


C. Causinius Schola: an *eques* in Frontline Politics

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Abstract: This note discusses the evidence on the *eques* C. Causinius Schola, an associate of Clodius, and argues for the significance of his political role in late Republican Rome.

Keywords: C. Causinius Schola; P. Clodius Pulcher; *equites*; Roman criminal trials.

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Resumen: Esta nota analiza las evidencias relativas al *eques* C. Causinius Schola, partidario de Clodio, y sostiene la relevancia de su papel político en la Roma republicana tardía.

Palabras clave: C. Causinius Schola; P. Clodius Pulcher; *equites*; procesos penales romanos.

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C. Causinius Schola was tightly implicated with two crucial moments in the life of P. Clodius Pulcher; all we know about him hinges on those two episodes.¹ In 62, when Clodius was indicted in the Bona Dea case, he was called up as a defense witness and provided him with an alibi: on the day of the festival the defendant could not possibly have been in Rome, because he was staying at Causinius' residence in Interamna.² Cicero gave evidence to the contrary: he claimed that Clodius had in fact visited him at his own house in Rome on the day itself.³ Cicero fatally undermined Causinius' account: the distance of 900,000 steps which separated Rome from Interamna could not feasibly be covered in a few hours.⁴ This geographical detail makes clear that the Interamna that Causinius called his hometown was Interamna Lirenas (mod. Pignataro Interamna) in south-east Latium.⁵

The jury had to choose between the word of a *consularis* and that of an individual with no record of office-holding; a passage in Quintilian, though, suggests that other witnesses conveyed the same version as Causinius.⁶ The outcome of the trial, much as it was notoriously rigged, indirectly framed Causinius as a perjurer; no legal consequences ensued from it. On a substantive level, though, Causinius' evidence was patently false: it is in fact the only known example of a false testimony to have been given in the late Republican courts.⁷ The fact that Causinius gave it on a such a high-profile occasion is a sign of the strength of his connection with Clodius, and surely also of the confidence that the future tribune had towards him: being able to hold one's own in the face of wide and substantial political opposition, on such a major occasion, was no easy undertaking.

A decade later, Causinius gave evidence at an even higher-profile trial: the case against Milo for the assassination of Clodius.⁸ He was an eyewitness: he had been travelling with Clodius on 18 January 52, along with two plebeians (P. Pomponius and C. Clodius) and about thirty armed slaves; of all the individuals who formed that retinue he was the only one of equestrian standing.⁹ The party was travelling from Aricia to Rome, but Causinius stated that the original plan had been to spend the day on an estate that Clodius owned *in Albano*, a few miles down the road (possibly near modern Castel Gandolfo).¹⁰ However, Clodius changed his plans after hearing of the death of the architect Vettius Cyrus, and decided to return to Rome later that day.¹¹ Cicero directly engages with Causinius' testimony in his defense speech, and defines him as *familiarissimus et idem comes Clodi*.¹² In the same breath he adds a brief dismissive mention of the evidence he had given at the Bona Dea case, which brings into focus the close connection between him and Clodius.¹³ Causinius' account,

¹ See the brief biographical summaries by Münzer in *RE* 3.2, col. 1813; Nicolet 1974, 834; Benner 1987, 165-166.

² Alexander 1990, 116, no. 236.

³ *Cic. Mil.* 46; *Ascon.* 49.11-17 C.

⁴ *Schol. Bob.* 85.29-31 Stangl.

⁵ Moreau 1982, 201-202 shows that this notice enables us to confidently place Causinius' residence at Interamna Lirenas, which is indeed at ca. 90,000 steps (i.e. 90 Roman miles) from Rome; the other potential candidates, Interamna Nahars and Interamna Praetuttiorum, are respectively closer and further than that. See also Wiseman 1974, 139 n. 7.

⁶ Quint. 4.2.88: *fiducia testium*.

⁷ Guérin 2015, 82.

⁸ Alexander 1990, 151-152, no. 309.

⁹ Clodius drew the support of other influential men of municipal origin, probably of equestrian standing: Menulla of Anagnia, who dedicated a statue of Clodius in the new complex attached to the Libertas shrine (*Dom.* 81), was clearly a man of means; Titius, who recruited people in the territory of Reate (*Sest.* 80, 112), had considerable political weight in that context. Cf. also the anomalous case of Gellius, son of L. Marcius Philippus (*cos.* 91) and stepbrother of L. Gellius Publicola (*cos.* 72), who belonged to a senatorial family, but never rose beyond the equestrian order (see Münzer's entry in *RE* 7.1, col. 991-992).

¹⁰ Keeline 2021, 231. On Clodius' property portfolio see Shatzman 1975, 327. Roselaar 2010, 165 n. 55 states that Causinius owned the estate: Cicero's text does not suggest that.

¹¹ Cicero's account of Clodius' movements is partly contradictory: Davies 1969; cf. Keeline 2021, 238-239.

