cannot prove that this was an inflexible rule in all families. If the custom was observed among the Corneli Scipiones, there will have been another boy born before Lucius, a Publius who died in early childhood and left his *praenomen* to be used again. Even without this probability, Aemilia's marriage may have been as early as 214, if the *Lex Villia*⁵⁸ applied to the praetorship which her son Lucius held in 174;⁵⁹ and if there was another boy before Lucius, she will have married even earlier. In either case she is likely to have been well into her forties by

⁴⁶ Suet. *Calig.* 7.

⁴⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 1. 41.

⁴⁸ Polyb. 31. 27. 2.

⁴⁹ 4. 3. 1.

⁵⁰ Polyb. 10. 19. 3-7; Livy 26. 50. 1-7.

⁵¹ Polyb. 21. 15. 3; Livy 37. 34. 4-6; Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, iii p. 107.

⁵² Val. Max. 3. 5. 1; 4. 5. 3; Livy 41. 27. 2; 41. 28. 5 (Cicereius).

⁵³ Degrassi, *ILLRP*, p. 311.

⁵⁴ Plut. *Aem.* 5. 5. with 35. 2.

⁵⁵ Livy 41. 28. 7.

⁵⁶ Livy 40. 42. 13.

⁵⁷ Livy 41. 18. 20.

⁵⁸ A. E. Astin, *The Lex Annalis before Sulla* (Collection Latomus 32, Brussels, 1958).

⁵⁹ Livy 41. 27. 2.

185, the date about which Cornelia should have been born if she married Gracchus in 170. This is biologically possible, but unexpected, involving as it does a gap of about twelve years between Cornelia and her elder sister, who, married after 183⁶⁰ but in time to have a son old enough for the consulship of 138, was born probably about 197.

Family patterns vary greatly even today, of course, but when we find that our first interpretation presents us with one family where the children are born in very rapid succession and another where they seem to be unduly spread out, it becomes desirable or even necessary to look for an alternative dating for Cornelia's marriage. It cannot be denied that an earlier date of birth for Cornelia would permit of her arrival in her own family at a more natural moment, and would also allow for the spacing out of her children over a longer period, which seems more probable.

In his discussion of the likelihood of a betrothal about 181, soon followed by marriage, Earl⁶¹ has touched on some points which suggest that Cornelia was born in the second five years of the second century, and it is possible to enlarge on these indications. The most important piece of evidence is the passage we have already referred to, in which Plutarch⁶² reports Polybius as saying that, after the death of Africanus, Cornelia's relatives, preferring Gracchus to all other candidates, gave her to him, *ὡς ἀνέκδοτον καὶ ἀνέγγυον ἀπολειφθεῖσαν*. We do not have the context in which Polybius made this statement, and it is not clear whether Plutarch is quoting verbatim or paraphrasing. In particular, the last clause might be an addition of Plutarch's own; but he was here refuting a story about a *betrothal* in the lifetime of Africanus, not a marriage, so why should he use the word *ἀνέκδοτος* unless he found it in Polybius?

Now Polybius, when he came to Rome in 167, must soon have made Cornelia's acquaintance and learned something of the earlier life of this niece of his host, L. Aemilius Paullus, besides forming at least a rough idea of her age. It would be absurd if he had written that her father had left her *unmarried* unless he believed her to have been of marriageable age – that is, at least twelve – in 183.

How does a date of birth as early as 195 fit in with what we know of the later years of Cornelia's life? She presumably lived for several years after the death of Gaius in 121, when she would have been seventy-four. Plutarch⁶³ records her lavish entertaining of famous and learned friends at Misenum thereafter. He reports in the same passage that her enemies claimed at that period that she had lost her reason from old age, which suggests that she was then of quite advanced years. He also describes her as delighting her companions with accounts of the life and habits of her famous father. Some of these accounts will have been based on hearsay – Aemilia outlived her husband by more than twenty years,⁶⁴ and must often have talked about him to her daughters – but *δίαίταν* does suggest that Cornelia herself had known her father long enough to have personal memories of him.

A birth-date in 195 is not invalidated by Cicero's⁶⁵ use of the word 'adulescens' to describe Cornelia at the time of her husband's death, although Mommsen⁶⁶ mentioned this point to support his late dating of the marriage. We can find other examples⁶⁷ of Cicero's use of 'adulescens' and 'adulescentia' to refer to the whole period of life between childhood and old age – 'the flower of one's age', as he himself

⁶⁰ Polyb. 31. 27. 3 *ἔδωκεν ἡ μήτηρ*.

⁶² *Ti. Gracch.* 4. 3.

⁶⁴ Polyb. 31. 26. 1 with 28. 1 and Livy *Epit.* 46.

⁶⁶ *Hermes* 1 (1866), 205 n. 1.

⁶⁷ Cic. *Phil.* 2. 113, 118; *de Sen.* 4; *Top.* 32.

⁶¹ *op. cit.* 54–5.

