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OVID *FASTI* 1.325–26, AND "LAMB FESTIVALS"

John Miller has argued that Ovid's generally acknowledged allusion to Callimachus' *Aitia* at *Fasti* 1.327–28 "resonates in its context" because it highlights the sacrificial victim's fear and thus sets the tone for all that comes after it.¹ In the couplet immediately preceding the one Miller discusses, Ovid may also allude to the *Aitia*, this time to Callimachus' treatment of a "lamb festival" held at Argos during the month of Ἀπρῆτιος (frag. 1.26–31 = 1.28–34 Massimilla). This note explores the

1. J. F. Miller, "The *Fasti* and Hellenistic Didactic: Ovid's Variant Aetiologies," *Arethusa* 25 (1992): 11–31, at 20. The text of the *Fasti* that I cite is E. H. Alton, D. E. W. Wormell, and E. Courtney, eds., *P. Ovidi Nasonis "Fastorum Libri" Sex*⁴ (Leipzig, 1997). Callimachus is quoted from R. Pfeiffer, ed., *Callimachus*, vol. I, *Fragmenta* (Oxford, 1965), with reference to G. Massimilla, ed., *Callimacho: "Aitia": Libri Primo e Secondo* (Pisa, 1996).

resonance of that allusion in the same section of the *Fasti* and argues that Ovid's distinctive approach to animal sacrifice here may owe much to Callimachus' handling of the myth of Linus and Coroebus there.

At Rome on 9 January, the *rex sacrorum* placated Janus with the "mate of a woolly ewe" (*Fast.* 1.333–34). This feast was called by various, related names, the most common being the Agonium, Agonalia, or Agonia.² It is a probable conjecture that the Agonium of 9 January was an NP day, "the usual designation for the great public festivals in the calendar."³ Ovid treats this feast at *Fasti* 1.317–458 and uses the day to explore two questions in passages of unequal proportion. The first surveys the etymology of the name "Agonalia" (1.317–34), the second, the origin of animal sacrifices to the gods (1.337–456).⁴

Ovid canvasses six possible derivations of the name "Agonalia." The third and fourth etymologies are as follows (1.325–28):

pars putat hoc festum priscis Agnalia dictum,
una sit ut proprio littera dempta loco.
an, quia praevisos in aqua timet hostia cultros,
a pecoris lux est ipsa notata metu?

The Callimachean provenance of the fourth etymology has been generally acknowledged. Ovid teases his reader to figure out how Agonalia could be derived *a pecoris* . . . *metu* (1.328). The "solution" is prompted by the allusion at 1.327 to Callimachus frag. 75.10–11: ἤφοι μὲν ἐμελλον ἐν ὕδατι θυμὸν ἀμύξειν / οἱ βόες δ'εἶαν δερκόμενοι δορίδα ("At dawn the oxen were about to rend their hearts catching sight of the sharp knife in the water"). With Callimachus' Greek verse already in mind at 1.327, readers of 1.328 can then "translate" *a pecoris* . . . *metu* by ἀγωνία ("agony"), which has a similar sound to Agonia/Agonium. Miller notes that even though there is no certainty about the amount of Ovidian invention in the etymologies canvassed throughout the *Fasti*, the derivation of Agonia or Agonalia from ἀγωνία "is so far-fetched an explanation of the Roman festival's name that we may be tempted to argue for an Ovidian invention."⁵ Whether the derivation is invented or not, Miller has well observed what effects Ovid derives from it: this allusion "resonates in its context" because it "heightens the real focus of the whole passage, the sacrificial victim."⁶

If we allow for the possibility that Ovid may have invented some of the etymologies for the Agonalia, we may find that he seeks to align his poem with Callimachus' *Aitia* in the third etymology as well. This derivation is no less odd than the "agony" one. Here Ovid suggests that the *dies Agonalis* may have come from a festival that is not attested in actual Roman cult, the "Agnalia" ("Lamb festival"). There is always the possibility that this etymology could have been suggested by some Roman antiquarian, but, "Agnalia," as Miller remarks, "does not explain *Agonium* (or even

2. A. K. Michels, *The Calendar of the Roman Republic* (Princeton, 1967), 134, 182.

3. G. Herbert-Brown, *Ovid and the "Fasti": An Historical Study* (Oxford, 1994), 22. 9 January is "the only day in the year for which none of the *Fasti* record a character letter. Since it precedes the Ides, it might well be N...," but since May 21 and December 11 are also called Agonia and are NP, it is more probable that January 9 was also NP" (Michels, *Calendar* [n. 2 above], 182).

