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.
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THOUGH CORNELIA marks the end of his oeuvre, Jupiter Feretrius brings to a close Propertius’ journey through Rome’s cityscape. It is a fitting finale for the elegist’s topographical experiment. As I have argued above, in his other topographical elegies Propertius explores varying ways of “reading” Roman monuments, and the supple connection between monuments and the formation of Roman identity. Elegy 4.1 opens the dialogue with disagreement between the poet and his alter-ego Horos about the nature of Rome’s cityscape, an opening that paves the way for the many voices and perspectives on Rome’s monuments that follow. There is no one “Rome” that means the same thing to all subjects. Likewise, elegy 4.10 introduces perspectives on the temple of Jupiter Feretrius that cause us to question rather than affirm its place in Rome’s urban and ideological landscape.

According to tradition, Romulus founded the shrine of Jupiter Feretrius to commemorate his victory over Acron, king of Caenina, whose armor he dedicated there.1 Thereafter any Roman commander who defeated the enemy commander in single combat was awarded the right to dedicate the spoils as spolia opima—the special name given to spoils taken under these guidelines—to Jupiter Feretrius. This exceptional honor was only achieved twice again, by Cossus in the fourth century BCE, after his victory over the Etruscan king Tolumnius; and by Marcellus in the third century BCE, who vanquished the northern king Virdomarus. The temple contained these three sets of spolia opima.
and the implements of the Fetiales, priests responsible for the declaration of just war. Though very small, the temple towered as a monument to Rome’s dominion.

In this chapter I explore how Propertius opens this monument up for discussion. He uses two primary strategies. One is to diminish the glory of the *spolia opima* by emphasizing the violence that precedes their dedication. Ignoring the celebratory dedication of the spoils in the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, Propertius dwells instead on the gruesome details of the deaths of Acron, Tolumnius, and Virdomarus. This ugly background tarnishes the temple’s glory. In the elegist’s reading, Rome’s oldest temple commemorates not Rome’s great victories but rather the violence that is at the heart of Rome’s identity. This violence is made even more foreboding by the implicit connections the poet draws between it and the new order. Propertius laces his narrative with details that evoke Augustus and the imperial family. In doing so he is following the new emperor’s cue: Octavian had restored the temple of Jupiter Feretrius in 32 BCE and controlled access to the right to *spolia opima* thereafter, thereby asserting his place as the culmination of Rome’s founders and heroes. Propertius is content to leave him there as the pinnacle of martial achievement, but reinterprets that role by refocusing the tradition that led up to him. These brutal deaths can be laid at the Princeps’ feet.

The poet’s second strategy is to create a softer alternative to the violent tradition of *spolia opima* by exploiting the glory of the role of Callimachus Romanus he had assumed in elegy 4.1. Propertius’ incipit for elegy 4.10 blends Callimachean imagery with that of the Roman triumph to cast Propertius as a Callimachean *triumphator*, achieving glory through rigorous poetic composition. Similarly, in the poem’s finale Propertius offers rival etymologies for Jupiter Feretrius’ name that again emphasize the power of words over places. Though he offers two possibilities for the name Feretrius (*ferre*, to bear *spolia* to the temple, and *ferire*, to strike down an enemy commander), the violent narrative that precedes this learned denouement induces us to prefer *ferire*. As monuments respond to and shape Roman identity, thus also words respond to and shape monuments. With the wordplay in these framing passages Propertius draws attention away from the historic achievement of *spolia opima* toward the achievement of his own poetry, and claims for himself access to that venerable space that houses Rome’s highest honors.
TEMPLE, SPOILS, AND PRINCEPS

Though the temple of Jupiter Feretrius was tiny and its contents rare, Octavian made it an important part of his early imperial ideology and intervened in its every aspect, rebuilding the temple itself, dusting off the Fetial implements and renewing the Fetial rites, and arbitrating later claims to dedicate *spolia opima*. His intervention provides a powerful example of how Octavian’s topographical activity helped shape and define not only the new order but also his role in it. Restoring the temple and its rites lent the authority of Romulus to Rome’s new founder at a time when his role was still in flux, and controlling access to the temple’s honors helped him keep this authority.

No archaeological remains have been connected to this temple and its location on the Capitol is uncertain, but its design may be preserved on a coin of c.45 BCE, minted by a certain Marcellinus, which shows a tetrastyle building raised on a podium of a few steps, lacking a cult image (Figure 11).²

Cornelius Nepos, in his *Life of Atticus*, tells us that the noted scholar and Epicurean had urged Octavian to restore the dilapidated temple, whose roof had fallen into disrepair. The suggestion can be dated to the period immediately preceding the battle of Actium, and Nepos contextualizes it in a discussion of Atticus’ political neutrality during these tense years of conflict. After describing Atticus’ connections to
Octavian through their mutual regard for Agrippa, Nepos reveals a more personal connection between the two men:

nullus dies temere intercessit, quo non ad eum scriberet, cum modo aliquid de antiquitate ab eo requireret, modo aliquam quaestionem poeticae ei proponeret, interdum iocans eius uerba eliceret epistulas. Ex quo accidit, cum aedes Iouis Feretrii in Capitolio, ab Romulo constituta, uetustate atque incuria detecta prolabetur, ut Attici admonitu Caesar eam reficiendam curaret. Neque uero a M. Antonio minus absens litteris colebatur, adeo ut accurate ille ex ultimis terris, quid ageret, curae sibi haberet certiorem facere Atticum.

No day had passed on which Octavian did not write to Atticus, when he would ask him something about antiquity or would propose some question about poetry, and from time to time he would even chuckle at his rather wordy letters. From this sort of exchange it happened that, when the temple of Jupiter Feretrius on the Capitol, which had been founded by Romulus, was falling down with roof caved in because of its extreme old age and lack of upkeep, at Atticus’ suggestion Caesar took to rebuilding it. Nor was Atticus’ friendship cultivated any less by Antony in his letters, to the extent that Antony would take great care to make Atticus very aware of what he was doing even from the farthest parts of the world. (Cornelius Nepos Att. 20.2–24)

Nepos’ praise for Atticus’ neutrality does not obscure the fact that his friendship conveyed political advantage to those who would hold it. Antony’s pursuit of Atticus, for example, seems motivated by a desire to be no less a part of the great man’s life than his rival. While Octavian seems motivated by a shared interest in antiquarian topics devoid of explicit political nuance, such interest in arcana on Octavian’s part is surely not that of a hobbyist alone. As I mentioned above, recent studies have shown that it is a mistake to separate antiquarian from political interests during the fall of the Republic, when ideological positions find support and validation in precedent. While Nepos glosses over Octavian’s more pragmatic motives, he admits he wrote this chapter after Atticus’ death in March of 32 BCE (Att. 20.1); the biographer’s lopsided picture of Atticus’ friendships might be the result of which dynast emerged victorious.

Caesar’s heir gained certain political advantage from his attention to the temple of Jupiter Feretrius. Atticus’ death dates the suggestion to the years before Actium, as does Nepos’ mention of the insults
exchanged between Antony and Octavian (Att. 20.5). Repairing this
temple carried with it more than the general prestige connected with
restoring Rome’s fallen monuments (about which Augustus boasts at
Res Gestae 19). The temple of Jupiter Feretrius was Rome’s first shrine
and Romulus’ most prominent contribution to the urban landscape. By
restoring the temple, Octavian became Rome’s new Romulus, its latest
and best founder. This likeness was not new; as early as 43 BCE Caes-
sar’s heir had flirted with the iconography of Romulus in order to gain
political advantage when he was the newest man on the political play-
ing field.5 His restoration of the temple just before the battle at Actium
helped define Octavian as a traditional Roman general at a time when
Antony was out of the city and adopting new and foreign rather than
traditional and Roman models of prestige. Octavian’s reverence for
Rome’s traditions (as opposed to Antonian extravagance) can also be
seen in the fact that in restoring the temple Octavian left intact its origi-
nal shape and size, which was very small (Dionysius 2.34.4).6

