The Elegiac Cityscape

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Published by The Ohio State University Press

Welch, Tara S.
The Elegiac Cityscape: Propertius and the Meaning of Roman Monuments.
The Ohio State University Press, 2005.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/28268.

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AS AN INTRODUCTION to the sorts of questions Propertius asks of the Roman cityscape in Book 4, this chapter explores the interplay of places and poetic styles in elegy 4.1, Book 4’s controversial programmatic poem that has much to say about topography but little about any one monument. Elegy 4.1 takes the reader on a verbal tour of Propertius’ Rome. Acting as tour guide, the poet introduces several ways of reading the city around him, several responses to Roman places. The most obvious instance of this multivalent reading is the fact that the poem is split into halves in which different speakers espouse contrasting views on the material of the fourth book—the first, a celebratory and grand view seemingly voiced by the poet himself; the second, a skeptical and more restricted view offered from the perspective of the astrologer Horos.¹

Yet even within each “univocal” half, the poet organizes and approaches the urban subject material in various ways that will inform the rest of the topographical poems in the book. In the first half of the poem, for example, Propertius offers (at least) three different ways of interpreting Rome. First, its opening lines, in which the poet introduces a guest to the ways the city he sees differs from the settlement it was long ago, introduce Rome as a city that changes over time. As the poem progresses, Propertius adds another element: cultural perspective. Highlighting his dual allegiance to his native Umbria and to his current homeland, Rome, Propertius suggests that Rome offers different faces to visitors with different cultural backgrounds. Third,
homing in on the way his own poetry will shape and glorify the city, Propertius introduces Rome as a place built of words rather than of brick and stone. In the second half of the poem, Horos adds to the list two additional perspectives: genre and gender. Taking aim at the enthusiasm expressed in the first half of the poem, Horos argues that the elegist must stick to a more modest Rome fitting for delicate and personal elegy. Similarly, the astrologer’s focus on women and the feminine suggests that men and women inhabit different Romes.

On a broader level, the poem’s two parts engage in a dialogue about how Rome fits into other physical models that inform identity. In the first half, Propertius promises to discuss Roman monuments in the context of rituals and festivals, i.e., in the context of other structures, intangible ones that helped Romans organize their lives in meaningful ways. In the second half, Horos broadens this context by posing an alternative architectural framework that influences actions and behaviors: the sky, whose paths and monuments direct our very fates. Horos’ claim reminds us all that Rome’s landscape—multiple though it is—is but one part of a larger material world. Ironically, Horos’ knowledge of a grander celestial city returns the focus to the smallest of units: the individual. Telling fortunes, Horos repopulates Rome (and other cities) with individuals—the poet included—each with his or her personal perspective, resisting or conforming to the ideologies built into the city around them.

ROMES PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

The first half of the poem is spoken, it seems, by Propertius himself, acting as a spectator of Rome’s glorious monuments. In the opening lines, Propertius juxtaposes the splendors of the city around him with its rustic roots:

hoc quodcumque uides, hospes, qua maxima Roma est,
ante Phrygem Aenean collis et herba fuit;
atque ubi Nauli stant sacra Palatia Phoebio,
Euandri profugae procul eae boues,
faictilibus creuere deis haec aurea templa,
nec fuit opprobrio facto sine arte casa.
Tarpeiusque pater nuda de rupe tonabat,
et Tiberis nostris aduem aubus erat.
qua gradibus domus ista Remi se sustulit, olim
unus erat fratrum maxima regna focus.
Curia, praetexto quae nunc nitet alta senatu,
pellitos habuit, rustica corda, patres.
bucina cogebat priscos ad uerba Quiritis:
centum illi in prato saepe senatus erat.