4. On the second question, see E. Lefèvre, "Die Lehre von der Entstehung der Tieropfer in Ovids *Fasten* 1.335–456," *RhM* 123 (1976): 39–64.

5. Miller, "*Fasti*" (n. 1 above), 19.

6. *Ibid.*, 20–21.

Agonalia) at all.”⁷ Moreover, it is a bit imprecise for a feast that involves the sacrifice of a ram. Ovid did, though, know of an aetiological treatment of a “lamb festival.” Callimachus, in the *Aitia*, discusses the Argive month Ἀρνείος (“Lamb month”) and the ἑορτὴ Ἀρνής (“Lamb festival”) celebrated there at that time. What sorts of associations might Ovid expect to arouse in his reader with a gesture toward Callimachus’ treatment of the Ἀρνείος? The lack of certainty about the structure of Callimachus’ episode prevents any conjectures about possible relationships on this front.⁸

Tone, though, might be another matter. During the month and the festival honoring lambs, the Argives killed any dogs they found.⁹ This Argive festival allowed Callimachus to treat in elegiacs, a meter of funereal lament, the lamentable story of Linus and Coroebus.¹⁰ Linus, the child of Apollo and the Argive princess Psamathe, daughter of King Crotopus, was handed over to a shepherd (to hide his mother’s violation from her father) and killed by the dogs of the king—hence the distinctive honors and punishments of the Argive month and festival. Crotopus punished Psamathe herself with death and Apollo responded by sending Poinē (“Punishment”), a monster that devoured the Argive children. This terror Coroebus killed. In anger at the new murder, Apollo once again sent a pestilence on Argos, and demanded satisfaction: the life of Coroebus. The youth went to Delphi and offered his life, but was granted forgiveness by the god.

The Ἀρνείος perhaps gave Callimachus the opportunity—as is suggested even by the scraps that survive—to compose something that sounds, ever so faintly, like the *Kindertotenlieder*. The speaker of the one complete couplet that survives from this section (frag. 27.1–2 = 28.1–2 Massimilla), ἄρνες τοι, φίλε κοῦρε, συνήλικες, ἄρνες ἐταῖροι / ἔσκον, ἐνιαυθοὶ δ’ αὐλία καὶ βοτάναι (“Lambs, dear boy, were your playmates, lambs your companions, and sheep folds and pastures your abodes”), talks of Linus, presumably, in a tone that could range anywhere from wistful to anguished. That same speaker (?) may have called Crotopus, the killer of Psamathe, a “child murderer,” mentions the thing (that Apollo?) “sent against the Argives,” and remarks that something “left mothers desolate and relieved wet nurses of their burdens.”¹¹ Here the dominant notes of the tenderness, the innocence, and the youth of Linus, of the Argive infants, and perhaps even of Psamathe herself, seem to stand in a rather brutal counterpoint to the continuing grief of the person to whom Linus is still “dear,” to those Argive mothers whose arms are now empty. The Linus cycle contained a villain, an

7. Ibid., 21. D. Porte, who calls *Agonalia/agnus/Agnalia* “un pur jeu phonique,” comments that “[l]es connaissances philologiques d’Ovide se révèlent alors d’une remarquable élasticité” (*L’Étiologie religieuse dans les “Fastes” d’Ovide* [Paris, 1985], 210–11); cf. H. Le Bonniec’s note ad 1.325 (*P. Ovidius Naso “Fastorum” Liber Primus* [Paris, 1965]): “*Agnalia*: mot artificiel, formé sur *agna* pour les besoins de la cause. Source inconnue.”

8. Commenting on frag. 27, Pfeiffer notes that “fort. ante frag. 26 hoc distichon ponendum est, at de structura huius fabulae nihil constat.”

