Notes for Propertius 4.4
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IV
This elegy is formally an aetiological poem, like Elegy ii, purporting to explain the origin of the old name of the Capitoline hill, *mons Tarpeius*, or of the particular eminence of it that was still known as the *sacrum Tarpeium* in historical times. But the real content of the poem, for which the aetiological motive serves as occasion, is an elaborately narrated tale of the guilty love of a Vestal virgin named Tarpeia. This narrative is related to the origin of the place-name by the concluding couplet of the elegy.

The story takes place in Romulus’ day, when the Sabine king Titus Tatius makes war against him. There is a Roman garrison on the Capitoline hill. The invading Sabines are encamped below. The Vestal Tarpeia, while fetching water from a spring near their encampment, sees the Sabine king and falls in love with him at first sight. She betrays the fortress to him, having stipulated that in return for this service she is to become his wife. But when he has gained his object he tells his men to throw their shields on her and crush her to death.

From other accounts (Livy i. xi, Plutarch, *Rom. xvii*, Dion. Hal. ii, xxxviii ff., Varro, *L.L.* v. 41) we gather that Tarpeia was the daughter of Spurius Tarpeius, captain of the garrison on the Capitoline; and that the garrison in question was an outpost, the rest of the Romans being on the Palatine and perhaps on other hills as well. It is not clear from Propertius’ version whether he assumes the same background or not. He certainly differs from our other versions in making love the motive of Tarpeia’s treachery—and, this of course is the very essence of his story. In the standard version her motive is greed for gold.

Nearly half the elegy consists of a long soliloquy of the lovesick Vestal (lines 29–66). Immediately before and after this come two passages in which her state of mind and behaviour are described (67–72 and 73–92). Preceding and following the group thus formed are two narratives, the first of how she falls in love (3–22) and the second of how she betrays the citadel and is killed (73–92); each of these begins with a description preliminary to the narrative proper (see lines 3 ff. and 73 ff.). The first couplet announces the subject and the last couplet (93–4) relates the story to the place-name *mons Tarpeius*, etc. It will be noticed that there is a certain symmetry in the length and disposition of the members composing the piece.

1. Tarpeium...sepulcrum: ‘Tarpeia’s crime and Tarpeia’s shameful end’.

seclusus: this is a probable conjecture for nemen of the MSS. Propertius says nothing about a nemen in his conclusion in lines 93–4 below, nor has any reference to a Tarpeium nemen been found in any other author. Moreover, line 2 suggests strongly that what we are being promised in this opening couplet is not an explanation of anything but simply a story of past events; the aetiological significance of these will be noted later, at the end of the poem.

The introduction of nemen into the MS. tradition is probably due to the influence of luces in the next sentence. But that luces is described simply to provide a setting for the beginning of the story, and thereafter disappears from view.

sepulcrum: the choice of this word may have been influenced by the fact that, according to some accounts, Tarpeia was actually buried on the Capitoline hill. But her tomb was removed by Tarquin (Plutarch, *Rom. 18*) when he built the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus; so that it did not exist in Propertius’ day to be made the subject of an aetiological study. Here sepulcrum probably stands for ‘death’, as fumes often does.

NOTES: IV, 1–3
1. However, Plutarch, *Rom. 17* mentions an exotic version by a Greek poet named Simius, not otherwise known to us, in which Tarpeia betrays Rome to the Gauls (not the Sabines) for love of her king, Brennus.
was to the spring in the copse here described that Tarpeia went to draw water. (There is doubt what spring is meant. Some think of the spring that rises in the Tullium, under the Capitoline hill; some of the fons Iuturnae under the Palatine.)

3. antro: (?) 'nook'. antrum: properly the space sheltered by an overhanging rock, may in poetry mean anything from a cave to a ravine; cf. i, ii, i, ii, i, ii and Housman on Manilius, vi, 311.

6. fistula: the shepherd's pipe.

7–8. hunc: Tattus contra...humo: 'over against this copse Tattus fenced his camp with a palisade of maple stakes, and piled a rampart of earth around it to make it safe'; here castra is to be construed with praecipitum as well as with coronat by the construction called etrò xuvov; for which cf. i, ix, 31 illis et silices at possint cedere quercus; ii, xx, 19 quod si nec nomen nec me tua forma teneret; Tib. i, ii, 11 nam uomeror, seu stipes habet desertus in agris seu setus in triuo florido sorta lapis.

[contra (an alternative would be propter) is a conjecture for fontem of the MSS., which must surely be corrupt: Tattus cannot have set a palisade either partly or wholly around the copse and spring, for that would be incompatible with Tarpeia going (as she will) to the spring to draw water; but cf. Liv. ix, ii, i, 14 castra propter aquam ualbo circumsident.]

