

THE SEPTIMONTIUM AND THE SUBURA

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A famous passage in Festus (458L) reads, *Septimontium . . . ap)pellatur mense (Decembri . . . post eum, qui dicitur in) Fastis Agonalia (quod eo die in septem m)ontibus fiunt sa(crificia . . .* He then proceeds to list eight names: *Palatio, Velia, Fagutali, Subura, (Cermalo, Caelio, Oppio) et Cispio*.¹ The parallel passage in Paulus (459L) from which this has been completed reads: *Septimontium appellabant diem festum, quod in septem locis faciebant sacrificium: Palatio, Velia, Fagutal[a], Subura, Cermalo, Caelio, Oppio, et Cispio*.²

Georg Wissowa, in an influential essay,³ escaped the difficulty of eight place-names by explaining *Caelio* as having once been a gloss on *Subura* that then crept into the text. The most recent investigation of the problem, that of Jacques Poucet (above, note 2), rejects this solution, asserting that *Subura* here must be the area north of the Oppius that we know as the Subura of the classical period. In what follows I shall argue for a return to Wissowa's interpretation of *Caelio* as a gloss, but with reasons very different from his.

It seems clear that learned Romans of the late republic believed that there was an area, once called "Subura," to the south of the Esquiline. The

¹This paper was written at a seminar on Roman topography sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and held during the summer of 1977 at the American Academy in Rome under the direction of Lawrence Richardson, Jr. I want to express my thanks to the National Endowment, and to the American Academy and its director, Professor John D'Arms, for their generous hospitality. I owe a special debt to Professor Richardson, who gave me invaluable advice during the early stages of writing and who carefully read a later version of the paper, saving me from embarrassing errors.

²I take it for granted that the number seven is indicated in the festival's name, as the Romans themselves believed, despite Louise Adams Holland's article, "Septimontium or Saeptimontium," *TAPA* 84 (1953) 16-34. The linguistic problem which she and Jacques Poucet, "Le Septimontium et la Succusa chez Festus et Varron," *BIBR* 32 (1960) 60-68, find in the traditional interpretation is not convincing. And her failure to give a persuasive explanation of the nature of the enclosure which she presumes seems a fatal weakness.

³*Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur römischen Religions- und Stadtgeschichte* (Munich 1904) 230-52.

tradition that at an early period the city contained a *regio Suburana*, which Dionysius (4.14) lists along with three others, the *Palatina*, the *Collina*, and the *Esquilina*, and in which Varro (*LL* 5.46) locates the Caelian hill, makes anything else impossible. Whether the original name was in fact “Subura,” or whether this was a contraction or corruption of another name, will make no difference. For us the important point is that reference to an area in the southeast part of the city as “Subura” would be a source of puzzlement to most Romans of the late republic and might therefore demand clarification.

Another difficulty with our passage in Festus is that several of the place-names in his list do not refer to clearly separate elevations. This problem I believe is more apparent than real. If the boundary separating the Cermalus from the Palatium, or the Fagatal from the Oppian proper, is indistinct today, still the general areas to which these names belonged are clear enough. As Poucet points out, *mons* in the sense that Festus uses it here, may well refer not to a hill so much as to a community on that hill.⁴ This we can see from Festus 284L, *Publica sacra, quae publico sumptu pro populo fiunt, quaeque pro montibus, pagis, curis, sacellis*, and also from Festus 474–76L.⁵ Since the tradition is clear that in the early, pre-urban period of Rome’s development communities were built on heights for security, the association of “hill” with “settlement” would have been a natural one.⁶ For the occurrence of settlements in low land between hills is likely to have been exceptional and due to special circumstances before a considerable degree of political coherence was achieved.