9. For all details of and references for the festival and the myth, see Pfeiffer ad frag. 26 and Massimilla, 299–302. Ovid adds another deity who receives dog sacrifices at *Fast.* 1.389–90.

10. There were competing myths about the origin of the famous “Linus song” (αἶλινον, “alas for Linus”). Perhaps Callimachus, by treating the Argive version, endorsed it.

11. On all this see Pfeiffer and Massimilla ad locc. Pfeiffer takes νόμφης (26.10 = 30.10 Massimilla) as Psamathe, παιδοφόνῃ (11) as Crotopus, and he takes Apollo to be the subject of ἦκεν ἐπ’ Ἀργείους (12), Poinē the object. The desolate mothers and nurses are found at 14: μητέρας, ἐξεκένωσεν, ἐκούφισθεν δὲ τιθῆναι. In support of his reconstruction, Pfeiffer notes the treatment in Ovid’s *Ibis* (cf. Massimilla, 301). With Callim. frag. 26.10–11, compare *utque patrem Psamathe, condat te Phoebus in ima / Tartara, quod natae fecerat ille suae* (Ib. 573–74); with frag. 26.12–14, compare the very next couplet in Ovid, *inque tuos ea pestis eat, quam dextra Coroebi / vicit, opem miseris Argolis inque tulit* (Ib. 575–76); and with frag. 28 (= 29 Massimilla), τὸν σε Κροτωπιάδην, compare *quique Crotopiadē diripuerit Linum* (Ib. 480).

angry god, a hero, and plenty of innocent victims caught in the crossfire. The few words that happen to have survived from Callimachus' *aition* of the Argive Lamb festival seem to focus on those innocent victims.¹²

The unusual thing about the topics that Ovid surveys in the second part of 9 January, the discussion of the origins of animal sacrifices to the gods (1.337–456), is the emphasis on the growing blood lust and vindictiveness of the gods and the comparative innocence of the victims. The sacrifice of animal victims at Rome was a key element in maintaining the *pax deorum*, yet Ovid here considers sacrifice not just at Rome, but around the world, and he is interested in the victims not because of their vital role as intermediaries, but because they were victimized by various gods. Ovid is quite specific that he is giving the actual chronological development of animal sacrifice.¹³ More and more innocent victims fall. Sow and goat (goat should have learned from sow what would happen) did actually eat the crops of Ceres and Bacchus, but, as Elaine Fantham has acutely remarked, Ceres' "bloodthirsty delight in the pig-sacrifice . . . is scarcely offset by the description of the killing as *merita caede nocentis* (1.350). Even the *culpa* admitted for pig and goat is challenged for the ox and sheep: 'quid bos, quid placidae commeruistis oves?' (1.362)."¹⁴ Once animals that kept out of the way of the gods began to be killed (*placidae . . . oves*, 1.362), it became open hunting season—no one was safe anymore (*quid tuti superest . . .*, 1.383).

The (d)evolution continues with other animals, including birds, the last sacrifice that Ovid explains. Birds played a crucial role in Rome's history and fulfilled many necessary functions in Roman public life. The gods' will had to be ascertained before any public function took place at Rome—elections, war, official proceedings—and a standard way to do so was by the observation of bird flight or bird utterance. Yet, according to Ovid's startling version, the last thing the gods wanted was for the birds to reveal their wishes to men (1.445–46). When they found out that the birds, that "harmless race" of "sweet singers" (*innocuumque genus, . . . facili dulces editis ore modos*, 1.442, 444), were giving out the secrets of their gang, they slaughtered the snitches and delighted in the entrails that were now pulled out.¹⁵ Ovid stresses the tenderness and innocence of the birds, creatures that sing sweet songs as they make their nests and hatch their eggs (1.441–44). They are the *solacia ruris* (1.441), they are only accustomed to the forest (*adsuetum silvis*, 1.442)—a far cry from the Forum or the Campus Martius.

12. The loss of Callimachus is felt especially keenly here. An interesting question is how the speaker(s) treated Apollo. The god himself could be the speaker of frag. 27, as could Psamathe or the Muse, the tone changing with each one. Does frag. 26 adumbrate resentment toward Apollo for the innocent life he killed, toward Crotopus, or toward both? Was frag. 26 a sermon on the cruelty of the gods or the rashness of men? Was there some kind of resolution reached?

