Terentia, the Temple of Vesta, and the Tabula Valeria

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In *Ad Familiares* 14.2, writing in despair to his wife Terentia, his daughter Tullia, and his son, Marcus in 58 BCE from exile in Thessalonica, Cicero states that P. Valerius informed him: *quemadmodum a Vestae ad Tabulam Valeriam ducta esses.* Taking sanctuary in the Temple, or more likely in the Atrium Vestae (Buonopane 56; Osgood 147), where her half-sister Fabia was a Vestal, Terentia was led away to the *Tabula Valeria*, presumably, to make an affidavit about property (Treggiari 66). Scholars have interpreted this troubling and mysterious incident in varying ways, raising questions about the precise location of the Tabula Valeria, the purpose of the summoning of Terentia and the authority who ordered it, and the degree to which psychological or even physical harm was imposed on Terentia, a Roman *matron* and wife of the exiled Cicero. I have several goals in this paper. First, I will explore Cicero's language in *Ad Familiares* 14.2 and in later public and political speeches where he refers to this incident in order to suggest that Terentia was subjected in public to both humiliation and physical abuse. Second, I will argue, as recent scholars now agree, that Clodius, tribune in 58 BCE and enemy of Cicero and his family, had summoned Terentia (Osgood 146-47). His official purpose of summoning Terentia may have been related to Cicero's or even to Terentia's property. However, he was most invested in continuing his hostile retaliation against Cicero, attempting to intimidate Terentia and impede her efforts to support her husband. Finally, I will discuss the crucial importance of Fabia and the Vestals in this incident, since Fabia's status as a Vestal provided the strongest protection of Terentia from Cicero's enemies but also guarded the interests of all Roman *matronae.* More broadly, Cicero's account of his wife's disgrace poignantly illuminates the crises faced by a family enduring the exile of a loyal Roman citizen and statesman.

Let us begin by looking at the Latin of Cicero's emotional account in his letter to Terentia (Handout 1): *A te quidem omnia fieri fortissime et amantissime video, nec miror; sed maereo casum eiusmodi, ut tantis tuis miseriis meae miseriae subleventur*. *Nam ad me P. Valerius, homo officiosus, scripsit, id quod ego maximo cum fletu legi, quemadmodum a Vestae ad Tabulam Valeriam ducta esses* ("Indeed for you, I see that you are doing all things most courageously and most lovingly, nor am I surprised; but I mourn the misfortune of a kind, that my miseries are alleviated only by your own great miseries. For P. Valerius, dutiful man, has written to me, this I read with the greatest weeping, how you were hauled from the Temple of Vesta to the Tabula Valeria"). Cicero places the assault on Terentia in context of their joint "miseries", *miseriae,* all created by his exile, which he refers to as *casus* ("calamity"). I note the mutuality expressed in the evocative phrase *tantis tuis miseriis meae miseriae* – the juxtaposition of his own sufferings with hers. Their *miseriae* are shared, but he feels sad that his sufferings are only bearable because she shoulders her own sufferings for his benefit. The arguments of Filippo Coarelli now appear definitive by dismissing the previous theory that *Tabula Valeria* was a "bank" and arguing instead that it was a tribunal for administering justice. The *Tabula Valeria,* a wall-painting near the tribunes' headquarters at the *Basilica Porcia*, was just west of the *Curia Hostilia* (see also Shackleton Bailey 287-288). Considering the topography of the Roman Forum (Handout 2), this magnifies the shocking nature of Clodius' actions. Terentia was sheltered by her Vestal half-sister Fabia in the Temple of Vesta, or more likely, in the Atrium Vestae, since the Temple was the sacred space where Vestals performed their official duties in secrecy. She was taken from this revered location and led through the central Roman Forum, along eastern to western parts of the Sacra Via with its public buildings and important religious sites, before many witnesses.

Clodius intended this to be publicly humiliating, and a loss of status for a respected Roman *matron* (Dixon 97; Treggiari 65-66; Buonopane 56, Osgood 147).

