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## INDEX

Jaakko Aronen	Ἄπωσίκακοι θεοί and Ἀθήνα ἀποτροπαία in the Roman Forum: A Note on IGUR 94—95 .....	5
Iiro Kajanto	Notes on the Cult of Fortuna .....	13
Mika Kajava	A Note on the Text Tradition of CIL IX 1973 .....	21
Bengt Löfstedt	Zur Latinität von T. Mores Utopia .....	23
Martti Nyman	Reconstructing Compound Accentuation: On the Pre-Latin Initial Stress .....	31
Tuomo Pekkanen	The Hellusii and the Oxiones of Tac. Germ. 46,4 .....	49
Leena Pietilä-Castrén	<i>Atria Tiberina</i> : Remarks on Ovid's <i>Fasti</i> 4,275—347 ..	61
Olli Salomies	Appius Claudius Iulianus und CIL X 1688 .....	69
Timo Sironen	Un nuovo documento osco-lucano del IV sec. a.C. da Pisticci .....	79
Heikki Solin	Analecta epigraphica LXXX—LXXXV .....	87
Rolf Westman	Analecta Oenoandensia: Zu neuen Fragmenten des Diogenes .....	109
Toivo Viljamaa	Gallus — Soldier or Shepherd? .....	119
Maija Väisänen	Una nave d'Alceo in tempesta: Che tipo di allegoria: Un commento al "Dichter und Gruppe" di W. Rösler ..	123
De novis libris iudicia	.....	135

ATRIA TIBERINA: REMARKS ON OVID'S FASTI 4,275—347

Leena Pietilä-Castrén

Towards the end of the Second Punic War, in 204 BC, the Sibylline Books prophesied to the Romans that the foreign enemy could be driven out of Italy only if the Mater Magna<sup>1</sup> — that is, the meteoric stone symbolizing her — were brought from Phrygian Pessinus to Rome. A precise description of this stone has been preserved by Arnobius: *nisi lapis quidam non magnus, ferri manu hominis sine ulla impressione qui posset, coloris furvi atque atrii, angellis prominentibus inaequalis, et quem omnes hodie ipso illo videmus in signo oris loco positum, indolatum et asperum et simulacro faciem minus expressam simulatione praebentem.*<sup>2</sup> Concerning the arrival of the Goddess detailed accounts, both in prose and verse, appear in Livy, Ovid, Silius Italicus, Appian, Herodian, Lactantius and Aurelius Victor.<sup>3</sup>

The Romans decided to send an embassy of great authority led by M. Valerius Laevinus, a renowned commander of fleet and army operations alike,<sup>4</sup> to carry the Goddess to Rome accompanied by as many as five quinqueremes.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the Roman navy was not actively employed in the warfare in 208—203<sup>6</sup> and therefore such a large squadron could be sent for ceremonial purposes. Despite the severity of the war situation great attention was paid in Rome to the choice of the most suitable person

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<sup>1</sup> About the form of the name see RE 18, Palatium, 36.

<sup>2</sup> Arnob. nat. 7,49.

<sup>3</sup> Liv. 29,14,5—14; Ov. fast. 4,275—347; Sil. 17,1—47; App. Hann. 7,56; Herodian. 1,11,3—5; Lact. inst. 27,12; Vir. ill. 46.

<sup>4</sup> Cos. 210, RE 8A, n:o 211, 45—49.

<sup>5</sup> Liv. 29,10,4—11,8.

<sup>6</sup> J. H. Thiel, Studies on the History of Roman Sea-power in Republican Times, Amsterdam 1946, 154—155.

to receive the Great Mother. The lot fell to P. Cornelius Scipio Nasica, a young man not yet old enough to hold the office of quaestor.<sup>7</sup> The choice was certainly affected by the popularity of the Scipios in those days as well as by his personal qualities.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, Livy tells us that Nasica was ordered to meet the Goddess at Ostia, accompanied by the married women of Rome. His task was to take the sacred stone from the ship, carry it ashore, and deliver it into the matrons' hands. The women, one of whom was Claudia Quinta, took care of the transportation of the Goddess to Rome, where it was temporarily housed in the Temple of Victory on the Palatine.<sup>9</sup>

According to Ovid the Goddess was universally welcomed at Ostia:

