



‘Pontifici dexter Caesaribusque meis’: Ambrogio Fracco’s *Sacrorum Fastorum libri*, Ovid’s *Fasti* and the Appropriation of March

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Accepted: 14 June 2022 / Published online: 26 July 2022
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Abstract

Written by the Roman humanist Novidio Fracco during the first half of the 16th century and published subsequently in 1547, the *Sacri Fasti* is an elegiac poem modelled on Ovid’s own *Fasti* and structured upon the Catholic liturgical calendar. As a work of the Cinquecento, one of the more novel attributes of the poem is in its combination of Ovidian mythologizing with the contemporary political and religious dynamics of Rome. In this way, Fracco draws on scenes from Ovid’s *Fasti* which celebrate Augustus and the imperial domus and refigures them for the age of Paul III. In this essay, I analyse the proem of Fracco’s third book, a grand battle between Christ and Mars, as emblematic of this synthesis between the mythological and the political. I begin with the poet’s invocation to the Virgin Mary, which, I contend, locates the poem within the Ovidian tradition and which forms an intertext with the opening of *Fasti* book four, Ovid’s appeal to the goddess Venus. I then discuss the main episode, the conflict between Christ and Mars, in which Fracco reorients March and the city of Rome as Christian and which establishes another intertext with the foundation myth for Rome at the opening of *Fasti* book three. Finally, I argue that Fracco, like Ovid, imbues his panel with political significance, using it as a means to sanction the partnership, anticipated and idealized during the Cinquecento, between Pope Paul III and Emperor Charles V.

Of those poets who lived and wrote in the era of Pope Paul III, Ambrogio Fracco occupies a unique position. Originally from Ferentino, Fracco had arrived in Rome in the early Cinquecento, establishing himself there as a priest and teacher.¹ His

¹ Most reconstructions of Fracco’s life are based on F. Pignatti, ‘Fracco, Ambrogio’, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, Rome, 1997, XLIX, pp. 566–7, which is itself largely a summary of B. Pecci, *Contributo per la storia degli umanisti nel Lazio*, Rome, 1891, pp. 466–8. Fracco’s education in Rome and presence there by 1527 can be established by *De adversis*, Rome, Biblioteca Lincei, MS Corsiniana 1327, fol. 139^v: ‘Roma quidem patria est studiorum et cura meorum’ (‘Rome is, indeed, my fatherland and the care of my studies’).

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main passion, however, was poetry, for which he took Ovid as his primary model. During the first part of the century, Fracco would imitate several Ovidian works, including the *Tristia* (a book of exilic elegies) and the *Heroides* (a collection of imaginary poetic epistles from classical heroines), in the process earning for himself the nickname ‘Novidio’ (the ‘New Ovid’).² Yet, it was during the papacy of Paul III (1534–1549) that Fracco published his *magnum opus*. Entitled the *Sacrorum Fastorum libri* (‘Books of the Sacred Calendar’; hereafter, *Sacri Fasti*), this was an imitation of Ovid’s *Fasti*, an elegiac exploration of the fabric of myths and festivals which comprised the ancient Roman year.³ Although Fracco largely stays true to the style and structure of the *Fasti*, he nevertheless takes as his focus the Christian culture of his own era, adapting his predecessor’s material to the calendar of Catholic feasts, particularly as practised in Rome.⁴ We thus have entries ranging from the singing of *Polorum regina* on the feast of St Michael to the tradition of illuminating the Pantheon during All Saints Day.

Christian versions of the *Fasti* had, in fact, been written prior in the quattrocento, by the humanists Lorenzo Bonincontri and Lodovico Lazzarelli, and in the early cinquecento, by the Carmelite monk Baptista Mantuanus.⁵ Yet, what distinguishes

² On his name, Fracco writes in the dedication to his *Sacri Fasti*: ‘Ego solus in familiarem meum Ovidium veluti transformatus’ (‘I alone was, so to speak, transformed into my friend Ovid’). Fracco’s poetry comprises three published poems and three different collections in MS. The second includes: (1) An imitation of Ovid’s *Heroides*, a reimagining of the *Tristia* set during the 1527 Sack of Rome entitled the *De adversis* and a collection of *epigrammata* in Rome, Biblioteca Lincei, MS Corsiniana 1327; (2) two books of hendecasyllabics in Rome, Biblioteca Alessandrina, MS 190, fols 57^r–76^r and (3) two elegiac epistles addressed to Carlo Borromeo, cardinal archbishop of Milan, 1560–1584, in Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS D 343 inf, fols 43^r and 50^r. These last elegies, unlisted by Pignatti, ‘Fracco’ (n. 1 above), also establish a *terminus ante quem* of 1560 for Fracco’s death. He published two other poems in addition to his *Sacri Fasti*. The first, in 1538, is an elegiac *poemetto* known as the *Consolatio ad Romam*, which represents the popular contemporary genre of *lamenti* for the sacked city and anticipates the political arguments in the *Sacri Fasti*. This was followed around 1546 by an elegiac epistle to Alessandro Farnese, Pope Paul III’s grandson, which envisions future triumphs for the cardinal and requests financial support.

³ For the text of Ovid’s *Fasti*, I use the Teubner edition of E. H. Alton, D. E. W. Wormell and E. Courtney, 4th edn, Berlin, 2005. For the *Sacri Fasti*, I cite, updating for modern punctuation, via the folio from the 1559 Antwerp printing of the text located in the Staatliche Bibliothek, Regensburg. The exception is for the Mars panel, in which I cite by individual line numbers. For the *Consolatio ad Romam*, I cite by line number from the 1538 Rome edition found in the Bibliothèque Mazarine, Paris.

⁴ On Ovidian stylistic borrowings in the *Sacri Fasti*, see J. Miller, ‘Ovid’s “Fasti” and the Neo-Latin Christian Calendar Poem’, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 10, 2003, pp.173–86 (177–9).

⁵ For a brief analysis of Lazzarelli’s *Fasti*, see A. Fritsen, ‘Ludovico Lazzarelli’s *Fasti Christianae Religionis*: Recipient and Context of an Ovidian Poem’, in *Myrica: Essays on Neo-Latin Literature in Memory of Jozef IJsewijn*, ed. D. Sacré and G. Tournoy, Leuven, 2003, pp 115–32. There are few studies on Bonincontri’s *Fasti*, although the best remains B. Soldati, ‘Gl’Inni Sacri d’un astrologo del Rinascimento’, in *Miscellanea di studi critici edita in onore di Arturo Graf*, Bergamo, 1903, pp. 405–29. The *Fasti* of Mantuanus have similarly received little attention, although J. Smet, *The Fasti of Blessed Baptista Mantuanus*, Washington DC, 1943 offers a summary. For background on the study of the *Fasti* in the Renaissance, see A. Fritsen, *Antiquarian Voices: The Roman Academy and the Commentary Tradition on Ovid’s Fasti*, Columbus, 2015, esp. pp. 29–62.

Fracco's calendar is not merely its highly Ovidian style, but its focus on the political landscape of cinquecento Rome, especially the accomplishments of Paul III. For this latter element, Fracco looked to Ovid's treatment of Augustus and the imperial *domus* in the *Fasti*, for which he found a parallel in the new pope and the ascendant Farnese dynasty. As such, the first 1547 printing of the poem includes a lengthy dedicatory letter to Paul III, while there are numerous panels which celebrate the pope's accomplishments, including his election and coronation in 1534, his initial calling of a general council in 1536 and the 1538 Peace of Nice.

In this paper, I focus on the beginning of the third book of the *Sacri Fasti*, which I argue is representative of Fracco's larger manipulation of Ovidian language and themes for political ends. We see there a struggle between Christ and Mars over the month of March, an entry which, as I show, responds to the foundation myth for Rome at the opening of *Fasti* Book III and Ovid's symbolic disarming of Mars there. While drawing, to a more limited extent, on other Augustan works such as the *Aeneid*, Fracco ultimately adapts Ovid's political ideal of a world under the rule of Augustus and the imperial *domus* to the geopolitical goals projected under Paul III. What emerges is a proem which not only reorients March (and Mars) as Christian, but which serves as an allegory for two of the more important themes of the *Sacri Fasti*: the establishment of European peace and a new era of cooperation between Paul III and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.

