

Greek Intellectuals at Rome: Caecilius Calactinus and Roman Poetry

This paper examines a fragment of the works of Caecilius Calactinus and argues that Greek intellectuals living in Rome in the first century BCE influenced contemporary Roman poets to a greater degree than previously understood. Work on Greek scholars at Rome during the first century BCE (e.g., Spawforth 2012, Hunter and de Jonge 2019) has tended to focus on Dionysius of Halicarnassus but given little attention to the figure of Caecilius Calactinus, a Jewish Sicilian literary critic and rhetorician who was part of Dionysius' circle of friends and fellow scholars. Caecilius was a significant litterateur in the Augustan Age and wrote the treatise to which Pseudo-Longinus's *On the Sublime* directly responded, but his prominence among the Augustan intelligentsia has so far been neglected in modern research. This scholarly lacuna prevents us from fully understanding the influence that Greek intellectuals in Rome may have had on Roman poetry; this case study of Caecilius will demonstrate the social and intellectual connections between these two groups and can bring more attention to the possibility of the interaction of their ideas.

In a surviving fragment of Caecilius's *Peri Historias* (FGrH 183 F2 = Ath. *Deipn.* 11.466A), the author gives an anecdote about the Sicilian tyrant Agathocles: sitting among partygoers drinking from golden cups, Agathocles reminds them that his success is due to his earlier practice of making clay cups (as he had grown up as the son of a potter). Thus the juxtaposition of golden and earthenware cups serves as a metaphor for a larger moralizing point about humble origins. This story appears to have been a Caecilian original, which was borrowed by later authors in several places (Diod. Sic. 20.63.4-5; Plut. *Mor.* 176E; Plut. *Mor.* 544B), but despite some mild variation, all subsequent versions retained the moral lesson of the anecdote

(de Lisle 2021). According to the *Suda*, Caecilius also composed a work entitled *On Things Said Consistently and Inconsistently with History by the Orators*, and thus it seems clear that he was interested in how historical anecdotes could be deployed for rhetorical purposes. Gagne 2016 has articulated the extreme social importance of the cup and its typologies in ancient culture (which is the focus of the Athenaeus book in which our Caecilius fragment appears), and the anecdote about Agathocles was memorable enough to be repeated by multiple later authors.

This fragment's focus on the moral symbolism of golden versus clay cups appears also in Roman poetry contemporaneous with Caecilius's career at Rome. Although the cup had long been a metapoetic symbol, for Roman poets of the first century BCE it also served to demonstrate (as it did for Caecilius) ethical considerations. The distinction between golden and earthenware cups forms the central image of Tibullus 1.1 (Wray 2003) and features in Tibullus's social critique in 2.3. Horace also makes multiple references to the composition of cups (e.g., *Odes* 1.20, 1.31, 2.7) in his larger project of describing the appropriate lifestyle for Roman elites, and the cup symbolism is also deployed by Ovid (*F.* 5.522). Gellar-Goad 2020 has described the importance in Roman literature of earthenware as an illustration of moral conduct's connection to luxury (or the lack thereof). Horace additionally unites cup discourse with the activities of "Sicilian tyrants" in *Epist.* 1.2, perhaps gesturing toward our fragment of Caecilius. While it would be speculative to assert the direction in which the influence traveled, nevertheless this parallel rhetoric demonstrates that inspiration could occur between Roman poets and the Greek rhetoricians with whom they interacted (and Caecilius, as Roberts 1897 describes, was an active member in the intellectual community at Rome). An analysis of the career of Caecilius Calactinus which situates him not only within the rhetorical debates of the Greek scholars at Rome but also among the poets of the Roman intelligentsia can better understand the possibility

of mutual influence among all participants, and future scholarship on the other contemporary Greek scholars at Rome (in addition to Dionysius of Halicarnassus) could be beneficial to the study of Roman poetry.

Works Cited

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