

AEDES MINERVAE IN FORO BOARIO

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RESUMO: Neste artigo, o Autor fornece uma nova interpretação para o templo arcaico descoberto sob os santuários gêmeos de Fortuna e de Mater Matuta no Forum Boarium, em Roma. Analisando a interpretação de Colini – o escavador do local – que assume ser este um templo de Mater Matuta, ele demonstra como esta atribuição é fundamentada em evidências esparsas e indiretas. Mesmo assim, é aceita pelos especialistas como um verdadeiro dogma.

Comparando o grupo estatuario associado com a segunda fase do templo arcaico com um grupo de estatuas de terracota recentemente restaurado e proveniente do Santuário de Portonaccio, em Veio, o Autor chega a uma conclusão bastante diferente. Com efeito, ele demonstra que este templo arcaico do Forum Boarium é na verdade um “*Aedes Minervae*” e não um templo de Mater Matuta como é, em geral, aceito.

UNITERMOS: Arqueologia romana – Roma arcaica – Culto de Minerva.

In 1936 Giorgio Pasquale published his famous essay “La grande Roma dei Tarquini”, a title which has set the tone of the current view of Rome in the sixth century B.C. Two years later a discovery was made which seemed to reveal regal Rome in all its splendor. This consisted of the early levels (the seventh to fifth centuries) underlying the twin temples situated below (and beside) the Church of S. Omobono in the shadow of the Capitoline Hill along the road from the Roman Forum to the Tiber and to the cattle and produce markets located near the river bank, the Forum Boarium and Forum Holitorium (Colini, AAVV, Cristofani, Richardson, 35-37). The excavator, Antonio M. Colini, immediately identified the twin temples of the later phases of the site as the temples of Fortuna and Mater Matuta (another name for Aurora) known to

have stood in the Forum Boarium and sometimes mentioned together. (Both were thought to have been built by King Servius Tullius, Livy V, 19,6 – Mater Matuta and Dion. Hal. IV, 27,7 – Fortuna.) When an archaic temple was discovered beneath the twin shrines, its first phase datable before 550 B.C., this was assumed to be the temple of Mater Matuta. And the identification has become almost a matter of dogma. “As agreed by all scholars today”, writes Rudi Thomsen in his biography of King Servius Tullius (p. 269), “the twin temples cannot be anything but the sanctuaries of Fortuna and Mater Matuta in the Forum Boarium.”

There are two questions to be asked. First, what is the evidence behind Colini’s identification? Second, is there an alternative interpretation?

The most important texts are those of Livy (to which the evidence of Plutarch, *Life of Camillus*, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Ovid, in the *Fasti* is, in every case, of secondary importance, see Platner and Ashby, ad verb, Richardson, ad verb.).

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Writing of events in 396 B.C. during the siege of Veii Livy says (V, 19, 6) that Marcus Furius Camillus, "*Ludos magnos ex senatu consulto vovit Veiiis captis se facturum aedemque Matutae Matris refectam dedicaturam, iam ante ab rege Servio Tullio dedicatam;*" (Vowed that if Veii fell and the senate gave its approval he would hold large-scale games and would dedicate a remade temple of Mater Matuta which had in the past been dedicated by King Servius Tullius).

There was, clearly, an archaic temple of Mater Matuta, but Mater Matuta alone.

Now to the year 213 B.C., again Livy (XXIV, 47,15-16). "*Romae foedum incendium per duae noctes ac diem unum tenuit. Solo aequata omnia inter Salinas ac portam Carmentalem cum Aequimaelio Iugarioque vico et templis Fortunae et Matris Matutae. Et extra portam est vagatus ignis sacra profanaque multa absumpsit.*" (At Rome a fire raged for two nights and a day. Everything from the salt pans to the Gate of Carmenta was levelled to the ground together with the Vicus Aequimaelius and the Vicus Iugarius and the Temples of Fortuna and Mater Matuta. And outside the gate the fire cut a wide path burning many shrines and nonsacred buildings.)

The temples of Fortuna and Mater Matuta are mentioned together. But one should note that they are two of four points of reference cited, with the intention, it seems, of showing the extent of the destruction. (The temples were rebuilt the next year, Livy XXV, 7,6.)