In addition to restoring the temple itself, Octavian put to new use
the Fetial instruments housed in the temple. The Fetiales were a priest-
ly college established by Numa,7 whose primary duty was to sanction
foreign affairs on behalf of the Roman state (Cicero Off. 1.36). Among
their specific duties, the Fetiales were supposed to send embassies, rat-
tify treaties, and declare just war on enemies by throwing a special
spear into enemy territory when all attempts at negotiation had failed.8
The Fetial instruments—the silex stone used to render sacrificial ani-
mals unconscious, and the spear thrown in declaring war—were
housed in the temple of Jupiter Feretrius.9 Augustus includes his
membership in this college in his own Res Gestae 7, having already
exercised his rights as a priest: Octavian had declared war on Cleopa-
tra in 32 BCE by throwing the Fetial spear in the Circus Flaminius in
front of the temple of Bellona (Dio Cassius 50.4.4). This action charac-
terized the war at Actium as a just war (and as a last recourse), and
characterized the enemy as foreign.10

Octavian may have wished to put his personal stamp onto the tem-
ple’s other contents as well. The honor would have likened him not
only to Romulus but also to Julius Caesar, who had been awarded the
right to dedicate spolia opima in 44 BCE.11 Unfortunately, the victory at
Actium was not such that spolia opima were an option for Caesar’s heir.
There may yet have been time for him to achieve this honor, but an
unfortunate circumstance in 29 BCE forestalled that possibility. In that
year Marcus Licinius Crassus, grandson of the triumvir, conquered
Deldo, king of the Bastarnae, in single combat. Crassus’ deed on the
battlefield is recorded in great detail by Dio Cassius, who situates it in the context of Crassus’ other successes in the east. Dio indicates that Crassus would have dedicated the spolia opima, had he been supreme commander when he stripped Deldo (51.24). It was determined that he was not eligible when Octavian intervened with evidence of a dubious precedent by which Crassus’ claim could be denied: a linen corselet of Cossus inscribed with his consular rank. The precedent of Cossus suggested that only a consul in office could dedicate spolia opima, a narrower definition than the tradition had previously held.

Crassus was excluded. Such a dedication would have been an embarrassment to the Actian victor, to be sure; he had not restored the temple of Jupiter Feretrius to lend its glory to another, or to facilitate oneupsmanship of his own superlative triple triumph in 29 BCE. It might have caused deeper concern as well, as the honor of spolia opima would have lent prestige to a successful general already popular among his soldiers. The prefect Gallus had paid dearly for just such prestige. Crassus was appeased with a triumphal ceremony, but not until the first constitutional settlement ensured that no such threat would arise again from a successful general in the field. The threat did not arise, and Crassus fell from view.

Having obviated the possibility of future dedications in the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, but still desirous of the prestige of a rare military honor, Augustus found an alternative in the recovery of the Parthian standards lost at Carrhae in 53 BCE, especially resonant in that they had been lost by the grandfather of the Crassus whose claim to spolia opima was recently denied. As Romulus had done, Augustus set out to build a temple to house them dedicated to Mars Ultor on the Capitol, a small round temple that Dio says was decreed in emulation (ζηλώμα, 54.8.3) of Jupiter Feretrius. Images of this temple appear on coins and Dio says Augustus fulfilled his decree, but it seems it was never built and that the recovered standards were kept in the temple of Jupiter Feretrius until a permanent location could be found for them.

That permanent location was the grand temple of Mars Ultor in the Forum of Augustus, a monument that clearly identified Augustus as the inheritor of all that was good in Roman tradition, including Romulus with his spolia opima. An image of Romulus tropaiophoros decorated one of the Forum’s two axial niches; the other featured Aeneas with his father and the Penates. The paired decorations may be seen as visual symbols for Augustus’s virtus and pietas, respectively, and were repro-
duced and displayed in places far from Rome. Though the statue of Romulus tropaiophoros does not survive, a painted copy of it does, from the Via dell’Abbondanza in Pompeii (Figure 12), as does the statue’s inscriptional elogium: Romulus Martis / filius urbem Romam / condidit et regnuit annos / duodequadraginta isque / primus dux duce hostium / Acrome rege Caenimensus / interfecto spolia opima / Ioui Feretrio consecrauit / receptusque in deorum / numerum Quirinus / appellatus est (Romulus the son of Mars founded the city and ruled thirty-eight years. He was the first leader to consecrate spolia opima to Jupiter Feretrius, having killed

FIGURE 12. Painting from Pompeii of Romulus and spolia opima. It is much more difficult to recognize the scene without the temple; the elogium would have identified it to the audience in Pompeii. After Rizzo, La Pittura Ellenistica Romana (Milan 1929), plate 194.
Acron king of the enemy from Caenina. Being received into the number of the gods, he was called Quirinus.18

It is interesting to note that the *elogium* provides not only the simple identification of the image but the history of the deed itself, as if the audience might not recognize Romulus *tropaiohoros* without the visual aid of the temple, and would need it explained and contextualized. The *elogium* also combines Romulus as urban founder, *tropaiohoros*, and son of Mars. Ovid’s description of the temple of Mars Ultor at *Fasti* 5.545–98 emphasizes three elements: *pius* Aeneas, Romulus *tropaiohoros*, and the Parthian standards.19 Their presence strengthened the association between Rome’s legendary founders and their contributions to Rome and the new founder and his special contribution. The temple of Jupiter Feretrius was now a monument to the past, while that of Mars Ultor—new repository for special military honors—looked to Rome’s future.20

This episode in the history of the temple of Jupiter Feretrius provides a striking example of how the Princeps adapted Roman monuments and their traditions to his own use—how many meanings became one, subsumed under the rubric “Augustan.” Tradition about the *spolia opima* had thus far admitted a good deal of variation. Were all such spoils to be dedicated to Jupiter Feretrius, or were some fitting for Mars or Quirinus? How are the spoils connected with the epithet Feretrius, if at all? Was the honor of dedicating *spolia opima* available only to Roman generals, or to soldiers of any rank who had killed an enemy commander? As late as Varro, for example, this last point was still a matter of discussion; Varro had asserted that any soldier could dedicate *spolia opima* (*apud* Festus 204L).21

Into this tradition Octavian inserted his voice, casting the deciding vote for the one version of the story that supported his position. After his intervention, the temple of Jupiter Feretrius became a repository for honors now inaccessible in the new regime but for his approval.22 The effect was perhaps underlined by the likelihood that the temple itself was inaccessible, before and after Octavian’s intervention.23 Octavian’s authority regarding the temple and its arcane contents was indistinguishable from his authority in the military and political sphere. His was the voice that counted.

Octavian’s coarse handling of the traditions of Jupiter Feretrius left a scar on its history, still visible in Livy’s narrative about Cossus’ achievement of the *spolia opima*. Having defeated Lars Tolumnius, Livy says, Cossus returned to Rome where he dedicated his spoils (4.20.1–4). In this description of the celebration, as elsewhere in his
narrative, Livy is very clear that Cossus was of lesser rank when he won his spoils, subordinate to the dictator Mamercus Aemilius, the glory of whose triumph is stolen by the rarity of Cossus’ honor. At this point Livy mentions the new evidence that the Princeps revealed to him, proving that Cossus was a consul in office fighting under his own auspices. Livy is explicit that Augustus’ information contradicts his own research; it is worth quoting his insertion in full (with words to be discussed below in bold typeface):

Following all the authors before me, I have argued that A. Cornelius Cossus was tribunus militum when he brought the second dedication of spolia opima into the temple of Jupiter Feretrius. But moreover, because spolia opima are only considered to be those that a leader has stripped from a leader, and we do not recognize someone as leader except the one under whose auspices the war is waged, the very inscription on the spoils has made clear to those other authors and to me that Cossus cap-
tured the spoils as a consul. Since I had heard that Augustus Caesar himself, founder or restorer of all temples, having entered into the temple of Jupiter Feretrius which he rebuilt since it was collapsing with age, read this fact written on the linen corselet, I thought it would be tantamount to sacrilege to deprive Cossus of such a witness of his spoils as Caesar, the author of the very temple. But what error there might be in this matter, that such ancient annals and that the records of the magistrates (which linen books, stored in the temple of Juno Moneta, Licinius Macer cites as his authorities again and again) hold that it was seven years later that A. Cornelius Cossus was consul together with T. Quinctius Poenus, is a matter for common speculation for anyone. For it even happens that it is not possible to shift such a famous battle into that year, because the three-year period surrounding Cossus’ consulship was lacking in war because of disease and want, to the extent that certain records, as if they were funeral registers, supply nothing beyond the names of the consuls. The third year from Cossus’ consulship holds that he was tribune of the army with consular authority, and in that same year also magister equitum; under this imperium he fought a second famous equestrian battle. That is all free conjecture. But, as I think, it is possible to turn to all sorts of opinions since, when his fresh spoils had been deposited in the temple, in front of Jove himself, to whom they were dedicated, and looking upon Romulus—hardly witnesses to be disparaged with a false claim—the author of the battle wrote that he, A. Cornelius Cossus, was consul. (Livy 4.20.5–11)