¹² See Powell 2013, 34-35 on Cicero's pressing need to engage with Causinius' testimony. The adjective *familiarissimus* is used a few lines earlier about another associate of Clodius of municipal origin (*Mil.* 46): Titus Patina from Lanuvium, about whom nothing else is known.

¹³ Berry 2015, 19 attractively argues that the clause *cuius iam pridem testimonio Clodius eadem hora Interamnae fuerat et Romae* is in fact an interpolated gloss as it does not quite serve Cicero's line of

though, could be of use to Cicero: it fed into the argument that Milo lacked information on Clodius' movements and had no intention of attacking him.

What was most significant about Causinius' testimony, though, was his account of the clash in which Clodius lost his life. According to Asconius, in his testimony he vividly stressed the atrocity of what he had witnessed.¹⁴ It was not merely a statement of what had occurred along the Appian Way: it was a heavily loaded political intervention, which was intended to make an impact. When M. Claudius Marcellus, one of Milo's advocates, began to question Causinius, the commotion caused by the *Clodiana multitudo* was such that Marcellus had to seek refuge on the tribune of the *quaesitor* Domitius.

We lose sight of Causinius after that memorable event. We have no way of telling whether he took part in the civil war, or whether the death of his friend led him to withdraw from the political fray. We are none the wiser on the nature of his connection with his hometown, nor can the trajectories of his descendants be traced in any way. One may fairly wonder whether he died without heirs. We know of a freedman of his, *C. Causinius Scolae l. Spinter*, who oversaw the construction of a funerary monument found at the Vigna Corsi on the Appian Way (of all places) in his capacity as *primus curator* of a *societas* whose membership and brief are not otherwise specified.¹⁵ Another inscription from the same site records the deaths of a freedwoman of Gaius called Causinia Tertia and of a twelve-year old girl called Causinia Advena (*CIL* 6.14623/4 = *EDR*156819).¹⁶ These two documents point to a stable connection of Causinius and his *familia* with the city of Rome and its surroundings, which lasted into the second half of the first century BCE, and continued in some form in the following decades. A *tessera nummularia* of unknown provenance (now at the British Museum), dating to 20 April 32 CE, records a money-handler called Heliodorus, who worked for a Causinius (*EDR*189978);¹⁷ it is just about possible to suggest a connection with Causinius Spinter. There are no records of the Causinii in the political history of the late Republic or the early Principate, though, nor in the municipal life of Interamna.

The profile of Causinius Schola, then, stands out in the otherwise untraceable trajectory of his family. However, it speaks to far-reaching developments in the history of the late Republic. He was a well-off individual of municipal origin who established a strong connection with a leading political figure in Rome, without pursuing public office, in so far as we know. We do not know what kind of ties he kept with his hometown;¹⁸ the fact he owned a property there is surely significant. Even his intriguing *cognomen* remains elusive.¹⁹ We do not know what drew him to politics, how he may have benefited from it, nor how he actually contributed to the operation of Clodius' faction.²⁰ His presence next to Clodius on 18 January 52 is the sign of a close relationship, although we should not straightforwardly infer from it that he was his right-hand man, let alone that he had been throughout the previous decade.

What is most striking, though, is the use of the spoken word that Causinius made on two occasions, as a star witness in politically crucial trials. In the first case he gave a story that, whilst unfounded, enabled Clodius to escape conviction; in the second one he decisively contributed to creating an unviable hostile climate around Milo and his defense effort. Far from being an unremarkable figure, he was a consequential player in a political project that set the agenda for the best part of a decade.²¹ Atticus is the classic illustration of the principle that being part of the

argument, and is missing from manuscript H and from Asconius' quotation of the passage (49 C). I find it defensible on content grounds. See also Keeline 2021, 230.

¹⁴ Ascon. 40.1-3 C. On the site of Clodius' assassination see Berry 2025, 95-99.

¹⁵ *CIL* 6.10326. Fabre 1981, 159-16 reckons that the association was established by Clodius himself in order to provide a burial for his associates; cf. also Benner 1987, 97.

¹⁶ D'Andrea 2023, 88, 199.

¹⁷ Cf. Wiseman 1971, 37 n. 5 ("the imperial banking house of Causinius").

¹⁸ Cf. Tatum 1999, 81: "a burgher".

¹⁹ Otherwise unattested: Kajanto 1965, 347.

²⁰ On the role of "intermediate leaders" in Clodius' faction see Vanderbroeck 1987, 54-56.

²¹ Cf. Gruen 1974, 274 n. 50: "not a figure of any significance". On Clodius' readiness to use friendly court witnesses at important political junctions cf. Benner 1987, 97.

senatorial order was no prerequisite for playing a significant role in Roman politics; Causinius Schola –a much less conspicuous figure– proves the same point on a very different, but not incommensurable scale. Late Republican politics was an even busier and less predictable space than we are usually prepared to envisage.

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