The Opening of March

The third book of Fracco's calendar opens in a firmly Ovidian context. Donning his predecessor's role as a seeker of 'causes' for various cultic matters, Fracco ponders the reasons for why March is a Christian month and calls upon the divine for both poetic inspiration and information:

Debita praeteritis stat mensibus ara⁶ duobus:
 atteritur nostris tertia meta rotis.
 'Alma fave', dixi, 'nam ut sint a Marte calendae
 annus et exoriens inde putetur avis,
 hoc quia tu natum conceptum mense tulisti,
 utque huius, sic hunc credimus esse tuum?
 Scis dea praeterea quod mensum haud nomina muto:
 sed damus hos aris, numinibusque suis.
 Ede precor, sacer est praesens quo mensis honore:
 et dux ingenio da tua vela meo.'
 Vix ea finieram pia quum regina deorum
 protinus ad vatem rettulit ora suum.
 Partequae, qua roseum vertit pulcherrima vultum,

⁶ *Ara*, virtually indistinguishable here from *libellus* (poetic book), introduces the theme of the *ara* which will reappear throughout the panel.

purpureum niveo venit ab ore iubar.
 Atque suum gremio natum complexa serenum
 cum foret, ex alto talia visa loqui. (Fracco, *Sacri Fasti*, III.1–16)

[An altar stands owed now that two months have passed:
 a third goalpost is rounded by my wheels.
 ‘Give me favour, nourisher’, I said, ‘how is it that the Kalends are derived from
 Mars
 and thence the year is thought by our ancestors to begin,
 since in fact you conceived and gave birth to your son in this month,
 and so we believe it to belong to the two of you?
 Moreover, goddess, you know that I do not change the names of the months,
 but I attribute these (months) to their rightful altars, and to their rightful
 divinities.
 Tell me, I pray, on account of what honour is the present month sacred,
 and, as my leader, fill the sails of my genius.’
 Scarcely had I finished my words when the pious queen of the gods
 straightaway turned her face towards her poet.
 And where she, most beautiful, turned her blooming complexion,
 a purple gleam shown forth from her snowy face.
 And once she had embraced her serene child in her lap
 she appeared to utter such things from on high.]⁷

A brief inspection of the passage reveals language and imagery which recall that of the *Fasti*. Like Ovid, Fracco likens his journey through the months to the voyage of a sailor (10) or the race of a charioteer (2). He, too, seeks *causae* and even speculates on why March is holy, calling upon the authority of a goddess who, for now, remains unnamed.⁸ Attentive readers of Ovid may even suspect that this divinity is initially Juno, whose festival, the Matronalia, was celebrated on 1 March. Indeed, Fracco explores this connection at the end of the panel and plays with the idea here, mentioning that the month has significance to the goddess and her ‘son’ (‘natum’), a description which could easily fit that of Juno and her own progeny Mars, while his use of the Ovidian title ‘regina dearum’ (‘queen of the gods’) similarly hints towards the pagan goddess.⁹

Yet, Fracco takes as the primary model for his poetic exchange an interaction with another deity entirely, Venus, whose appearance at the opening of *Fasti* Book IV he has adapted for his own poem:

‘Alma, fave’, dixi ‘geminorum mater Amorum’;

⁷ All Latin translations are my own.

⁸ Ovid models his exchanges with divinities on Callimachus’s *Aetia*. For an overview, see J. Miller, ‘Ovid’s Divine Interlocutors in the *Fasti*’, in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, III, ed. C. Deroux, Brussels, 1983, pp. 156–92.

⁹ Miller, ‘Ovid’s “Fasti”’ (n. 4 above), p. 178, also notes the connection here between Mary and Juno. On the description of the goddess, cf. Ovid, *Fasti*, VI.37, where she is described as the ‘regina dearum’.

ad vatem voltus rettulit illa suos;
 'quid tibi' ait 'mecum? certe maiora canebas.
 num vetus in molli pectore volnus habes?'
 'scis, dea', respondi 'de volnere'. risit, et aether
 protinus ex illa parte serenus erat.
 'Saucius an sanus numquid tua signa reliqui?'
 Tu mihi propositum, tu mihi semper opus.
 Quae decuit primis sine crimine lusimus annis;
 nunc teritur nostris area maior equis.
 Tempora cum causis, annalibus eruta priscis,
 lapsaque sub terras orta que signa cano.
 Venimus ad quartum, quo tu celeberrima mense:
 et vatem et mensem scis, Venus, esse tuos'.
 Mota Cytheriaca leviter mea tempora myrto
 contigit et 'coeptum perfice' dixit 'opus'.
 Sensimus, et causae subito patuere dierum:
 dum licet et spirant flamina, navis eat. (Ovid, *Fasti*, IV.1–18)

['Give favour, nourisher', I said, 'mother of the twin cupids';
 that one turned her face towards her poet;
 'What do you need from me?' she replies, 'You certainly used to sing of
 greater things.
 You don't still harbour an old wound in your soft heart, do you?'
 I responded, 'You know, goddess, about my wound.' She laughed, and immed-
 iately
 the sky was clear from her direction.
 'Wounded or in good health have I ever deserted your standard?
 You are always my purpose, you are always my undertaking.
 In my early years I harmlessly played around with which things were fitting;
 now a greater field is trodden by my horses.
 I sing about time and its causes, (time) unearthed from ancient records,
 and constellations when they have sunk below the horizon and then have
 risen.
 We have come to the fourth month in which you are most celebrated:
 and you know, Venus, both the poet and the month are yours.'
 Moved (by my words) she lightly touched my temples with her
 Cytherean myrtle, and she said, 'Complete the work which you have under-
 taken.'
 I felt inspired and the causes of the days were suddenly revealed:
 while it is permitted and the winds blow, let my ship set sail.]

Comparing the two passages, we see that Fracco has adopted his predecessor's language and structure. Fracco's opening address, 'alma fave' ('give favour, nourisher'), alludes directly to Ovid's appeal to Venus, as does the line-start 'scis dea' ('you know, goddess'). Fracco's divine interlocutor, moreover, glances towards the poet ('rettulit ora') and causes the sky to beam in recollection of the gestures of

Ovid's Venus and the 'clear sky' ('aether serenus') in which her majesty resounds. Indeed, one could be forgiven for thinking that Fracco is actually speaking with Venus, but for the hint towards the immaculate conception ('conceptum'), which ultimately reveals his interlocutor to be the Virgin Mary.

The next stage of the proem continues the imitation. Fashioning himself as a 'vates' ('poet/priest'), Fracco enters an Ovidian style didactic exchange with his 'goddess'. After asserting different reasons for March's Christian orientation, he falls into a hieratic trance in which an image of the Madonna depicted caressing the infant Christ inspires him to answers:¹⁰

'Quod prius ad proprium mensem vocor, accipe vates,
 et tibi tu causas temporis ede mei.'
 Dixerat et nati pectus mihi contigit hasta
 visus eram causas et mihi posse loqui.
 Ergo suo funem solvat de litore puppis,
 quaque vocat ventus, vela secunda ferat. (Fracco, *Sacri Fasti*, III.17–22)

['Because I am beforehand summoned to my own month, learn, my poet,
 and set forth for yourself the explanations for my time.'
 She spoke and she touches my chest with her son's spear
 and I seemed to myself capable of giving explanations.
 Therefore, let my ship set loose its mooring from the coast,
 and wherever the wind calls, let it bring favourable sails.]

