

CATULLUS 52 AND THE CONSULSHIP OF VATINIUS

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When considering the chronology of Catullus' life and works scholars usually take as their starting point the biographical information provided by Saint Jerome. In his expansion of the *Chronica* of Eusebius, Jerome lists under *A. Abr.* 1930 (87 B.C.): *Gaius Valerius scribtor lyricus Veronae nascitur* and under *A. Abr.* 1960 (57 B.C.):¹ *Catullus XXX aetatis anno Romae moritur*. That Jerome has made a mistake has long been recognized and is not now in dispute. In poem 113 Catullus mentions the second consulship of Pompey, which fell in 55 B.C.; in poem 55 he mentions the Porticus Pompeii, built during that second consulship. Two poems referring to Caesar's invasion of Britain (11 and 29) must belong to 55 at the earliest. The recognition of Jerome's error has provoked some extreme reactions; Joseph Scaliger, for instance, went so far as to argue that Catullus wrote the hymn to Diana (34) for the *Ludi Saeculares*, revived by Augustus in 17.² During the last one hundred and fifty years, however, the usual approach of scholars has been to salvage what they can from Jerome by determining the precise nature of his mistake.

One of the first of such attempts was made in 1837 by K. Lachmann.³

¹ Mss A, P and F (Amandinus, Petavianus and Freherianus) read *A. Abr.* 1960 (57 B.C.); the others read *A. Abr.* 1959 (58 B.C.). All dates, except where specified, are B.C.

² *Thesaurus Temporum* (Leyden 1606) 155.

³ For Lachmann's suggestion commentators refer readers to page 174 of his edition of Lucretius (Berlin 1850). In this work, however, Lachmann merely states that Catullus was dead in 46. His discussion of Jerome's confusion of the consular years is, in fact, to be found in a letter to M. Haupt, included in J. Vahlen's edition of Lachmann's correspondence, *Karl Lachmanns Briefe an Moritz Haupt* (Berlin 1892) 22. Lachmann won considerable support for his view (see Schwabe *op. cit.* [below n. 5] 47), in particular from Haupt, who gave the theory currency in his *Quaestiones Catullianae* (Leipzig 1837). In 1870, however, Haupt changed his view and moved over to Schwabe's camp (see *Opuscula* 1 [Leipzig 1875] 9).

He noted that the latest datable event mentioned in the poems of Catullus was the consulship of Vatinius, which fell in the year 47. The reference occurs in poem 52:

quid est, Catulle? quid moraris emori?
 sella in curuli struma Nonius sedet,
 per consulatum peierat Vatinius:
 quid est, Catulle? quid moraris emori?

Lachmann suggested that the figure XXX, given for Catullus' age at death, was probably reliable, being derived, no doubt, from Suetonius, *De Viris Illustribus*; he further suggested that Jerome made his initial mistake in the date of the poet's *birth*, by confusing the consul for 87, Cn. Octavius Gnaei filius, with the consul for 76, Cn. Octavius Marci filius, and then went on to place his *death* in 57 to accommodate a life of thirty years to the erroneous 87. He argued, therefore, that the true dates were probably 76 and 46.⁴ Lachmann's thesis was dealt a serious blow in 1862 by L. Schwabe, in his *Quaestiones Catullianae*.⁵ Schwabe, who believed that Lesbia was Clodia Metelli and that the affair with Catullus began in about 61, argued that it was highly improbable that the poet could have been born as late as 76. He also noted that there was no reference in the works of Catullus (apart from the apparent reference in poem 52) to any event later than 54, and that Catullus could therefore not have been alive after that date. Adopting a suggestion put forward by Th. Mommsen, in his *Römische Geschichte*,⁶ that the reference in poem 52 was not to the actual tenure of the consulship but to Vatinius' arrogant prediction that it would one day be his, Schwabe claimed that the poem should be dated not to 47, but to 55. He suggested that the figure XXX could be a corruption of XXXIII in Suetonius' text and that the probable dates of Catullus' birth and death were 87 and 54. Schwabe's study has had an enormous influence during the last century and, while later scholars have disagreed with him on points of detail,⁷ his basic thesis, that Catullus was dead

⁴ It should be noted that Lachmann proposed the years 76 and 46, not, as is almost invariably stated, 77 and 47.

⁵ Giessen 1862; hereafter, Schwabe.

⁶ (Berlin 1920¹²) 3. 332; hereafter, Mommsen. Schwabe used Mommsen's third edition.

⁷ Different corrections of Jerome have found favour from time to time. One possibility, proposed hypothetically by Schwabe but not actually favoured by him, is that

some years before 47, has not been seriously challenged.⁸ The purpose of the present paper is not to speculate on Lachmann's theory, or on any other theory about the dates of Catullus' birth and death; it will confine itself to the question whether scholars have been justified in their assumption that poem 52 was not written in 47. The poem does, after all, contain a reference to Vatinius' consulship, and this consulship indisputably fell in 47. The natural inference to be drawn from this, and the one that scholars drew up to the nineteenth century, is that the reference is to the actual consulship of that year. The natural interpretation is not necessarily the true one; however, we should be reluctant to abandon it until convincing evidence to the contrary is provided.

