SENDING UP THE FOUNDER: 
OVID AND THE APOTHEOSIS OF ROMULUS.*

Anne Gosling
University of Natal, Durban

ABSTRACT

A comparative reading of Ovid’s accounts of the apotheosis of Romulus (Met. 14.805-28 and Fasti 2.481-512) reveals significant echoes and variations. Striking divergences from other sources (Cicero, Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus) are also apparent. Ovid shows no (overt) interest in the political background, suppresses Romulus’ military aspect, and is more concerned with fabulous elements. Yet his own stylistic emphases, and a nexus of resonances between the Metamorphoses and Fasti, with echoes of Aen. 6.851-53 and Aen. 1.292-93, pointedly situate Romulus in the civil sphere as lawgiver, an interesting perspective in the light of Augustan propaganda and the inescapable elements of fraternal strife and murder in Rome’s foundation legend. By ellipsis and allusion Ovid constructs an image of Romulus which interrogates the Augustan ethos and connects with the wider themes of the Fasti, particularly the rejection of militarism and the celebration of the arts of peace.

Recent readings of Ovid’s later poetry – Metamorphoses, Fasti and the poems of exile – have concentrated on two aspects in particular: the situation of his work within the broader historical and cultural context of the Augustan age, and his intertextual resonances with earlier and

* An earlier version of this paper was read at the conference on Augustan Poetry and the Traditions of Ancient Historiography held at the University of Durham from 31 August to 3 September 1999. I am grateful to the University of Natal for funding to enable me to attend this conference, and to the conference participants in Durham and in the Classics Graduate Colloquium at the University of Natal in Durban for stimulating and challenging discussion. Thanks are also due to the anonymous referees of Acta Classica, who both made detailed comments and suggestions which have been of great help in improving the paper; any errors and deficiencies which remain are my own.

contemporary poets. There is an accumulating awareness of how the latter can illuminate Ovid’s view of the former, with many critics reading an increasing sense of unease, if not actual rejection, in Ovid’s reflections on, and reflections of, the Augustan construct.¹ Dissonances between the voices of elegy, epic, aetiology and encomium, the games of love and the playful intellectual éclat of Alexandria complicate the picture by opening interpretative possibilities of irony and subversion. Ovid’s narration of the apotheosis of Romulus (Fast. 2.481-512 and Met. 14.805-28) is a case in point. Alessandro Barchiesi has shown how Ovid’s narrative in the Fasti raises problems of credibility and authority, at every level, both of points of detail and of narrative import, from the imputation of regicide to the witness of the earliest recorded member of the Julian family to Romulus’ apotheosis and, by implication, to the authority for the actual or envisaged deification of Julius and Augustus.² Garth Tissol similarly sees the apotheoses of Aeneas and Romulus in Metamorphoses 14 as preparing for and introducing ‘not only the apotheosis itself of Caesar’s soul, but also the interpretive questions it raises’ in Met. 15.746-870. Discussing the divergent critical views of the apotheosis of Caesar and the associated Augustan panegyric (which range from regarding Ovid’s tale as supportive of Augustus to subversive), he concludes that Ovid’s treatment ‘is intentionally incoherent, presenting the reader with irreconcilable interpretive options.’³ This sense of multiple interpretive possibilities pertains also to Ovid’s two accounts of the apotheosis of Romulus, where a comparative reading points up both echoes and differences. The intention is probably not one of simple variation for variation’s sake: Ovid frequently uses similarities and divergences to point to a particular subtext. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that here Ovid is retelling an ostensibly historical narrative, whereas the other stories he repeats are generally

¹ The bibliography is extensive: see, for example, Wallace-Hadrill 1987; Feeney 1992; Herbert-Brown 1994; Williams 1994; Fantham 1995, 1998 and 2002; Newlands 1995:146-74; Borchiesi 1997. For a useful recent survey (including discussion of the ambivalent ways in which Ovid’s engagement with Augustan ideology can, and perhaps should, be read) see Myers 1999.


³ Tissol 2002:321. Cf. Evans 1992:2-5 on ‘integration propaganda’ in which literature and history are rewritten ‘as a process, as [they] are explained in an effort to integrate them into the present.’
There is, of course, relatively little scope for historical treatment in the first two-thirds of the *Metamorphoses*, and Ovid’s selective survey of Roman history in the third pentad is interlaced with much extraneous mythological material, and is, as Tissol shows, ‘re-mythologized’. While acknowledging that there are some similarities between the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* versions, Tissol maintains that the two passages are in fact ‘remarkably dissimilar’, and suggests that Ovid deliberately omits any mention of the exploits which were to earn Romulus’ apotheosis in order to avoid reminders (evident in the *Fasti* version) of ‘the violence and ruthlessness’ which ‘make him a problematic parallel to Augustus ... Ovid remythologizes history, reducing human agency and minimizing the potential of his Roman characters to serve as flattering parallels’. I would suggest further that Ovid plays on both the similarities and the differences in his two accounts, and expects his readers to construct a different Romulus through synthesis of apparent contradictions. We can take the comparative reading a step further by considering the significance of Ovid’s use of (and in some suggestive points his failure to use) other versions of the story in the light of a complex of allusion and reminiscence.

