

At Home on the Palatine? The *Sedes* of Vesta in Ovid's *Fasti*

In the *Fasti*, Ovid describes Vesta's incorporation into Augustus' house on the Palatine, proclaiming that one *domus* holds three eternal gods (*Fast.* 4.949–54). This description of Vesta on the Palatine parallels the *Fasti Praenestini*, which record that “a shrine and altar of Vesta were dedicated in the home of emperor Caesar Augustus, *pontifex maximus*” (*[fanu]m et [ara] / Vestae in domu Imp(eratoris) Caesaris Augu[sti po]ntif(ici)s max(imi) dedicatast*, Degrassi 13.2.17). These characterizations of Vesta in her new augustan *domus* bolster the close associations between the emperor and the goddess (cf. Bömer 1987; Littlewood 2006), but the decision to move her was a bold break with tradition (cf. Feeney 1991). Newlands 1995 has argued that in the *Fasti* Vesta “is closely connected with the Augustan *domus*” until Book 6, when Ovid's portrayal of her becomes more “polyphonic.” This paper argues that in his account of the Vestalia in Book 6, Ovid foregrounds Vesta's traditional home, exposing tensions underlying her move to the Palatine.

First, I discuss Ovid's description of Vesta's traditional temple. Ovid emphasizes the longevity of the temple, attributing its construction to king Numa (*Fast.* 6.259) and contrasting the contemporary bronze roof with the ancient thatched one (*Fast.* 6.261–64). He describes the temple as perfectly suited to the nature of Vesta, suggesting that its round shape reflects the connection between the goddess and the earth (*Fast.* 6.265–82). Ovid's description of Vesta's original temple is much longer and more detailed than his brief treatment of Vesta's incorporation onto the Palatine, with the result that her traditional home threatens to upstage her new one.

Next, I turn to Ovid's description of the Gallic sack of Rome. During the attack, Mars proclaims to Jupiter: “we have seen the pledges of Trojan Vesta transferred from their *sedes*”

(*vidimus Iliacae transferri pignora Vestae sede, Fast.* 6.365–66). The word *sedes* emphasizes that the sacred objects have an established place in the temple of Vesta. A few lines later, Jupiter uses the same word when he entreats Vesta not to abandon her *sedes*: “Do not desert, Vesta, your *sedes*” (*nec sedes desere, Vesta, tuas, Fast.* 6.380). Ovid’s repetition of *sedes* echoes Camillus’ speech in Livy, in which he proclaims, “Surely that is the only *sedes* for the Vestals, from which nothing except for the captured city has ever moved them” (*Vestalibus nempe una illa sedes est, ex qua eas nihil umquam praeterquam urbs capta movit, Livy* 5.52.13). By moving Vesta, Augustus departs from a tradition endorsed by Jupiter and Camillus.

In addition, Ovid recalls a time when Vesta was nearly crushed by “her own roof” (*tectis . . . suis, Fast.* 6.437–38). Newlands 1995 and Barchiesi 1997 have discussed the transgressive agency of the *pontifex maximus* Metellus, who enters the burning temple of Vesta and snatches the goddess from the flames. Ovid specifies that “The snatched goddess approved the deed” (*factum dea rapta probavit, Fast.* 6.453), indicating that those who wish to move her from her own house (*tectis . . . suis*) need her approval. By underscoring that Metellus would not typically be permitted to enter the temple and move Vesta, Ovid casts doubt on the legitimacy of Augustus’ decision to move her to the Palatine.

These episodes from the Vestalia, with their emphasis on Vesta’s traditional home, contrast with the image of Palatine Vesta in service to the *pax Augusta*. There may also be a personal undertone to Ovid’s portrayal of Vesta’s move. Just as Augustus removed the goddess from her traditional home, he also removed Ovid from his *domus* in order to serve his own agenda. In the *Tristia*, Ovid describes his book, venturing to a Rome that it has never seen, encountering “the place of Vesta” (*locus Vestae, Trist.* 3.1.29) along the Via Sacra. Immediately thereafter, the book ventures to the Palatine (cf. Miller 2002), where it sees Augustus’ house, but

there is no mention of Vesta (*Trist.* 3.1.31–68). Although Augustus has forcibly moved both Ovid and Vesta, the poet refuses to accept the emperor’s vision for their new homes.

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