It should be noted at the outset that the assumption of death in 47 does not conflict with what has been established with virtual certainty about the chronology of Catullus' life. The absolute *terminus ante quem* for his death is 32, since Nepos speaks of him as being dead in this year.⁹ Some information, though depressingly little, can be gleaned

the true dates are 84 and 54 and that Jerome confused the two consulships of L. Cornelius, in 87 and 84. B. Schmidt, *C. Valeri Catulli Veronensis Carmina* (Leipzig 1887) lxii (see also "Die Lebenszeit Catulls und die Herausgabe seiner Gedichte," *RhM* 69 [1914] 267-83), suggests that the true dates are 82 and 52 and that Jerome confused the consulship of the younger Marius (82) with that of the elder Marius (86) and the consulship of Q. Metellus Pius (52) with that of Q. Metellus Nepos (57). A. L. Wheeler, *Catullus and the Traditions of Ancient Poetry* (Berkeley 1934) 89-90, believes that Jerome's source knew that Catullus was born in 87 and assumed that he died in 47 (on the basis of a misinterpretation of poem 52). Jerome's XXX, he claims, is a misreading of the original (incorrect) figure XXXX. For the scholars who have held these and other theories see E. V. Marmorale, *L'ultimo Catullo* (Naples 1957) 21 n. 1, and H. J. Leon, "A Quarter Century of Catullan Scholarship (1934-1959)," *CW* 53 (1960) 107-8.

⁸ I can find only two studies in which it is assumed that Catullus was still alive in 47. L. Herrmann, "Catulle et Lucrèce," *Latomus* 15 (1956) 480, states in one sentence, without further elaboration, that Catullus died in 47. In a brief article, P. Gilbert and M. Renard, "Les dates de naissance et de mort de Catulle," *AC* 11 (1942) 93-96 argue that Catullus died in 47 and that Jerome read *A. U. C. DCLXVII* (87) in the text of Suetonius in place of the true figure *A. U. C. DCLXXVII* (77). Gilbert and Renard were restricted by the conditions under which they wrote (in 1952) and made their proposal quite independently of the work of Lachmann and Schwabe; hence there is no attempt to take up the objections raised by the latter or to discuss the problems of poem 52.

⁹ While Atticus was still living Nepos wrote (*Atticus* 12): *idem L. Julium Calidium quem post Lucretii Catullique mortem multo elegantissimum poetam nostram tulisse aetatem vere videor posse contendere*. This places Catullus' death at some indeterminate point before 32 (the date of Atticus' death).

from the poems themselves.¹⁰ Poem 11, dated by its allusion to Caesar's British campaigns, appears to be a final farewell to Lesbia. If it is assumed that there was no further reconciliation, and the tone of poem 11 does not make it likely, then the affair must have been over by 54 and the "Lesbia" poems must predate 54.¹¹ In 57 Catullus visited Bithynia during the governorship of Memmius;¹² some poems were almost certainly written shortly after his return (4, 10, 31, 46); poem 101, written at his brother's grave in Bithynia, must belong to 57.¹³ Poem 28, containing a reference to Piso's governorship in Macedonia, and to Catullus' stay in Bithynia, is to be dated to 57/55;¹⁴

¹⁰ Opinions differ greatly about what constitutes a "datable" poem. For the situation stated in its gloomiest terms, see R. G. C. Levens, "Late Republican Poetry. ii. Catullus," *Fifty Years of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford 1954) 288-89: "... the one chronological fact which emerges with absolute certainty from the internal evidence of the poems is that their author was alive in 55 B.C."

¹¹ The "Lesbia" poems are conveniently listed by K. Quinn, *Catullus. The Poems* (London 1970) xvi.

¹² It is generally agreed that the governorship of Bithynia referred to by Catullus is the one held by Memmius in 57. R. Ellis, *A Commentary on Catullus* (Oxford 1876) xlviii-li and 21-2 (hereafter, Ellis), assumes a previous governorship in 65 (see n. 14).

¹³ The standard view is that Catullus wrote poem 101 when, as a member of Memmius' entourage, he visited his brother's grave in Bithynia. However, P. Maas, "The Chronology of the Poems of Catullus," *CQ* 36 (1942) 79-82 (hereafter, Maas), suggests that it could have been written during a second, later, visit. R. J. M. Lindsay, "The Chronology of Catullus Life," *CP* 43 (1948) 44, argues that poem 101 could have been written at any point after the brother's death since there is no need to assume that it was written *in situ*.

¹⁴ Poem 28 was written during or shortly after Catullus' stay in Bithynia with Memmius. It is addressed to his friends Veranius and Fabullus, who are on the staff of a certain Piso and are suffering because of his stinginess. Piso is usually identified with L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, father-in-law of Julius Caesar, who was proconsul of Macedonia from 57 to 55. The problem is that in poem 9 Catullus welcomes Veranius back from *Spain* and in poem 12 he speaks of both Veranius and Fabullus as having spent time together in Spain. Various solutions have been offered. Ellis suggests that Piso is Cn. Calpurnius Piso, quaestor propraetore in Hispania Citerior in 65, and that Memmius held a post in Bithynia at the same period; there is, in fact, no evidence for such an earlier governorship of Bithynia by Memmius. W. Kroll, *C. Valerius Catullus* (Leipzig 1929) 18, suggests that Piso Caesoninus might have been propraetor in Spain in about 60; again, this is purely hypothetical, and in any case the period does not coincide with Memmius' term in Bithynia. M. Lenchantin de Gubernatis, *Il Libro di Catullo* (Turin 1966³) 54, believes that Piso was governor of one of the Spains in 57 and might be M. Pupius Piso Calpurnianus, consul in 61. The simplest solution is that offered by Schwabe (244-46; see also R. Syme, "Piso and Veranius in Catullus," *CM* 17 [1956] 129-34), that Veranius and Fabullus were in Macedonia with Piso Caesoninus and made a separate journey together to Spain.

