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CAECILIUS TIDAS AND METELLA IN CATULLUS' POEM XXXV?

Abstract: In our opinion, Tidas, a Roman poet from the Neoteric circle, may be the same person as Caecilius, an unknown personal friend of Catullus and the author of an unfinished, although acclaimed poem about the Phrygian *Magna Mater*. If this identification is correct, then Caecilius' fiancée, who is called "girl more learned than Sappho's Muse" (*Sapphica puella Musa doctior*) in poem XXXV by Catullus, must be identified with Metella, the beloved girl of Tidas. The identity of both pairs is securely confirmed by a correction of the doubtful word *misellae* (it is a banal deformation of *Metellae* 'of Metella') in the Catullan text. Our conclusion is that the Roman poet Attius Caecilius Tidas was related to the *Caecilii* family from Novum Comum and, like most neoterics, came from the Cisalpine Gaul.

Tidas (or perhaps Tida¹) is one of the most mysterious poets of the Neoteric circle². Comparatively little is known about his life, writings and position among the *poetae novi*. Apuleius (*Apol.* 10) reports that he wrote love poetry to a Metella under the Greek name of Perilla, just like Catullus did the same to Clodia under the pseudonym Lesbia. Most elegists of the Augustean epoch (e.g. Cornelius Gallus, Albius Tibullus, Propertius) follow this way of behaviour, as documented by Apuleius (*Apol.* 10: *eadem igitur opera accusent C. Catullum, quod Lesbiam pro Clodia nominarit, et Tictimam similiter, quod quae Metella erat Perillam scripserit, et Propertium, qui Cynthiam dicat, Hostiam dissimulet, et Tibullum, quod ei sit Plania in animo, Delia in uersu*).

¹ The Latin grammarians register two archaic masculine forms ending with *-as*, namely *paricidas* (= Class. Lat. *parricida*) and *hosticapas*. It is not impossible that the Latin language inherited two different Indo-European formations ending with *-as* and *-a*, respectively, and subsequently the latter one was generalized, see J. Safarewicz, *An Outline of the Historical Grammar of the Latin Language*, Warszawa 1952, p. 125 (In Polish). It is uncertain, however, whether the cognomen *Tida(s)* is of Latin origin or not. In this paper we prefer to use the name Tidas with reference to the neoteric poet.

² See especially N. Scivoletto, "Tida, poeta novus", [in:] *Poesia latina in frammenti. Miscellanea filologica*, ed. G. Puccioni, Genova 1974, pp. 201-211.

Ovid (*Tristia* II 433-438) quotes the by-name of the poet in gen. sg. *Ticidae*, mentioning him among other neoterics:

Quid referam Ticidae, quid Memmi carmen, apud quos
 rebus adest nomen nominibusque pudor?
 Cinna quoque his comes est, Cinnaque procacior Anser,
 et leve Cornifici parque Catonis opus,
 Et quorum libris modo dissimulata Perillae
 nomine, nunc legitur dicta Metella suo.

(Why allude to the verse of Tidas or of Memmius, in whom things are named – with names devoid of shame? With them Cinna too belongs and Anser, more wanton than Cinna, and the light poems of Cornificius and of Cato, and those in whose books Metella is now disguised beneath the name of Perilla nad now referred to with her own³).

Ovid confirms the information of Apuleius. Tidas, who referred to his beloved girl as Perilla, is listed first. Other writers of the neoteric circle, who subsequently called her by her own name Metella, come later. Metella, the beloved girl of Tidas, has been conjecturally identified with a notorious adulteress known from Cicero (*Ad Att.* XI, 23.3; XII, 52.2; XIII, 7.1), and that adulteress was identified with the daughter of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer and Clodia (so recently E. Courtney⁴, following F. Münzer, D. R. Shackleton Bailey, T. P. Wiseman), who indicate here an interesting case of ‘like mother, like daughter’⁵.

The poet is usually identified with an *equus* Lucius Ticida, who when bringing supplies to Caesar’s army in Africa in 46 BC was caught and apparently executed by the Pompeian Metellus Scipio (*Bell. Afr.* 44, 1, 46, 3). This identification is possible, but far from being certain. On the basis of the Priscianian fragment of Tidas’ *hymenaeus* K. T. Witzcak suggests that the name (*praenomen*) of Tidas was Attius⁶. If this suggestion would be correct, then the poet should be a different person than L. Ticida. The former might be a relative of the latter, perhaps a brother or son⁷. Unfortunately, our

³ See Ovid, *Tristia, Ex Ponto*, with an English translation by A. L. Wheeler, 2nd edition, revised by G. P. Goold, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London 1996, p. 86 (Latin text) and 87 (English translation).