Historians of the past century read this passage with cynicism; whether Livy could not reconcile his own research with Octavian’s information or whether he chose not to, the seams between Livy’s research and the Princeps’ contribution are visible, creating the impression that he succumbed either to pressure or decorum in revising his narrative.25 Add me to the list of cynics, but what interests me most in the context of this passage is not so much that Augustus inserted himself into tradition, but that Livy invites his readers to contemplate that insertion. The fact that Livy made the emendation apparent to his readers suggests that it has value as an emendation more than as an organic part of his text. In this instance, then, the process of writing his history is as important as the history itself. A few years ago Miles, exploring Livy’s inability to reconcile his chosen sources with the Princeps’ information, concluded that the historian’s aporia about sources in the case of Cossus must also darken the reliability of his every source and historical conclusion.26 In other words, Livy resists the closure demanded by the Princeps’ discovery, though his resistance
simultaneously undermines his own history.

Indeed, Livy’s passage seems to be a meditation on the word *auctor*, which appears four times in his digression. The word, a natural favorite in Livy’s first book, evokes both authority and origination; his use of it to describe Augustus’ relationship with the temple of Jupiter Feretrius is particularly worthy of note (*ipsius templi auctor*, 4.20.7). In the sentence immediately prior to that one, Livy calls the Princeps the founder or restorer of all temples (*omnium templorum conditor aut restitutor*). What does it mean, then, that he is the *auctor* of this one? To be sure, *auctor* is a common word for describing a builder or founder of a city.\(^2\) In the passage above Livy compares this sort of authorship with other sorts, and each use of the word carries rhetorical weight in his account. The word is applied first to all those authors who wrote histories before him, and whose reports he followed until he had the Princeps’ evidence. The unanimity of Livy’s sources, as Miles suggests, lends compelling weight to their authority; one might say that this unanimity emphasizes rather the authority in these *auctores* than their origination of the tradition. Next the word refers to Augustus’ relationship to the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, a usage that emphasizes origination rather than authority, or, to be more precise, authority through origination. Third, Livy uses the word to denote the linen scrolls that were Licinius Macer’s authorities; these scrolls, records of the magistrates, combine the ideas of origination (since they are original contemporary records) with the authority of consensus; as with the *auctores* Livy followed in his unamended account, Macer’s sources are plural. Finally, Cossus is called *auctor* of his deed on the battlefield—like Augustus, originator, yet unlike him originator of the deed itself rather than the proof of it: compare Cossus’ *auctor pugnae* with Augustus’s less than compelling *auctor templi*. Livy’s digression thus draws attention to the process of change in Roman tradition, and to the competing voices of truth that operate within it.

Evolution and change in Roman tradition were not new phenomena. Evidence abounds for the additions, selections, and deletions made by various Romans to their legends, rituals, and customs. Nevertheless it is striking that the tradition of the *spolia opima* effectively froze with Octavian’s intervention; his efforts not only went into reinterpreting the past, but closing off interpretations in the future. Just as the triumphal Fasti inscribed on Augustus’ arch end with his own triple triumph—a visual, monumental reminder that no military glory would surpass his—so, too, the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, built anew by Octavian then surpassed by his Forum with its new sort of *spolia opima*, served as a reminder in the landscape of the change that accompanied
the new leader. Regarding the *spolia opima*, one might say, Augustus had closed the conversation.

A REOPENING OF CLOSURE
*Propertius and the Temple of Jupiter Feretrius*

Some fifteen years had passed since the restoration of the temple and a dozen since Crassus’ denied honors when Propertius turned his pen to the temple of Jupiter Feretrius. While any controversy had surely died down, the lapsed time also allowed for the new emperor’s powers to coalesce and for Octavian to become Augustus. Harrison argues that it was important for the Augustan authors to get the details right; hence Livy amends his account, Vergil includes and honors three dedicants in his description of Rome’s proto-heroes in the underworld, and Propertius follows suit. Harrison’s reading of Propertius’ poem rightly stresses its normative flair: “What strikes the reader is the fixity of the number three, which is treated as canonical and repeated at both the beginning and end of the poem: Propertius speaks as if no addition to the *spolia opima* had been contemplated since Marcellus in 222 BCE, and the whole thing is treated as an antiquarian matter. One suspects already that the Augustan line is being followed: the account is closed, and no addition is envisaged—not even from Augustus himself, the new Romulus, and certainly not from any other general.”

The fixity of the story is, I believe, exactly Propertius’ point. The poet is content to work with a tradition delimited by the Princeps, and even takes it one step further; in subtle ways, he associates all three dedicants with Augustus himself. The new *auctor* of the temple thus becomes a player throughout the tradition of which he is the apex. Yet Propertius’ description of the events within this tradition does not flatter any of its players, least of all its most recent. Rather, the poet’s narrative dwells on the violence of the battles and expresses sympathy for the victims.

ROMULUS AND ACRON
*A Wolf at the Gates*

To Romulus, as founder of the tradition of *spolia opima*, Propertius gives his due: eighteen lines detailing his victory over Acron of
Caenina. This first and longest of the three tales sets the tone for what is to follow, and the poet begins explicitly by acknowledging Romulus as a model for the practice:

\[
\text{imbuis exemplum primae tu, Romule, palmae huius, et exuvio plenus ab hoste redis.}
\]

You set the example with this first victory, Romulus, and you return heavy with spoils from the enemy. (4.10.5–6)

Propertius sets an ambiguous tone at once—\textit{imbuis} means primarily “to dip, wet,” and thus also, by extension, “to dye,” and from there “to stain with blood.”\textsuperscript{29} In the lines that follow, the poet holds in the balance the positive and negative meanings of Romulus’ achievement, creating an ambiguous origin for the tradition of \textit{spolia opima} and Romulus’ place in that tradition. As we shall see, not only are the spoils Romulus dedicates stained with the blood of the contest, but the language used to describe that contest evokes a passage of Vergil’s \textit{Aeneid}, published in 19 BCE, in a way that confounds the easy identification of Roman and enemy. What is more, Propertius adds another layer to his already ambiguous narrative by inserting details that bring Augustus himself into the poem as a new Romulus.

In the incipit of this poem Propertius promises to sing of the temple of Jupiter Feretrius and about arms dedicated within:

\[
nunc Iouis incipiam causas aperire Feretri, armaque de ducibus trina recepta tribus.
\]

Now I shall begin to uncover the origins of Jupiter Feretrius, and the three sets of arms received from three leaders. (4.10.1–2)

As in elegy 4.6, in which Propertius promised to sing about the temple of Palatine Apollo but never really did, here also the poet is curiously silent about the actual armor Romulus dedicates. To be sure, Romulus’ story begins with mention of the spoils that constitute the honor (\textit{palmae}), but without any elaboration about them; they are simply spoils or, more precisely, spoil (\textit{exuvio}); the use of the singular neuter rather than the usual feminine plural, as Richardson explains, “tends to give the word the value of an abstract idea” rather than a concrete dedication.\textsuperscript{30} After a bit of background about Acron, Propertius offers two more tantalizing details about the spoils:
Having dared to hope for spoils stripped from the shoulders of Quirinius, he himself gave up his own instead, but not unmoistened with his own blood. Romulus sees him brandishing his spear in front of the hollow towers, and cuts him off with prayers uttered: “Jupiter, this victim, Acron, will fall for you.” Romulus had vowed, and Acron fell as spoils for Jove. (4.10.11–16)

First, Acron’s spoils, still undefined, are nevertheless drenched in his own blood. With this detail the poet evokes the violence of the contest between Romulus and Acron without glorifying the actual spoils achieved; the only real weapon the poet mentions is Acron’s spiculum. At 4.10.16 there is a hint at the specific wound that produced the blood: occupat suggests the violence of a hewn throat. Second, four lines later we learn that Acron is himself the prize, offered as a victim to Jupiter. Again, Richardson’s comment hits the mark: “One expects hic Acron corruet uictima; the inversion (sc. of hic to haec) makes his value as a victim seem greater than his value as a man.” The inversion also plays on the pun with Acron’s name: there falls the high one. It is not the spoils themselves that matter to the Roman founder and his god—no such symbolic honor will do. Rather, it is the dead body.

