CAECILIUS TICIDAS AND METELLA IN CATULLUS’ POEM XXXV?

Abstract: In our opinion, Ticidas, 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 Ticidas. 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 Catullean text. Our conclusion is that the Roman poet Attius Caecilius Ticidas was related to the Caecili family from Novum Comum and, like most neoteries, came from the Cisalpine Gaul.

Ticidas (or perhaps Ticida\textsuperscript{1}) is one of the most mysterious poets of the Neoteric circle\textsuperscript{2}. 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 Lesbiae pro Clodia nominarit, et Tici­dam similiter, quod quae Metellae erat Perillam scripsisset, et Prop­pertium, qui Cynthiae dicat, Hostiam dissimulat, et Tibullum, quod ei sit Plania in animo, Delia in uersu). \footnote{The Latin grammarians register two archaic masculine forms ending with -\textit{as}, namely \textit{paricidas} (= Class. Lat. \textit{parricida}) and \textit{hosticapas}. It is not impossible that the Latin language inherited two different Indo-European formations ending with -\textit{as} and -\textit{a}, respectively, and subsequently the latter one was generalized, see J. Safarewicz, \textit{An Outline of the Historical Grammar of the Latin Language}, Warszawa 1952, p. 125 (In Polish). It is uncertain, however, whether the cognomen \textit{Ticida(s)} is of Latin origin or not. In this paper we prefer to use the name Ticidas with reference to the neoteric poet.} 

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 Ticidas 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. Ticidas, 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 Ticidas, 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 eques 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 Ticidas’ hymenaeus K. T. Witczak suggests that the name (praenomen) of Ticidas 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

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4 The Fragmentary Latin Poets, edited with commentary by E. Courtney, Oxford 1993, pp. 228-229.
knowledge is very restricted. We do not know if they originated from the same family \textit{(gens)}. The relatively rare nickname \textit{Ticida(s)} may suggest a relationship. However, the \textit{nomen gentilicum} is unknown in both cases and therefore the question is still open.

Describing the life and works of Ticidas, the Roman poet from the Neoteric circle, one important fact made us wonder: why Catullus, whose work remained practically undamaged, does not mention Ticidas 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 \textit{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 Ticidas’ absence in Catullus’ poems is caused by coincidence or circumstance unknown to us\(^8\). However, there also remains a question to be taken under consideration that Ticidas might have appeared at the Veronian poet not into his name \textit{(praenomen)} or nickname \textit{(cognomen)}, but rather under his family name \textit{(nomen gentile vel gentilicium)}. Yet Caius Licinius Calvus is mentioned three times under his nickname \textit{Calvus} (c. XIV. 2, XCVI. 2: voc. sg. \textit{Calve}; LIII. 3: nom. sg. \textit{Calvos}) and two times under his family name (c. L. 5 & 8: voc. sg. \textit{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: \textit{gens Caecilia}), author of an unfinished, although acclaimed poem about the Phrygian \textit{Magna Mater}. In the Latin literature manuals Caecilius is usually described as one of the \textit{neoterici}. The possibility that Ticidas 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 Ticidas 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 doctor” (c. XXXV, 16-17). It is well known that Tici-

\(^8\) K. T. Witczak, “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 \textit{persona non grata} and Catullus did the same to her. Now we prefer to consider Metella to be the same person as the praised \textit{puella docta} in c. XXXV (see below).

das in his poems under a Greek name Perilla praised a Metella who wrote poems herself\textsuperscript{10}. This cannot be just a matter of coincidence.

Secondly, the Caecilii family name and Ticidas 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\textsuperscript{11}. Metella, Ticidas’ 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 Ticidas’ 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 Ticidas 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”\textsuperscript{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”.

\begin{quote}
Carmen XXXV

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

\textsuperscript{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"


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 inappropriate. The fact
that fires of love have burst (literally “have eatten, 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 Ticidas with the Catullus’ Caecilius cannot be questioned. A high probability exists that Ticidas and Metella appear together in poem XXXV by Catullus. Of course, it cannot be claimed with certainty that the poet Ticidas was related to the Caecilii family from Novum Comum (today Como), but such a conclusion seems highly convincing. We therefore assume that (Attius) Caecilius Ticidas, like most neoterics, came from the Cisalpine Gaul.