

## Muse of the Pipes: The Aqua Marcia and Aqua Virgo as Roman Poetic Tradition

The aqueducts of Rome are symbols of mastery over the natural world, and they affected how Romans interacted with and understood their 'natural environment'. The Aqua Marcia and Aqua Virgo are the only aqueducts mentioned in Roman poetry. Since 'pure water' had become an emblem of poetry already in Callimachus, it is perhaps appropriate that these aqueducts had a reputation for freshness and purity (Frontinus 92, Pliny *NH* 31.41f.). Indeed, these aqueducts have been considered representative of Flavian poetic innovation: Statius and Martial find them fitting symbols for poetry that is at once Callimachean, and grandly materialistic (Martelli 2009; Newlands 2002). However, the Flavian treatment of these aqueducts is prefigured already in Augustan poetry. I analyse the complete literary history of the Marcia and the Virgo to show how the natural world, and the poetics built around it shifted in the early principate.

These aqueducts appear first as symbols of human innovation, comparable but inferior to poetic works (Prop. 3.2.14), and representative of urbane poetics (Ov. *A.A.* 3.385-98; *Tr.* 3.12.21-32; *Pont.* 1.8.35-62). For Propertius, the natural world is still the touchstone for aesthetic refinement (Prop. 3.22.3-24), and the Aqua Marcia receives praise by being added to the numbers of Italy's alluring native waters. Ovid, on the other hand, uses the Aqua Virgo to co-opt the pleasing effects of nature within the controlled urban environment created by the Augustan building program (Ov. *A.A.* 3.385-98; *Fast.* 1.461-8; cf. Favro 1996: 171-6). For him, the aqueduct is a constitutive part of urban life which fittingly embodies his own refined and urbane poetry. From exile, the Aqua Virgo forms an important point of contrast with the wild and untamed landscape of Tomis, in which his poetic abilities are stunted (*Tr.* 3.12.21-32; *Pont.* 1.8.35-62).

The Flavian poets develop this Ovidian approach, using both the Marcia and the Virgo as symbols of the harmonious balance between nature and human construction (Mart. *Epig.*

6.42; Stat. *Silv.* 1.5). This is a harmony explicitly based upon domination of the natural world and of other peoples (Mart. *Epig.* 11.96); in terms of poetics, it is now the Roman aqueducts and not the springs of Greece from which Martial draws inspiration (*Epig.* 9.18, cf. Prop. 3.3). The confluence of both the aqueducts' courses is in the baths of Claudius Etruscus, which were not only supplied by both the Marcia and the Virgo, but also celebrated by both Statius (*Silv.* 1.5) and Martial (*Epig.* 6.42). This topographic coincidence is fully exploited by each, as the aqueducts' clear waters allow for the creation of a revisionist poetics which "modernize" traditional topoi of natural landscape description (Fabbrini 2007: 203; Newlands 2002: 199, 209-16). Yet the ultimate triumph of the artistry of Etruscus' baths is that they are supplied, not by two unknown streams, but by two literary aqueducts. In a world at the disposal of the Roman emperor, the Marcia and the Virgo come to represent an artistic triumph which blends the artificial with the natural, the Roman with the foreign, tradition with modernity.

### Bibliography

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