

CATULLUS 1.9-10

*Quare habe tibi quidquid hoc libelli  
qualecumque; quod, <o> patrona virgo, 9  
plus uno maneat perenne saeclo.*

(Text: Mynors 1958)

The question of patronal identity – or even patronage – in Catullus 1, raised by *patrona virgo* (line 9 above, the vulgate reading), may never be settled decisively. Consider just five of the more recent treatments of the phrase (cf. Myers 2021, 73, n. 25).

Favouring Cornelius Nepos, the new book's dedicatee, as patron, Gratwick 2002 emends to

*qualecumque <ali>quid. patro<ci>ni ergo  
“in witness of your advocacy, may it endure...”*

Rejecting that as “too cacophonous to be acceptable”, Trappes-Lomax 2007, 34-36 would delete *patrona* as a gloss on *Thaleia*, “the Muse of light verse”:

*qualest cumque. quod <o Thaleia> virgo.*

Against that, in turn, Heyworth 2008 ad loc. objects that there are no proper parallels for a vocative proper name with *virgo* in apposition; he also finds problematical the strong pause between the choriamb's short elements, and the strained tmesis.

Gärtner 2007, 3-4 suggests that identification of *virgo* as “Muse” may be supported by seemingly ironic echoes of Catullus' diction in *Priapea* 2. 3-4 (*carmina digna non libello / scripsi non nimium laboriose / nec Musas virgineum locum vocavi*); uncertainty remains.

Giardina 2011 proposes *qualecumque; quod, <o> patrone, vulgo* which also (cf. Heyworth, above) has a strong pause within the choriamb, while adverbial *vulgo*, “pubblicamente”, “davanti a tutti”, entails an unexpected, extended enjambement.

In his exhaustive study of the dedication, Setaioli 2018 makes a good case for the mutual respect of giver and recipient; the poet describes the historian's work in terms applicable to his own poetry: “la stima fra i due scrittori è reciproca” (p. 1093). So Setaioli avoids getting involved in the “oziosa discussione” of Nepos' patronage. Accepting the vulgate text in 9-10, he understands an appeal to the patron Muse to grant his *libellus* a ‘modest immortality’. Compare Gärtner 2007 and, *contra*, Heyworth (above).

That the line may have held an original *patrone*, as suggested by Giardina, and earlier by Hand 1894, 4 (reading *<o> patrone, per te / plus...*) is an attractive possibility. Catullus offers his new book to Nepos because, he says, Nepos thought his previous light writings worthy, *namque tu solebas / meas*

*esse aliquid putare nugae* (3-4). The exact nature of Nepos' approval is unknown but was presumably practical, perhaps commendatory to the literary intelligentsia of the day. Catullus consequently may have addressed him as *patronus*, not in the term's formal sense, familiar from *patronus* ~ *cliens* relationships, but in the sense of a well established figure who advocates or speaks on behalf of another; so Giardina, citing *TIL* X 787, 7 (*'laxius de quolibet tutore, defensore...'*) and *OLD*, s.v. *patronus* ("an influential person who has undertaken the protection of another person, a patron..."). Far from being ironic, the address will have expressed – with cheerful self-depreciation – a request that Nepos continue to lend a patron's support for the new *libellus*.

I suggest that our vulgate *patrona virgo* represents an attempt to extract sense, possibly a reference to "Our Lady" (cf. Giardina 2011, 58), from a corruption of *patrone rogo*, itself a scribal inversion of *rogo, patrone*. So, perhaps:

*ROGOPATRONE* > *PATRONEROGO* > *PATRONERGO* (?) > *PATRONA VIRGO*.

Catullus then will have written:

*quare habe tibi quidquid hoc libelli,  
qualecumque quidem, rogo, patrone:  
plus uno maneat perenne saeclo.*

"therefore have for yourself whatever this is of a book, whatever indeed its worth, *please*, my patron: may it then (*sc.* with your patronage) endure for more than one generation".

For petitive *rogo*, "please", see Dickey 2012, 738-45 ("requests for favours from friends", also "for major requests"). And for the posited scribal inversion of *rogo patrone*, compare MSS inversions at 1.8 (*habe tibi ~ tibi habe*), 23.13 (*magis aridum ~ aridum magis*), 30.8 (*tuta omnia ~ omnia tuta*), 61.46 (*est amat'is ~ amat'is / est*), 61.185 (*tibi est ~ est tibi*), with Fordyce 1961, 243, on 61.46, and Trappes-Lomax 2007, 13 (who comments on the prevalence of such inversions in the transmission of Latin texts, citing the *Transpositorum vocabulorum exempla* in Verg. *Aeneid*, compiled by Ribbeck 1866, 361-62).

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#### ABSTRACT:

The vulgate reading *patrona virgo* at Catullus 1.9 should be taken as representing an attempt to decipher a corrupted scribal inversion of *rogo, patrone*, a plea addressed to the poem's dedicatee, Cornelius Nepos ("accept this book... *please*, my patron"). The nature of such patronal support is examined, along with some other recent studies of lines 9-10.

#### KEYWORDS:

Catullus, patronage, textual criticism, scribal inversions.