In contrast to the abstract presentation of Acron’s spoils, the poet is oddly explicit about what armor Romulus himself wears, and his martial accouterment is primitive and fierce:

The parent of our city and of virtue was used to conquering like this, who tolerated the cold military camp since he came from a meager
home. As a horseman he was equally adept with reins and the plough, and his wolf-skin helmet was bedecked with a shaggy crest. His modest shield did not gleam painted with inlaid golden-bronze: slaughtered cattle provided his pliant baldric. (4.10.17–22)

Romulus’s crude leather armor recalls the skin-clad senators in Rome’s proto-Curia, described in elegy 4.1 (pellitos . . . Patres, 4.1.12). The rustic details are meant to evoke an earlier, unsophisticated time and the hardy men who accompanied it. Romulus’ wolf-skin helmet in particular suggests the tough quality of early Romans, proud as they were of their association with the wolf, whom the poet calls Rome’s altricum and optima nutricum in the opening poem of the book (4.1.38 and 55 respectively). Romulus’ personal relationship with the wolf makes his choice of the wolf-skin helmet all the more striking: it is not only Rome’s totemic animal, but also Romulus’ special badge of toughness. The fact that he wears the hide of his former nurse makes Romulus all the more savage. Finally, the adjective hirsuta cements the image; in Book 4, this word has always indicated something harsh and antithetical to elegiac values. The elegist’s description of Acron and Romulus presents a complex intertextual engagement with Vergil’s Aeneid—though not, as might be expected, with Vergil’s account of the three dedicators of spolia opima. Rather, Acron at the gates of Rome evokes a passage from Aeneid 9, with specific verbal echoes marked in boldface type:

ergo etsi conferre manum pudor iraque monstrat, obiciunt portas tamen et praecepta facessunt, armatique cauis exspectant turribus hostem.

.................

... huc turbidus atque huc lustrat equo muros aditumque per auia quaeit. ac ueluti pleno lupus insidiatus ouili cum fremit ad caulas, uentos perpessus et imbris, nocte super media; tuti sub matribus agni balatum exercent; ille asper et improbus ira saeuit in absentis; collecta fatigat edendi ex longo rabies et siccae sanguine fauces: haud aliter Rutulo muros et castra tuenti ignescunt irae, duris dolor ossibus ardet.
And so even if their shame and wrath lead them to join the battle, they [the Trojans] slam the gates shut and do what they have been told, and taking up arms they await the enemy in the hollow towers.

...................

...[Turnus] in turmoil ranges on his horse here and there along the walls, and he seeks an entrance through pathless ways. Just as a wolf on the prowl sitting watch at the full sheepfold, when he howls at the openings, beaten by winds and rains after midnight; the lambs, lying safe under their mothers, bleat incessantly; the wolf, harsh and made wicked with wrath, rages against the lambs he cannot get; his pent-up hunger wears him out for a long time and his dry jaw thirsts for blood: hardly otherwise do the furies enflame the Rutulian as he sees the walls and the camps, and pain glows in his hard bones. (Vergil *Aen.* 9.44–46, 57–66)

Propertius’ phrase *hunc uidet ante cauas . . . turris* (4.10.13) echoes Vergil’s *cauis exspectant turribus hostem* (*Aen.* 9.46) and likens Acron at the gates of Rome to Turnus at the Trojan camp. The likeness fits: both are Latin enemies of Roman founders, fighting at—and for the prize of—Rome. This parallel would implicitly liken Romulus to Aeneas, but Propertius’ details make it impossible to remain comfortable about linking Rome’s great founders in this respect. For one thing, in Vergil’s text Aeneas is not actually watching from the towers, or even in the camp. He is away on a diplomatic mission, having left the Trojans with instructions not to provoke a battle nor to enjoin one on the open plain if they find themselves provoked.

Aeneas’ clearly defensive proto-Romans invite the reader to consider Romulus’ motives in attacking Acron. Propertius’ poem is vague on this point, and it is unclear where the battle between Romans and Caeninans takes place, or why. The simplest explanation, and the one given by Livy, is that Acron and his Caeninans were the first to attack Rome after the rape of the Sabine women (Livy 1.10). Thus Acron seeking the gates (*portas . . . petentem*, 4.10.7) is attacking the gates of Rome in war; Romulus sees him from the walls and decides upon the spoils. Rothstein, however, noting that the fight takes place outside Caenina’s walls, not Rome’s, has suggested a different sequence of events: Acron presumably petitioned Rome and brandished his spear; Romulus decided upon and vowed the spoils; then Romulus killed Acron as the latter fled back to the gates of Caenina (*portas . . . petentem* in 4.10.7). In Rothstein’s reading, Romulus’ attack was not entirely defensive. Yet in this case Rome has turreted walls (4.10.13, a patent anachronism) and
Caenina’s entryways are described as *portas*—the word normally used for Roman gates. Surely Rothstein’s interpretation is too much to rest upon the verb *redis* (4.10.6), but the specter of Rome on the offensive is nevertheless raised.

A further detail in Propertius’ passage raises similar concerns vis-à-vis Vergil’s narrative: Romulus’ wolf-skin helmet. In Vergil’s passage, Turnus pacing at the gates is compared to a wolf at a sheepfold, pacing and hungry, with jaw thirsty for blood (*siccae sanguine, Aen.* 9.64). Propertius’ Romulus, decked out in wolf-skin, thus becomes Vergil’s predator who has bathed Acron’s armor in blood (*non sanguine sicca suo*, 4.10.12); Acron is not the wolf but the wolf’s victim. Propertius preserves Vergil’s diction but reverses his syntax. The complex allusion thus confounds any easy identification of Romulus as the defensive combatant in this battle. Acron’s blood is the blood for which the Romulean wolf thirsts. Vergil’s simile has become Propertian reality.

Given the resonance of Propertius’ passage with the *Aeneid*, it is also tempting to see a contrast between Romulus’ crude baldric and Pallas’ elaborately imprinted one in the *Aeneid*. The elegist’s founder wears a swordbelt made of rough leather; Vergil’s youthful hero wears an engraved piece worthy of its own detailed ekphrasis, a piece that plays a decisive part in the ending of the great epic poem. The presence of Pallas’ *balteus* in the background of Romulus’ poem is confirmed by the fact that Pallas himself, about to face Turnus in his last fight, anachronistically mentions the possibility of dedicating Turnus’ armor as *spolia opima* (*Aen.* 10.449–50). This haunting echo evokes Pallas, I believe, to suggest Romulus’ difference from him: where Pallas wore an engraved baldric worthy of his own youthful beauty and innocence, Romulus wears a belt of slaughtered hide fitting for his grittiness and tough experience in war. Unlike poor Pallas, Romulus defeats his Turnus and dedicates his spoils.