On the other hand, we have evidence of two areas called “Subura” in antiquity, both of which are valleys or sections of valleys (see below). Relying on Varro’s explanation of *Subura* as a corruption of *Succusa* (*LL* 5.48) as well as on a related passage in Festus (402L), Wissowa explained away the seeming contradiction of a mountain community in a valley by locating the Succusa on the Caelian. Varro derives the name from a *pagus Succusanus* which “ran up under” the Carinae,⁷ and Festus says *Suburam Verrius alio libro a pago Succusano dictam ait: hoc vero maxime probat*

⁴“L’Importance du terme ‘collis’ pour l’étude du développement urbain de la Rome archaïque,” *AC* 36 (1967) 107–8.

⁵*Septimontio, ut ait Antistius Labeo, hisce montibus feriae: Palatio . . . Veliae . . . Fagutali, Suburae, Cermalio, Oppio, Caelio monti, Cispio monti*. Here Festus is using a series of datives: “for” the Palatium, “for” the Velia, etc.

⁶For discussions of the meaning of *pagus*, *pagani*, see bibliography in Poucet (above, note 4) 107, note 36.

⁷*Subura Iunius scribit ab eo, quod sub antiqua urbe; cui testimonium potest esse, quod subest ei loco qui terreus murus vocatur. Sed ego a pago potius Succusano dictam puto Succusam . . . Pagus Succusanus quod succurrit Carinis*.

eorum auctoritatem, qui aiunt, ita appellatam et regionem Urbis et tribum a stativo praesidio, quod solitum sit succurrere Esquilinis, infestantibus eam partem Urbis Gabinis. A permanent guardpost, says Wissowa, must have been situated on an elevation, from which it could see, and manoeuvre against, an attacking enemy. Therefore it will not have been a *pagus Succusanus* that “succoured” the Esquiline but a hypothetical *mons Succusa*⁸ from which the adjective form *Succusanus* derived.

There are three objections to this construction. (1) There is no evidence for a *mons Succusa*. (2) A post on the Caelian to protect the Esquiline against attacks from Gabii is an absurdity. Such attacks would sweep down on the Esquiline along the high plateau to the east and the value of a detachment on the Caelian for any flanking manoeuvre would be very dubious. (3) The passage in Festus obviously is a fanciful confection built on the word *succurrere*, which to Varro meant “run up under,” and therefore is worthless as evidence.

A closer examination of the section of Varro from which our passage is taken shows that Varro’s Subura is a low lying area, not an elevation, chiefly to the south of the Oppian, possibly continuing up to the west of the hill.⁹ In this section (*LL* 5.45–54) Varro is describing region by region the succession of the *sacraria* of the Argei. In *Suburanae regionis parte princeps est Caelius mons*, he says (5.46). Palmer unquestionably is right when he observes that Varro’s source here must have been a handbook made up for the most part of short phrases without syntactic relation,¹⁰ which Varro sometimes turns into sentences and sometimes does not. Here this handbook must have read: *Caelius mons. princeps* . . . as in section 50 it read *Oppius mons. princeps* . . . *Oppius mons. terticeps* . . . etc. What Varro’s sentence means is not, “[L]a première chapelle des Argées correspond au *Mont Caelius*,”¹¹ but that it is *on* the Caelian. The next

⁸Wissowa (above, note 3) 250–52.

⁹A. von Gerkan (“Zum Suburaproblem,” *RhM* 96 [1953] 20–21) asserts that the natural slope of the valley between the Caelius and the Oppius is not toward the *vallis Murcia*, but to the north, toward the passage between the Carinae and the Velia, but this has been disputed by nearly everyone who has dealt with the question since then (see, e.g., L. A. Holland, *Janus and the Bridge=Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome* XXI [Rome 1961] 345–49). The simplest explanation for the existence of two Suburas, and therefore the best, would seem to be that the name originally was used of the Colosseum valley; that, as habitation extended to the north, the name came to be extended, if it had not been already, to the low land bounded to the north and east by the Quirinal, Viminal, and Cispius; and that, thanks to the association of the Caelian with the southern Subura and the great increase in population and traffic in the northern one, it survived especially in association with that area.

