

A ROMAN HECALE: OVID *FASTI* 3.661–74<sup>1</sup>

haec quoque, quam referam, nostras pervenit ad auris  
 fama, nec a veri dissidet illa fide.  
 plebs vetus et nullis etiam tum tuta tribunis  
 fugit et in Sacri vertice montis erat.  
 iam quoque, quem secum tulerant, defecerat illos  
 victus et humanis usibus apta Ceres.  
 orta suburbanis quaedam fuit Anna Bovillis,  
 pauper, sed multae sedulitatis anus.  
 illa levi mitra canos incincta capillos,  
 fingeat tremula rustica liba manu;  
 atque ita per populum fumantia mane solebat  
 dividere: haec populo copia grata fuit.  
 pace domi facta signum posuere perenne,  
 quod sibi defectis illa tulisset opem.

This is one of the identities offered by Ovid for the goddess Anna Perenna, whose festival falls on the Ides of March. Ovid's lines give us the following information about this version of Anna: she was a poor but industrious old woman living in the suburbs of Rome, her benevolent baking and distribution of cakes provided much-needed sustenance for the *plebs* during their *secessio* on the Mons Sacer, and the *plebs* repaid this service when peace was restored by dedicating a cult-statue to her, so founding the cult of Anna Perenna. This Anna is thus a minor character, otherwise unknown, associated with a cult of obscure origin and with a major historical event, the first *secessio plebis* to the Mons Sacer usually dated to 494 B.C. This alone would make it likely that Ovid is inventing her here as circumstantial detail. When we consider that we are told that she lived at Bovillae, some twelve miles south-east of Rome (*orta ... Bovillis* surely indicates residence as well as place of birth), and that the Mons Sacer was located three miles north-east of the city, any probability of Ovid's story being a fully historical report vanishes; Anna of Bovillae was simply in the wrong place to purvey cakes to the *plebs* on this occasion, unless she ran a modern-style delivery service over a thirty-mile circuit. The possibility remains that there was an otherwise unknown cult of Anna Perenna at Bovillae to which Ovid refers, since the association of Anna with Bovillae must have come from somewhere, especially as it here seems to introduce an unwanted inconsistency. The poet's profession that the story of Anna in general comes from another source and that it is probably true (661–2) need not of course exclude a conscious fiction: the Ovid of the *Fasti* often shows an arch approach to the truth of traditional stories (cf. e.g. *Fasti* 4.203–4).<sup>2</sup>

So why did Ovid insert this story and provide it with such circumstantial detail? In general terms, it clearly fits the ethos of Ovid's preceding description of the festival of Anna Perenna, celebrated by plebeian picnics on the Campus Martius (523–42). The story of cake-baking and distribution on the Mons Sacer gives the reasons why Anna is dear to the *plebs*, and why she is associated with outdoor eating in a kind of vestigial *secessio* to a less inhabited area outside the city proper. More particularly,

<sup>1</sup> I am most grateful to Adrian Hollis for help and encouragement, and for drawing my attention to the passage quoted in n. 2.

<sup>2</sup> A fictional origin for Ovid's description of Anna is also suggested by the appearance of a cake-baking poor woman in an unknown context in Eratosthenes' *Hermes* (fr. 10 Powell): ἡ χερνῆτις ἐριθος ἐφ' ὑψηλοῦ πυλῶνος / δηνδαλίδας τεύχουσα καλοῦς ἤειδεν ἰούλους.

it also contains a previously unnoted allusion to the poetry of Callimachus, Ovid's most important model in the *Fasti*,<sup>3</sup> by providing a Roman parallel to the story of Hecale in Callimachus' poem of that name, a poem which Ovid clearly knew well.<sup>4</sup>

