Q. CAECILIUS METELLUS MACEDONICUS

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In his recent study of the Roman republican aristocracy, K. Hopkins sounded a note of caution concerning the parentage of Q. Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus, who triumphed pro praetore in 146, was consul in 143, and censor in 131. His affiliation Q.f. L.n. is not usually disputed, but this scepticism has caused me sufficient concern to explore the problem.

Macedonicus was praetor in 148 and, therefore, ought to have been born about 188. He won the consulship in 143 two years later because he suffered the humiliation of repulsae in consecutive elections. His brother L. Caecilius Metellus Calvus reached the same magistracy in the following year, and certainly must have benefited from Macedonicus' incumbency as an influential electoral factor. If his election to the consulship was suo anno, then his birth date ought to be assigned to 185.

Q. Caecilius L.f. L.n. Metellus, the consul of 206, is generally regarded as the father of the consuls of 143 and 142, but if, for the sake of argument, Macedonicus was not the son of the consul of 206, and also not the grandson of the consul of 251, then a Q. Caecilius Metellus and a L. Caecilius Metellus have to be found. Such an arrangement is initially quite plausible, because both are apparently available. A legatus named Q. Metellus is recorded in 185, and a quaestor called L. Metellus is attested for 214. Thus, the following family stemma could be devised:

L. Caecilius Metellus (cos.251)

Q. Metellus (cos.206)  L. Metellus (q.214)  M. Metellus (pr.206)

Q. Metellus (leg.185)

Q. Caecilius Metellus Macedonicus  L. Caecilius Metellus Calvus

(cos.143)  (cos.142)

While this hypothesis may appear attractive, it does contain fundamental flaws, which I shall now illustrate.

According to Livy, L. Caecilius Metellus, the quaestor in 214, achieved
notoriety by suggesting, in the aftermath of Cannae, that the res publica be moved overseas. However, there is considerable doubt about the historicity of this politician's name, because when the same Metellus reappears in the next year in conflict with the censors, he is usually assigned the praenomen 'Marcus'. Livy also relates that in 209 he was omitted from the lectio by the censors of that year on account of his previous treasonable behaviour, but that he regained his political position by winning the aedilate in 208, and became praetor urbanus in 206. There is clearly some confusion about the identity of this particular Metellus, and while it is always possible that a L. Caecilius Metellus was quaestor, it does in fact seem rather unlikely. H.H. Scullard, for instance, recognised that this was an error by Livy, and suggested that M. Caecilius Metellus the praetor is probably identical with the quaestor. This would also explain the delay in his career since he was plebeian aedile in 208, the same year in which his consular, and probably younger, brother was curule aedile. Thus, L. Caecilius Metellus, the supposed quaestor, may be discarded from any prosopographical reconstruction of the family.

Q. Caecilius Metellus who was sent by the Senate to Greece in 185 to arbitrate between Philip V of Macedon and the Thessalian poleis may have been the consul of 206, but legati even in important ambassadorial roles need not have been senior politicians. The commission which was dispatched consisted of Metellus, M. Baebius Tamphilus, and, according to Livy, but not Polybius, a Ti. Sempronius. The political and senatorial status of Metellus' colleagues will reveal, without doubt, just who he was. M. Baebius Tamphilus is relatively easy to identify. He had been praetor in 192, and later became consul in 181, after a considerable delay to his career, and so in 185 he was a senior praetorius. Livy claims that Ti. Sempronius was the third member of the party, but this is by no means certain. The Ti. Sempronius ought to be Gracchus who became consul in 177, and who in 185 may have been an ex-tribune or merely quaestorius. There are considerable problems about Gracchus' career in the 180's with his tribunate depending on the date of the trial of L. Cornelius Scipio Asiaticus, either in 187 or 184. If the later date is preferred, it makes it almost impossible for him to have undertaken a major role in Greece in 185, when an important election was at hand. The only other available Ti. Sempronius is the former consul of 194, Longus, but I would suggest that he is unlikely to have been the third member of the party, particularly since he is named after an ex-praetor. Livy may have misread his source here, because Polybius noted that Ti. Claudius Nero was the third legatus. Nero gained the praetorship in 181, and in 185 was perhaps an aedilicus. Polybius is surely the more reliable source, particularly since he was closer to the actual events.