*Omnis eques mixtaque gravis cum plebe senatus  
obvius ad Tusci fluminis ora venit.  
Procedunt pariter matres nataeque nurusque  
quaeque colunt sanctos virginitate focos.*<sup>10</sup>

Ovid calls the ship *hospita navis*.<sup>11</sup> He, or rather his source, seems to claim that the Great Mother was not taken on board one of Laevinus' quinqueremes, but was transported by a special Phrygian ship. Silius Italicus, for his part, calls the ship *Latia puppis*.<sup>12</sup> It is more likely that Ovid's *hospita navis*, a vessel especially equipped for this purpose, is nearer the truth as it later became *navis salvia*, an object of a cult.<sup>13</sup>

In Ovid's version the Tiber was low as a result of a long drought and the ship ran aground on a shoal:

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<sup>7</sup> Liv. 29,14,6—8. RE 4, n:o 350, 1494—1497. Later, in 191, he became consul with M' Acilius Glabrio.

<sup>8</sup> Diod. Sic. 34,33,2; Cic. har.resp. 13,27.

<sup>9</sup> She remained in the Temple of Victory until her own temple, also on the Palatine, was finished in 191. Liv. 36,36,3—4. S. B. Platner—Th. Ashby, Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome, London 1929, 324—325. F. Coarelli, Roma, Bari 1980, 128—129. T. P. Wiseman, AJ (1981) 61, 46—47.

<sup>10</sup> Ov. fast. 4,293—304.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 4,298.

<sup>12</sup> Sil. 17,8—9.

<sup>13</sup> CIL VI 492—494. K. Latte, Römische Religionsgeschichte, München 1960, 259 n.2.

*sedula fune viri contento bracchia lassant,  
vix subit adversas hospita navis aquas.  
sicca diu fuerat tellus, sitis usserat herbas:  
sedit limoso pressa carina vado.  
quisquis adest operis, plus quam pro parte laborat,  
adiuvat et fortes voce sonante manus.  
illa velut medio stabilis sedet insula ponto,  
attoniti monstro stantque paventque viri.<sup>14</sup>*

This episode is overlooked by Livy, but other authors repeat it in various forms: Silius Italicus tells us *Tuscique sonora / Thybridis adduxit sublimis* (sc. Nasica) *ad Ostia puppim* and further on *sacra ratis subitisque vadis immobilis haesit.*<sup>15</sup> In Appian the story goes: λέγεται δὲ τὴν ναῦν, ἣ ἔφερεν αὐτό, ἰλί τοῦ ποταμοῦ τοῦ Τιβέριος ἐνσχεθεῖσαν.<sup>16</sup>

Sueton also mentions *en passant* that (Claudia) *quae navem cum sacris Matris deum Idaeae obhaerentem Tiberino vado extravit* while presenting famous women of Claudia family.<sup>17</sup>

It is characteristic of later Antiquity that Herodian refers the whole accident to some supernatural force: κομισθὲν δὲ ἐπὶ νεῶς τὸ ἄγαλμα καὶ γενόμενον ἐν ταῖς τοῦ Θύμβριδος ἐκβολαῖς ταύταις γὰρ ἀντὶ λιμένων ἐχρῶντο οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι ἔστησε θεία δυνάμει τὸ σκάφος.<sup>18</sup>

It was thought that a vessel carrying a deity would run aground or otherwise refuse to move until a *persona casta* became involved.<sup>19</sup>

Aurelius Victor says *Mater deum a Pessinunte arcessita cum adverso Tiberi veheretur, repente in alto stetit.*<sup>20</sup> According to the testimony of all the authors the ship seems to have run aground either at the mouth of the river or when already further upstream.

Usually the *codicarii* carried the river-boats upstream from Ostia to Rome by hauling them with ropes from ashore. The *codicarii* formed

<sup>14</sup> Ov. fast. 4,297—304.

<sup>15</sup> Sil. 17,14—15.25.

<sup>16</sup> App. Hann. 7,56.

<sup>17</sup> Suet. Tib. 2,3.

<sup>18</sup> Herodian. 1,11,3—5.

<sup>19</sup> F. Bömer, P. Ovidius Naso. Die Fasten II, Heidelberg 1958, 234.