9. curesus: an adjective (here agreeing with tibicem) formed from Cures (pl. the Sabine capital) and meaning 'Sabine'.

12. Foro: i.e. 'where now the Roman forum is'.

13. murus erant montes: the point seems to be that the Romans depended for their defence on the hills, to which they had retired: there was no wall around the whole area which later constituted 'Rome', as indeed appears from the position of the Sabine encampment.

ultrix: Curia, saepete: sc. erant: 'there were sheepfold'. The point is the primitive and pastoral condition of what was later the great metropolis. In all this line the poet is answering the question he asked in line 9 above: quid tum Roma fuit?

[Some punctuate otherwise and construe saepete with Curia as a participle; but the point of it is then obscure.]

14. ex illo fonte: i.e. the one described in lines 3–6 above. The narrator reverts to it now because it is the scene of what follows. aquus may be the home of Tattius or collectively the homes of the Sabines. (This detail has probably been suggested by reminiscence of another legendary tale—Castor and Pollux watering their chargers at the fons Iuturnae after the battle of Lake Regillus; cf. Dion. Hal. vi, xiii and Prop. viii, xxii, 26.)

x5. deeae: i.e. for Vesta. Fetching water for the service of the goddess would be one of a Vestal's regular duties.

x6. hinc: from the spring just recalled.

fontem: spring-water.

libavit: 'went to draw'. The perfect (preterite) tense here refers to a single past occasion, the one on which Tarpeia first saw Tattius.

at illi here and at iv, vii, i changes the grammatical subject but not the subject of thought, and adds a touch of description. More usually, at illi transfers attention to a different subject of thought.

16. medium...caput: i.e. the water-pot was balanced on her head.

x7-x8. et satis...Vesta, tua?: this is an interjection by the poet as his story approaches its fatal moment, i.e. udit...Tatium in the line next to come. Vesta is in mind from deeae in line 15.

20. pictaque...armis...leuare: the warrior is manoeuvring his arms in the course of his practice; cf. Tit. iii, vii (iv, i), 95 quis parma, seu dextra velis seu laesa tueri, (optior). picta arma must be understood primarily a blazoned shield. The meaning of per is probably 'over' the mane, as the rider turns this way and that.

23–5. saepe illa...secta rubis: this passage describes the first phase of her passion; a further phase is described in the corresponding passage 67–72 below.

23. imperitis: the moon was really 'innocent' of having sent the omens which Tarpeia alleged as pretext for her excursions. We do not know what these omens were, or what the superstition was that necessitated hair-washing on account of them. Tarpeia wanted an excuse to go down the hill in the hope of catching a glimpse of Tattius.

25. blandis...Nymphis: perhaps here 'amorous' or 'indulgent'; cf. Sil. It. xvii, 81 blandum nimium faciliquem marito. In its usual sense blandus is better suited to the person making the prayer than to the deities prayed to.

26. Romula...hasta: for the form of the adjective cf. on iv, iii, 64 above.
NOTES: IV, 27-41

27. primo...fumo: 'as the smoke began to rise (from the evening fires)'; cf. Virg. Ec. i, 82 et iam summa praelium villarum culmina fumant (in an evening scene). The fires would be wanted in the evening for cooking and warmth at night. That evening is meant is clear from ignes in line 31, and from the context: Tarsus's object in all this is to get a chance of seeing Titius, so she goes down in the day and returns as darkness approaches.

28. hissit...rubis: perhaps because she used the path through the branches to which reference is made in line 48 below; perhaps because she had been hiding in the undergrowth to watch Titius.

29. Tarpeia...arce: 'the Tarpeian height', apparently anticipating the name which the hill was to receive; cf. 93 below.

34. conspicer: usually depensent, conspicor is here (and occasionally elsewhere) found as a passive. She fancies she would be looked at with admiration; cf. the value of conspectus in Virg. Georg. iii, 17 Tyrio conspectus in ostro, etc.

36. probro Vesta pudenda meo: 'Vesta before whom my wickedness is ashamed'. (While pudet secerum = 'I am ashamed of my sins'; pudet deorum = 'I am ashamed before the gods'.)

37. meos...amores: 'my heart'; cf. Virg. Aen. iv, 28-9 ille meos, primus quis me sibi invixit, amores abstulit. The horse that takes Titius back to his camp will bear her heart with him, henceforth on the Sabine side.


39. Scyllam: Scylla, daughter of Nisus king of Megara, fell in love with Minos, who was at war with Nisus, and betrayed Nisus to him. She is sometimes (but not regularly) identified with Scylla the sea-monster, who is often represented with dogs growing out of the lower part of her person.

