

## Catullus, Memmius, and Bithynia

Gaius Memmius was the son-in-law of Sulla, an orator who won backhanded praise from Cicero (*Brut.* 247), seducer of the wife of Marcus Lucullus (*Cic. Att.* 1. 18. 3) and a fierce adversary of his brother (*Plut. Cat. Mi.* 29. 5-8), a poet whose immodesty impressed Ovid (*Tr.* 2. 433), a praetor (*Cic. Q. fr.* 1. 2. 16), a candidate for the consulship, a disgraced exile, the probable but imperfect patron of Lucretius, and a perfect villain for Catullus, and a successful military commander, hailed by his troops as “Imperator.” The last is evidenced by a denarius (427 Crawford). The obverse presents the head of Ceres, facing right, with C · MEMMI C · F · reading downwards. On the reverse is a trophy and a kneeling captive with hands tied behind his back; reading downwards on the left is the title IMPERATOR and on the right C · MEMMIUS.

To my knowledge this remarkable coin is never brought up in discussions of Catullus, despite the fact that Catullus would have been serving in the *cohors* of Memmius at the time he was acclaimed imperator. Crawford and others date the coin to 56, following the consensus that Memmius was governor of Bithynia in 57. This presents a problem, for it seems unlikely that Memmius could have engaged in any significant military campaign nine years after the province had been pacified (*Cic. Agr.* 2. 47) and a full five years after Pompey’s settlement of the East. It is much more likely that Memmius’ victory was earlier, at a time when there was still potential unrest in the area of Bithynia following Mithradates’ resurgence in 67. I argue here that the sum of the evidence shows that the most likely date for Memmius’ victory, and for Catullus’ journey to Bithynia, is 66.

Catullus provides no way to date his service under Memmius. The only reason for fixing on 57 is that Memmius was praetor in 58 and so would have been assigned a province after his year in office. This is unwarranted. Provincial appointments the year following a praetorship

were not automatic. Of the five praetorships for 58 listed as certain by Broughton, only one (excluding Memmius) was a pro-magistrate in 57, C. Fabius Hadrianus.

A date as early as 66 for Memmius' assignment to Bithynia might seem impossible because of the belief that Memmius was tribune in 66. As Ryan (1995) and Bellemore (1996) have shown, this too is unwarranted. There is no evidence that Memmius was tribune in 66. Ryan and Bellemore reached similar conclusions, namely that Memmius' tribuneship was either in 64 or 62. Memmius was connected to Pompey by his marriage to Sulla's daughter, Fausta, and by his cousin's marriage to Pompey's sister. It would not be surprising for Pompey to appoint Memmius as a legate, in accordance with the *lex Manilia*, and assign him to Bithynia while he pursued Mithradates.

The date of 66 is also supported by the Suda's entry on Parthenius, which states that Cinna acquired Parthenius as a slave "when the Romans defeated Mithradates" (*οὗτος ἐλήφθη ὑπὸ Κίννα λάφυρον, ὅτε Μιθριδάτην Ῥωμαῖοι κατεπολέμησαν*). Rawson (1985, 70) argued that the Cinna mentioned here could not be the poet and companion of Catullus, but must be Cinna's father. Lightfoot (1999, 10-13) held that the language of the Suda is too formulaic to adduce a date, but it seems that this can only refer to Pompey's decisive victory at Nicopolis (Dasteira) in the summer of 66, and, together with the Memmius coin, it strongly indicates that this is the time Cinna and Catullus were in Bithynia (cf. Wiseman 1974, 48).

This re-dating of Bithynia invites a fresh look at Catullus' career. On a more limited scope, it rehabilitates Ellis' reading of poems 28 and 47, in which he argued that Veranius and Fabullus served in Spain roughly the same time Catullus was in Bithynia.

## Bibliography

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