

Virgins and Prostitutes in Roman Mythology*

Since the publication of Mary Beard's influential article on the 'sexual status' of Vestal Virgins in 1980, this important priestly college has received a great deal of scholarly attention. The last decade alone has seen a growing interest in the subject with four book length studies bearing 'Vestal Virgins' in the title.¹ Various issues related to the Vestals' social and political status as well as religious duties have been viewed from different modern perspectives. These studies have added to our understanding of the many facets of the Vestal college as a whole, as well as attempting to bring into better focus the Vestal as a woman and an individual. One may imagine that little remains to be said on a topic so well researched in recent times. However, this paper does not focus on Vestals and their social status, but rather attempts to isolate and identify a curious motif in Roman mythology: the relationship between Vestals and prostitutes. Very little has been said on this subject, and so far no one has attempted to trace the instances of its occurrence. By analysing three separate cases of the motif in Roman literature, we aim to clarify this curious mythological relationship which has so far evaded scrutiny. The first case concerns the most familiar story in Roman mythology, the foundation myth, where the virgin and the prostitute play the roles of a biological mother and a stepmother to the twins, respectively. The second case deals with a less known example from the Second Punic War, where the same motif will become apparent. The third, and most difficult case, tackles the myths of Gaia Taracia and Acca Larentia, and this is where the virgin-prostitute binary motif will provide a solution to a very complex set of aetiological myths that have so far not been explained.

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¹ M. BEARD, *The sexual status of Vestal Virgins* in *Journal of Roman Studies* 70, 1980, p. 12-27, revisited in M. BEARD, *Re-reading Vestal virginity*, in R. HAWLEY and B. LEVICK, (eds.) *Women in Antiquity*, London, 1995, p. 166-78. Recent booklength studies are: N. MEKACHER, *Die vestalischen Jungfrauen in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Wiesbaden, 2006; R. L. WILDFANG, *Rome's Vestal Virgins*, London, 2006; S. A. TAKACS, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls and Matrons*, Austin, 2008; and L. J. THOMPSON, *The Role of Vestal Virgins in Roman Civic Religion*, Lewiston (N. Y.), 2010.

I

The Roman foundation myth is a familiar story. The strife between two rival brothers, Amulius and Numitor results in a miraculous birth of divine twins from the daughter of Numitor, Ilia (or Rhea Silvia), who is a Vestal Virgin. Romulus and Remus are put into a basket, cast into the Tiber, and stranded on its shores where a she-wolf nurtures them, and a shepherd, Faustulus, takes them home. They are then reared by Faustulus and his wife, Acca Larentia, who is said to be a prostitute. When they reach adolescence, they spend time in the wilderness, hunting and cattle rustling. This provokes a conflict with the shepherds of Amulius and ultimately results in his downfall and the restoration of Numitor at the hands of the twins.²

Recent decades have seen a resurgence of interest in this myth. In *Remus: A Roman Myth* T. P. Wiseman approached it with the hypothesis that much of Roman mythology has been shaped by Roman drama and speculated on the various stages of Greek influence.³ It is now widely recognized that Roman historians starting from Fabius Pictor have been subject to a degree of Greek influence.⁴ However, the core of the foundation myth involving the twins was clearly based on a native Italic tradition, as argued by J. Bremmer and N. Horsfall.⁵ More recently, A. Meurant demonstrated the genuinely Italic setting of the foundation myth in the example of the twins, a fundamental feature of the narrative.⁶ Thus, the later accretions present in the developed narratives of Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Livy have not entirely concealed the native core. It would be impossible to discuss here the many complex

² This is only an outline of the foundation myth as presented in the mainstream version of LIVY I.3-6 and DION. HAL. *Ant. Rom.* I.76-84. For a discussion and further references see the bibliography below.

³ T. P. WISEMAN, *Remus: A Roman Myth*, Cambridge, 1995. This is not the place to go into a discussion of the implications of Wiseman's theories on the foundation myth, which have been criticized by numerous scholars, see e.g. N. PURCELL'S review in *BMCRev* 97.5.18.

⁴ See recently M. SCAPINI, *Temî greci e citazioni da Erodoto nelle storie di Roma arcaica*, Nordhausen, 2011, (*Studia Classica et Mediaevalia* 4), a book not without its faults (see the review by K. VANHAEGENDOREN, *BMCRev*, 2012.10.44). See also A. KOPTEV, *Timaeus of Tauromenium and Early Roman Chronology* in C. DEROUX (ed.) *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, vol. XV, Bruxelles, 2010 (Collection Latomus vol. 323), p. 5-48.

⁵ J. BREMMER and N. HORSFALL, *Romulus, Remus and the Foundation of Rome* in *Roman Myth and Mythography*, London, 1987, p. 25-49.

⁶ A. MEURANT, *L'idée de gémellité dans la légende des origines de Rome*, Bruxelles, 2000.

issues presented by the foundation narrative, but some basic strains relevant to our case can be identified. Wiseman recognised two different strains in the narrative when he pondered the question concerning the relationship between the mythological cycle of the Lupercalia on the one hand, and the foundation myth about the twins on the other.⁷ Comparative research has indeed demonstrated that much of the Lupercalia mythology has an Indo-European origin, and the recent identification of Faunus' Indo-European counterpart throws additional light on that aspect: the savage brotherhood of the naked Luperci and their pastoral god Faunus stand in close relation to Mars as the father of the twins and the symbol of the she-wolf.⁸

On the other hand, Plutarch reports that there was a version of the foundation myth in which a virgin conceived the twins from the sparks of the hearth, without the intervention of a man.⁹ This alternative version of the conception of the twins thus bears the same motif as the myth of the conception of Servius Tullius.¹⁰ That this was a native Italic tradition not restricted to Rome is indicated by the foundation myth of Praeneste. Its founder, Caeculus was also conceived by the sparks of the hearth and established his authority by a miraculous fire sent from Vulcan, his father.¹¹ The same element accompanies a few other notices we find on the conception of Italic heroes, Cacus among them.¹² Hence, in the Italic tradition, a virgin could have conceived divinely (by means of fire) and this version of the story did not have Mars or his animal totem, the she-wolf.

Thus, the Roman foundation narrative as represented in the mainstream versions of Livy or Dionysius of Halicarnassus may be a result of a fusion of two separate mythological layers. One layer revolves around Mars and his symbol, the she-wolf, while, in the other, a Vestal conceives from the sacred fire and her child is

⁷ WISEMAN, *Remus* [n. 3], p. 86-7. For a more nuanced view see MEURANT, *gémellité* (prev. n.), p. 53-77.

⁸ On Indo-European elements in the mythology of the Lupercalia see A. ALFÖLDI, *Die Struktur des voretruskischen Römerstaates*, Heidelberg, 1974, p. 107-47. On the Indo-European origin of Faunus see D. NEČAS HRASTE and K. VUKOVIĆ, *Rudra-Shiva and Silvanus-Faunus: Savage and Propitious* in *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 39, 1&2, 2011, p. 100-15.

⁹ PLUT., *Romulus* II, 3-6.

¹⁰ SERV. *Aen.* VII, 678; see G. CAPDEVILLE, *Volcanus*, Rome, 1995, p. 15-28.

¹¹ Other versions reported he was found in or near a fire by girls fetching water. This is possibly a later rationalized explanation for an originally miraculous motif. For greater detail see the analysis by J. BREMMER in BREMMER and HORSFALL (eds.) *Roman Myth*, [n. 5] p. 49-59, who stresses the fact that the Praenestine myth was later shaped according to the Roman foundation myth. Although a possible influence cannot be excluded, the similarities are more likely to be a result of common Italic heritage rather than borrowings. See also CAPDEVILLE, *Volcanus*, [prev. n.], p. 41-59.

¹² For greater detail see G. CAPDEVILLE, *Volcanus* [n. 10] p. 97-146.

then adopted and reared by a prostitute.¹³ This conflation was facilitated by the central feature of the narrative: the birth of the heroes.¹⁴ The two mythological layers differ in the means of conception of the heroes, one explaining it through the intervention of Mars and the other through the intervention of fire.¹⁵ The fusion was also facilitated by the ambiguous signifier of *lupa*, being both the animal of Mars and a word for a prostitute. However, as D. Sabbatucci argued, it would be wrong to suppose that Acca Larentia as the nurse of the twins is only a later heuristic attempt to rationalize an older and more primitive motif of a she-wolf.¹⁶ The conflation of two separate versions around the signifier of *lupa* does not imply one is merely a rationalized form of the other.¹⁷ While the she-wolf belongs to the domain of Mars, Acca Larentia is not its anthropomorphized counterpart, but a mythical figure in her own right, an expression of the motif of a prostitute whose function relates to the sustenance of the Roman people (in this case the nursing of the twins). Acca was already present in the foundation narrative as far as we can trace it back, in Fabius Pictor and Ennius.¹⁸ Therefore, rather than being a later heuristic interpretation, the figure of Acca Larentia is paramount to the foundation myth and a structural component tied to the element of the virgin, Rhea Silvia.

On the narrative level, Acca plays a crucial role in the childhood and youth of the twins. As A. Meurant argued, this phase of the foundation myth has an initiatory character.¹⁹ The youths are made to endure trials in the wilderness, traversing a period of chaos that prepares them for the battle with Amulius, and the founding of a new

¹³ Many scholars have made much of Pliny's notice on the phallus kept in the interior of the *aedes Vestae*. WILDFANG, *Vestals* [n. 1] p. 20, n. 57 has consequently downplayed this information. However, the ritual keeping of a phallus near the sacred hearth corresponds to the fertilizing role it plays in this mythological tradition. See J. A. NORTH, *Roman Religion*, Oxford, 2000, p. 5.

¹⁴ The two layers correspond to the solar and sovereign hero in G. Dumézil's classification, the former being an offspring of the sun god (and likened to fire), and the latter being a representative of a sovereign god (Jupiter or Mars). See G. DUMÉZIL, *Camillus*, London, 1980, p. 221-39.

¹⁵ Among the elements of the Vestal layer in the mainstream version of the foundation myth, CAPDEVILLE, *Volcanus* [n. 10], p. 83-94 also lists Romulus' founding of Volcanal and the two traditions about his murder, one claiming he was killed in the temple of Vulcan and the other that he was taken into heaven during a thunderstorm.

