

## Metapoetics and Minerva in Ovid's *Fasti*

At *Fasti* 3.809-848 Ovid exhorts a catalogue of celebrants—weavers and fullers, teachers and students—to worship Minerva, patron goddess of crafts, during the festival *Quinquatrus*. Scholarship on this passage primarily discusses the social history of the festival (Frazer, 1929; Fowler, 1916; Pasco-Pranger, 2006), yet Ovid's vocabulary warrants a closer look at the poetic functions of the text. Specifically, I argue that frequent metapoetic language alongside an explicit reference to Minerva's relationship to poets (*certe dea carminis illa est; si mereor, studiis adsit amica meis*, 3.833-834) programmatically associates Minerva with elegy, and particularly to Ovid himself, who we know from *Tristia* 4.10.11-14 was born during the *Quinquatrus*.

As a text firmly rooted in the Alexandrian tradition of *aitia*, the *Fasti* already promotes itself as learned (Miller, 1982). In this passage, Ovid repeatedly uses variations of the term *doctus* (3.816, 824, 832) to introduce his metapoetic commentary on Minerva's role as a teacher and patron to poets. He highlights the didactic nature of the elegy by embedding the etymology for *discipulus* in the image of Minerva teaching girls to weave (*discant et plenas exonerare colos*, 3.818). Ovid further comments on Minerva's role in elegy by describing her teaching as *erudio* (3.820)—a variant on *doceo* and *disco* that derives from *rudis* and suggests the polished nature of elegy and the act of writing itself (*TLL* 5.828.52). Through this use of both *doctus* and *rudis*, Ovid alludes to Minerva's role in the elegiac tradition.

Ovid also aligns Minerva's students and celebrants to elegy as he calls upon weavers, fullers, and cobblers, all of whom have occupations that metapoetically refer to poets. He first characterizes the boys and girls who praise Minerva as *tenerae* (3.815), a programmatic description of elegy in opposition to epic and which Ovid employs frequently in the *Amores* (McKeown, 1998). Minerva then teaches girls to soften wool (*lanam mollire*, 3.817); this variant

on *mollis* codes the weaving as elegiac (Wyke, 2002). Along the same lines, the fullers, whose very occupation requires the cleaning of garments, are symbolically fruitful to the assimilation of weaving and poetry as well as the polish and refinement of elegy. The metapoetic use of a fuller is unusual, but Ovid embeds elegiac terminology in his invocation by encouraging them to worship Minerva (*hanc cole*, 3.821-2). *Cole* is etymologically related to *cultus* (Maltby, 1991), and thus an image of elegiac refinement. Likewise, Ovid's address to the cobblers, who bind the feet (*vincula plantae*, 3.823), may be playfully interpreted as punning on meter (Henkel, 2014). In all of these instances Ovid literalizes the role of the elegiac poet so that Minerva may be seen metapoetically as a patron to poets, and only after these references does he invoke her like a Muse in 3.833-34.

Though beyond the scope of this talk, we may notice similar terminology when Ovid addresses a patron in *Tristia* 3.14, which includes an allusion to Minerva at line 3.14.13, and he makes explicit that he was born during the *Quinquatrus* in *Tristia* 4.10. If Ovid sees a benevolent relationship between Minerva and himself, expressed both in the *Fasti* and *Tristia*, these passages may encourage additional layers of interpretation to other Ovidian texts where the goddess is present.

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