Romulus’ ambiguity in this poem—his assimilation both to Aeneas and to Turnus, his similarity to and difference from heroes of a bygone era—is not confined to his historic achievement of the *spolia opima*. Rather, Propertius brings the Princeps into the story as well. As noted above, one of the reasons Caesar’s heir was interested in restoring the temple of Jupiter Feretrius was the association with Romulus that he was cultivating in the years after Caesar’s death. The timing of his intervention into the crumbling temple’s history was calculated to lend Octavian the prestige of Rome’s founder and, indirectly, to cast Antony as a foreigner uninterested in Rome’s traditions. Propertius’ brief description of Romulus’ achievement reveals that he understood
these motives. In no other version of this story, for example, is Acron named as a descendant of Hercules (*Acron Herculeus*, 4.10.9). As we saw in chapter 5, Antony had claimed descent from Hercules through his son Anton. As with the shifting associations with both Aeneas and Turnus, Acron’s lineage brings the specter of civil war into this episode. Romulus versus Herculean Acron foreshadows Romulean Octavian versus Herculean Anton(y). The poet’s use of past, present, and future verb tenses in the passage emphasizes this telescoping of time that allows Romulus and Augustus to be seen in parallel. At 4.10.14–16 Romulus sees Acron (*uidet*, looking sideways form the past), vows that he will fall (*corruet*, looking forward from the past), and Acron did indeed fall (*corruit*, looking back from the present). Past, present, and future come together, and with them Romulus and Augustus.

SECOND THOUGHTS

*Cossus’ Victory and Sympathy for the Fallen*

The elegist’s account of the next episode in the history of the temple of Jupiter Feretrius is equally stark and equally difficult to read as celebratory. The second man to dedicate *spolia opima* in the temple was A. Cornelius Cossus, whose rank had become such an important precedent for the new emperor before his first constitutional settlement. Propertius is not explicit on the famous debate about whether Cossus was consul or *tribunus militum* when he defeated Tolumnius,37 but he does construct his narrative in a way that unsettles the honor of the dedication.

Where Romulus had defended Rome against an enemy force at its gates (at least at first; see above), Cossus’ victory over Tolumnius takes place at Veii in the context of Roman expansion:38

*Cossus at insequitur Veientis caede Tolumni,*

*uincere cum Veios posse laboris erat;*

*necdum ultra Tiberim belli sonus, ultima praeda*

*Nomentum et captae iugera terna Corae.*

But Cossus follows with the slaughter of Veian Tolumnius, when it took some work to be able to conquer Veii; not yet was the sound of war
heard beyond the Tiber, the farthest prize so far being Nomentum and the three acres Cora offered when it was captured. (4.10.23–26)

Though Barber 1960 (1953) transposes lines 25–26 and thus reads the couplet as the end of the Romulus episode rather than as part of the Cossus story (because, presumably, Rome had fought beyond the Tiber before its expedition to Veii), I find the original order offered in the manuscripts does no injustice to the facts and smooths the transition between stories; Cossus’ victory is part of one long process of Roman expansion, and these lines enact the same sort of temporal elision that occurred in Romulus’s story with the variety of verb tenses the poet used. In its original position (as reproduced above), the couplet explores the continuum, contrasting Rome’s “domestic” fight against Caenina with its war “abroad” against Tolumnius’ forces. One scholar terms the Roman action “brigandage,” and Propertius’ mention of Cora’s scant acres suggests land redistribution, and with it, a motive of expansion. The effect of a Roman offensive is heightened by the way Propertius represents the battle itself:

forte super portae dux Veiens astitit arcem
    colloquiumque sua fretus ab urbe dedit:
dumque aries murum cornu pulsabat aeno,
    uinea qua ductum longa tegebat opus,
    Cossus ait “Forti melius concurrere campo.”
    nec mora fit, plano sistit uterque gradum.
    di Latias iuuere manus, desecta Tolumni
    ceruix Romanos sanguine lauit equos.

By chance the Veian leader stood atop the stronghold of the gate and confidently addressed the crowd from his city. And while the ram was striking the wall with its bronze horn, where the long vine-work was protecting the machine of war, Cossus said, “Better for the brave to meet in the open field.” Without delay each one sets his feet on the plain. The gods helped the Latin troops, Tolumnius’ severed neck bathed Roman horses with its blood. (4.10.31–38)

Tolumnius, the elegist says, was giving some sort of speech from atop his gates when Cossus forced the fight. This detail is curious; no other author includes it. What sort of speech was the Veientine leader giving? Was he taunting the enemy below? Was he exhorting his own troops to
valor? Was he trying to negotiate with the besiegers? Roman tradition paints Tolumnius with more negative colors; he had killed Roman envoys to Fidenae, and Rome’s attack was to avenge this atrocity (Livy 4.17.1–6). Propertius, on the other hand, leaves room for doubt about Tolumnius’ culpability, as Tolumnius does nothing in the poem other than defend his own walls. The word *Latias* is also curious in this passage, and further supports the idea of Roman expansion. To be sure, at the most basic level it draws a contrast with implied *Etruscas manus*, but one wonders, are the Caeninians defeated by Romulus now included among the *Latias. . . manus*?

As with his treatment of Romulus, Propertius mentions little or nothing about the spoils Cossus captured and focuses instead on the enemy commander’s death. This death frames his discussion of Cossus’ deed, as 4.10.23 opens the narrative with Tolumnius’ slaughter (*caede*), and 4.10.38 ends it with the details of this slaughter. Again, the elegist attends to the gore, creating a vivid tableau of the Etruscan’s severed head spurting red blood onto nearby horses. Livy suggests that Cossus killed Tolumnius with many spear-thrusts, and then took his head back to Rome on a stake (4.19.5). Propertius takes the story one step further: for Tolumnius’ blood to spurt, the heart must still have been beating at the moment of decapitation. Cossus did not defile the dead body, as in Livy’s version; rather, the decapitation was the death. The vivid *sanguine* that bathes nearby horses in Cossus’ narrative, appearing in the same *sedes* it had at 4.10.12 to describe Acron’s gory spoils, links these two dedications of *spolia opima* in the blood that stains them.

As with Romulus’ tale, there is no triumphant return to Rome for Cossus in Propertius’ poem, and the death that frames this second portion of the narrative itself undermines celebration of the *spolia opima* as an achievement. But the most striking element of the elegist’s version is the interjection of a powerful and beautiful lament for lost Veii. This lament falls at the center of the poem and lends to the whole a feeling of melancholy and sympathy for Rome’s victims:

```
heu Vei ueteres! et tuos tum regna fuistis,
et uestro posita est aurea sella foro:
nunc intra muros pastoris buicina lenti
cantat, et in uestris ossibus arua metunt.
```

Alas, ancient Veii! At that time you were still a kingdom, and the golden throne still sat in your forum. Now within the walls sounds the horn of
an unhurried shepherd, and they harvest fields upon your bones.
(4.10.27–30)

With heu at 4.10.27 we witness the poet’s pain, and the repeated -ue-sounds that follow extend his vocalic cry. The second-person pronouns and adjectives compound the effect, emphasizing the personal connection between the poet and the fallen city and drawing us as readers into this lament. The repetition of the second person underscores Veii’s decline from prosperity to ruin—you(r) kingdom, your throne, your bones.

Propertius’ portrait of lost Veii is rich with resonance. The topos of a great city fallen into ruin recalls and reverses the topos of the humble settlement grown to magnificence that Propertius had applied so effectively to Rome at 4.1.1–14, and simultaneously blends two popular images of Etruria found in Roman literature: that of Etruria as a grand and vast land stretching to the sea, and as the simple and rustic land that runs along the Tiber.41 The elegist’s Veii is a great kingdom that has become a rustic village. To this nostalgic and melancholy Etruria Propertius adds a powerful and conventional image of the effect of war on the landscape—the plowing of bones.42 Vergil had earlier used this image to lament the grim realities of civil war at the close of the first book of the Georgics:

scilicet et tempus ueniet, cum finibus illis
agricola incuruo terram molitus aratro
exesa inueniet scabra robigine pila,
aut grauibus rastris galeas pulsabit inanis,
grandiaque effossis mirabitur ossa sepulcris.

