Ovid, *Fasti* 3.330[1]

eliciunt caelo te, Iuppiter; unde minores
  nunc quoque te celebrant Eliciumque uocant.
constat Auentinae tremuisse cacumina siluae,
  terraque subsedit pondere pressa Iouis.

They draw you down from the sky, Jupiter, and that is why more recent generations still worship you today, and call you Elicius. It is certain that the summit of the Aventine wood trembled, and the earth sank beneath the weight of Jupiter.

(Ov. *Fasti* 3.327-30)[2]

Dismayed by an unprecedented flurry of thunderbolts, the pious king Numa sets out to expiate the omen. His divine consort Egeria advises him to learn the *ritus piandi* (291) from Picus and Faunus, who will, however, only reveal the necessary information under compulsion. Numa makes plans to ambush the gods, taking up position in a cave within a grove 'under the Aventine, black with the shade of the holm-oak, at sight of which you would say, "A spirit is here"' (*lucus Auentino suberat niger ilicis umbra, | quo posses uiso dicere 'numen inest'*, 295-6). The description of this numinous location continues (297-9):

in medio gramen, muscoque adoperta uirenti
  manabat saxo uena perennis aquae ;
inde fere soli Faunus Picusque bibebant.

In the middle was a meadow, and an unceasing stream of water, covered with green moss, flowed from the rock. From it Faunus and Picus, unaccompanied, were in the habit of drinking.

Once captured by the king, Faunus and Picus tell Numa that only Jupiter himself can be consulted about Jupiter's own domain (if we read *tecta* at 316; if we read *tela*, and there's little to choose between those readings, Jupiter's weapons),[3] but that with their help Numa may be able to draw Jupiter down from the sky to answer his enquiry. In the passage that heads this note the two rustic deities do indeed draw Jupiter to earth; and subsequently, in a battle of wits between the *altorum rexque paterque deum* and Numa, a peculiar ritual of expiation is agreed involving offerings of an onion, human hair, and a small fish. Further information on the character of the cult at the altar of Jupiter Elicius is forthcoming from Varro (*LL* 6.94), Livy (1.20.7), Pliny the Elder (*HN* 2.140), Plutarch (*Numa* 15.3-6) and Arnobius (*Nat.* 5.1 = Valerius Antias *HRR* fr. 6 Peter),[4] the latter two close to

[1] The author is grateful to Stephen Heyworth, Matthew Leigh, Andrew Sillett and *CQ*'s anonymous reader for their comments on an earlier draft.
[2] Quotations from *Fasti* are based on the Teubner text of E. H. Alton, D. E. W. Wormell and E. Courtney, *P. Ovidi Nasonis Fastorum libri sex*[4] (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1997). Translations are my own.
[3] Alton, Wormell and Courtney (1997) cite the arguments of F. Krüger, *De Ovidi Fastis recensendis* (Rostock and Schwerin, 1872), 24 in favour of retaining *tecta*.
[4] Valerius Antias F8 in T. J. Cornell et al., *The Fragments of the Roman Historians* (Oxford, 2013).

Ovid's account and thus helpful for elucidating a shared source or sources.[5] At no point does one get the impression that the ancients found the cult any less mysterious than modern scholars.

The purpose of this note is simply to show that, in the course of describing Faunus and Picus' elicitation of Jupiter from the sky, from which Ovid explicitly etymologizes 'Elicius', the peculiar title of the aspect of Jupiter associated with 'the prodigies imparted by lightning or other visible sign' (Livy 1.20.7) or even the summoning of thunderbolts (Pliny, *HN* 2.140),[6] Ovid insinuates another aetiology: the detail in line 330 that 'the earth sank down beneath the weight of Jupiter' (*terra ... subsedit pondere pressa Iouis*) in fact presents a mythical explanation of a prominent topographical feature in the vicinity of the scene of these events.