<sup>20</sup> Vir.ill. 46. Some editors change *in alto* into *in alveo* or *in vado*, E. Keil, Breslau 1872.

one of the most important guilds of Ostia.<sup>21</sup> In his description of the events Ovid probably intends exactly these *codicarii* as he writes *sedula fune viri contento bracchia lassant*, and *quisquis adest operis, plus quam pro parte laborat, / adiuvat et fortes voce sonante manus* and finally *stantque paventque viri*.<sup>22</sup> It was only the pious Claudia Quinta who, in order to prove her chastity, was alone able to free the vessel from the sandbank.<sup>23</sup>

In Silius Italicus version the women tried first to tow the boat with ropes.<sup>24</sup> It would, indeed, be quite natural to emphasize the role played by women in this procedure as the worship of Cybele was especially popular among women and castrated men.

On the other hand, Livy does not mention the difficulty on the river at all, he simply states that *vae (sc. feminae) per manus succedentes aliae aliis ... pertulere*.<sup>25</sup> By this I understand that the women did the towing instead of the *codicarii*.

When the vessel was again set in motion the high-spirited procession arrived, according to Ovid, at the curve of the river:

*fluminis ad flexum veniunt — Tiberina priores  
atria dixerunt — unde sinister abit.*<sup>26</sup>

It is a common opinion that the *atria Tiberina* mentioned by Ovid is

<sup>21</sup> L. Casson, JRS 55 (1965) 32, 36—38. R. Meiggs, Roman Ostia, 2nd ed., Oxford 1973, 293—294, 312.

<sup>22</sup> Ov. fast. 4,297.301—302.304.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 4,305—328. The later authors regarded Claudia Quinta simply as a Vestal virgin: Vir.ill. 46; Herodian. 1,11,4.

<sup>24</sup> Sil. 17,16—17.

<sup>25</sup> Liv. 29,14,13—14.

<sup>26</sup> Ov. fast. 4,329—330. According to Ovid (4,331—347) the procession advanced upstream as far as the river Almo (the modern Acquataccio), where the Goddess was ritually bathed. It continued from here by land — through Via Appia — to porta Capena, where the Idaean Mother was welcomed by Scipio Nasica. Bömer claims that this route would be most improbable (Bömer, 220). He forgets, however, that porta Capena was without doubt the best entrance to the City. It was quite natural that such an important religious procession entered through that gate. (F. Coarelli, Il foro Romano, periodo arcaico, Roma 1983, 112).

a distortion of some obsolete local name.<sup>27</sup> The site has been located on the spot where Ovid writes the River Tiber "turns left", that is to say north, for the first time. Or, rather, where it used to turn, immediately east of the Ostian colony, when it followed its ancient river bed (*fiume morto*).<sup>28</sup> It was here that Cardinal Giuliano Della Rovere, later Pope Julius II, built his castle in 1483—86. Unfortunately, the Tiber as a consequence of a disastrous flood, changed its course in 1557. Nowadays the river turns towards the north, just as it passes the old Ostia.<sup>29</sup>

Carcopino has reached the conclusion that *atria Tiberina* was an ancient place of cult worship as Ovid's expression *priores dixerunt*<sup>30</sup> can, in fact, be interpreted. According to this theory, this place of worship was of pre-Roman, perhaps Etruscan origin, and was where several deities were worshipped on each bank of the river. Without doubt one of these deities was Vulcan, who along with Tiber and the Dioscuri, was later on one of the most important gods in Ostia.<sup>31</sup>

While talking about the origin of the word *atrium* Carcopino points to the Etruscan ancestry of both the expression and its significance.<sup>32</sup> This theory was already in existence with the Roman antiquarians and other authors; nowadays, however, the Etruscan influence is not generally recognized.<sup>33</sup> It is true that Ovid still calls Tiber *Tuscum flumen*;<sup>34</sup> this is, however, a literary expression, as is, for instance, the expression *ripa etrusca* for the northern side of the river.

One possibility would be, of course, to regard the expression *atrium* as symbolic. Remembering that the Mater Magna entered the Tiber at Ostia, *atrium* would refer to the entrance hall of a house. The word *ostium*

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<sup>27</sup> G. Calza, RE 18, 1655. J. Carcopino, Virgile et les origines d'Ostie, Paris 1919, 527. Bömer, 236.

<sup>28</sup> J. Le Gall, Le Tibre, fleuve de Rome dans l'antiquité, Paris 1952, 21—25.