There will come a time when the farmer, working the soil with his curved plow, will find in those lands rough javelins corroded by rust, or he’ll hit empty helmets with his heavy hoe, and he will wonder at the huge bones that appear when graves are dug up. (G. 1.493–97)

The passage from the Georgics juxtaposes Italian fecundity and Italian death. For Propertius, though, the image of bones in fields is not national but personal. He had used the image twice earlier in his poetry, in the startling sphragis to the first book (1.22) and in its partner-poem that precedes it, the sepulchral epigram of a man named Gallus who dies during the civil wars in Umbria in 41–40 BCE (1.21). In these
two poems, Propertius stops talking about Cynthia and reveals his personal history. He is an Etruscan who witnessed the civil wars fought on his native soil and was dispossessed of his home. Both 1.21 and 1.22 mention the bones of the dead on Etruscan soil:

\begin{quote}
et quacumque super dispersa inuenerit ossa, 
   montibus Etruscis, haec sciat esse mea.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
(sic mihi praecipue, puluis Etrusca, dolor, 
tu proiecta mei perpessa es membra propinqui, 
tu nullo miseri contegis ossa solo), 
proxima supposito contingens Umbria campo 
me genuit terris fertillis uberibus.
\end{quote}

And wherever she finds bones scattered over Etruscan hills, let her know that they are mine. (1.21.9–10)

(therefore it is especially painful for me, Etruscan dust, that you permitted the limbs of my wretched kinsman to be scattered, that with no soil do you protect his bones), nearby Umbria, touching on the field settled below, bore me, Umbria fertile in its rich earth. (1.22.6–10)

Propertius’ closure to Book 1 forces a rereading of the rest of the book and reinterprets the lover-poet who dominates the earlier poems. He repeats his disdain at 2.1.29; in a famous and lengthy recusatio, Propertius mentions in the context of other imperial feats he won’t celebrate in song the eversos focus antiquae gentis Etruscae (the overturned hearths of the ancient Etruscan people). As Nethercut has shown, the passage is structured so as to taint all the emperor’s exploits with the stain of civil war. The elegist’s sore memories of a civil war that ravaged his homeland and his kin help explain his audible disdain for typical pursuits of Roman men and his preference to dally in a love affair. Lest there be any doubt about the connection between Propertius’ poetic choices and his painful Umbrian background, the seer Horos in elegy 4.1 confirms the painful nexus of the elegiac poet, the bones of the dead, and Etruria’s fertile fields. Having offered his own credentials as a seer and chronicled his successes, Horos points his prophetic finger at Propertius and details the elegist’s past:

\begin{quote}
Umbria te notis antiqua Penatibus edit—
   mentior? an patriae tangitur ora tuae?—
\end{quote}
Horos’ identification of the poet comes just before his impassioned plea for Propertius to write love elegy rather than national aetiology (Apollo . . . uetat insano verba tonare Foro, “Apollo forbids you to thunder in the raging Forum,” 4.1.133–34). In other words, Propertius’ Umbrian background makes him unsuited for poetry that celebrates Roman places. Elegy 4.10 fulfills Horos’ prophecy; the temple of Jupiter Feretrius resonates too closely with Umbrian defeat. Perhaps because of how personal it sounds, the lament in 4.10 is considered one of Propertius’ most powerful set-pieces,* and it is impossible not to share his grief for what was lost. Like the closing poems of the first book, the lament for Veii in elegy 4.10 casts a shadow on the whole poem. By its concentrated focus on the victim and the losses involved in one episode of Roman glory, the poet turns our perspective to other victims in Rome’s steady march to imperial mastery over Italy.

Because of the evocations of the poet’s own losses in Etruria, his scornful attitude is directed not only at Rome’s general tendency toward militarism, but toward the specific manifestation of that attitude in 41–40 BCE, when Octavian destroyed Perusia. Details peculiar to Propertius’ account of Cossus and Tolumnius seem calculated to raise the specter of recent civil war in this poem about the attachment to martial valor. The destruction of Perusia lingers in ancient sources as
a particularly grim episode in the civil wars that followed Caesar’s death.\textsuperscript{47} Perusia, upset at Rome’s encroachment on its territory for land on which to settle Roman veterans, enlisted the aid of Lucius Antonius against Octavian.\textsuperscript{48} As a result Octavian besieged Perusia for many months, until the Perusians were forced to surrender. In a massacre known as the \textit{arae Perusinae}, Octavian had the senators from the town beheaded as a sacrifice to Julius Caesar. What truth the legend of the \textit{arae Perusinae} preserves is unknown, but it is certain that stories of the executions had been magnified into a tale of massacre early on.\textsuperscript{49} As mentioned above, where tradition holds that the Romans attacked to avenge the ambassadors killed by Tolumnius, Propertius connects the Roman invasion to a desire for land:

\begin{quote}
necdum ultra Tiberim belli sonus, ultima praeda
\hspace{1em}Nomentum et captae iugera terna Corae.
\end{quote}

Not yet was the sound of war heard beyond the Tiber, the farthest prize so far being Nomentum and the three acres Cora offered when it was captured.\textsuperscript{(4.10.25–26)}

Likewise, whereas in Livy’s account the battle between Cossus and Tolumnius was fought on the plains outside Fidenae, Propertius’ conflict is a siege of Veii like the one at Perusia. The elegist even describes Tolumnius barricaded within the gates of Veii as the Romans attacked with siege engines:

\begin{quote}
forte super portae dux Veiens astitit arcem
\hspace{1em}colloquiumque sua fretus ab urbe dedit:
dumque aries murum cornu pulsabat aeno,
\hspace{1em}uinea qua ductum longa tegebat opus.
\end{quote}

By chance the Veian leader stood atop the stronghold of the gate and, confident, addressed the crowd. And while the ram was striking the wall with its bronze horn, where the long vine-work was protecting the machine of war.\textsuperscript{(4.10.31–34)}

Such towered gates are anachronistic to Cossus’ time, but not to 40 BCE; a second-century gate such as the one described at 4.10.31 still exists at Perugia, and is called the \textit{porta Augusta}.\textsuperscript{50} Finally, in Livy’s account Tolumnius was killed in battle and then beheaded. Propertius’
Tolumnius, like those sacrificed at the altar to Caesar, was decapitated while still living.

... desecta Tolumni
ceruix Romanos sanguine lauit equos.

... Tolumnius’ severed neck bathed Roman horses with its blood.
(4.10.37–38)

In Propertius’ poem, Veian Tolumnius raises the specter of the *arae Perusinae*. The elegist thus sheds generic tears of lament for a great city destroyed, and real tears for the losses of his own day.

**M. CLAUDIUS MARCELLUS AND DYNASTIC CLOUT**

The elegist’s account of M. Claudius Marcellus’ entry into the history of the temple of Jupiter Feretrius is almost perfunctory; he seems to include details only to emphasize how paltry are the spoils themselves and, of course, the vivid death of the enemy, the Gallic king Virdomarus:

Claudius at Rheno traiectos arcuit hostis,
Belgica cum uasti parma relata ducis
Virdomari. genus hic Rheno iactabat ab ipso,
mobilis e rectis fundere gaesa rotis.
illi ut uirgatis iaculans it ab agmine bracis
torquis ab incisa decidit unca gula.

Claudius held off the enemy that had invaded from the Rhineland, when the Belgian shield of the huge leader Virdomarus was brought back to Rome. He used to boast that his clan came from Rhine itself, quick to pour out javelins from his guided chariot. As he came, hurling his javelin, from his troops with his striped trousers the twisted torque fell from his slit throat. (4.10.39–44)

Here for the first time Propertius details the spoils to be dedicated in the temple of Jupiter Feretrius; the word *relata* at 4.10.40 indicates they
were brought back to Rome. They are the stylized, almost exaggerated accouterment of a barbaric northerner.51 One wonders what sort of triumphal spectacle would be provided by some striped pants and a necklace. Even Virdomarus’ shield is small; the poet draws attention to the contrast between huge Virdomarus and his modest parma (4.10.40). Yet even as this huge menace, descendant of the Rhine, boasts and vaunts from his chariot, Marcellus dispatches him quickly and without sentiment (recall that Romulus and Cossus had each spoken a vow or challenge before killing their enemies). Like Acron and Tolumnius, Virdomarus dies by a blow to the neck. The guttural stops, voiced and unvoiced, in line 4.10.44 mimic the gurgling sounds of a slashed throat: torquis ab incisa decidit una gula.