All that you see here, visitor, where great Rome stands now, was but hill
and grass in the days before Trojan Aeneas. And where stands the Palatine sanctuary for Phoebus Protector of the Sea, the exiled cattle of Evander used to take their rest. These golden temples arose out of clay spirits, nor was it any shame to live in a house built without pretense. The Tarpeian Father thundered from his bare rock, and Tiber was a neighbor to our cattle. Do you see where the house of Remus rises up yonder on its high steps? Once a single hearth was the extent of the brothers’ kingdom. The Curia, which now gleams aloft with the Senate in its ceremonial toga, once held skin-clad Elders, humble hearts those. A shepherd’s horn used to assemble Romans of yore: then “the Senate” was often any hundred men in a field. (4.1.1–14)

In this passage, contemporary Rome is the Rome of Augustus; all of the specific monuments mentioned in these opening lines can be linked to Augustus’ urban activity. The four-line emphasis on the Palatine Hill and the possibility of a view of the Capitol, the Tiber, the Forum, and the Quirinal suggest to Stahl that the speaker is located on the Palatine Hill, perhaps even near the Temple of Palatine Apollo; this would make the opening lines’ viewpoint “Augustan in the most literal way.” One problem inherent in the trope of Rome’s humble beginnings is the tension between nostalgia for a better past (a “Golden Age” rhetoric, such as can be seen in Tibullus 1.10) and pride in a glorious present (an “evolution of justice” rhetoric, such as the one found in Lucretius De Rerum Natura Book 5). Like Vergil in Aeneid 8, in which Aeneas takes a tour of the rustic locale that will become Rome’s splendors, Propertius must straddle the line between progress and degeneration, planting seeds of the present in the past and finding the virtues of the past in the present. For Stahl, Propertius solves this problem precisely by means of the Augustan viewpoint mentioned above: the repeated images of Aeneas and his followers weave the gens Iulia throughout the story of Rome’s growth. Stahl’s reading of this poem thus sees continuity between Rome past and Rome present, continuity guaranteed by the recent extensive attention given by the Julian family to urban progress.
Yet like its mirror-image in *Aeneid* 8, this trope also requires that readers always be aware of the differences in, or discontinuities among, Romes then, now, and yet to be. Indeed, so broad is the gap between then and now that Propertius must explain Rome’s humble past to his visitor, to whom it is not readily apparent in the modern, golden city. Newman refers to this distance as a type of estrangement, a concept confirmed by the poet’s own statement that the Roman has but a thin connection to his heritage:

\[
\text{nil patrium nisi nomen habet Romanus alumnus:}
\]
\[
\text{sanguinis altricem non putet esse lupam.}
\]

The Roman foster child has nothing from his ancestors except the name: he would not wish to believe that a she-wolf nursed his bloodline. (4.1.38)

In temporal terms, the Roman foster child is alienated from his own past. DeBrohun, in her recent study of this poem, argues that the gulf between past and present raises questions about how Rome grew. The unsettling answer that Propertius provides, she argues, is that Rome grew through the use of *arma*, a method that problematizes not only the growth and development of Rome but also the parallel growth of Propertius’ poetry from small to great. To highlight a slightly different element of DeBrohun’s complex argument, these *arma* are equally problematic for both temporal frames of the physical city: the sophistication and scale of Roman/epic arms are at odds with Rome’s simple forebears, and with the peace that seems manifest in the current city’s splendors. Rome’s past and present are thus both connected by means of *arma* and differentiated by them.

In its refusal to choose between connecting Rome’s past and present and severing them, this opening passage poses the tension between continuity and discontinuity that operates in all aetiology, and so provides a fitting introduction to the themes the poet will discuss later in the poem and throughout Book 4. As Bing points out, the very need to explain something from the past “bespeaks at once an awareness of the enormous gulf separating past and present, and the desire to bridge it.” Bing notes that interest in aetiology increased dramatically in the Hellenistic period; whereas Homer’s heroic age, unattested in the Greek landscape but for the tomb of Achilles, is to remain remote, Greeks of the Hellenistic period felt a greater need to forge linkages to
the past. I believe this rise in interest reflects a growing insecurity about cultural identity in a period following tremendous social and political upheaval—i.e., in a period that marks a strong break from a past now lost. Similarly, the temporal play of Propertius’ opening poem and of the aetiological poems that pepper Book 4 has strong implications for Roman identity. As one critic states, the simultaneous bridge/gap drawn between past and present in this passage, as in aetiology in general, constitutes a search for what is “Roman” that has no stable answers. Is it what was, what is, or what will be in the destiny implied by the forward march of time? The presence of Romes divergent over time thus multiplies the ways one may interpret Roman monuments.

