

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

VALERIUS CATO, FURIUS BIBACULUS, AND TICIDAS

One of the many problems with which we are faced when attempting to understand the group of poets contemporary with Catullus, often referred to as "neoterics" or "new poets,"¹ is to determine the importance of the grammarian Valerius Cato. The evidence for Cato's relationship with these poets originates mainly from one source, the *De grammaticis* of Suetonius, namely: "P. Valerius Cato . . . docuit multos et nobiles visusque est peridoneus praeceptor maxime ad poeticam tendentibus ut quidem adparere vel his versiculis potest 'Cato grammaticus Latina Siren / Qui solus legit ac facit poetas.' is scripsit praeter grammaticos libellos etiam poemata ex quibus praecipue probantur Lydia et Diana. Lydiae Ticida meminit 'Lydia doctorum maxima cura liber.' Dianae Cinna 'Saecula permaneat nostri Dictynna Catonis.' vixit ad extremam senectam sed in summa pauperie et paene inopia, abditus modico gurgustio postquam Tusculana villa creditoribus cesserat, ut auctor est Bibaculus . . ."² 'Catonis modo, Galle, Tusculanum / Tota creditor urbe venditabat. / Mirati sumus unicum magistrum, / Summum grammaticum, optimum poetam / Omnes solvere posse quaestiones, / Unum difficile expedire nomen. / En cor Zenodoti en iecur Cratetis'" (11) and "Eosdem litteratores vocitatos Messalla Corvinus in quadam epistula ostendit, non esse sibi dicens rem cum Furio Bibaculo, ne cum Ticida quidem aut litteratore

Catone: significat enim haud dubie Valerium Catonem poetam simul grammaticumque notissimum" (4).

From these testimonies we can make the following relevant statements: (1) that Cato was a teacher of many distinguished pupils; (2) that he alone created poets;³ (3) that he composed a *Diana* (*Dictynna*) welcomed by Cinna; (4) that he wrote a *Lydia* praised by Ticidas; (5) that he was the subject of two epigrams written by Bibaculus; and (6) that he was linked by Messalla Corvinus with Ticidas and Bibaculus.

The purpose of this article is to examine the widely held belief which has arisen from these data that Cato was the leader and teacher of Catullus and his fellow poets.⁴ Firstly, let us consider Cato as a teacher and creator of poets. It is by no means clear from the testimonies of Suetonius who were the pupils of Cato and who were the poets he influenced, for no mention is made of any of their names.⁵ What in fact are we to make of the term *solus* in the anonymous verses on Cato? If it is interpreted in a literal sense,⁶ it follows that Cato must have been the teacher of *all* notable poets of the era. Therefore, if Cato were the teacher of Catullus, he would also presumably on this analogy have been the teacher of Lucretius! It is more likely that the tone of the verses is one of humorous exaggeration.⁷

Secondly, it is sometimes maintained that

1. The terms "neoterics" and "new poets" in quotation marks will be used loosely to describe the poets grouped around Catullus. A more accurate definition of the terms than is usually given appears below (n. 13).

2. Only one of the epigrams of Bibaculus is quoted here as being of importance.

3. For the meaning of *facit* in the sense of "establish the reputation of," see G. L. Hendrickson, "Horace and Valerius Cato," *CP*, XII (1917), 331.

4. This view has become so traditional that documentation is largely unnecessary. However, the following may be consulted: R. Helm in *RE*, Ser. 2, VII (1948), 2348; Schanz-Hosius, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* (Munich, 1927), I, 288; C. J. Fordyce, *Catullus* (Oxford, 1961), p. 358; E. Castorina, *Questioni neoteriche* (Florence, 1968), pp. 53 ff.,

articles in *OCD*, s.vv. "Neoterici" and "Valerius Cato." All these works were written after the objections voiced by R. P. Robinson, "Valerius Cato," *TAPA*, LIV (1923), 98-116.

5. It has sometimes been inferred from Suetonius that Ticidas and Bibaculus were pupils of Cato.

6. Cf. D. F. S. Thomson, "Catullus and Cicero: Poetry and the Criticism of Poetry," *CW*, LX (1967), 229, who believes that there was just one school of *poetae*, the *collegium poetarum*, whose head was Cato.

7. Cf. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 103. This may also be the tone of the epigram quoted on Cato, esp. of the verses "unicum magistrum, / Summum grammaticum, optimum poetam," which appears similar to the spirit of Poem 26 of Catullus (cf. n. 15).

the *Diana* was the first poem of its type in Latin literature⁸ and served as a model for the pupils of Cato. However, since the poem was probably an epyllion,⁹ it appears unlikely that Cato was the originator of this genre, but rather Cinna at the instigation of Parthenius.¹⁰ In this case Cinna did not follow Cato but Cato, Cinna.