In the version in the *Fasti*, Mars begins the sequence of events by approaching Jupiter to ask for the translation of Romulus to heaven. With persuasive rhetoric Mars tells Jupiter that Rome is now securely established and no longer needs his son: let him be returned, as promised, to his father, to fill not only his own place but that of the dead Remus (*Fasti* 2.483-88):

---

4 For example, Callisto (*Met.* 2.401-530; *Fast.* 2.153-92), Hippolytus (*Met.* 14.497; *Fast.* 6.737-56), the Alban kings (*Met.* 14.609-22; *Fast.* 4.41-50); on the latter two, see Tissol 2002:305. I am grateful to one of the anonymous referees for drawing attention to the unusualness of this reworking of an historical narrative.

5 Tissol 2002:305-35.

6 Tissol 2002:331, 334.

7 It is not possible to draw any conclusions through comparative readings as to the priority of either the *Metamorphoses* or the *Fasti*. In company with most recent critics, I believe that Ovid was working on both texts at more or less the same time and that the resonances and divergences between them are intentional.

8 The hazards of statements of authorial intention justifiably perturb critics; nevertheless Hinds 1998:144 is right in maintaining that, although we cannot know for sure the intention of an author, and the ‘alluding poet’ is a construct, nevertheless the construct gives energy and allows for a good way of reading text.

‘Jupiter,’ he said, ‘Rome’s power has achieved its strength; it does not need the services of my blood. Give back the son to his father. One may have died; the one who remains for me will stand for himself and for Remus. “One there will be whom you will raise to the azure expanse of heaven,” you said to me. Let Jove’s words be fulfilled.’

In very similar terms in *Met.* 14.808-15, Mars points out to Jupiter that Rome is secure enough not to need Romulus any longer, and reminds him of his promise to raise the hero to the heavens:

‘tempus adest, genitor, quoniam fundamine magno res Romana valet et praeside pendet ab uno, praemia (sunt promissa mihi dignoque nepoti) solvere et ablatum terris inponere caelo. tu mihi concilio quondam praesente deorum (nam memoro memorique animo pia verba notavi) “unus erit, quem tu tolles in caerula caeli” dixisti: rata sit verborum summa tuorum!’

‘The time is here, father, since Roman power stands securely founded, and depends on one ruler, to give the rewards (promised to me and to your deserving grandson), to take him up from earth and set him in heaven. You said to me once, in a council of the gods (for I remember, and marked your holy words with mindful heart), “One there will be whom you will raise to the azure expanse of heaven.” Let the substance of your words be fulfilled!’

"LL 7.6): 'unus erit, quem tu tolles in caerula caeli / templa'. One effect of the verbal reminiscences and the allusion is to underline the divine element in the story.

The narration of the actual apotheosis is quite distinctive in each of the two poems. The details are similar but the order of presentation is different, and there are no verbal echoes. For these few lines (Fasti. 2.489-96 and Met. 14.816-24) we have Ovid indulging his talent for telling the same story in another way. Both versions inform the reader that Romulus was engaged in lawgiving (a significant point to which we shall return), but the placing of this information in the story, and the actual wording, differ. In the Fasti Jupiter’s assenting nod is followed by an earthquake, poetically suggested by allusion to Atlas; then the sun disappears, the sky is blotted out by clouds, and rain pours down; but in an intervening couplet we are told (Fasti. 2.491-92):

est locus, antiqui Caprae dixere paludem:
forte tuis illic, Romule, iura dabas.

There is a spot, called Goat’s Marsh by the ancients; it happened, Romulus, that you were giving laws to your people there.

In the Metamorphoses, Jupiter first sends clouds and thunder and lightning. Taking this as a sign, Mars leaps to horse and hurtles earthwards. He comes to a standstill on the summit of the Palatine and carries off Romulus (Met. 14.823-24):

reddentemque suo non regia iura Quiriti
abstulit Iliaden.

He carried off Romulus as he was giving laws – not regal laws – to his citizens.

There is much more detailed visual description, and rather more grandeur, in the Metamorphoses than in the Fasti, where the snatching up of the king is related with extreme conciseness, underlined by the brevity and dactylic speed of the pentameter (Fasti. 2.496):

fit fuga: rex patriis astra petebat equis.
The people fled; the king, borne by his father’s horses, swept up to the stars.