WHOSE CITY?

At the end of elegy 4.1’s first half, the poet rounds off his tour with a surge of patriotism—but for which patria is unclear:

\[
\text{moenia namque pio coner disponere uersu:}
\]
\[
\text{ei mihi, quod nostro est paruus in ore sonus!}
\]
\[
\text{sed tamen exiguo quodcumque e pectore riui}
\]
\[
\text{fluxerit, hoc patriae seruiet omne meae.}
\]
Ennius hirsuta cingat sua dicta corona:
\[
\text{mi folia ex hedera porrige, Bacche, tua,}
\]
\[
\text{ut nostris tumefacta superbiat Umbria libris,}
\]
\[
\text{Umbria Romani patria Callimachi!}
\]

For I should try to lay out these walls in my holy verse: alas, that there is such a tiny voice in my throat! But all the same, whatever trickles from my puny breast, it will all go to serve my fatherland. Let Ennius decorate his words with a bristly crown: decorate me with leaves from your ivy, Bacchus, so that Umbria might grow proud, swollen with my books, Umbria, fatherland of the Roman Callimachus! (4.1.57–64)

Since Propertius has been describing monuments in Rome, the moenia of 4.1.57 surely are Rome’s walls, and patria in 4.1.60 would seem to refer to Rome, glorified in the poet’s verse. But Propertius’ patria in 4.1.64 is explicitly Umbria. The repetition of the word patria draws
attention to the fact that the poet is at home in two cities, and that he brings with him the perspective of a resident of each. Similarly, at 4.1.63 his goal is to glorify Umbria (ut . . . tumefacta superbiat Umbria), but two lines later he complicates the matter with the claim that his written city rises for Rome’s benefit (4.1.67):

Roma, faue, tibi surgit opus, date candida ciues
omnia, et inceptis dextera cantet auis!

Rome, approve: this work rises for you. Grant favorable omens, o citizens, and may the bird of prophecy sing propitiously at what I have begun! (4.1.67–68)

The combined purposes of Roman and Umbrian glorification emphasize his ambivalent viewpoint on Rome, and open the possibility for variations across Italy in ways of viewing Rome. The seer Horos, skeptical speaker of the poem’s second half, draws renewed attention to Propertius’ culturally divided perspective on Rome. Pointing out that Propertius is Umbrian (4.1.121–30), Horos warns that Apollo forbids the poet to thunder in the Forum (uetat insano uerba tonare Foro, 4.1.134). Not only is thundering antithetical to the Callimachean elegist, but more importantly for the present argument, the Forum is no place for an Umbrian to speak out. Horos’ point is all the more powerful for the reader who recalls the end of Vergil’s second Georgic, in which the poet contrasts the happy Italian who cultivates the rustic gods (ille deos qui novit agrestis, G. 2.493) with the unhappy Roman who witnesses the insane Forum (ferrea iura / insanumque forum aut populi tabularia vidit, G. 2.501–2).

The poem elsewhere hints at other people with plural cultural identities. At 4.1.33–38 Propertius lists towns that have been absorbed not just into the Roman polity but into the very city itself, now suburbs and satellite towns dwarfed by great Rome:

quippe suburbanae parua minus urbe Bouillae
et, qui nunc nulli, maxima turba Gabi.
et stetit Alba potens, albae suis omine nata,
ac tibi Fidenas longa erat isse uia.
nil patrium nisi nomen habet Romanus alumnus:
sanguinis altricem non putet esse lupam.
Indeed Bovilla was less a suburb when the city was small, and the Gabines, who are now nothing, were a great horde. And Alba stood strong in those days, born from the omen of a white sow, and the road to Fidenae used to be considered a long one. The Roman foster child has nothing from his ancestors except the name: he would not wish to believe that a she-wolf nursed his bloodline. (4.1.33–38)