The politician consistently named first by Livy when he discusses the activities of this embassy is Q. Caecilius Metellus, and on the basis of that fact he ought to be regarded as the senior legate. Therefore, he should outrank both M. Baebius Tamphilus, the ex-praetor, and Ti. Claudius Nero, who should replace Ti.
Sempronius as a member of the legation. Because no other member of the Caecilii Metelli gained high office in the second century before 148, the one politician available for this important position is the consul of 206. Moreover, Q. Caecilius Metellus was undeniably alive in 193 when Livy categorically states that he was present at a senatorial debate. Not only did the consul of 206 continue to have a vigorous career in the 180's, but he also intervened in the quarrel between the newly elected censors of 179, M. Aemilius Lepidus and M. Fulvius Nobilior. Livy’s description on that occasion of a Metellus who was one of the principes senatorum leaves little doubt that the politician referred to is the consul of 206. The death of this influential leading figure may have occurred sometime during the latter half of the 160’s since his demise goes unrecorded by Livy.

Prior to the lex Villia Annalis, when politicians who aspired to high office were often successful in their thirties, the consul of 206 was elected in the year following his aedilate. This suggests that he was born not much after 240, particularly since Pliny records that he read the laudatio at the funeral of his father. L. Caecilius Metellus, the consul of 251, who died in 221 can hardly have been born much later than 281, which indicates that he was at least forty years of age at the birth of his consular son. Furthermore, while Macedonicus’ birthdate can be established at eighteen years after his father’s consulship (206–188), this is not an inordinately longer delay than in the previous generation (251–c.240). Although the possibility of longer than average generations is not always readily acceptable, there are other instances of this phenomenon. The apparently long hiatus between the consulships of 206 and 143/2 does not indicate that a generation is missing. Several other leading families in Roman political life also fail to produce consuls at regular intervals, but not because of some misfortune in the family. For example, D. Iunius Brutus, the consul of 77, was the son of the consul of 138, M. Aemilius Scaurus, praetor in 56, was the son of the consul of 115, and L. Porcius Cato, consul in 89, was the grandson of M. Porcius Cato who had been consul in 195.

It may be correct to assert that in any senatorial family there were numerous ‘other’ sons who, because they did not relish the prospect of a political career, preferred to remain equites. Nevertheless, it would be decidedly odd if Macedonicus, who was apparently from a famous line, was actually related to two Caecili Metelli, who were so completely obscure. It is worth remembering that the ancestors of Ser. Sulpicius Rufus, who gained the consulship in 51, and who came from a comparatively unknown family, are mentioned by Cicero. Had Macedonicus’ ancestors been of equal mediocrity, it is quite probable that the contrast between fame and obscurity would have survived in the sources. More significantly, Pliny the Elder, who was, perhaps, in a better position to judge, never doubted the relationship between Macedonicus and the consul of 206. So, quite simply, the most realistic affiliation for the consul of 143 is the one he already possesses. There is no need to tamper either with his parentage or with
the stemma of the Caecilii Metelli.

**STEMMA OF THE CAECILII METELLI**

L. Caecilius Metellus Denter  
(cos.284)

L. Caecilius L.f. C.n. Metellus  
(b.c.281, d.c.221, cos.251)

Q. Caecilius L.f. L.n. Metellus  
(b.c.240, d.c.165, aed.208, cos.206)

Q. Caecilius Q.f. L.n. Macedonicus  
(b.c.188, d.c.115, cos.143)

M. Caecilius Metellus  
(b.c.241, q.214, trib. 213, aed.208, pr.206)

L. Caecilius Metellus  
(b.c.185, cos.142)

**NOTES**


2. MRR 1.461.

3. His severitas apparently made him unpopular with the electorate, *de Vir. ill.61.3*; Val.Max.7.5.4; conjectured from Livy, *Oxy. Per.* 52; cf. A.E. Astin, *Scipio Aemilianus*, Oxford 1967, 85–86, 104. His triumph in 146, MRR 1.467, ought to have brought him sufficient popularity to secure a consulship in 145.

4. MRR 1.474.


8. Livy 24.43.2–4: ‘extemplo censoribus P. Furio et M. Atilio a (M.) Metello tribuno plebis dies dicta ad populum est — quaestorem cum proximo anno adempto equo tribu moverant atque aerarium fecerant propter coniurationem deserendae Italiae ad Cannas factam’.

9. Livy 27.11.2, 27.36.9, 28.10.3–9.

10. Pliny, *NH* 7.43.140: ‘multos liberos relinquuere’. This refers to the children of the cos.251, and so there is a possibility that a L. Metellus existed. However, the family propaganda inherent in such a statement probably taken from this politician’s epitaph should not be overlooked.


