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ΑΠΩΣΙΚΑΚΟΙ ΘΕΟΙ AND ΑΘΑΝΑ ΑΠΟΤΡΟΠΑΙΑ
IN THE ROMAN FORUM

A Note on IGUR 94—95

Jaakko Aronen

The following inscriptions engraved in the bases of two marble altars were found in 1817 in the Roman Forum near the column of Phocas: IGUR 94 Ἀπωσικάκοις θεοῖς *ex oraculo*¹ and IGUR 95 Ἀθάναι ἀποτροπαῖαι *ex oraculo*.²

In his edition of IGUR Moretti rightly connects these with two more similar altars with inscriptions. IGUR 96 Διὶ πατρίῳ *ex oraculo* is no longer extant, but it has been described by Smetius³ and according to him it was found "in aede S. Valentini ad Forum piscarium quae non longo intervallo interiecto erat a Foro Romano". That the original site of this altar, too, was the Forum is corroborated by IGUR 97 Διὶ ὑπάτῳ [*ex oraculo*], found in the way which leads from the Forum Romanum to the Forum transitorium and separates the Curia from the Basilica Aemilia.⁴ According to Moretti the letter-forms in this inscription resemble those seen in Pirro Ligorio's drawing of the lost IGUR 96. Moreover, the stone itself is similar in shape to those of IGUR 94 and 95. All the

¹ First edited by G. A. Guattani, *Memorie enciclopediche Romane per il 1817*, Roma 1819, p. 50. Other editions: CIG 5991; CIL VI 105; IG XIV 957; IGRom. I 28; ILS 3984.

² Ed. princeps: Guattani, p. 50. Other editions: CIG 5439; CIL VI 106; IG XIV 957; IGRom. I 28; ILS 3983.

³ M. Smetius, *Inscriptionum antiquarum quae passim per Europam liber*, Leiden 1588, f. 17,6 and *Inscriptiones antiquae . . .*, ms. Napoli Cod. V E 4, f. 68.

⁴ R. Lanciani, *NSc.* 1885, 156.

above-mentioned altars are dated by Moretti approximately in the latter half of the second century A.D.

Moretti states that it has been difficult to understand the significance of these oracular inscriptions; e.g. Borghesi discussed them but could not give any explanation.⁵ Moretti's own opinion is that the inscriptions were publicly engraved on the orders of some oracle to prevent a public disaster. He tentatively suggests that the disaster might have been the plague brought to Rome by soldiers returning from the Parthian war (166 A.D.).⁶

There is one more inscription, overlooked by Moretti but, in my opinion, to be added to the same group. On the pavement of the Basilica Julia — more precisely, on the second step of the stairs that ascend from the street in front — the following graffito has been scratched: CIL VI 29850 *Senatus populus(que) [Romanus ex] oraculo*. Instead of a slavish reproduction of a nearby public inscription, we might have here a combination of two separate titles, as Hülsen suggests.⁷ Be this as it may, the important fact remains that this graffito certainly is in its original place and can thus be expected to help us in determining the origin of the altars.

L. Deubner dealt in passing with the two first-mentioned inscriptions which record ἀπώσικακοι θεοί and Ἀθάνα ἀποτροπαία. He used them in support of his theory that the area of the Lacus Iuturnae between the temples of Vesta and the Dioscuri was used for the specific type of cure of disease called *incubatio*.⁸ He thinks that there exists a link between the cult of the Dioscuri and that of the old Latin water-goddess Juturna. To him ἀπώσικακοι θεοί were the Dioscuri who functioned as healing deities at the spring of Juturna (i.e. appeared in dreams to the sick and cured them or gave medical instructions). As regards Ἀθάνα, no explanation is given.

⁵ B. Borghesi, *Oeuvres complètes* VI, Paris 1868, 72—73.

⁶ Cf. J. M. Gilliam, *The Plague under Marcus Aurelius*, *AJPh* 82 (1961) 225—251 with references to ancient sources.

⁷ *Röm. Mitt.* 1894, 92.

⁸ L. Deubner, *Juturna und die Ausgrabungen auf dem römischen Forum*, *Neue Jahrb. f. die klassische Altertumswissenschaft* 9 (1902) 370—388, reprinted in *L. Deubner, Kleine Schriften zur klassischen Altertumskunde. Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie* 140, Königstein/Ts. 1982, 12—30.

