

## CALVUS EX NANNEIANIS<sup>1</sup>

Cic. *Att.* 1. 16. 5. Nosti calvum<sup>2</sup> ex Nanneianis illum, illum laudatorem meum, de cuius oratione erga me honorifica ad te scripseram. . . .

IN a recent article (*CQ* xviii [1968], 296–9) Dr. T. P. Wiseman has (a) vigorously attacked the almost universally accepted view that the person to whom Cicero here alludes is Crassus, urging instead that the villain of the piece is C. Licinius Macer Calvus,<sup>3</sup> and (b) proposed *veavlaïs* for the manuscript reading *Nanneianis* with which he would, I imagine, be unhappy, as others have been before him, even if he accepted the identification with Crassus.

It is with the first of these problems that I am concerned. On the second, Wiseman may indeed be right to reject the explanation of *ex Nanneianis* which Manutius<sup>4</sup> offered on the assumption that Crassus is our man. But for present purposes it is sufficient to point out that rejection of this theory of Manutius does not entail rejection of the identification with Crassus. It would do so only if there existed a *self-evident* emendation or alternative explanation of the phrase which ruled Crassus out, and this can hardly be said to be the case. As matters stand, we have first to settle the identity question and then see what (if anything) can be done about *ex Nanneianis*.

The identification with Crassus rests, of course, on the *oratio honorifica*; the speech of Crassus reported at *Att.* 1. 14. 3 seems to fill the bill admirably, and this clearly constitutes a strong *prima facie* case, though I agree with Wiseman that we cannot absolutely exclude the possibility that a lost letter mentioned a similar speech by someone else, so that we *are* entitled to reject the traditional view if sufficiently strong arguments can be brought against it. I further concede that if Wiseman's arguments could be accepted without qualification they would indeed be powerful enough. In my judgement, however, a great deal of qualification seems to be necessary.

Wiseman brings two objections, or groups of objections, against the traditional view. One of these concerns the word *calvus* (or *Calvus*) itself, which he insists must here be a proper name, founding this contention mainly<sup>5</sup> on the belief that Cicero could not possibly have used the adjective. The adjective is

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Professor O. Skutsch for comments and advice.

<sup>2</sup> Or *Calvum*. Some editors print with a capital C although they take the phrase to refer to Crassus. The problem, of course, would not have presented itself to Cicero.

<sup>3</sup> Which would seem inescapable if Crassus is out and the reading *calvum* is sound. It has in fact been doubted by some (e.g. Tyrrell, who offered *callidum*), but there is no need to reject it.

<sup>4</sup> I do not repeat Manutius's explanation here; it may be found in Wiseman's article and in the standard commentaries. When I say that Wiseman may be right to reject it, it is with the broad objection that the theory is too far-fetched that I have some sympathy. Wiseman's subsidiary point, the

spelling discrepancy between our passage and *Comm. Pet.* 9, should carry no weight. Obscure proper names can suffer far worse than this at the hands of scribes.

<sup>5</sup> He is also troubled by the lack of any other evidence that the adjective was applicable to Crassus. Although he does not seem to lay much stress on this point, it is perhaps worth while suggesting that the argument may have even less force than he believes. Corroboration is likely to be found in only two authors, Cicero himself and Plutarch. It should therefore be pointed out that Plutarch does not seem to mention the (notorious) baldness of Julius Caesar; neither (unless I have missed or forgotten something) does Cicero. This seems to rob the argument from silence of most of its force.

nowhere else attested in Cicero's writings, and Wiseman maintains that this is because the word was too coarse for him. But even without pressing the unimpeachable (and equally isolated) instance of *calvitium* at *T.D.* 3. 62—though I think that this may damage Wiseman's case more than he believes—I consider this to be an overstatement. In fact neither Wiseman nor H. R. W. Smith,<sup>1</sup> whom Wiseman follows, can go so far as to say that the word is a downright obscenity; it is 'something approaching an obscenity' (Wiseman), 'not quite an obscenity, but . . . a rough's word, very much at home in an obscene context' (Smith). And whatever overtones the word may from time to time have acquired, it does seem to have been the standard adjective for the not uncommon condition which it describes; so that unless the Romans really were incapable of even thinking of baldness without sniggering, it seems hard to believe that the word *calvus* was absolutely taboo. It is of course true that the adjective here is likely to be used abusively rather than purely descriptively; but it seems hardly unreasonable to suggest that among the Romans, as with us, baldness could be regarded as a fit object of mockery simply *qua* physical disfigurement, without any sordid implications. And if this was indeed the case, the rarity of *calvus* in the politer<sup>2</sup> and more dignified literary forms may largely be accounted for.

I am not, therefore, convinced that the use of the adjective *calvus* would necessarily convict Cicero of any great degree of coarseness. But I would also ask whether we need exert ourselves to acquit him. He could, for example, call an enemy *maialis* in what purports to be a speech delivered in the senate;<sup>3</sup> in the light of this, ought we really to press for the exclusion of *calvus* from an angry private letter, even if Wiseman is right about the nature of the word?