This interface between Fracco and Mary functions both as a response to Ovid's discussion with Venus in *Fasti* Book IV and as a foreshadowing of themes in the scene to follow. To begin, the syntagma 'causas temporis' recalls Ovid's own programmatic summary of his calendar poem's project, restated to Venus here from the work's opening verse (*Fasti*, I.1. 'tempora cum causis'; cf. IV.11).¹¹ Even starker is Mary's touching of Fracco with Christ's 'spear' ('hasta'), an action corresponding to when Venus inspires Ovid by tapping him with Cytherean myrtle.¹² The appearance of the *hasta* also foreshadows what we will see in the subsequent narrative, where it appears as none other than the cross itself. In short, Fracco supplants Ovidian gods through the Ovidian model. The appearance and mannerisms of Ovid's Venus are now those of the Madonna and Child, and it is they who will guide Fracco on his

¹⁰ On the invocation of deities, B. Harries, 'Causation and the Authority of the Poet in Ovid's *Fasti*', *Classical Quarterly*, 39, 1989, pp. 164–85 (168), argues that it develops a shared possession of the *causa* between the poet and the god/goddess: 'Thus, when Minerva is asked directly to supply details of the *Quinquatrus minores* ... the account which follows might easily be the goddess's own and is clearly not to be questioned'.

¹¹ On the relationship between cause and time in the *Fasti*, see *ibid.*; C. Newlands, *Playing with Time: Ovid and the 'Fasti'*, Ithaca NY, 1995.

¹² J. Miller, 'Ovid's Janus and the Start of the Year in Renaissance *Fasti Sacri*', in *The Afterlife of Ovid*, ed. J. North and P. Mack, London, 2015, pp. 81–94 (89), points out that Fracco enters an inspired state also in his invocations to the Holy Trinity (January) and the Holy Spirit (June).

quest for causes. The implication is not only that a Christian world has replaced the pagan, but that Fracco himself is the 'New Ovid', whose constructed system of time, much like his divinities, will supersede that of his predecessor.¹³

What follows in the *Fasti* also prepares us for another important facet of Fracco's presentation which will emerge more clearly below. Ovid proceeds to address Augustus and trace his mythological lineage (IV.23–57), reaching a crescendo which synthesizes Venus, Rome's Trojan origins and the rule of the new imperial dynasty: 'pro Troia, Romane, tua Venus arma ferebat...ut scilicet olim magnus Iuleos Caesar haberet avos' ('Roman, your Venus bore arms on behalf of Troy ... so that clearly great Caesar would one day have Julian grandfathers'). The effect, then, is to depict the traditional bonds between myth and the calendar as inextricably bound with the political destiny of the Augustan *domus*. As we shall see, this dimension of Ovid's poem did not escape Fracco, who likewise attunes time and legend to the political realities of his day.

The Battle Between Christ and Mars

From justification of the poet's ability to know *causae*, we now move to the episode proper – an Ovidian aetiological narrative which answers the questions Fracco posed to the Madonna. The story enters *in medias res*, when we discover that Mars has caught word of an attempt by Christ to destroy paganism and to appropriate March for his mother Mary:

Iura dabat Latio sumptis Mars utilis armis
 auxerat et genti regna superba suae.
 Audit in excidium veterum tamen ire deorum,
 qui domiti capiat totius orbis opes.
 Venerat et matri surgentem legifer annum
 hoc in mense dedit, qui quoque Martis erat. (Fracco, *Sacri Fasti*, III.23–8)

[Mars, useful once he has undertaken arms, was giving laws to Latium
 and he had enlarged for his people their proud kingdom.
 Yet he hears that one who would seize the wealth of the whole conquered
 world
 is heading to destroy the old gods,
 The lawgiver had come and granted to his mother the year
 rising in this month, which also belonged to Mars.]

The image of Mars developed by Fracco selectively engages with the introduction of *Fasti*, III.1–166, the month of March. Lines 23–4 rework *Fasti*, III.85–6, where Ovid explains the god's importance among the early Romans and why he was honoured with the first month by his son Romulus: 'Mars Latio venerandus erat, quia praesidet armis; arma ferae genti remque decusque dabant' ('Mars was worthy to

¹³ On this balance between imitation and competition, see S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of appropriation in Roman poetry*, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 52–63, who explores the similar dynamic between Virgil and Ennius, and their respective claims to being the 'primus poeta' ('first poet').

be venerated in Latium because he presides over arms; arms gave the fierce people a state and honour'). Fraccho, too, situates his Mars in Latium, but instead of bestowing on the Romans 'decus' ('honour') and 'rem' (a state), he expands a 'proud kingdom' ('regna superba'). This is Mars the irascible and bellicose deity, whose fundamentals are war and weapons, described in near identical terms to his portrayal in Ovid as 'sumptis ... utilis armis' ('useful once he has undertaken arms').¹⁴ Mars's values also permeate society at large, whereby he is described as 'giving laws' ('iura dabat') to his warlike people. Yet, as we shall see, the true 'lawgiver' ('legifer') soon arrives, the god whose mission, to quote Matthew's gospel, is 'to fulfil the law ... not abolish it'.¹⁵

Reacting to Christ's threat, Mars expresses indignation and an intention to counter his enemy by mobilizing for war:

Tunc sic armipotens: 'Cum mense modo astulit annum.
 Iam parat imperium subripuisse meum.
 Et mihi thura ferant? Referentur limina Iani:
 det Bellona hastam, det Furor arma mihi.
 Denique mense meo conceptus mense peribis,
 Christe, meo. Irati sint rata verba dei.'
 Dixerat, et curru Solymarum vectus ad urbem
 ora senis cepit conciliumque movet.
 Impia Iudaici surrexit turba furoris
 inque Deum fraudes, duraque tela parant.
 Cogitur in crimen proles sine crimine nata
 vinclaque caelestes tendit in arcta manus. (Fraccho, *Sacri Fasti*, III.31–42)

[Then the god, powerful in arms, spoke as follows: 'Just now he (Christ) took the year along with the month. Now he prepares to seize my power. And would they offer me incense? The thresholds of Janus will be opened: let Bellona provide my spear, let Fury supply my arms. And, finally, you, Christ, conceived in my month, will perish in my month. Let the words of an enraged god be brought to fruition.' So he spoke and after having driven his chariot to Jerusalem he assumed the guise of an old man and calls an assembly. An impious mob of Judaic rage arose and they prepare deceptions and harsh spears against God. Their offspring, born without crime, are compelled to a crime and it (the *turba*) extends narrow shackles upon divine hands.]

¹⁴ Ovid, *Fasti*, III.173.

¹⁵ See Matthew 5:17: 'nolite putare quoniam veni solvere legem aut prophetas non veni solvere sed adimplere'.

Departing from Latium we arrive at Jerusalem, where Mars devises a strategy to thwart Christ. The scene which follows develops along lines both biblical and classical, drawing on elements from the *Aeneid* and the *Fasti*. In keeping with his strictly bellicose aspect, Mars wields his traditional *hasta*,¹⁶ rides in his chariot¹⁷ and, in further emphasis on his warlike nature, is given the epithet 'armipotens' ('powerful in weapons') found in Ovid's panels on the Quirinalia and Mars Ultor.¹⁸ All the while Fracco's mention of the temple of Janus ('limina Iani'), opened in times of war, likens the god to a Roman conqueror about to embark on campaign.

But amid Mars's threats and bluster is a fickle and vindictive god. In language evocative of Virgil's petulant Juno, Mars is shown to be governed by 'furor' ('rage') and frets over the loss of his worldly honour, specifying both his power ('imperium') and religious offerings ('thura').¹⁹ Although outwardly daunting, he chooses not to risk open combat with Christ, opting instead to surreptitiously orchestrate the events which will lead to his passion. The scene unfolds as a retelling of the burning of the Trojan ships in *Aeneid* Book V, where Iris, disguised as the elderly Beroe ('Beroe ... longaeva'), provokes the Trojan wives to turn on their husbands.²⁰ This role of inciter is now played by Mars who dons the guise of an old man ('senis'), possibly the high priest Caiaphas, to rile up the Jewish crowd which, using its own 'fraudes' ('deceits'), will demand Jesus's execution at the hands of Pilate.²¹ Taken together, these intertexts underscore themes of intemperance, the trickery of pagan gods, and the vainglorious opposition to a greater fate.