poem 29, which complains about the wealth amassed by Mamurra from the conquest of Britain, probably belongs to 55/54. Poem 113 is firmly dated to 55 by the reference to Pompey's consulship, while poem 55 is not earlier than 55, since it contains a reference to the Porticus Pompeii, built in that year. Poem 53 must belong to one of the years in which Calvus prosecuted Vatinius, probably 58, 56 or 54.¹⁵

Thus the datable "facts" of Catullus' life give no real clue to the date of the poet's death and in no way cast doubt upon the possibility of its having occurred in 47 or shortly after. Should we be obliged to defend this date against the more *hypothetical* reconstructions of Catullus' life? Syme describes Catullan chronology as "that imbroglia of problems where dogma and ingenuity have their habitation, where argument moves in circles, and no new passage in or out."¹⁶ The numerous and widely diverging theories about Catullus' life that have been brought forth in the last two centuries bear testimony to the validity of Syme's statement. The scarcity of reliable chronological data has not proved to be a deterrent; Levens sardonically comments: "Yet writers on Catullus, in this century as in the last, have seldom hesitated to give confident accounts of his career, tracing the course of his love-life and assigning particular poems to particular dates or phases At first glance most of them appear to tell much the same story; but differences apparent on a closer inspection betray the large part played by fancy in this game of reconstruction."¹⁷ From time to time, however, suggestions have been made that while not provable, are at any rate highly plausible and have won the adherence of a great

¹⁵ The first recorded prosecution of Vatinius was in 58, when he was charged under the Lex Licinia Iunia. The trial was cancelled largely because of the intimidation of Publius Clodius. The Bobbio scholiast (Stangl 150) says that Calvus was the accuser; however, the reliability of the scholiast is open to serious doubts (see E. S. Gruen, "Cicero and Licinius Calvus," *HSCP* 71 [1966] 217-18). In 56 Cicero and Calvus united in the defence of Publius Sestius, during which Vatinius was bitterly attacked. Cicero remarked to his brother (*ad Quintum Fratrem* 2.4.1) that Calvus was prepared to undertake an actual prosecution of Vatinius; whether or not he did so is not known. H. Comfort, "The Date of Catullus LIII," *CP* 30 (1935) 74-76, rejects the possibility of 56 on the grounds that Catullus would be travelling from Bithynia in that year. In 54 Vatinius was prosecuted for *ambitus* and defended by Cicero. The prosecutor is unknown but it may well have been Calvus, since he did at some point prosecute Vatinius for *ambitus* (Quintilian 6.1.13; Seneca, *Epistle* 94.25; Charisius 296.21).

¹⁶ *Op. cit.* (above n. 14) 131.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.* (above n. 10) 289.

many scholars. Two factors in particular, Catullus' relationship with Asinius Pollio and, more important, with Lesbia, are often introduced into discussions of Catullan chronology, and it will not be out of place to test the year 47 against the "standard" reconstructions of these two relationships. Traditionally Lesbia has been identified with Clodia Metelli.¹⁸ If the reference to a *vir* in poem 93 is to her husband,¹⁹ and if the husband is Q. Caecilius Metellus Celer, consul of 60,²⁰ then we have a *terminus ante quem* for Catullus' writing career and affair with Lesbia, since Metellus died in 59. Now these possibilities neither weaken nor strengthen the argument for 47; their significance is only for the date of Catullus' birth, since according to this reconstruction Catullus must have been born early enough to be an active poet, and lover, in 59.²¹ In poem 12 Catullus speaks of a certain Asinius Pollio as a *leporum differtus* [codd. *dissertus*] *puer ac facetiarum*. Without knowing the precise relationship between Catullus and Pollio we cannot be sure what significance to attach to the word *puer*, but it must be conceded that it at least implies that Pollio was not older than Catullus, and was probably younger. If Pollio is the future statesman, C. Asinius Pollio, as most believe, then he was born in 76.²² Again, this does not

¹⁸ Apuleius, *Apology* 10, informs us that Lesbia belonged to the Gens Clodia, and Catullus 79 indicates that she was one of the three sisters of P. Clodius. She was first identified with Clodia Metelli by Petrus Victorius, *Variae Lectiones* (1553) xvi.i, and since the time of Victorius the identification has been generally accepted. M. Rothstein, "Catull und Lesbia," *Philologus* 78 (1923) 1-34, argues that Lesbia is Clodia Luculli. His view is favoured by Maas 81. T. P. Wiseman, *Catullan Questions* (Leicester 1969) 50-60 (hereafter, Wiseman) argues that she could have been any one of the three sisters of P. Clodius. G. Giri, "Se Lesbia di Catullo sia Clodia, la Sorella di P. Clodio," *RIGI* 6 (1922) 161-77, claims that Lesbia could be an unknown member of an inferior branch of the Gens Clodia.

