

Goddess in the House? The Identification of the *Domina* in Catullus 68

In his poem 68, Catullus twice refers to a certain *domina* (68.68, 156). It is easy, at first blush, to understand the term to mean Catullus' beloved, given the rich and productive ways in which Catullus constructs his relationship to Lesbia, and given the word's significance in later Roman Elegy. However, there has been a substantial strain of scholarship objecting to this identification. Scholars have been inclined to read and understand a reference to a "chatelaine" charged with the management of the house in which Catullus and Lesbia have their meeting. Kinsey (1967), Wilkinson (1970), and Papanghelis (1982) all argued in favor of this reading on various grounds, primarily arguing that if the *domina* is Lesbia it would create an awkwardness or redundancy, while emphasizing the close association between the words *domus* and *domina* in both this and other poems. Lyne (1979) argued that the concept of *servitium amoris* was an innovation of the later elegists and would have been completely unfamiliar to Catullus and his contemporaries. Thus these arguments all had the effect of undermining any reading that would put Catullus' usage in line with the familiar elegiac *domina*. Although other scholars, such as Baker (1975), have read the *domina* of poem 68 as Lesbia, their arguments have tended to focus on the same structural and thematic elements as the opponents of that reading. In spite of ongoing efforts to identify this elusive figure, Theodorakopoulos (2007) recently claimed that "we do not know for certain who the person referred to as *domina*, and somehow linked with the *domus*... is."

This paper will argue in favor of identifying the *domina* of poem 68 with Catullus' beloved by comparison to other contexts in his corpus in which he uses the term. Although none of these instances are directly parallel to his usage in 68, there are some suggestive trends. This paper will demonstrate that Catullus' typical usage of the term occurs in references to goddesses

(as in 34.9 or 63.91) or women who are powerful or impressive in a way comparable to goddesses (as in 3.10 or 61.31). My presentation will then show that these usages are consistent with reading the *domina* of poem 68 as Lesbia, who is immediately afterwards described as a “shining goddess” (*candida diva*, 68.70), and later compared to Jupiter (68.140); I will also argue that, conversely, in no other case in the Catullan corpus can *domina* be read as a “chatelaine.” This paper will then illustrate how reading *domina* as a term generally used of goddesses and women in comparable positions addresses some of the salient structural and thematic issues that might otherwise oppose identifying the *domina* of poem 68 with Lesbia. While this paper will by no means put an end to debate over the interpretation of this aspect of the poem, it will contribute to a fuller understanding of how Catullus conceives of his relationship to Lesbia within the larger body of his work.

Bibliography

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