Finally, 196 B.C. Livy (XXXIII, 27, 4-5) recounts the following concerning Lucius Stertinius after his return from Spain. "*L. Stertinius.....de manubiis duos fornices in foro boario ante Fortunae aedem et Matris Matutae unam in maximis circo fecit et his fornicibus signa aurata imposuit*" (L. Stertinius.....erected from his share of the booty two arches in the Forum Boarium, before the temple of Fortuna and the temple of Mater Matuta, and one in the Circus Maximus and he placed gilded statues on these arches.)

It is this last passage that provides the principal support for what has been called Colini's "happy intuition" (Castagnoli, 1973-74). But in order to accept his identification of the twin temples as those of Fortuna and Mater Matuta one must envisage two arches cheek by jowl outside

the area sacra in addition, of course, to the arch in the Circus Maximus (there is no trace of any arch inside the enclosure of the S. Omobono Sanctuary; the foundations of Imperial date between the temples interpreted by Coarelli (1989: 363-414) with appendix by G. Ioppolo (443-450 and fig. 112) as the foundations for an arch, can have nothing to do with Stertinius' arches which stood in front of the temples of Fortuna and Mater Matuta). Without doing violence to Livy's text we may equally well envisage two arches placed before two temples located in different parts of the Forum Boarium. Certainly in the latter case the effect of Stertinius' monuments would have been no less imposing and possibly more so. Furthermore, if the two temples were separate landmarks of the Forum Boarium area, Livy's mention of them, together with the Vicus Aequimaelius and the Vicus Iugarius, in connection with the fire of 213 B.C. makes sense as a means of defining the extent of the devastation. To sum up: the temples of Fortuna and Mater Matuta were not necessarily situated one beside the other, and there is no concrete evidence to identify either with the remains in the S. Omobono Sanctuary.

Having cleared the decks of dogma, let us look for an alternative identification for the archaic temple. The most promising guide for the identification of the archaic temple is to be found in the well-known statuary group connected with its second phase (Fig. 1). As restored and interpreted by Anna Sommella Mura (1977, 1981) the figures are Minerva and Hercules. I accept this as an architectural group, serving as a finial above one of the gables, despite the incomplete evidence for the reconstruction of the roof. There was a second group, presumably in the same position at the other end of the roof, but the fragments are too scant to permit identification of the subject (for the most recent discussion Colonna, 1992).

Learned interpretations of this group have been offered which take their point of departure from Mater Matuta, seeing her as a double of the Greek Leukothea and furthermore appearing here assimilated to Athene, while Hercules represents her son Palaemon/Melcart (Colonna in Neppi Modona and Prayon, Coarelli, 1988). But if the observations offered above are correct, there is no need to press the exegesis of this sculptural group as a manifestation of Mater Matuta. No less can we

be sure of Servius Tullius' connection with the building and embrace the parallels that have been suggested between Heracles and Athene in the service of the Peisistratids of Athens and Hercules and Minerva adorning a temple of the Roman King (Grottanelli, Ampolo). And I would set aside as

speculation the suggestion that the goddess is an armed Venus rather than Minerva (Cristofani, 1981). Rather, it is appropriate here to quote Ambros Pfiffig (p. 30) on the subject of Etruscan Minerva: "Die etruskische Göttin obgleich ikonographisch wie Pallas Athene dargestellt, ist



Fig.1. Terracotta sculptural group of Hercules and Minerva from the S. Omobono Sanctuary, Rome. Rome, Musei Capitolini – Antiquarium Comunale. Photo courtesy Musei Capitolini.

keine jungfräuliche Göttin sondern in einem eigentümlichen und eigenständigen Mythos anscheinend Gattin des Hercle und Mutter des Maris, wobei auch Hercle zumeist in griechischer Typologie dargestellt wird" (The Etruscan goddess, although represented iconographically as

Pallas Athene, is no maiden goddess but a goddess revealed in her own independent myth as the wife of Hercle and the mother of Maris, whereby Hercle is generally shown in the Greek fashion).

