

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

MACROBIUS AND THE CONSULSHIP OF VATINIUS

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SO WELL ESTABLISHED WAS THE TRADITION of political invective during the last century of the Roman republic that not only were the misdemeanours and omissions of a magistrate during his term of office cast in his teeth, but even if a person had not been in office long enough to do *anything*, right or wrong, he was not spared the mockery of the professional wit. The type of jibe to which he was liable to be exposed is illustrated by Macrobius, *Sat.* 2.3.5:

In consulatu Vatirii, quem paucis diebus gessit, notabilis Ciceronis urbanitas circumferebatur. "magnum ostentum," inquit, "anno Vatirii factum est, quod illo consule nec bruma nec ver nec aestas nec autumnus fuit." querenti deinde Vatinio quod gravatus esset domum ad se infirmatum venire, respondit, "volui in consulatu tuo venire, sed nox me comprehendit."

The consulship of P. Vatinus is probably familiar to most through the allusion in Catullus 52: *sella in curuli struma Nonius sedet, / per consulatum peierat Vatinus*. Vatinus long predicted that the office would be his,¹ and it eventually fell to him in 47 B.C. Now the *Saturnalia* is the only work that refers specifically to the length of Vatinus' term (*paucis diebus*) and on the strength of this evidence many historians and editors of Catullus duly report that the consulship lasted for a few days at the end of December.² Macrobius' statement, however, poses serious problems. In 48 B.C. Caesar was appointed dictator with power to control the non-plebeian elections, and those for the following year were postponed until after his arrival from the East, in late September, 47 B.C. We are not told how long after his arrival they were held, but, since his stay in Italy was intended to be only temporary (he in fact left for Africa in the middle of December), it would have been natural for him to want to have the

¹In *Vatinium* 11: *quaesturam petisti cum P. Sestio* [in 64 B.C.], *cum hic nihil loqueretur, nisi quod agebat, tu de altero consulatu gerendo te diceres cogitare*.

²See, for instance: W. Drumann, *Geschichte Roms* (Königsberg 1837) 567; L. Schwabe, *Quaestiones Catullianae* (Giessen 1862) 39; Th. Mommsen, "Der Senatsbeschluss bei Josephus," *Hermes* 9 (1875) 286 n. 1; R. Y. Tyrrell-L. C. Purser, *The Correspondence of Cicero* (Dublin 1897) 5. liv; W. Kroll, *C. Valerius Catullus* (Leipzig 1929) 94; A. L. Wheeler, *Catullus and the Traditions of Ancient Poetry* (Berkeley 1934) 260 n. 4; C. L. Neudling, *A Prosopography to Catullus* (Oxford 1955) 179; M. Lenchantin de Gubernatis, *Il Libro di Catullo* (Turin 1966³) 93; K. Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems* (London 1970) 247; G. E. F. Chilvers, *OCD* (1970) s.v. "Vatinus."

elections settled as soon as possible.³ In any case *CIL* 1² 939 makes it clear that Vatinius and his colleague, Q. Fufius Calenus, were consuls by November 17 at the latest,⁴ thus holding office for at least one and a half months, not *paucis diebus*. There is, moreover, an internal difficulty. Their second joke, as it is related in the *Saturnalia*, falls flat. Cicero, it appears, had intended to visit Vatinius during the latter's consulship but was overtaken by nightfall. If applied to Vatinius, consul, according to Macrobius, for "a few days," the quip has little point; it has real point only if applied to a person who was consul for no more than *one* day.⁵

We do know of one person who was eminently, if not exclusively, fitted for the role occupied by Vatinius. On the last day of 45 B.C. the consul Q. Fabius Maximus died, and C. Caninius Rebilus was appointed consul suffectus for one day. The situation was a novel one; Cicero used it as an excuse to display his wit⁶ and Tacitus notes that it was the *only* time that such a thing happened before A.D. 69, when Rosius Regulus was made consul suffectus for one day.⁷ Moreover, it can be shown from an examination of other passages of the *Saturnalia* that Cicero told the joke about night overtaking the visitor at the expense of this same Caninius. At *Sat.* 7.3.10, Macrobius tells us that Cicero made three witticisms about the same (*in eundem, eidem*) consul:

sunt alia scommata minus aspera, quasi edentatae beluae morsus, ut Tullius in consulem qui uno tantum die consulatum peregit: "solent," inquit, "esse flamines diales, modo consules diales habemus." et in eundem: "vigilantissimus est consul noster qui in consulatu suo somnum non vidit." eidemque exprobandi sibi quod ad eum consulem non venisset, "veniebam," inquit, "sed nox me comprehendit."