¹⁶ D. SABBATUCCI, *Il mito di Acca Larentia*, in *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 29, 1958, p. 41-76 at. p. 49-51.

¹⁷ As in LIVY I, IV, 7. The first author to provide this explanation seems to be VALERIUS ANTIAS (apud *Orig. Gent. Rom.* XXI), otherwise known for deliberate manipulation and reworking of Rome's early history. See T. P. WISEMAN, *Roman Drama and Roman History*, Exeter, 1998, p. 75-90. On the sceptical rationalisation of myths in late Republic and early empire see J. MARINCOLA, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography*, Cambridge, 2003, p. 117-27.

¹⁸ FABIVS PICTOR. apud DION. HAL., *Ant. Rom.* I, 79; ENNIUS in *Orig. Gen. Rom.* XX, 3.

¹⁹ A. MEURANT, *D'Albe-la-Longue au pomerium: Romulus et Rémus sur la route* in *Latomus* 62, 2003, p. 517-542.

order, a new city. The debased prostitute is the most representative symbol of their savage lifestyle, and a key element in their journey to reclaim what is rightfully theirs by origin. Conversely, the Vestal Rhea Silvia represents that royal heritage. She is the twins' main link to Alba Longa and the legitimate source of their divine and royal aspirations. Thus, in the narrative of the foundation myth the virgin and the prostitute represent opposite values, one marking their high status and the other their life as shepherds in the wilderness. Both of these contrasting elements are essential in a foundation narrative, where divine origin and savage existence play their roles in the formation of a hero.

To conclude, the two positions at the opposite ends of female sexuality form a pair and cooperate in their service to the Roman people, which involves divine and earthly forms of service. The latter aspect is embodied in the debased figure of the prostitute who provides sustenance to the people (or its leaders) and the former in the Vestal Virgin whose duty is to offer sacrifice for its wellbeing.

II

Having isolated one particular element in the Roman foundation myth, the virgin-prostitute relation, along with the function each of the two women plays in the narrative, we proceed to demonstrate the presence of this mythological motif in other areas of Roman literature. In book 26 of *Ab Urbe Condita*, Livy describes the events that took place after Capua revolted from the Romans in the aftermath of the battle of Cannae.²⁰ The Romans were very eager to wreak vengeance on their former ally who had abandoned them in the direst peril. Thus, having taken the city, the Romans inflicted severe punishments and carried out many executions. Therefore, in 210 BC the Capuans sent an embassy to plead with the senate for mercy. In order to determine whether some of the Campanians were innocent, the senate summoned witnesses

²⁰ The siege and fall of Capua is a significant event in the war with Hannibal. The city was perceived as an important factor on both sides. The Romans considered it was imperative to destroy Capua not only for retribution, but also in order not to appear weak in the eyes of the rest of Italy. Hannibal considered Capua so important that he at one point hastened to lift the siege, but failed. He then finally decided to commence his long delayed attack on the city of Rome, hoping that the Romans would have to leave Capua in order to protect their most vital interest. See L. RAWLINGS, *The War in Italy* in D. HOYOS (ed.), *Blackwell Companion to the Punic Wars*, Chichester, 2011, p. 299-319 and M. P. FRONDA, *Between Rome and Carthage: Southern Italy during the Second Punic War*, Cambridge, 2010, p. 100-48.

from the ranks of those who were involved in the capturing of Capua. Among these, Marcus Atilius Regulus was held in highest regard and he advised that two women alone were to be spared while the rest ‘had the same feelings towards us as had the Carthaginians’.²¹ The two women were to be excused because they aided the Roman people in a remarkable way. Vestia Oppia sacrificed daily for the wellbeing and victory of the Roman people while Faucula Cluvia was a prostitute who secretly brought food to the hungry Roman captives. As if this was not incredible enough, Livy reports that the senate decided to restore freedom and wealth to these two women and grant them the right to petition them personally if they wished any further reward. Livy then goes on to enumerate the severe punishments inflicted upon the Capuans.²²

Thus, according to Livy, the entire city of Capua was guilty of the same enmity towards the Romans, and the people was fittingly punished and resettled, except two women who miraculously strove to save their enemies. When this passage of Livy is compared to other corresponding descriptions of Capua’s punishment, one looks in vain for the mention of women in Capua.²³ The miraculous intervention of these two women should thus be considered a mythical insertion into an otherwise historical narrative of the Second Punic War. Vestia Oppia’s status as a Vestal Virgin is obvious from her very name, and her function (sacrificing for the wellbeing of the Roman people) dispels all doubts.²⁴ Faucula Cluvia is denoted as a prostitute with the words Gellius uses for Acca Larentia, the prostitute of Hercules: she had made profit from her body (*quaestum corpore fecisset*) before she became a reward for the god

²¹ The sentence about the two women, from P. G. WALSH, *Titi Livi Ab urbe condita libri XXVI-XXVII*, Leipzig, 1989 (Teubner), XXVI, 33, 8: *duas mulieres <esse> compertum est, Vestiam Oppiam Atellanam Capuae habitantem et Fauculam Cluviam quae quondam quaestum corpore fecisset; illam cottidie sacrificasse pro salute et victoria populi Romani, hanc captivis egentibus alimenta clam suppeditasse*. See also VALERIUS MAXIMUS’ version of the story (V, 2, 1), who calls the woman Faucula.

²² I.e. in LIV. XXVI, 34. It is clear from the context that in chapter 33 LIVY is revisiting the issue of the settlement of Capua as described in chapter 16, but in a different form and relying on another source. See M. FREDERIKSEN, *Campania*, London, 1984, p. 244-50.

²³ Primarily APPIAN, *Hann.* VII, 43. The other sources on the punishment of Capua are all silent on this issue: DIO/ZONARAS IX, 6; CIC. *Leg. Agr.* II, 88; VAL. MAX. III, 8, 1; SILIUS ITALICUS XIII, 348-80. POLYBIUS’ treatment of it is lost. Some of the conditions of the punishment as related by LIVY were probably not enforced. See M. FREDERIKSEN, *Campania* [prev. n.].

²⁴ While Vestia clearly implies a Vestal, Oppia was also a name carried by Vestals. This is clear from LIVY’S account of the *incestum* committed by the Vestal Oppia in 483 BC (II, 42, 11). Although other sources name her differently, the name Oppia given by LIVY is accepted as the most likely variant (see R. M. OGILVIE, *Commentary on Livy’s book 1-5*, Oxford, 1965, p. 349).

along with a rich feast.²⁵ Faucula's task to feed the Roman people is also parallel to that of Acca, the wife of Faustulus, who nursed Romulus and Remus.²⁶ When Livy's story is compared to the foundation myth, a pattern begins to emerge: a myth that involves two women, opposed by their sexual status, but united in the common efforts for the wellbeing of the Roman people. The Vestal stands at the divine end of the spectrum (her office is to perform sacrifice for the people) while the duty of the prostitute is to nurse or feed it.²⁷

The presence of this fanciful story in the otherwise historical narrative of the Second Punic War supports the notion that mythological motifs in Roman historiography are not restricted to the regal period and early republic. Regardless of who Livy's source for this story may be,²⁸ it should be added to the number of pieces of evidence that show Roman historians continued to embellish their narratives with myths even in the period after the Second Punic War.²⁹ The striking similarities that this story bears to the foundation myth show how it continued to exert a strong influence on the formation of Roman historical consciousness. The virgin-prostitute motif that lay at the core of the foundation myth was applied to a historical episode of the Second Punic War. We shall see another example of the same tendency in the myths of Gaia Taracia and Acca Larentia.

²⁵ *quae corpore quaestum facit*, a phrase used to refer to a prostitute in legal texts and the title of R. FLEMMING'S article (*Quae Corpore Quaestum Facit: The Sexual Economy of Female Prostitution in the Roman Empire* in *Journal of Roman Studies* 89, 1999, p. 38-62). For its use in Gellius, see below (section III).

²⁶ As a *Latomus* referee points out, a similar theme appears in an episode after the battle of Cannae, when a contingent of Roman troops that escaped to Canusium are provided with supplies and food by a wealthy Apulian lady, named Busa. See LIV. XXII.52.7 and VAL. MAX. IV.8.2. There is, however, no indication that she was a prostitute nor is there a Vestal Virgin involved. Thus, this might well be a historical episode to which our mythical pattern was never applied, unlike in the case of Faucula Cluvia and Vestia Oppia.

²⁷ The subject of these two motifs in Roman mythology was broached by G. DUMÉZIL in an article on Celtic legends *Meretrices et virgines dans quelques légendes politiques de Rome et des peuples celtiques*, *Ogam* 6, 1954, p. 3-8. However, there DUMÉZIL does not go into an exploration of this subject in Roman literature, but discusses the position of Acca in his theory of the functions and relates some interesting Celtic parallels for the motifs.

²⁸ On Livy's sources for the third decade of *Ab Urbe Condita* see D. S. LEVENE, *Livy on the Hannibalic War*, Oxford, 2010, p. 82-163.

²⁹ This conclusion is supported by a number of works by T. P. Wiseman, see e.g. the aforementioned *Roman Drama* [n. 17] above. A good example that apparently belongs to Vestal related mythological tradition is the mythical adventure of L. Caecilius Metellus. He allegedly went blind in the fire of 241 BC, although it is historically known he was *pontifex maximus* at the time and held the office of dictator in 224BC (which would have been impossible for a blind man). In an interesting twist, the story specifies that he lost his vision while saving the sacred objects that were kept in the innermost temple of Vesta. The story thus falls into the same mythological cycle involving Vestals and fire. For a connection with the myth of Caeculus, see A. BRELICH, *Il mito nella storia di Cecilio Metello* in *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 15, 1939, p. 30-41 and M. MEULDER, *Le crible de la vestale Tuccia* in *Latomus* 65, 2006, p. 327-46.