Ovid often paradoxically draws attention to a detail by compression, as if to pass over it. He will also, in Alexandrian fashion, allude cryptically to a significant point. ‘Fit fuga’ is just such a point (and it is further emphasised by the metrical isolation imposed by the unusual pause coinciding with the end of the first foot): ‘flight’ could easily pass for another detail in the description of a sudden startling event, until one reflects that it is not a logical word to describe either Romulus’ or Mars’ actions at the time, but instead is an oblique reference to the flight of the common people mentioned in Dionysius of Halicarnassus 2.56.5 and Plutarch, Romulus 27.7 as having occurred during the storm in which the king disappeared.

There is no mention in the Fasti of what happened to Romulus’ mortal remains, but the Metamorphoses has a striking image of his physical disappearance (Met. 14.825-26):

... corpus mortale per auras
dilapsum tenues, ceu lata plumbea funda
missa solet medio glans intabescere caelo.

His mortal body slipped away through the thin air as a bullet of lead shot from a broad sling will melt away in mid-air.

The Fasti has a slight echo in 2.509, ‘in tenues oculis evanuit auras’ (‘he vanished from my sight into thin air’), but the context is the subsequent epiphany of Romulus, not his apotheosis. Also in the epiphany (Fast. 2.503), Romulus is described as ‘pulcher et humano maior trabeaque decorus’ (‘beautiful, larger than human form, adorned with a robe of state’), and these words bear a distinct similarity to the end of the apotheosis account in the Metamorphoses (14.827-28):

pulchra subit facies et pulvinaribus altis
dignior est qualis trabeati forma Quirini.

[His body] was replaced by a handsome appearance, more worthy of the lofty couches of the gods, a form like that of Quirinus in his robe of state.

The echo adds to the already strong emphasis Ovid gives to the miraculous and divine aspect of Romulus’ death as opposed to the rationalistic human
aspect. However, the dissimilarity of the two versions increases at the end. The epiphany to Julius Proculus, which forms an important part of the Fasti version, is not alluded to in the Metamorphoses, which ends instead with the apotheosis of Romulus’ wife Hersilie as Quirinus’ consort Hora. It is possible that the very slight verbal similarities at this point serve to draw attention to the final divergence of the two narratives rather than to link them, and therefore to point to a certain undependability and lack of authority in the myth.

More can be made out of the differences between Ovid’s poetic versions and the near-contemporary prose sources: Cicero, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Livy. Cicero maintains (Rep. 2.17-20) that Julius Proculus’ story of Romulus’ apotheosis was told at the instigation of the senate, to clear them of suspicion of having murdered the king, a suspicion to which his pro-senatorial narrative gives no credence. Dionysius says (2.56.3-5) it is more likely that Romulus was murdered by his own people than that he was carried up to heaven by Mars; he cites various allegations of arbitrary, unfair or cruel behaviour and offers two possibilities: either that the patricians conspired to kill him in the senate house or that the new citizens, resentful of his favouring the original citizens, seized the opportunity of the darkness and confusion of a sudden storm to kill him during a public assembly. Typically, Ovid shows no interest in the political background which mainly interests Cicero and Dionysius, and is concerned with those aspects of the story which a more sober historical approach finds least plausible. In Cicero, to be sure, Scipio accepts the deification as a natural consequence of Romulus’ achievements and renown (2.17), but his concern is with the constitution and his narrative does not enlarge on the apotheosis itself. Dionysius mentions (2.56.2) the apotheosis fairly briefly

---

9 Tissel 2002:334 shows that with Hersilie, as with Romulus, Ovid noticeably passes up opportunities for panegyric.

10 Newlands 1995 argues that in destabilising the authority of his aetiologies in the Fasti, Ovid undermines Augustan certainties. See also Newlands 2002:206 on Fast. 4.835-56: ‘an exculpatory account of Remus’ murder that lays the blame on a guard, Celer, not Romulus ... Clearly social and institutional pressures as well as personal factors shape this reinvention of the past.’ Schiesaro 2002:65 mentions the unreliability of the gods when dealing with events that affect themselves: Romulus’ account is ‘a blatantly subjective and self-serving view of Remus’ death.’ For a similar conclusion specifically on the apotheosis of Romulus, see Barchiesi 1997:112-19. On his argument, the apotheosis of Romulus is paradigmatic for those of Julius and Augustus, on which see Hardie 1998.
and dismissively as the version of those who tend to describe Romulus’ life in fabulous terms, before proceeding to what he regards as more credible versions of political murder. But in Ovid it is the apotheosis that predominates, almost to the exclusion of the rationalist interpretation.\textsuperscript{11}

