CATILINE’S WIFE

As we know from Sallust’s *Bellum Catilinae* (Cat. 15.2, 35.3–6; Klebs, *RE* 2.2544, no. 261) the wife of L. Sergius Catilina, pr. 68 (cos. candidate 65, 64 and 63) was called Aurelia Orestilla. The only information to be gleaned from this source is not especially complimentary, for Sallust says: ‘Postremo captus (Catilina) amore Aureliae Orestillae, cuius praeter formam nihil umquam bonus laudavit’.

A beautiful and, one may perhaps be forgiven for assuming this, a young woman, but who in fact was she? What were her origins? And what in particular were her family connections?

The clan name ‘Aurelius’ is common enough among respectable Roman company, and three families are attested as having had consular representation during the later Republic (i.e. between 201 and 31 B.C.). The use of this Aurelia’s cognomen, however, an unusual practice for women of this period (cf. Fulvia, *Cat*. 23.3, and Sempronia, *Cat*. 25.1), leaves no doubt that she was a member of the Aurelii Orestes (the other consular Aurelii are Cotta with consulships in 200, 144, 119, 74 and 65, and Scaurus, cos. suff. 108).

By the first century B.C. the Aurelii Orestes were among that extremely rare breed of Roman political families which had achieved the consulship in four successive generations. Although this family had certainly possessed senatorial status from the first half of the second century, at least, L. Aurelius L.f. L.n. Orestes was the first consul of his family and achieved this exalted position in 157 (Klebs, *RE* 2.2514–2515, no. 179). He shared his year in office with a certain Sex. Iulius Sex. f. L.n. Caesar, the first Iulius Caesar to win high magisterial office in a historically verifiable period (Sex. Caesar, cos. 157, was only a very distant relative of the C. Iulius Caesar who became consul in 59). L. Orestes, meanwhile, continued to have a successful career for some time after his consulship and is known to have been a legatus to L. Mummius (cos. 146) in Greece in 146.1

The son of the consul of 157, another L., Aurelius Orestes, was consul in 126 and went out to become governor of Sardinia. From successful military operations in this province he gained a triumph in 122.2 Clearly a capable general, he is unfortunately more often remembered for the fact that he was the commanding officer of a young politician called C. Sempronius Gracchus, who was his quaestor for two years (126–124) before becoming a tribune of the plebs (Plut. C. *Gracch*. 1.4, 2.1–3). Although it is usually argued that Gracchus left Sardinia after a quarrel with, and without the permission of, his governor, there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that they were actually enemies.3 Orestes may well have been a friend of the man who later achieved fame and a certain notoriety. His absence from Rome during the crucial period of Gracchus’ tribunates may well in a sense have contributed to the events in 121, for his undoubted political expertise could surely have been employed in restraining the ambitions of the younger politician, and in calming an ugly situation which rapidly got out of hand.4

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The grandson of the consul of 157, again L. Aurelius Orestes, became consul in 103 (Klebs, RE 2.2515, no. 181). His colleague was C. Marius who was then involved in fighting the Cimbri and Teutones, and in that particular year held his third consulship. Of this consul Orestes very little is known other than the fact that he died tragically before the end of his term of office, but fortunately his family line did not die with him (Plut. Mar. 14.7; Broughton, MRR.1.562).

This family’s representation at consular level did end, nonetheless, with the consul of 71, Cn. Aufidius Cn.f. Orestes, who probably died shortly after his tenure of this magistracy; he is definitely not attested as alive after this date.5 Cicero (de Dom.13.35) says that a certain Cn. Aufidius (from a family with previous praetorian status in the senate, Broughton, MRR.2.535) adopted an Orestes, and this man was surely the son of the consul of 103.6 He, unluckily, had no son who survived to become a consul although it is possible, of course, that a son sat in the senate, and may even have reached an unrecorded praetorship, since the sources are so poor. Thus, this prestigious family like so many others disappeared from the fasti of the later Roman Republic. Cn. Aufidius Orestes’ colleague in the consulship was P. Cornelius Lentulus Sura, who was later expelled from the senatorial order by the censors of 70, Cn. Cornelius Lentulus Clodianus and L. Gellius Poplicola. There cannot, thus, have been much affection between the family of Clodianus and the Cornelii Lentuli Surae. Although Sura regained his position in the senate by winning a second praetorship in 64,7 this previous slight on his character, probably politically motivated, may account for his participation with Catiline in the infamous conspiracy of 63.

Aurelia Orestilla was, therefore, not only a lady with apparent good looks, but also a member of a well known political family, and very probably in the possession of considerable wealth. If we can really believe Cicero and Sallust when they claim that Catiline was a spendthrift (Cic. in Cat. 1.6.14, ‘Praetermitto ruinas fortunarum tuarum . . .’; Sall. Cat. 5.4, ‘alieni appetens, sui profusus’), although three consular candidacies in three successive years were more than sufficient to bring any politician to the verge of bankruptcy, it would account for the ‘amor’ which afflicted him, providing that his marriage to Aurelia Orestilla can be dated to the late 60’s. Our sources are not very informative regarding the fate of Aurelia Orestilla after Catiline’s plotting was revealed to the public, and after he had departed from Rome, then to be killed at Pistoria in 62. We may perhaps hope that Aurelia Orestilla made another match more longlasting and respectable than her previous marriage. She was certainly still alive in 50 because Cicero mentions her in a letter to M. Caelius Rufus (ad fam.8.7.2) and says that her daughter, mentioned by Sallust (Cat. 35.3), was due to be married to a Q. Cornificius, probably the son of the praetor of about 66 (cos. cand. 64), and himself later to win the praetorship about 45 (Broughton, MRR.2.557). At least one point concerning Aurelia Orestilla is obvious, however: the lustre of her background explains why Catiline entrusted her safety to Q. Lutatius Catulus (cos. 78), one of the most senior members of the senate in 63. Only one of the most highly regarded principes of the res publica would have been considered
appropriate for taking care of an Aurelia Orestilla, not an obscure matron of ill repute, but a lady of the highest political and social circles at Rome.®