¹⁹ Rothstein, *op. cit.* (above n. 18) 24, claims that *vir* need not necessarily mean "husband" but can be taken in the sense of "lover" (see also, Maas 81).

²⁰ Until recently it has been agreed that if Lesbia is Clodia Metelli any reference to her husband must be to Metellus and must predate his death in 59. However, the complexities of Catullan chronology are growing constantly; in 1969 Wiseman 58-59 argued that Lesbia could well have married a second time. In that case any reference to her husband could be to the *second* husband and could be later than 59.

²¹ If, in addition, the *puella* of poem 68b is Lesbia and if the *vir* mentioned in line 146 of that poem is Metellus Celer, then Lesbia had already begun to be unfaithful to Catullus before 59.

²² If Jerome has not made another mistake. Under *A. Abr.* 2020 (A.D. 4) he states: *Asinius Pollio orator et consularis qui de Dalmatis triumphaverat LXXX aetatis suae anno in villa Tusculana moritur.*

tell us anything about the death of Catullus; it simply means that he was probably born before 76. Even if Catullus was thirty at the time of his death, as Jerome claims, it would still be *feasible* for him to have been alive in 47 and yet meet the conditions outlined above. It would mean that he must have been born, at the latest, in 77, and by this reckoning he would be about a year older than Pollio and eighteen years of age in 59. It must be remembered, however, that in any case the age of thirty is based on the assumption that Jerome's figure XXX is correct, an assumption that no scholar has made without reservation and one that many, including Schwabe, have rejected.²³

The fact, noted by Schwabe and others, that Catullus does not refer to anything (apart from the consulship of Vatinius, of course) that can be dated to later than 54, a period of great political upheaval, should not be given undue weight. Even if Catullus *was* silent about political events after 54 it would be dangerous to assume that he was dead; we know little of what his circumstances were and there might have been good reason for his silence. In any case there is no proof that he was silent; the majority of Catullus' poems are undatable, and among the undatable ones there are some thirty that contain references to political figures or are attacks upon unknown figures who might be political.²⁴ Such poems could belong just as well to the period after 54 as to the period before, and some are, if anything, more appropriate to the later period. The famous couplet, *nil nimium studeo, Caesar, tibi velle placere, / nec scire utrum sis albus an ater homo* (93), could have been written at

²³ In defence of Jerome's XXX editors quote Ovid, *Amores* 3.9.61-62: *obvius huic venias hedera iuvenalia cinctus / tempora cum Calvo, docte Catulle, tuo*. This couplet does indicate that Catullus died "young," but what *precise* age is intended by the phrase *iuvenalia tempora* is not clear. To the extent that it is appropriate of a man of thirty, it is hardly much less appropriate of a man of, say, thirty three or thirty four. Although he was about thirty five when he died (see Pliny, *Natural History* 7.165 and Cicero, *ad Familiares* 15.21.4), C. Licinius Calvus, Catullus' close friend, is described as an *adulescens* by Cicero, *Brutus* 279: *quamquam facienda mentio est, ut quidem mihi videtur, duorum adulescentium* [sc. Calvus and C. Curio], *qui si diutius vixissent magnam essent eloquentiae laudem consecuti*. Jerome's mistakes are notorious and in his treatment of Catullus he has made one blunder of a very elementary nature in the date of the poet's death. The rest of his information should, in view of this, be regarded with the utmost suspicion.

²⁴ Again, not everyone will agree about which poems are datable and which are not. For instance, I include among the undatable the "Mentula" poems (94, 105, 114 and 115) since even if Mentula is to be identified with Mamurra we cannot be sure when they were written; Mamurra probably died in 45, to judge from Cicero, *ad Atticum* 13.52.1 (written in that year): *tum audivit* [sc. Caesar] *de Mamurra, vultum non mutavit*.

almost any time but it is especially biting if it is later than August, 48, when Caesar, having defeated the Pompeians at Pharsalus, became master of the Roman world and the focal point of the Romans' attentions.²⁵ Similarly, poem 44, which makes fun of the literary accomplishments of Publius Sestius, is undatable but, if anything, is more appropriate to the year 50 than to any other, since in that year Cicero refers to Sestius' poor reputation as a literateur.²⁶ The danger inherent in the *argumentum ex silentio* is best illustrated by the study of Maas. He shows that this argument can, if necessary, be applied in reverse. Noting that none of the poems of Catullus can be dated securely before 56 he proposes that Catullus wrote nothing *before* that date.²⁷

Catullus' own writings, then, do not offer much help in determining whether the poet was alive in 47. Are any clues provided by the historical background? The year 47 must have been a distressing one for those who still had faith in the future of constitutional government in Rome. In August of the preceding year Caesar had inflicted a crushing blow on the Pompeians at the battle of Pharsalus. When news of this victory reached Rome he was appointed dictator and given, among other things, control of elections (except those for plebeian offices). For the remainder of 48 and for most of 47 Caesar was on campaign and did not return to Italy until the September of 47. During his absence elections were not held and authority was exercised by Antony, his *Magister Equitum*. Chaos reigned in Italy and Antony was unable to maintain discipline. Because of the financial hardships caused by the war there was widespread dissatisfaction, a situation aggravated by the agitation of P. Cornelius Dolabella, Cicero's son-in-law. At one point Antony had to intervene with troops and some eight hundred men were killed. Caesar was obliged to return, and when he did so