Deubner's incubation theory cannot be considered convincing here, and not in other respects either, as I hope to be able to show on another occasion.⁹ However, I agree with him that ἀπωσικάκοι θεοί could be regarded as the Dioscuri. Unfortunately the epithet ἀπωσικάκος 'repelling evil' is not connected with them elsewhere,¹⁰ but, as is well known, Castor and Pollux were frequently called σωτήρες. Their soteriological functions include above all interventions in battles (Sagra, Regillus, Pydna, etc.) and the protection of seafarers.¹¹ It is significant that according to the legendary information the Aedes Castorum in the Forum was established as a result of their intervention in the battle of Lake Regillus (496 B.C.) and the subsequent epiphany at the Lacus Iuturnae.¹² There is also some, admittedly weak, evidence that the Dioscuri were regarded as healing gods,¹³ and their cult in Rome (and obviously also elsewhere) included some rather obscure chthonian and oracular aspects.¹⁴

On this basis alone it may be too precarious to identify ἀπωσικάκοι θεοί with the divine twins. However, there remain two more concrete arguments which I think have considerable force if put together with the above remarks.

⁹ In my paper 'Iuturna e il suo culto' to be published in the new series of the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma in 1984.

¹⁰ LSJ provides only one other occurrence of the word: BMus. Inscr. 370 (Delos) ἄνεμοι ἀπωσικάκοι.

¹¹ Cf. e.g. E. Bethe, Dioskuren, RE V, 1905, 1094—1097; K. Latte, Römische Religionsgeschichte, München 1960, 174—175; R. Schilling, Les Castores romains à la lumière des traditions indo-européennes, Coll. Latomus 45 (1960) 185. Cf. also the articles by J. Sihvola and T. Sironen on the role of the Dioscuri in Roman history and literature, to appear in the book mentioned in n. 9.

¹² Dion.Hal. 6,13; Val.Max. 1,8,1; Plut. Aem.Paul. 25, Coriol. 4,5, etc. In addition to the bibliography referred to in the previous note, cf. F. Castagnoli, L'introduzione del culto dei Dioscuri nel Lazio, Stud.Rom. 31 (1983) 3—4; M. Sordi, La leggenda dei Dioscuri nella battaglia della Sagra e di Lago Regillo, Contributi dell'Istituto di Storia antica 1 (1972) 47—70.

¹³ See the evidence brought together in my article mentioned in n. 9, and also Bethe 1097.

¹⁴ Cf. n. 13 and the following expressions in inscriptions: CIL VI 413 *ex iussu numinis eorum, pro salute*; Pais, CIL V Suppl. It. 1266 *ex visu*. Cf. also Schol. ad Pers. 2,56 quoted below.

1. The topographical argument. As already mentioned, the altar with the inscription ἀπωσκάκοις θεοῖς was found near the column of Phocas (i.e. not far from the Basilica Iulia and its neighbouring building, the temple of the Dioscuri). On the other hand, in the Basilica Iulia we have the graffito *ex oraculo*, which implies that there were in the immediate vicinity one or more oracular inscriptions. Since the Basilica Iulia, I repeat, is the building adjacent to the temple of the Dioscuri, we can hypothesize that the altar's original place was somewhere near the Aedes Castorum.

2. Schol. ad Pers. 2,56. We learn from this scholium to Persius that there were interpreters of dreams in the temple of the Dioscuri and — which is crucial — that Castor and Pollux had appeared in dreams to the Romans and given them medical advice when they had been suffering from some kind of plague: *in quorum (sc. Castoris et Pollucis) templo somniorum interpretes haberi solent — — Cum Romani pestilentia laborarent, Castor et Pollux in somniis populum monuerunt, quibus remediis morbi curarentur.*

We see how the expression ἀπωσκάκοις θεοῖς *ex oraculo* fits perfectly with this piece of information concerning the functions of the temple and the character of the Dioscuri. The above-mentioned theory of Moretti, according to which the altars were dedicated to save the people from the plague brought to Rome by soldiers in 166 A.D., seems to find support in the scholiast's phrase *cum Romani pestilentia laborarent.*

What about the other inscription Ἀθάναι ἀποτροπαίαι, also found near the column of Phocas? Can we assume that this altar, too, had drifted there from the vicinity of the temple of the Dioscuri? My answer to this question is positive. I suggest that Ἀθάναι is to be connected with the alleged cult of Minerva in this corner of the Forum. The presence of Minerva behind (i.e. to the south of) the temple of the Dioscuri, in the direction of the Palatine, is problematic and has remained obscure in many respects. However, there seem nowadays to be sufficient grounds for believing that the remains of the building later known as the church S. Maria Antiqua had originally belonged to some kind of library (dedicated to Minerva?); and the adjacent edifice, before erroneously thought to be the Templum Divi Augusti, could have been the Athenaeum, a kind of university established by Hadrian but which had probably served

for similar purposes also earlier.¹⁵ The name *Athenaeum* suggests the cult of Minerva. But we do not necessarily have to accept the identification of the Athenaeum, since Minerva is also otherwise attested in this area.

Firstly, from the reign of Domitian onwards there exist many military diplomas which indicate in the following way the place where the *tabulae honestae missionis* were posted up: *post aedem Divi Augusti ad Minervam*.¹⁶ Now we know that the temple of Augustus was in the unexcavated area behind the Basilica Iulia, i.e. next to the above-mentioned Athenaeum(?) and the library. The definition *ad Minervam* could thus denote some part of these buildings immediately behind the temple of the Dioscuri.

