In the collection of essays edited by Sarah Pomeroy and focused on the treatises *Marriage Advice* and *A Consolation to his Wife*, several scholars examine Plutarch’s conception of the marital relationship from various angles. Though they each have different theses and take different approaches, there exists an essential unanimity that Plutarch recognizes a woman’s capacity for virtue but also that he would not expect a wife to act independently of her husband except in rare circumstances. Lin Foxhall describes the situation most completely. In Plutarch’s works, women (not only wives) are found to exercise their virtues in two scenarios. In one, they “display virtue in proper (i.e., subordinate) relation to men.” This is the characteristic experience of the woman as wife in Plutarch: she is expected to be a partner to her husband but nonetheless operate under his direction, and then only after having been trained by him. “The second,” Foxhall continues, “occurs where the male side of what ought to be an equation is absent, flawed, or inadequate. Women’s power and virtue in an active sense are portrayed as freestanding (i.e., not operating under male control) and positive only when there is some fatal defect in the proper male principle which ideally ought to be controlling, leading, and guiding women.” This second scenario is thus defined as the negative of the first. Ideally, a man will lead a woman as she exercises her virtue; in his absence, a woman may take matters into her own hands.
In this chapter, I focus on a particular virtue of women as it is narrated by Plutarch, that of moderation (sophrosyne), and how it manifests itself in a wife’s devotion to her husband. This devotion, which ideally is mutual, results in a tightly bonded couple and a well-ordered household. Moreover, a wife’s sophrosyne often coexists with other virtues (for example, love of one’s children and high-mindedness) that allow her to act as a true partner to her husband. If the husband is removed from this equation, however, the truly moderate (sophron) wife is nonetheless expected to maintain her devotion post mortem. In fact, her power to act, described above as freestanding and positive, continues to be limited by this devotion, and Plutarch appears to have believed that, in ideal circumstances, the virtuous wife would choose to die along with her husband. He makes this belief apparent in the story of Camma, a married Galatian woman who resisted adultery and then, when her pursuer killed her husband, avenged his murder before taking her own life. Even though Camma is a legendary, perhaps fictional, character, Plutarch relates her story twice in the *Moralia*, finding her important as an exemplum of spousal virtue and behavior. Moreover, the moral example set by Camma reappears in Plutarch’s portraits of Porcia, wife of Brutus, and Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi. While Plutarch does not make specific reference to Camma in writing about these women, he does employ the principle of her story—a sophron devotion maintained even after her husband’s death—to draw his portraits of the two historical figures. In the case of Porcia, he exploits the popular but false tradition of her suicide to emphasize her role as committed partner to Brutus, and for Cornelia, who does not (and indeed cannot) commit suicide following her husband’s death, Plutarch nonetheless demonstrates that she possessed the same character as the other women by narrating her refusal to remarry and her commitment to raising her husband’s children. All three women, in Plutarch’s telling of their stories, reflect the ideal of sophrosyne and spousal devotion that perseveres even beyond the lives of their husbands.

Before turning to Plutarch, I must note briefly that he was not the only or the first ancient author to see suicide or widowhood as the virtuous wife’s proper response to her husband’s death. The Roman univira, the woman who took only one husband in her entire life, was idealized in legend, if not in practice, for demonstrating pudicitia (that is, sophrosyne) as both a married woman and a widow. In a passage that is probably derived from Seneca’s *On Marriage*, Jerome extolls pudicitia as the signature virtue of the wife: “It was this virtue that made Lucretia equal to Brutus, or perhaps made her even better. . . . It made Cornelia equal to Gracchus; it made Porcia equal to the
other Brutus; Tanaquil is even more famous than her husband” (Adv. Iovinian. 1.49). Two of the women mentioned here, Cornelia and Porcia, also appear in Plutarch’s Lives and are the focus of this chapter. But Plutarch included all three in the introduction to his Virtues of Women, where he claims that comparing the lives and deeds of men and women is an effective means of judging their qualities. Thus, he argues, we may judge “whether Semiramis’ natural tendency to accomplish great deeds was of the same character and type as Sesostrius’; whether Tanaquil’s cleverness was like that of King Servius; whether Porcia’s judgment was like that of Brutus, or Timoclea’s was like that of Pelopidas” (243C). He goes on to suggest that everyone, man or woman, displays his or her virtue uniquely: “For Achilles was brave in one way, and Ajax in another; Odysseus’ judgment was different from Nestor’s; Cato was not just in the same way as Agesilaus; Eirene did not love her husband as Alcestis loved hers; and Cornelia was not high-minded in the same manner as Olympias” (243C–D). Clearly Plutarch was working within a tradition that idealized Cornelia and Porcia (among others) for their virtues, including pudicitia or sophrosyne, and employed them as exempla to discuss the virtues of women in general. To these Roman women, however, Plutarch adds Camma. He is, in fact, our earliest and fullest source for her story, which becomes for him a fundamental example of the sophron wife who maintains her devotion even after her husband’s death. I continue this chapter with a reading of Camma’s story as it appears in Dialogue on Love.

