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# THE ORIGIN OF THE POET CATULLUS

J. Suolahti

As we know the full name of the poet Catullus was C.<sup>1</sup> Valerius<sup>2</sup> Catullus.<sup>3</sup> So he was a member of the ancient Patrician gens of the Valerii. His cognomen and his native town Verona<sup>4</sup> show that the poet hardly came from any of the main lines of either of the main branches, the Poplicolae-Flacci or the Messallae, from which there rose a continuous line of consuls. Thus he must have belonged to one of the side branches of the wide gens. It is known that many such branches existed during the Republic and in the Imperial Period their number multiplied. Most of them obviously descended from Plebeian clients of the Patrician gens, from freedman,<sup>5</sup> and new citizens.<sup>6</sup> But some, no doubt, could well derive their pedigree from some Patrician member. So for instance the Faltones and the Laevini had severed as early as the 3rd century from the Poplicolae. It is most likely that there were also other patrician Valerii belonging to the collateral branches, although there exist no sources to prove that.

As to the question what that family branch was like to which the poet Catullus belonged, there are several possibilities. It may have descended from the famous Patrician consuls or at least from the Valerii of the Regal Period. Still, it did not have to be patrician any more, for many branches of patrician families had renounced their status and passed to the plebs or sunk to it.<sup>7</sup> It is even more likely that it has descended directly from the plebs. But also the plebeian branches of the Valerii differed, however, very much from each other. Some of them — like the Tappones, the Triarii, and the Orcae — had risen to the Senate already in the Late Republic, while the members of other branches had only recently received their civic rights; perhaps the manumission of some

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<sup>1</sup> Apul. apol. 10; Hieron. chron. a. 1930 (87 a.Chr.), p. 150 H; E. STAMPINI, *Il prenome di Catullo* (Atti della reale Accademia di scienze di Torino 52, 1916/17), p. 385; cf. Plin. n.h. 37,81. —

<sup>2</sup> Suet. Iul. 73; Porph. Horat. sat. 1,10,18. — <sup>3</sup> Catull. 56,3 etc.

<sup>4</sup> Ovid. am. 3,15,7; Plin. n.h. 36,48; Mart. 1,61,1; 10,103,5; 14,195; Hieron. l.l.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Valerius Antiochus (RE 101). — <sup>6</sup> E.g. L. Valerius Antias (RE 99).

<sup>7</sup> TH. MOMMSEN, *Die römischen Patriciergeschlechter* (MOMMSEN, *Römische Forschungen I*, Berlin 1864, p. 69—127), pp. 103—107.

of them was not of earlier date, either. To which one of these groups did the family of C. Valerius Catullus belong?

Unfortunately no reliable sources have been preserved and the final solution of the problem can probably not be achieved with the present material. But by examining the production and opinions of Catullus and also the lives and phases of other Valerii Catulli it is possible to throw some light on the question. In addition to this, other patrician families offer material for comparison.

## II

Several scholars have tried to infer the origin of Catullus from the material contents of his poems and from the social attitude expressed in them, but they have not come to any agreement.<sup>1</sup> The poems do not contain any direct references to the origin of their author. The only thing that becomes obvious from them is the fact that Catullus came from Verona in North-Italy<sup>2</sup>, and this is proved by other sources.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps a little more information can be derived from the social orientation of the poet. In many respects his attitude towards the countryside and its people seems to resemble that of the aristocrats of the capital. But unlike the aristocrats he does not consider it shameful, though uncomfortable,<sup>4</sup> to live outside Rome in Verona.<sup>5</sup> Still he finds it a suitable object for good-humoured jokes.<sup>6</sup> But the dying Pisaurum<sup>7</sup> or Formiae<sup>8</sup> could be very well disparaged, especially if some hated person happened to be from there. His contempt is directed particularly towards upstarts and the lower sections of society.

But Catullus despised also the lower classes of Rome. He had hardly more respect for those »Magnanimi Remi nepotes» than some Patrician of the capital did.<sup>9</sup> However, an aristocratic attitude to life need not in itself be a sign of aristocratic descent. Tacitus e.g., who was probably the son of a knight,<sup>10</sup> had

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. SCHUSTER, Valerius Catullus (RE VII A, 1948, pp. 2353—2410), pp. 2353—56.

<sup>2</sup> Catull. 4; 17; 31; 68.

<sup>3</sup> Ovid. am. 3,15,7, Plin. n.h. 36,48.

<sup>4</sup> Catull. 68,27.

<sup>5</sup> Id. 68,30. — <sup>6</sup> Id. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Id. 81. — <sup>8</sup> Id. 41,43.

<sup>9</sup> Id. 58; cf. 17.