13. *Prima Ceres avidae gavisae est sanguine porcae* (1.349); *sus dederat poenas: exemplo territus huius / palmitu debueras abstinuisse, caper* (1.353–54); *culpa sui nocuit, nocuit quoque culpa capellae: / quid bos, quid placidae commeruistis oves?* (1.361–62); *quid tuti superest, animam cum ponat in aris / lanigerumque pecus rucolaeque boves?* (1.383–84), etc.

14. E. Fantham, "Ceres, Liber and Flora: Georgic and Anti-Georgic Elements in Ovid's *Fasti*," *PCPS* 38 (1992): 39–56, at 47.

15. *Tuta diu volucrum proles tum denique caesa est, / iuveruntque deos indicis exta sui* (1.449–50). The birds couldn't keep their mouths shut (*linguae crimen habetis, / dique putant mentes vos aperire suas*, 1.445–46), the last thing crooks want from their *indices*. Verres was luckier. He kept his finger on the pulse of Sicilian commerce through a network of trusty (*certi*) informants: *Quaecumque navis ex Asia, quae ex Syria, quae Tyro, quae Alexandria venerat, statim certis indicibus et custodibus tenebatur* (Cic. *Verr.* 2.5.145). "Die Verwendung von *index* in der Bedeutung *nuntius, proditor* u. ä. beginnt mit Ovid . . . Thes. VII 1140, 71 ff.," F. Bömer, *Die Fasten*, 2 vols. (Heidelberg, 1957–58), ad 1.450 (*indices*).

Miller has shown how the fear of the sacrificial victims in the second part of 9 January (1.337–456) is introduced by the Callimachean allusion at *Fasti* 1.327–28. Ovid's mention of an "Agnalia" at 1.325 perhaps also alludes to Callimachus, his Ἀρνειός. Callimachus used that Argive feast to treat the myth of Linus and Coroebus, and Ovid's presentation of this myth in the *Ibis* suggests a familiarity with the *Aitia* version. Ovid may have incorporated elements of Callimachus' Ἀρνειός as part of the texture of his own picture of religious sacrifice in the *Fasti*. There, Ovid imagines cruel gods inflicting their will on helpless, fearful, and (usually) innocent victims.¹⁶ Perhaps Callimachus touched on some of these same themes when he handled the Ἀρνειός, and perhaps he lurks, yet again, behind Ovid's Agnalia—or is it the "Agnalia?"¹⁷

THOMAS D. FRAZEL
Tulane University

16. On one level, then, perhaps we are relieved not to learn why Janus, a pacific, jovial figure to whom many readers have responded favorably, "must be appeased" on 9 January (*Ianus Agonali luce piandus erit*, 1.318). We might not like him as much. It is uncomfortable enough to know that he, like Venus, destroys marriages (*rex placare sacrorum / numina lanigeræ coniuge debet ovis*, 1.333–34); cf. *ergo saepe suo coniunx abducta marito / uritur Idaliis alba columba focis*, (1.451–52). On Janus, see, e.g., A. Barchiesi, "Discordant Muses," *PCPS* 37 (1991): 1–21, at 14–17; and P. Hardie, "The Janus Episode in Ovid's *Fasti*," *MD* 26 (1991): 47–64. The topic of animal sacrifice returns at the very end of Book 1. When we reach that *Caesaris ara*, the *ara Pacis* (1.709–22), what are we to make of the sacrifice, and the role of the gods, there: *tura, sacerdotes, Pacalibus addite flammis, / albaque perfusa victima fronte cadat; / utque domus, quae praestat eam, cum pace perennet / ad pia propensos vota rogate deos* (1.719–22)?

17. If the "Agnalia" does allude to Callimachus, then Ovid puts the allusions in the "correct" order—the Ἀρνειός was most likely featured in the first book of Callimachus' work (see Pfeiffer ad frag. 29), and the fearful oxen are from the tale of Acontius and Cydippe found in Book 3 of the *Aitia* (frag. 75.10–11).

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