Thirdly, we are told that a poem of Cato was praised by Ticidas, but unfortunately the latter is an even more shadowy figure than Cato, so that his relationship with the "neoterics" is conjectural.¹¹

Finally, the problem of Furius Bibaculus: the quotation by Suetonius of a fragment of a letter of Messalla Corvinus in which Messalla states that he will have nothing to do with Cato, Bibaculus, and Ticidas has generally been interpreted as an important literary document of the period. But is the link necessarily literary?¹² Although we have seen a literary relationship between Cato and Ticidas, we must also be able to establish a similar association between Cato and Bibaculus. As far as we can tell, Bibaculus did not write any of the kinds of poetry written by Cato, but the relationship is assumed to exist because both poets are believed to be "neoterics."¹³ It is certainly true that to some degree the poetry of Bibaculus resembles that of Catullus:

firstly, both poets gained a reputation as writers of iambic;¹⁴ and, secondly, Bibaculus composed epigrams in the hendecasyllabic meter, one of which has close affinities with a poem of Catullus.¹⁵ These features, however, are not exclusive to the poets usually regarded as "neoterics," for the hendecasyllabic meter was used by Varro in his *Menippean Satires* (Frgs. 49, 101, 565–68, Buecheler), and in invective Bibaculus was linked not only with Catullus but also with Lucilius and Horace.¹⁶ One would hardly speak of Lucilius, Varro, and Horace as "neoterics," therefore why of Bibaculus on this evidence?

In conclusion we can state the following points that make difficult or tend to refute the view that Cato was the leader and teacher of the "neoterics": (1) that as far as we know Cato was not the pioneer in any of the kinds of poetry written by the "neoterics"; (2) that we do not know the names of any of his pupils; (3) that we do not know when he acquired his fame as a grammarian;¹⁷ (4) that his link with Ticidas and Bibaculus is not necessarily a link with "neoteric" poetry; and (5) that there is no acknowledgment of Cato as leader and teacher by any of the "neoterics."¹⁸

N. B. CROWTHER

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

8. Cf. L. Alfonsi, *Poetae novi: Storia di un movimento poetico* (Como, 1945), p. 37.

9. I.e., a short poem in hexameters in the manner of the *Zmyrna* of Cinna.

10. Cf. W. V. Clausen, "Callimachus and Latin Poetry," *GRBS*, V (1964), 188.

11. Even the identity of Ticidas is not certain; cf. F. Münzer, *RE*, Ser. 2, VI (1936), 845 f. We have evidence that he wrote erotic poetry (*Ov. Tr.* 2. 433) and a *Hymenaeus* (Frag. 1 M.).

12. Cf. G. Brugnoli, "Grammatici novi," *RCCM*, IV (1962), 154–62, who suggests a scholastic and grammatical link.

13. On the respective poetry of Cato and Bibaculus, see Schanz-Hosius, *op. cit.*, pp. 287–89, 290–92. I have shown elsewhere ("ὁ νεώτερος," *Poetae Novi, Cantores Euphorionis*, to be published in *CQ*) that the terms νεώτεροι and poetae novi were used by the ancients solely to denote these poets who composed the short, hexameter poem (the epyllion). We have seen that Cato probably falls into this category, but there is no evidence for such a poem by Bibaculus. On the contrary, it seems that Bibaculus may have composed epic. The scholiasts on Horace *Satires* 1. 10. 36–37 and 2. 5. 40–41 (with the

exception of Porphyryon on the first passage) identify the bombastic epic poet with Bibaculus, but their comments have often been challenged (cf. N. Rudd, *The Satires of Horace* [Cambridge, 1966], p. 289). One of the main objections is that it is inconsistent for a "neoteric" poet to have written epic. Yet because of the absence of such important genres as the epyllion and erotic poetry the adherence of Bibaculus to the "neoteric" movement is far from certain.

14. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 4. 34, Quint. 10. 1. 96, Diom., *GL*, I, 485, 15–17.

15. I.e., Frag. 2 (M.) quoted above. Cf. W. A. Heidel, "Catullus and Furius Bibaculus," *CR*, XV (1901), 215–17.

16. Cf. the references given in n. 14.

17. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 102, suggests an arbitrary date of 60–50 B.C. He ascribes Cato's influence to a younger group of poets, Cornelius Gallus, Messalla Corvinus, and possibly Vergil.

18. It is possible that the Cato in Catullus (Poem 56) was Valerius Cato, but this poem has no obvious literary overtones. On the other hand, cf. the literary references in Catullus to, e.g., Calvus, Cinna, and Cornificius. The attempt of Leo to fill the lacuna in the last distich of 95 with the name *Catonis* obviously depends on an a priori assumption.