III

In the previous section we discussed the application of the virgin-prostitute motif to an episode of Roman history. The distinctive roles played by unlikely characters led us to the conclusion that the story was a myth where a virgin and a prostitute had the same function as in the foundation narrative. Now we move to a more difficult case, which involves a series of aetiological myths that have spawned many different attempts at explanation. In order to bring out the centrality of aetiology in these myths, this section will offer an analysis of primary sources, before turning to possible interpretations and theories that the scanty primary evidence has attracted. By far the most important source on Acca Larentia and Gaia Taracia is Aulus Gellius who discusses them in a passage of book seven of his *Attic Nights*, the only instance where the pair (virgin and prostitute) are discussed together. As a detailed analysis will require us to continually revisit particular points of this account, the passage is quoted in full:

*Accae Larentiae et Gaiae Taraciae, sive illa Fufetia est, nomina in antiquis annalibus celebria sunt. Earum alterae post mortem, Taraciae autem vivae amplissimi honores a populo Romano habiti. Et Taraciam quidem virginem Vestae fuisse lex Horatia testis est, quae super ea ad populum lata. Qua lege ei plurimi honores fiunt, inter quos ius quoque testimonii dicitur tribuitur testabilisque una omnium feminarum ut sit datur. Id verbum est legis ipsius Horatiae; contrarium est in duodecim tabulis scriptum: 'Inprobus intestabilisque esto.' Praeterea si quadraginta annos nata sacerdotio abire ac nubere voluisset, ius ei potestasque exaugurandi atque nubendi facta est munificentiae et beneficii gratia, quod campum Tiberinum sive Martium populo condonasset.*³⁰

The names of Acca Larentia and Gaia Taracia (or if that is Fufetia), are famous in the ancient annals. The former received the most distinguished honours from the Roman people after her death, while Taracia was so honoured while still alive. That Taracia was a Vestal Virgin is attested in the Horatian law, which was proposed to the people concerning her. She received many honours through this law, among which she was given the right of testimony, and she was the only one of all women who was granted the right

³⁰ GELLIUS VII, 7. This and all other citations of GELLIUS are taken from P. K. MARSHALL'S edition of *Noctes Atticae*, Oxford, 1991 (Oxford Classical Text) while L. HOLFORD-STREVVENS' new critical edition is eagerly awaited.

to be *'testabilis'*.³¹ This word is used in the Horatian law itself while its opposite is recorded in the Twelve Tables: 'May he be dishonoured and *intestabilis*'. Besides, if she had wished to leave the priesthood and marry upon reaching forty years of age, she was given the right and ability to leave the priesthood and marry, in gratitude for her generosity and kindness, as she donated to the people the Campus Tiberinus, or else Campus Martius.

In order to elucidate various aspects of this aetiological myth, we will offer an analysis of sources parallel to Gellius by following the elements presented in his report. Gellius is here referring to Gaia Taracia, whose story is familiar in Roman tradition. Pliny the Elder also mentions *Gaia Fufetia sive Taracia* when referring to Roman women who were honoured with the erection of a statue. In explaining her merit for receiving this great honour, Pliny cites the cause specified in the Annals: *quod campum Tiberinum gratificata esset ea populo*.³² Furthermore, the story of Gaia Taracia's donation of land to the Roman people parallels Plutarch's alternative aetiology for the creation of the Tiber Island. The first aetiology of Plutarch's is well known from other sources. It relates how the field of Mars was consecrated after the expulsion of king Tarquin:³³ all the grain sheaves found on the field were collected and cast into the Tiber where they accumulated to form the Tiber Island.³⁴ Plutarch adds an alternative *aetion* that involves the mediation of a Vestal Virgin called Ταρκυνία who "donated another field adjacent to this" (i.e. to the field of Mars).³⁵

³¹ *testabilis*, the right to bear witness, explained below, p. 000.

³² PLINY'S (*Nat. Hist.* XXXIV, 25) condensed version of this story is a short note in his discussion on women who received the honour of a statue. This element fits historical reality as statues of Vestals were erected in the *atrium Vestae* (see MEKACHER, *vestalischen Jungfrauen* [n. 2], p. 121-49). That Gaia herself had a statue is a mythical element rather than a historical reality, and this can also be deduced from the context of PLINY'S report. While he specifies the time and place of erection (and sometimes) destruction of other statues he describes, the account of Gaia holds no such information. He merely writes *invenitur statua decreta* implying he had read about it in a source, and not seen the statue himself (see M. B. FLORY, *Livia and the History of Public Honorific Statues for Women in Rome*, in *TAPhA* 123, 1993, p. 288-9). PLINY'S phrase *ubi vellet* is a translation of Hellenistic ὅπου βούλεται and this additionally calls the reality of the statue into question. See M. SEHLMAYER, *Stadttrömische Ehrenstatuen der republikanischen Zeit*, Stuttgart, 1999, p. 82.

³³ The presence of Mars on the Campus Martius is no doubt of great antiquity. It is supported by the existence of an *Ara Martis* situated east of the Pantheon in the Via del Seminario. The altar should go back as far as the beginnings of the republic, if not the regal period. See E. M. STEINBY (ed.) *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, vol. I, Rome, 1993, s.v.

³⁴ This is the version also found in DION. HAL. (*Ant. Rom.* V, 13) and LIVY (II, 5). Along with many other objects, grain sheaves were in fact cast into the Tiber in historical times. Nero ordered that the entire grain stock of the city be cast into the river because it went bad (TAC., *Ann.* XV, 18).

³⁵ PLUTARCH'S description of the Vestal Virgin closely resembles Gellius' account: Ἦνιοι δὲ τοῦτο συμπεσεῖν ἱστοροῦσιν οὐχ ὅτε τὸ Ταρκυνίου καθιερώθη πεδίον, ἀλλὰ χρόνοις ὕστερον ἄλλο χωρίον ὁμορῶν ἐκεῖνῳ Ταρκυνίας ἀνεΐσης. Ἡ δὲ Ταρκυνία παρθένος ἦν ἱέρεια, μία τῶν Ἑστιάδων, ἔσχε δὲ τιμὰς ἀντι τοῦτου μεγάλας, ἐν αἷς ἦν καὶ τὸ μαρτυρίαν αὐτῆς δέχεσθαι μόνης γυναικῶν· τὸ δ' ἐξεῖναι γαμῆσθαι ψηφισαμένων οὐ προσεδέξατο (PLUT. *Publicola* VIII, 7-8).

Although these sources (Gellius, Pliny and Plutarch) are consistent in relating a story about a virgin and her donation of a field of land, they also contain uncertainties that imply the story might have had more than one version. The very name of the woman is cited variously as Gaia Taracia or Fufetia in both Gellius and Pliny while Plutarch stands out with Ταρκυνία. This could be perceived as evidence of a second version, but also as Plutarch's mistake influenced by the first *aetion* he gives where the field of Mars is described as initially land of King Tarquin (Ταρκυνίου).³⁶ As said, this version was more widely known and Plutarch's treatment of it is consequently more extensive while that of Ταρκυνία occupies only two whole sentences.³⁷ If this is indeed a mistake of Plutarch's, it was informed by his previous mention of king Tarquin and the similarity of Ταρκυνία to Taracia.³⁸

In any case, problems with different variants do not end there. The name of the field that the virgin donated is variously specified as either *campus Tiberinus* or *campus Martius*. Gellius' phrase *campum Tiberinum sive Martium* can be understood as the field of Tiberinus or, in other words, the field of Mars, and this is the interpretation usually accepted in modern scholarship.³⁹ However, Plutarch's passage adds clarity to the picture as he specifies the area donated by the Vestal as adjacent to the field of Mars, which could then correspond to *campus Tiberinus* as it is named in Pliny and Gellius.⁴⁰ The problem with this interpretation lies with the fact that no other ancient source refers to *campus Tiberinus*, but that is not reason enough to

³⁶ According to A. MOMIGLIANO, *Tre figure mitiche: Tanaquilla, Gaia Caecilia, Acca Larenzia*, in *Quarto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, Rome, 1969, p. 455-85 at p. 465. See also F. CASTAGNOLI, *Il Campo Marzio nell' Antichità* in *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* 8.1, 1946, p. 93-193 at p. 103.

³⁷ In his *Life of Publicola* the former occupies VIII, 1-6 while the latter takes only VIII, 7-8 [see note 35].

³⁸ Plutarch is known for casual inaccuracies in his treatment of Roman religion. See C. P. JONES, *Plutarch and Rome*, Oxford, 1971, p. 81-7. Plutarch uses Roman and Greek sources, adding his own, often idiosyncratic, interpretations, and there are obvious mistakes in his treatment of Roman festivals (for example the date of Larentalia, see n. 62 below), which might be a consequence of working from memory and by dictation, as Jones believes. As was the case with other Greek authors, Plutarch considered Roman religion as the religion of another Greek polis. See F. GRAF, *Plutarco e la religione Romana* in I. GALLO (ed.) *Plutarco e la Religione*, Naples, 1996, p. 269-283.

³⁹ S. B. PLATNER and T. ASHBY, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, London, 2002, p. 92, s.v. *Campus Martius*: "Gellius identifies campus Tiberinus and campus Martius"; L. RICHARDSON, *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, Baltimore, 1992, p. 68, s.v. *Campus Tiberinus*; MOMIGLIANO, *Tre figure* [n. 36], p. 465; T. P. WISEMAN in *LTUR*, p. 220, s.v. *Campus Martius*; R. M. OGILVIE, *Commentary* [n. 24] p. 245: "Gellius adds that she gifted the whole Campus Martius and not merely the Campus Tiberinus".

⁴⁰ For an attempted identification with *Campus Minor* (mentioned in CATULLUS LV, 3) see PLATNER and ASHBY *Topographical Dictionary* [prev. n.] p. 95 s.v. *Campus Tiberinus*; RICHARDSON, *Topographical Dictionary* [prev. n.], p. 67 s.v. *Campus Martius* connects it with *Prata Flaminia*. See also *LTUR*, vol. I, p. 224, s.v. *Campus Minor*.

simply take this as another name for the field of Mars. Thus, if *campus Tiberinus* is Plutarch's area adjacent to the field of Mars, then Gellius' words should be understood as 'campus Tiberinus or, according to others, Campus Martius'. The same applies to the two variants for the name of the Vestal, which should also be understood as 'Gaia Taracia, or according to others, Fufetia'.⁴¹ With whatever variations there are, the story invariably involves a virgin who donates land to the Roman state and is thus one in a series of aetiologies that strive to explain the topography of Rome. Many myths in Roman literature are so closely linked to place that Beard, North and Price have called Roman myths 'myths of place'.⁴² We shall return to this issue to examine it more closely.