Propertius calls Marcellus by his gentilicum—Claudius. There is no metrical reason for him to do so, and the choice is startling; he could have called him Marcellus. Vergil had: all three dedicators of spolia opima are included in the parade of heroes in Aeneid 6. Of the three Marcellus’ achievement is given most detail—five lines (6.855–59), compared to Romulus’ two (6.779–80) and Cossus’ one (6.841). The prominence of Marcellus in Anchises’ account adds pathos to the appearance of the younger Marcellus, Augustus’ nephew, whose potential for spolia opima will be cut short by his untimely death. Grimal believes that Propertius’ choice to write a poem about spolia opima is the elegist’s tribute to the lost Marcellus, and that the elegy must have been written earlier than 16 BCE.52 But why not mention the possibility in elegy 3.18? And why, then, call the historical victor in 4.10 Claudius?

In my view Propertius uses the name Claudius to connect the spolia opima once again to the recent exploits of the imperial household, telescoping past and present as he had done with his accounts of Romulus and Cossus. Claudius was Livia’s gentilicum and that of Augustus’ two stepsons, Tiberius and Drusus. In 16 BCE—as it happens, the date traditionally assigned to the publication of Propertius’ fourth book—Lollius suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of the Germans, a disaster that came to be called the clades Lolliana. Augustus sent Tiberius and Drusus north to deal with the enemy. Omens on the eve of their departure were bad, and the Princeps restored the faith of the gods by repairing the temple of Quirinus on the Quirinal hill. Augustus mentions this restoration in the same breath as that of Jupiter Feretrius at Res Gestae 19, and his attention to Quirinus seems a subtle tribute to the city’s first founder. The brothers had soon pacified the transalpine regions; within three years Drusus was commander of the armies along the Rhine (with Tiberius back in Rome as consul). Drusus would
continue to fight on the German frontier—as far as the Elbe—until his
death in 9 BCE. Suetonius mentions that Drusus planned to dedicate
spolia opima from his German victories (Claud. 1), but was prevented by
his death; after Drusus’ funeral Augustus paid tribute to this lost pos-
sibility by dedicating his own fascular laurels to Jupiter Feretrius.53

Propertius’ use of the name Claudius evokes Augustus’ heirs and
their exploits to the north. The elegist’s jumbled geography con-
tributes to the allusion. In 222 BCE Marcellus defeated Virdomarus at
Clastidium. There Romans defeated a mixed army of northerners—
Gauls, primarily Insubrians, with some German allies. Tradition holds
Virdomarus as the Insubrian king—i.e., a king from Cisalpine Gaul.
Propertius’ man, in contrast, though he wears Celtic trinkets, comes
from beyond the Rhine, indeed boasts of his ancestry from the Rhine,
and carries a Belgian shield. This conflated geography is more than
poetic carelessness. Virdomarus’ background thus described assim-
lates his threat to the one being met by the imperial sons. Although
Suetonius situates Drusus’ attempt at dedicating spolia opima later in
the German campaign, it is tempting to wonder whether there were
suggestions of it in the early years of the action, just after Lollius’
defeat—especially if the restoration of the temple of Quirinus in 16
BCE was meant to pave the way for a dedication of spolia opima within
the imperial family. It is also possible that Propertius’ poem was writ-
ten somewhat later than 16 BCE; that is the terminus post quem given to
the book’s publication by the mention of Scipio’s consulship in 16 BCE.

The possibility that Tiberius and Drusus’ campaign in the north was
yet unfinished when Propertius wrote his poem might explain the per-
functory tone of this episode within it. Propertius leaves the details up
to the imperial sons. Nevertheless, after the bloody deaths of Acron
and Cossus, and the lament for Veii, the achievement of spolia opima
does not seem as glorious as perhaps the imperial family might hope.
The elegist’s perspective on this martial honor is not flattering, and
before it is won the Claudian victory in the north is tarnished by the
blood from Virdomarus’ severed throat.

These are the stories of the dedicators of spolia opima—what about
the temple in which they were to be dedicated? In telling of the three
historical achievements of this rare honor Propertius has been silent
about the urban location that commemorates it. He does not even
attend much to the spoils captured in battle, preferring to describe
Romulus’ crude equipment rather than Acron’s, ignoring Cossus’ ded-
ication, and accentuating Virdomarus’ exotic clothes and undersized
military weaponry. Instead, he has drawn attention to the moment of
death that facilitated each dedication to Jupiter Feretrius. In fact, the temple and its contents are all but nonexistent in the poem, and all that remains palpable—red and wet—is the blood that spatters them. Bloodstained by association is the Princeps as well, whose lurking presence haunts all three episodes of this rare Roman achievement. The Propertian reader, accustomed to sweet love poetry, may remember this human blood whenever he visits the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, or sees other signs of his new emperor in the city around him.

**CALLIMACHUS ROMANUS CLIMBS THE CAPITOL**

Propertius frames his unsettling narrative of the history of the *spolia opima* with passages that draw attention to the poet hard at work. A similar frame operates in elegy 4.6. There, the poet as *uates* introduces the celebration of Apollo and his temple on the Palatine, then returns after the narrative of Apollo’s deeds at Actium to lead a sympotic night of revelry. As we saw in chapter 4 above, this poetic frame acts as a foil for the battle narrative it contains and reinterprets it in ways that favor the poet; Propertius as *uates* has not only a more pleasant task than Apollo or his protégé in battle, Octavian, but also a greater effect on the way his readers interpret the monumental topic of the poem (the temple of Palatine Apollo) than its imperial builder. Poetry creates monuments. Likewise in elegy 4.10, the poet’s self-conscious introduction and conclusion frame and interpret the central narrative. Propertius begins his poem with a brief statement of his resolve to compose it and the great rewards his poem will bestow on him. He ends with a series of etymological suggestions that draw the reader’s attention to the power of (his) words to construct our interpretation of visual arts. This metapoetic frame draws attention to poetic achievement as a fitting—and preferable—alternative to the pursuit and winning of *spolia opima*, and enacts Propertius’ own “restoration” of the tiny temple on the Capitol.

Propertius opens his temple as the triumphant *Callimachus Romanus* he had promised to be at elegy 4.1.64:

```
nunc Iouis incipiam causas aperire Feretri
armaque de ducibus trina recepta tribus.
magnum iter ascendo, sed dat mihi gloria uires:
non iuuat e facili lecta corona iugo.
```
Now I shall begin to uncover the origins of Jupiter Feretrius, and the three sets of arms received from three leaders. I climb a great path, but glory gives me strength: a crown gathered from an easy height gives no pleasure. (4.10.1–4)

This incipit recalls two great Alexandrian poems. The word *causas*, or origins, is the Latin translation for *aetia*, the title of Callimachus’ masterpiece. The rest of the incipit derives from Aratus, who, like Propertius, begins his great didactic poem *Phaenomena* with Zeus: ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεθα (Let us begin from Zeus, *Phaen.* 1). Aratus was admired by his contemporary Callimachus as an artist who had treated a grand theme at length with consummate leptotes, or “subtlety” (*Epigr.* 27). With his evocation of these two poets, Propertius reinforces his allegiance to the aesthetic sensibilities for which Callimachus’ name was a beacon; the Roman elegist is not only like Callimachus, but he is like a poet Callimachus admired. His double allusion creates a poetic triad of mutual admiration.

The second couplet develops the poet’s Callimachean stance and describes his written achievement in terms that resonate with the slender Muse. In writing this little poem he climbs a great path—*magnum iter*, 4.10.2. “Great” must here mean “steep” as in “ambitious,” as commentators have suggested—casting his brief poem on Jupiter Feretrius as the rare and demanding sort that pleases Apollo in Callimachus’ hymn to the god (2.105). But if *magnum* also means “great” as in “wide,” Propertius’ composition constitutes a Callimachean misdemeanor. The great path he climbs contradicts the Alexandrian master’s injunction not to travel the wide and common road (μὴ καθ’ ὀμά διφρον ἐλαθὼν μηδ’ ὀμον ἀνὰ πλατὺν . . . , *Aet.* fr.1.26–27). I believe the couplet is richer with the tension between “wide” and “steep” preserved. Propertius did not promise at 4.1.64 to be Callimachus; he promised to be *Callimachus Romanus*. As scholars have recognized, the elegist’s application of Alexandrian poetic rigor to the grand themes of Roman rites, days, and the names of places expands and redefines Callimacheanism. The ambitious poem on the temple of Jupiter Feretrius is the capstone of this promise.