Given how many foreigners have become Romans—Fidenates, Bovillans, Gabines, Albans, Umbrians, Propertius himself—we might wonder from how far afield the hospes comes to whom Propertius gives his tour of the great city (4.1.1). The last couplet of this passage emphasizes Rome’s immigrant population: Romans are all alumnus, foster children.14 As Johnson points out, such naturalized citizens are at once Roman and not Roman, self and other: “But who,” Johnson asks, “is an Umbrian to explain to Romans the truth of their city? It is he, after all, who stands as alumnus, the naturalized citizen, in this equation between those who know that their mother’s milk was from the famous wolf and those who don’t believe in that myth.”15 It is worth noting that everywhere Propertius uses the word alumnus—four times overall, three in Book 4—he connects it to a place rather than a person.16 Identity comes from places as much as from parents. What do Rome’s monuments mean to Romans? Which Romans? With these tensions between native and foreign, self and other, elegy 4.1 calls into question the entropic impact of cultural perspective on the meaning of a culturally diverse city.

A CITY OF VERSE

In marking out his new poetic endeavor, the poet establishes a tension between monuments made of stone and brick and those he constructs out of his words. Turning from Rome’s glorious past to his own task as its poet, Propertius sets Romulus’ walls (and what they have become) side by side with his own poetic walls:

optima nutricum nostris lupa Martia rebus,
qualia creuerunt moenia lacte tuo!
moenia namque pio coner disponere uersu:
ei mihi, quod nostrò est paruu in ore sonus!
sed tamen exiguò quodcumque e pectore riui
fluxerit, hoc patriae seruiet omne meae!

Wolf of Mars, best of nursemads for our commonwealth, what walls grew from your milk! For I should try to lay out these walls in my holy verse: alas, that there is such a tiny voice in my throat! But all the same, whatever trickles from my puny breast, it will all go to serve my fatherland. (4.1.55–60)

Scholars often note the Callimachean resonance of these lines; they are topographically important as well: Propertius establishes the theme of himself as builder. *Disponere* has strong spatial force, and the word is normally used of laying out or positioning buildings in space. The metaphor continues with *versu*, emphatic at line’s end, all the more startling as the nominal partner for the adjective *pio* earlier in the line. It is worth noting how succinctly line 4.1.56 poses a contrast to the *incipit* of Vergil’s *Aeneid*, with its very different combination of walls and piety (*Aen.* 1.7 and 1.10, respectively). What is more, since the walls that grew from the she-wolf’s milk surely refer to Romulus’ archaic city, and to the contemporary walls the speaker points out to the visitor, the repetition of *moenia* at 4.1.56–57 (*qualia creverunt moenia . . . moenia . . . coner disponere*) makes clear the parallel between Rome’s first founder, its re-founder, Augustus, and its latest founder, Propertius, each an architect of the city in his own way and with his own tools.

As this *Callimachus Romanus* builds to a conclusion in the first half of the poem, he urges visitors to judge monuments by his own poetic talent:

scandentis quisquis cernit de uallibus arces,
ingenio muros aestimet ille meo!
Roma, faue, tibi surgit opus, date candida ciues
omnia, et inceptis dextera cantet auis!
sacra diesque canam et cognomina prisca locorum. (4.1.65–69)

Whoever sees these citadels rising above the valleys, let him judge their walls by my genius! Rome, approve: this work rises for you. Grant favorable omens, o citizens, and may the bird of prophecy sing propitiously at what I have begun! I shall sing of the rites and festivals of Rome, and of the hallowed names of its places.
As Newman points out, we might have expected a different line: *ingenium muris aestimet ille meum!* (let him judge my genius by those walls!), a claim such as the poet often makes about Cynthia: she is (paradoxically) the source and product of his *ingenium* (2.1.4 and cf. 2.30b.40) and has power over his words. Instead, the poet chooses to reverse the common trope about his talent—instead of his subject conferring fame on his talent, his talent confers fame on his subject. The astrologer Horos will mimic Propertius’ language with the same message at 4.1.125–26: *scandentisque Asis consurgit vertice murus, / murus ab ingenio notior ille tuo* (the wall of Assisi climbing upon its hilltop—a wall made more famous because of your genius). Words have power over people—and cities. Architecture has now replaced the *puella* as the beneficiary of the poet’s skill. It is also important to note that this injunction about judging fame is given not to his readers *per se*, but to anyone who sees monuments; the poet’s effect is not confined to poetry and its readers. Rather, those who see monuments are to judge them by Propertius’ words.