<sup>10</sup> A. STEIN, Der römische Ritterstand. Ein Beitrag zur Sozial- und Personengeschichte des römischen Reiches. Munich 1927, p. 326; cf. Plin. n.h. 7,76.

a conception of life more conservative and aristocratic than most other aristocrats of his time.

One can also try to explain the poet's descent by examining his friendships and acquaintances. This method is of course not a very reliable one, for naturally a person and especially a poet need not descend from the same class as his friends.<sup>1</sup> In his poems Catullus mentions by name about 80 persons. Of course all of them were not his friends, perhaps not even real persons. But from the names one can conclude at least something about the circles in which he associated.

The friends Catullus had in his youth came from Northern Italy like himself. Part of his poems, too, deal with his native district. Some of his Veronese acquaintances, among them brother and sister Aufilenus and Aufilena<sup>2</sup>, belonged to families which are new even by name. Probably the Veronese Balbus and the immoral Rufus<sup>3</sup> of Bononia came from new families,<sup>4</sup> although without knowing their *nomens* one cannot be sure. Other North-Italian acquaintances of Catullus, the poet Caecilius<sup>5</sup> from Novum Comum, a poet by the same name from Verona,<sup>6</sup> Caelius<sup>7</sup> (lover of the above mentioned Aufilenus), Cornelius from Brixia,<sup>8</sup> the historian Cornelius Nepos<sup>9</sup> from Padua, Postumius from Brixia,<sup>10</sup> and Quintius<sup>11</sup> (lover of Aufilena) bore, like Catullus himself, names of old consular gentes, but they evidently belonged to equestrian side branches. Still, some of them could have risen to the Senate as perhaps was the case with Cornelius.<sup>8</sup> Most might have descended from freedmen and clients of the consular gens, but of course it is not quite impossible either that among the progenitors of some of them there could have been some member of the main branch, who had failed in his official career.

From still further, from Spain was the profligate Egnatius.<sup>12</sup> He bore the name of a rather insignificant family, which, however, had appeared in the senatorial lists.

In all probability, most of Catullus' friends were, however, from his Roman time. Among them, too, were of course some from North-Italy. Many bore the

<sup>1</sup> SCHUSTER, pp. 2355-65, 2369-74.

<sup>2</sup> Catull. 100,1; 110,1; 111,1.

<sup>3</sup> Id. 67,3. — <sup>4</sup> This Rufus was hardly Cicero's friend M. Caelius Rufus, as it has been stated, for this man descended from a knight family of Puteoli.

<sup>5</sup> Catull. 35,2 and 18.

<sup>6</sup> Id. 67,9. — <sup>7</sup> Id. 58,1; 100,1; 100,5; 100,8.

<sup>8</sup> Id. 67,35; 102,4; perhaps a tribune in 67. — <sup>9</sup> Id. 1,3.

<sup>10</sup> Id. 67,35. — <sup>11</sup> Id. 82,1; 100,1.

<sup>12</sup> Id. 37,19; 39,1 and 9.

name of a new family and obviously came from the countryside. Such were e.g. the false friend Alfenus<sup>1</sup> from Cremona, who later on during the Civil War became a consul, as well as Pollio,<sup>2</sup> the brother of the pilferer Asinius from the Marrucinian region. And further, from new families descended Camearius,<sup>3</sup> the intimate friends Fabullus and Veranius,<sup>4</sup> the thief Vibennius,<sup>5</sup> the bad poet Volusius,<sup>6</sup> the bad writer Aquinus,<sup>7</sup> Ravidius,<sup>8</sup> Vectius,<sup>9</sup> and probably also Victor<sup>10</sup> whose gentile name is not known. Most of them seem to have belonged at least to the knights. This is known for certain about Fabullus and Veranius who belonged to the retinue of Calpurnius Piso in Spain and then in Macedonia.

Catullus came of course into contact with the lower sections of society, too. He mentions harlots — whose names are mostly Greek —, mistresses and writers, such as Acme,<sup>11</sup> Amaena,<sup>12</sup> Ipsithilla,<sup>13</sup> Socration,<sup>14</sup> and Thallus.<sup>15</sup> Naturally some of these names may be pseudonyms of well-known citizens.

But most of Catullus' friends in Rome bore the name of some senatorial gens, although it is certain that all of them did not descend from senators. So for instance it is hard to believe that the drunken hostess Postumia<sup>16</sup> belonged to a patrician family, unless the person in question was a wanton wife like Clodia-Lesbia, perhaps the wife of Caelius Rufus and mistress of Caesar bearing the name Postumia.

