

A Reevaluation of *Pro Caelio* 67: Cicero's Unnoticed Insult

Cicero's well-known speech *Pro Caelio*, in which Cicero defends his friend Marcus Caelius Rufus, affords insights into the Roman legal system, class distinctions, and accepted customs. The point of connection between these three aspects of Roman life is found in the primary manner in which Cicero defends his client: he seeks to undermine the credibility of Clodia and her accomplices, thus rendering their testimony untrustworthy. He censures them by associating them with three distinctly immoral, yet prevalent, elements of contemporary Roman society: adultery, mimes, and playing board games. Much ink has been spilled on the first two of these, notably by Wiseman (1985), yet the third has remained completely undetected until now. This third element of Cicero's rebuke, that of game playing, shall be the focus of this paper.

This paper requires a two-pronged approach. First will come an analysis of *Pro Caelio* in which the reference to playing board games is made clear, taking into account modern scholarship and previous interpretations. The crucial matter is Cicero's use of the word *alveus* as a place where Clodia's friends avoided detection in *Pro Caelio* 67. The proper definition of the extremely flexible word *alveus* in this context has been debated. Yonge's early translation was 'canal,' but nearly all translators since 1985 have followed the translation of 'tub,' or its variants 'bath' and 'bathtub,' given by T. P. Wiseman in Catullus and His World (1985). Such a definition implies either an actual bath – certainly logical, since the scene being described takes place at the Senian bathhouse – or, what Wiseman concludes is more likely, a large empty tub, invoking a popular mime motif of a lover hiding in a tub to avoid detection. This translation of 'bathtub,' unspecified whether filled or empty, has grown to be so prevalent that *Pro Caelio* 67 is even listed as

an example in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* definition for *alveus* as ‘bathtub, sunken recess for bathtub’ (*OLD* 1). However, upon closer examination, neither a full nor an empty tub can have been meant here. Further investigation demonstrates that the correct translation of *alveus* in this context is in fact ‘game board,’ *OLD* 5, with the implication that Clodia’s men avoided detection by playing a board game outside of the baths, which would have strongly negative social resonances.

The second step of my argument will prove that Cicero was not only aware of board game players as a class of people, but he held them in contempt, just as he did adulterers and mimes, thus showing that his identification of Clodia’s accomplices as gamblers was degrading and disempowering, undermining their credibility even as it mocked them. This will be accomplished by a broad examination of similar word usages and references by Cicero, taken from affirming that his disregard of game playing and players is evident elsewhere and is applicable to this context.

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