**Camma in Dialogue on Love**

Plutarch tells Camma’s story twice over a period of about twenty years, and both versions tell us quite a lot about how he conceived of a wife’s devotion to her husband. In Virtues of Women, the story is self-contained and features the more developed description of Camma’s character. I will look at that version later in the chapter. I begin with the briefer and earlier version found in Dialogue on Love (767C–768D). In this instance, Plutarch adduces Camma in support of his general argument that erotic love inspires a sense of oneness in a married man and woman. This devotion brings with it “moderation [of sexual desire] with respect to each other, which is essential to a marriage” (σωφροσύνη πρὸς ἀλλήλους, ἢς μάλιστα δεῖται γάμος, 767E) and which is opposed to a self-restraint that is imposed by custom and maintained through shame or fear. That is to say, the married couple that feel mutual erotic attraction will for-sake other lovers voluntarily, and the modesty that they practice with respect
to extramarital relationships becomes fundamental to the unity of their household. Plutarch goes on to reinforce this point with arguments and examples that culminate in this general statement about the loyalty of women in particular: “The noble woman [ἡ δὲ γυναῖκα γυνὴ] who has been united to her lawful husband through erotic love would endure assaults by bears and serpents before submitting to the touch of or intercourse with another man” (768B). Plutarch’s phrasing implies a natural aversion to sexual relations with another man, which he characterizes as even stronger than the natural instinct for self-preservation. Thus, in Plutarch’s characterization, the sophron wife who feels eros for her husband would find it essentially impossible to consent to a relationship with another man.

Plutarch’s declaration of the noble wife’s extreme devotion leads him directly to the anecdote of the Galatian Camma as an illustration of his point. Plutarch assumes that she is both sophron and erotically attached to her husband, and thus we encounter no further development of her character. Plutarch, then, proceeds directly to the story’s central conflict, which is a test of that uxorial devotion. Camma, in fact, proves faithful to her husband, Sinatus, twice: once while he is alive, and once when he is dead. She is beautiful, Plutarch tells us, and this fact causes the politically powerful Sinorix to be captured by desire for her (ἐρῶς ἐπιθύμησι). Sinorix is compelled to kill Sinatus, however, because “he could neither force nor convince the woman [to be his lover] as long as her husband was alive” (768B). This briefly told element of Camma’s story, which amounts to a preliminary test of her devotion, is in itself enough to prove the point of Plutarch’s general argument: if Camma is bound by eros to her husband, Sinatus, she would logically be moved by neither words nor force to share Sinorix’s bed. However, in explaining Sinorix’s motivation for killing Sinatus, and especially in his use of the phrase “so long as her husband was alive,” Plutarch establishes a false assumption on the part of Sinorix, who clearly does not understand the nature of the couple’s relationship. He believes, therefore, that he can seduce Camma once her husband is dead.

He quickly discovers his mistake. Camma, in fact, demonstrates an even higher level of devotion, remaining faithful to her husband even after Sinorix kills him. First, she finds solace in her service to Artemis, taking up the duties of an ancestral priesthood. This particular source of comfort is perhaps significant, since Camma as a widow has devoted herself to a celibate deity and, by implication, is likely practicing celibacy herself. In fact, although many kings and other powerful leaders are courting her, she declines to entertain any of them. When Sinorix boldly approaches her to propose marriage, however, she
accepts his offer and leads him to the altar of Artemis to confirm their engagement through the ritual of libation and drinking from a shared cup. But the cup contains poison, and Camma drinks first before sharing with Sinorix, thus ensuring her death as well as his. In her final speech, she makes clear both her satisfaction in avenging her husband’s murder but also, and primarily, her continued devotion: “‘O dearest husband,’ she said. ‘I went on living without you in my grief, awaiting this day. But now, rejoice and receive me. For on your behalf I have taken revenge against this most evil of men, and I have gladly become your partner in life, and his in death’” (Amat. 768D). Camma addresses Sinatus as “husband” even after his death, and she defends herself for remaining alive without him, seeming to assume that a truly devoted wife would have ended her life immediately upon his death. She expects, moreover, that the separation has caused grief to Sinatus (“But now, rejoice”), and now that she has avenged his death, she expects that they will be reunited (“and receive me”).

Camma’s death, strictly speaking, is unnecessary for her revenge. It must, therefore, be a further demonstration of her loyalty, an extreme response to the idea of sexual intercourse with another man that is even more definitive than her simple refusal of Sinorix’s advances while her husband was alive, or her declining offers from other powerful men after his death. As an example of uxorial devotion inspired by erotic love, however, Camma’s actions are also ambiguous because they mix murder and vengeance with spousal attachment. The story would have provided clearer evidence if Camma had demonstrated her loyalty post mortem without having the additional motivation of seeking justice. We cannot be too critical, however, since the anecdote serves its purpose in the dialogue, which is to reinforce the argument for marital eros with an example of a wife’s extreme devotion. Camma, indeed, preferred a certain death, such as comes from facing the “assaults by bears and serpents,” to sharing Sinorix’s bed.