²⁵ At some point in Catullus' life a reconciliation was effected between himself and Caesar, as we know from Suetonius, *Julius* 73: *Valerium Catullum, a quo sibi versiculis de Mamurra perpetua stigmata imposita non dissimulaverat, satisfacientem eadem die adhibuit cenae, hospitioque patris eius, sicut consuerat, uti perseveravit.* Poem 93 could hardly, of course, belong to the period of reconciliation; there is nothing, however, in the statement of Suetonius to suggest that it was permanent or even long-lasting.

²⁶ In *ad Familiares* 7.32.1 (written in 50, or late 51 at the earliest), Cicero complains that other people's epigrams are being passed off as his; even Sestius' are being attributed to him: *ais enim, ut ego discesserim, omnia omnium dicta, in his etiam Sestiana, in me conferri.*

²⁷ Wiseman goes even further, claiming that Catullus' whole poetic career should be limited to the years 56 to 54.

Q. Fufius Calenus and P. Vatinius were elected consuls, and held office for the remainder of the year; Caesar's supporters of senatorial rank were rewarded with the other offices.

Mommsen was of the opinion that the historical context of the poem should be sought in events several years earlier than 47. In 56 Pompey and Caesar met at Luca and among their other schemes drew up a list of intended consuls: *si vero id est, quod nescio an sit, ut non minus longas iam in codicillorum fastis futurorum consulum paginulas habeat quam factorum . . .* (Cicero, *ad Atticum* 4.8a.2). That Vatinius' name was on the list is a reasonable assumption; at any rate he did not hesitate to make known his own confidence in his prospects, as we know from Cicero, in *Vatinium* 6: *at tamen hoc, Vatini, memento . . . me . . . magnificentissime post hominum memoriam consulem factum, omniaque ea me pudenter vivendo consecutum esse, quae tu impudenter vaticinando sperare te saepe dixisti*; and 11: *quaesturam petisti cum P. Sestio, cum hic nihil loqueretur nisi quod agebat, tu de altero consulatu gerendo te diceres cogitare*. Mommsen, who considered that Catullus died in 54, suggested that poem 52 could have been written at any time between 56 and 54. Within this framework there have been different theories. Schwabe claimed that 55 would be a most appropriate date since in that year Rome was shocked by the scandalous election to the praetorship of Vatinius against the candidacy of M. Cato. C. L. Neudling,²⁸ following Schmidt,²⁹ suggests that 54 would be more appropriate since Catullus would hardly have referred to the *sella curulis* occupied by Nonius if Vatinius had held curule office at the same time.

Thus a choice must be made between two different historical backgrounds. The preference for the earlier period, as has been pointed out already, began with Mommsen,³⁰ and Mommsen had, in fact, a compelling *a priori* reason for so choosing. In another passage of his *Römische Geschichte* (page 492), he made an unwarranted assumption. Since the names of no curule officers, apart from the consuls, have survived for the year 47 Mommsen apparently concluded that it was

²⁸ *A Prosopography to Catullus* (Oxford 1955) 179; hereafter, Neudling.

²⁹ *Op. cit.* (above n. 7) xxxv.

³⁰ Mommsen may not have been the first to think of the idea of an anticipated consulship. Schwabe (page 39) speaks of a *vir doctus nescio quis in Zimmermanni diatriis* who reached the same conclusion as Mommsen, but, apparently, quite independently of him.

because no other curule officers were elected in that year.³¹ This would mean, naturally enough, that poem 52 could not refer to events in 47 since Nonius could not have occupied the curule chair then. Given those terms of reference Mommsen's suggestion was a necessary and, indeed, a brilliant one; unfortunately, those terms of reference are no longer considered valid, since Mommsen's theory has long since been abandoned, and indeed he abandoned it himself at one stage. In 1875 Mommsen argued that a session of the senate in 47 was presided over by one of the praetors and suggested: "Dass die Prätores . . . einige Tage früher als die Consuln creirt worden sind, hat für diese verwirrten Zeiten nichts Auffallendes."³² Modern authorities do not even refer to Mommsen's original assumption, let alone debate it; they ascribe the election of curule officers to the year 47 without question.³³ It is interesting, however, that literary scholars have remained under the spell of the great historian. Its effect can be seen not only in the works of nineteenth-century scholars, such as Ellis and Schmidt, but even in very recent publications on Catullus, where one still finds expressed the view that consuls were the only curule officers elected in 47.³⁴

Thus the initial reason for changing the date of the poem was based on a false premise, which has persisted in exercising an influence on modern literary scholarship.

