

TARPEIA PUDICITIA IN PROPERTIUS 1.16.2 –  
AND THE EARLY ROMAN HISTORIANS<sup>1</sup>

*ianua Tarpeiae nota pudicitiae* (Propertius 1.16.2)

On reaching this line in his commentary upon Book 1 of Propertius P. J. Enk declared: “hic versus inter difficillimos Propertii est”.<sup>2</sup> Most recently S. J. Heyworth wrote of it: “*ianua Tarpeiae nota pudicitiae* (‘famous for the virtue of Tarpeia’) is manifest nonsense”. Heyworth then went on to offer his own preferred solution to the line’s long-standing problems, viz. to accept in place of O’s *Tarpeiae* the emendation *Patriciae* proposed by Pasoli (following Phillimore), and to read (with Goold) A’s *uota* rather than N’s *nota*.<sup>3</sup> The line thus becomes:

*ianua Patriciae vota Pudicitiae*

and so it stands in Heyworth’s Oxford Classical Text.

Many scholars before Heyworth had found N’s version of Propertius 1.16.2 intolerable, particularly in view of Propertius’ own extended treatment of Tarpeia’s *impudicitia* in Elegy 4.4, and had opted for these or for alternative emendations. Other scholars, including notably Paolo Fedeli,<sup>4</sup> had defended the received text on various grounds. They argued either that the line is ironic; or that it refers to a time before Tarpeia fell victim to the charms of the Sabine king Titus Tatius and betrayed the Capitol to him; or that it evokes more generally Rome’s great antiquity or the temple of Juno on the Capitoline or traditional Roman morality; or that the

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1) I am very grateful to Mr Ian DuQuesnay and Prof. John Marincola for their advice on this paper, and to the editor and anonymous referees of Rheinisches Museum for further suggestions.

2) P. J. Enk, *Sex. Propertii elegiarum liber I* (Monobiblos), 2 vols, Leiden 1946, II 136.

3) S. J. Heyworth, *Cynthia: a companion to the text of Propertius*, Oxford 2007, 70–71.

4) P. Fedeli, *Sesto Propertio: il primo libro delle elegie*, Florence 1980 (Accademia Toscana di Scienze e Lettere «La Colombaria»: Studi 53), 368–369.

Tarpeia in question is the Vestal Tarpeia inaugurated by Numa (below) – and so on and so forth.<sup>5</sup> These approaches can be found conveniently summarised and referenced by Fedeli (cited n. 4) 368–369 and Heyworth (cited n. 3) 70–71.

None of the defences of the textual tradition proposed has, however, proved widely convincing; nor have any of the emendations offered. So it might be time for a reconsideration of the problem. Common both to the textual defenders and the textual emenders is the assumption that the story of Tarpeia, as transmitted from antiquity, is in essence unitary and unequivocal:<sup>6</sup> Tarpeia, daughter of Sp. Tarpeius, commander of the Capitol garrison, fell in love with Tatius and / or was greedy for the gold bracelets worn by the Sabine warriors;<sup>7</sup> she therefore offered to betray the Capitoline Hill to the Sabines if they would give her “what they had on their left arms”, and she did so, but was ‘rewarded’ by being crushed to death by the Sabines’ shields.

It is true that this story, which belongs to a narrative-type popular among Hellenistic Greek poets and logographers,<sup>8</sup> is the one most frequently told about Tarpeia. But there are cracks in the ancient unanimity which seem to have escaped Propertian scholarship upon 1.16.2. Eight lines about Tarpeia by the Greek

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5) Some of these approaches are comforted by the fact that, of the numerous uses of the adjective *Tarpeius* in Roman literature (especially poetry), only a very few refer to Tarpeia: most have to do with the *Mons Capitolinus* having originally been ‘*Mons Tarpeius*’.

6) The legend and its variants are well discussed and documented by A. Baudou, *Tarpeia, traîtresse indo-européenne, héroïne pisonienne*, Cahiers des études anciennes, 1995, 81–89. The single exception to the scholarly consensus among Propertians which regards the Tarpeia legend as unitary is the speculative remark of D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Propertiana*, Cambridge 1956, 46: “But some otherwise unknown local tradition may well lie behind” (sic). As will appear below, this is indeed the case, although the “tradition” is hardly to be described as “local”.