Wiseman's other group of objections consists of a number of points at which the cap, as designed by Cicero, does not seem to fit Crassus. Wiseman agrees that Crassus might well have been prepared to play a part in corrupting the jury at Clodius' trial, but he urges that Crassus' methods would not have been so amateurish as those ascribed by Cicero to *calvus ex Nanneianis*. Crassus would not 'compromise himself so openly in so controversial an affair'; the traditional view presents us with 'an elderly consular behaving grotesquely out of character'. Much of what Wiseman says along these lines can be accepted as fair comment,<sup>4</sup> but I am not sure that his conclusion necessarily follows. For as arguments against the identification with Crassus these points derive their force from the underlying premiss that the letter offers us an objective and

<sup>1</sup> *U.C.P.C.A.* ii (1951), 157 n. 129.

<sup>2</sup> And I do not see that we need invariably regard it as a near-obscenity even in impolite literary forms. Need there, for example, be anything sinister about Plaut. *Amph.* 462?

At this point, a piece of comparative lexicography may be interesting. Gk. *φαλακρός* is used in technical writing (Hippocrates); by Herodotus (in ethnographical vein); and in comedy. On the other hand it seems to be avoided by the orators, by the tragedians (except when writing satyr-plays), and by Thucydides and Xenophon. One might infer that Plato would never have used the word unless absolutely compelled to do

so by exigencies of subject-matter; but the inference would be wrong, cf. the little bald tinker at *Rep.* 495 e.

<sup>3</sup> *Pis.* 19, cf. R. G. M. Nisbet ad loc.

<sup>4</sup> But not, I think, all; for example, does the letter explicitly claim that *calvus ex Nanneianis* did his dirty work openly? Cicero claims to have certain knowledge, but that is not the same thing. Had someone asked him *how* he knew, I suspect that the word *comperi* (cf. *Att.* 1. 14. 5) might have featured in his reply. I also wonder whether Wiseman does not treat the rhetorical tetra-colon *accessiuit . . . dedit* with more respect than it deserves.

reliable account of what happened. In fact, however, we may be dealing with a wild and irresponsible libel. Not perhaps totally wild; there may have been a strong and credible rumour that Crassus had interfered with the jury. But the *details* of the transaction, as presented by Cicero, may in great part arise from a mixture of optimistic credulity (Cicero (a) would be eager to believe the most lurid explanation of a verdict which he took as a personal insult<sup>1</sup> and (b) disliked Crassus intensely)<sup>2</sup> and sheer malicious invention. For example, the *noctes certarum mulierum atque adolescentulorum nobilium introductiones* may simply exemplify the tendency of wild and unfounded sexual allegations to accumulate around almost any sort of scandal; while the 'single slave, and from a gladiatorial school to boot' seems to me suspiciously suggestive of the invective writer's stock-in-trade. The whole brilliant narrative (which Cicero must have enjoyed writing despite his mortification) possesses, I think, just that larger-than-life quality which one associates with some of the stories found in the *in Pisonem* (and elsewhere in invective); stories 'meant to cause pain or hilarity, not to be believed'.<sup>3</sup> It all seems a little too good to be true—of Crassus or of anyone else. Implausibility need hardly be a problem; it may be half the fun.

In my submission, then, Wiseman has not refuted the traditional view. It would, of course, be rash to claim that I have reinstated this view beyond all shadow of doubt, or that Wiseman's theory has nothing at all to be said for it.<sup>4</sup> The problem involves the weighing of conflicting probabilities, and in issues of this kind there is often more than ordinary scope for legitimate disagreement. Nevertheless, the *oratio honorifica* still seems to me to be much the most reliable pointer which the passage offers us; and it points to the (bald) triumvir M. Licinius Crassus.<sup>5</sup>

University College London

P. W. FULFORD-JONES

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Historia* xv (1966), 65–73, esp. 72–3.

<sup>2</sup> Balsdon, in *Cicero* (ed. T. A. Dorey), p. 190, suggests that there were 'only three men for whom Cicero felt genuine hatred', and that Crassus was one of them. I would not dissent.

<sup>3</sup> R. G. M. Nisbet, pp. 196–7 of his edn. of *in Pisonem*.

<sup>4</sup> Though perhaps Wiseman overestimates the positive attractions of Licinius Calvus. There is certainly nothing intrinsically implausible in the suggestion that he might

have supported Clodius in 61, but (if one discounts the present passage) I know of no clear evidence concerning his precise political affiliations at this date, and he appears only once in Cicero's correspondence (a brief mention as Macer Licinius at *QF* 2. 4. 1, 56 B.C.) before the Civil War. This silence seems somewhat surprising if Calvus was regarded as an active and effective Clodian as early as 61.

<sup>5</sup> As for *ex Nanneianis*, Manutius may after all have been right. But perhaps text and/or explanation are now irretrievable.