Livy (1.16) is more inclined than the other prose sources to give credence to the apotheosis, but there is little indication that Ovid followed his version directly, and indeed Ovid differs from Livy in several points of detail. Livy’s Romulus simply disappears in a cloud during a storm; Ovid’s, more dramatically and poetically, soars heavenward in Mars’ chariot. In Livy the soldiers are at first thrown into panic by the storm, but then readily enough accept the senators’ assertion of his being caught up to heaven, and find consolation in worshipping and praying to the new god. The suspicion of murder which fell on the senate is treated somewhat dismissively by Livy (1.16.4): ‘fuisse credo tum quoque aliquos qui discerptum regem patrum manibus taciti arguerent …’ (‘even at that time, I believe, there were some who secretly urged the view that the king had been torn to pieces by the hands of the senators …’); the assertion is taken seriously by Dionysius (2.56.4). This rationalisation is not fully expounded by Ovid and the reader requires external knowledge to grasp the allusion in the \textit{Fasti} (2.497-99):

\begin{quote}
luctus erat, falsaeque patres in crimine caedis. 
haesissetque animis forsitan ille fides;
sed Proculus ...
\end{quote}

There was mourning, and the senators incurred the charge of a false murder.
And perhaps that belief would have stuck in people’s minds, but Proculus ...

Again, as with ‘fit fuga’ above, conciseness may be seen as a pointer to narrative significance, emphasising not only the charge but also the narrator’s express rejection of it.\textsuperscript{12} On the other hand, in comparison with Livy (1.16.6), Ovid considerably expands and dramatises the epiphany of

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}

\textsuperscript{11} See Barchiesi 1997:112-19; he strengthens his thesis by comparison with Plut. \textit{Rom.} 27-28. For an outline of the development of the apotheosis legend, and of the anti-senatorial tradition, see Ogilvie 1965:84-85.

\textsuperscript{12} The emphasis, perhaps, strengthens the argument of Barchiesi 1997:116 that in appearing to reject the suggestion of patrician guilt and give prominence to the witness of Julius Proculus, Ovid in fact undermines the credibility of the miracle.
Romulus to Proculus (Fast. 2.499-509). He sets it on a bright moonlit night, while in Livy it occurs 'prima hodierna luce' ('at first light today') – a more prosaic time, when a man walking to Rome from Alba Longa would be likely to be abroad. Despite the miraculous nature of the epiphany, Livy's Proculus is almost matter-of-fact in his report: "'Romulus' inquit, "Quirites, parens urbis huius, prima hodierna luce caelo repente delapsus se mihi obvium dedit.'" ('"Citizens," he said, "Romulus, the father of this city, suddenly descended from the heaven at first light today and presented himself before me."') He describes himself as 'perfusus horrore venerabundusque' ("filled with dread and reverence"), but his fear is already a thing of the past. There is nothing in Livy like the build-up of tension or the immediacy of Proculus' encounter as experienced in Ovid, where the first indication of something untoward happening is a sound of rustling in the bushes by the road, which makes Proculus step back, his hair standing on end; Livy's 'cum ... adstitissem' ("when I had stopped before him") is tame by comparison with Ovid's 'rettulit ille gradus' ("he took a step back").

Ovid does not here set up obvious intertextual resonances between his account and Livy's as he does in some other narratives. There is, however, a nexus of verbal echoes between Ovid, Livy and Vergil which could be intended to alert the reader to a particular way of telling the story: that is, the omission of Romulus' military and warlike aspects in this narrative.

The charge which Proculus is told by Romulus to convey to the Romans, '... patrias artes militiamque colant' ('let them cultivate the arts of...')

---

13 Although neither Livy nor Ovid mentions the fact, Proculus was traditionally a farmer ('hominis agresti', Cic. Rep. 2.20) and this too implies that daybreak would be a normal time for him to be about.

14 In seeing this appearance of the new deity out of the wayside bushes instead of from the heavens as a typically elegiac technique of making the gods less distanced and majestic than in epic, Heinze 1919:337 misses the dramatic – or rather melodramatic – quality of Ovid's spine-tingling description.

15 Heinze 1919:338 regards this omission as indicative of elegiac style, as opposed to epic, but there is more to Ovid's non-militarism than mere generic conformity. On Ovid's critique of militaristic Roman artes, and the one-sidedness of Romulus' charge in Fast. 2.508, 'et patrias artes militiamque colant', see Barchiesi 1997:117-19, who points out that, in the comparable charge delivered by Anchises in Aen. 6.851-52, 'the reduction of artes to imperium entails considerable sacrifices' (117 with n. 18).
their ancestors and the military way of life’, Fast. 2.508) is compared by
commentators with Aen. 6.851-53, but it is more baldly militaristic than the
imperial mission articulated by Anchises:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento} \\
\text{(hae tibi erunt artes), pacisque imponere morem,} \\
\text{parcere subjiciis et debellare superbos.}
\end{align*}
\]

Roman, remember to rule the peoples under your control (these will be your arts), to impose the precepts of peace, to spare subjected peoples and wear down the arrogant in war.