7) On the debate over which of these motifs (greed or love) was the original cf. Baudou (as n. 6) 85 and n. 27.

8) For the folk-tale aspect and the Hellenistic Greek antecedents cf. F. Corsaro, *Sulla ridefinizione properziana del mito di Tarpeia* (Properzio IV, 4), *Siculorum Gymnasium* 45, 1992, 43–65, at 44–47; Baudou (as n. 6) 83–84. For the latter cf. also R. M. Ogilvie, *A commentary on Livy, Books 1–5*, Oxford <sup>2</sup>1969, 74, and esp. G. Forsythe, *The Historian L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi and the Roman Annalistic Tradition*, New York / London 1994, 151–153; J. L. Lightfoot, *Parthenius of Nicaea: The Poetical Fragments and the Ἐρωτικά Παθήματα*, Oxford 1999, 316–317; 346–349; 496–507 – with further material at 324–327, 418–428.

poet Simylos (of unknown date) are preserved by Plutarch.<sup>9</sup> Simylos related that Tarpeia betrayed Rome not to the Sabines but later, and for similar reasons, to the Gauls.<sup>10</sup> This variant is not useful for the text of Propertius 1.16.2 since in it Tarpeia continues to be *impudica* and a traitor. But it shows that there was nothing sacred about the ‘orthodox’ version of the Tarpeia legend that protected it from ancient tampering. More dramatic proof of its variability comes in another version recorded by Plutarch, who attributes it to “others writing about Tarpeia”, one of whom he identifies as ‘Antigonos’ – a Greek author, probably of the third century BC, who wrote a history of Italy.<sup>11</sup> In this version Tarpeia is not only innocent of treachery but is a model of filial virtue: she is the daughter of Tatius who has been forced into concubinage with Romulus (!), and she betrays Rome to her father. Cf. Plutarch, Romulus 17.5: τῶν δ’ ἄλλα περὶ Ταρπηΐας λεγόντων ἀπίθανοι μὲν εἰσιν οἱ Τατίου θυγατέρα τοῦ ἡγεμόνος τῶν Σαβίνων οὖσαν αὐτήν, Ῥωμύλῳ δὲ βία συνοικοῦσαν, ἱστοροῦντες ταῦτα ποιῆσαι καὶ παθεῖν ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός· ὧν καὶ Ἀντίγονός ἐστι.

As the live-in companion of Romulus the Tarpeia of Antigonos and his fellow writers was, of course, not a *virgo pudica*. But she was not a traitor, nor was she deserving of censure. An even more virtuous Tarpeia was portrayed in the *Annales* of the second-century BC Roman historian L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi Censorius.<sup>12</sup> Piso’s version is preserved in the *Antiquitates Romanae* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, one of those learned Hellenes who flocked to Rome in the reign of Augustus to make their fortunes

9) Plut. Romul. 17.6, cf. Supplementum Hellenisticum No. 724; F. E. Brenk, Tarpeia among the Celts: watery romance, from Simylos to Propertius, *Studies in Latin literature and Roman history* 1, 1979, 166–174.

10) Cf. Plut. Romul. 17.5, who denounces Simylos’ version. It may have been a rationalising variant: Gauls were known to wear gold torques, whereas Sabines were not. Fabius Pictor and Cincius Alimentus had been aware of this objection to their version and had tried to cope with it: χρυσοφόροι γὰρ ἦσαν οἱ Σαβίνοι τότε καὶ Τυρρηνῶν οὐχ ἦττον ἀβροδίατοι (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.38.3). Their attempt was not as feeble as might appear since the Sabines, although often portrayed as frugal, did have a certain reputation for wealth: cf. Forsythe (as n. 8) 153 and n. 116.

11) Cf. Jacoby, FGrHist III C. 892–893 no. 816, 893. F2.