Propertius continues to hold in balance the physical and verbal cities in the next couplet. *Tibi surgit opus,* he says at 4.1.66: this work rises for you. *Opus* has strong poetic connotations, and *surgit* is commonly used of architecture. We might press these nuances of the phrase, by translating it thus: this (poetic) work rises (into the skyline) for you. In the pentameter, Propertius once again sets himself up as a new Romulus, founding a new city: a bird on the right (*dextera auis*) will approve his endeavor, just as birds on the right had shown favor to Romulus’s city when it was new. Finally, and most importantly, his famous programmatic statement draws attention to the names of places—*cognomina prisca locorum*—not the places themselves. These names, moreover, are not simply *nomina,* names given at birth, but rather *cognomina,* names bestowed afterward to clarify and redefine existing identities. Throughout this programmatic section, therefore, Propertius’ words juxtapose the monuments themselves with what is said about them. There is a Rome of stone, and a Rome of words.

**ROME FOR THE ELEGIAC LOVER**

In the second part of this introductory poem, the seer Horos interrupts the enthusiastic poet with a warning against this new and ambitious program. Horos—himself embodying another voice, a self-styled
defender of elegiac norms—introduces still more variables in interpreting Roman places, the first and foremost of which is genre. As he begins his rebuttal to Propertius’ new grand designs, Horos picks up the theme of the city of words only to turn it on its head:

quo ruis imprudens, vage, dicere fata, Properti?
non sunt a dextro condita fila colo.

Where are you rushing, Propertius you fool, to utter the fates? These threads were not set up on a favorable distaff. (4.1.71–72)

With dextro . . . colo Horos recalls the dextera . . . auis Propertius had summoned four lines earlier to sanction his poetic city, but he re-appropriates divine favor for the poetic mission; though line 4.1.72 surely refers to the literal activity of the Parcae, who weave and mete out the threads of fate, the line also plays on spinning as a metaphor, as old as Homer, for poetry. Horos also plays on the double meaning of condita, an obvious term for city building, especially after the proem to Vergil’s Aeneid (1.33). Horos’ interruption itself seems to indicate a fundamental incompatibility between urban subject matter and finely spun poetry. After the seer demonstrates his own credentials, he makes his point about this incompatibility even more explicit. Apollo, erstwhile patron of Propertius’ former love poetry, forbids it:

tum tibi pauca suo de carmine dictat Apollo
et uetat insano verba tonare Foro.

at tu finge elegos, fallax opus: haec tua castra!—
scribat ut exemplo cetera turba tuo.

Then Apollo tells you a few things about his type of poetry, and he forbids you to thunder in the frenetic Forum. No—you craft elegies instead, a tricky task: this is your tour of duty!—so that the rest of the crowd may write from your example. (4.1.133–36)

Again, Horos turns the poet’s own words to new meaning: where Propertius had promised that his opus would rise up for Rome (tibi surgit opus, 4.1.67), Horos encourages him to stick with elegiac poetry, a fallax opus. Propertius’ poetic city is antithetical to elegiac poetry. Horos is responding to the poet’s own promise of a grander style for Book 4: words such as tumefacta and superbiat (4.1.63), surgit (4.1.67), and images such as the poet’s chariot racing toward a new goal
Horos’ response to this inflated program is that the poet is forbidden by his patron Apollo to thunder, *tonare*, in the Forum. The phrase is multivalent. On one level it speaks about the sort of poetry Apollo’s poet is best suited to write: the word *tonare* at once evokes Callimachus’ famous statement that thundering was Zeus’s province, not Apollo’s:

> “βροντᾶν οὐκ ἐμόν, ἄν Δίος.”
> καὶ γὰρ ὅτε πρῶτιστον ἐμοὶ ἐπὶ δέλτον ἔθηκα
> γούνασιν, Ὄπολλων ἐπεν ὃ μοι Λύκιος:
> “... ὅσιε, τὸ μὲν θύσις ὅτι πάχιστον
> θρέψαι, τὴν Μοῦσαν δ’ ὀγαθε λεπταλέην.”