The heroine of Callimachus' *Hecale* shares too many characteristics with Ovid's Anna of Bovillae for coincidence. Hecale, it will be recalled, lived in the Athenian deme later named after her as Hecale, conventionally located some fifteen miles north-east of the city centre<sup>5</sup> (cf. *Hecale* fr. 1 Hollis 'Ακταΐη τις ἔναϊεν 'Ερεχθῆος ἐν ποτε γουνῶ), a similar suburban location to Bovillae. She too was an old woman living in poverty—cf. fr. 40.5 γρηῡς, fr. 41 οὐ γάρ μοι πενίη πατρώιος, οὐδ' ἀπὸ πάππων / εἰμὶ λιπερνήτις; she too showed her benevolence and industry by providing hospitality for strangers (fr. 2 τῖον δέ ἐ πάντες ὁδῖται / ἦρα φιλοξενίης· ἔχε γὰρ τέγος ἀκλήιστον), which in her case included entertaining Theseus, passing on his way to encounter the Marathonian bull (fr. 27–39). The headgear of both old women is particularly described (*Fasti* 3.670 *levi mitra canos incincta capillos*, *Hecale* fr. 65 Hollis ἐπρεπέ τοι προέχουσα κάρης εὐρεΐα καλύπτρη, / ποιμενικὸν πῖλημα). Both were honoured for their generosity by a lasting memorial which included cult—Hecale by the naming of her deme after her and her association with the establishment of a local cult of Zeus Hecaleius after her death which occurred very soon after her entertainment of Theseus (*Diegesis Hecalae* xi.1–7); the strong emphasis at the end of the *Hecale* on the lasting nature of Theseus' grateful memorial to the old woman (fr. 82 Hollis) coheres very well with the punning 'signum...perenne' (*Fasti* 3.673) suggested by Ovid as the origin of the cult of Anna *Perenna*. There are of course differences: Anna of Bovillae does not invite strangers into her humble home, nor is she said to die in the course of the story, but the detailed similarities are sufficient to posit a relationship between the two texts.

Apart from individual plot-elements and structure, the overall context and function of the two tales is also significantly similar. In both cases the poet concentrates in the Alexandrian manner on a minor and unimportant episode associated with a major event, to the virtual exclusion of the major event itself, which is made to serve simply as a convenient background for the minor episode. Just as Theseus' heroic defeat of the Marathonian bull is almost forgotten in favour of the humble entertainment offered by Hecale and her life-story,<sup>6</sup> so the tumults of communal dissension at Rome take second place to the tale of Anna's cakes. Functionally, it is almost superfluous to point out that the two stories both provide religious aetiologies: the *Hecale* explains the double honour given to Hecale by Theseus, the naming of the deme Hecale and her association with the founding of the cult of Zeus Hecaleius, while that of Anna of course provides one explanation for her deification and consequent celebration in the religious calendar of the *Fasti*.

But there is also an instructive contrast, which can give important indications of

<sup>3</sup> No commentary on the *Fasti* mentions the link with *Hecale*, and it is not to be found in the very useful index of later allusions and imitations in the excellent recent edition of the *Hecale* by A. S. Hollis (Oxford, 1990). On Callimachus and the *Fasti* see the important treatments by J. F. Miller in *ANRW* II.30.1 (1982) 400–412, in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History III*, C. Deroux (ed.) [Collection Latomus 180] (Brussels, 1983), 156–92, and in *Arethusa* 25 (1992) 11–32.

<sup>4</sup> The *Hecale* is clearly extensively quarried in Books 2 and 8 of the *Metamorphoses*: on the former cf. A. M. Keith, *The Play of Fiction: Studies in Ovid's Metamorphoses Book 2* (Ann Arbor, 1992) 9–20, on the latter A. S. Hollis, *Ovid Metamorphoses VIII* (Oxford, 1970), 106–28. Lesser allusions are also found elsewhere in Ovid: cf. Hollis, op. cit. (n. 3), 33–4.

<sup>5</sup> On the location of the deme Hecale cf. Hollis, op. cit. (n. 3), p. 7 n. 10.