39-40. saeuisse...saeusus: such repetitions are not uncommon in Propertius, if the MSS. may be believed; cf. iii, viii, 2 and 4, iii, ix, 37 and 39, iii, xi, 19 and 21 and other instances.

41. fratrem...cornua monstri: the Minotaur. Panphae, mother of the Minotaur by the legendary bull, was also mother of Ariadne by Minos. Ariadne betrayed the Minotaur for love of Theseus.

NOTES: IV, 42-56

42. lecto stamine: by following the clue of the thread. torta uia: 'the winding way' (of the labyrinth).

45. Pallad...ignis: the fire of Vesta; here called 'of Pallas' because the Palladium, the image of Minerva (= Athena) supposed to have come from Troy, was kept in Vesta's temple.

47. potebatur: cf. line 78 below ebria tursa. This is an emendation for pugnabatur of the MSS., which is incompatible with the rest of the story, if, as seems likely, we are to understand that the next day referred to by cura here is the day of the festival described in lines 73 ff., on which the betrayal takes place. [It is not certain however that we should so understand the chronology of the story. It may be, perhaps, that some time passes in lines 69-72 after Tarpeia has conceived the idea of treachery, before she gives effect to it; just as some time passed in lines 23-6 after Tarpeia fell in love with Titius, before she conceived the idea of treachery. If this is so, the MSS. reading pugnabatur must be retained, and we must suppose that in Tarpeia's soliloquy (lines 30-66) we have a specimen or a summary of thoughts that went through her head on several occasions. On one of those, thinking of an expected general assault on the Roman positions, she wishes she could warn her hero of a safe and sure way that she knows to his objective. Regarding tota...urbe see the introductory note to this elegy; and cf. line 13 above.]

48. in caele: soliloquizing, she addresses him in imagination.

capae spinosis; for the prosody cf. on iv, i, 41.

50. tacentis...aquis: i.e. a silent trickles. (Or perhaps simply 'hidden'; for cf. Val. Flacc. 1, 483 where the abnormally penetrating vision of Lyceus is said to be able even to rumere terras et Stygia transmissa tactum depingere uinu.)

52. haec quoque...lingua: i.e. like Medea's in the famous story.

formosa: 'my fair one', the man she loves.

53. toga picta: the royal robe, of purple embroidered with gold; under the republic it was worn by a victorious general at his triumph. Tarpeia says that Titius is worthy to be king of Rome, and in effect invites him to aspire to be.

55-6. sic hospes patria metuor regina sub aula, etc.: 'thus (i.e. by your becoming king of Rome) let me hold court (metuor = be revered) as a conqueror's (hospes = foreign) queen
in my native land (literally native court); I bring you no mean dowry—Rome betrayed'. [Text and interpretation are uncertain here.]

57-8. si minus...repente uices: 'if not (i.e. if you will not accept my offer to betray Rome, and so do not become its king), at least avenge the rape of the Sabine women; bear me away, and pay the Romans back for what they did, with a fair reprisal'. According to the legend, Tarius' invasion of Rome was a consequence of the famous rape of the Sabine women by the Romans.

59-60. [commissas acies ego possum solvere nupta: uos medium palla foedus inita mea: the text thus amended gives good sense. One might be tempted to retain the MS. reading nupseae, punctuating before instead of after it and taking it as a genitive in agreement with the idea 'of me' which is contained in the possessive mea. But it has been pointed out to me that in this construction the genitive regularly follows the possessive adjective.]

60. uos medium palla foedus inita mea: 'do you (Sabines and Romans) be reconciled through my marriage and make a pact of peace'. The palla, an outer garment, was not peculiar to brides; but in Ov. Her. xxv, 162 a splendida palla is attribute of Hymenaeus, and here as there the word symbolizes marriage. medius is applied to one who serves as a mediator, which is the role in which Tarpeia sees herself here; cf. Lucan 1, 118 ut generosa socertis medias inunxere Sabinas; Sil. It. xvi, 230 haud deiformis erit ubi ad foedera versus pacator mediusque Syphax.

Thus, though medium here is attached grammatically to foedus (and is not altogether inapposite in sense, since medium foedus might be a treaty of reconciliation), it really goes in thought with palla mea. For other examples of transferred epithets cf. iv, ii, 34 and 63. (If we had here media palla mea, the construction would be an ordinary ablative absolute. As it is, palla mea is an unusual ablative of cause or attendant circumstances; cf. iv, xi, 96 prostate mea.)

61. addes, Hymenaeo, modos: 'on with (or raise loud) the marriage song'; cf. addere gradum = 'haste'.

64. credite, uenstra...: she addresses the warring Sabines and Romans, as in 60 above.