“It is not my job to thunder, but that of Zeus.” For as soon as I put the tablet on my knees Lykian Apollo said to me, “Poet, feed the victim to be as fat as possible, but keep your Muse slender.” (*Aitia* fr.1.20–24)

Because of the Callimachean intertext, I read Propertius’ *suo de carmine* as “about his song” rather than “from his song.” I believe Apollo is feeding the poet guidelines, not words. Thundering, says the god, is not the sort of thing appropriate to Apollo’s poet. On another level the phrase *vetat tonare* forbids Propertius from engaging in a public career such as would be boomed in the Forum. Yet thundering also summons the image of Jupiter Tonans from 4.1.7, a temple built by Augustus in 23 BCE to commemorate the special favor shown to him by the sky-god. In forbidding thundering, Apollo thus vetoes not only a grand, un-Callimachean poetic style but an Augustan monument as well. Add to this the explicit interdiction from the Forum, and we are left with the impression that grand poetry may treat some sorts of urban places—some parts of Rome—while elegiac poetry inhabits different places—some other parts of Rome, parts without thunder or the bustle of the Forum. This relationship between—or rather severance of—genre and urban location offers yet another way of reading Rome: it changes according to the matrix of genre.

**GENDERED SPACE**

Furthermore, the stories Horos tells to validate his own authority are all about women—not the men who had featured in the more patriotic
first half of the poem. The reader may recall that in the poem’s first half, against a catalogue of Evander and Aeneas, the Patres, Fabius Lupercus, Lucumo, Titus Tatius, Romulus and Remus, Caesar, Iulus, the Decii and the Bruti (both the founder of the Republic and the tyrannicide), the poet includes only Vesta, armigera Venus, the Sibyl, the prophet Cassandra, and the she-wolf as representatives of the softer sex—hardly puellae in any sense, except for Cassandra, but, as DeBrohun argues, all these women serve and operate in an exclusively male world. Horos, on the other hand, focuses closely on women and women’s concerns. Various examples of female sexuality fill his own prophetic cursus honorum—Arria, a mother who lost two sons to warfare (4.1.89–97); Cinara, who suffered a difficult childbirth (4.1.99–102); Iphigeneia, virginal sacrificial victim of the Trojan War (4.1.109–14); and Cassandra again, now the rape victim of Ajax (4.1.114–18). These women and their experiences are the antithesis of the masculine experience outlined in such inflated terms by Propertius in the first half of the poem.

When the seer turns to the poet’s own stars, he draws attention to the fact that Propertius’ life has been guided by a feminine, not masculine, influence. After the loss of his father in the civil wars, a loss inappropriate for one as young as the poet presumably was, Horos reveals that Propertius took up the toga of manhood under his mother’s guidance, not his father’s:

ossaque legisti non illa aetate legenda
patris et in tenuis cogeris ipse lares:
nam tua cum multi uersarent rura iuuenci,
abstulit excultas pertica tristis opes.
mox ubi bulla rudi demissa est aurea collo
matris et ante deos libera sumpta toga.

And you collected the bones of your father, which should not have been collected at such a young age, and you are forced into a lowly estate. For although many bulls used to turn over the soil in your fields, a grim surveyor’s rod took away the riches you had cultivated. Soon, when the golden amulet was released from your young neck, you took up the free man’s toga before the watchful gods of your mother. (4.1.127–32)

A ceremony normally involving fathers and sons has become, in the wake of war, one between mothers and sons. Propertius is thus shepherded into manhood by his mother; in this way he is, the seer sug-
gests, more in tune with feminine concerns than with the traditionally masculine exploits promised in the poem’s first half.