The tone in Ovid is closer to that in Livy’s account, though more succinct. In Livy, Julius Proculus reports Romulus’ injunction: “‘abi, nuntia’ inquit “Romanis, caelestes ita veli ut mea Roma caput orbis terrarum sit; proinde rem militarem colant sciantque et ita posteris tradat nullas opes humanas armis Romanis resistere posse’” (“Go,” he said, “tell the Romans that the gods wish my Rome to be the head of the world; accordingly let them cultivate and know the military way of life and pass on to their descendants the tradition that no human strength can resist Roman arms’”, 1.16.7). The similarity between Ovid’s ‘militiamque colant’ and Livy’s ‘rem militarem colant’ is the only verbal link between the two accounts and would be easy to dismiss as coincidental if it were not for another link, this time with Vergil.

The occurrence of ‘artes’ in the two contexts in which Rome’s mission is voiced (Fast. 2.508 and Aen. 6.852) is so slight an echo as to tempt the critic to opt for chance rather than design. But at Aen. 1.291-96 Jupiter’s prophecy to Venus refers to a time after the apotheosis of Julius Caesar when wars will be replaced by a more gentle age, under the laws of Fides and Vesta, Quirinus and Remus, when the gates of war will be closed and Furor will be firmly bound:

\[
\begin{align*}
aspera tum positis mitescent saecula bellis; \\cana Fides et Vesta, Remo cum fratre Quirinus \\
\text{iura dabunt; dirae ferre et compagibus artis} \\
c\text{ludentur Belli portae; Furor impius intus} \\
saeva sedens super arma et centum vinctus aenis \\
\text{post ergum nodis fremet horridus ore cruento.}
\end{align*}
\]
Then wars will be ended and the harsh ages will become gentle; venerable Faith and Vesta, Quirinus with his brother Remus, will give the laws; the dread gates of War will be locked with close-fitting iron bolts; impious Fury, seated in frenzy on the weapons inside and bound with a hundred knots of bronze behind her back, will rage savagely with bloodstained mouth.

The formulation ‘Remo cum fratre Quirinus / iura dabunt’ has an unmistakable echo in both Fast. 2.492, ‘forte tuis illic, Romule, iura dabas’, and Met. 14.806, ‘Romule, iura dabas’. In Vergil, enjambement underlines ‘iura dabunt’; in Ovid, apostrophe, intruding the poet’s voice into the flow of third-person narrative, marks the significance of the words, and the fact that Romulus is engaged precisely in making laws is underlined by repetition as the narrative of the Metamorphoses resumes its course after Mars’ speech to Jupiter (14.823, ‘reddentemque suo non regia iura Quiriti’). Now it happens that, in depicting Romulus as occupied with law and justice and thus setting the founder’s final earthly activity in the civil rather than the military sphere, Ovid is unique among near-contemporary sources. In Dionysius, Romulus is addressing troops in camp when the storm breaks; in Livy, he is reviewing the army on the Campus Martius. Taken in conjunction with the verbal echoes, this difference in detail emphasises the civil sphere, a delicate reminder that militarism needs to be balanced by the arts of peace and clemency, and that the Augustan ideal propounded by Vergil has more dimensions than the Romulean ideal voiced in the epiphanies in Livy and the Fasti. If we examine the context of the Vergilian source of the allusion, we find Venus reminding Jupiter that he had promised her that the Romans, springing from their Trojan forebears, would emerge as world leaders who would hold every land and sea under their control (Aen. 1.235-36), and Jupiter reaffirming the promise and making an explicit Julian connection between the young Ascanius, with his surname Iulus, and the line of descent from Aeneas through Ilia, pointing to Augustus, to eventual apotheosis and to the dawning of an age of peace and reconciliation under the laws imposed by Remus and Quirinus. This peace is achieved, ultimately, not by military dominance, but by ‘iura’, and the allusive link Ovid has established with the Vergilian passage makes Vergil’s description of the Romans as ‘gentem togatam’, a

---

16 As one of the anonymous referees pointed out, Vergil, in a (fictive) prophetic situation, uses the future tense, whereas Ovid’s past tenses imply an historical narrative. This increases the conflict between mythology and history discussed by Tissot 2002:305-35.
race distinguished by the formal dress of civil and public life and government (282), significant for Ovid’s narratives too. In the *Metamorphoses*, in the same line as we read of Romulus’ legislative activities, we find Mars specifically putting aside his military gear before approaching Jupiter to request Romulus’ apotheosis (*Met.* 14.806):

Romule, iura dabas, posita cum casside Mavors ...

Romulus, you were giving laws, when Mars, setting aside his helmet ...