Aemilius,<sup>17</sup> M. Aelius,<sup>18</sup> Aurelius,<sup>19</sup> Cominius,<sup>20</sup> Flavius,<sup>21</sup> Furius,<sup>22</sup> Gellius,<sup>23</sup> Hortensius,<sup>24</sup> Menenius,<sup>25</sup> Porcius,<sup>26</sup> Quintilia,<sup>27</sup> Quintia,<sup>28</sup> Septimius,<sup>29</sup> and (Quintilus) Varus<sup>30</sup> might also have belonged to senatorial families as far as one can conclude from their names. The debauched Gellius for instance was evidently an unsuccessful brother of the consul of the year 72.<sup>31</sup> But it is almost

<sup>1</sup> Id. 30,1.

<sup>2</sup> Id. 12,6.

<sup>3</sup> Id. 55,10 and 20.

<sup>4</sup> Id. 9,1; 12,15–16; 13,1 and 14; 28,3; 47,3. — <sup>5</sup> Id. 33,2. — <sup>6</sup> Id. 36,1 and 20; 95,7 = Tanusius (cf. Sen. ep. 93,11)?

<sup>7</sup> Id. 14,18. — <sup>8</sup> Id. 40,1. — <sup>9</sup> Id. 98,1 and 5. — <sup>10</sup> Id. 80,7.

<sup>11</sup> Id. 45,1–2; 45,10; 45,21–23.

<sup>12</sup> Id. 41,1; 43. — <sup>13</sup> Id. 32,1; cf. 42. — <sup>14</sup> Id. 47,1. — <sup>15</sup> Id. 25,1 and 4. — <sup>16</sup> Id. 27,3.

<sup>17</sup> Id. 97,2.

<sup>18</sup> Id. 68,41; 68,50; 68,66; 68,152. — <sup>19</sup> Id. 11,1; 15,2; 16,2; 21,1. — <sup>20</sup> Id. 108,1. — <sup>21</sup> Id. 6,1. — <sup>22</sup> Id. 11,1; 16,2; 23,1; 23,24; 26,1. — <sup>23</sup> Id. 74,1; 80,1; 88–91; 116,6. — <sup>24</sup> Id. 95,3.

<sup>25</sup> Id. 59,2. — <sup>26</sup> Id. 47,1; cf. 56,1–3 (Cato). — <sup>27</sup> Id. 96,6. — <sup>28</sup> Id. 86,1; perhaps from Verona. — <sup>29</sup> Id. 45,1 and 21–23. — <sup>30</sup> Id. 10,1.

<sup>31</sup> RE VII, 1912, pp. 1003–1005.

certain that also some others have really belonged to the senatorial aristocracy. Licinius Calvus (Macer), an intimate friend of the poet, was the son of a praetor and a member of an old prominent gens.<sup>1</sup> Another close friend C. (Helvius) Cinna probably rose to plebeian tribuneship and possibly he too belonged to a senatorial family.<sup>2</sup> Also Cornificius,<sup>3</sup> who became a praetor, belonged to a senatorial gens, though to a rather young one. P. Sestius<sup>4</sup> probably did not descend from the half fictitious consul (RE 9), but was at least a son of a tribune of the plebs and became himself a tribune in 58.<sup>5</sup> It is also possible that Cominius and Hortensius can be identified with the recorded senators having the same name. It is even more certain that the praetor of 49, Manlius Torquatus,<sup>6</sup> and Iuventius<sup>7</sup> belonged to the nobility, not to mention Catullus' mistress Lesbia—Clodia, whose father and husband were consuls.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand there were also those who descended from equestrian side branches, or even from freedmen and had only the name of some consular gens. Such were e.g. the grammarians P. Valerius Cato<sup>9</sup> and L. Cornelius Sulla Epicadus.<sup>10</sup>

It might also be worth pointing out that Catullus belonged to the retinue of praetor C. Memmius,<sup>11</sup> governor of Bithynia, just as his friends Veranius and Fabullus belonged to that of Calpurnius Piso.<sup>12</sup>

Further, the poet's father was a friend of Caesar's,<sup>13</sup> although the son severely attacked<sup>14</sup> the destined dictator and his supporters Mamurra,<sup>15</sup> Nonius,<sup>16</sup> and Vatinius<sup>17</sup> in his poems. It cannot, however, be said for sure whether Catullus personally knew these people no more than it can be stated of Cicero<sup>18</sup> — whom he praised — or of the aspirant Antius.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Id. 14,2; 50,1; 53,3; 96,2.

<sup>2</sup> Id. 10,30; 95,1; 113,1.

<sup>3</sup> Id. 38,1. — <sup>4</sup> Id. 44,19—20.