Horos’ focus on mortal women, and on Propertius’ mother, offers yet another outlook on the split city that emerges from this split poem. Just as the seer pits the grand Callimachean city against the softer elegiac town, he suggests a difference between man’s Rome and woman’s. He follows his famous urban injunction (uetat . . . tonare Foro . . . at tu finge elegos, 4.1.134–35) with a plea to attend to the ladies:

militiam Veneris blandis patiere sub armis,
  et Veneris pueris utilis hostis eris.
nam tibi uictrices quascumque labore parasti,
eludet palmas una puella tuas.

You will endure a tour of duty under the soft weapons of Venus, and you will be a useful foil for Venus’ boys. For whatever conquests you have earned with your own work, one girl will make sport of your victory palms. (4.1.137–40)

Horos has transformed martial Venus, advancing Caesar’s arms at 4.1.46, into Martial Venus, waging her war for and with lovers. One woman will win this war against the poet, cheating him out of the tokens of victory. “Avoid the Forum,” Horos tells Propertius: it is the poetically correct thing to do, and a girl will keep you from such male pursuits anyway. Gender difference, too, influences the way one interprets Roman places and the places one interprets.31

HOROS’ OMINA AGAINST THE POET’S COGNOMINA

It is widely agreed that the intrusion of a second voice at 4.1.71 retracts and amends the program set out in the first half of the poem.32 Horos urges a return to personal elegiac poetry and an awareness of the woman that foils all grander plans. He also demonstrates a broad interest in the interconnection of physical environment and identity. Like Propertius, Horos follows a physical structure: that of the sky. Horos’ knowledge of the sky, he contests—that is, his expertise in its topography—gives him special authority to interpret the city on the ground. Horos presents a lengthy argument that identity is better
revealed and shaped by the celestial city than the terrestrial one; that
the terrestrial city obscures its own cost in human suffering, while his
heavenly architecture reveals it; and that the city on the ground will
always be shaped and seen by persons, rather than institutions or cat-
egories.

As mentioned above, Horos opens his rebuttal by discrediting the
city Propertius promised to celebrate a few lines earlier:

quo ruis imprudens, uage, dicere fata, Properti?
non sunt a dextro condita fila colo.
acciens lacrimas cantans, auersus Apollo:
possis ab inuita uerba pigenda lyra.

Where are you rushing, Propertius you fool, to utter the fates? These
threads were not set up on a favorable distaff. You are inviting tears by
your singing: Apollo is against it. You seek words from your unwilling
lyre that you will regret. (4.1.71–74)

Condere is a word of building, and also of weaving; we saw above how
these lines attach Propertius’ poetic project to his urban project. Yet
these lines also bring into play the relationship between building a city
(and weaving poetry) and understanding one’s place in a wider uni-
verse, by speaking the will of the gods (dicere fata, 4.1.70). Propertius’
project of understanding Roman identity simply via the sacra diesque
and cognomina prisca locorum is, to Horos, foolish, off-task, and unsan-
tioned by the gods. In fact, the explicit absence of divine sanction for
Propertius’ project, seen in the phrases non . . . a dextro . . . colo and au-
ersus Apollo, frustrates the hopes of the poet who just five lines earlier
hoped for favorable portents (candida omina) and an auspicious (dextera)
bird of omen (4.1.67–68). In Horos’ opinion, the omens did not appear.33

