History or Horoscope?:Competing Approaches to Time Measurement in Propertius IV.1

Propertius IV.1 has long constituted a marvel for interpreters, in part because of its composition (i.e., whether it's one poem or two; see Gunther 2006) and in part because of its seeming redefinition of elegiac conventions. The first speaker, after providing a comprehensive history of Rome replete with an archeology of pre-Roman Italy, paradoxically declares himself the Umbrian-Roman Callimachus (1.64: *Umbria Romani patria Callimachi*), and proclaims a new program of aetiological elegy — to "sing of festivals and days and ancient names of places" (1.69: *sacra diesque canam et cognomina prisca locorum*) — a predecessor of Ovid's calendrical poem, the *Fasti* (see Barchiesi 1997). And yet, at the poem's very fulcrum — where many commentators have split the elegy in two — an astrologer named Horos enters the scene, ridiculing the first speaker for his attempt to escape elegy.

To offer a solution to the apparent discontinuity of the poem, this paper will analyze Propertius IV.1 as a kind of dialectic between two ways of measuring time: the unified, linear and aetiological time of Caesar's calendar, and the astrological and elegiac time of Horos. Considering that this poem was published (see Hutchinson 2006) soon after Roman consul and triumph lists were put on display in the Forum (19 BCE) and the *Ludi Saeculares* were reconstituted (17 BCE), and given that the *Ara Pacis* and Augustus' *Horologium* may already have been under construction, the first speaker's attempt to "write Rome" by linking the pre-Roman landscape to the contemporary teleological narrative fits well with Augustus' propaganda of conquering time (see Feeney 2007). The Arcadian Golden Age of pre-Roman Italy, which transitions so easily into the skin-clad senators of Romulean Rome, is predictably aligned in the opening lines of the poem with the arms of Caesar and the line of Iulus.

Yet, Horos' abrupt intrusion mocks the state-sponsored agenda of mapping a strictly linear,

historical time. The astrologer bursts in with a reproach of Propertius by name and an allusion to the *Aeneid*: "where do you…rush…Propertius, to speak the fates?" (1.71: *quo ruis…dicere fata, Properti*?). Q*uo ruis* is a phrase that recurs a few times in the *Aeneid*, most notably when Hecuba warns Priam not to go into battle. But more importantly, "speaking the fates" without reading the stars is precisely what the Augustan regime aims to do with its architectural projects to conquer time. The hills of Rome transform in the first 70 lines of the poem into the great scaling buildings of Rome, and thereby offer a teleological frame analogous to the alignment of solar and lunar calendars and their uniform calibration under Augustus. Horos, in contrast, presents a different model of time, an astrological and elegiac one. By reading the stars and divining their signs (1.107-8: *aspicienda uia est caeli uerusque per astra trames*), Horos likens himself to Calchas, interpreting a bleak future for the Greeks heading home from Troy. Finally, after providing a brief mythological history of the Trojan *nostoi*, he declares, in direct contradiction of Propertius' version of antiquity: "so much for history" (1.119: *hactenus historiae*). That is to say, astrological time — itself an alternative version of "history" — aligns with the Greek myth of the deep past rather than with the Roman myth of linear historical time. Ventriloquizing Apollo, in turn, Horos demands that Propertius return to elegy, and that he measure his "days and nights by the judgment" (1.143: *illius arbitrio noctem lucemque uidebis*) of his beloved.

Indeed, the elegiac time of the subjective self and the state-constructed time of Augustan propaganda are in direct competition in the dialectic between "Propertius" and Horos (cf. Janan 2001). If we keep the poem intact as it is found in the manuscripts, we can find a different kind of unity in the discontinuity. We can see a nostalgic longing for a subjective model of time, and a refusal to abide by the Augustan clock.

Bibliography

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