

Phaethon's Fall in the Augustan Campus Martius: Myth, Monuments, and Muddled Time
in Book 2 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

A.J. Boyle's 2003 volume *Ovid and the Monuments: A Poet's Rome*, notes several passages in Ovid's *corpus* that refer to Roman monuments. This paper adds to Boyle's discussion of monumentality, suggesting we broaden the allusions to Rome's monuments in Ovid to include the *Metamorphoses*' Phaethon episode. Although Ovid never directly refers to any of Augustus' monuments in this passage, I argue that the final moments of Phaethon's mythical flight and death are told in such a way as to correspond to each of the monuments situated in the Campus Martius of Ovid's day.

Ovid's depiction of the zodiac points to the topography of the Roman landscape. Scorpio, Ovid suggests, is the sign that causes Phaethon's demise (*Met.* 2.193-200). Closer examination, though, indicates that it is not Scorpio who causes Phaethon's fatal fall, but Libra, the birth sign of Augustus, for which Scorpio is making space between his two claws: *est locus, in geminos ubi bracchia concavat arcus / Scorpius et cauda flexisque utrimque lacertis / porrigit in spatium signorum membra duorum* (2.195-97).

While many commentaries (cf. Barchiesi 2005) point out that the Ovidian couplet recalls *Georgics* 1.32-35, in which Vergil celebrates Augustus' future catasterism, I suggest these lines additionally allude to the time-keeping monument of the Campus Martius, the so-called *Horologium Augusti*, whose meridian pavement was labelled with the signs of the zodiac written in Greek, indicating a correspondence between the myth of Phaethon and the urban space of Ovid's lived Rome. In other words, the *est locus* of *Met.* 2.195 signals two times and spaces simultaneously. On the one hand, the phrase refers to narrative time of Ovid's myth, and to the

celestial space that Libra inhabits. On the other, it refers to the Campus Martius of Ovid's own day, and more specifically to the Horologium placed there in 10 BCE.

The exploration of three further elements in Ovid's myth, namely Phaethon's cremation and epitaph (*Met.* 2.325-28), as well as the subsequent transformation of the Heliades into poplar trees (2.344 ff.) similarly reinforce the idea that Ovid links the narrative time of the Phaethon myth to the Campus Martius of the 1st c. CE. My discussion of Phaethon's epitaph and cremation, as well as the presence of poplar trees in the myth, will show that these references can conjure up for the reader images of the *Mausoleum Augusti* and its affiliated *Ustrinum*, two monuments which, according to Strabo, were planted with poplar trees (Strab. 5.3.8.).

By drawing connections between Phaethon's myth and Augustus' monuments, this paper will contribute to recent discussions of the "written city" by Edwards (1996), Welch (2005), and Barchiesi (2009), which first showed how the visual and ideological effects of Ovid's Phaethon episode invite a comparison with the poet's contemporary Rome. In addition, this paper will ultimately argue that Ovid creates links between the narrative time of Phaethon's myth and the monuments of his own day in order to draw the reader's attention to a central, yet paradoxical tenet of Augustan ideology, one which the entire funerary complex of Augustus' Campus Martius ignores: real gods don't have tombs because they never die.

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