<sup>5</sup> RE IIA, 1921, pp. 1886—1890.

<sup>6</sup> Catull. 61, 165—6: en tibi (Viniæ) domus ut potens et beata viri tui.

<sup>7</sup> Id. 48,1; 81,1; 99,1; 24,1: flosculus es Iuventiorum.

<sup>8</sup> SCHUSTER, pp. 2357—58.

<sup>9</sup> Catull. 56,1—3? — <sup>10</sup> Id. 14,9.

<sup>11</sup> Id. 10,7; 28,9—15.

<sup>12</sup> Id. 28,1; 47,2.

<sup>13</sup> Suet. Iul. 73.

<sup>14</sup> Catull. 29,2; 57,2; 93,1. — <sup>15</sup> Id. 29,3; 41,4; 43,5; 57,2; 94,1; 105,1; 114,1; 115,1 and 8. —

<sup>16</sup> Id. 52,2.

<sup>17</sup> Id. 14,3; 52—53.

<sup>18</sup> Id. 49,2.

<sup>19</sup> Id. 44,11.



Catullus also mentions quite a few other persons who may have been senators as far as can be inferred from their names. Such were the uneducated Arrius,<sup>1</sup> who was sent to Syria on official commission, the bad writers Caesius,<sup>2</sup> Fuficius,<sup>3</sup> Herius,<sup>4</sup> the adultress Maecilia,<sup>5</sup> the bad writer (Nonius?) Suffenas,<sup>6</sup> (Octavius?) Naso,<sup>7</sup> (Roscius?) Otho,<sup>8</sup> (Scribonius?) Libo,<sup>9</sup> and (Valerius?) Tappo.<sup>10</sup> The cognomens Gallus,<sup>11</sup> Rufa,<sup>12</sup> and Silo<sup>13</sup> on their part do not give much indication of their bearers' gens.

So Catullus obviously associated with a variety of people. At least some of them belonged to the highest society of Rome. It is true that his fame as a poet may have opened the doors of many an aristocratic home for him, although he was not then so much appreciated as in our days. But his very mode of living and his attitude to life fit best a young man belonging to the nobility or at least to some senatorial family. Still, the circle of friends does not give any absolutely reliable evidence about this, for certainly to the same circle belonged also many upstart from the rank of knights and many natives of the countryside. Attention has been called to the fact that the father of Catullus was a friend of Caesar's.<sup>14</sup> But naturally the future dictator tried in every way to seek favour among the powerful men of North-Italy; although in this case the friendship may have been due to a similar descent. Only one thing is certain: the poet and his father must have been knights, for only young men of this rank were admitted to the retinue of a governor. Since neither the information about the poet himself nor his own poems reveal his origin, it is worthwhile to examine his North-Italian family branch and its phases.

### III

Catullus has probably been the cognomen of the whole family branch to which the poet belonged, and not only his personal cognomen. For persons by the name Valerius Catullus are recorded as individuals and State Magistrates both in inscriptions<sup>15</sup> and literary sources from the time of Augustus onwards.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Id. 84,2 and 11.

<sup>2</sup> Id. 14,18. —

<sup>3</sup> Id. 54,5. — <sup>4</sup> Id. 54,2. — <sup>5</sup> Id. 113,2: the wife of Pompeius? — <sup>6</sup> Id. 14,19; 22,2; 22,10; 22,19. (Suffenus?).

<sup>7</sup> Id. 112,1—2. — <sup>8</sup> Id. 54,1. — <sup>9</sup> Id. 54,3.

<sup>10</sup> Id. 104,4. — <sup>11</sup> Id. 78. — <sup>12</sup> Id. 59. — <sup>13</sup> Id. 103,1.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. above.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. CIL V 7239 (Susa); V 4484 (Brixia). — <sup>16</sup> Cf. pp. 167—171.

It is true that none of them are from an earlier period than the poet, nor are they even his contemporaries. In case of Catullus it is most likely that there would have remained some mention of this having been only the poet's individual cognomen. On the other hand, it is possible that it has been given as cognomen to one of the poet's ancestors in Transpadana, the very home district of the poet. The name Catullus is possibly of Celtic origin.<sup>1</sup> There also appear forms Catulus and Catlus meaning 'clever' or 'cunning'<sup>2</sup> like the word Catus, of which they are diminutives. The name is quite common in North-Italy.<sup>3</sup> It is often attached to gentile names, like Campilius, Cassius, Casticius, Cornelius, Faelius, Iulius, Munatius and Quintius. It seems likely that at least some of the bearers of these names have descended from Celts, who after receiving their citizen rights had kept their former name as cognomen, but taken the name of their patron to be their nomen. This might have been the case with the poet's ancestors, too. On the other hand it is possible that also the cognomen has to be associated with a Roman aristocrat, Q. Lutatius Catulus, the consul of 218 (RE 5) who conquered part of Gallia Cisalpina.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps one of his clients or relations received the name Valerius through adoption and thus became the ancestor of the Valerii Catulli. But this is rendered unlikely by the fact that the Valerii Catulli never used Quintus as praenomen.