<sup>29</sup> Carcopino, 504. Th. Ashby, JRS 2 (1912) 192—194. M. F. Squarciapino, StudRom 12 (1964) 412.

<sup>30</sup> Ov. fast. 4,329—330.

<sup>31</sup> Carcopino, 527—530. Latte, 130—131.

<sup>32</sup> Carcopino, 528.

<sup>33</sup> Varro, ling. 5,161; Fest. (L) 12. A. G. McKay, Houses, Villas and Palaces in the Roman World, Ithaca—New York 1975, 17. J. B. Ward Perkins, Architektur der Römer, Stuttgart 1975, 50—51.

<sup>34</sup> Ov. fast. 4,294.

has always had the meaning of "exit" or "entrance" to for instance the sea, a river, a harbour, and was equivalent to *fauces*.<sup>35</sup> Other expressions such as *ostium Tiberinum* and *ostia Tiberina* are used elsewhere.<sup>36</sup> Following this metaphor the Mater Magna entered at "*ostium*" (the doorway) and continued towards "*atrium*", the central hall of the house, where the *Lares* were usually kept.<sup>37</sup> As the houses grew bigger and a peristyle was added to the scheme, the *atrium* was used as an entrance hall.<sup>38</sup> Thus Rome, the final destination of the cult statue, would correspond to the peristyle. The plural form *atria* would follow by analogy with *ostia* or for metrical reasons.

Varro connected the word *atrium* with the town Atria,<sup>39</sup> which still exists under the name Adria at the Po delta. According to the Romans themselves a certain Etruscan influence existed in this town, although it was founded by the *Veneti*.<sup>40</sup> Originally the town was situated close to the seashore; however, by the time of the beginning of the Empire the coastline had already become heavily silted and after numerous floods had receded away from the town. Atria was, however, accessible by means of a canal as late as during the reign of Vitellius.<sup>41</sup>

There were some similarities between Atria on the Po delta and *atria Tiberina*: both were originally situated near the sea, they also guarded the two most important river valleys in Italy.<sup>42</sup>

In a witty but unfortunately overlooked article Erik Wistrand has come to some most interesting conclusions when studying the expression *ante atria* in Festus.<sup>43</sup> He states that at least in classical prose the term *atrium* occurred only when used about public buildings of relatively ancient origin.<sup>44</sup> In the plural and often without an epithet *atria* is equivalent to

<sup>35</sup> TLL 9:1, 1156,11. RE 18, 1665, *ostium*.

<sup>36</sup> Cic. Manil. 33; Ov. met. 15,728; Verg. Aen. 1,13—14; Liv. 26,19,11.

<sup>37</sup> Kleine-Pauly 3, 493.

<sup>38</sup> RE 2, 2146, *atrium*; RE 1A, 983, Römisches Haus.

<sup>39</sup> Varro ling. 5,161.

<sup>40</sup> Liv. 5,33; Plin. nat. 3,120; Strab. 5,214. H. Nissen, Italische Landeskunde I, Berlin 1883, 91; II:1, Berlin 1902, 214—215.

<sup>41</sup> Tac. hist. 3,12.

<sup>42</sup> Carcopino, 528.

<sup>43</sup> Fest. (L) 448.

<sup>44</sup> E. Wistrand, AIRRS 2 (1932) 58. Platner—Ashby, 56, s.v. *atrium libertatis*.



*atria auctionaria*.<sup>45</sup> Analogically *atria Tiberina* would signify a market place at the Tiber delta where auctions were held.

The Tiber also curves northwards further upstream, though perhaps not to such an extent as the famous first curve. Nowadays there is a relatively sharp curve — although earlier it seems to have been less accentuated<sup>46</sup> — where the terrain starts to rise after the marshy tract of the delta. Here too lie the first hills near the modern suburb of Acilia. On one of these hills, Monte Cugno, the old Latin town of Ficana has been identified during recent excavations.<sup>47</sup> Ficana has been mentioned for instance by Pliny the Elder while recording abandoned sites in Latium.<sup>48</sup>

Earlier Ficana had been tentatively sited on another hill, Dragoncello, lying further to the west.<sup>49</sup> Nearby, a number of very old dwellings have been discovered on Monte Cugno. It is also here that the last tributary of the Tiber, Fosso Galeria, which was actively used by Veian Etruscans as a trade route, flows into the main river. Sherds of proto-Villanovan pottery discovered on Monte Cugno also point to the proximity of the Etruscans.<sup>50</sup>