12) Cf. H. Peter, *Historicorum Romanorum reliquiae*, Stuttgart 1967 (repr. with addenda), I clxxxi–cxcii, 120–138; M. Chassignet, *L’Annalistique romaine II. L’Annalistique moyenne* (fragments), Paris 1999, xix–xxviii, 18–39; H. Beck / U. Walter, *Die frühen römischen Historiker I. Von Fabius Pictor bis Cn. Gellius*, Darmstadt 2001 (Texte zur Forschung 76), 282–329.

by flattering the pretensions of their Roman masters. Dionysius presents Piso's version in association with, and interwoven with, those of the Roman historians Fabius Pictor and Cincius Alimentus, who wrote in Greek, and who told the standard story about Tarpeia. Dionysius' intention was to permit comparison of the different accounts and to underpin his own preference for that of Piso. But his procedure makes for a certain complexity in his text, from which Piso's version (Piso fr. 5 Peter = fr. 7 Chassignet = fr. 11 Forsythe, cf. Calpurnius Piso FRH 7. F7 Beck/Walter) must be unravelled. Piso's tale ingeniously rationalises away every element of the orthodox account, but it has gone unmentioned by Propertian scholarship on 1.16.2. So it is worth setting it out here in some detail to reveal the plausibility with which its author invested it.

In essence Piso's story was that Tarpeia was innocent both of greed and of love for Tatius, and she had no design to betray Rome to the Sabines. Instead Tarpeia was a loyal Roman double-agent who wanted to save Rome. She was "inspired by the desire of performing a noble deed, namely, to deprive the enemy of their defensive arms and thus deliver them up to her fellow citizens".<sup>13</sup> As in the accounts of Fabius and Cincius, Piso recounted how Tarpeia sent her maid out by a postern-gate to make an appointment for her to meet with Tatius; at the meeting Tarpeia offered to admit the Sabines to the Capitol, on condition that they would give her "the things which all the Sabines had on their left arms";<sup>14</sup> this was agreed. Piso's story then once more diverged from those of Fabius and Cincius: Piso related that Tarpeia sent a messenger to Romulus to alert him to her agreement with Tatius, to tell him that she intended to demand the Sabines' shields as the price of her sup-

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13) ὡς δὲ Πείσων Λεύκιος ὁ τιμητικὸς ἱστορεῖ, καλοῦ πράγματος ἐπιθυμία (sc. Ταρπεῖαν εἰσέρχεται) γυμνοῦς τῶν σκεπαστηρίων ὄπλων παραδοῦναι τοῖς πολίταις τοὺς πολεμίους (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.38.3). Translations of Dionysius are those of the Loeb Classical Text of E. Cary (Cambridge, Mass. / London 1937).

14) πέμψασα δ' οὖν τῶν थेραπεινίδων τινὰ διὰ πυλίδος, ἣν οὐδεὶς ἔμαθεν ἀνοιγομένην, ἤξιον τὸν βασιλέα τῶν Σαβίνων ἔλθειν αὐτῇ δίχα τῶν ἄλλων εἰς λόγους, ὡς ἐκεῖνῃ διαλεξομένη περὶ πράγματος ἀναγκάσιου καὶ μεγάλου, δεξαμένου δὲ τοῦ Τατίου τὸν λόγον κατ' ἐλπίδα προδοσίας καὶ συνελθόντος εἰς τὸν ἀποδειχθέντα τόπον, προελθούσα εἰς ἐφικτὸν ἢ παρθένος ἐξεληλυθέναι μὲν νυκτὸς ἐκ τοῦ φρουρίου τὸν πατέρα αὐτῆς ἔφη χρεῖας τινὸς ἕνεκα, τὰς δὲ κλεῖς αὐτῇ φυλάττειν τῶν πυλῶν καὶ παραδώσειν αὐτοῖς τὸ ἔρμα νυκτὸς ἀφικομένοις μισθὸν τῆς προδοσίας λαβοῦσα τὰ φορήματα τῶν Σαβίνων, ἃ περὶ τοῖς εὐωνύμοις εἶχον ἅπαντες βραχίσιν (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.38.4).

posed treachery, and to ask him to send troops to the Capitol to seize the undefended Sabines. Her messenger, however, defected to Tatius and revealed Tarpeia's plan to him.<sup>15</sup>

In his combinatory narrative Dionysius next briefly interjects part of the accounts of Fabius and Cincius, who told how Tarpeia kept her treacherous bargain, handed over the citadel to the Sabines, and demanded her reward (i. e. their gold bracelets) as agreed.