With the demands of the enraged mob met, we turn to the moments after Jesus's trial. We witness his crucifixion and the piercing of his side by the *hasta*. It seems that Mars's threat that Christ 'will perish in my month' has been fulfilled. Yet, unbeknown to the god of war, 'Christus triumphans' emerges from the dead:

Venerat ad superos domito redivivus ab Orco;
 Romula victori sunt data regna Deo.
 Territus hoc Mavors clypeumque resumpsit et hastam.
 Nox erat: armato protulit ora Deus.
 Cornibus²² hasta tribus, nonisque ex orbibus aegis,
 factaque de spinis aurea cassis erat.
 Quique color Lunae, tunc quum sine nube videtur,
 tactaque fraternis candida flavet equis.

¹⁶ Cf. Ovid, *Fasti*, III.1 and III.172.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, II.858.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II.481 and V.559.

¹⁹ At *Aeneid*, I.21–2, Juno comes 'for the destruction of Libya' ('excidio Libyae'), while a few lines later at I.49 she laments the would-be loss of her offerings: 'aut supplex aris imponet honorem?' ('or will a suppliant place an offering upon my altars?').

²⁰ *Ibid.*, V.619–40.

²¹ Although infrequent, anti-Semitism does appear in Fracco's poetry, most notably at the opening of Book V of the *De adversis*, Rome, Biblioteca Lincei, MS Corsiniana 1327, fol. 163^v, where he compares his own struggles with those of Ovid in Tomis, singling out his mistreatment by Jews during the Sack: 'Sitque alios passus quam vis quos ipse ferebat, / Iudeos nullos pertulit ille viros' ('And although he [Ovid] suffered at the hands of others whom he was enduring, he endured no Jewish men').

²² For this use of *cornu*, see *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. 6d.

Qualis et argento tunc quum circumdatur auro,
 talis in aetherei corpore regis erat. (Fracco, *Sacri Fasti*, III.49–58)

[Restored to life, he returned to the world above from vanquished Hell;
 Romulus's empire was bequeathed to the victorious God.
 Terrified by this, Mars donned both his shield and spear.
 It was night: God revealed his face to the armed deity.
 He had a spear with three points, and an aegis from the nine circles,
 and a golden helmet made from thorns.
 And it is that colour of the moon, then when it appears in the cloudless sky,
 and shines bright yellow, touched by the fraternal horses.
 What appearance it has when surrounded by silver and gold,
 such was the helmet upon the ethereal king's body.]

Having returned from the Harrowing of Hell, Jesus has not only conquered death, but the Roman Empire ('Romula regna'). His depiction is an ekphrasis, one showing that he has weaponized his own passion. He now holds a *hasta* with three points ('cornibus hasta tribus') – a reference to the cross and a rebuttal to the earthly *hasta* brandished by Mars. His aegis comes from the nine circles of the underworld, while his helmet ('cassis'), evoking that worn by Mars at *Fasti*, III.2 and III.171, is his crown of thorns. Mirroring the description of Aeneas when he triumphantly introduces himself to Dido in Carthage, Christ radiates with an ethereal glow – a clear indication of his divinity.²³ His is a figure synthesizing martial and religious virtue – a portrait evoking qualities of fear, awe and reverence. But Christ has not simply withstood Mars, rather, he has *become* Mars. Christ's appropriation of Mars's signature weapon, his *hasta*, suggests a transferal of power, while his *cassis* and emblazoned *aegis* recall the god's appearance in the *Fasti*.²⁴ This transformation also carries with it great symbolic force: the triumph of faith over force, of *arae* over *arma*, and the rebirth of Rome itself as a Christian city.

Christ, however, is not finished. To the vanquished god he now proclaims that he is the new Mars and, therefore, that March is rightly his month:

'Ergo Erebi', dixit, 'Mavors eversor in auras
 reddor, et invito te mea tela gero.
 Magna quod evertor, caelo quod magnus in ipso,
 arbiter armorum militiaeque vocor.
 Mars mihi sit nomen. Sum belliger. Hasta cruore
 aspice victori quam madet ista mihi.
 Tradita de victis est hostibus ecce corona:
 caelum pro scuto est. Tu tua tela iace.
 Pone hastam, et clypeum. Quid tela resumis in illum,

²³ Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid*, I.592–3: 'quale manus addunt ebori decus, aut ubi flavo / argentum Pariusve lapis circumdatur auro'.

²⁴ For the *hasta* as a symbol of Mars, see C. Bailey, *P. Ovidi Nasonis Fastorum liber III*, Oxford, 1921, p. 35, and S. Heyworth, *Ovid Fasti: Book III*, Cambridge, 2019, p. 75.

quem mare, quem pontus, sidera, terra tremit?
 Sit satis erratum: sensi tua vulnera sensi
 fataque, quae dudum te duce sponte tuli.
 Mense hoc concipior; morior rediturus eodem.
 Sit pudor, et mensem iam mihi redde meum.’ (Fracco, *Sacri Fasti*, III.59–72)

[‘Therefore’, he said, ‘I return to the surface as Mars, the conqueror of Hell, and I wield my spears even as you stand against my will. Because I overturn great forces, because I appear great in heaven itself, I am called the master of arms and of the soldiery. Let Mars be my name. I am the wager of war. Look at how that spear drips with blood in my victory. Behold, my crown is handed over from conquered enemies: heaven takes the place of my shield. Toss aside your arms. Lay down your spear and shield. Why do you again raise weapons against him whom the sea, whom the ocean, the stars, (and) the land fears? Let things be set right: I have sensed your wounds and I have sensed the fates, which I long endured of my own accord when you were the instigator. I am conceived in this month; I die, in order to return in the same month. Have a sense of shame and return to me now my month.’]

The overall tone of the speech is triumphant. Mars’s threat that Christ ‘conceived in my month will perish in my month’ has been turned into a vaunt, with the risen Jesus boasting ‘I am the one conceived in this month, I, dying, will return in the same month’. Where Ovid failed to completely disarm Mars for his peaceful calendrical poetry – he insisted on keeping his *hasta* – Christ succeeds, rendering as inept the god ‘utilis armis’.²⁵ Having already subsumed Mars’s appearance, Christ also now appropriates his title ‘Mavors’, explaining that it better suits him ‘because I overturn great affairs’ (‘magna quod evertō’). While this appropriation of Mars’s name accords with Christ’s earlier self-characterization as the ‘eversor Erebi’ (‘the destroyer of Erebus’), it is also an etymological play on ‘Mavors’ found in Cicero among others.²⁶ Given Ovid’s tendency to legitimize his myths through etymology, Christ’s appropriation of the title serves to further transfer Mars’s identity and, by extension, purview, to himself.²⁷

²⁵ Ovid, *Fasti*, III.171–2: ‘sic ego. sic posita dixit mihi casside Mavors / sed tamen in dextra missilis hasta fuit’. Earlier, at III.9–10, Ovid had also called upon the god to set down his spear, which he failed to do. Heyworth, *Ovid Fasti* (n. 24 above), p. 117, speculates that this reluctance is thematically motivated by Ovid, who desires to keep his emphasis on the bellicose Romans in his panel on the Rape of the Sabine Women.

²⁶ R. Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies*, Leeds, 1991, p. 372, quotes Cicero, *De natura deorum*, II.67: ‘qui magna verteret Mavors’ (‘Mavors who overturns great things’).

²⁷ For examples of etymologizing in the *Fasti*, see, e.g. II.19, III.810, IV.87–9, V.74.

In addition to ‘Mavors’, Christ further co-opts two other epithets of Mars: ‘arbiter armorum’ (‘master of weapons’) and ‘belliger’ (‘wager of war’). The former appears at a pivotal moment in Book III of the *Fasti*: Romulus’s dedication of the first month to Mars:

Arbiter armorum, de cuius sanguine natus
 credor et, ut credar, pignora multa dabo,
 a te principium Romano dicimus anno:
 primus de patrio nomine mensis erit. (Ovid, *Fasti*, III.73–6)

[‘Master of weapons, from whose blood I am thought
 to be born and (so that I may be believed) I will bestow on you many hon-
 ours,
 we say that the Roman year begins with you:
 the first month will be called after my father’s name.’]