That scene now requires our attention. It turns out not only that Ovid is describing a place readily identifiable to Roman readers, but also that, rather untypically for scholarship on the topography of ancient Rome, there is a clear and longstanding consensus as to where it was. In his comprehensive historical survey of the Aventine, Alfred Merlin, following Rubino and Gilbert,[7] identified the grove, cave and spring under the Aventine where Ovid places the ambush of Faunus and Picus with the grove, cave and spring of the Bona Dea temple (cf. Prop. 4.9.24, 25, 33, 35, 53, 59-60). The latter shrine stood on a gentle slope below the *Saxum*, 'the cliff which forms the conspicuous N angle of the SE summit, the "Lesser Aventine"',[8] the site where tradition placed Remus's unlucky taking of the auspices (Ov. *Fast*. 5.148-54):[9] the late-antique Regional Catalogues (*Libellus de regionibus urbis Romae*, p. 92, 14 Nordh) record in Region XII, which encompassed this section of the ancient city, an *aedes Bonae Deae Subsaxanae*,[10] and a recently discovered fragment of the Severan Marble Plan depicts a section of the sanctuary, accompanied by the surviving letters SAXSA/NA, without doubt what remains of BONA DEA SUBSAXSANA.[11]

The place where Numa traps Faunus and Picus and has his dialogue with Jupiter is also said to be on the Aventine, and, as Bömer writes, when Ovid remarks that *Auentinae tremuisse cacumina siluae* (329) he is not describing the swaying of treetops (which would hardly be an appropriately supernatural phenomenon), but rather using an expression effectively synonymous with *Auentinum cacumen* at *Fast*. 4.816, which describes Remus' augural station on the *Saxum*. However, what clinches the identification of Faunus and Picus' spring on the Aventine with the Bona Dea precinct is the very close connection that existed between the two indigenous deities Bona Dea and Faunus, seemingly female and male counterparts: they are variously described as husband and wife, father and daughter or brother and sister.[12] (An extra consequence of identifying Faunus and Picus' spring with the Bona Dea sanctuary is that we should probably print *saxo* at 298 as *Saxo*.)

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[5] See *HRR* I^2.239 and n. For a synthesis of the information regarding Jupiter Elicius see *LTUR* 3.135 s.v. 'Iuppiter Elicius, Ara' (M. Andreussi). The perils of summoning Jupiter from heaven are illustrated by a traditional account of the death of Numa's successor Tullus Hostilius (Liv. 1.31.8).

[6] The breadth of Jupiter Elicius' functions are discussed by Andreussi (n. 5).

[7] A. Merlin, *L'Aventin dans l'Antiquité* (Paris, 1906), 110; J. Rubino, *Beiträge zur Vorgeschichte Italiens* (Leipzig, 1868), 212-213, n. 298; O. Gilbert, *Geschichte und Topographie der Stadt Rom im Altertum* (Leipzig, 1883-1890), 2.156-7 n.

[8] L. Haselberger et al., *Mapping Augustan Rome*, JRA Supp. 50 (Portsmouth, RI, 2002), 68-9 s.v. 'Bona Dea (*Sub Saxo*)'.

[9] Cf. T. P. Wiseman, *Remus: a Roman myth* (Cambridge, 1995), 112-13.

[10] For a detailed description of the shrine, as we know it, see *LTUR* 1.200-201 s.v. 'Bona Dea Subsaxana' (L. Chioffi).

[11] R. Meneghini and R. S. Valenzani, Formae Urbis Romae: Nuovi frammenti di piante marmoree dallo scavo dei fori imperiali (Rome, 2006), 25.

[12] H.H.J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea: the sources and description of the cult* (Leiden, 1989), especially 324-7.

As for the altar of Jupiter Elicius supposedly established after Numa's exploit, Ovid's account implies that it was close at hand, presumably in the same grove (so instinct with divinity, 296) under the Aventine. Pliny, *HN* 2.140 might be understood to imply that the *ara* of Jupiter Elicius was situated, and his *sacra* took place, in a *lucus*.

