

CATULLUS AND CANGRANDE DELLA SCALA

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Ad patriam uenio longis a finibus exul,
causa mei reditus compatriota fuit:
scilicet a calamis tribuit cui Francia nomen,
quique notat turbæ prætereuntis iter.
Quo licet ingenio uestrum celebrate Catullum,
cuius sub modio clausa papyrus erat.

These well-known couplets, found in mss G and R of Catullus, purport to give, but in fact rather successfully withhold, the identity of the Veronese resurrector of the unique ms of Catullus from which all our codices, except those of the *florilegia*, are derived.

In an article in *AJP* written a little over forty years ago, Tenney Frank tries his hand at solving the riddle.¹ He propounds the theory that Benvenuto de Campesani, the author of the couplets, meant to indicate that Catullus' *compatriota* was Benvenuto's own patron, the overlord of Verona from 1311 through Benvenuto's death in 1323, and for sixteen years longer, namely Cangrande I della Scala.

Let us follow Frank's argument. He first takes verse 3, *scilicet a calamis tribuit cui Francia nomen*. He notes that attempts were made by Joseph Scaliger and by the poet Dante to find a more respectable etymon for the first element of della Scala's name than the obvious—and of course correct—derivation from what Scaliger refers to as *illud latrans animal*. Scaliger definitely, and Dante probably, connected the word with the royal title Khan. Benvenuto, according to Frank, found another flattering, or at least non-opprobrious derivation. Noting, says Frank, that Cangrande's baptismal name Francesco suggests a French origin for the family, Benvenuto pretends to derive

¹ Tenney Frank, "Can Grande and Catullus," *AJP* 48 (1927) 273-75. Frank refers to earlier discussions of the problem.

the name from the Old French *cane*, "reed" (as in our sugar-cane, canebreak), modern French *canne* with two *n*'s, equivalent of course to the Latin *calamus*. This, then, would be the meaning of *a calamis tribuit cui Francia nomen*, "the man to whom the French language gave a name derived from reeds." Two observations, one favorable, one unfavorable, may be made. First, though Tenney Frank does not mention this, we can perhaps see a certain appropriateness in the use of the word *calamus* in verses relating to a manuscript, if we remember the word's secondary meaning of "pen."

On the other side of the ledger, it is by no means certain, as Spangenberg points out,² that Cangrande's baptismal *praenomen* actually was Francesco. However, even if Cangrande's name was *not* Francesco, Tenney Frank's theory might still hold, simply in the sense that Cangrande had derived the first element of his name from the French word for *calamus*. So far, so good. Kroll, in his fourth edition of Catullus,³ reports Frank's interpretation of verse 3 without dissent. One must say that it is at least as satisfying as the procedure of imagining an otherwise unknown Franciscus de Calamis, as, for example, G. B. Pighi does in his 1961 prolegomena,⁴ or an anonymous notary of Verona (*a calamis*), as Ullman suggests.⁵

But when we come to verse 4, *quique notat turbae praetereuntis iter*, I think we may say that Frank widens the credibility gap to the point of cutting the ground out from under his theory. For he would have us believe that the allusion here is to the caravan-route from Pelusium toward Palestine, which, as Pliny (*HN* 6.166) remarks, was lined with *calami*. Not only is this far-fetched, as Frank himself admits, but, with all respect to a mighty Latinist, it is an interpretation of doubtful Latinity. For Frank seems not to have noticed that the singular *qui . . . notat* could surely not refer to the plural *calamis*; it must instead have the same antecedent as the *cui* of *tribuit cui Francia nomen*, namely the mysterious *compatriota* himself, whether Cangrande or *alius quidam*. This objection is made even more cogent by the fact that the plural

² Hans Spangenberg, *Cangrande I della Scala* (Berlin 1892) 3, note 1.

³ C. Valerius Catullus, ed. Wilhelm Kroll⁴ (Stuttgart 1959) 295.

⁴ *Catullo Veronese, Prolegomeni, testo critico e traduzione di Giovanni Battista Pighi. Tomo 1; Prolegomeni al Catullo Veronese* (Verona 1961) 23.

⁵ B. L. Ullman, "The Transmission of the Text of Catullus," *Studi in onore di Luigi Castiglioni* (Firenze, 1960?) 1036.

notant, had that been the versifier's meaning, would have been entirely admissible metrically. It is no wonder that Kroll says of the American scholar that he could not offer an enlightening interpretation of verse 4.

Now B. L. Ullman, writing in 1960 on the transmission of the text of Catullus,⁶ mentions our "celebrated but enigmatic epigram," but does not refer to Tenney Frank's interpretation. Says Ullman, "I have no new solution for this poem." It is the purpose of this brief paper to rush in where Ullman preferred not to tread.

Let us consider. How could it be said of Cangrande that he observes *turbæ prætereuntis iter*? Surely the warlike overlord of Verona had better things to do than to watch the passage of the transient throng. But what a man himself may not do, his counterfeit presentment may. William Pitt, in his oration condemning England's use of American Indian warriors against the English colonists, says, "[T]he immortal ancestor of this noble lord frowns with indignation at the disgrace of his country." Now the frowner was not the man himself, dead for nearly two centuries, but his portrait hanging on the wall of the House of Parliament. What of a portrait, or portrait-statue, of Cangrande, well enough known to the Veronese to make the allusion perfectly clear to contemporary readers?

I am happy to report that such a portrait does indeed exist, in the form of an equestrian statue of Cangrande, originally erected outdoors in Verona *coram populo*, but now kept within the Veronese museum of Castel Vecchio. But it is not enough for there to be a statue, any statue—even though any statue might conceivably be said to observe the passersby. If the statue were like that of Cangrande's successor Cansignorio della Scala, which shows the horseman looking straight ahead,⁷ I should not have ventured to make this proposal. But I found that the equestrian statue of Cangrande, as I expected, is actually gazing down at the *turba præteriens*, with an expression that is markedly quizzical. So much is this so that it seems to me entirely credible that it was to this statue that Benvenuto refers. You may judge for yourselves (Fig. 1). Please note that even Cangrande's horse seems to share his master's attentiveness; in fact, the

⁶ Ullman (above, note 5).

⁷ *Enciclopedia Italiana*, s.v. "della Scala," p. 555.



FIGURE 1. Cangrande della Scala.

horse's expression has elicited the comment in the *Guide Michelin*⁸ that the beast seems to be gazing at the tourist!

I suggest, then, that this is the meaning of *quique notat turbae praeter-euntis iter*, and that, until a more convincing solution is found, we accept Tenney Frank's theory that the resurrector of the Catullan MS was none other than Cangrande I della Scala himself.

⁸ *Michelin Green Guide, Italy*, English Edition² (London, n.d.) 233.