And in both the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti* the deified Romulus appears, not in military garb, but in the purple robe of state (*Met.* 14.827-28 and *Fast.* 2.503, quoted above). Militaristic Romulus’ injunction to cultivate the ancestral arts of warfare may be, but the visual details symbolically distance both narratives from the military sphere. This non-military slant harks back to the passage in which Romulus is first mentioned in the *Fasti* (1.27-44) – where, programmatically, he wears the *trabea* and lays down laws (*Fast.* 1.37-38):

haec igitur vidit trabeati cura Quirini,
    cum rudibus populis annua iura daret.

It was these things, then, that Quirinus in his robe of state perceived, when he was giving the laws of the year to his primitive people.

We have seen, then, that Ovid sets up a complex allusive web which emphasises unexpected and dissonant aspects of the story, and that

---

17 Barchiesi 1997:115 uses the assertions in Dion. Halic. 2.56.3 that Romulus had begun to act with cruelty and unfairness, no longer ruling like a king but more like a tyrant, to argue that *Fast.* 2.492 may be read as critical of Romulus: ‘in this light, *forte iura dabas* sounds very like “you were administering justice haphazardly.”’ However, Ovid’s concern to emphasise the civil sphere argues against this interpretation, and indeed Barchiesi partly contradicts it later: ‘*Iura dabas* excludes the unacceptable version which sees Romulus ... as a despot ...’ (167).

18 See Miller 2002:193-96: Romulus here ‘is a towering figure, proleptically divine (*Quirini*) outfitted in kingly garb (*trabeati*), administering laws to his people (*iura dareli*)’ (105). Miller points out that criticism of Romulus in *Fast.* 1.27-44 is softened by the explanation of his mistake as a natural one, but that the passage ends by imputing to Romulus lack of piety in comparison with Numa.
his Romulus is not the conventional martial hero, but a legislator, a leader in peace time. Apart from tales of the war against the Sabines in *Met.* 14. 775-804, neither the *Fasti* nor the *Metamorphoses* version provides any explicit record of the military renown which traditionally attaches to Romulus. Not even the civil, legislative aspects foregrounded by Ovid receive explicit praise in his narrative: when we compare the terse ‘Romule, iura dabas’ with the admiration Scipio expresses for Romulus as the founder of the Roman state and its early constitution in Cicero’s *De Republica*, we may well wonder whether Ovid is damning with faint praise. In Scipio’s view, Romulus is to be accepted as the son of Mars because by ancestral tradition those who have deserved well of the state (‘bene meriti de rebus communibus’) should be regarded not only as of divine nature, but actually of divine birth (2.4). Among Romulus’ statesmanlike qualities Scipio names foresight, in the siting of Rome (2.5-11) and in the plan to ensure the city’s future by capturing the Sabine women – a novel and uncouth stratagem, as Scipio admits, but showing greatness of mind in the long view (2.12). His insight into the benefits of a balance between monarchy and senate is also commended (2.15). And so, when he comes to speak of the disappearance of Romulus, Scipio maintains that it was as a result of his achievements and renown that the king was believed to have been deified (2.17; cf. ‘tanta fuit in eo vis ingenii atque virtutis’, ‘there was in him such power of ability and virtue’, 2.20); he insists, moreover, that the age of Romulus was one of culture and erudition, not of primitive superstition, making the acceptance of his deification the more impressive (2.18-20). One suspects that the generic lightness of elegy might have made claims like Scipio’s sound ironic, had Ovid included them. The fact that he has not raises the issue of whether his portrayal offers a Romulus so inconsistent with the tradition as to be ridiculous or unbelievable, and if so, whether this is an intentional slur on Augustan ideology as well.\(^\text{19}\)

---

\(^{19}\) Romulus figures prominently in the *Fasti* as a whole, and a number of critics feel that Ovid treats him with irony or even a degree of hostility. See Bömer 1957:27-28, 45; Fox 1996:188 (who sees ‘gentle mockery’ in the account of Romulus’ lack of skill in matters of the calendar; so too Miller 2002:n. 18); Porte 1984 (suggesting that Remus appears in a better light than Romulus in 2.371-80); but cf. Drossart 1972, who argues that in Fast. 4.837-56 and 5.451-76 Ovid is at pains not to let Romulus be seen as blameworthy. Beard 1987 raises the possibility of subversiveness in the distance between Romulean and Augustan Rome which Ovid creates in his account of the Parilia in 4.721-862. Barchiesi’s reading of the seven stories of Romulus in the *Fasti* (1997:154-77) acknowledges that
In this connection it is useful to consider briefly the evolution of the myths of Romulus, which T.P. Wiseman believes to have been ‘progressively invented’ in the late 4th and the 3rd centuries BC, and their use as propaganda.\textsuperscript{20} The earliest, and most enduring, aspect is that of the nurturing of the twins by the wolf. Remus is a later addition: the twinship is a symbol of shared power and Remus (whose name means ‘slow’) comes late to power, as did the plebeians in that period; the deification of Romulus may be dated to the beginning of the 3rd century, when temples of Victory and Quirinus were dedicated following the defeat of the Gauls.\textsuperscript{21} In the political invective of the later Republic, Romulus is synonymous with tyranny and monarchical ambition, and the fratricide that is inseparable from the foundation of the city becomes an image for civil war in the time of Sulla and after the death of Caesar; writers favourable to Sulla, however, emphasise Romulus’ constitution and good government.\textsuperscript{22} The identification of Romulus with Quirinus is found in the propaganda of Julius Caesar and is fully accepted once Augustus is in power.\textsuperscript{23} It is noteworthy that until the end of the Republic propaganda concentrated on Romulus as military hero.\textsuperscript{24} When Livy (5.49) refers to Camillus as another Romulus