Porcia, Wife of Brutus

Camma could well have been fictional, invented by Plutarch or discovered by him in the course of his reading. If she was real, her revenge and suicide had at least become a legend, more important to Plutarch as an exemplum than for the reality of her existence. Porcia, however, was undoubtedly a real person
who played a small but critical role in historical events. Nonetheless, Plutarch draws upon an idealized conception of marriage as he shapes her image in the *Parallel Lives*. He was also, as we have seen, building on a tradition that had already made her an exemplum cast in the mold of women like Camma. In *Brutus* 13, he narrates a scene between husband and wife that establishes Porcia’s character in terms recognizable from the anecdote of Camma, and in reporting Porcia’s death (*Brut.* 53; *Cat. Min.* 73), he again has recourse to the notion of uxorial devotion that leaves a widow with no real option but suicide upon the death of her husband. Camma’s story, in fact, is likely to have had some influence on the depiction of Porcia: Plutarch wrote *Dialogue on Love* around the same time as *Brutus*, and so he certainly knew of the anecdote when writing about the marriage of Porcia and Brutus.¹⁴

Poria’s story also allows us to examine a direct literary influence, since, as I have argued elsewhere, Plutarch appears to have looked to the character of Panthea in Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* in drawing his portrait of Porcia.¹⁵ There are, in fact, many similarities in the characterizations of all three women. In my earlier study, I found that the *Cyropaedia* had directly influenced Plutarch. In a speech that Xenophon gives to Panthea, she expresses her noble character, and especially her devotion to her husband, Abradatas. After hearing her words, Abradatas prays to Zeus that he “appear to be a husband worthy of Panthea” (φανῆναι ἄξιον . . . Πανθείας ἀνδρὶ, 6.4.9). This scene, I argued, is recreated in *Brutus* when Porcia confronts her husband about the plot against Caesar and demands to be involved in matters that are obviously troubling her husband (13.4–10). In order to prove her competence, however, she first stabs herself in the thigh, inflicting a wound that results in pain, fever, and a great flow of blood. At the height of her agony she addresses her husband in a calm voice, stating her intellectual credentials and making clear her devotion. Then, after revealing her wound, she demonstrates that her character and intellect are strong enough even to withstand bodily pain. Brutus is amazed, praying to the gods in words identical to those of Abradatas, asking, too, “that he appear to be a husband worthy of Porcia” (ἀνδρὶ Πορκίας ἄξιον φανῆναι, 13.11). Plutarch, I argued, is quoting Xenophon and so asking the reader to see Porcia in the same light as Panthea.

There is, however, more to this story. In their speeches to their husbands, both Panthea and Porcia argue that they are devoted spouses, worthy of partnership but also willing to endure personal harm as proof of their devotion. Panthea, for instance, declares that “if any other wife ever honored her husband above her own life, I believe that you know that I am one of these
women” (Xen. Cyr. 6.4.3). The emphasis on the woman’s life as being of lesser value than her spousal devotion is reminiscent of what we saw with Camma. At this point in Panthea’s story, however, while her husband, Abradatas, is still living, there is no need for drastic action. Instead, an oath will suffice: “Nonetheless, since I have such feeling for you, as you already know, I swear to you on my philia and yours that I would rather die together with you, who are a noble man, than to go on living with you, both of us having been shamed” (δὸμος δὲ οὕτως ἔχουσα πρὸς σὲ ὄσπερ σὺ οἴσθα, ἐπομνύω σοι τήν ἐμὴν καὶ σὴν φιλίαν ἢ μὴν ἐγὼ βούλεσθαι ἂν μετά σοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ γενομένου κοινῆ γῆν ἐπιέσασθαι μᾶλλον ἢ ζῆν μετ’ αἰσχυνομένου αἰσχυνομένη, Xen. Cyr. 6.4.6). In addition to repeating her willingness to die, Panthea emphasizes the couple’s common purpose. Her use of the adverbial “together” (κοινῆ) resonates with Camma’s declaration that she was a “partner in life” (βίου . . . κοινωνός) with Sinatus. Moreover, Panthea’s connection to Abradatas is based on philia, admittedly a different sort of affection than the eros that Camma felt for Sinatus. Nonetheless, both spouses feel a devotion that originates in an emotion rather than one that is enforced by convention or a sense of duty.16

We can easily see how a model such as Panthea would have been attractive to Plutarch as he drew his portrait of Porcia, especially if he was aiming at a Camma-like ideal of uxorial devotion. When he introduces Porcia, therefore, he describes her as philosophos and philandros (φιλόσοφος δ’ ἡ Πορκία καὶ φίλανθρος οἴσα, Brut. 13.4).17 Both of these adjectives are significant. Philandros establishes Porcia as loving her husband, echoing Panthea’s declaration of the philia she felt for Abradatas and likewise grounding her devotion in emotional attachment rather than a social or legal obligation. Philosophos establishes the intellectual bond between her and Brutus, whose philosophical training is emphasized by Plutarch, and it also brings to the fore the training she received from her father, Cato the Younger.18 In her speech to Brutus, Porcia trades on this training to claim her right to partnership as well: “I am the daughter of Cato, and I was married into your household, Brutus, not like the concubines in order to share only your bed and your table, but to be a partner [κοινοφόρῳ] in both good and painful circumstances” (Brut. 13.7). Here the Greek term is identical to what we find in the story of Camma, not necessarily an indication of direct borrowing but revealing a common conception of the two wives’ relationships to their husbands and the role they play in their marriages.19