Was Terentia physically harmed? Cicero's use of *ducta esses* in the passive voice surely implies that she was under compulsion. In later speeches, Cicero is more explicit in use of verbs *vexo* and *rapto,* using them most often in the passive voice like *ducta esses,* to describe violence against *misera uxor* Terentia and their family by his political enemies, namely Clodius. Handout 3 shows Cicero's descriptions of the harms done especially to his wife and children (*Dom.* 59.1; *Sest.* 54.7 and 145.10; *Mil.* 87). Particularly regarding the public speeches, scholars are divided on the question of whether Cicero has exaggerated his accounts of injuries to his family as a rhetorical device to elicit sympathy. I argue that, while it is impossible to know the precise degree to which Terentia suffered physical abuse, Cicero's accounts in the letter to Terentia and in the speeches are generally overlapping and consistent in implying assault.

The wider context of political and religious events is important in considering the bullying treatment of Terentia and the possible motives behind it. According to Plutarch, *Cicero* 19-20, In 63 BCE, Terentia as wife of Cicero as consul hosted the celebrations of the Bona Dea religious festival at their home. Encouraged there by the Vestals, Terentia reported a sign to Cicero of a favorable omen from the Bona Dea, convincing him to order the death of the Catilinarian conspirators without trial. Recent scholarship has focused on this intervention of Terentia and the Vestals and also has explored their possible involvement in the circumstances surrounding Clodius' trial for *incestum* in 61 BCE and Cicero's role in it (Tatum 202-208; Lewis 141-149; Cadoux 162-179; Brennan 354-66; Osgood 123-152). In 62 BCE Clodius disguised himself as a woman in order to violate the religious mysteries of the *Bona Dea,* rites restricted to women. Clodius' political enemies attempted to prosecute him. At his trial Clodius claimed that he was

not present on the night of the alleged sacrilege. Cicero had reasons to be drawn into the trial. Cicero's convictions of the sanctity of domestic space and the importance of the religious festivals for the good of the state made Clodius' unprincipled violation of the Bona Dea unforgivable. When Cicero gave testimony that destroyed Clodius' alibi, he joined Terentia and the Vestals within a political environment that put them at great risk. They were principled in their actions in defense of the rites of the Bona Dea, of *matronae,* and of all Roman citizens.

Clodius' acquittal gave him ideal opportunities for retaliation against Cicero and Terentia. In 58 BCE Clodius as tribune of the plebs had a bill passed to outlaw anyone who had put Roman citizens to death without a trial, a bill aimed at Cicero for his condemnation of the Catilinarian conspirators in 63 BCE. Clodius passed another bill that banished Cicero by name, confiscated Cicero's possessions, had Cicero's house on the Palatine Hill in Rome burned down, and built a shrine dedicated to *Libertas* ("Liberty") in its place. Choosing exile rather than standing for a trial that would be rigged against him, a decision for which he expresses extreme remorse many times in his letters to Terentia, Cicero remained in exile for over a year, from May 58-September 57 BCE. While Clodius and his gangs ran rampant, Terentia, along with Cicero's friends and political allies, exchanged letters with Cicero and worked tirelessly to get him recalled to Rome. Terentia was most diligent about telling Cicero the people to whom he owed his thanks, but he clearly expressed his thanks to his wife most of all.

With Cicero in exile 400+ Roman miles from Italy, his property burned or confiscated, powerless to support his family but instead relying on them for his well-being, Terentia was perceived by Clodius to be a vulnerable target. He and his supporters had repeatedly used violence and intimidation to achieve their political aims. While a few scholars assume that Clodius summoned Terentia to appear before him and the tribunes about a matter relating to property, this

is an assumption without evidence. Dixon (93-120) and Treggiari (56-70) consider the multiple vexed questions about the family's financial dealings and economic challenges while living through the crises created from Cicero's exile. Whether the property, or properties, in question belonged to Terentia or to Cicero can't be determined. Terentia married Cicero, *sine manu,* with a sizable dowry. Their marriage *sine manu* meant that she retained other properties and extensive wealth that did not transfer to her husband. In her husband's exile, she maintained their properties, staff, and finances. In *Ad Fam.* 14.1.5 (Handout 4), Cicero expresses panic upon learning that Terentia was intending to sell her *vicus,* a row of houses, fearing that she was depleting her own fortunes which they may need for the well-being of their children. He repeats these concerns in *Ad Familiares* 14.2.3, suggesting that she ask their friends and allies to bear expenses instead of using her own funds. His pleas for her to rely on their friends and allies to support them financially in their struggles went unheeded. As Dixon and Treggiari point out, Terentia acted independently in controlling her own wealth and property. As Dixon states: "Subsequent references to her own holdings certify that her fortune, if at risk, survived…."