⁴ *The Fragmentary Latin Poets*, edited with commentary by E. Courtney, Oxford 1993, pp. 228-229.

⁵ On the life, career and activities of Clodia, the wife of Q. Caecilius Metellus Celer, see M. R. Skinner, "Clodia Metelli", *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 113 (1983), pp. 273-287.

⁶ K. T. Witzcak, "The Praenomen of Tidas", *Eikasmos. Quaderni Bolognesi di Filologia Classica* 8 (1997), pp. 191-193.

⁷ Cf. F. Münzer, *L. Ticida*, REnc. B. VIa, pp. 844-846; H. Bardon, *La littérature latine inconnue*, vol. 1, Paris 1952, pp. 352-353.

knowledge is very restricted. We do not know if they originated from the same family (*gens*). The relatively rare nickname *Ticida(s)* may suggest a relationship. However, the *nomen gentilicium* is unknown in both cases and therefore the question is still open.

Describing the life and works of Tigidas, the Roman poet from the Neoteric circle, one important fact made us wonder: why Catullus, whose work remained practically undamaged, does not mention Tigidas at all? After all the poet from Verona with great affection names other Neoterics: he addresses three poems to Caius Licinius Calvus (c. XIV, L, XCVI) and in another place he speaks about him with high esteem (c. LIII). He also addresses Quintus Cornificius as a true friend (c. XXXVIII). In one poem he treats Caius Helvius Cynna as a comrade (c. X, 29-30), in another one he extols to the skies his epyllion titled *Smyrna* (c. XCV). He probably mentions Publius Valerius Cato in c. XCV (according to the likely speculation of some researchers, who fill the gap in the transmission). Of course, there may be a possibility that Tigidas' absence in Catullus' poems is caused by coincidence or circumstance unknown to us⁸. However, there also remains a question to be taken under consideration that Tigidas might have appeared at the Veronian poet not into his name (*praenomen*) or nickname (*cognomen*), but rather under his family name (*nomen gentile vel gentilicium*). Yet Caius Licinius Calvus is mentioned three times under his nickname *Calvus* (c. XIV. 2, XCVI. 2: voc. sg. *Calve*; LIII. 3: nom. sg. *Calvos*) and two times under his family name (c. L. 5 & 8: voc. sg. *Licini*)⁹. It seems that this line of research may become successful, for in Catullus' poem XXXV there appears an unknown poet called Caecilius (therefore related to the well-known Roman family: *gens Caecilia*), author of an unfinished, although acclaimed poem about the Phrygian *Magna Mater*. In the Latin literature manuals Caecilius is usually described as one of the *neoterici*. The possibility that Tigidas is disguised under this family name – as we are aware of – has not been examined. Three non-trifle facts appear to be evident in identifying Tigidas as the Catullian Caecilius.

Firstly, the poet Caecilius loves with reciprocity a girl, who was conversant with poetry and who Catullus describes as „Sapphica puella / Musa doctior” (c. XXXV, 16-17). It is well known that Tici-

⁸ K. T. Witzcak, "Ovid's Letter to Perilla (Tristia III 7)", *Filomata* No. 435-436 (1996), 126-127 (in Polish), tried to explain the absence of Metella in the works of Caius Valerius Catullus, assuming that she was a kinswoman (perhaps a daughter) of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer, the deceived husband of Klodia-Lesbia. Metella treated the Veronian poet as *persona non grata* and Catullus did the same to her. Now we prefer to consider Metella to be the same person as the praised *puella docta* in c. XXXV (see below).

⁹ Cf. M. N. Wetmore, *Index verborum Catullianus*, Hildesheim 1996, p. 13 & 53.

das in his poems under a Greek name *Perilla* praised a *Metella* who wrote poems herself¹⁰. This cannot be just a matter of coincidence.

Secondly, the *Caecilii* family name and *Tidas* nickname can be easily connected to each other, for the *Caecilii* family from *Novum Comum* (the birthplace of *Catullus*' friend) was very large and extended. It is worth mentioning the fact that both *Plinius*'s where born there, i.e. *Pliny Older* (C. *Plinius Secundus Maior*) and his nephew *Pliny Younger* (C. *Plinius Caecilius Secundus Minor*), who even after being adopted kept his family name *Caecilius* as one of his nicknames. The highest rank of state attained of course this line of the *Caecilii* descent, which adopted the surname *Metelli*¹¹. *Metella*, *Tidas*' beloved girl, was undoubtedly related to this family line. A common family name does not presuppose, however, that there was a relationship between the lovers. Nevertheless *Tidas*' personage fits perfectly into the picture of *Catullus*' poet-friend.