A more straightforward aetiological aspect that can be recognized in Gellius' account of Gaia Taracia is the legal status of Vestal Virgins.⁴³ Modern scholarship has rightly called into question the existence of a *lex Horatia*, which is a historical fabrication to date the institution of Vestals' ancient rights.⁴⁴ This part of the aetiological myth seeks to explain the special set of rights and privileges that Vestals enjoyed in distinction to other women as well as other priestly colleges.⁴⁵ The most prominent of these was their testability, which involved the right of making a will as well as testifying in court.⁴⁶ A Vestal could thus manage her property as she wished,

⁴¹ This point is difficult to see in a modern translation (including our own above): J. C. ROLFE, *Attic Nights*, London, 1927 (LOEB): "Gaia Taracia, or Fufetia as she is sometimes called"; R. MARACHE, *Les Nuits Attiques*, Paris, 2002 (Les Belles Lettres): "Les noms d'Acca Larentia et de Gaia Taracia, à moins que cette dernière ne soit nommée Fufetia".

⁴² BEARD et al. *Religions of Rome*, Cambridge, 1998, vol I, p. 173.

⁴³ On the legal status of Vestals see F. GUIZZI, *Aspetti giuridici del sacerdozio romano: Il sacerdozio di Vesta*, Naples, 1968, p. 159-200 and J. F. GARDNER, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, Bloomington, 1991, p. 22-9. For a discussion on the relation between their legal and sexual status see BEARD, *Vestal Virgins* [n. 1, 1980] with BEARD, *Vestal Virginity* [n.1, 1995].

⁴⁴ The *Lex Valeria Horatia* of 509 BC is a falsified retrojection of the historical *lex Valeria* of 300 BC. The *Leges Valeriae Horatae* from 449 BC are also of dubious authenticity. See R. M. OGILVIE, *Commentary* [n. 24], p. 252, 497-503 and E. CANTARELLA, *I supplizi capitali in Grecia e a Roma*, Milano, 1991, p. 156.

⁴⁵ R. L. WILDFANG, *Vestal Virgins* [n. 1], p. 67 comes closest to our interpretation: "Quite possibly, though, the Vestal referred to by both Plutarch and Aulus Gellius was the first Vestal to receive a right that subsequently came to be standard practice for all Vestals". See also T. P. WISEMAN, in *LTUR* I, p. 226 and A. MOMIGLIANO, *Tre Figure*, [n. 36], p. 464.

⁴⁶ According to PLUT., *Popl.* VIII, 4 and GELL. VII, 7. Modern scholars have pointed out three cases where the sources seem to imply that an ordinary women's testimony was considered in court (CIC. *Ver.* I, 37, 94; VAL. MAX. VIII, 3; SUET. *Claud.* XL, 2). Even if ordinary women appeared in court, as R. L. WILDFANG, *Vestal Virgins*, [n. 1] p. 67-70 argued, they did so rarely and "as mute witnesses, whose testimony was read aloud by others". In other words, women were probably questioned beforehand, and the evidence gathered that way was later considered in open court.

unlike other women who were required to have a tutor.⁴⁷ They were thus considered to be *alieni iuris* (under the power of another) as the tutor administered their property for them. Vestals, however, were the only women *sui iuris*, who did not have a tutor, a right recorded as early as the Twelve Tables.⁴⁸ Moreover, Gaia's donation of land to the Roman people, an important element in the story, also strives to explain a peculiar fact in Vestals' legal status. Although the Vestal had the right of making a will, she could choose to relinquish it and die intestate. In this case, it is not her relatives who succeeded her, as was the usual case with Roman women, but the state itself.⁴⁹ This peculiar provision has stirred much debate in both ancient and modern scholarship, and it is thus no wonder that it occupies a prominent place in our aetiological myth.⁵⁰

The last element in the story involves the right of a Vestal to leave the order and marry after thirty years of service. This is also a special privilege in relation to other priestly colleges whose service could end only with the death of a priest or his wife (*flamen Dialis, rex sacrorum*) or if they were forced to leave the order because of a ritual flaw.⁵¹ The fact that Gaia relinquished this right also reflects historical reality, as Vestals rarely decided to leave the order.⁵²

The story of Gaia as related by Gellius is thus a double aetiology: it explains the rights of Vestals as well as city topography. The former aspect of the aetiology can be clearly interpreted in view of historical reality (the exceptional status of Vestals)⁵³ while the latter is more controversial. In order to clarify it, let us continue

⁴⁷ This holds true at least for the period of the Republic. On the laws introduced in the Empire and the position of women in Roman law, see J. F. GARDNER, *Women in Roman Law*, [n. 43], p. 14-22.

⁴⁸ Table V, 1; GAIUS I, 145: *loquimur autem exceptis virginibus Vestalibus, quas etiam veteres in honorem sacerdotii liberas esse voluerunt: itaque etiam lege XII tabularum cautum est.*

⁴⁹ GELLIUS I, 12, 18, following Labeo's commentary on the Twelve Tables says: *virgo Vestalis neque heres est cuiquam intestato nec intestatae quisquam, sed bona eius in publicum redigi aiunt* ("A Vestal Virgin is neither a successor to someone who dies intestate nor is anyone her successor if she dies intestate, but her property is said to be transferred to the state").

⁵⁰ The ancients were already puzzled by this provision: *Id quo iure fiat, quaeritur* (Labeo in GELLIUS I, 12, 18). For modern scholarship see the discussion in R. L. WILDFANG, *Vestal Virgins*, [n. 1] p. 64-7 who cogently argues that the key lies with the family status of Vestals. When entering the order they would leave the *potestas* of their family, thereby breaking agnatic relations by which succession was determined. Thus, as a Vestal no more had a family in the eyes of the law (*de iure*), this was the reason the state had to step in.

⁵¹ On Roman priests and their usual period of office see M. BEARD, *Priesthood in the Roman Republic*, in M. BEARD and J. NORTH (eds.) *Pagan Priests*, London, 1990, p. 19-48. For a recent overview of priestly functions see J. RÜPKE, *Fasti Sacerdotum*, Oxford, 2010, p. 7-17.

⁵² Even in the few cases when they left the order and married, bad luck was associated with such marriages (DION. HAL. *Ant. Rom.* II, 67, 2; PLUT. *Numa* X, 1-2).

⁵³ The explanation for the exceptional status of Vestals is offered in H. N. PARKER'S (*Why were the Vestals Virgins*, in *American Journal of Philology* 125, 2004, p. 563-601, at p. 563-74) anthropological

with the report of Gellius. The second story Gellius relates in the same passage concerns the prostitute Acca Larentia (7.7):⁵⁴

Sed Acca Larentia corpus in vulgus dabat pecuniamque emeruerat ex eo quaestu uberem. Ea testamento, ut in Antiatia historia scriptum est, Romulum regem, ut quidam autem alii tradiderunt, populum Romanum bonis suis heredem fecit. Ob id meritum a flamine Quirinali sacrificium ei publice fit et dies e nomine eius in fastos additus. Sed Sabinus Masurius in primo memorialium secutus quosdam historiae scriptores Accam Larentiam Romuli nutricem fuisse dicit. 'Ea' inquit 'mulier ex duodecim filiis maribus unum morte amisit. In illius locum Romulus Accae sese filium dedit seque et ceteros eius filios "fratres arvales" appellavit. Ex eo tempore collegium mansit fratrum arvalium numero duodecim, cuius sacerdotii insigne est spicea corona et albae infulae.'

But Acca Larentia lived by selling her body and earned a plentiful sum of money in that trade. In her will she made king Romulus the heir of her property, as is written in the history of Antias, or, as others relate it, the Roman people. Because of that favour she is offered public sacrifice by the *flamen Quirinalis* and a day was added to the calendar which is called after her. However, Masurius Sabinus, in the first book of his *Memoralia*, following some historians says that Acca Larentia was the nurse of Romulus. 'This woman', he says, 'lost one of her twelve sons by death. In his place Romulus gave himself to be the son of Acca, and called himself and her other sons "the Arval brethren"'. From that time the college of the Arval brethren has remained, twelve in number, whose priesthood bears these signs: a garland of wheat ears and white fillets.'

The story of Acca Larentia, the prostitute, is well known from many sources that cite it as an aetiology for the festival of the Larentalia. The multiple accounts show some degree of variation: the myth developed as it went through the ages. This requires an elaboration of its own which will take us to where we had left Gaia.

The earliest author to whom we can trace Acca is Cato the Elder, cited by Macrobius.⁵⁵ The details are lost but the kernel of Cato's account had already contained elements we find in other sources: a prostitute who gained great wealth through her trade left it to the Roman people and hence offerings are made to her every year at the Larentalia. However, the mainstream version appears more

discussion where she argues that the Vestals acted as the embodiment of the Roman state and thus needed to be freed from all male prerogatives that encumbered other women.

⁵⁴ On a discussion of the name Larentia in the sources see G. RADKE, *Acca Larentia und die fratres Arvales. Ein Stück römisch-sabinischer Frühgeschichte* in ANRW 1.2, 1972, p. 421-41, although his conclusions on Larentia as originally a 'Grünen' divinity of nature is dubious to say the least.

⁵⁵ *Sat.* I, 10, 16.

developed and can be found in Varro, Verrius Flaccus, Plutarch and Macrobius.⁵⁶ The caretaker (*aedituus*) of the temple of Hercules had too much time to spare so he challenged his god to a game of dice and lost. The stake was a rich feast and one of the famous prostitutes of the day, Acca Larentia, whom the caretaker locked into the temple for the night. Hercules slept with her and instructed her to marry the first man she saw in the forum that day. This man was Tarutius who happened to be very rich.⁵⁷ After his death Acca inherited his fortune, which she in turn left to the Roman people. The sources report she was either buried in the Velabrum or there simply vanished from the face of the earth.⁵⁸ Hence, according to this *aetion*, the *flamen Quirinalis* offers sacrifice (*parentatio*) to her Manes in the Velabrum on the Larentalia (23rd December).⁵⁹ It is difficult to determine the significance of this aetiology as we know so little about what it strives to explain, but D. Sabbatucci was right to identify a rich feast, prostitution, and topography amongst its main constituent parts.⁶⁰ Thus, while the ritual details of the *aetion* seem to elude us, here again we can detect the motif of the prostitute accompanied by the element of sustenance (i.e. the rich feast).