The Aventine hill, 'the southernmost of the seven hills of Rome', was really two hills, 'divided into two heights, the Aventinus Maior and Aventinus Minor, or Aventine and Little Aventine (sometimes also called pseudo-Aventine), with a distinct cleft between them, down which ran the Vicus Portae Rauduscularae (Viale Aventino, Via di Porta S. Paolo)'.[13] The evidence suggests that, while the Aventine was considered 'a single geographical unit'[14] throughout antiquity, a distinction between the two parts of the hill was also recognized. Skutsch stressed that distinction in the process of explaining Ennius' description of the taking of the auspices by Romulus and Remus,[15] proposing that while Ennius' Romulus stood *in alto Auentino*, 'the Aventine proper to the north of the *via portae Rauduscularae*', Remus took his stand where later tradition (most clearly Ovid at *Fasti* 5.149-52) placed him, 'on the *Saxum*, the highest elevation on the north side of the south-eastern hill, above the shrine of the *Bona Dea Subsaxana*'.[16] To the Lesser Aventine, by Skutsch's theory, Ennius attached a name surviving in texts relating to the Aventine, Mons Murcus.

The shrine of the Bona Dea, and by extension the altar of Jupiter Elicius, were thus located below the *Saxum* at the northern extremity of the Lesser Aventine: latest thinking is undecided between the northern side of the *Saxum* cliff (and thus inside the Servian Wall) or its eastern slope (outside the wall);[17] although investigation of a stretch of republican-era wall to the north of the *Saxum* and 'not far from the *vicus Piscinae Publicae*' by Di Manzano and Quinto,[18] plausibly identified as part of the enclosure wall of the Bona Dea sanctuary,[19] suggests a location on the northern slope.[20] At any rate, if the two cult places were close to the *Saxum*, they were also adjacent to the 'distinct cleft' or 'depression'[21] that separates the Lesser from the Greater Aventine, through which once ran the *Vicus Piscinae Publicae* and its extension the *Vicus Portae Rauduscularae*. It is to this cleft, I propose, that Ovid is alluding when he talks of the impact of Jupiter's divine weight on the ground of the Aventine hill, *terraque subsedit pondere pressa Iouis*.

The *Fasti*, a poem about Roman time, is also necessarily about Roman space, bearing the same wilful but intimate relation to a map of the city of Rome as the *Metamorphoses* does to a map of the world: 'It was not possible ... to consider the organisation of Roman time without engaging also with the spatial context through which Roman time was articulated.'[22] Here, in a

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[13] L. Richardson, Jr., *A new topographical dictionary of ancient Rome* (Baltimore, 1992), 47, s.v. 'Aventinus Mons'.

[14] Richardson, loc. cit.

[15] O. Skutsch, *Studia Enniana* (London, 1968), 63-71.

[16] Skutsch (n. 15), 65. Wiseman (n. 9), 112-13 provides some useful contemporary orientation: 'The church of S. Balbina stands there now, on the height between the headquarters of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation and the Baths of Caracalla.'

[17] Haselberger (n. 8).

[18] P. Di Manzano and R. Quinto, "Area di S. Balbina," *Bulletino della Commissione archeologica communale in Roma* 89 (1984), 69-75.

[19] Cf. Meneghini and Valenzani, op. cit. (n. 11), 26 (Stefania Fogangolo).

[20] Also the location favoured by F. Coarelli, *Rome and environs: an archaeological guide* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 2007), 310.

[21] S.B. Platner and T. Ashby, *A topographical dictionary of ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1926), 65, s.v. 'Aventinus Mons'.

[22] C. Edwards, *Writing Rome: textual approaches to the city* (Cambridge, 1996), 57.

characteristically witty *obiter dictum*, a double hill somewhat awkwardly saddled with a single name and identity is provided with an aetiological explanation, perhaps (despite *constat* in 329) the poet's own innovation: the Aventine had indeed been single and indivisible, until Jove himself visited Rome and left his indelible mark on the landscape.

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