But there were also numerous magistrates from the gens Valeria who took part in the conquest of North-Italy,<sup>5</sup> and many natives of the district were certainly indebted to them for their citizen rights and names. Accordingly in the inscriptions of this province hundreds of Valerii are mentioned. From Verona alone there are known over 70 of them.<sup>6</sup>

As Verona did not receive the Latin rights until the year 89,<sup>7</sup> and it was granted the citizenship not earlier than in 49 — after Catullus' death —, it was

<sup>1</sup> Thesaurus Linguae Latinae Onomasticon II, Leipzig 1907—13, pp. 274—275, cf. 275—277; W. SCHULZE, *Zur Geschichte der lateinischen Eigennamen* (Abh. Gesellsch. der Wissensch. zu Göttingen, Phil. hist. Kl. N.F. V, 5), Berlin 1933, p. 23, note 2, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> Varro, l.L. 5,99; Cic. de or. 2,220, Plin. n. h. 7,1118.

<sup>3</sup> CIL V 7070 (Taurini); V 2126 (Tarvisum); V 5853 (Mediolanum); V 5922 (Mediolanum); V 5300 (Comum); V 4162 (Cremona—Brixia); V 3122 (Vicetia); V 4137 (Cremona—Brixia); V 4460 (Brixia).

<sup>4</sup> Zon. 8,20; cf. CIL V 8114 (Vercellae); 8210 (Aquileia), 6045 (Mediolanum), V 10\* (Pola).

<sup>5</sup> E.g. M. Valerius Laevinus (RE 211) cos 220, L. Valerius Flaccus (RE 35\*) leg 200, cos 195, procos 194, III vir. col. deduc. 190, L. Valerius Tappo (RE 38\*) III-vir col. ad. Placentiam et Cremonam deduc. 190, ad. Bononiam 189 etc.

<sup>6</sup> CIL V 382, 3264, 3302, 3315, 3321, 3367, 3391, 3434—35, 3441, 3474, 3492, 3517, 3563, 3581, 3585, 3604, 3631, 3638, 3643, 3664, 3680, 3731, 3741, 3790, 3794—3817, 8855, 8870.

<sup>7</sup> Paneg. Lat. 9,8; H. NISSEN, *Italische Landeskunde* II, Berlin 1902, p. 205—6.

rather late that a considerable part of its population moved there from elsewhere. The prosperity of the town began, indeed, at the end of the Republic and reached its highest point in the Early Empire.<sup>1</sup> This becomes evident also from the various cognomens of the Valerii of Verona.<sup>2</sup> Some of them are, however, individual cognomens. Since Catullus, as well as his father, were Roman citizens, they themselves or their ancestors must either have received their citizen rights together with some older colony or as individual citizenship in Verona in case the family was of Celtic origin. Both these possibilities must be considered. The founding of colonies in Transpadana began immediately after the war of 222 — 218 and, apart from these, several members of the Celtic nobility in other places as well were likely to receive citizen rights as a reward for their loyalty. Thus it is possible that the ancestors of Catullus were Celts who had received their citizenship as early as the second century. In support of this statement it has been said e.g. that there is a Celtic touch in his language.<sup>3</sup> This is, however, very uncertain. Even if a thing like this could be proved, it does not reveal anything about his descent, only about his former residence.

But after the conquest of North-Italy a flood of population had streamed there from the south. Later on, individual occupants of land moved not only to military colonies but also elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Most of them were Latin, some even citizens of Rome. The ancestors of Catullus may very well have been among them. This does not necessarily mean that they descended from the main branch of the Valerii, but they may derive their origin from the numerous clients of the gens.

Of course it is not impossible that Catullus really belonged to an old patrician family. In the course of time branches of wide patrician families sank to the plebs or at least gave up their official careers and moved to the country. E.g. the father of M. Aemilius Scaurus was a poor contractor,<sup>5</sup> the ancestors of L. Sergius Catilina<sup>6</sup> had not appeared in public offices for a long time and the

<sup>1</sup> Strab. 5,213; Tac. h. 3,8.