In section I, we discussed the same motif, applied to another Acca Larentia, who was also associated with the rites of Larentalia. This was the famous wife of Faustulus who adopted Romulus and Remus. Unsurprisingly, the two separate Accas were conflated with time, no doubt owing to their common trade. Thus, our sources are in doubt as to whether the Larentalia was dedicated to one or the other of the Accas, and most leave the question open.⁶¹ With others, however, the issue has led to some entertaining solutions. Licinius Macer, cited by Macrobius at the end of his

⁵⁶ VAR. *Rer. Div.* apud AUGUST. *Civ. Dei* VI, 7; VERRIUS in *Fastis Praenest. ad 23 Decem.*; PLUT., *Quaest. Rom.* XXXV and *Romul.* V; MACROBIUS I, 10, 12-15. OVID *Fasti* III, 55-8 and CICERO *ad Brut.* I, 15, 8 only touch on the subject of Larentia.

⁵⁷ Thus in VARRO and PLUTARCH (Ταρρούτιος). VERRIUS has Tarutilus while MACROBIUS has Carutius (places cited in the prev. n.).

⁵⁸ The former account is supported by MACROBIUS and PLUTARCH *Romul.* V while the latter is to be found in VARRO and PLUTARCH, *Quaest. Rom.* XXXV.

⁵⁹ Some authors date the event to the time of Romulus (such as GELLIUS here), and some to the time of Ancus Martius (MACROBIUS I, 10, 12-15). T. MOMMSEN'S conclusion (in *Römische Forschungen*, Berlin, 1864, vol. II, p. 1-22) that one of these was the true Acca whose myth then became transposed onto the false Acca is misleading. Although the names of the two figures were obviously confounded at some point, both Accas played their part in two originally separate myths.

⁶⁰ He points out that *aeditui* were usually slaves, which might reflect the offering to Acca and the *diis Manibus servilibus* (VAR. *L. L.* VI, 24). Not incidentally, Hercules was famous for his voracity and amorous adventures. See SABBATUCCI, *Acca Larentia* [n. 16], p. 41-76.

⁶¹ VERRIUS Flaccus seems to contradict himself on the issue if we are to believe LACTANTIUS (*Divin. instit.* I, 20.5) who cites Verrius on *Faulam Herculis scortum* as the deity of the Larentalia, although in *Fasti Praenestini* Verrius calls her Acca Larentia. The latter also corresponds to an entry in PAULUS (Lindsay p. 106).

passage on Acca, conflated the two by identifying them as the same person. The prostitute Acca left her trade to marry Faustulus, and she nursed the twins, but when Romulus became king and Faustulus died, she remarried a rich man named Carutius and left her wealth to Romulus, her adopted son.⁶² A remarkable life indeed!

Still, Acca's biography was to be additionally enriched, according to Gellius' citation from Masurius Sabinus, a first century jurist. The myth of Acca as the nurse of Romulus was then adapted to provide an aetiology for the newly reformed Arval Brethren and the old Acca received eleven more sons so that they (along with Romulus) would represent the twelve members of the Arval priesthood.⁶³ Such expansions and amplifications demonstrate that the myth of Acca the prostitute was fully operational up to imperial times, and pliable to new roles and adaptations.⁶⁴ More importantly, Masurius' myth of Acca is clearly an aetiology: an old mythical figure is being used to explain new religious circumstances.

Our sources also imply that the myth of Acca Larentia (the prostitute of Hercules) is an aetiology for the festival of the Larentalia whose significance is difficult to determine owing to a lack of ancient evidence.⁶⁵ However, the fact that

⁶² On the other hand, PLUTARCH (*Romul.* IV-V, *Quaest. Rom.* XXXIV-V) attempted to keep the two Accas separate, both the nurse of Romulus and the prostitute of Hercules. He ascribed the former to the Larentalia, and the latter to 'a festival in April'. He was referring either to the holiday of Venus Erycina or to the Floralia, both of which were celebrated in late April and associated with prostitutes (for references see H. H. SCULLARD, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic*, London, 1981, p. 106-11). This conflation led to the story of Acca being applied to Flora (e.g. LACTANTIUS I, 20) whose *ludi* were instituted in 241 or 238 BC, with regular yearly celebrations only from 173 BC. Thus, this *aetion* for the presence of prostitutes at the games (making Flora herself a prostitute) could not have been conceived before at least the late second century BC when the (older) story of Acca had already been well established, as we can see from Cato the Elder (below).

⁶³ See M. BEARD, *Acca Larentia Gains a Son: Myths and Priesthood at Rome* in M. M. MACKENZIE and C. ROUECHÉ (eds.), *Images of Authority: papers presented to Joyce Reynolds on the occasion of her seventieth birthday*, Cambridge, 1989, p. 41-62 and J. SCHEID, *Romulus et ses frères: le Collège des frères arvaies, modèle du culte public dans la Rome des empereurs*, Rome, 1990, p. 19. Masurius' version is a late adaptation in which he conflates Acca Larentia with the mysterious Mania, *mater Larum*. This is etymologically unsound owing to different vowel quantities (Lārentina vs. Lāres), but in terms of mythology Masurius could have based this connection not on some 'original nature' of Larentia (RADKE, *Acca Larentia* [n. 54], p. 440-1) but rather a similarity between Romulus and Remus and the Lares Praestites. This old hypothesis has been advocated at least since E. TABELING, *Mater Larum*, Frankfurt, 1932 and was recently revisited by F. COARELLI, *Palatium*, Rome, 2012, p. 174-85.

⁶⁴ This is another case demonstrating that mythography was an attractive activity for the jurists of early imperial times. For 'myths' that were used as *argumenta* in rhetorical schools see M. BEARD, *Looking (harder) for Roman myth: Dumézil, declamation and the problems of definition* in F. GRAF (ed.), *Mythos in mythenloser Gesellschaft: das Paradeigma Roms*, Stuttgart, 1993, p. 44-64.

⁶⁵ Ancient sources describe it as a *parentatio*, a ritual dedicated to the dead. The sources agree as to its date and time (23rd of December in the Velabrum), but disagree as to who were the priests in charge

this story and Masurius' myth of Acca are aetiologies might provide the key to unlocking at least some of the aspects of the former. Again, the earliest source to which we can trace back the myth of Acca Larentia is Cato the Elder. Unlike later authors who focus on the myth with Hercules and then simply claim that she left her wealth to the Roman people, Cato specified several plots of land: *agros Turacem Semurium Lintirium et Solinium*. We know nothing about the location of these fields, and only the existence of Semurius can be separately ascertained from an attestation in Cicero.⁶⁶ Just as in the case of *campus Tiberinus*, their location is a complete mystery most likely owing to the fact that mythical topography is at stake alongside the real, material geography.⁶⁷

For, if we compare the two aetiologies, concerning Gaia Taracia and Acca Larentia, a virgin and a prostitute, the elements that stand out the most are topography and land. In the earliest attested forms of the myths, both Gaia and Acca were showered with great honours because they had left their lands to the Roman people. Many smaller elements in the stories reflect this main concern: the mysterious *ager Turax*, Acca's lover Tarutius, Gaia Taracia (Tarquinia in Plutarch) all point to an aetiology. In the words of R. M. Ogilvie, they are 'attempts to explain a name'. Scholars have suggested Tarentum (or *Terentum*) as the most likely candidate.⁶⁸ This was the most westerly point of Campus Martius, which is the topographical subject of the myth of Gaia Taracia (*campum Tiberinum sive Martium*). In a sense, the position of the Tarentum at the very edge of the field of Mars and bordering on the river Tiber itself makes it possible for it to be characterized either as 'adjacent to the field of Mars' or belonging to the field itself. However, it is wrong to suppose that the *campus*

(See references in SCULLARD, *Festivals* [n. 62], p. 210-2). Thus, the ancients themselves were struggling to make sense of the Larentalia, which should partly account for the aetiologies.

⁶⁶ CICERO mentions that the *ager Semurius* was allotted by Antony to Caesar's military tribunes (*Phil.* VI, 14). Another field could be traced only if we accept the manuscript reading of MACROBIUS as *ager Solonius* (rather than *Solinius*) and then suppose this is the same as *ager Solonius* which CICERO glossed over in a letter (*Att.* II, 3, 3), but which is outside Rome, on the via Ostiensis. R. E. A. PALMER, *The Archaic Community of the Romans*, Cambridge, 1970, p. 141-7 speculated that the original names were Taracis, Semurius, Laterius and Solonius, connecting these to family and curial names.

⁶⁷ This might also account for the fact that we find no mention of these fields in the later versions of the myth. The mythical implications of these names probably came across as archaic and unintelligible to later sources and so human characters gained central focus.

⁶⁸ R. M. OGILVIE, *Commentary* [n. 24], p. 245; see also A. MOMIGLIANO, *Tre Figure* [n. 36], p. 467; R. E. A. PALMER, *Community* [n. 66], p. 143; F. CASTAGNOLI, *Campo Marzio* [n. 36], p. 103.

Tiberinus is the same as the Campus Martius, or the Tarentum.⁶⁹ A place name in an aetiological myth does not necessarily mean that the place exists in reality. Rather, what is at stake is mythical geography: the ‘Tiber field’ is a name that implies a connection between these myths and the river, a point to which we shall return (in section IV).