Panthea, we recall, swore an oath to die along with her husband. As Xenophon’s story unfolds, she is given the chance to fulfill her promise. After Abradatas dies in battle, Cyrus the king declares that he will honor Panthea “for the
sake of her sophrosyne and all her virtue” (σωφροσύνης ἔνεκα καὶ πάσης ἀρετῆς, Xen. Cyr. 7.3.12) and will escort her to any man she chooses. Panthea responds with her own declaration, saying that she will not conceal to whom she wishes to go, and soon thereafter, she commits suicide on top of her husband’s body (Xen. Cyr. 7.3.14). Panthea and Camma, therefore, are cut from the same cloth. With regard to Porcia, we read in Brutus that some ancient authors claimed that Porcia committed suicide following her husband’s demise. These accounts are not universally accepted, however, and in fact are suspect even to Plutarch. Even so, when it came to narrating Porcia’s death, he found these dubious stories valuable enough to include and, in light of his conception of the virtue of women like Camma and Panthea, perhaps even preferable.

Plutarch did not include a death scene for Porcia in either his Lives or Moralia. He does, however, twice discuss her death, in Brutus and Cato Minor. The fuller version appears at the end of Brutus, where Plutarch narrates the aftermath of Brutus’ death, including this report of Porcia’s reaction: “Nico-

laus the philosopher (as well as Valerius Maximus) records that Porcia, Brutus’ wife, was wishing to die. None of her friends would allow it, however, but they remained by her side and watched her carefully. And so, she seized some coals from the fire, swallowed them down, and held her mouth closed. In this way, she killed herself” (Πορκίαν δὲ τὴν Βρούττον γυναῖκα Νικόλαος ὁ φιλόσοφος ἱστορεῖ καὶ Οὐαλέριος Μάξιμος βουλομένην ἀποθανεῖν, ώς οὖδεὶς ἐπέτρεπε τὸν φίλων, ἀλλὰ προσέκειντο καὶ παρεφύλαττον, ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς ἀναρπάσασαν ἀνθρακάς καταπείν, καὶ τὸ στόμα μύσασαν, οὕτω διαφθαρῆναι, Brut. 53.5). Like Camma and Panthea, then, Porcia is said to have committed suicide following her husband’s death. As soon as he relates this account, however, Plu-

tarch reveals that it is likely to be false: he cites a letter from Brutus (who was obviously alive at the time of writing) in which he mentions Porcia’s death, thus proving that Porcia never actually was a grieving widow. Moreover, as John Moles indicates in his commentary, there is other ancient evidence to support the suggestion that Brutus outlived his wife. Plutarch, it seems, was right to doubt Nicolaus’ account.

But if he knew that Nicolaus was wrong, why did he mention the suicide? Moles suggests that he was “reluctant to give up so good a story” and that even when Plutarch hesitates to endorse the evidence of Brutus’ letter unequivocally—he adds “if indeed it’s genuine” (εἴπερ ἄρα τῶν γυνησίων ἐστίν, Brut. 53.7) after describing its contents—he is not demonstrating “critical acumen, but rather an artistic reluctance to ditch” the more dramatic version.
Moles is certainly right in principle, but the story of Porcia’s suicide was probably more than just good in Plutarch’s view. He likely believed that it revealed the truth about Porcia, even if it was not historically accurate. In other words, although Porcia did not, in fact, die in the way and for the reasons reported by Nicolaus, Plutarch believed that she would have done so, if she had outlived her husband. There must have circulated a general characterization of Porcia’s superiority to bodily pain (as reflected, for example, in Brutus 13) and her devotion to Brutus. Nicolaus or his source would have based the false account of her suicide upon this characterization, perhaps relying on another story, like that of Camma or Panthea, as a model. In this way, Porcia’s death, even before reaching Plutarch, may have undergone inventive reconstruction and type-casting, and Plutarch’s fondness for stories of extreme uxorial devotion would have made the idea of Porcia’s suicide attractive to him.

As a parallel, we may consider how Plutarch handles the problem of Solon’s visit to Croesus. In response to those who argue based on chronology that the visit could not have occurred, he both attacks the accuracy of their calculations and makes an argument based on his general understanding of Solon’s character.

I do not think it right to dismiss a story so famous and so well attested, and (even more significant) one that is in accord with Solon’s character and worthy of his greatness of mind and wisdom, all on account of some so-called chronological principles, which are being updated by countless people, even as they have remained unable till now to resolve their disagreements. (Sol. 27.1)

Plutarch offers no positive historical evidence for the meeting of Solon and Croesus. Instead, he casts doubt on the ability of others to disprove the meeting conclusively, and he insists that the story is worth telling because it relates character traits that he knows from other, presumably indisputable, sources. In the case of Porcia, conversely, Plutarch is more trusting of the letter that
undermines the story of her suicide than he is of the “so-called chronological principles” that called Solon’s meeting with Croesus into question. Nonetheless, he allows the story of Porcia’s suicide to enter his readers’ minds, to color their impression of Porcia and to convey a sense of her character and devotion.