65. urbi festus erat: with this we supply dies from the following line.

Parilia: the festival of Pales, on 21 April. This was the supposed date of Rome's foundation. See note on iv, i, 19.
76. *cum pagana madent fercula diuitis*: ‘when the board at the village feast flows rich with plenty’. *madent* suggests both cookery and ‘richness’ of the food (with oil, etc.), also perhaps tipiness; *diuitis* suggests plenty and disregard of expense. *fercula* are dishes; then the ‘courses’ of a banquet.

77–8. *cumque super...pedes*: see note on iv, i, 19.

82. *pactis ipsa futura comes*: either (a) *pactis* is ablative, ‘by the terms of the bargain’; and we supply a dative (the Sabines or Tatius) after comes; or (b) *pactis* is dative after comes and means ‘her betrothed and his men’; cf. Sili. xi. 11, 843 (Tarpeia) *pactis reservavit clausura Sabinis*. Either way, she is engaged to accompany the party who make the stealthy attack.

83. *mons erat ascensu dubius*: beside its primary meaning ‘doubtful’ *dubius* can bear the secondary meaning ‘difficult’; and so *mons ascensu dubius* can be said in the same way as *res factu difficilis*. Here the context shows that this is said of this hill (strictly, of this way up the hill) to give one reason why it was not better guarded; so the viewpoint must be that of the defender, and the meaning ‘was known (or believed) hard to climb’. For this attachment of a subjective value to an objective statement cf. i. vi, 101 *sim digna merendo = may I be judged worthy...*.

festoque remissus: ‘and the guard on it relaxed because of the holiday’. As in the preceding sentence we have had to understand *mons* as ‘way up the hill’, so here we have to understand it as ‘guard on the hill’; this is made easy in the first case by the context, and in the second by the strong and definite meaning in *remitus* (cf. *custodia remissa*, etc.).

85. *omnia praebebant somnum*: ‘all around was a scene of slumber’; cf. *corpora victa sopora* in Ovid’s description, Met. xiv, 779. *For praebebant = ‘displayed to view’* cf. iii. xiii, 42 *praebebant ustris turbis benigna factum* (cf. alters displaying inscriptions).

86. *poenae insignilirae suis*: ‘to remain on watch and see the vengeance he was planning carried out’. [sub is an emendation of the MS. reading *sub*.

88. *nubendique petit, quem uelit ipsae, diem*: ‘and asks him to name what day he will for her to be his bride’. Here *petit = pactis ut dicat*: cf. *Ov. Fast. iii, 117 disce...quod petis*. [ipsae is a conjecture for *ipsa* of the MSS. Keeping *ipsa* one gets ‘asses to be allowed to name the day’.]

92. a *duce Tarpeium mons est cognomen aedeps*: ‘the

94. *uigil, inimica praemia sortis habes*: literally ‘you that kept watch, you have your reward for the treacherous watch you kept’; disregarding the apostrophe as foreign to English idiom we can translate ‘such is her reward for the traitor’s watch she kept’. Tarpeia is called *uigil* ironically, because she stayed awake while all the rest were asleep (line 85). Her *sors* here, carrying on the metaphor, must be the watchman’s ‘turn of duty’; for this sense of the word cf. Sili. i. 17, 973 *uestigia uigil*. *uigil exuultrat, dum sorte vicetim altereat partes exccubibus*; Hor. Od. iii. xiv, 15–16 *defunctuque laboribus aequalet recreat sortes uigilium*. Her *sors* in this sense is *inimica* because it was a watch wrongly kept, just as inimica *regnas* in Ov. Met. v, 277 means a kingdom wrongly won, and *inimicas cruris* in Val. Max. iii, xiext. 3 *blood wrongly shed*. It is not possible for *inimica sors* here to mean (primarily at any rate) her ‘cruel fate’, for the concluding lines of the elegy must accord with its general sentiment; and there has been no suggestion anywhere that her fate was anything but fully merited by her treacherous conduct: cf. lines 1, 17–18, 69–70, 87, 89, 92. The point of *praemia* seems to be that all the reward she got for her treachery was to have the hill named after her, in memory of her shame; the reward she wanted she did not obtain.

[That Propertius should use *inimica sors* in a sense, as determined by its context, so different from its common and obvious meaning is not incompatible with his practice elsewhere; cf. ii, 19, 43 *femur ossis = ‘leave her marks’ (instead of ‘set foot’ or ‘tread’); iii, 3, 53 *maxima turba = ‘most violent disturbance’ (instead of ‘largest number’). However, there is another possible way of printing and reading this passage that deserves consideration: *uigil inimica, praemia sortis habeas = ‘you that kept a traitor’s watch, you have your reward for the watch you kept’.*]