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The Topography of Fides in Propertius 1.16

I begin by examining the claims that in this paraclausithyron (1.16) the anonymous lover treats the closed door as if it were the gates of a temple. I argue that not only is the apparently empty house figured as a temple, but that the absent deity is in fact *Fides*, goddess of political loyalty appropriated here to represent sexual fidelity. I then argue that readers would have recognized the monologue as situated before the Temple of Fides on the Capitoline. I close with considerations of how placing the poem in a familiar part of Rome transforms it from a generic pleasantry into a bold claim for the importance of public over private in Augustan Rome.

Propertius 1.16 stands out for its "baldly impersonal" character (Copley, *Exclusus Amator*). Although possessing many charms, the elegy--with its anonymous lover, unnamed mistress, and proud door-narrator--is usually stigmatized as a generic exercise. The only real controversy of scholarship is the precise import of lines 42-44. I rehearse the arguments previously advanced and cite additional evidence to show that the lover here pays obeisance to the door as one does in Rome to an object of veneration: he falls to his knees and kisses the steps, turns himself in devotion, and offers gifts. The ultimate clue to the lover's actions lies in this final act: offering gifts "with covered hands" (*occultis ... manibus*). Boyancé ("Main de Fides"), following Dieterich, has shown that in the early Empire the use of covered hands was restricted primarily to ceremonies in honor of Fides.

If the lover in 1.16 is in fact honoring Fides, he should be standing before her temple. The most likely candidate would be the well-attested shrine atop Rome's political center, the Capitoline hill (Reusser, *LTUR* ad loc.). This identification enhances other elements of the elegy: the triumphs of the opening line recall the processions that would have passed by this shrine before stopping at the temple of Jupiter; the reference to the door as *perfida* (43) becomes a pun; a lament on perverse *Fides* also fits well the immediate context of the Monobiblos, where the preceding poem has for its dominant theme erotic infidelity (1.15.2, 34) and laments that the gods have been forgotten (1.15.26; see too 1.16.10). Fides has become *perfida*; the doors of her home no longer receives *triumphatores*, noble women, or even the gods themselves. Since the state no longer consorts with *Fides*, Propertius vainly seeks it for his lover.