The myths of Gaia and Acca are connected by more than this mythical geography. In the Republic, it was unusual and legally unprecedented for a woman (without a tutor) to leave her property to anyone, even the state. As we have seen, this right was reserved for Vestal Virgins. Yet, after the death of her husband, in her will Acca Larentia leaves the wealth she had acquired by marriage to the state. The prostitute here enjoys the right of a Vestal Virgin, and her heir is the state, just as in the case of a Vestal who died intestate.⁷⁰ These connections had already been discovered by Mommsen, who concluded: “zwei aus einem und demselben Namen eines Gemeindegrundstücks *unabhängig* von einander entwickelte Besitztitel-Anekdoten”.⁷¹ The conclusion is valid in all but one word, the adverb “*unabhängig*” (independently). The two aetiologies involving a virgin and a prostitute are in fact connected from the very beginning. Mommsen believed that the myth of Gaia was a modified version of the myth of Acca, and the same opinion was maintained in most of the scholarship until recent times.⁷² Even if this were true, the question that immediately poses itself is: why would a myth of a prostitute be transposed onto a myth of a (Vestal) Virgin? The modern suggestion that a pure Vestal Virgin was invented to replace an ignominious prostitute will simply not do. For Acca Larentia was revered as the nurse and stepmother of the city founders throughout Roman history: in this honourable role she was never replaced by a virgin. Why then would the other Acca (who consorted with Hercules) need to be replaced by a virgin in a story that certainly bears far less social importance than the foundation myth? What is at stake is not replacement, but coexistence. It is hardly conceivable that the problem

⁶⁹ Following WEINSTOCK (*Ludi Tarentini und ludi saeculares* in *Glotta* 21, 1932, p. 40-52) CASTAGNOLI, *Campo Marzio* [n. 36], p. 99-112 simply equates *ager Turax* and Campus Tiberinus with Campus Martius. This misses the aetiological point of the myth.

⁷⁰ V. SCIALOIA, *Il testamento di Acca Larentia* in *Tipografia della Reale Accademia dei Lincei* 14, 1905, p. 141-160. For the legal position of prostitutes in general see T. A. J. MCGINN, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome*, Oxford, 2003.

⁷¹ T. MOMMSEN, *Römische Forschungen* [n. 59], vol. II, p. 7, n. 18 (italics added for emphasis). The thesis was revisited by BOEHM, *RE* s.v. *Gaia Taracia* vol. VII, I, 1910, cols. 480-3.

⁷² MOMIGLIANO, *Tre Figure* [n. 36], p. 464-6; S. WEINSTOCK, *Ludi Tarentini* [n. 69], p. 43-6; R. E. A. PALMER, *Community* [n. 66], p. 142; F. COARELLI, *Il Foro Boario*, Rome, 1988, p. 139.

of a place name incidentally spawned two similar *aetia*, which occupy opposite ends in the spectrum of female sexuality. In previous sections, we have already seen that the association between a virgin and a prostitute is not accidental, nor restricted to this particular case in Roman literature. In this section, we have seen that Acca the prostitute was awarded to Hercules along with a rich feast, and that the divine office of a Vestal prominently features in the myth of Gaia. These are by now familiar elements in the virgin-prostitute binary relationship which is a mythical pattern, and not a result of mere coincidence.

IV

In sections I and II we have discussed the virgin-prostitute binary motif and its application to the foundation narrative and the otherwise historical narrative of the Second Punic War. In section three, we recognised the same motif in the case of Acca Larentia and Gaia Taracia. The question naturally arises as to what was it applied to in this case. In the myth of Gaia, two strains can be identified, one revolving around the subject of Vestal privileges, and the other around the subject of land and topography. We were able to readily explain the former aspect, but in order to elucidate the latter, we must ascertain what relation this *aetion* bears to the rituals it is presumably meant to explain.

The *Fasti Antiates Maiores* is the only source that refers to a cult of Gaia. There, a note for the 8th of December (*Tiberino Gaiæ*) indicates that this was the date of the dedication of a temple that she shared with Tiberinus, the god of the river.⁷³ The calendar does not specify whether this was Gaia Taracia or some other Gaia, but it seems the myth of Taracia bears a connection to the Gaia of the *Fasti*.⁷⁴ For the temple of Tiberinus was situated on the *insula Tiberina* and the location of Gaia there would explain why Plutarch cites the case of Tarquinia as an aetiology for the Tiber Island, and why Gaia Taracia is said to have donated the *campus Tiberinus* in other versions. There is also a famous story, according to which another virgin, Ilia (or

⁷³ *Fasti Amiterni* is the only other source that refers to the temple. Archaeological remains have not been identified. See S. Maischberger in *LTUR*, s.v.

⁷⁴ Other than Gaia Taracia (or Fufetia), Roman mythology knew of Gaia Caecilia who became the central character of aetiologies on Roman marriage rites. She was identified with Tanaquil, but might have also had some connection to the goddess Gaia. See A. MOMIGLIANO, *Tre Figure* [n. 36], p. 455-70.

Rhea Silvia) drowned in the river or simply married the Tiber.⁷⁵ Thus, both Ilia and Gaia were associated with the Tiber, the former through her drowning (or marriage) in the river and the latter through her cult, and the land she donated.⁷⁶

If scholars have found it difficult to locate the *campus Tiberinus*, this is because the name was meant to suggest an aetiological connection to the cult of Gaia on the island, which she shared with Tiberinus.⁷⁷ Again, as nothing is known about the cult, we cannot go beyond that suggestion. *Campus Tiberinus sive Martius* in Gellius would then be an attempt to connect two strands in the aetiologies of the Tiber Island, one that associates it with the Tarquini (and grain sheaves from the Campus Martius) and the other that revolves around virgin characters (Ilia or Rhea Silvia and Gaia Taracia). If Campus Martius and *insula Tiberina* are so closely connected in these myths, the explanation that most readily springs to mind is that presented by the myths themselves. The grain sheaves from the Campus Martius were cast into the river and create the Tiber Island. This is most likely a reference to the natural phenomenon of alluviation where the sediment brought by the river from the north is perceived as accumulating in the place of the Island.⁷⁸ Thus, the virgin-prostitute motif here has an unexpected protagonist, which has so far received little attention, the Tiber.

It is in this light that the topographical elements in the myths about Gaia and Acca are related to the mysterious Tarentum. How Tarentum was perceived by the Romans is demonstrated by the etymology cited by Servius: *Tiberis...Tarentum dicitur eo quod ripas terat* ('Tiberis is called Tarentum because it wears away its shores'). Servius refers to the beginning of book eight of the *Aeneid* where the divine

⁷⁵ Ilia drowned in the Tiber, but she was also said to have married the river: see ENNIUS, *Annales* (ed. SKUTSCH), I.xxxix; OV., *Fasti* II, 597-8; STATIUS, *Silvae* II, 3, 99-100; HOR. *Carm.* I, 2, 18 with PORPHYRY *ad loc.* According to others, it was not the Tiber, but the river Anio that Ilia married: SERV. *ad Aen.* I, 273; OV., *Amores* III, 6, 45-82.

⁷⁶ There are many stories that associate Vestals with the Tiber, including the myth of Tuccia, who carried Tiber water to the Forum in a sieve without spilling a drop. See MEULDER, *Vestale Tuccia* [n. 29], p. 327-46 who observes the Indo-European element of interplay between fire and water in this and other cases. A *Latomus* referee also points out that the famous case of Claudia Quinta, who proved her chastity by hauling the ship that carried the statue of Magna Mater can also be cited as an example of chastity connected to the Tiber. The legendary Cloelia, who is said to have a statue on the Sacra Via, also escaped across the Tiber. However, neither of the two is said to be a Vestal Virgin. See FLORY, *History of Public Statues* [n. 32], p. 289-90.

⁷⁷ Of course, as MOMIGLIANO, *Tre Figure* [n. 36], p. 465-471 argued, *campus Tiberinus* was equally so an aetiology for the Tiber Island itself (although his speculation on **ager Tarax* is misleading).

⁷⁸ The alluvial formation of the Tiber Island has been confirmed by geological studies: see LTUR, s.v. and U. VENTRIGLIA, *La Geologia della città di Roma*, Rome, 1971, p. 56-7.

Tiber speaks to Aeneas, identifying himself as ‘the full river which you see tearing its shores and cutting fruitful fields’.⁷⁹ Servius adds that the river was also called *Rumon* for tearing its shores, as well as *Serra* (‘saw’).⁸⁰ The etymologising might be fanciful, but the notions it carries are relevant. Tarentum signified the powerful abrasion of the river. This is why one strain of aetiologies connects the Tiber Island with the grain sheaves from the Campus Martius, and the other strain exhibits curious cases of wordplay on the root ‘*Tar*’ (Tarutius, Taracia, Turax), referring to Tarentum. However, the bend of the Tiber at the north-western corner of Campus Martius was not the only place that was referred to as *tarentum*.

The ritual of Acca Larentia was performed in the Velabrum, which the ancients derived from *vela* (‘sails’), another telling etymology.⁸¹ Most sources only say that offerings were made there on the grave of Acca in a ritual of *parentatio* (a ritual offering to the dead).⁸² It is only Varro who preserved another small, but most precious piece of information on the circumstances of this ritual in *De Lingua Latina*. Unfortunately, the passage is so corrupt that various attempts have been made to make sense of Varro’s description of the Larentalia, which the manuscript reads as *qui atra dicitur diem tarentum accas tarentinas*.⁸³ It was Mommsen again who caused a great confusion when he did away with the word *tarentum* completely and put *Parent<ali>um* in its place, an approach followed by later scholars.⁸⁴ However, E. Vetter argued for a much more persuasive reading: *qui atra dicitur die<s ad locum*

⁷⁹ (*Aen.* VIII, 62-4): ...*ego sum pleno quem flumine cernis stringentem ripas et pingua culta secantem, caeruleus Thybris.*

⁸⁰ *STRINGENTEM RIPAS radentem, imminuentem: nam hoc est Tiberini fluminis proprium, adeo ut ab antiquis Rumon dictus sit, quasi ripas ruminans et exedens. in sacris etiam Serra dicebatur, unde ait nunc 'et pingua culta secantem'. in aliqua etiam urbis parte Tarentum dicitur eo quod ripas terat. alii 'stringentem' iuxta veterem morem dictum intellegunt: 'stringere' enim significare dicunt tactu modico praeterire, ut ipse ait "magno strinxit de corpore Turni"* (*SERV. Aen.* VIII, 63).

Other authors also refer to the Tiber’s power of erosion, and the river carrying silt along its course. See particularly OVID, *Fast.* I, 242, VI, 228; *Met.* XIV, 448; *Tr.* V, 1, 31 and HOR., *Carm.* I, 12, 13 and II, 3, 18 (see S. J. GREEN, *Ovid’s Fasti One: A Commentary*, Leiden, 2004, *ad loc.*).