But Dionysius then reiterates that, according to Piso, Tarpeia was trying to disarm the Sabines, not to get their gold bracelets. The Sabines offered her their gold, but Tarpeia demanded their shields.<sup>16</sup> Tatius, perceiving a way to evade his bargain, threw his shield at Tarpeia and told his men to do likewise, so that she was killed. In Fabius' version, so Dionysius adds (he says nothing here about Cincius), Tatius' evasion was in the other direction: when Tarpeia asked for the gold, the Sabines were angered by the amount and killed her with their shields. Summing up the episode Dionysius declares his personal preference for Piso's version, arguing that the honours paid in the past and still paid by the Romans to Tarpeia (burial on the most sacred spot in the city and annual libations, as described by Piso)<sup>17</sup> are proof that she was no traitor to Rome. If she had betrayed Rome, Tarpeia would not have received them; rather her corpse would have been cast out of the city.<sup>18</sup>

15) Πείσων γὰρ ὁ τιμητικός, οὐ καὶ πρότερον ἐμνήσθη, ἄγγελόν φησιν ὑπὸ τῆς Ταρπείας ἀποσταλῆναι νύκτωρ ἐκ τοῦ χωρίου δηλώσοντα τῷ Ῥωμύλῳ τὰς γενομένας τῇ κόρῃ πρὸς τοὺς Σαβίνους ὁμολογίας, ὅτι μέλλοι τὰ σκεπαστήρια παρ' αὐτῶν αἰτεῖν ὅπλα διὰ τῆς κοινότητος τῶν ὁμολογιῶν παρακρουσαμένη, δύναμιν τε ἀξιόσποντα πέμπειν ἐπὶ τὸ φρούριον ἐτέραν νυκτός, ὡς αὐτῷ στρατηλάτῃ παραληψόμενον τοὺς πολεμίους γυμνοὺς τῶν ὀπλῶν· τὸν δὲ ἄγγελον αὐτομολήσαντα πρὸς τὸν ἡγεμόνα τῶν Σαβίνων κατήγορον γενέσθαι τῶν τῆς Ταρπείας βουλευμάτων (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.39.1).

16) Ἐπειτα πάλιν ὁ μὲν Πείσων φησὶ τῶν Σαβίνων τὸν χρυσὸν ἐτοίμων ὄντων δίδονα τῇ κόρῃ τὸν περὶ τοῖς ἀριστεροῖς βραχίονσι τὴν Τάρπειαν οὐ τὸν κόσμον ἀλλὰ τοὺς θυρεοὺς παρ' αὐτῶν αἰτεῖν (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.40.1).

17) For the other evidence for her tomb cf. Baudou (as n. 6) 83 n. 14.

18) ἔοικε δὲ τὰ μετὰ ταῦτα γενόμενα τὴν Πείσωνος ἀληθεστέραν ποιεῖν ἀπόκρισιν. τάφου τε γὰρ ἐνθα ἔπεσεν ἤξιστα τὸν ἱερότατον τῆς πόλεως κατέχουσα λόφον, καὶ χοῆς αὐτῇ Ῥωμαῖοι καθ' ἕκαστον ἐνιαυτὸν ἐπιτελοῦσι (λέγω δὲ ἃ Πείσων γράφει), ἃν οὐδενὸς εἰκόσ αὐτὴν, εἰ προδιδοῦσα τὴν πατρίδα τοῖς πολεμίοις ἀπέθανεν, οὔτε παρὰ τῶν προδοθέντων οὔτε παρὰ τῶν ἀποκτεινάντων τυχεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰ τὴ λείψανον αὐτῆς ἦν τοῦ σώματος ἀνασκαφὴν ἔξω ριφῆναι σὺν χρόνῳ φόβου τε καὶ ἀποτροπῆς ἕνεκα τῶν μελλόντων τὰ ὅμοια δρᾶν (Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.40.2–3).