Not far from these fragments a skeleton of a horse was unearthed which has lately been connected with the cult of Mars Ficanus still to be found in this area in Imperial times.<sup>51</sup> According to Carcopino other deities worshipped in or near Ostia were Tiber, Vulcan and the Dioscuri.<sup>52</sup> Therefore he presumes that the same deities were also venerated at the ancient place of cult worship at *atria Tiberina*. Later, in Ostia, the cult of the Dioscuri was probably connected with their activity as protectors of merchants and trade;<sup>53</sup> their particular task was to guard sailors

<sup>45</sup> Wistrand, 59. See also Ov. am. 1,13,19—20; Cic. pet. 10; Iuv. sat. 7,7; Cic. leg.agr. 1,3,7.

<sup>46</sup> S. Quilici Gigli, ArchClass 23 (1971) 33. L. Chiumenti—F. Bilancia, La campagna romana antica, medioevale e moderna VI: Vie Nomentana e Salaria, Portuense, Tiburtina, Roma 1977, 245.

<sup>47</sup> Ficana, en milesten på veien til Roma, Copenhagen 1980, passim.

<sup>48</sup> Plin. nat. 3,68—70.

<sup>49</sup> Carcopino, 457. Ashby, JRS 2 (1912) 153. Quilici Gigli, 27—29, 33.

<sup>50</sup> Enea nel Lazio, archeologia e mito, Roma 1981, 102.

<sup>51</sup> Ficana, milesten, 42—43, 47, 113. An altar dedicated to Mars Ficanus was discovered at the Via Ostiensis nearby: Floriani Squarciapino, BA 2 (1955) 183.

<sup>52</sup> Carcopino, 530.

<sup>53</sup> C. Pavolini, Ostia, Bari 1983, 160.

against the dangers on the sea. Thus it was quite natural that precisely these deities were worshipped in a harbour town. However, it is a well-known fact that initially they were famous horsemen. Also later the *equites* were intimately associated with the cult of the Dioscuri.<sup>54</sup>

In this area Castor and Pollux were worshipped at an early date in Lavinium, where the famous bronze tablet with the inscription *Castorei Podlouqueique / qurois* from the end of the sixth century BC was recently found.<sup>55</sup> One possibility, therefore, would be to relate the horse skeleton of Ficana rather to the cult of the Twins that existed in the archaic period in this area than to the cult of Mars Ficanus.

To locate *atria Tiberina* let us return to Ovid's *passus* in which he describes the site *fluminis ad flexum veniunt — Tiberina priores / atria dixerunt — unde sinister abit*.<sup>56</sup> This *passus* has always been interpreted in such a way that it is the river that makes a curve to the left. In my opinion, however, another interpretation is perhaps more plausible: the "exit" to the left is the last tributary of the Tiber before the mouth, where now the modern Fosso Galeria at Ficana is situated.<sup>57</sup>

As is generally known, the colony of Ostia was founded as late as the fourth century, while the ancient authors insist on the existence of Ostia by the time of the era of the Kings.<sup>58</sup> This archaic Ostia was perhaps further upstream at the site Festus calls *Saxa Puilia*,<sup>59</sup> that is exactly on the spot where according to my theory *atria Tiberina* should be situated. During the Middle Republic Archaic Ostia was perhaps known as *atria Tiberina*, an old cult site where there was also a market. The most important article of trade was, of course, salt, as the salt beds of Ostia lay near by. In this case it would be quite natural to expect some sort of warehouses near the market place. Some still unpublished structures identified at Ficana could fit this theory very well.

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<sup>54</sup> Latte, 175.

<sup>55</sup> F. Castagnoli, PP 32 (1977) 351—353. Enea nel Lazio, 179.

<sup>56</sup> Ov. fast. 4,329—330.

<sup>57</sup> See for instance TLL 1:69, 35: Plaut. Truc. 564 *aqua abeat in mare*. Cato frg. or.inc. 9 *aqua de via abiret*. Mela 3,41 *Cyrus et Cambyses ... vicinis fontibus editi in diversa abeunt*.

<sup>58</sup> Liv. 1,33,3; Dion.Hal. 3,38.

<sup>59</sup> Fest. (L) 298.