STEMMA OF THE AURELII ORESTES

L. Aurelius L.f. L.n. Orestes (cos. 157)

L. Aurelius L.f. L.n. Orestes (cos. 126)

L. Aurelius L.f. L.n. Orestes (cos. 103)

Cn. Aufidius Cn.f. Orestes (cos. 71)

Q. Mucius Orestinus = Aurelia Orestilla = L. Sergius Catilina (trib. 64)

Q. Cornificius = filia (pr. c.45)

NOTES

4. Cic. Brut. 25.94 notes that ‘Sunt etiam (multae orationes) L. et C. Aureliorum Orestarum, quos aliquo video in numero oratorum fuisse’. C. Aurelius Orestes, not otherwise attested, was presumably a brother of the cos. 126; see Sumner, G.V. The Orators in Cicero’s Brutus: Prosopography and Chronology, Toronto 1978, p. 46, where he conjectures without strong argument that the cos. 103 and 71 were descendants of the former not the latter.
5. Cicero, pro Plane. 21.52, says that Cn. Orestes was an example of a politician from a notable family who failed to be elected to the tribunate; praetor urbanus 77, Broughton, MRR 2.88; Klebs, RE 2.2295–2296, no. 32.
6. M. Pupius Piso, cos. 61, Broughton, MRR 2.178, who is coupled with Orestes in this instance of adoption by elderly men, was near enough a contemporary of the cos. 71, although unlike Orestes he had a delay of ten years between being praetor and finally winning a consulship.
7. This was not an unprecedented phenomenon at all, since C. Licinius Geta, cos. 116, was expelled from the senate by the censors of 115, L. Caecilius Metellus Diadematus and Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus, but regained his position and went on to become censor in 108, with Q. Fabius Maximus Eburnus, Broughton, MRR 1.548. Furthermore, C. Antonius, cos. 63, was similarly treated in 70, but his career did not suffer unduly as a consequence.
8. Cf. a possibly pejorative remark by Cicero, ad. fam. 9.22.4. She was perhaps related to Q. Mucius Orestinus, tribune of the plebs in 64, Gruen, E.S. The Last Generation of the Roman Republic,
In an intriguing recent article by T.T. Rapke¹ the author argued inter alia that Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso (cos. 7 B.C.) clashed openly and cantankerously with Tiberius on no less than three occasions during the first two years of the new reign, and ‘nowhere in the sources is Piso found in agreement with Tiberius at any time or on any issue’.² Consequently the notion (of e.g. Syme, Seager, Levick and others) that Piso was a friend and ally of Tiberius is a fiction. Piso had changed from ‘a loyal and esteemed public servant’ of the first emperor to a headstrong and intractable irritator of the second. His selection as imperial governor of Syria was brought about by the influence of his wife, Plancina, with Livia Augusta. This radical reinterpretation merits further scrutiny.

Three passages were selected by Rapke to prove his point.³ In the first he writes that Granius Marcellus, propraetorian governor of Bithynia, was accused of maiestas before the Senate in A.D. 15. Tiberius was so angry at the disrespect shown by the accused towards himself and particularly Augustus that he exclaimed he would vote openly and under oath, thus placing the senate under the same obligation. Piso, displaying one of those few vestigia morientis libertatis, asked the emperor whether he would vote first or last. According to Tacitus the emperor repented of his outburst and allowed Marcellus to be acquitted. Rapke adds: ‘If Suetonius (Tib. 58) is referring to the same trial, a conviction still resulted’. Why not add Tacitus’ revealing appendix? The charge of extortion against Marcellus was referred to a special commission.⁴ This case is extremely unstable, as Bauman perceptively remarks.⁵ Miller and Seager believe that Tiberius was angry because the charges were frivolous or maliciously trivial,⁶ so his anger burst out over the mutilated imperial statue and he insisted on a formal trial to obtain a definitive verdict once and for all.⁷ Goodyear, after reviewing the literature on this case, is inclined to prefer these views.⁸ In addition, Shotter argues plausibly that Piso’s purpose may not have been malicious but rather he intended to extricate Tiberius and the Senate from a difficult position.⁹ At any rate none of these scholars feels that Tacitus is here insinuating that the emperor was angry with Piso.

In the second passage Piso allegedly inflicts on Tiberius another species libertatis before the Senate the following year. ‘In the face of obsequious opposition from C. Asinius Gallus and with Tiberius observing the exchange in stony silence, Piso argued that the decorum reipublicae demanded that the Senate continue to meet
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