13. MRR 1.350, 1.373, 1.383, 2.537.

14. Ti. Sempronius Gracchus’ offices in the 180’s are very cluttered: trib. pleb.187/184 MRR 1.376
(for the later date), Livy 38.52.3 (for the earlier date); IIIvir colonis deducendis 183, *MRR* 1.380; ae.d.182, *MRR* 1.382; pr.180, *MRR* 1.388.

15. *MRR* 1.342, 2.616.

16. Pol.22.6.6; cf. Scullard, (above, n.11) 148, n.3, who prefers the inclusion of Gracchus.

17. Since the commission was evidently composed of a senior *consularis*, and a senior *praetorius*, the third member is more likely to have been Nero rather than the ex-quaestor/tribune Ti. Sempronius Gracchus, or another ex-consul Ti. Sempronius Longus.


19. The commission was evidently composed of a senior *consularis*, and a senior *praetorius*, the third member is more likely to have been Nero rather than the ex-quaestor/tribune Ti. Sempronius Gracchus, or another ex-consul Ti. Sempronius Longus.

20. Livy 40.1.2; *MRR* 1.382, L. Caecilius Metellus Denter, pr.182; *MRR* 1.409, M. Caecilius Metellus Denter, leg.173; *MRR* 2.538. These politicians were cousins of the cos.206 through their common ancestor, the cos.284.

21. Livy 35.8.4: 'Q. Metellus, qui consul dictatorque fuerat'.

22. Livy 40.45.8: 'quo repente principes senatorum cum agmine venerunt civitatis, inter quos Q. Caecilius Metellus verba fecit'; Scullard (above, n.11) 180; *OCD* 677; RE 3.1229-1230. It is possible that he died some time in the late 170's. Livy 23.21.7; Scullard (above, n.11) 58, 87, n.3, 180, n.2; *MRR* 1.393.

23. The cos.206 became *apontifex* in 216, but his death is not noted by Livy in the extant books up to 167, although *lacunae* do appear in the relevant places in the text. It is possible that he died some time in the late 170's. Livy 23.21.7; Scullard (above, n.11) 58, 87, n.3, 180, n.2; *MRR* 1.393.

24. Livy 27.36.9: curule aedile, 208; *28.10.2-3, 28.10.8, 28.11.12: consul, 206.

25. G.V. Sumner, *The Orators in Cicero's Bruto*: Prosopography and Chronology, Toronto 1973, 32, argued for shortly before 237 as the likely birth date for the cos.206, since he had presumably assumed his *toga virilis* before being allowed to give the funeral oration. Pliny, *NH* 7.43.139, 'Q. Metellus in ea oratione quam habuit supremis laudibus patris sui L. Metelli'.

26. Sumner (above, n.25) 32, 43, also suggested that the cos.206 was not the eldest son of the cos.251, but because his *praenomen* was not 'Lucius'. Thus, his affiliation is L.f. L.n. C.pron.


28. The cos.206 was the son of Salonianus, the result of Cato's second marriage, Pliny, *NH* 7.14.61; Gellius, *NA* 13.20.7. L. Gellius Poplicola, cos.36, was the son of the cos.72, who was probably born about 135, Sumner (above, n.25) 102–103.


30. The numerous references to Macedonius ought at some stage to have mentioned an obscure background, but Cic. 2 in *Verr* 3.90.211; *pro Font.* 11.23 dwell instead on his personal qualities, while Suet. Aug. 89.2, refers to his family; cf. Pliny, *NH* 7.15.59: 'Q. Metellus Macedonius, cum sex liberos reliquerat, XI nepotes reliquit, nurus vero generosoque et omnes qui se patris appellatisque salutarent XXVII'.


32. Pliny, *NH* 7.44.142: 'hisius quoque Q. Metéli qui illis de patre dixit filius inter rara felicitatis humanae exempla numeratur. Nam praetere nonores amplissimos cognomine Macedonici a quattuor filiis inlatus rogo, uno praetore, tribus consularibus (duobus triumphalibus), uno censorio, quae singula quoque pauci confugeret'. Macedonius' death can, therefore, be fixed accurately to 115 or 114, after the election of M. Caecilius Metellus to the consulship of 115, and before the successful election of C. Caecilius Metellus Caprarius to the same office. *RE* 3.1229–1230, where the *stemma* includes a L. Metellus, trib.213; cf. Münzer, *Römische Adelsparteien und Adelsfamilien*, Stuttgart 1920, 304.
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