⁶³ *C. Gracch.* 19.

⁶⁵ *de Div.* 1. 36.

puts it. (Interestingly, exactly the same division of life into 'pueritia', 'adulescentia' and 'senectus' appears in a fragment of a speech of Gaius Gracchus,⁶⁸ from whose writings Cicero took the story in which Cornelia is described as 'adulescens'.) For a woman, the central section of life must surely have been equated with the child-bearing period, to which the marriage laws of Augustus and the observations of the gynaecologist Soranus⁶⁹ set an end only at fifty. If Cornelia was forty-one at the time of the birth of Gaius, she was still 'adulescens' in Cicero's sense of the word.

The points we have raised about Cornelia's date of birth all belong to the realm of probability rather than proof. Let us now look again at Plutarch's evidence about the fate of her children, for a birth-date about 195 goes along with a betrothal between 183 and 180, followed by marriage either before 180 or in 178/7. If Gracchus had not secured at least a promise of marriage before he left for Spain, he would have been unlikely to find Cornelia still available on his return; and 175, when she would have been twenty, seems much too late. With a marriage in 181/0, the births of the twelve children might have been spread over as much as twenty-six years. This would not necessarily conflict with Plutarch's claim that all twelve were alive when their father died, but it would mean that several of the daughters were no longer in any sense children on Cornelia's hands as Plutarch seems to imply they all were. When we look again at his second statement,⁷⁰ we see that there is some confusion there and perhaps room for reinterpretation. For one thing, during her widowhood Cornelia lost Tiberius and Gaius, if not Sempronia, as well as the others. For another, ἐξέθρεψεν may be too narrowly interpreted if we limit it to the mere preservation of the lives of the children into adulthood, especially as it is accompanied by φιλοτίμως. It might refer rather to the *education* of Tiberius and Gaius, and what follows hardly applies, we might suppose, to the daughter who married Aemilianus.

But διαγενομένους does; and this may be a point at which our new interpretation of 'plerumque et alternant' throws light on the situation. Tiberius and Gaius are the only sons we hear of in adult life, so it is a fair assumption that whatever other sons there were did not grow up. But daughters tended to be lost sight of rather easily at Rome, as when Polybius⁷¹ describes L. Aemilius Paullus as dying ἄτεκνος and then indicates later in the same chapter that at least two daughters survived him. The point here was, of course, that married women belonged to their husband's families and did not carry on their father's line and name. Thus Gaius Gracchus, too, could lament that only himself and a boy were left of the descendants of Africanus and Tiberius Gracchus senior, taking no account of the continued existence of at least one of his sisters, the widow of Aemilianus.⁷² This Sempronia, however, was not so easily forgotten by the later writers like Plutarch. She had been in the public eye more than most women because of the exceptional distinction of her husband, the rumours⁷³ (even if unfounded) of her complicity in his mysterious death and her public appearance⁷⁴ in 101 to refute the claims of an impostor to be her nephew. Those of her sisters who were grown up by the time their father died would be married, and no doubt well married, but we seldom know the names of the wives of prominent Romans. These other Semproniae might have vanished from history, but not necessarily into premature graves; though it might still be true that they all predeceased their long-lived mother, as Seneca claimed.

If the spacing out of twelve children over twenty-six years seems unlikely before the

⁶⁸ *ORF*², p. 187, no. 43.

⁷⁰ *Ti. Gracch.* 1. 3.

⁷² *ORF*², p. 190 f., no. 47.

⁷⁴ *Val. Max.* 3. 8. 6.

⁶⁹ *Gyn.* 1. 20. 1.

⁷¹ *Polyb.* 31. 28. 2, 8.

⁷³ *Livy, Epit.* 59.

days of reliable methods of contraception, two things can be said. Because of Gracchus' absences in Spain and Sardinia, the first five years of a marriage in 181 would have produced only two children; and Cornelia, as a Roman matron of the old school,⁷⁵ probably breast-fed her children for nine months or more, and so enjoyed the postponement of conception which that practice often produces. In more recent times, a similar situation was to be observed in the family of Tolstoy, and plenty of other responsible parents of the nineteenth century managed to build up their large families over twice as many years as there were children.

Thus it seems that a case can be made for placing the marriage of Gracchus and Cornelia as early as 181, though 170 remains a possible alternative. Our new interpretation of Pliny 7.57 helps the discussion in several ways. It disposes of the difficulty about the position of Tiberius in the family. If we choose to stick closely to Plutarch's account of that family's fate, a string of daughters born before Tiberius gives Cornelia up to about fifteen years to produce her twelve children, though this involves some speculation about the age at marriage of the first daughter. If, on the other hand, we are impressed by the pointers we have found to a date of birth about 195 and a correspondingly earlier marriage-date for Cornelia, the fact that her family began with a series of daughters enables us to suggest a way of interpreting Plutarch's account to fit in with this.

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⁷⁵ Tac. *Dial.* 28–9.