If the Nonius occupying the curule chair could be identified we should be in a better position to assign a date to poem 52. Pliny, *Natural History* 37.81, tells us that Catullus' Nonius was the father of the senator of the same name who was proscribed by Antony in 43 because the latter coveted a stone worth 20,000 sesterces that he owned:

³¹ Although he gives no names Dio clearly *implies* that curule officers were elected in 47. At 42.27.2, commenting on the arrogance of Antony in an unfamiliar situation, he notes: "For there was *as yet* no consul or praetor" (ὑπατος μὲν γὰρ οὐδεὶς οὐδὲ στρατηγὸς οὐδέπω ἦν). Moreover, at 42.51.3, Dio states that Caesar rewarded senators from his own party with "priesthoods and offices" (ἱερωσύνας τε καὶ ἀρχαῖς). It should be noted that according to Suetonius, *Caesar* 76 2, no elections for magistrates, apart from tribunes and plebeian aediles, were held during Caesar's third and fourth consulship (46 and 45).

³² "Der Senatsbeschluss bei Josephus," *Hermes* 9 (1875) 286.

³³ See, for instance, T. R. S. Broughton, *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic* (New York 1952) 2.287 (hereafter, Broughton); M. Gelzer, *Caesar* (Oxford 1968) 263-64; E. Badian, "Two More Roman Non-Entities," *Phoenix* 25 (1971) 138-42; G. V. Sumner, "The Lex Annalis under Caesar," *Phoenix* 25 (1971) 259-63.

³⁴ E.g. M. Schuster, "Valerius (Catullus)," *RE* 7A.2355; Levens, *op. cit.* (above n. 10) 301 n. 8; Neudling 134.

filius strumae Noni eius, quem Catullus poeta in sella curuli visum indigne tulit. Pliny informs us that he was also the grandfather of Servilius Nonianus, consul in A.D. 35. Unfortunately, since Pliny does not provide a cognomen it has not been possible to identify Catullus' Nonius with either of the two Nonii, M. Nonius Suffenas and Nonius Asprenas, who were active in his day.

The candidate favoured by Ellis and Neudling is M. Nonius Suffenas, who was involved in Roman politics in the 50s but who, it can be shown, is unlikely to have held curule office between 56 and 54. He was quaestor *ca.* 63,³⁵ and, as tribune of the plebs, joined with his colleagues L. Proculus and C. Porcius Cato in obstructing the consular *comitia* in 56.³⁶ He was probably praetor in 53 or 52,³⁷ for we know from Cicero that he was governor of a province in the East in 51/50.³⁸ Although it is possible that he held a curule aedileship between his tribunate and praetorship, the odds are against this. If he was praetor in 52 the latest date for the aedileship would be 54; magistrates in office could not campaign for a subsequent office, so that an interval of a full year would be required between aedileship and praetorship.³⁹ However, in 54 Suffenas was prosecuted, along with his former colleagues, because of his obstruction of the consular *comitia*.⁴⁰ Since the curule aedile had neither *sacrosanctitas* nor *imperium*, this official did not enjoy immunity from prosecution during his term of office as did some of the other magistrates;⁴¹ nevertheless, prosecutions were rare.⁴² Similarly,

³⁵ See Broughton, under 62 and *Supplement*, 43.

³⁶ Dio 39.27.3.

³⁷ M. Hölzl, *Fasti Praetorii* (Leipzig 1876) 70, places his praetorship in 53. F. Münzer, "Nonius," *RE* 17.901, and Broughton place it in 52.

³⁸ Writing in February, 50 (*ad Atticum* 6.1.13) Cicero speaks of Nonius as governing a province close to his own (Cilicia).

³⁹ There were, of course, exceptions to this rule; L. Licinius Lucullus, for instance, was aedile in 79 and apparently went to the praetorship in the following year, as Cicero, *Academica* 2.1, shows: *absens factus aedilis, continuo praetor, licebat enim celerius legis praemio*. An interval of two full years was normally required between the praetorship and the consulship, and it has been argued that the same rule applied to the period between the aedileship and praetorship, in which case the latest possible date for Suffenas' aedileship would be 55 (but see n. 44). For recent discussions of the interval between aedileship and praetorship see A. E. Astin, *The Lex Annalis before Sulla* (Brussels 1958) 9-19; E. Badian, *Studies in Greek and Roman History* (Oxford 1964) 144-47.

⁴⁰ Cicero, *Ad Atticum* 4.15.4.

⁴¹ Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht* (Leipzig 1887³) 1.698-708.

⁴² B. Kübler, "Magistratus," *RE* 14.428. On the difficulty of prosecuting an aedile during the 40s see Varro *ap.* Gellius 13.13.4.

55 is an unlikely year. Although the plebeian tribunate did not, apparently, come within the scope of the formal *Lex Annalis*,⁴³ nevertheless it would have been very unusual for Suffenas to have passed straight from the tribunate to the curule aedileship.⁴⁴

In the list of praetors for 47 Broughton includes L. Nonius Asprenas, consul suffectus in 36 and probably the tribune of the plebs of 44. This attribution is based on the fact that the *Senatus Consultum de Panamara* indicates that Asprenas was of praetorian rank by 39,⁴⁵ while in 46 he held *imperium proconsulare* in Africa, guarding Caesar's camp with two legions before the battle of Thapsus.⁴⁶ This attribution is questioned by Broughton in his *Supplement*, because his attention had been drawn to an inscription from Valentia, in Gallia Narbonensis, honouring Asprenas as propractor;⁴⁷ since there is no year available between 46 and 40 for him to have been governor, Broughton now feels that the dates of his praetorship and propractorship should be left open. The date of the inscription and the identity of the person honoured have been disputed, some claiming that the Nonius in question is the son or the grandson of the Catullan Nonius. Badian, however, has argued convincingly that the language of the inscription makes it beyond question pre-Augustan and claims that Asprenas' governorship must have fallen some time before 49.⁴⁸ Badian further points out that the tenure of *imperium propraetore* does not at this period indicate that the man held the praetorship before or soon after, since "... Caesar arbitrarily and unconstitutionally distributed army ranks and commands as he saw fit" (page 141). So, while Asprenas was praetor in a year before 40, there is no way of telling whether he held office in 56/54, in 47 or in some other year.