<sup>2</sup> Actius, Amphio, Anthiocus, Apolo, Aprilis, Arnanus, Atimetus, Attia, Burrius, Candida, Capito, Cluvianus, Crispinus, Festus, Firmina, Firmus, Galla, Gavia, Gratus, Hecale, Herennia Maxima, Ianuarius, Ismarus, Lucusta, Macer, Marcellina, Maxima Herennia Augurina, Montanus, Nempsis, Optata, Oriclo, Pastor, Planta, Rutilius, Secundus, Surus, Sux, Tertia, Trophinius, Venator, Valens, Valeriana, Veneria.

<sup>3</sup> SCHUSTER, p. 2354; H. J. ROSE, Catullus (*Classical Journal* 16, 1921, pp. 540—555), p. 542, K. P. HARRINGTON, *Catullus and his influence*, Boston 1923, pp. 31—2.

<sup>4</sup> G. E. F. CHILVER, *Cisalpine Gaul. Social and Economic History from 49 B.C. to the Death of Trajan*, Oxford 1941, pp. 1—.

<sup>5</sup> Cic. Mur. 16; Asc. Cic. pro Scaur. 25 St; V.ill. 72; Val. Max. 4,4,11.

<sup>6</sup> Plin. n.h. 7,104; Liv. 44,40,5.

nobility of Q. Sulpicius Rufus was remembered only by the historians.<sup>1</sup> As the Second Civil War had heavily taxed the nobility, Augustus tried to animate it by giving public offices to members of families that had sunk to the plebs long ago.<sup>2</sup> Among them there were certainly many who had moved to the country. Such had been the Aebutii who rose as early as the 2nd century, and may have descended from *tresvir coloniae deducendae* M. Aebutius Helva (RE 12)<sup>3</sup> who moved to Ardea in 442. Fabius Maximus, a knight of Narbo who fought on the side of Pompeius,<sup>4</sup> could also be a patrician. But analogical cases of this kind do not prove anything for sure. Thus three alternatives remain: Catullus descended from Celtic natives, from a client of the Valerii, from Patricians. Some kind of criterion in weighing the different possibilities is given by the later phases of the Valerii Catulli in their official careers.

## IV

We are naturally best informed of those Valerii Catulli who rose to the Senate. Examining them will throw light on the story of this branch of the gens.

The first known aspirant for an official career in this branch was L. Valerius Catullus (RE 124), who acted as moneyer round the years 9—4.<sup>5</sup> Some scholars have thought that he was the son of the poet.<sup>6</sup> But as moneyers as a rule were young men just beginning their public careers, this seems very unlikely. For if Catullus died immediately after the year 54, as it is generally assumed, his son should have been at least 45 years old by the time when L. Valerius Catullus had his bronze coins minted. So this man is more likely to have been the poet's grandson. But as there is no indication of Catullus having been married at all, the person in question may be an offspring of his brother or some more remote relation. To this indicates also the differing praenomen. At least the eldest son and grandson would have been given the name Caius, the first name of the

<sup>1</sup> Cic. Mur. 16.

<sup>2</sup> S. J. DE LAET, *De samenstelling van den romeinschen senaat gedurende de eerste eeuw van het principaat* (28 voor Chr. — 68 na Chr.), Antwerpen 1941, p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> Liv. 4, 11, 5—6.

<sup>4</sup> Schol. Hor. Sat. 1, 1, 13.

<sup>5</sup> H. MATTINGLY—B. SYDENHAM, *The Roman Imperial Coinage I*, London 1923, p. 81, 218.

<sup>6</sup> E. BABELON, *Description historique et chronologique des monnaies de la république romaine vulgairement appelées monnaies consulaires II*, Paris 1886, p. 524; S. J. DE LAET, *Samenstelling*, p. 88; P. ROHDEN—H. DESSAU *Prosopographia imperii Romani saec. I.II.III* (PIR), III, Berlin 1898, p. 354, n. 38.

poet; whereas among other members of the second and third generation persons called Lucius might well have existed.

The same cognomen gives, however, reason to believe that there was some kind of relationship between the poet and the moneyer. This is not, of course, absolutely certain, for the cognomen Catullus was so common, that among the wide gens of the Valerii there could very well be two different Catullus-branches.