In fact, in arguing that the letter contradicting Nicolaus appears to be genuine, Plutarch claims that it, too, accurately represents his general impression of Porcia, since it contains evidence of, among other characteristics, “the erotic love felt by his wife” (τὸν ἔρωτα τῆς γυναικὸς, Brut. 53.7). This erotic attachment places Porcia in the same category as Camma, and, in light of Camma’s story, could by itself explain why Plutarch found the story of Porcia’s suicide credible, if unhistorical. But Plutarch might well have inferred that Porcia’s loyalty unto death was motivated by more than just eros. In the Cato Minor, for instance, he describes her as “lacking neither sophrosyne nor courage” (οὔτε σωφροσύνης οὔτε ἀνδρίας ἀπολειψθέντα, 73.6). Sophrosyne, we recall from Dialogue on Love, was also a characteristic of the ideal married couple who felt eros for each other, and it became the basis for their voluntary exclusion of other lovers; it was characteristic of Panthea as well. Porcia’s sophrosyne may explain why, when Plutarch mentions her death in Cato Minor, he allows the suicide version of the story to stand uncritically, declaring simply that she “gave up her life in a manner worthy of her nobility and virtue, as I have written in my account of Brutus” (προῆκα τὸν βίον ἄξιος τῆς εὐγενείας καὶ ἀρετῆς, ὡς ἐν τοῖς περὶ Βρούτου γέγραπται, 73.6). Plutarch, it seems clear, preferred to imagine Porcia as dying by her own hand as an immediate response to the death of her husband.

In sum, Porcia’s intellectual and ethical capacity, which includes sophrosyne, would certainly allow her to experience erotic desire while at the same time keeping it within the proper bounds of her marriage. She could be expected, like the generic noblewoman, Camma, of Dialogue on Love, to forgo other lovers. And, with Camma and Panthea in mind, Plutarch might easily imagine that Porcia would feel the desire to end her life after her partner had lost his. She lays the foundation for just this sort of decision in the course of her speech to Brutus when she claims that she was married to Brutus not merely to share his bed but to be his partner (κοινωνός) in both good and bad circumstances. Given this intellectual and ethical foundation, Plutarch probably felt justified in transmitting the story of Porcia’s suicide, finding it “in accord with her character” as with the story of Solon and Croesus, even if he knew it to be inaccurate.
Camma in *Virtues of Women*

Plutarch introduced the first version of Camma’s story in *Dialogue on Love* to illustrate the narrow point about the strength of the devotion that arises from eros moderated by sophrosyne. About two decades later, in *Virtues of Women*, Plutarch’s aim was to demonstrate female virtue more generally. Thus, the Camma we meet in the later version is more broadly drawn as a character. Moreover, she possesses qualities that we find in both the earlier Camma as well as Porcia and Panthea. Plutarch introduces her as follows:

ο Σινάτος γυναῖκα παρθένον ἔσχε Κάμμαν ὄνομα, περίβλεπτον μὲν ἰδέα σώματος καὶ όρα, θαυμαζομένην δὲ μᾶλλον δι’ ἄρετήν· οὐ γὰρ μόνον σώφρον καὶ φιλανδρός, ἄλλα καὶ συνετή καὶ μεγαλόφρον καὶ ποθεινή τοῖς ὑπηκόοις ἦν διαφερόντως ὑπ’ εὐμενείας καὶ χρηστότητος.

Sinatus married a *parthenos* named Camma, who attracted attention with the form of her body and her beauty, but was admired even more for her virtue, for not only was she *sophron* and *philandros*, but she was also intelligent, high-minded, and especially beloved by her servants because of her goodwill and kindness. (*Mul. Virt.* 257E–F)

In light of the previous discussion, Camma’s fundamental virtues, sophrosyne and *philandria*, set specific expectations. These are the qualities that connect her to the Camma in *Dialogue on Love* (though with *philia* standing in for eros, as it did with Panthea) and that will drive her to reject Sinorix’s advances, avenge her husband’s murder, and take her own life. Plutarch does not call her *philosophos*, but she does possess the intellectual and personal qualities that would allow her to be a partner to her husband and run their household skillfully. The adjective *megalophron*, which might also be translated as “generous,” and the goodwill and kindness that she demonstrated toward the servants could indicate a smoothly running household. These latter qualities were unnecessary in the earlier version of Camma’s story, and so Plutarch either left them out there or added them here. If he added them, it must have been to give the reader the sense that Camma was a full partner (κοινονός) to her husband, something Camma herself overtly claims in the earlier version.
That claim of partnership in *Dialogue on Love* comes in the speech Camma makes after tricking Sinorix, which she addresses to her dead husband, Sinatus. Plutarch also assigns her a speech in *Virtues of Women*, but in this instance Camma addresses Artemis and Sinorix.