Thirdly, the text of poem XXXV might have contained (after a small emendation) the confirmation of the identity of *Tidas* and the *Catullus*' *Caecilius*. It is known that scientists for long have been raising the query: why does *Caecilius*' lover, the "girl more learned than *Sappho*'s *Muse*"¹² appear anonymously? The possibility that her name could have been modified by a mediaeval copyist has never been taken into consideration. Meanwhile, it will be enough to change the unclear in the context (and at the same time questionable) word *misellae* (codices contain this reading only) into *Metellae* to receive the text, which we allow ourselves to quote in whole, adding the translation by *Guy Lee* with the consequent change of "the poor thing's marrow" into "Metella's marrow".

Carmen XXXV

Poetae tenero, meo sodali,
velim Caecilio, papyre, dicas
Veronam veniat, Novi relinquens
Comi moenia Lariumque litus.
nam quasdam volo cogitationes

¹⁰ G. Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy*, London 1996, p. 50, describes *Metella-Perilla* in the following way when he speaks about the neoterics: „We know that they were roughly contemporaries and that some of them were personal friends of *Catullus*. There was a lady among them, who was celebrated in the poems of her friends under a pseudonym, *Perilla*, and wrote verses under her real name, *Metella*”

¹¹ Cf. K. Zeigler, W. Sontheimer (eds.), *Der Kleine Pauly. Lexikon der Antike*, vol. 1, Stuttgart 1964, pp. 985-989. See also M. Cary et alii, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford 1957, pp. 151-152, s.v. *Caecilia* (1-3) and *Caecilius* (1-6), pp. 562-563, s.v. *Metellus* (1-11).

¹² The translation is quoted after G. Lee, see *The Poems of Catullus*, edited with an Introduction, Translation and brief notes by G. Lee, Oxford, New York 1991, p. 37.

amici accipiat sui meique.
quare, si sapiet, viam vorabit,
quamvis candida milies puella
euntem revocet, manusque collo
ambas iniciens roget morari,
quae nunc, si mihi vera nuntiantur,
illum deperit impotente amore.
nam quo tempore legit incohatam
Dindymi Dominam, ex eo **Metellae**
ignes interiorem edunt medullam.
ignosco tibi, Sapphica puella
Musa doctior: est enim venuste
Magna Caecilio incohata Mater.

App. crit. 14 *Metellae* scripsimus : *misellae* codd. et edd.

Poem 35

I'd like you, papyrus, to tell my comrade
Caecilius, the tender poet,
To come to Verona, leaving Novum
Comum's walls and the Larian shore.
I want him to consider certain
Thoughts of a friend of his and mine.
So if he's wise he'll eat up the road,
Though a pretty girl should call him back
A thousand times and laying both
Hands on his neck should beg him stay.
There's one now, if I'm rightly informed,
Dying of desperate love for him.
For ever since the day she read
His unfinished *Lady of Dindymus*
Fires have been eating **Metella's** marrow.
And I don't blame you, girl more learned
Than Sappho's Muse. Caecilius' *Great*
Mother is charmingly unfinished.

We must admit that the term *misella* „poor little thing” in relation to a girl, who understands poetry, who has a personal poetic talent, who loves and is loved is completely inappropriate¹³. The fact

¹³ It is worth mentioning that all the modern Polish translators of Catullus' poetry (namely A. Świderek in 1956; J. Sękowski in 1983; J. Wójcicki in 1990) omit the word *misellae* in their translations. We assume them to accept the term in question as inappropriate in this context.

that fires of love have burst (literally “have eaten, bitten”) inside her has no meaning since love for Catullus, especially reciprocal love (as in this case), is not referred to as a distress, but, on the contrary, as a feeling mostly desired and pleasurable. Thus the correction is justified. If „Sapphica puella / Musa doctior” in Catullus’ original text was Metella, then identifying Tigidas with the Catullus’ Caecilius cannot be questioned. A high probability exists that Tigidas and Metella appear together in poem XXXV by Catullus. Of course, it cannot be claimed with certainty that the poet Tigidas was related to the *Caecili* family from Novum Comum (today Como), but such a conclusion seems highly convincing. We therefore assume that (Attius) Caecilius Tigidas, like most neoterics, came from the Cisalpine Gaul.