By seizing from Mars, the name used by Romulus in his dedication of the month, Christ signals that March is now his and that he is Rome’s new patron. Implicit in the title ‘arbiter armorum’ is also a sense of theological supremacy, that through Christ alone can *arma* be properly judged. The transformation is therefore complete. Christ is the patron deity of Rome; he is now the wager of war and the bearer of arms, and, ultimately, his name is now Mars (‘Mars mihi sit nomen’).

A Caesar and a Pope

If the panel ended here, we would be left with a kind of Ovidian homage for a Christian age. But in Mars’s vanquished dejection, Fracco reveals that he also shares his predecessor’s talent for using his stories to comment on contemporary politics – a shift in the narrative heralded by the now victorious Christ:

‘Victus es, ut non sis. Aris te subiice nostris,
 pontifici dexter, Caesaribusque meis.
 Atque illis sumpto, qua Sol patet, omnia telo,
 me duce, des: Iussi summa sit ista mei.’
 Hactenus ille gemens, ‘quia belliger ordine vincor,
 quamlibet imperium, magne, feremus’, ait.
 Dixit et in Domini convertit tela rebelles
 proque Deo forti militat usque manu. (Fracco, *Sacri Fasti*, III.74–81)

[‘You stand conquered, so that you are no more. Subject yourself to my altars,
 as one favourable to my pontiff and my Caesars.

And once you have taken up your spear, under my leadership, grant them everything

wherever the sun shines. Let that be the essence of my command.'

He (Mars), groaning to this point, says, 'Because I, the wager of war, am rightly defeated,

I shall advance your empire, o great one, however you want.'

He spoke and he turns his spears against those rebelling from the Lord, and continuously he fights with brave hand on behalf of God.]

What stands out first in this passage is the unusual role of *arae*. In the *Fasti*, Ovid imposes a programmatic dichotomy between *arma*, representing the sphere of war and epic poetry, and *arae*, that of religion, peace and elegiacs – a division seen in the poem's dedication to Germanicus at I.13: 'Caesaris arma canant alii: nos Caesaris aras' ('let others sing about the arms of Caesar, we [will sing] of his altars').²⁸ Yet, in Christ's enjoiner to Mars, the *arae* come to embody both the religious and physical dimensions of power, a synthesis clarified in the next line where Mars is again encouraged to take up his weapons and to 'be favourable' ('dexter') to the pontifex ('pontifici') and the Caesars ('Caesaribus').²⁹ This line is itself a reformulation of Ovid's appeal to Janus at *Fasti*, I.67–9: 'dexter ades ducibus ... dexter ades patribusque tuis populoque Quirini' ('be favourable to your leaders ... be favourable to your senators and the people of Quirinus'). In short, Fracco has replaced the Ovidian division of authority with a version of its traditional Augustan conception, in which *arma* are set in harmony with *arae*, as represented by the alliance between the 'the Caesars' ('Caesaribus') and 'the pope'.

Fracco's new order also extends to the tangible world of ruler and ruled. Mars is to confer 'wherever the sun shines' ('qua sol patet') to the power of the pontifex and the Caesars – an expression which echoes Ovid's own panel on Augustus and Romulus:

Te Tadius parvique Cures Caeninaque sensit,
hoc duce Romanum est solis utrumque latus,³⁰
tu breve nescioquid victae telluris habebas,
quodcumque est alto sub Iove, Caesar habet. (Ovid, *Fasti*, II.135–8)

[Tadius as well as small Cures and Caenina felt your might (Romulus), under his (Augustus's) leadership both sides of the sun are Roman; you possessed some small tract of conquered land, whatever is under the towering sky, Caesar possesses.]

²⁸ For a summary of the lengthy debate on Ovid's programmatic division between *arma* and *ara*, see S. Green, *Ovid, Fasti 1: A Commentary*, Leiden, 2004, pp. 37–8.

²⁹ That this Mars is given a new purpose is much different from Ovid's version of the god who, as Heyworth, *Ovid Fasti* (n. 24 above) p. 76, notes, is set 'on the path that leads to lust and humiliation'.

³⁰ On the phrase, see M. Robinson, *A Commentary on Ovid's Fasti, Book 2*, Oxford, 2011, p. 152.

Ovid's account is fundamentally a teleological one, contrasting the present grandeur of Rome with its humble origins. While Romulus fought local wars and established a small kingdom, under Augustus Roman power achieves a height commensurate with its destiny. By adapting Ovid's phrases 'hoc duce' and 'Romanum est solis utrumque latus', Fracco strikes an analogous relationship between Augustan Rome and its Christian successor. Moreover, just as Augustus supersedes the petty Romulus, so too does Christ triumphs over the duplicitous Mars – Romulus's father – and his 'proud kingdom'.³¹

As in the *Fasti*, there are also reasons to interpret the battle as reflecting a contemporaneous political situation, in this case, that of the cinquecento. The now Christian Mars promises to advance a now theologically grounded Roman 'imperium' ('empire'), a concept popular in the Renaissance and traceable to the Donation of Constantine. Even more vivid is the description of Mars, who, with a shift to the present tense, 'turns his spears against the 'rebels of the Lord' ('in Domini convertit tela rebelles') and 'fights with a brave hand on behalf of God' ('proque Deo forti militat usque manu').

To make sense of Fracco's *pontifex*, his *Caesares* and *rebelles*, it is first necessary to locate his poem in the Rome in which he lived and in the papacy under which he wrote. Entering the fourth decade of the cinquecento Rome was in a beleaguered state. The catastrophic sack on 6 May 1527 had left the city and its international prestige in tatters, such that by the death of Pope Clement VII in 1534 public morale had reached a nadir.³² The change in fortunes arrived in Paul III, whose ascendancy to the papacy was acclaimed by the Roman people as ushering in a 'renovatio urbis' ('renewal of the city').³³ In Rome, his election and coronation saw citywide celebrations and inaugurated a return to the vibrancy of earlier cinquecento papacies.³⁴ Yet, it was abroad where the greatest challenges lay. Inheriting the threats of the Protestant Reformation, intra-Catholic fighting and Ottoman encroachment, Paul sought a general council and a united front on behalf of Christendom. The success of these policies hinged, however, on cooperation with the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who, after the 1525 Battle of Pavia, stood alone as the supreme power broker in Europe.

³¹ Ovid, *Fasti*, II.139–40. The comparison between Augustus and Romulus has generated significant debate on the political nature of the *Fasti*. For an overview, see Robinson, *A Commentary* (n. 30 above), pp. 138–9.

³² In the Renaissance, the image of a downtrodden Rome became a literary trope. In his 1528 *Presa di Roma*, Eustachio Celebrino bluntly calls the city the 'coda di mundo', while in the *De adversis*, Rome, Biblioteca Lincei, MS Corsiniana 1327, fol. 170^v, Fracco remarks that Rome was 'ante vocata caput' ('once known as the head of the world'). For more on the theme, see V. de Caprio, 'Testi poetici sul Sacco di Roma del 1527', *Rivista di Studi Italiani*, 4, 1986, pp. 35–53, esp. 37–42; A brief analysis of Fracco's panel on the Sack is found in B. Xinyue, 'Commemorating the Sack of Rome (1527): Antiquity and Authority in Renaissance Poetic Calendars', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 88, 2020, pp. 1–21.

³³ On the phrase, see P. Partner, *Renaissance Rome, 1500–1559: A Portrait of a Society*, Berkeley, 1979, p. 73.

³⁴ Both anniversaries are recounted in the *Sacri Fasti*. For an overview, see L. von Pastor, *The History of the Popes, from the Close of the Middle Ages*, transl. and ed. R. F. Kerr, 2nd edn, XI, St. Louis, 1923, pp. 23–8.

It therefore comes as little surprise that Paul took every initiative to ingratiate himself with the emperor. Especially noteworthy was Paul's sanctioning of, and participation in, Charles's 1535 campaign against Tunis.³⁵ In the *Sacri Fasti* this event receives its own panel, in which Rome rejoices at the defeat of her enemies and expresses her hopes in Charles:

Glorior et post tot crudeli damna sub hoste,
te duce de lacrymis exeruisse caput.
Inque tamen nostra spes est quoque Caesare rerum.
Coget is errantes in tua saepta greges.