“In most revered of deities,” she said, “you are my witness that I continued living after my husband’s murder for the sake of this day, and for all that time I enjoyed nothing good in my life except the hope of justice. And now that I’ve obtained it, I am going down to my husband. But for you, most unholy of all men, let your people prepare you a tomb in place of a bridal chamber and a marriage.” (*Mul. virt.* 258B–C)

In making Camma call upon Artemis (as witness) and Sinorix (as victim) rather than her husband, Plutarch here puts more emphasis on the act of vengeance than on the spousal devotion that arises from eros and sophrosyne. As in the earlier version, however, Camma again justifies her decision to live on after Sinatus’ death and then claims that she will rejoin her husband. In her final words, a direct address to the man who tried to replace her husband, she reveals her trick, and in the story’s finale, we read how Camma remains alive long enough to confirm the death of Sinorix before dying herself. Because of the focus on vengeance, Plutarch omits Camma’s overt claim of partnership with Sinatus and the expectation that he also feels grief at their separation. I suggested above, however, that the partnership is represented in Camma’s intelligence and managerial skills. Moreover, Camma’s claim that she is going down to Sinatus suggests a closeness, and perhaps a full-fledged *koinonia*, that remains intact even in death, much as Panthea’s promise to show Cyrus to whom she wished to go also makes clear her continued devotion to Abrodatus, and Porcia’s false suicide demonstrates her commitment to Brutus. Whether real or fictional, then, Camma’s story served Plutarch for many years as a vehicle for thinking about a virtuous and erotic marital partnership, and it
provided him with a model for conceiving of the character of at least one historical figure.

**Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi**

In the final section of this chapter, I consider the actions of another *sophron* woman who was famous in Plutarch’s day, though not as a wife but as a mother. Cornelia, memorialized by Roman authors and by a statue that bore the inscription “Mother of the Gracchi,” was known especially for raising her sons, Tiberius and Gaius. This is her primary role in Plutarch’s *Gracchi* as well, and yet Plutarch has also shaped her character in several ways that make her similar to his Camma and Porcia. There are, of course, important differences in these women’s circumstances. Camma and Porcia (and Xenophon’s Panthea, too) appear not to have had children, which leaves them free to take their own lives once their husbands have died. Cornelia, conversely, outlives her husband but does not commit suicide. Her reputation, moreover, even before reaching Plutarch, had already been shaped by Roman notions of the *matrona*, who was expected to be faithful to her husband and his household, which included remaining a widow and raising his children after his death. Despite Cornelia’s well-established reputation, however, we still find a Plutarchan coloring to her portrait in the *Gracchi*.

Plutarch begins to draw that portrait in the introduction to those *Lives*, where he tells an anecdote ostensibly to demonstrate the elder Tiberius’ good character. Tiberius, he writes, had been elected censor once and consul twice, and he celebrated two triumphs for his military achievements. Even so, he was more highly regarded for his virtue (λαμπρότερον ἦν τὸ ἀπό τῆς ἀρετῆς ἄξιομα), and this aspect of his reputation earned him the privilege of marrying Cornelia, daughter of Scipio Africanus, even though he and Scipio had been at odds politically (*Gracch. 1.1–3*). Having made this claim, Plutarch introduces the following anecdote as evidence:

λέγεται δὲ ποτε συλλαβεῖν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης ξεῦγος ὀρκόντων, τοὺς δὲ μάντεις σκεψαμένους τὸ τέρας, ἄμφω μὲν ὡκ ἄν ἀνελέῖν ὦδ᾽ ἀφεῖναι, περὶ δ᾽ ἐκατέρω διαμεῖν, ὡς δὲ μὲν ἄρρην τῷ Τιβέρῳ φέροι θάνατον ἀναρθεῖς, ἢ δὲ θήλεια τῇ Κορνηλίᾳ. τὸν οὖν Τιβέριον, καὶ φιλοῦντα τὴν γυναῖκα, καὶ μᾶλλον αὐτῷ προσήκειν ὄντι πρεσβυτέρῳ τελευτάν ἤγοιμενον ἐπὶ νέας οὐσίας ἔκεινης, τὸν μὲν ἄρρηνα
It is reported that he once captured a pair of snakes in his bed. The seers, once they had examined the sign, did not allow Tiberius to kill both snakes or to let both go, but said that he must choose between them: if the male snake were killed, it would mean death for Tiberius, and if the female snake were killed, it would mean death for Cornelia. Then Tiberius, who loved his wife and believed that it was more fitting for him than for her to die, since he was older and she was still young, killed the male snake and let the female go. Just a short time later he died, leaving behind twelve children born to him by Cornelia. (Gracch. 1.4–5)

Thus, Tiberius proves true to the reputation for virtue that won him marriage into Africanus’ family. No one, least of all Cornelia, could fail to admire his noble decision. Valerius Maximus, who includes a version of this anecdote in his collection under the heading De amore coniugali (4.6), makes this point explicitly, introducing Cornelia at the end of his version to reinforce Tiberius’ excellence: “And so, I do not know whether I would call Cornelia more fortunate because she had such a husband, or more pitiable because she had lost one such as him” (itaque Corneliam nescio utrum feliciorem dixerim quod talem virum habuerit an miseriorem quod amiserit, 4.6). 30 Plutarch mentions Cornelia at the end of his version as well but conceives of her differently. In Plutarch’s mind, she is not Tiberius’ admirer but the mother of the twelve children who remain with her in the household.