Piso's story seems to have only one Greek analogue, which featured in Theophrastus, (in part) in Aristotle, and in the *Naxiaka* of Andriscos.<sup>19</sup> It appears at greater length in Plutarch, *Mulierum Virtutes* 17 and in section 9 of Parthenius' *Erotika Pathemata*, a work dedicated to Cornelius Gallus, Propertius' patron and elegiac predecessor. There are divergences between these various accounts, but in the version closest to Piso's tale of Tarpeia, the Naxian girl Polycrite cozens the amorous enemy general, is smothered by the belts and head-bands heaped on her by her grateful fellow-citizens, and receives a public funeral. Piso's account of Tarpeia enhanced the reputation of Rome and Romans in general.<sup>20</sup> It explained away everything in the standard version of Tarpeia's story without in any way sullyng her character. It also removed another potential embarrassment, namely that a homonymous Tarpeia was one of the first four Vestal Virgins later consecrated by Numa.<sup>21</sup> The rehabilitation of Tarpeia by Piso did not go unnoticed by the Augustans: it was referred to by Livy, albeit obliquely and without mention of its author.<sup>22</sup> No great leap of imagination is required to suppose that Propertius' Hellenistic tastes would have led him to be interested in this variant version of the Tarpeia myth which sanitised early Rome and had eminent Roman authority in the work of the censor L. Piso. Propertius might have encountered the white-washing variant by reading Piso's *Annales*; there is evidence that he

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19) For the details cf. Baudou (as n. 6) 82 n. 13; Forsythe (as n. 8) 152; and esp. Lightfoot (as n. 8) 324–327, 418–428.

20) For this as a possible motive for Piso's version cf. Chassignet (as n. 12) 116.

21) Πρῶτον μὲν οὖν ὑπὸ Νομᾶ καθιερωθῆναι λέγουσι Γεγανίαν καὶ Βεργηνίαν, δεύτερον δὲ Κανουλίαν καὶ Ταρπηίαν (Plut. Numa 10.1.1). Baudou (as n. 6) 86 n. 34, listing other traces of the Vestal Tarpeia, regarded Prop. 1.16.2 as a reference to her, as had others before him: cf. Enk (as n. 2) II 136. Forsythe (as n. 8) 155–156 discusses links between the two, but is sceptical about their possible influence on the white-washing account. Yet another 'Tarpeia' is named by Virgil as one of Camilla's virgin companions (Aen. 11.656); this could be an even more glancing allusion to the sanitising variant, although N. Horsfall, *Virgil, Aeneid 11: a commentary*, Leiden / Boston 2003 (Mnemosyne Suppl. 244), 368 thinks that she was "named for the traitress Tarpeia of Liv. 1.11 ... Her fame and daring outweigh any stain".

22) Livy, 1.11.9, with Ogilvie (as n. 8) 74–75; Chassignet (as n. 12) 115; Beck / Walter (as n. 12) 291. Florus, 1.1.12 alludes to it even more obliquely; cf. also the analogous story that Tatius killed Tarpeia *eo quod secreta Romuli ei propalare noluisset* (Chronographus anni 354 ed. Th. Mommsen in MGH auctor. antiquiss. IX 144.8–9 = Chronicon A 334 in *Chronica minora I*, ed. C. Frick, 113.7–9).

did read history.<sup>23</sup> Or Propertius might have met it in the contemporary salons of Rome, perhaps even at a recitation by Dionysius of Halicarnassus himself. The first part of Dionysius' *Antiquitates Romanae* was not published until 8 BC at the earliest, but Dionysius could already have arrived in Rome by late 30 BC,<sup>24</sup> and he may well have set about establishing himself there straightaway by teaching and / or reciting.

At all events, before rushing into emendations that rewrite Propertius 1.16.2 so as to make it virtually unrecognisable, we should consider the hypothesis that Propertius was alluding provocatively to a variant version of the myth of Tarpeia, one which exonerated her and which might have been the talk of the moment when Propertius was finalising elegy 1.16. It is no argument against the proposals of this paper that in Elegy 4.4 Propertius features the orthodox legend. The story of Tarpeia betraying Rome for love made a better *αἴτιον*, both in itself and for a poet who had still only half-abandoned erotic elegy. It also gave Propertius access to useful antecedents in Hellenistic poetry (above); and there was never an obligation upon an ancient poet to be consistent in his telling of myths.