Propertius thus naturalizes the *Aitia*’s self-conscious incipit. The narrow Callimachean path becomes a great Roman road, of the sort that made Rome famous through the world: well crafted, even beautiful, and offering bold access to distant wonders. Good old-fashioned Roman glory lends strength to the struggling poet. As Callimachus’ path is naturalized into a Roman road, so, too, is the poetic persona
naturalized into a Roman traveler. Climbing his difficult poetic hill, with the promise of glory at the top, the poet enacts a sort of Roman triumph. In this poem about armor and warfare and dedications to Jupiter on the Capitol, the poet’s difficult climb up the steep hill reminds of the procession up the cliius Capitolinus by victorious commanders awarded the great honor of a triumph. The temple of Jupiter Feretrius lay atop the Capitol just before the end of the triumphal procession. As Rome’s first temple, it was the destination of the triumphal ceremony until the bigger temple to Jupiter was built nearby over two hundred years later.\(^5\) Those making the journey with spolia opima were rare indeed—three men only achieved this honor, as Propertius reminds us twice at 4.10.2. Climbing his difficult path, Propertius makes himself equal to them.\(^5\)

The last line of the proem follows suit in Romanizing Callimachus. The elusive crown that the poet finds pleasing surely evokes the rare droplets of Deo (Demeter) that Callimachus’ Apollo prefers over the muddied Euphrates (Hymn 2.105–12). But it is important to note that Propertius seeks a corona (crown) rather than the sert a (garland), even though he had earlier eschewed the former as harsh while preferring the latter as more refined (e.g., 3.1.19–20, and cf. 4.1.61–62). His prize is nothing less than the symbol of Roman martial and civic glory—to be sure, the honor given to the triumphant general. This corona is Propertius’ poetic spolia opima, and his poem appropriates imperial honors.

The triumph had proven to be a rich theme for Cynthia’s poet in Books 1–3—as a foil for his own private pursuits, as in 2.1, or as a metaphor of his militia amoris, as at 2.4. The triumph appears several times in Book 4, a phenomenon Galinsky attributes to Propertius’ “new concession to the Augustan spirit.”\(^6\) I believe the triumph recurs in the fourth book for different reasons. As a powerful Roman metaphor for achievement in the public realm and as a celebration that involves rites, days, and the names of places, the triumph is a potent symbol of the way Roman identity is encoded in the cityscape. Propertius’ Callimachean triumph buccaneers for his poetry the honors normally given to Roman generals—in fact, none of the three dedicators of spolia opima gets as far up the Capitol in the poem as does the poet himself. Propertius’ rich incipit at once elevates the status and prestige of elegiac poetry to one of Rome’s central honors; shatters the monopoly on Roman virtue and glory previously held by martial achievement; overwrites onto the triumphal route and the Capitol a new kind of victory ritual; and dedicates to Jupiter Feretrius a new kind of spoil—a poem, rarer and more precious than Virdomarus’ striped pants.
The power of words over places returns at the end of the poem, in which Propertius poses alternative etymologies for Jupiter Feretrius’s epithet:

\[
\text{nunc spolia in templo tria condita: causa Feretri,}
\text{omine quod certo dux ferit ense ducem;}
\text{seu quia uicta suis umeris haec arma ferebant,}
\text{hinc Feretri dicta est ara superba Iovis.}
\]

Now three sets of spoils are established in the temple: for this reason he’s called Feretrius, because leader strikes (\textit{ferire}) leader by sword under sure omen; or because they used to carry (\textit{ferre}) these conquered weapons on their shoulders, hence the proud altar of Jupiter Feretrius has its name. (4.10.45–49)

His refusal to choose between these options opens, rather than closes, possibilities and leaves the connection between the past, the present, and the city unresolved. Note that the poet uses “or” rather than “and”; his etymologies are offered as alternatives that Romans can choose, depending on how they view the monument. As noted above, Propertius’ poem says almost nothing about the transportation of spoils back to Rome, their carriage up the Capitol, or their dedication to Jupiter; the closest he comes to validating the etymology from \textit{fero} is at 4.10.40, when he mentions that Virdomarus’ little \textit{parma} was brought back (\textit{relata}), presumably to Rome (and cf. \textit{tulit} at 4.10.18).

While Propertius refuses to take sides on \textit{ferre}, he does have much to say about wounding with swords, as each of the three conquered foreign commanders provides armor splashed with his own blood. The fact that these three violent acts are divinely approved with sure omen (\textit{omine . . . certo}, 4.10.46) implicates the gods in Rome’s glorification of carnage, following up on the suggestion earlier in the poem that the gods guided Latin forces (\textit{di Latias iuuere manus}, 4.10.37).

\textit{Callimachus Romanus} would replace it with the glorification of poetry. The wordsmith posits fanciful phonetic echoes of the epithet by combining \textit{f-}, \textit{r-}, and \textit{t}-sounds: for example, in \textit{frenis . . . aratris} (4.10.19), in \textit{fretus} (4.10.33), and in \textit{fortis} twice (4.10.32 and 36). These more fanciful echoes defamiliarize the temple and the identity it manifests in its name, opening new vistas for interpretation and naming. So also does the unspoken \textit{fere tria}, “roughly three,” an etymology whose specter is evoked by the very text that vanishes before our eyes.
with ever shrinking narratives. The text thus uses its own disappearance as a strategy to provoke its audience into wondering where any fourth dedication has been lost or ruled out, thanks to the Princeps—and the poet.

**CONCLUSION**

Critics have noted the complete absence of the feminine in this poem. There are no women in preference for whom the poet can mask his distaste for the Roman masculine, martial values that are embedded in the monuments around him (and that had been reasserted by Hercules in elegy 4.9). Rather, Propertius makes it clear to the reader what has happened, indeed what must happen, to adorn the temple of Jupiter Feretrius—death. By focusing on the victims whose spoils decorate the city, the elegist exposes uncomfortable fissures in the connection between Roman monuments and Roman identity.

Propertius is careful in this poem to associate Romulus’ ambiguous victory with the birth of the city. At 4.10.17 Romulus is the parent of the city and of virtue—*urbis uirtutisque parens*. In a very concrete sense this is true: Rome’s first shrine arose from Romulus’ battle, and so the city is a result of his martial virtue. Yet I believe Propertius’ comment is more general and pervasive than that. Romulus’ battle, his victory, and his dedication are paradigmatic of the ways and means by which Rome’s cityscape evolved. Manubial temples were common in the city, as were temples to gods appropriated from enemies either with the gods’ consent (e.g., via *euocatio*) or without it. By Propertius’ day Rome was filled with monumental reminders of its expanding hegemony. Romulus set—or stained—the first example for this connection between the Roman city, Roman virtue, and warfare. The poet explores this connection by playing with words that echo the *ui(r)* in *uirtutis*: it appears in *uincere* alongside *uirtutis* in the same line (4.10.17), in *uictor* at 4.10.8, in *uictima* in 4.10.15, and picks up again in *Virdomari* in 4.10.41 and *uirgatis* in 4.10.43. *Vis,* too, lurks behind these words.

Propertius’ formulation *urbis uirtutisque parens* foreshadows the honorific title given to Augustus in 2 BCE: *pater patriae*. Though it is extremely fanciful to suggest that the Senate and people were influenced in this decision by Propertius’ poem, written a dozen years earlier, it is interesting to note that Augustus’ honorific title involved the Roman cityscape no less than did the title Propertius bestowed on
Romulus. At *Res Gestae* 35 Augustus himself reveals that the title *pater patriae* was to be inscribed on his own Palatine home, on the Curia (which he had rebuilt), and on his Forum Augustum—three different places in the city that testified to his role as its (re)founder and (re)builder. Propertius’ poem anticipates what Augustus would do with the title *pater patriae* in Rome, only to unsettle it. Wherever Romulean virtue is encoded in Roman buildings and places, Propertius’ poem encourages us to see bloodstains and victims. For the elegist, there is one overwhelming response to the city thus built, a response uttered by the book’s last speaker directly upon the heels of elegy 4.10’s disturbing urban vision: at 4.11.1, Cornelia says “stop” (*desine*).