⁸¹ For references see *LTUR* s.v. *Velabrum*. For archaeological research on the Velabrum see A. J. AMMERMAN, *Environmental Archaeology in the Velabrum, Rome: Interim Report in Journal of Roman Archaeology* 11, 1998, p. 213-23.

⁸² see n. 65 above.

⁸³ VAR. *L. L.* VI, 23. The critical edition of GOETZ and SCHOELL (eds.), *De Lingua Latina*, Leipzig, 1910 (Teubner), renders the passage as follows: *Larentinae, quem diem quidam in scribendo Larentalia appellant, ab Acca Larentia nominatus, cui sacerdotes nostri publice parentant[e] †sexto die, qui atra dicitur diem tarentum accas tarentinas.*

⁸⁴ For example, MOMMSEN was followed by R. G. KENT, *De Lingua Latina*, London, 1938 (LOEB): ...*Larentalia appellant, ab Acca Larentia nominatus, cui sacerdotes nostri publice parentant e sexto die, qui ab ea dicitur dies Parent<ali>um Accas Larentinas.*

dictu>m tarentum Accas Larentinas ('which is called the black day at the place called the tarentum of Acca Larentia').⁸⁵ There are difficulties with this reading, of course. We do not know what *atra dies* should mean (and how exactly that is related to the word *tarentum*) so that filling the gap with *ad locum dictum* seems a solution as good as any.⁸⁶ It is certain, however, that Varro's archaic phrase *tarentum Accas Larentinas* can refer to nothing but the grave of Acca, which he glossed as *sepulcrum Accae* in the very next sentence.⁸⁷ Vetter's reading has been ignored by classicists, but it caught the attention of no less of a philologist than C. Watkins who was able to provide the Indo-European etymology of *tarentum*. By a perfectly regular formation, *tarentum* is derived from the Indo-European root **terh₂* (pass over, cross, overcome), and it means 'a crossing place, ford'.⁸⁸ Its English cognate is the preposition 'through'. Watkins cites many instances of this root in various Indo-European languages to reconstruct a common formula: 'hero overcomes (**terh₂*) adversary', and its variant 'hero overcomes (**terh₂*) death'.⁸⁹ *Tarentum* is thus a place to cross the river, but can also bear connotations of crossing to the other world.

Both Acca and Gaia are related to a *tarentum*, Acca by the *parentatio* on her grave, and Gaia Taracia by her very name and the aetiologies that link the Campus Martius and the Tiber Island. As we saw, based on the names in the myth of Acca (*ager Turax*, Tarutius), scholars have postulated that the myths of Gaia and Acca were either conflated, or that one is a projection of the other. However, there is no need for such speculation if we know that Acca was also associated with a *tarentum*. The other Tarentum (on the Campus Martius) was the cult place of *ludi saeculares* and the underground altar of Dis, the god of the underworld.⁹⁰ Thus, both places were

⁸⁵ E. VETTER, *Zum Text von Varros Schrift über die lateinische Sprache*, in *Rheinisches Museum* 101, 1958, p. 257-85.

⁸⁶ CASTAGNOLI, *Campo Marzio* [n. 36] p. 102 also follows the critical edition while citing other scholars' readings. He is right to conclude: "benchè non si possa arrivare ad una lettura certa, sicura sembra tuttavia una relazione con *Tarentum*".

⁸⁷ *hoc sacrificium fit in Velabro, qu[i]a in novam viam exitur, ut aiunt quidam ad sepulcrum Accae, ut quod ibi; prope faciunt diis Manibus servilibus sacerdotes* (L. L. VI, 24). On topography of the area and a possible identification for this cult place see now F. COARELLI, *Palatium* [n. 63], p. 77-83.

⁸⁸ This interpretation makes sense in view of the fact that OVID (*Fast.* I, 501) mentions a shallow crossing at the very edge of Campus Martius, called *vada Tarenti*, see L. HASELBERGER s.v. in L. HASELBERGER, D. GILMAN ROMANO, D. BORBONUS (eds.), *Mapping Augustan Rome*, Portsmouth (R. I.), 2002.

⁸⁹ C. WATKINS, *Latin tarentum, the ludi Saeculares and Indo-European Eschatology* in *How to Kill a Dragon*, Oxford, 1995, p. 347-56.

⁹⁰ The *Ludi Saeculares* were also known as *Ludi Tarentini*. See WATKINS, *Latin tarentum* [prev. n.], who persuasively challenged the standard interpretation that the Tarentum cult was wholly introduced from Magna Graecia (and its homonymous city). While later Greek accretions are apparent in the very

associated with the cult of the dead. Tarentum was positioned in *extremo Martio Campo*, while Acca's *tarentum* was located in the Velabrum.⁹¹ It cannot be a coincidence that the Velabrum and Campus Martius were both flatlands and the first areas to be flooded by the Tiber (even in a minor flood).⁹² In the republican period, they were still occasionally submerged, with major floods occurring about every twenty, and minor floods every five years on average.⁹³ Both Acca's *tarentum* and the famous Tarentum on the Campus Martius harboured a cult of the dead and were associated with subterranean powers.⁹⁴ Given that both these areas were regularly flooded, a connection to chthonic deities seems hardly surprising. After all, rivers are universally connected to the underworld in numerous world mythologies, not just in the case of the Tiber.⁹⁵ The original meaning of *tarentum* as 'crossing place' can then be understood both literally and in the context of crossing over to the other world.⁹⁶ This is why our sources say that Acca was either buried or disappeared in the Velabrum, and why the Tarentum *in Campo Martio* is also associated with descent into the underworld.⁹⁷ We may conclude that the virgin-prostitute motif was in this case applied to the Tiber and the cult of the dead on its shores.⁹⁸

names of the divinities, Tarentum must have been associated with the cult of the dead before the introduction of Proserpina and Dis (most likely a calque of Pluto).

⁹¹ *extremo Mart[io Campo]* (FESTUS 440L). AMMERMAN'S (*Velabrum* [n. 81]) report on archaeological research in the Velabrum indicates that the natural ground level of the area in the regal period was certainly less than 10 meters above sea level, which made it extremely susceptible to flooding, given that even the normal height of the Tiber was 5-7m above sea level.

⁹² On the areas flooded by the Tiber, including the Velabrum and Campus Martius in particular see G. S. ALDRETE, *Floods of the Tiber in Ancient Rome*, Baltimore, 2006, p. 33-50. Notably, he considers the area around the Tarentum 'particularly flood-prone' (p. 178).

⁹³ According to ALDRETE, *Floods of the Tiber* [prev. n], p. 71-81, a persuasive analysis based on comparative evidence.

⁹⁴ At the end of his article on Acca, SABBATUCI, *Acca Larentia* [n. 16], p. 75) pointed to the Velabrum as the place of a prehistoric cemetery and an area flooded by the Tiber, and hinted that the figure and myth of Acca "e sembrano fornire l'interpretazione soggettiva alla obbiettiva realtà costituita dall'inondazione e dalla liberazione delle acque".

⁹⁵ This issue of water and death in Roman mythology is so vast and important that it would merit a separate study of its own. We may mention here as examples the story about the disappearance of Romulus in *palus Caprae* and the myths of *lacus Curtius* in the Roman Forum. For rituals that associate death and water see F. CALISTI, *Sacralità dell'acqua e "sacrifici di riscatto"* in H. DI GIUSEPPE e M. SERLORENZI (eds.), *I riti del costruire nelle acque violate*, Rome, 2008, p. 31-42.

⁹⁶ It was said that ferries used to traverse the Velabrum at the time of year when it was flooded (VAR. *L. L. V*, 44, PLUT. *Rom. V*, 5, and PROPER. *IV*, 9, 5). This would give yet another dimension to the 'crossing place' at the Velabrum.

⁹⁷ SENECA (*Apocol. XIII*, 1) is following the same tradition when he has Hermes drag Claudius *per campum Martium, et inter Tiberim et viam Rectam descendit ad inferos*. He is referring to the Tarentum, although the context is jocular; see S. J. HEYWORTH, *Roman topography and Latin diction in Papers of the British School at Rome* 79, 2011, p. 43-69 at p. 45-7.

⁹⁸ This aspect would also explain why Acca Larentia became associated with the *mater Larum*, an even more mysterious figure that was probably a product of learned speculation. U. PESTALOZZA, *Mater*

There are other interesting aspects that the two myths seem to share. Scholars have observed that Acca and Gaia were the only two women in Roman mythology perceived as not originally goddesses, but divinized mortals.⁹⁹ This has led É. Moskovszky to speculate on human sacrifice, a recurrent obsession in studies of Roman mythology, despite the fact that the ancient sources were continuously appalled by the thought of such rituals.¹⁰⁰ The portrayal of these women as mortals is more likely to be a result of mythical thought that shaped them according to the perceived roles of women in a patriarchal society.¹⁰¹ Although Acca earned a fortune through one of the most ignominious trades, she became a goddess just like Gaia, her chaste counterpart. The closeness of the motif to real life women, prostitutes and Vestal Virgins made the myth pliable and current up to imperial times. As Beard observed, even these later variations of the myth of Acca show a strange ambivalence, playing with both obscene and divine components.¹⁰² We believe that this all too human dimension in the women reflects their close connection to the reality they represented, as well as the general tendency in Roman mythology to present myths in the guise of historical rather than imaginary narratives.

Hence, although one cannot ignore the fact that Acca and Gaia were perceived as divinized mortals, P. Mingazzini's claim that they were historical women who were later divinized goes too far in its literal interpretation of myth.¹⁰³ Taking into account the striking connections that Gaia and Acca have to the Tiber, we can only speculate on how exactly river-related phenomena informed the construction of these myths. Flooding no doubt influenced the choice of cult places: Tarentum, Insula Tiberina and the Velabrum. It is extremely difficult to go beyond that. We can only

Larum e Acca Larentia in Religione Mediteranea, Milan, 1951, p. 323-67, and RADKE, *Acca Larentia* [n. 54] have made much of this connection. Even if one were to suppose the connection between the Lares and Larentia was older, it would be difficult to prove using the ancient evidence on the cult of the Lares. See G. DUMÉZIL, *Archaic Roman Religion*, Chicago, 1970, p. 341-2.