The coins themselves do not give any hints at the origin of their designer.<sup>1</sup> The moneyers of that time chose motives for their coins from the life of Augustus and not any more from the history of their own family. Coinage served the imperial propaganda.<sup>2</sup>

In the coins of Valerius Catullus there are the name of the master and the letters S(enatus) C(onsulto) on one side, and on the other there is a laurel wreath, the purpose of which was obviously to remind of the wreath granted by the Senate to Augustus to be hung above his door.<sup>3</sup>

Similar coins had been minted by Valerius' colleagues P. Betilienus Bassus (RE 1), C. Rubellius Blandus (RE 4), and C. Naevius Capella (RE 12) who belonged to equestrian families raised to official careers by Augustus. Such a one was the family of Valerius Catullus. But from the colleagues it is not possible to conclude whether Valerius Catullus belonged to the plebs as they did, or not. The standard of the moneyers remained very high still in Augustus' time.<sup>4</sup> Thus, about half of all moneyers known from that time were members of the nobility. Among them there were at least seven patricians, partly from families that had not appeared in public offices for some time. Augustus wanted to maintain the standard and traditions of public officials as high as possible. But the nobility had lost many of its members in the Civil War, and many other members had retired from public life because of their opposing attitude. In place of them Augustus tried to scrape together members of families that had sunk from their official careers long ago and become poor.<sup>5</sup>

One of these men was e.g. Quintilius Varus, whose ancestors had not acted as consuls for almost four centuries. The question rises whether it were not

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<sup>1</sup> M. GRANT, *The six Main Aes Coinages of Augustus*, Edinburgh 1953, p. 108—109, 4.

<sup>2</sup> C. H. W. SUTHERLAND, *Coinage in Roman Imperial Policy, 32 B.C.—A.D. 68*. London 1951, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Id. p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> K. PINK, *The triumviri monetales and the Structure of the Coinage of the Roman Republic* (Numismatic Studies of the American Numismatic Society 7), New York 1952, p. 44—48.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. p. 167 note 2.

possible that Valerius Catullus, like him, belonged to a collateral branch — settled in countryside — of a Patrician family.

This assumption seems to be supported by the facts that are known about the descendants of the moneyer. In the year 31 the first two consules suffecti were Faustus Cornelius Sulla and Sex Teidius (= Tedijs) L. f. Valerius Catullus (RE 122).<sup>1</sup> As besides the moneyer no other officials by the name Valerius Catullus are known from an earlier time, it is most likely that he was at least a relation of the consul's, if not his father.<sup>2</sup> The son had possibly passed over to the senatorial family of the Teidii through adoption. This might have helped him in his official career, but on the other hand it is to be considered that his descendants gave up the name Teidius and are mentioned merely as the Valerii. Indeed, besides him only one senator Sex Teidius (RE 2) — a supporter of Pompeius in 49 — is known from the gens Teidia. There is an inscription giving pontifex Valerius Catullus (RE 121) together with the consul Valerius,<sup>3</sup> whose son he seems to have been. Perhaps he may be identified with the young Valerius Catullus<sup>4</sup> that is mentioned by Suetonius and according to him was related to a consul and had an intimate relation with emperor Caligula. Perhaps he is also to be identified with the L. Valerius L. f. Catullus<sup>5</sup> mentioned in an inscription found in Athens. The town of Athens had payed homage to him and to his mother Hispula, from which we can conclude that they were Romans of noble birth. As the inscription does not mention the official rank of Valerius, he must have been very young. His mother may have been a daughter of P. Terentius Hispo (RE 49),<sup>6</sup> a friend of Cicero's. Hispo, who belonged to a side branch of the Terenti, was a remarkable financier.

The next generation produces a consul again. In 73 L. Valerius Catullus Messallinus was consul ordinarius<sup>7</sup> with emperor Domitianus. The name gives reason to believe that he was a son of the above mentioned friend of Caligula.

<sup>1</sup> A. DEGRASSI, *I fasti consolari dell'impero romano dal 30 avanti Cristo al 613 dopo Cristo*, (Sussidi eruditi 3), Roma 1952, p. 10; CIL XIV 2095.

<sup>2</sup> PIR III, p. 354, n. 37; III, p. 299, n. 38; DE LAET, *Samenstelling*, p. 88, n. 388; p. 136, n. 801; RE VA, p. 127, n. 3; R. SYME, *The Roman Revolution*, Oxford 1939, p. 79, 363.

<sup>3</sup> CIL XIV 2095.

<sup>4</sup> Suet. Cal. 36; PIR III, p. 354, n. 35; DE LAET, *Samenstelling*, p. 145, n. 921; p. 176, n. 1264; p. 213, n. 1692.

<sup>5</sup> CIA III 619 a.b = IG III 4159; W. DITTENBERGER, *Römische Namen in griechischen Inschriften*, *Hermes* 6, 1872, pp. 281—313, p. 310; P. GRAINDOR, *Athènes de Tibère à Trajan*, Le Caire 1931, pp. 40—.

<sup>6</sup> Cic. fam. 13,65; id. Att. 11,10,1.