³In two places (42.20.4 and 42.55.4) Dio says that the elections were held ἐπ' ἐξόδῳ τοῦ ἔτους. In itself the phrase signifies nothing more precise than that the major part of the year is over. What period Dio has in mind is not made explicit, and both instances of the phrase must be seen in their contexts. In the first (42.20.4), he implies that the ἐξόδος began straight after Caesar's late arrival: καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐς τὴν παρουσίαν αὐτοῦ [αἱ ἀρχαιεσσίαι] ἀναβληθεῖσαι ἐπ' ἐξόδῳ τοῦ ἔτους ἐτελέσθησαν. In the second (42.55.4) he uses the phrase to emphasize Caesar's autocracy, in that although as dictator he was checked by the consuls, they were consuls in name only and, in any case, were not appointed until most of the year was over. That the elections were held straight after Caesar's arrival in Italy is believed by M. Gelzer, *Caesar: Politician and Statesman*, tr. by P. Needham (Oxford 1968) 263; E. Badian, *OCD* (1970) s.v. "Fufius" (the *OCD* is inconsistent in its articles on Vatinius and Fufius [see n. 2]); G. V. Sumner, "The *Lex Annalis* under Caesar," *Phoenix* 25 (1971) 259.

⁴HERMIA/SP. A.D. XV. K. DEC/Q. FUF. P. VAT.

⁵Whether or not the first joke, about the seasons, might have been appropriately made about Vatinius must remain an open question, since it is far from certain what point Cicero was trying to make. This does not affect the argument on the second joke.

⁶*Ad Fam.* 7.30.1. See also Plutarch, *Caes.* 58.1 and Dio 43.46.4.

⁷*Hist.* 3.37. For other references to Caninius' consulship, see Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 7.181; Suetonius, *Caes.* 76.2; idem, *Nero* 15.2.

Although the consul is not named in the above passage the identification is revealed by two other passages (*Sat.* 2.2.13 and *Sat.* 2.3.6), where the first two jokes are recounted and their occasion given as the consulship of Caninius. Thus, apart from the difficulties outlined in the first part of this note, we have the curious, though not, admittedly, impossible, situation, that Cicero told the same joke about two different people.

There can be little doubt that a joke has been assigned to Vatinius that was, in reality, told about Caninius. *How* the substitution took place must remain an open question. It is clear that Vatinius' name is reported correctly by the MSS of the *Saturnalia* since Macrobius goes on to say that the jibes were provoked by Vatinius' remark about Cicero's varicose veins. It may be that Macrobius inherited the mistake from a handbook of Ciceronian witticisms:⁸ a copyist familiar with the name of Cicero's great rival and the butt of so much of his repartee could well have misread *Vatinius* for *Caninius*.

Whatever the reason, let it suffice to note that the mistake was somehow made and that this passage of the *Saturnalia* should not be allowed to confuse, as it has done in the past, the question of the length of Vatinius' consulship. Macrobius' *paucis diebus* is clearly the result of a compromise between his roles as honest historian and entertaining *raconteur*, a lame attempt to accommodate, if only partially, Vatinius' term of office to the requirements of a joke not originally meant for him.

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THE INSCRIPTION FROM THE SEA-WALL AT ANEMURIUM

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PROFESSOR E. ALFÖLDI-ROSENBAUM has recently published in this journal, with detailed photographs and a facsimile, a metrical inscription from the sea-wall at Anemurium on the Isaurian coast.¹ Her text and translation are as follows (with marks of ligature added):

1. τείχος ἀμωμήτοιο ταγαῖς ἐτέλεσε τάχιστα
2. λαμπροτάτου κόμητος τοῦτο Ματρωνιάνου·
3. εὐσεβῆς ἀγαθὸς στρατιῆς τε τεταγμένος ἐσθλῆς
4. πρώτων Ἀρμενίων, ὦν κλέος ἐστὶ μέγα.

⁸See *Sat.* 2.1.12: *Cicero autem quantum in ea re valuerit quis ignorat qui vel liberti eius libros quos is de iocis patroni composuit, quos quidam ipsius putant esse, legere curavit?*

¹Elisabeth Alföldi-Rosenbaum, *Phoenix* 26 (1972) 183–186, with figg. 1–6. I owe thanks to several friends for their help.