My own conviction is that Clodius' real purpose was not to question Terentia about property, her own or Cicero's. If this were the case, he might have done this privately, respecting her sanctuary in the sacred space of the Atrium Vestae. Rather, Clodius may have had several, more sinister, intentions. First, Clodius wished retaliation for Terentia's and Cicero's political and religious convictions that insisted upon his punishment for sacrilege. Second, with public humiliation and probably physical abuse of Terentia, Clodius attempted to undermine her loyalties to her husband's causes and to her dedicated efforts in support of his return to Rome (Buonopane 56). Evidence from Cicero's letters confirm that Terentia, while humiliated at the hands of Clodius, was not deterred from her efforts in favor of her husband and family. Third, Cicero's status as an

exile created serious legal complexities and consequences. Was Cicero's Roman citizenship in question? If it was, what did this mean for his marriage? Treggiari (58-60) has a fine discussion about the legal consequences of exile for a Roman husband and wife. She concludes (59): "The legal position may have been that she was a woman not married according to Roman law, but united to a man in a relationship to which they both agreed and treated as a marriage, although they lacked legal capacity." The legal complications of Cicero's exile were likely exploited by Clodius, who may have been arguing against Cicero's Roman citizenship and intensifying pressure on Terentia to stop acting as *uxor iusta* to Cicero. This would have placed his wife and children at even greater risk of financial and other personal losses.

Lastly, Terentia's decision to find shelter in the Temple of Vesta, or in the House of the Vestals, was made possible by her family connection to Vestal Fabia, Terentia's sister. By 58 BCE, Fabia was likely *Maxima*, chief Vestal, and could use her superior status to provide shelter and support for Terentia. Understanding the needs to remain in Rome to get Cicero recalled from exile, and to support her children, Terentia's decision to shelter in the temple under Fabia's protection was a powerful statement of her devotion to religion and family. We may ask why, when Clodius forcibly led Terentia from the sacred shrine of Vesta, Fabia was unable to intervene (Brennan posed this question). We may solve part of the mystery with the knowledge that Fabia, from the evidence of Cicero *Cat.* 3.9 and Orosius 6.3.1, was accused of *incestum* with Catiline in 73 BCE. Another Vestal, Licinia, was also accused, and both Fabia and Licinia were acquitted. Plutarch *Cat. Min.* 19.3 (Handout 5) attests that: "At one time he (Cato) opposed Clodius the demagogue, who was raising agitation and confusion as a prelude to great changes, and was calumniating to the people, priests and priestesses, among whom Fabia, a sister of Cicero's wife Terentia, was in danger of conviction. But Cato put Clodius to such shame that he was forced to steal away from

the city; and when Cicero thanked him, Cato told him he ought to be thankful to the city, since it was for her sake that all his public work was done." There continues to be strong scholarly support for the idea that the attack to which Plutarch refers is Fabia's prosecution for *incestum* in 73 BCE, with Clodius as prosecutor. Others insist that the context of Plutarch's description must be 61 BCE, either after Clodius' acquittal for *incestum* at the Bona Dea or even prior to his trial when Cato was at odds with Clodius. I follow those who believe Plutarch's account that Clodius, although he would have been only 19 or so in 73 BCE, was, indeed, Fabia's prosecutor. She was absolved from the charge of *incestum*, as perhaps her accusers were principally interested in calling out the crimes and moral depravities of Catiline rather than in accusing a Vestal of an unforgivable religious offense. Even though Fabia was absolved, the seriousness of the charge against her may have impacted her status and authority. Both Fabia and Clodius were charged with *incestum.* Both were acquitted. However, if Clodius was the prosecutor of Fabia and she was absolved from wrongdoing, this may have left him especially bitter when he was charged with the same crime of *incestum* in 61 BCE. Fabia's ultimate acquittal may not have released her from loss of reputation and potential harm from enemies such as Clodius. Whatever the risks involved, Terentia and Fabia ensured that their voices were heard in political and religious issues. Fabia was unwavering in her support for Terentia and Cicero and shared their devotions to religion and family. Clodius' attacks on Cicero, Terentia, and Fabia were, ultimately, far worse for Cicero than they were for Terentia and Fabia.

In conclusion, I hope this paper has highlighted a few of the many crises faced by Cicero and his family during his painful exile. The marriage of Terentia and Cicero did not endure. But in the most distressing and challenging year of Cicero's exile, theirs was definitively a partnership of joint interests, of mutual support and trust in economic, political, religious, and family unity.