<sup>6</sup> For the apparent brevity of the description of Theseus' defeat of the Marathonian bull in the *Hecale* cf. Hollis, op. cit. (n. 3), 215.

differences in poetic purpose. The story of Hecale would seem to have no particular political overtones for Callimachus' Alexandria, though the journey on which it occurred could be used to stress the democratic and populist view of Theseus, travelling Attica to solve the problems of his people (Plutarch *Theseus* 14.1). For Ovid's Rome, however, one detail in the tale of Anna has at least an indirect political meaning in contemporary terms. The *plebs* is said to be 'nullis etiam tunc tuta tribunis' (663) at the time of the *secessio* of 494; this was technically true, since in the usual account it was only after that protest that the leaders of the *plebs* were officially constituted as *tribuni* (Livy 2.33.1–2), but the statement is given considerable prominence in its context. This is surely because it glances at the fact that *tribunicia potestas* with its populist overtones was one of the main constitutional foundations for the power of Augustus, who like Caesar constantly presented himself as holding an authority which was popularly based,<sup>7</sup> and who in his *Res Gestae* and on coins prominently paraded his years of tribunician power.<sup>8</sup> The *plebs* may have had no protector in 494, but they certainly had one by the Augustan period, one known to every contemporary reader of the poem.

Thus this reference is not a mere matter of constitutional antiquarianism; in the implicit contrast with the absence of protecting tribunes in the past there is surely some deference to the contemporary Great Tribune Augustus, and some promotion of his populist image. The idea of popular safety under tribunician protection, explicit in line 663, may accordingly be linked with the more general idea that Rome and its people are safe under the guardianship of Augustus, a frequent feature of poetic encomia of the *princeps*: Ovid himself puts this in similar terms in *Tristia* 2, addressed to Augustus (157) 'per patriam, quae te *tuta et secura* parente est'.<sup>9</sup> Here, indirect but distinct, we can see a clear element of Augustan propaganda, matching other aspects of Augustan self-presentation, monuments or honours celebrated in the *Fasti*: compare 1.587–616 (name of Augustus), 1.709–24 (Ara Pacis), 2.119–44 (title of *pater patriae*), 3.705–10 (avenging of Caesar), 4.673–6 (first title of *imperator*), 5.545–98 (the *Forum Augustum*), 6.455–58 (Augustus as *pontifex maximus*), 6.468 (avenging of Crassus), 6.637–48 (Augustus' good example as censor).

Ovid's re-working of the Hecale story stresses the importance of Callimachus as model in the *Fasti*, not merely as a poetic antiquarian of religion but also as a source for poetic structures and techniques. But the implicit Augustanism of the context adds a more overt political element, appropriate to the *Fasti* in general: Ovid's poem on the religious calendar was surely written in order to please the *pontifex maximus* as well as in order to emphasise the poet's own Hellenistic credentials.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Z. Yavetz, *Plebs and Princes* (Oxford, 1969), 83–102.

<sup>8</sup> *Res Gestae* 4.4 'consul fueram terdecimens, cum scribebam haec, et eram septimum et tricensimum tribuniciae potestatis'. For reference to years of *tribunicia potestas* on Augustan coins cf. conveniently C. H. V. Sutherland, *Roman History and Coinage* (Oxford, 1987), 14 and 25.

<sup>9</sup> For similar sentiments addressed to Tiberius and Germanicus cf. *Fasti* 1.67–70; for similar praise of Augustus cf. Horace *Odes* 1.12.49, 3.14.14–16, 4.5.17–40, 4.14.43–4, *Epistles* 2.1.2 with Brink's note.

<sup>10</sup> For this Augustan view of the *Fasti* cf. e.g. G. W. Williams, *Change and Decline* (Berkeley, 1978), 83–6, J. C. McKeown in Tony Woodman and David West (edd.), *Poetry and politics in the age of Augustus* (Cambridge, 1984), 174–87. For a powerful exposition of a more subversive reading cf. S. E. Hinds, *Arethusa* 25 (1992), 81–153, and for a good account of the problems involved in deciding between these two opposite interpretations cf. A. Wallace-Hadrill in L. M. Whitby, P. R. Hardie, and M. Whitby (edd.), *Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble* (Bristol, 1987), 221–30.