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Consoling Tiber: Rivers and Exemplarity in the *Consolatio ad Liviam*

1.

“quamquam amnes decet ira, tamen, Tiberine, quiescas:
non tibi, non ullis uincere fata datur.
iste meus periit: periit arma inter et enses
et dux pro patria: funere causa leuet.
quod potui tribuisse, dedi: uictoria parta est.
auctor abit operis, sed tamen extat opus.
Quondam ego tentavi Clotho quae duasque sorores,
pollice quae certo pensa seuera trahunt,
ut Remus Iliades et frater conditor urbis
effugerent aliqua stagna profunda uia.
de tribus una mihi 'partem accipe, quae datur' inquit
'muneris; ex istis quod petis alter erit.
hic tibi, mox Veneri Caesar promissus uterque:
hos debet solos Martia Roma deos.'
Sic cecinere deae: nec tu, Tiberine, repugna,
irrite nec flammam amne morare tuo,
nec iuuenis positi supremos destrue honores.
uade age et immissis labere pronus aquis!”
(*CAL* 233-250)

“Although anger befits rivers, nevertheless, Tiber, keep still: it is not granted for you, nor for anyone, to conquer fate. He died, a general under my purview, he died among swords and arms, and a leader on behalf of his country. His cause is taken away in death. I imparted to him as much as I was able: victory was obtained. The author of the work is gone, but still the work remains. Once, I approached Clotho and her two sisters, who draw out unforgiving fate with a sure thumb, that Remus, son of Ilia, and his brother, the founder of the city, somehow flee the pools of the lower world. One of the three said to me: “accept the part of the gift which is given. Of the two, one will have what you seek. This one is promised to you, and soon each Caesar is promised to Venus: Martian Rome owes these gods alone.” In this way the goddesses sang: don't fight against it, Tiber, don't delay the flames in vain with your stream, don't destroy the final rites of the youth placed there. Go on and flow forward with your current loosened!”

2.

Ipse pater flauis Tiberinus adhorruit undis,
sustulit et medio nubilus amne caput.
tum salice implexum muscoque et harundine crinem
caeruleum magna legit ab ore manu
(*CAL* 221-224)

Father Tiber himself shuddered in his yellow waves and, clouded, lifted his head from from the middle of the river. Then with his huge hand he drew back his hair, tangled with willows and moss and reeds, from his face.

huic deus ipse loci fluuio Tiberinus amoeno
populeas inter senior se attollere frondes
uisus (eum tenuis glauco uelabat amictu
carbasus, et crinis umbrosa tegebat harundo)
(*Aeneid* 8.31-4)

Old Tiberinus, the very god of this place, lifted himself from his pleasant stream appeared to him among the poplar leaves (fine linen veiled him in a grayish cloak, and shadowy reeds covered his hair).

3.

paret et in longum spatiosas explicat undas
structaque pendenti pumice tecta subit.
(*CAL* 251-2)

[Tiber] obeyed and lengthwise loosened his broad waves, and entered his abode, build up with hanging pumice.

Thybris ea fluuium, quam longa est, nocte tumentem
leniit, et tacita refluens ita substitit unda,
mitis ut in morem stagni placidaeque paludis
sterneret aequor aquis, remo ut luctamen abesset.
(*Aeneid* 8.86-89)

Tiber eased his swollen stream for the entire length of the night, and flowing calmly he stilled it with silent wave, so that he spread his water's surface like a mild pool or a peaceful swamp, so there would be no difficulty for the oars.

4.

paret et in longum spatiosas explicat undas
structaque pendenti pumice tecta subit.
(CAL 251-2)

[Tiber] obeyed and lengthwise loosened his broad waves, and entered his lair, built up with hanging pumice.

postquam est in thalami pendentia pumice tecta
peruentum et nati fletus cognouit inanis
Cyrene (Georgics 4.374-6)

After [Aristaeus] arrived at her chamber, roofed with hanging pumice, and Cyrene recognized her son's useless tears...

5.

Quantos ille uirum magnam Mauortis ad urbem
campus aget gemitus! uel quae, Tiberine, uidebis
funera, cum tumulum praeterlabere recentem!
(Aeneid 6.872-4)

How many groans of men will that Campus Martius bring to the great city! What funerals will you see, Tiber, when you pass by the recent tomb!

6.

Condidit Agrippam quo te, Marcelle, sepulcro,
Et cepit generos iam locus ille duos.
(CAL 67-68)

He buried Agrippa in your same tomb, Marcellus, and that place already snatched two sons-in-law.

Prisca quid huc repeto? Marcellum Octauia fleuit
Et fleuit populo Caesar utrumque palam.
Sed rigidum ius est et ineuitabile Mortis,
Stant rata non ulla fila tenenda manu.
(CAL 441-444)

Why do I seek out ancient examples? Octavia wept over Marcellus and Caesar wept over each openly among the people. But the law of death is stern and unavoidable, but the threads remain fast, not to be controlled by any hand.

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