[And, after so many miseries at the hands of a harsh enemy, I pride myself that, under your leadership, I have, from my miseries, (again) revealed my face.

And, nevertheless, our hope of things is also in Caesar.

He will compel those wandering herds into your folds.]³⁶

As in the Mars panel, we are here introduced to a 'Caesar', in this case Emperor Charles V, word of whose conquest has reached Italy. Rome herself who, in an allusion to the 1527 Sack, had before suffered 'so many miseries at the hands of a harsh enemy' ('tot crudeli damna sub hoste'), can at last take pride in a victory. We also see that in Caesar rests the hope of 'compel[ling] wandering herds into your (i.e. Victory's) folds' – a line with clear theological undertones and which ought to be read in light of Charles's Ottoman and Protestant foes.

The celebration of the victory over Tunis was, however, reserved for Rome itself. There, Paul took the extraordinary step of inviting the emperor to hold a triumph *alla maniera antica* and to stage a show of strength between the two leaders. Thus, on 5 April 1536, with ensigns heralding him as 'Caesar' and the 'third Scipio', Charles led a procession under the city's ancient triumphal arches, over the Ponte Sant'Angelo, and finally to St Peter's, where he paid tribute to Paul III.³⁷ At Rome, Fracco was present for the festivities and memorializes the day in his *Sacri Fasti*:

Vox erat, 'ecce venit': crepuerunt omnia plausu
teque capit gremio culta Capena suo.
Visus et es, positis laeva, dextraque figuris,
inter scipiadas tertius ire tuos.
Talis erat Libycis ludos quum Caesar ab oris
rettulit, et victo parta tropaia Iuba.³⁸

[There was a shout, 'Behold he comes': all things resounded with applause and the Porta Capena, now decked out, takes you in her fold.

³⁵ On the campaign against Tunis and la Goletta, see J. Tracy, *Emperor Charles V, Impresario of War*, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 147–9.

³⁶ *Sacri Fasti* (n. 3 above), fol. 95^r.

³⁷ For an overview of the triumph, see V. Forcella, *Tornei e giostre: ingressi trionfali e feste carnevalesche in Roma sotto Paolo III (1534–1549)*, Rome, 1885, pp. 35–50; H. Gamrath, *Farnese: Pomp, Power and Politics in Renaissance Italy*, Rome, 2007, pp. 73–80.

³⁸ *Sacri Fasti* (n. 3 above), fol. 45^r.

And you seemed to parade as a third between your Scipios,
 with statues placed on your left and right,
 Such was Caesar when he brought back games from the Libyan
 shores and trophies gotten from conquered Juba.]

Reading Fracco's account, we experience a world far removed from the city's recent troubles and more emblematic of imperial Rome. Charles is a Caesar who enters the city as a triumphant general. The Porta San Sebastiano, referenced by its ancient name *Capena*, becomes a triumphal arch adorned with statues of legendary Romans, while the climax of the day is a meeting at St Peter's between the two leaders, refigured as a show of unity between a Caesar and his *Pontifex*:

Contigeras templum. Victricia signa secutus
 duceris exceptus patris ad ora choro.
 Oscula iunguntur, iunguntur colla duorum,
 qualia, qui clavi, qui valet ense, solent.
 Nocte coronatae micuerunt lumine turres,
 de stipula et mediis dolia plena viis.
 Sicque tuo felix gavisa est Roma triumpho
 iussit et hanc fastis Caesaris esse diem.³⁹

[You reached the temple. Having followed victorious standards
 you are led, received by song and dance, before the father.
 Kisses are joined, the two share an embrace,
 of the sort which he who wields the key and he who wields the sword are
 accustomed.
 At night the crowned towers flickered with light,
 and in the midst of the roads there are jars full of grain.
 And so did Rome happily rejoice in your triumph
 and ordered this day to be included in Caesar's calendar.]

In Fracco's magnificent Rome, the brotherly goodwill shared between Charles and Paul is the Farnese ideal of a restored church state.⁴⁰ The new pope presides over an imperial and Christian capital, replete with triumphal arches and towers. Rome herself rejoices in the conquest of its new Caesar, whose African victories evoke those of Scipio Africanus or Julius Caesar. Victory standards are juxtaposed with a kiss and an embrace, and Rome exults in the newfound unity between Paul's spiritual power (*clavis*) and Charles's imperial might (*ensis*) – a bond evoking the *fraternitas* between saints Peter (the key) and Paul (the sword).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 45^v.

⁴⁰ G. Brunelli, 'L'opzione militare nella cultura politica romana: le relazioni papato-impero (1530–1557)', in *L'Italia di Carlo V: Guerra religione e politica nel primo cinquecento*, ed. F. Cantu and M. A. Visceglia, Rome, 2003, p. 526, cites the *Orationes tres* of Bernardino Rutilio, the *Exhortatio contra Turcas* of Cardinal Bessarion and the orations of Cardinal Reginald Pole as exempla.

This partnership is subsequently brought into focus throughout the *Sacri Fasti* as the calendar's dominant political theme. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the work's proem, wherein Fracco establishes Paul and Charles as his primary dedicatees and their unity as of central importance:

Tu quoque tranquillo Caesar me respice vultu
 atque tua e coelo sidera pande rati.
 Inspicies et tu tibi tradita festa per aras
 aequaque cum sancto munera Patre feres.
 Hanc tu nam sedem bello, pace ille paravit:
 tutaque relligio est inter utrumque patrem.
 Praeterea vestra signantur imagine fratres,
 dum tu ensem, claves exerit ille suas.

[You also, Caesar, look upon me with a tranquil visage
 and, from the sky, reveal your constellations to my ship.
 You too will look through the altars upon feasts passed down to you
 and you will bear equal favours with the Holy Father.
 For you prepared this seat in war, as he prepared it in peace
 and religion is safeguarded between both fathers.
 Moreover, the brothers are depicted in your image:
 while you stretch forth the sword, he stretches forth his keys.]⁴¹

As in the triumph, Charles and Paul are presented as the twin pillars of the church, each bearing 'equal favours' ('aequa munera'). Through their combined efforts, Charles in war and Paul in peace, religion itself is safeguarded ('tuta'). They are the territorial and spiritual protectors of the church, presented again according to the leitmotif of saints Peter and Paul, one holding the keys ('claves'), the other the sword ('ensem'). This theme of cooperation is likewise emphasized in other panels. For instance, Paul's initial call in 1536 for a general council offers an opportunity to imagine a renewed papal/imperial effort against both the Protestant and Ottoman threats, while the motif reappears in entries on the 1538 Peace of Nice and the 1544 Peace of Crespy.

⁴¹ Fracco, *Sacri Fasti*, (n. 3 above), fol. 1^v.

A *Novus Ordo*

With this context in mind, we can return to the denouement of the Mars narrative. For, in Christ's enjoiner to Mars, we find the same kind of language and the same distribution of power specified between the Caesars ('Caesaribus') and the pope ('pontifici'), albeit in a mythologized Ovidian form. Indeed, Christ's emphasis on an *imperium* stretching both east and west bears similarities, nearly verbatim, to a speech delivered by Charles V himself in Fracco's first published work, the *Consolatio ad Romam*:

'Vesper et Eous Romamque aquilasque sequentur,
Pontificum faciam solis utrumque latus.
Nempe iterum felix toti dominaberis orbi
ibit et ante tuos Parthia victa pedes.'⁴²

['West and east will follow Rome and her eagles,
I will make each side of the sun belong to the popes.
Truly, again, will you (Rome) happily rule the entire Earth
and conquered Parthia will process before your feet.']

Whether it be Christ or Charles, Fracco projects the same geopolitical ideal. The Ovidian line 'solis utrumque latus' is found in both speeches as is the empire of the popes, presented in each as a kind of manifest destiny. Importantly, these passages offer a key for reading the Mars panel. Mention of an eastern dominion over Rome's traditional Parthian enemies, itself an Augustan literary trope, reflects the real desire in the cinquecento to counter the Ottoman tide.⁴³ Similarly, Christ's mention of 'rebels of the Lord' ('Domini ... rebelles') makes sense in the context of the Protestant Reformation, against which the chief bulwark was viewed to be Charles V.⁴⁴ In effect, Christ's speech anachronistically presents Fracco's contemporary political ideal: a unity between Charles V and Paul III opposite the enemies of Catholicism.