Ovidian lightness and irony, which are only to be expected, since there are aspects of Romulus which must inevitably be seen as primitively militaristic and barbarous, have the potential to cast a negative slant on Augustus by association with Romulus, but the uncivilised aspects of Romulus’ portrayal are countered by characteristics of ‘pietas’ and moderation—not unfavourable to the Augustan discourse. On the other hand, the claim of Habinek 2002:58 that reminding the readers of the circumstances of the foundation ‘seems more helpful than hurtful to the cause of empire’ ignores Ovid’s nuanced irony.

The comparison between Augustus and Romulus in the entry commemorating the conferring of the title \textit{Pater Patriae} (Fast. 2.129-44), which flatters Augustus by telling Romulus he has been surpassed in every respect, need not necessarily be read as hostile to Romulus; see Fantham 2002:202. But its tone borders on the frivolous, and line 139, ‘tu rapis, hic castas duce se iubet esse maritas’ (‘you rape married women; he directs them to be chaste under his rule’) reminds us that Romulus’ way of acquiring wives had been treated less than seriously in the (offensive?) \textit{Ars Amatoria} (1.101-32).


\textsuperscript{21} Wiseman 1991:115, 118 and 123. The legend of Julius Proculus witnessing the apotheosis probably stems from the ambitions of the Julii in the 1st century BC; see Classen 1962:193. But Martin 1982:229, while recognising the importance of the apotheosis in the time of Caesar and Augustus (perhaps even of Sulla), argues against the idea that it was invented in the 1st century.


\textsuperscript{24} Evans 1992:87-90; see 102 for a summary of the uses made of Romulus.
and second founder of Rome, he may be reflecting an Augustan rather than early Roman concept, but from the time of Sulla, Romulus also increasingly stands for the wise ideal ruler. The variety of Romulean associations that were available for propaganda in the 1st century BC is well illustrated by Cicero, who alters his image of the founder at need: founder, fratricide, tyrannical autocrat, pious founder, wise ruler.  

As is well known, Augustus considered taking the title of Romulus (Suet. Div. Aug. 7). Although its negative connotations dissuaded him, his own image as a new founder of Rome was important enough to require the rehabilitation of the first founder, freeing him from blame in the death of Remus and emphasising the good relationship of the brothers, even to the extent of regarding Remus as co-founder. But Romulus alone is conditor urbis in the Fasti (1.27 and 3.24), and Ovid underlines this by his quotation of Ennius in both versions of the apotheosis: unus erit ..., conspicuous at the beginning of the hexameter. Five lines earlier in the Metamorphoses, Mars tells Jupiter that ‘res Romana ... prae-side pendet ab uno’ (809); here, too, ‘uno’ is emphasised by position. Remus is not mentioned at all in the Metamorphoses, but in the Fasti his murder, though not blamed on Romulus, is prominent. When, in Fast. 2.485-88 (cited above), Mars asks

References:

2a Classen 1962:183-92; Schneider 2000:143-45. I am grateful to one of the anonymous referees for drawing my attention to the latter reference and to Schneider’s argument that ‘Cicero presents the Romulus myth as the primeval paradigm of Roman absolute rule, his own dark perception of a past that preordained the future fate of Roman politics’ (144-45). Romulus’ murder of Remus to gain sole rule is condemned (Off. 3.41) and he is an exemplum for the cruel excesses of sole rulers when Cicero disparages Caesar, ‘hunc de pompa Quirini contubemalis’ (‘this comrade in arms from Quirinus’ crowd’, Att. 13.28.3). In Cat. 1.33 he is the pious founder of temple and city, both under the protection (from Catiline) of Jupiter; having been deified by the praises of his citizens he is by implication a pattern for Cicero saving the state (Cat. 3.2). His deification is the result of his achievements and virtues (Parad. 11; Rep. 2.17) and his remarkable good counsel and wisdom (Or. 1.37).