“Mother of the Gracchi” will, of course, become Cornelia’s claim to fame, and so Plutarch pivots immediately to a demonstration of the character that allowed her to achieve this title: “Cornelia then took charge of the children and the household, and she showed herself to be so sophron, child-loving, and great-souled that Tiberius was thought to have reasoned quite rightly when he chose to die in place of such a wife” (Корнелия δ’ ἀναλαβότα τοὺς παιὰς καὶ τὸν ὀἶκον, οὕτω σωφρόνα καὶ φιλότεχνον καὶ μεγαλόψυχον αὐτὴν παρέσχει, ὡστε μὴ κακῶς δῶσαι βεβουλεύσθαι τὸν Τιβέριον ἀντὶ τουτεῦτης γυναικὸς ἀποθανεῖν ἐλόμενον, Gracch. 1.6). Thus Valerius’ “such a husband” becomes for Plutarch “such a wife.” With twelve children to raise, there is no question of Cornelia taking her own life. Even so, we may recognize several traces of the model
established by those wives who did. Cornelia is *sophron*, which is the fundamental character trait of the devoted wife, and she demonstrates her ongoing partnership by assuming responsibility for the children and household in the absence of her husband. Tiberius, moreover, was said to have made his decision because he “loved his wife” (φιλοῦντα τὴν γυναῖκα), a sign of the *philia* that knit together the marriages of Camma, Porcia, and Panthea. We might assume that the feeling was mutual, though we do not find Cornelia described as *philandros*. Instead, Plutarch claims that she is *philoteknos*, loving of her children, who naturally become the exclusive object of her *philia* once Tiberius is gone. And finally, she is called *megalopsychos* (great-souled), an adjective that, like the *megalophron* that was applied to Camma, might be translated as “generous” and hint at good relations with her household servants. Plutarch, then, portrays Cornelia as a character similar to, if not identical with, his Camma and Porcia.

In *Dialogue on Love*, Plutarch claims that the *sophron* wife who feels eros for her husband will naturally resist adultery. That, of course, is the point of the story of Camma, who refuses to remarry after Sinatus’ death “even though many kings and rulers were courting her” (μνωμένον πολλόν βασιλέων καὶ δυναστῶν αὐτήν, *Amat.* 768E). In *Gracchi*, once Plutarch describes Cornelia’s character, he inserts an anecdote to establish her loyalty along the same lines: “She even refused King Ptolemy when he was offering to share his crown and was proposing marriage” (ἡ γε καὶ Πτολεμαίου τοῦ βασιλέως κοινουμένου τὸ διάδομα καὶ μνωμένου τὸν γάμον αὐτῆς ἤρνησατο, 1.7). Plutarch is our only source for Ptolemy’s offer, which has been interpreted as unhistorical and as serving “to underline the integrity of Cornelia and her family.”31 Read in the light of Camma and Porcia, however, we can see that this anecdote, though very brief, carries a meaning that is more personal than political. Cornelia’s refusal to marry Ptolemy further marks her as a devoted spouse. The refusal of both Cornelia and Camma to marry even a king—“many kings,” in Camma’s case—establishes their devotion as extreme. And Ptolemy’s offer to “share his crown” (κοινομένου τὸ διάδομα) raises the notion of partnership that is fundamental to the marriages of both Camma and Porcia. In this instance, however, the partnership is to be rejected in favor of loyalty to the existing household and children. Ptolemy’s courtship is probably a fiction, but in this situation Plutarch is once again concerned more with character than history. As with Porcia’s suicide, he must have felt justified in repeating the anecdote on slender evidence or even inventing it himself, since an idealized wife like Cornelia would certainly have refused such an offer had it actually been made.
Despite the typical character and behavior that we find in the mother of the Gracchi, we must not lose sight of the fact that Plutarch does not introduce Cornelia into the Gracchi as a character in her own right. He is writing the biography of two of her sons, and thus the noble death of her husband and her able management of the household in his absence set the stage for Tiberius and Gaius. Plutarch makes this point in the conclusion to the introduction: “She raised them so zealously that, although they were agreed to have the best natural disposition of all Romans, with respect to their virtue they appeared to have gained more through their education than their natures” (Gracch. 1.7). Thus, we see in the brief portrait of Cornelia the practical value of the uxorial devotion that was modeled for its own sake by Camma. The senior Tiberius was virtuous and might well have passed his natural qualities down to his sons, but it was their mother’s nurturing that made them into the political leaders they turned out to be. And that nurturing was available to them because of Cornelia’s extreme and enduring devotion to her husband.