In contrast, Horos claims to speak for the god Apollo, even to be his
proxy—or at least to be privy to the god’s thoughts. He breaks into the
poem just as Apollo had in Callimachus’ Aitia 1.23–24, with a warning
and with some advice about what sort of poetry is appropriate (τὸ μὲν
θύσῃ ὅτι πόλιστον θρέψαι, τὴν Μοῦσαν δὲ ώγαθὲ λεπταλέν; feed the
victim to be as fat as possible, but keep your Muse slender). Horos
twice voices Apollo’s displeasure with Propertius’ intended theme of
topographical poems: at 4.1.73 (auersus Apollo) and again at 4.1.133
(Apollo . . . uetat insano uerba tonare Foro). Horos’ access to the god’s will
is a byproduct of his acquaintance with the heavens: he is a bona fide
astronomer/astrologer, and takes every chance to offer his credentials
as such. Indeed, he asserts the reliability—*fides*—of his craft four times in the poem (4.1.80, 92, 98, and 108), and traces his roots to the likes of the famous Hellenistic astronomers Conon and Archytas (4.1.77–78). He is thus an expert not only at the stars, but at the sort of erudite art Propertius has promised. Horos is skilled in the movement of the stars (4.1.75–76) and poses the value of knowing the topography of the heavens:

> aspicienda uia est caeli uerusque per astra  
> trames, et ab zonis quinque petenda fides.

You must pay attention to the path of the sky, and the true corridor through the stars; seek assurance from the sky’s five zones. (4.1.107–8)

Though he extols such astrological knowledge as an alternative to oracles, hepatoscopy, haruspicy, and necromancy—all of which failed to foretell the fates in the particular case Horos is describing (4.1.103–6)—his description emphasizes the spatial layout of the sky: its paths and passageways (*uia, trames*), and its neighborhoods (*zonis*).

With his expertise in the stellar topography that allows him to sing the fates, Horos redirects Propertius’ gaze to individuals as inhabitants of the city. From this perspective, Rome’s existence and growth rests on such events as the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, the lost innocence of Cassandra, and the death of Arria’s two sons. The astrologer brings the point home by reading Propertius’ own stars, concentrating on the profoundly sad effect Rome has had on his own life. As it was then, so it is now:

> hactenus historiae: nunc ad tua deuehar astra;  
> incipe tu lacrimis aequus adesse novis . . .  
> ossaque legisti non illa aetate legenda  
> patris et in tenuis cogeris ipse lares:  
> nam tua cum multi uersarent rura iuuenci,  
> abstulit excultas pertica tristis opes.

Enough of ancient history: now let me proceed to your stars; you, be ready to deal with renewed tears. . . . And you collected the bones of your father, which should not have been collected at such a young age, and you are forced into a lowly estate. For although many bulls used to turn over the soil in your fields, a grim surveyor’s rod took away the riches you had cultivated. (4.1.119–20, 127–30)
Propertius, Horos argues, can never view the city unprejudiced by his sad past; thus he should abandon his project and keep to personal elegies. The city can never be divorced from the individuals who inhabit it; a fall must accompany the rise, and thus Horos can only promise to sing of tombs:

dicam: “Troia cades, et Troica Roma resurges”;
et maris et terrae longa sepulcre canam.

I shall say: “Troy, you will fall, and Trojan Rome, you will rise anew”;
and I shall sing of the tombs widespread on land and sea.36 (4.1.87–88)

CONCLUSION

Propertius’ introductory poem, then, while promising to explain Rome’s monuments in the book to come, does so by offering many ways, often contradictory, of explaining them. The multiple perspectives on Rome’s places offered in elegy 4.1 raise the possibility that Rome’s monuments are not monolithic in their meaning, but rather mean different things to different people or to the same people at different times or in different contexts. With this open program in place, the poet turns his pen to individual places and monuments, the first of which—the statue of Vertumnus—offers a test case for the flexibility embodied in elegy 4.1. The rest of the topographical elegies in Book 4 also respond to the nuances and questions raised in this programmatic elegy, exploring Rome’s change and continuity over time (elegies 4.4, 4.9, 4.10); the diverse faces it offers to insiders and outsiders (4.2, 4.10); the city as a monument of words rather than stone (4.6, 4.10); how Rome differs when seen through a variety of generic lenses—elegy, epic, didactic, and the like (4.2, 4.9, 4.10); the gulf between the Rome inhabited by men and that inhabited by women (4.2, 4.4, 4.9, 4.10); and the tension between individual and institutional Romes (4.4, 4.10).