⁹⁹ P. MINGAZZINI, *Due pretese figure mitiche, Acca Larentia e Flora in Athenaeum* 25, 1947, p. 140-65; see also MOMIGLIANO, *Tre Figure* [n. 36], p. 455-6.

¹⁰⁰ É. MOSKOVSKY, *Larentia and the god: archaeological aspects of an ancient Roman legend in Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 25, 1973, p. 241-64 also detected the connection between the myth of Larentia and the river, but exaggerated in his attempts to date the myth to a great winter in the regal period, as well as in his speculations on Etruscan influence and human sacrifice.

¹⁰¹ A. STAPLES, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins*, London, 1998, p. 57-93 offers an interesting discussion of the ambivalent perception of women in Roman society and their sexual categorisation.

¹⁰² "The nexus of myths around the figure of Acca Larentia offered one of the most elevated, divine images of priestly origins, as well as one of the most human and most lowly" (M. BEARD, *Acca Larentia* [n. 63, 1989], p. 50.

¹⁰³ MINGAZZINI, *Acca Larentia* [n. 99].

note that captives, slaves, and criminals were cast into the Tiber and the Cloaca Maxima since the river was perceived to purify all impurities.¹⁰⁴ In times of flooding, the Tiber would take numerous victims, especially in the area closest to the riverbank, which was populated by marginalized groups, prostitutes among them.¹⁰⁵ Various ancient sources specify human corpses as floating amongst the detritus of the advancing river.¹⁰⁶ The floods often had a portentous significance for the Romans and were in many cases perceived as coming from the gods.¹⁰⁷ This religious dimension of flooding no doubt influenced the formation of the myths. However, one should restrain from trying to pin down an exact historical event that would then serve as a basis for the stories. Other Roman myths have suffered enough under the weight of such simplifications¹⁰⁸ and it never does justice to the complex nature of mythology.

Another connection between Acca and Gaia is the time of year in which we find them recorded in the calendar. The date of the dedication of the temple of Gaia and Tiberinus, as well as the Larentalia, falls in the month of December. Aldrete demonstrated that Tiber floods occurred most frequently in later winter and early spring, with peak levels in December and January.¹⁰⁹ The note in the *Fasti Antiaties* refers to the dedication of Tiberinus' and Gaia's temple on the 8th of December, and the Larentalia falls on the 23rd of the same month. The latter was an ancient festival, inscribed in large capitals in the same calendar. Our sources refer to priests offering sacrifice on Acca's grave in the Velabrum, which is an area within the Servian pomerium. Burials were prohibited within the pomerium, and Mingazzini argued the belief in the existence of a grave located in the Velabrum should in theory precede the expansion of the Palatine to the Servian pomerium.¹¹⁰ Thus, this location, extremely

¹⁰⁴ See D. G. KYLE, *Death and Spectacle in Ancient Rome*, London, 2001, p. 213-41. P. J. Jones (*Reading Rivers in Roman Literature and Culture*, Lanham (Maryland), 2005, p. 25-35) discusses the ambivalent characterisation of Italian rivers, which are often depicted as washing away death and pollution, but also as being polluted by corpses.

¹⁰⁵ ALDRETE, *Floods of the Tiber* [n. 92] p. 230; TAC. *Ann.* XIV, 15.

¹⁰⁶ For references see G. S. ALDRETE, *Floods of the Tiber* [n. 92], p. 118-23 who demonstrates in his analysis that the number of victims must have been much higher than we would usually suppose.

¹⁰⁷ ALDRETE, *Floods of the Tiber* [n. 92], p. 219-225.

¹⁰⁸ A good example would be that of WISEMAN, *Remus*, [n. 3], p. 89-128, who criticises all previous attempts to explain the duality of Romulus and Remus through some form of political reality only to end up himself pinning it down to the strife between patricians and plebeians in the 4th and early 3rd centuries BC.

¹⁰⁹ G. S. ALDRETE, *Floods of the Tiber* [n. 92], p. 66-71.

¹¹⁰ MINGAZZINI, *Acca Larenzia* [n. 99], p. 144. However, MINGAZZINI'S assumption is based on the supposition that the 'grave of Acca' is an ancient belief, but it is also possible that the 'grave of Acca' is a secondary addition, invented to explain the much older and mysterious term *tarentum*. For references to the calendars see RADKE, *Acca Larenzia* [n. 54], p. 440.

prone to Tiber flooding was probably the subject of this myth even before the construction of the Cloaca Maxima. In any case, the festival of the Larentalia is of considerable antiquity and its date is much more likely to be connected to the period of great winter rains and consequent Tiber flooding rather than to any other calendrical cause.¹¹¹

The contents of the myths also speak in favour of the festival's antiquity as they feature areas of key importance for the earliest city. The subject of the myth of Gaia, *Campus Tiberinus*, which misled so many scholars into identifying it with Campus Martius, is an aetiological name that seeks to explain not only the connection between Gaia and the Tiber (Island), but also underlies the importance of the river in the very formation of the city. The Tiber was the largest river in Central Italy and it formed the natural boundary between Etruria and Latium. The Tiber Island was then an excellent strategic location, and Rome itself was founded near its banks because it provided the easiest point to cross the great river.¹¹² Thus, both the river and its island played a crucial role in formation of a city that was become the centre of the Mediterranean. The importance of the island as a ford used to bridge the Tiber can hardly be overestimated. Equally so, it cannot be a coincidence that the very next ford upstream was at the Tarentum (*vada Tarenti*), and that our myths strive to connect these two points (*campus Martius sive Tiberinus*).

The myths were a result of careful observation of the Romans' everyday surroundings, and the role of the river in the life of the city. The two etymologies of Tarentum (the Indo-European 'crossing place' and Servius' 'the place of tearing') conveniently sum up its significance in the perception of early Rome. Simultaneously, the river's abrasion was not the only phenomenon to be observed. The Tiber floods were even more deserving of attention as they presented much more of a problem. On a regular basis, the river would submerge the Tarentum, Insula Tiberina, Forum Boarium and the Velabrum. This is why the latter place harboured a *tarentum* of its own which later became known as the burial place of Acca Larentia. We should not forget that the foundation myth was also set in the context of a flood, which proved to

¹¹¹ A. W. J. HOLLEMAN, *Larentia, Hercules and Mater Matuta* in *L'Antiquité Classique* 45, 1976, p. 197-207 argued that Larentia represented the "Spirit of Vegetation" at the turn of the New Year and hence the dating of the Larentalia.

¹¹² G. FORSYTHE, *A Critical history of Early Rome: From Prehistory to the First Punic War*, Berkeley, 2005, p. 80-2.

be instrumental in saving the basket with the twins.¹¹³ These elements represent very ancient concerns, and perhaps even preserve the memory of the Regal period, a time when the Velabrum was flooded every winter.¹¹⁴ Of course, the floods bring an abundance of water, but they also deposit sediment and hence the constant rise in the levels of the Velabrum. This neatly encapsulates the other side of flooding: alluviation.

The powerful natural phenomena were transposed to the sphere of myth. Alluviation was first represented by grain sheaves, but then the historicising tendency of Roman mythology involved human characters:¹¹⁵ a divine Vestal virgin drowned in the Tiber, while Gaia received worship on the Tiber Island. The binary mythological thinking then drew a prostitute into the flood myth in order to explain the *tarentum* in the Velabrum. She was associated with Hercules, who had two temples nearby, in the Forum Boarium where the famous *Ara Maxima* was also located, at least since the 6th century BC.¹¹⁶ Gaia Taracia and Acca Larentia are thus ancient figures that testify to the earliest phase of Roman mythmaking. The myths were formed on yearly observations of the city's immediate environment. The places that shaped the city of Rome shaped her mythology in turn. Just as their later aetiological developments patently reflected social and political circumstances (status of Vestals, reforming the Arvals, etc.), so the early myths of Gaia and Acca represented what the river meant for a city that was (to paraphrase Herodotus) the gift of the Tiber.¹¹⁷

To conclude, the virgin-prostitute relationship is a mythological motif that can be traced through at least three instances in Roman literature. We find it plays a role in the foundation myth, which must have influenced its appearance in the historical circumstances of the Second Punic war. Finally, recognising its presence in the complicated myths of Gaia Taracia and Acca Larentia enables us to offer a solution to

¹¹³ As our anonymous referee points out, there are other ancient myths (dated to the archaic period) that are closely associated to the Tiber. For two such cases see M. B. ROLLER, *Exemplarity in Roman Culture: The Cases of Horatius Cocles and Cloelia*, in *Classical Philology* 99.1, 2004, p. 1-56.

¹¹⁴ AMMERMAN, *Velabrum* [n. 81], p. 220-1.

¹¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, for the river Tiber itself was personified as king Tiberinus of Alba Longa (see LIVY I, 3, 8) and cast as a human king in some other mythological contexts (SERV. *Aen.* VIII, 72. 330).

¹¹⁶ COARELLI, *Foro Boario*, [n. 72], p. 60-106; 164-204; M.-A. MARCOS CASQUERO, *El exótico culto a Hércules en el Ara Máxima* in *Revista de Estudios Latinos* 2, 2002, p. 65-105.

¹¹⁷ To cite Le Gall's conclusion at the end of his treatment of the role of the Tiber in the formation of the city: "Sans le Tibre, Rome n'aurait pas existé". See J. LE GALL, *Le Tibre, fleuve de Rome dans l'Antiquité*, Paris, 1953, p. 36-43.

the so-far unexplained aspect of these myths: the topography related to the Tiber.¹¹⁸ We have restrained from explaining the presence of human characters through a singular instance of historical occurrence. However, if the virgin-prostitute motif reflects an ambivalence in the perception of female sexuality, it comes as no surprise that it was also applied to the river which facilitated life in the city, but also took away many lives in times of great flooding and could thus be perceived as equally ambiguous.

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¹¹⁸ Various theories might help explain why this motif appears in mythology in the first place. For instance, the ‘Madonna-whore complex’ is a noted phenomenon in psychoanalysis. However, we have chosen to restrict this discussion to documenting and explaining some of its occurrences in Roman mythology. Theoretical explanations will require separate studies, as will attempts to trace other instances of this motif in Roman literature (such as the case of Anna Perenna in Ovid’s *Fasti*).