The culmination of the narrative only reinforces the allegorical reading, while also introducing a twist. With Christ's speech at an end, Fracco resumes his dialogue with Ovid's *Fasti*:

⁴² Fracco, *Consolatio ad Romam* (n. 3 above), pp. 375–8. Fracco generally uses the term 'Parthian' ('Parthi') as a stand-in for Ottoman, e.g., his panel on the general council at *Sacri Fasti* (n. 3 above), fol. 69r: 'Haec nostri coget Parthos in numinis aras / thura dare ...' ('This one [peace] will compel the Parthians to offer incense at the altars of our god').

⁴³ Ovid, e.g. imagines vengeance upon the Parthians in his Mars Ultor panel at *Fasti*, V.545–98; Fracco's concern over the Ottomans is evinced by his 10 August entry, *Sacri Fasti* (n. 3 above), fol. 102r, memorializing Charles V's 1529 relief of Vienna, while they are mentioned explicitly at Fracco, *Consolatio ad Romam* (n. 3 above), pp. 513–17, where Charles and Paul campaign together: 'in te collectae venient Othomane cohorts ... ultor erit Caesar Pater et cum Caesare patrum' ('the gathered Ottoman cohorts will rush against you ... Caesar – and with Caesar the pope – will be your avengers').

⁴⁴ Protestants are notably mentioned in Fracco's 24 February entry, *Sacri Fasti* (n. 3 above), fol. 24r, which celebrates Charles's coronation as Holy Roman Emperor. There, Fracco imagines imperial victories over the Lutheran Henry IV of Saxony and the English monarch Henry VIII.

Illeque dum pugnat non cessat vincere Caesar
 barbaraque ad patrios ferre trophaea deos.
 Sic sed ut attollant victricia signa manipuli:
 praecedatque aquilas fixus in arma deus.
 Hunc sibi pilanus: rogat hunc ad bella tribunus
 munitusque acies hoc sibi quisque parat.
 Nostri hinc Martis opes nunc sunt: victoria magnis
 hinc et Caesaribus semper honesta fuit.
 Hincque suas retinet Romana potentia vires,
 orbis et urbs facta est religione caput.
 Hincque arae primus iam cedit et ultimus orbis,
 et quaecumque Deum terra timebit, erit.

[And while he (Mars) fights, Caesar does not cease to conquer
 and to bring barbarian trophies to his native gods.
 But so that the maniples may raise up their victorious standards
 and the God transfixes upon arms may precede the eagles.
 The reservist (solicits) this man for himself: the commander solicits him for
 war,
 and each, fortified by this one, prepares its battleline.
 From him now comes the power of our Mars: from him there was always
 honest victory for the great Caesars.
 And from him Roman power retains its own strength,
 and the city became the world's religious capital.
 And from him either end of the world now yields to the altar,⁴⁵
 and whichever land fears God, will exist.] (Fracco, *Sacri Fasti*, III.82–93)

Once enemies, Christ and Mars are now the unified avatars for spiritual and territorial hegemony: a balance mirrored in Caesar bringing trophies of conquest back to the religious centre of Rome. The newfound unity between spiritual and martial power is also pervasive, with infantryman and tribune alike rallying under the standard of the crucifix. Here again Fracco reworks a scene from the introduction to *Fasti* Book III, this time, Romulus's regimentation of society into tenths to match the number of months in his original calendar:

Inde patres centum denos secrevit in orbes
 Romulus, hastatos instituitque decem,
 et totidem princeps, totidem pilanus habebat
 corpora, legitimo quique merebat equo.⁴⁶ (Ovid, *Fasti*, III.127–30)
 Thence did Romulus separate the senators into ten
 groups, and he instituted ten companies of men with spears,
 and the same number of members both the leader and the
 reservist had, and who merited the use of an official horse.

⁴⁵ For translation of the phrase 'primus et ultimus orbis', see Green, *Ovid* (n. 28 above), p. 326.

⁴⁶ For an analysis of the passage, see Heyworth *Ovid Fasti* (n. 24 above), p. 107.

The similarity between the passages underscores the sense that Rome has experienced a new founding. As the fledgling Roman kingdom reflected the military virtues and system of time created by Romulus, Christ is now the focal point of a new Rome, and it is towards his death and resurrection that all society is oriented.

Although the partnership between Paul and Charles is presented as a union of equals, not unlike that of saints Peter and Paul, the insinuation of theological supremacy remains. In Fracco's paradigm, it is the crucifix which precedes the eagles ('aquilas'), and it is to Rome that spoils are brought. Perhaps most notable is Fracco's repurposing of the phrase 'Roman power retains its own strength' ('suas retinet Romana potentia vires') taken from Ovid's entry on the Quirinalia:

Nam pater armipotens postquam nova moenia vidit,
 multaque Romulea bella peracta manu,
 'Iuppiter', inquit 'habet Romana potentia vires.' (Fracco, *Sacri Fasti*, III.481–3)
 [For after the father, powerful in arms, saw the new walls
 and the wars waged by the hand of Romulus.
 Jupiter', he says 'Roman power has its strength.']

In the *Fasti*, this passage concludes the foundation narrative of Rome: Mars, after seeing the new walls of his city and Romulus's military victories, reports to Jupiter that Roman power 'has its strength' and can thus begin its trajectory towards domination. Alert to this context, Fracco likewise creates a new foundation story wherein Christian Rome 'retains its strength' ('retinet vires') through the alignment of emperor and pope. Of course, the verb *retineo* also carries with it a political subtext: the papal objective of holding together a fractured church and Europe.

The most forceful expression of the new geopolitical order, however, comes at the end of the panel: 'arae primus iam cedit et ultimus orbis / et quaecumque Deum terra timebit, erit' ('and from him either end of the world now yields to the altar, and whichever land fears God will exist'). Fracco here reworks one of the most memorable scenes from the *Fasti*, Ovid's section on the *Ara Pacis*:

Horreat Aeneadas et primus et ultimus orbis:
 siqua parum Romam terra timebat, amet. (I.717–18)

[And let the first and last nation shudder at the descendants of Aeneas:
 if any land was fearing Rome too little, let it love her.]

In adapting these lines, Fracco recontextualizes the climax of *Fasti* Book I to the end of his own Mars narrative. No longer does the world yield to the 'descendants of Aeneas', but instead to the altar itself and, by extension, the Catholic Church. We thus have a reformulation of Ovid's antithesis between *arae* and *arma*, in which *arma* are put into the service of *arae*, a global order bent towards theological supremacy as is represented by the relationship between Mars and Christ, the pope and Caesar.

With Christ's speech at an end, we observe the aftermath of the battle. The now subservient Mars retains the name of March, while Fracco denotes the transition to

a Christian Rome with the creation of a new liturgy involving 'fire and water' ('ignis ... et unda') and the foundation of a 'new sacred order' ('sacer ordo novus'). We then return to the theme introduced at the opening of the proem: why March is sacred to both Mary and Christ. Fracco accordingly offers a series of Ovidian-inspired aetiologies for religious practices in cinquecento Rome, each of which is associated either with Easter or the Annunciation, the celebrations of Christ and Mary, respectively. From the former, Fracco emphasizes customs instituted in remembrance of Good Friday, Jesus's 'last day' ('ultima dies'). We thus see explanations for practices such as the liturgical blessing of oil and the prohibition of corporal punishments for prisoners ('luce nefas illa credunt punire nocentes').