Since it cannot be proved that either character held curule office

⁴³ Mommsen, *op. cit.* (above n. 41) 534-5; Astin, *op. cit.* (above n. 39) 46 n. 1.

⁴⁴ Mommsen *op. cit.* (above n. 41) 534. A full year was the normal minimum between the tribunate and subsequent office.

⁴⁵ G. Cousin and G. Deschamps, "Le Sénate-Consulte de Panamara," *BCH* 11 (1887) 225-38; P. Viciereck, *Sermo Graecus* (Göttingen 1888) 20; R. K. Sherk, *Roman Documents from the Greek East* (Baltimore 1969) 27. Asprenas' praetorian rank is guaranteed by his prominent position in the list of witnesses to the decree.

⁴⁶ Caesar, *Bellum Africanum* 80.4. In 45 he conveyed a body of cavalry from Italy to Caesar in Spain (*Bellum Hispaniense* 10.2).

⁴⁷ *CIL* 12.1748:]IO. .L.FIL /]RENAT.PROP /]OLONI.ET.INCOLAE / PATRONO.

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.* (above n. 33) 139.

during either of the two periods in question, it is clear that Nonius' curule office will not cast much light on the date of the poem.⁴⁹ Do the activities of the other character, Vatinius, provide any clue? While it is impossible to disprove that Vatinius swore by his anticipated consulship and that Catullus saw fit to refer to it, the notion does raise certain problems. To illustrate such an oath editors have, from the time of Heinrich Valois,⁵⁰ quoted a passage from Ammianus Marcellinus (24.3.9): *animabat autem Iulianus exercitum, cum non per caritates, sed per incohatas negotiorum magnitudines deieraret adsidue: "sic sub iugum mitteret Persas, ita quassatum recrearet orbem Romanum." ut Traianus fertur aliquotiens iurando dicta consuesse firmare: "sic in provinciarum speciem redactam videam Daciam; sic pontibus Histrum et Euphratem superem" et similia plura.* E. Baehrens also draws attention to a passage of Dio (50.5.4.) in which it is said that Cleopatra would swear an oath by her intention to dispense justice on the Capitol: *τὴν τε εὐχὴν τὴν μεγίστην, ὅποτε τι ὀμνύοι, ποιεῖσθαι τὸ ἐν τῷ Καπιτωλίῳ δικάσαι.*⁵¹ These passages illustrate that it was not unknown for people to swear oaths upon their future hopes, and editors ascribe to Vatinius a remark such as, *ita consul fiam, ut quae adfirmo vera sunt* (Schwabe) or *ita consul fiam, verba haec vera sunt* (Baehrens); but what earthly reason Vatinius may have had for swearing an oath in this way is not made clear. The intentions of Julian, Trajan and Cleopatra were to inspire confidence in their followers. That Vatinius should have been so foolhardy as to try to impress upon another party the veracity of a statement by an appeal that would draw attention to his total lack of scruples is, to say the least, questionable.⁵² The closest parallel that I can find to this type of foolhardiness is a remark of Otho, preserved by Dio (62.11.2): *οὕτω με Καίσαρα ἴδοις.* Dio does imply, however, that Otho's statement was a rash and foolish one and that only the fact that he and Nero were "soul-mates" in crime saved him. Moreover, the phrase *per consulatum* means, surely, "through or by his consulship." That it

⁴⁹ Citing Catullus 52, Broughton tentatively lists a Nonius Struma as curule aedile in 55.

⁵⁰ See Haupt, *Opuscula* I (Leipzig 1875) 9.

⁵¹ *Catulli Veronensis Liber* (Leipzig 1885) 262.

⁵² It may be, of course, that Vatinius' oath was not to be taken at its face value and prefaced some casual or jocular remark; but how would Catullus be justified in bringing a charge of perjury against a remark that was not intended to be taken seriously in the first place?

stands for *per spem consulatus* or *per consulatum speratum* may be possible but no editor has provided a parallel for such an elliptical expression of an oath; one should note, by way of contrast, how explicit Ammianus and Dio are in the passages quoted above. G. Friedrich cites as parallels *Aeneid* 6.363–64: *quod te per caeli iucundum lumen et auras, / per genitorem oro, per spes surgentis Iuli*; and Phaedrus, *Appendix* 28.3: *per superos omnes perque spes omnes tuas*.⁵³ These are not really appropriate, however, since, again, Vergil and Phaedrus are quite explicit in their meaning. Finally, while poem 52 might be a comment on conditions that have existed for some time, the strong outburst of the first and last lines, *quid est Catulle? quid moraris emori?*, implies a reaction to a particular event. The assumption of curule office by a *foc* like Nonius would be one such event. Was Catullus also annoyed by boasts of Vatinius about a projected consulship? If so, his response in 56/54 is somewhat belated, since Vatinius made known his expectations in this direction in 64, when he was candidate for the quaestorship.⁵⁴