Secondly, there exists a curious topographical link between Minerva and the Dioscuri. In the so-called *Chronica urbis Romae*, a text from the Constantinian age, several *operae publicae* including the restoration of *templum Castorum et Minervae* are attributed to Domitian.¹⁷ In a regional catalogue *Curiosum urbis Romae regionum XIII cum brebiariis suis*, which also derives from the 4th century, we find the following topographical sequence: *Basilicam Iuliam, Templum Castorum et Minervae, Vestam*, etc.¹⁸ The striking fact here is that these passages suggest the possibility of an association of the two cults. At least they clearly attest the presence of Minerva near, if not directly connected with, the temple of the Dioscuri.¹⁹

¹⁵ A clear survey of the earlier discussion is provided by P. Romanelli—P. J. Nordhagen, *S. Maria Antiqua*, Roma 1964, 19—21. Cf. also F. Coarelli, *Roma* (Guide archeologiche Laterza), 1980, 74.

¹⁶ Cf. CIL III, p. 859ff.; CIL III Suppl., p. 1965ff. and the examples listed in CIL XVI, p. 196. Perhaps Martial, too, refers to these two places (4,53,1).

¹⁷ R. Valentini—G. Zucchetti, *Codice topografico della Città di Roma I*, Roma 1940, 275.

¹⁸ Valentini—Zucchetti 117.

¹⁹ As a further piece of evidence one might consider the now lost marble head of a feminine figure with a Corinthian helmet (2nd cent. A.D.), which was found in the area of the Lacus Iuturnae and which, as far as I can see, fits Minerva's iconography. Boni, *NSc.* 1901, 117, speaks of Athena-Hygieia and Roma-Salus, whereas Coarelli wants to see it as the cult statue of Volupia (whose iconography is totally unknown) to support his theory of the cult of Volupia in the *aedicula* later dedicated to Iuturna (F. Coarelli, *Il Foro Romano. Periodo arcaico*, Roma 1983, 243, 260—261). I leave the matter open here. The statues found at the Lacus Iuturnae will be discussed by L. Harri in the near future.

In the light of the previous discussion it seems rather obvious that we can identify Ἀθάνα with Minerva and ἀπωσίκακοι θεοί with the Dioscuri and locate the provenance of the altars somewhere near the temple of the Dioscuri.

We saw above that the epithet ἀπωσίκακος 'repelling evil' was well in keeping with the soteriological functions of the Dioscuri. Ἀθάνα-Minerva's epithet ἀποτροπαία 'averting evil' frequently occurs in connection with Apollo (also in oracular contexts).²⁰ As regards Athene, in one passage of Plutarch the offerings made to her are characterized by this adjective.²¹ As far as I know, apart from our text ἀποτροπαία occurs as an epithet of Athene only in an inscription recording the prices of various priesthoods (Erythrae, 3rd cent. B.C.)²² and in another inscription from Lindos (2nd cent. B.C.).²³ This may, however, be sufficient evidence to prove that it was a more or less current denomination of Athene in the ancient world.

Finally, a short comment remains to be made on the other two inscriptions Διὶ πατρίῳ *ex oraculo* and Διὶ ὑπάτῳ [*ex oraculo*]. Zeus-Jupiter's activity as σωτήρ is well known and need not concern us here. Whether these two altars were placed together with the other two cannot be verified. They were not found in exactly the same place,²⁴ but they are contemporary and are most probably, if not strictly topographically, at least factually connected with them.

In conclusion, I should like to summarize the more general consequences that arise from the hypothetical identification of ἀπωσίκακοι θεοί with the Dioscuri and Ἀθάνα ἀποτροπαία with Minerva. (1) New evidence is brought for the presence of Minerva near the temple of the Dioscuri. (2) The obscure connection between Minerva and the Dioscuri, previously attested only by some 4th century texts, might be worth more serious consideration. (3) The apotropaic and soteriological features of the cult of the

²⁰ See Jessen, Ἀποτρόπαιος, RE II, 1896, 189—190; LSJ and LSJ Suppl. s.v.

²¹ Plut. Quaest.Gr. 3 θυσίας καὶ ἱεροουργίας ἀποτροπαίους.

²² F. Sokolowski, Lois sacrées de l'Asie mineure, Paris 1955, No. 25, lines 59,82 and 146.

²³ F. Sokolowski, Lois sacrées des Cités grecques, Suppl., Paris 1962, No. 88,b3.

²⁴ See p. 5.

Dioscuri have become more apparent, which in turn may contribute to a better understanding of this whole corner in the Forum (I am thinking of the healing goddess Juturna and the various chthonian aspects which have recently been discussed in detail).²⁵

²⁵ Coarelli, *Il Foro Romano*, 227—282.