2c Complete omission of Remus may be a deliberate avoidance by Ovid of any unfortunate associations that might cloud the encomium of Romulus-Caeser-Augustus (Tissot 2002:332).

2d Fast. 2.134, 143, 485-86; 3.70; 4.841-44; 5.449-80.
for Romulus to be returned to him, the emphatic positions of ‘alter’ and ‘ unus’ and the resulting play between them draw attention to the death which has destroyed any possibility of twin rulers of Rome.

It seems, then, that in the Fasti Ovid is determined to foreground the sole rule of Romulus and to keep intimating the reason for it, even while he ostensibly exculpates him. He will not pass over in tactful silence the problem of the fratricide inherent in the foundation legend, but he introduces it obliquely through the interconnections of his two apotheosis tales. It must be remembered that Romulus was paradigmatic for the sin of civil war (Hor. Epod. 7.17-20), and although Ovid was writing long after the event, he would not have been unaware that Antony’s death had been caused by the man who was not just Antony’s colleague in the triumvirate, but his brother-in-law.30

Some modern readers will find the narrative of Mars’ swoop to earth in the Metamorphoses, or of Romulus’ epiphany in the Fasti, melodramatic to the point of absurdity; others will see them as exemplifying the baroque and studied effects Ovid deploys in both works. Bald imputations of pro- or anti-Augustan stance are no longer tenable, but critical awareness of the overriding pervasiveness of Augustan ideology means that Ovid continues to be read with a consciousness of his engagement with, or rejection of, Augustan themes. He remains, though, an elusive author and anything that can be interpreted as ironical or subversive is open also to being taken as a genuine and positive reflection of Augustan paradigms.31 On either reading, however, what is undeniable is that Ovid has used verbal reminiscences in structuring and giving direction to his two apotheosis narratives in response to each other, to other accounts and to Vergilian themes, so as to polarise two aspects of Roman culture. ‘Giving laws’ is a (re)constructive process that takes place after the destructiveness of war is over and done with; it stands for the ethos of peace and order and civilised norms and rejects militarism, lawlessness, violence and brutality.32 This is Ovid’s way of envisaging the fulfilment of Jupiter’s prophecy in Aen. 1.291-96, when Fides and Vesta and Romulus with his brother Remus will give laws, while Furor, securely bound, rages impotently. It is worth

30 I am indebted to one of the anonymous referees for this suggestion.
31 The best treatment of the Fasti as a serious Augustan work is that of Herbert-Brown 1994.
32 On Ovid’s thematic rejection of militarism in the Fasti - expressed in the programmatic ‘Caesaris arma canant alii’ (‘Let other poets sing of Caesar’s arms’, 1.13) – see, for example, Hinds 1992 and Barchiesi 1997 passim.
remarking, also, that in Ovid, Romulus’ laws are ‘non regia’ (Met. 14.823): he is not here the tyrant of 1st century invective. But when Ovid laughs at Romulus for ignorance in matters outside the military sphere, like astronomy (Fast. 1.29-30), or compares the first Pater Patriae negatively with Augustus (Fast. 2.133-44), opposing the ‘vis’ of Romulus’ rule with the ‘leges’ of Augustus’, or repeatedly recalls the death of Remus, his readers must wonder how seriously he takes the ‘Augustan’ Romulus. Can his carefully-engineered separation of Romulus the lawgiver from Romulus the man of arms and violence be taken at face value as a complimentary image for Augustus after he has brought about peace, or is it an ironic exposé of the savage background to a veneer of civilised peace? Does the contradiction between his Romulus and the portrayal of the founders Aeneas and Romulus as warrior-heroes in the Forum of Augustus constitute a negation of the Augustan imagery or a refinement of it? Whether or not Ovid is serious about Romulus, he is serious about the incompatibility of destructive militarism and the constructive arts of peace. Whether or not Romulus measures up to the ideal, whether or not his successor Augustus does, this is the standard by which Ovid in the Fasti judges Roman heroes, Roman tradition, Rome herself.

Bibliography


---

33 On the Forum Augustum, see Evans 1992:108-18. Tissol 2002:311-12 contrasts the interpretive stability of the heroes in Augustus’ forum with the interpretive flux of the same heroes in *Met. 14*, where ‘these figures are iconic in a far less tightly regulated context of meanings than they are in the forum.’ He also points out that Ovid’s account in the *Metamorphoses* goes against the Enniian interpretation, that Romulus was raised to heaven because of his great deeds, for Jupiter responds to Mars’ plea without any detailing of Romulus’ achievements. ‘... Ovid’s apotheosis of Romulus functions but feebly as an Augustan icon precisely because of its lack of historical specificity: lacking res gestae, Ovid’s Romulus offers readers little to go on in drawing conceptual parallels to the achievements of Augustus’ (330-31).


Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

For further information go to: http://www.casa-kvsa.org.za/acta_classica.htm