None of these difficulties make a date of 56/54 impossible, of course; but if poem 52 is dated to 47 the problems disappear. Moreover, it is then possible to interpret the poem in such a way that it has special force. Catullus makes it clear that his anger over the election of Nonius to curule office arises from the fact that the office will be tainted by its holder. This is brought out by the juxtaposition of the two contrasting words *curuli* and *struma*, as though the unsightly growth was spreading over the curule chair itself;⁵⁵ Nonius is an “excrescence on the body politic,” as Quinn puts it.⁵⁶ Ideally this should be balanced by an illustration not only of Vatinius’ lack of scruples but also of the way in which he violates the sanctity of the highest executive office in the Roman world. There was, in fact, a specific occasion in 47 when Vatinius committed perjury in such a way that in the eyes of Catullus an indignity was inflicted upon the office of consul. It was an occasion

⁵³ *Catulli Veronensis Liber* (Leipzig and Berlin 1908) 239.

⁵⁴ Cicero, in *Vatinius* 11 (quoted above).

⁵⁵ Compare this with the words of Cicero (*pro Sestio* 135) about Vatinius: *ei medentur rei publicae, qui exsecant pestem aliquam tamquam strumam civitatis*. It is interesting that here and in other places (*ad Atticum* 2.9.2.; in *Vatinius* 39; cf. Plutarch, *Cicero* 9.3) Cicero uses the word *struma* of Vatinius’ deformity. Why Catullus uses a word associated with Vatinius to describe Nonius is a mystery; perhaps he wishes to emphasize that they are “two of a kind.”

⁵⁶ *Op. cit.* (above n. 11) 247.

almost, if not exactly, contemporaneous with the assumption of curule office by Nonius.

Within five days of assuming office a consul, like any other new magistrate, was required *iurare in leges*.⁵⁷ In the presence of the quaestor, before the temple of Castor, he was required to take an oath that as consul he would uphold the laws of the state.⁵⁸ If he failed to take this oath he would lose the right to hold office after five days, although it appears that this disbarment was at some point replaced by a fine.⁵⁹ Livy provides a good illustration of this oath, and of Roman ingenuity (31.50.7). Gaius Valerius Flaccus was elected aedile for 199 and could not take the oath of office since as *flamen dialis* he was prohibited from taking an oath.⁶⁰ Livy notes that there was a danger that he might have to relinquish his office after five days; the problem was solved by a resolution of a tribune of the plebs that a surrogate should take the oath and that it should be as though Gaius had himself taken it. Accordingly, his brother, Lucius Valerius Flaccus, took the oath in his place.

Thus at some point during the first five days of his consulship Vatinius would take the oath of office; Catullus, we can be sure, would not imagine for a moment that as he took the oath Vatinius had any intention of upholding the laws of the state, and he would look upon it as a perjured oath.⁶¹ Poem 52, then, can be taken as a fitting commentary on the events of 47. For most of the year there was chaos while the Roman constitution was suspended and the regular magistrates were not in office. That was bad enough, but then, in September when the regular magistrates were chosen, came the last straw: *quid moraris emori*?⁶² The magistrates actually chosen, or at any rate two

⁵⁷ Livy 31.50.7; Appian, *Bellum Civile* 1.30. For the earliest instance of this oath see Livy 2.1.9; Dionysius 5.1.3. The oath is discussed by Mommsen *op. cit.* (above n. 41) 619–22.

⁵⁸ We do not, unfortunately, have the wording of the oath. Some idea of what it might have contained is provided by the *Lex Bantina*, *CIL* 1². 582 (Bruns 53).

⁵⁹ The charter of Salpensa, the *Lex Salpensa* of 84/82 (*CIL* 2.1963; Bruns 142), required the magistrates of the town *iurare in leges* within five days of assuming office on pain of a fine of 10,000 sesterces (see section 26 of the Law).

⁶⁰ Gellius 10.15.5.

⁶¹ Catullus was not the only one to believe that Vatinius was prone to perjury. Cicero, in *Vatinius* 3, speaks of *inconstantiam tuam cum levitate, tum etiam periurio implicatam*.

⁶² *Emori* is a particularly strong word (cf. Sallust, *Catilina* 20.9.) and brings out well the notion of a series of crises culminating in a final disaster. C. J. Fordyce, *Catullus* (Oxford 1961) 222 translates: "Why don't you die and have done with it?"

of them, simply served to illustrate the depths of degradation to which Rome's political tradition had sunk.

To sum up: although scholars have been unwilling to assign poem 52 to 47 B.C. there is no real justification for their reluctance. Nothing that we know about Catullus' life precludes his having been alive in 47 and nothing in the poem itself conflicts with what took place in Rome in that year. Moreover, while the assumption of a predicted consulship involves certain problems of interpretation, an allusion to the actual consulship of Vatinius allows us to interpret the poem as a pointed commentary on the events of 47.