The virtuous Tarpeia of Piso's version and her prominent positioning near the beginning of Propertius 1.16 have thematic implications which extend throughout the elegy. The speaker of 1.16 is a house-door (*ianua*), which insists on its former high status as the door of a dwelling which once belonged to a *triumphator* (1), when it preened itself on being open amid the concomitants of a triumph<sup>25</sup> – the gilded chariot and the tearful captives (3–4). Within the same quatrain (2) the door associates itself proudly with the chastity of Piso's Tarpeia (implying that the house was originally that of the *gens Tarpeia*). Then from line 5 on the door begins to lament its present sad plight. Its current (female) owner, it sadly admits, is immoral and her public reputation is in ruins (cf. *turpes*, 7;

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23) Cf. A. J. Woodman, Propertius and Livy, CQ 48, 1998, 568–569, showing that Prop. 3.1.12 employs a Livian phrase, while Prop. 3.1.15 refers to annals. Livy will probably not, however, have been Propertius' source for 1.16.2: not only is the chronology tight, but Livy is too oblique in his reference to this variant to have influenced Propertius.

24) Cf. Ant. Rom. 1.7.2.

25) On the assumption that *triumphis* (1) is a poetic plural, and that the *triumphator* is a single figure. If not, the above should be read *mutatis mutandis*.

*infamis*, 9; *famae*, 11; *turpior*, 12; *dominae vitii*, 47). Hence the door, so it tells us, is, when closed, beset and maltreated by her (male) excluded lovers, persons as immoral as the door's mistress (5–16). In the remainder of the elegy the door recounts the typical speech made to it by such an *exclusus amator* (17–44) before concluding with a further complaint about the bad reputation which it is acquiring because of the activities of its mistress and her lovers (47–48). The *triumphator* of lines 1 and 3–4 represents the acme of Roman male military and public virtue, just as the chaste Tarpeia of line 2 represents the best of Roman female virtue: she is an icon who takes her place alongside famous figures such as Cloelia and Veturia, women who preserved their chastity and normally remained within the domestic sphere but who, when duty to the Roman state called, were willing to demonstrate courage and to risk their lives acting in the public sphere for the safety of Rome. Tarpeia and the *triumphator* thus exemplify the old Roman male and female virtues – in shaming contrast to the immoral contemporary woman who now owns the house and her stream of degenerate (elegiac style) lovers who now frequent the door. The identification of Tarpeia as Piso's model of private and public female virtue thus unifies the elegy thematically and reveals it as yet another replay of that *militia / amor* antithesis which underlies so many of the elegies of Propertius' first collection.

In view of the prominence and querulousness of the *ianua*, two last possibilities are worth mentioning in connection with it.<sup>26</sup> First, a postern-gate (πυλίς) appears in both the orthodox and the variant versions of the Tarpeia story; through it Tarpeia sent her maid to make contact with Tatius, and later admitted the Sabines to the Capitol.<sup>27</sup> Might the motifs be linked? Tempting though the concept is, Propertius' *ianua* is a house-door, not a πυλίς; so, if there is a link, it is at most attenuated, and it may be non-existent, particularly since the Romans made a clear distinction between different sorts of doors / gates.<sup>28</sup> The second, more illuminating,

26) They were suggested to me by Prof. Marincola and Mr DuQuesnay respectively.

27) Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 2.38.4; 2.39.2. Tarpeia also at 2.38.4 says that she has the "keys of the gates" i. e. of the Capitol (τὰς ... κλεῖς ... τῶν πυλῶν).

28) Cf. N. Adkin, A Door Like a Pig? (Juvenal 7,42), *Eos* 92, 2005, 137–141, at 139–141. Ov. Am. 1.9.20 makes a similar distinction: *hic* (the soldier) *portas* (city-gates) *frangit*, *at ille* (the lover) *fores* (house-doors).

possibility concerns *Tarpeia pudicitia*. This seeming oxymoron, placed prominently at the start of the elegy, must have forced readers to question their assumptions about the Tarpeia legend by recollecting the alternative version in which Tarpeia is model of virtue. Hence it may well have been intended to initiate and reinforce the *ianua*'s argument, insisted upon throughout the elegy, that it (and the house) are innocent parties who have (by implication like Tarpeia) been subjected to defamation.

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