For Mary, Fracco charts a slightly different course, returning once more to Ovid's *Fasti* and contemporary politics. Although adumbrated in the introduction, here a connection is made explicit between Juno, the goddess of the Matronalia, and Mary, who is presented as both the paradigmatic virgin and mother:

Foemineas Martis nam quas dixere calendas,
 accepit meritis sanctius illa suis.
 Omnia nam tamquam sint virginis acta figura,
 conveniunt illi factaque prima tulit.
 Pace nurus Martis iuvat; fuit Ilia mater.
 Haec nos pace iuvat; haec ea mater erat.
 Ite nurus igitur meliori numine fretae,
 Iuno ante, Exquiliis haec modo vestra manet.
 Ferte sed huic flores. Sint candida lilia flores,
 laeta sit ut quibus haec nuntia laeta tulit.
 Ferte nurus: quondam Iunoni namque ferebant
 haec et foecundum, dicite, tempus habet. (Fracco, *Sacri Fasti*, III.112–23)

[That one (Mary) has received more solemnly, because of her own merits, the Kalends

of March which they have called womanly.

For as if all things were done by the personage of a virgin,
 they befit her and she first set in motion all achievements.

The daughter-in-law of Mars helped with peace; Ilia was the mother (of Romulus).

This one (Mary) helps us in peace; this one was such a mother.

Therefore, go forth daughters-in-law relying on a better divinity,
 Juno beforehand, now this one abides as yours on the Esquiline.

But bring forth flowers to this one. Let the flowers be white lilies,
 so that she be happy with those to whom she bore these happy messages.

Bring them (flowers) forth, married women: for they formerly brought (them) to Juno

and, say it, this one (Mary) has the fecund time.]

Whereas Mars's identity is earlier appropriated by Christ, Mary now steps into the role of two famous Roman women, in the process, appropriating both aetiologies for Ovid's Matronalia. The first is Ilia (often called Rhea Silvia), the mother of Romulus, whose status as a *mater*, as Ovid's Mars speculates, is perhaps the reason for the name of the Matronalia.⁴⁷ The second is the wife of Romulus and 'daughter-in-law of Mars' ('nurus Martis'), Hersilia, who famously intervened to end combat between the Romans and Sabines – the event which also serves as the second aetiology for the Matronalia.⁴⁸ These roles of *mater* and harbinger of peace are now occupied by Mary, whose worship, together with that of her son, has replaced the celebration of the ancient Roman holiday.

Much like what we saw with the 'rebels of the lord', Fracco's language also carries an implied subtext pertinent to cinquecento Rome. The use of the emphatic first person pronoun and present tense verb in the description of Mary as 'help[ing] us with peace' ('nos pace iuvat') suggests a contemporary political interpretation and accords with the programmatic role of peace (*pax*) in the *Sacri Fasti*. We may recall, for instance, the earlier description of Paul III as 'having prepared (his seat) in peace' ('pace ille paravit') and Fracco's panel on Paul's calling of a general council,⁴⁹ where a personified *pax* imposes Catholicism on the Protestant and Islamic worlds. Importantly, Mary herself, at times, even embodies *pax*. This is the case for the 7 May entry, the anniversary of a special procession and mass held by Paul III in 1536 in the church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva to pray for European concord:

Pacis et armorum dea quondam credita Pallas:
Nunc est sub cuius haec pede victa iacet.

...

Pace Deum populis peperisti, paceque digna
templa tibi, pacis nomina sola meres.
Pace tuus natus duce te tot subiicit urbes
Et duce te pacem praecipit ille suis.
Da precor hanc patribus, plebi, populoque Quirini
Et fac concordēs, pacificosque duces.

[Pallas was formerly believed to be the goddess of arms and of peace:
she (Mary) is now the one under whose foot this one (Pallas) lies conquered.

...

You (Mary) bore God for the people in peace and you alone merit for yourself
temples worthy of peace, (you alone) merit the name of peace.
Your son, born in peace, under your leadership, conquered so many cities

⁴⁷ See Ovid, *Fasti*, III.233. Heyworth, *Ovid Fasti* (n. 24 above), p. 127, calls this etymology 'delightfully absurd' given that she was also a Vestal Virgin.

⁴⁸ Cf. Ovid, *Fasti*, III.206, where Mars calls Hersilia 'mea nurus' ('my daughter-in-law').

⁴⁹ See above, n. 42.

and under your leadership he orders peace for his followers.

Grant, I pray, thisto the fathers, the plebs, and the people of Quirinus
and make the leaders concordant and peace-making.]⁵⁰

Glossing the name of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva (‘sub cuius haec pede victa iacet’), Fracco fashions Mary as the replacement of Pallas, the new goddess of peace who gives birth to Jesus ‘in peace’ and ‘merits temples worthy of peace’ (‘pace digna templa meres’).⁵¹ Moreover, Fracco’s prayer for Mary to render the ‘duces’ (Charles V and Francis I) peacefully provides an analogue to her role as begetting peace in the poem.

The last section of the panel further elevates Mary by displacing the goddess of Roman *matronae*, Juno. Fracco here explicitly evokes Ovid’s Matronalia, 1 March (‘Martis kalendas’), where we see a temple to Juno Lucina, the goddess of child-bearing, founded on the Esquiline Hill.⁵² To this temple Ovid summons mothers to bring flowers and pray:

Ferte deae flores: gaudet florentibus herbis
Haec dea: de tenero cingite flore caput.
Dicite ‘tu nobis lucem, Lucina, dedisti’:
Dicite ‘tu voto parturientis ades.’ (Ovid, *Fasti*, III.253–6)
[Bring forth flowers to the goddess: this goddess delights in flowering
Plants: garland your head with the tender flower.
Say ‘you brought us into the light, Lucina’,
Say ‘please respond to the vow of her giving birth’.]

Looking again to our poem, we see that Fracco has taken the temple of Juno Lucina, and the prayers vowed therein, and reimagined them. What was the temple of Juno on the Esquiline is now the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, while now, in place of generic ‘flowers’ (‘flores’), white lilies (‘candida lilia’) are to be offered – associated with Mary and used to adorn her altars during the feast of the Annunciation (25 March). Moreover, we might also detect here a tacit reference to Paul III, who took the lily as a personal symbol and incorporated it in his own self-promotion.⁵³ Thus, just as Christ ultimately appropriated Mars’s identity, so too does Mary replace Juno, the mother of Mars, as the goddess most associated with March.

⁵⁰ Fracco, *Sacri Fasti*, fól. 59^r. Xinyue, ‘Commemorating the Sack of Rome’ (n. 32 above), p. 10, treats the entry as an allegorical extension of the Sack panel (6 May) celebrating Rome’s ‘rebirth’. In reality, it commemorates a specific mass held by Paul before a planned diplomatic mission to attain peace between Charles V and Francis I. For more see L. von Pastor, *Storia dei Papi: Dalla fine del Medio Evo*, transl. and ed. A. Mercati, V, Rome, 1959, p. 170.

⁵¹ Likely a reference to the Roman church of Santa Maria della Pace.

⁵² For historical background on the temple and how its aetiology is manipulated by Mars, see Heyworth, *Ovid’s Fasti* (n. 24 above), p. 130.

⁵³ Fracco himself has ‘coelestia lilia’ (‘celestial lilies’) sprinkled on Paul’s head during his coronation (5 November; *Sacri Fasti* [n. 3 above], fól. 147^v). The δίκης κρίνον (‘lily of justice’), e.g. was a common feature of Paul III’s imagery.

Conclusion

In Fracco's *Sacri Fasti* there are a number of episodes similar to the Mars narrative, yet none which capture so well the poem's thematic tenor and which are quite so emblematic of its larger construction. At the surface level, there are elements common to Ovid's *Fasti*: an invocation to a muse, astrological references and even etymological play, not to mention themes such as the primacy of Rome and the importance of the Caesars. Behind such classical imitation, though, is a poet of time and place. Through a battle between Christ and Mars, Fracco creates a poem which functions at two levels: the first, to re-found Rome as a Christian city and to displace its pagan divinities, establishing in the process aetiologies for religious practices associated with Easter and the Annunciation. In the second, Fracco creates a poem topical to his own era, establishing as a subtext two of the dominant political themes in the *Sacri Fasti*: the establishment of European peace (*pax*) and a proactive alliance between Paul III and Charles V against the enemies of the Church.

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