<sup>7</sup> CIL V 7239; Frontin. aq. 102; Chr. pasch. a. 354; Chr. Hydat. a. 354; DEGRASSI, p. 21; DE LAET, *Samenstelling*, p. 205, n. 1567; PIR, p. 355, n. 41.

The cognomen Messallinus may refer to his mother's family, the Valerii or Statilii Messallae, unless Catullus Messallinus had moved through adoption from either family.<sup>1</sup> Another possibility is that the person in question according to contemporary fashion assumed the cognomen Messallinus to show his descent from this famous family branch. In any case, the Valerii Catulli and the noble-born Valerii Messallini seem to have had connections that may hint at a remote kinship.

In the reign of Domitianus, Catullus Messallinus was regarded as informer.<sup>2</sup> He was still alive, though blind, in 93,<sup>3</sup> but seems to have died before Domitianus.<sup>4</sup> Possibly the (Valerius) Catullus Mes(salinus) recorded as a sacrificial servant in A.D. 105 could be thought of as the grandson of the favourite of Domitianus.<sup>5</sup> The family branch, at least the straight line, seems to have died out with him. Still it is possible that the Valerii Catullini known from a later age were related to it in a way or other, perhaps through marriage, unless they descended from the clients of the family.

The first of them was still a knight, C. Valerius Catullinus,<sup>6</sup> procurator of Dacia (RE 119); whereas the Valerius Catullinus (RE 118) who was sent by Didius Iulianus to take in his command the rebelling troops of Septimius Severus<sup>7</sup> may have been a senator, perhaps even a consular. Of course Severus let his men kill him.<sup>8</sup> The family, however, did not die out with him, for as late as the time of Constantinus the Great there was a Valerius Catulinus as Praeses Pannoniae Superioris.<sup>9</sup>

It is true that we cannot conclude anything absolutely certain about the origin of the Valerii Catulli from the official careers of the members of the family. But the quick rise of the family at the early Empire suggest that they either enjoyed a particular favour of the ruler or claimed — right or wrong — their origin from the Roman nobility, assumably from the patricians. There is no evidence

<sup>1</sup> B. BORGHESI, *Oeuvres complètes* V, Paris 1869, p. 528; RE IIIA, 1929, p. 2208, n. 44; VIIA, 1948, p. 2552.

<sup>2</sup> Tac. Agr. 45; Plin. ep. 4,22,5; Iuven. 4,113; v.ill. 12,5.

<sup>3</sup> Plin. ep. 4,22,5; Iuven. 4,114; Tac. Agr. 45.

<sup>4</sup> S. GSELL, *Essai sur le règne de l'empereur Domitien*, Paris 1891, p. 269; B. STECH, *Senatores Romani qui fuerint inde a Vespasiano usque ad Traiani exitum*, Lipsiae 1912, n. 57, 401, 708, 1113; Ind. Plin. n. 427.

<sup>5</sup> CIL VI 2075 I v. 49.

<sup>6</sup> CIL III 857; CIL III, p. 8075; J. JUNG, *Fasten der Provinz Dacien*, Innsbruck 1894, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> Hist. Aug. Did. Iul. 5,7; id. Pesc. Nig. 2,5.

<sup>8</sup> Hist. Aug. Sev. 13,7.

<sup>9</sup> H. DESSAU, *Inscriptiones Latinae selectae* I, Berolini 1892, p. 158, n. 704.

in favour of the first alternative. Perhaps they belonged to those collateral branches of patrician families that Augustus raised to public offices and of which the recorded ones probably form only a part. Of course the patrician pedigree of the family branch is not bound to be a genuine one. Augustus was hardly too particular as to this matter, if he only found a man suitable in other respects.

## V

The information of the life of the poet, the contents of the poems, the instances of the Valerii Catulli and the Valerii of Verona in inscriptions, and the official careers of the known Valerii Catulli, do not give any decisive evidence as to the origin of the family branch. As already pointed out there remain three possibilities. The poet may have descended from some North-Italian Celt who had received citizen rights from some Valerius. But he could also be a descendant of an emigrant from the south, from Latium or Rome. In that case his ancestors have probably been clients of the Valerii. If so, the poet was a descendant either of the old client class or of slaves that the family had manumitted later. The connection had, however, broken long ago, for the poet obviously belonged to the knights, and mixed as an equal with the nobility of Rome.

Catullus' attitude to life, his society, the later family history get, however, their most natural explanation, if we suppose that he belonged to some branch of an old patrician family which had settled down in the country. Some collateral branches of the Messallae would perhaps be the most likely, because we find the later members using the compound name Messalla Catullus. But one cannot build too much on this kind of evidence. The origin of Catullus still remains uncertain, and only a very lucky discovery of inscriptions would enable us to solve the problem.