Much like Porcia’s claim to partnership in her husband’s conspiracy against Caesar, Cornelia’s dedication to her marriage was in support of a larger purpose that lay beyond her household and involved her, albeit indirectly, in important historical events. Ever the teacher, Plutarch certainly hoped that his readers would admire the idealized virtue and yet grasp the practical value in the stories of all three women. In this way, Camma, Porcia, and Cornelia were made to stand alongside the great men of the Parallel Lives, whose character might be imitated even if their accomplishments could not be matched.

Notes

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2. In that volume’s conclusion, the authors reinforce a general view of Plutarch’s ethics; cf. Blomqvist 1997; Nikolaidis 1997; Walcot 1999; Beneker 2012, 17–39; Tsouvala 2014. On women following the direction of men, see Dressler in this volume.
4. Plutarch wrote about Camma before he wrote about Porcia and Cornelia. On the dating, see nn. 9 and 14.
6. On this passage, see Treggiari 1991, 219–20, and Dressler in this volume. Jerome also praises wives who were said to have committed suicide upon the deaths of their husbands (1.43–45).
7. In addition to sophrosyne, Plutarch made loving one’s husband (φιλανθρίτη) and being high-minded (μεγαλοφοροσθνη) characteristic virtues of his ideal wives.

8. The only other ancient version of Camma’s story, by Polyaenus (Strat. 39), appears to be based on Plutarch’s; see Stadter 1965, 23 and 103 n. 262; Péré-Noguès 2012, 160–61.

9. Jones 1966, 69–72, shows that Dialogue on Love was written after 96 CE, while Virtues of Women dates to ca. 115.

10. Plutarch advises fidelity to the young couple in Marriage Advice (precepts 43–44, 144B–D), but his rationale there is based on the need for the husband to maintain his reputation outside the house and sensitivity to the pain that infidelity causes the wife. See Goessler 1999, 108; Patterson 1999, 130.

11. This fact sets the anecdote apart from the version found in Virtues of Women, where Plutarch describes Camma’s character in more detail.

12. Stadter 1965, 105–6, suggests that Camma’s story was derived from a historical, rather than a fictional, source, and that Sinorix’s murder of Sinatus was likely politically motivated, though Plutarch leaves this element out in both his versions; see also Görgemanns et al. 2005, 180 n. 389. In his commentary on Dialogue on Love, Martin 1978, 530, notes that “Plutarch tells a story involving Sinatus, a tetrarch in Galatia, who is murdered by Sinorix (also a Galatian tetrarch).” Martin’s omission of Camma brings to the fore the potential historicity of this anecdote but distorts Plutarch’s use of it. Tanga 2019, 190–92, discusses the historical and literary background to the story in more detail.

13. I do not think that Camma commits suicide to avoid prosecution for the murder of Sinorix. Such a motivation would make her speech disingenuous and her actions self-serving, and they would not support Plutarch’s larger argument.

14. See again Jones 1966, 69, who dates Brutus to after 99 CE, a few years later than Dialogue on Love.


17. I follow Stadter 1999, 181 n. 27, in rejecting Sintenis’ emendation of φιλόσφορος to φιλόσπορος.

18. The introduction to the Dion-Brutus (Dion 1.3–4) establishes philosophical training as an important theme in this pair of Lives; cf. Beneker 2012, 89–90.

19. On the wife as philandros and koinonos, see Jazdzewska in this volume.

20. Panthea is also cited as an example of a loyal wife by Jerome (Adv. Iovinian. 1.45). See also Dressler in this volume.

21. Cf. Nic. Dam. FGrH 90 F99; Val. Max. 4.6.5. Delvaux 1993 argues that Plutarch probably did not read the anecdote in Valerius Maximus but found the reference in another source. (Thanks to Christopher Pelling for including this citation in his notes to Moles’ commentary.)

23. Moles 2017, 384; see also Moles 1997, 159–61, for a more detailed discussion.


25. Porcia’s active role in her own death (προήκαρτο τοῦ βίον) is typically read as a reference to her suicide in Brut. 53.5; cf. Ziegler and Gärtner 1993, ad loc. Moles 2017, 383, lists the other ancient accounts of Porcia’s death, which all give suicide as the cause, and which he suggests derive from Nicolaus.

26. For dating, see n. 9.

27. For more on the differences between the two versions, see the discussion of Tanga 2019, 195.


29. For further bibliography, see Treggiari 1991, 233–36; Hemelrijk 1999, 14 n. 28, 64 n. 28.

30. Cicero relates this anecdote twice in On Divination (1.36, 2.62), but he does not comment on the character of Tiberius or Cornelia. See, in general, Barnard 1990, 388, which argues that the anecdote “seems to be pure folklore with no possible kernel of truth.”

31. Hemelrijk 1999, 64 n. 28, summarizing the argument of Günther 1990; see also Dixon 2007, 7 n. 17. There is disagreement about which of the Ptolemies would have made the offer.

Works Cited


Goessler, L. 1999. “Advice to the Bride and Groom: Plutarch Gives a Detailed Account