The publication of a terracotta statue group from the Portonaccio Sanctuary at Veii, found



Fig. 2. Terracotta sculpture of Minerva from group of Hercules and Minerva, Portonaccio Sanctuary, Veii. Rome, Villa Giulia Museum. Photo courtesy Prof. Giovanni Colonna.

together with the famous terracotta sculptures of the temple in 1916 but only recently restored, provides further light on Etruscan Minerva and, indirectly, on the archaic temple of the S. Omobono Sanctuary (Fig. 2-3). The group in question is once again Minerva and Hercules (Colonna, 1987a;

there are a total of four votive statues of Minerva and two of Hercules from the sanctuary). It seems that this sculpture was not intended as an architectural element but stood in or before a small *sacellum* at the opposite side of the Portonaccio Sanctuary from the main temple. In this *sacellum* there were



Fig. 3. Terracotta sculpture of Hercules from group of Hercules and Minerva, Portonaccio Sanctuary, Veii. Rome, Villa Giulia Museum. Photo courtesy Prof. Giovanni Colonna.

found four graffiti on fragments of sixth century pottery with dedications to Minerva (Colonna, 1987b). The sculptural group of Minerva and Hercules, therefore, has the appropriate iconography for a dedication at a shrine of the goddess (Colonna 1987b, Cioncoloni Ferruzzi and Marchiori, Edlund). A cult of Minerva in her aspect as the protectress of industry, and especially weaving, is also consistent with finds of objects related to weaving (loom weights, spindle whorls) and to women (especially the numerous women's fibulae with thickened bows and added elements in bone and amber) found in the excavation (AAVV, 1989:55-56).

At Rome Minerva was one of the divinities of the Capitoline triad, and the goddess was at home in the Sabine region and in Latium, particularly at Lavinium, the city from which Rome drew so much of her lore and religion (Radke, Castagnoli, 1972, Finelli, for the cult places at Rome Richardson ad verb.) The archaic cult place at S. Omobono, located beside the Tiber, has a character which sets it apart from the other Roman sanctuaries of its day. The votive deposits of these other archaic cult places in Rome have few imported goods and in general maintain a distinctively Latin character. The rich archaic material from the S. Omobono sanctuary, on the other hand, has been described as

typical of a port sanctuary (Bartoloni). Etruscans felt at home here, as shown not only by bucchero pottery but also by the ivory lion bearing a graffito from one Aras Silketena (Cristofani, n° 1.6.). During the sixth century, in the time of the Tarquins, there were certainly Etruscans resident in Rome. According to Tacitus (Ann. IV, 56) the Vicus Tuscus, which joined the Forum with the Tiber port a stone's throw from the S. Omobono Sanctuary, derived its name from the followers of Tarquin the First who settled there. On the archaic temple of the S. Omobono Sanctuary (or possibly standing as an isolated sculptural dedication) a group of Minerva and Hercules was prominently displayed. Having set aside Colini's "happy intuition", one may suggest that the evidence now at hand, and especially the similar statuary group from the Minerva shrine at Veii, points to the identification of the archaic temple in the Forum Boarium as an otherwise unrecorded *Aedes Minervae*. I believe the evidence from Veii makes this a stronger possibility than that of identifying the temple as a shrine of Hercules (Sbordone) or of seeing the male figure of the sculptural group as Semo Sancus Dius Fidius in the company of a "dea uranica, ctonia e forse anche marina" (a Uranian, chthonian and possibly marine goddess, Levi, 1989, 1991).

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ABSTRACT: In this article the Autor advances a new interpretation for the archaic temple discovered beneath the twin shrines of Fortuna and Mater Matuta in the Forum Boarium. Analysing Colini's (the excavator's) interpretation by which this temple is assumed to be a temple of Mater Matuta, he shows us how this assumption is based in scanty and indirect evidence. Even so, it is accepted by specialists as a real dogma.

Comparing the statuary group connected with the second phase of the archaic temple with a recently restored terracotta statue group from Portonaccio Sanctuary at Veii, the Autor arrives at a very different conclusion. As a matter of fact, he is able to demonstrate that this archaic temple in Forum Boarium is in reality an "*Aedes Minervae*" and not Mater Matuta's temple as is usually assumed.

UNITERMS: Roman Archaeology – Archaic Rome – Minerva's cult.

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