¹⁰R. E. A. Palmer, *The Archaic Community of the Romans* (Cambridge 1970) 84, note 2.

¹¹Jean Collart, *Varron: de Lingua Latina, Livre V* (Paris 1954) 29. Throughout this paper, except for minor punctuation, I have used Collart’s text, unless I have indicated differently.

station listed for Regio I, the fourth, is named three times, with three different spellings in almost as many lines, in the best manuscript, *F* (Laurentianus LI 10): *Ceroniensem, Cerolienses, Cerulensis* (5.47). The next station listed is the sixth (5.48): *eidem regioni adtributa Subura, quod sub Muro Terreo Carinarum; in eo est Argeorum sacellum sextum*.

In section 49 the first three words are *secundae regionis Esquiliae*. We have now moved on to the second region, in which the first station is described as follows (5.50): *Oppius mons. princeps Esquiliis uls lucum Facutalem; sinistra via, secundum moerum est*. The second station is not listed. The third and fourth stations are also on the Oppian, while the fifth and sixth are on the Cispan. In the third region (5.52) the third station is on the Quirinal, the fourth on the *collis Salutaris*, the fifth on the *collis Mucialis*, and the sixth on the *collis Latiaris*. Clearly here we are following a continuous route, going generally north and then west in a counter-clockwise direction.

Returning to section 48, I argue that station six of the *regio Suburana*, described as in the Subura, must have lain southwest or west of the Oppian, rather than, as Poucet asserts,¹² in the valley known in later times as the Subura. Poucet's support for this identification rests entirely on the phrase in section 48, *sub Muro Terreo Carinarum* (see above). This earthen wall, he claims, has been localized in modern times at the northwest point of the Oppian.¹³

But the Carinae was especially the western slope of the Oppian and certainly continued around the curve to the southeast,¹⁴ at least as far as the Tigillum Sororis on the Vicus Cuprius,¹⁵ although we have no reason to think that it extended much further. Undoubtedly it also extended equally far to the east around its northern curve. The only argument for locating station six of Regio I northwest of the Carinae is that the *Murus Terreus* here mentioned is to be identified with the wall which is by, or near, the first station of Regio II (Varro *LL* 5.50; see above).

This station is, according to the Collart text, *uls lucum Facutalem*. The Fagutal grove is more precisely located by a passage in Solinus (1.26) where he says: *Tarquinius Superbus et ipse Esquilinus supra clivum Pullium ad Fagutalem lucum sic [habitaui]*. The name Clivus Pullius, according to Huelsen, survived in the name of an ancient church, S. Iohannis in

¹²Poucet (above, note 2) 51–60.

¹³Poucet 51, and note 5.

¹⁴For Cicero (*De Har. Resp.* 23.49) says that Pompey undertook to build a house *in Carinis* . . . *quae Palatio responderet*.

¹⁵See C. Huelsen, *Topographie der Stadt Rom in Altertum* I.3 (Berlin 1907) 263 and 323.

Carapullo or “in Clivo Plumbeo,” which stood below S. Pietro in Vincoli.¹⁶ However, even if we accept the probability that the grove stood on the northwest point of the Oppian, Argei station I.6 still almost certainly stood under the southwest slope of the hill. The Murus Terreus, in all probability, was a terrace wall, supporting the scarped slope, extending around the western curve of the hill, and the reading *uls* or *ouls lucum Facutalem*, accepted by all editors since Mueller, is probably incorrect.

The possibility of a different reading was recognized by Jordan,¹⁷ but adopted by no subsequent editor. In this Regio four stations, of which this is the first, are localized in relation to groves. The text is very corrupt, and *F* reads, for stations three, four, and five, *tertipcepsos*, *quatricepsos* (sic), and *quinticepsos*. On the assumption that the copier did not understand what he was reading and mistook “c” for “o,” these readings were convincingly corrected by Mueller to read *tertipceps cis lucum Esquilinum*, *quatriceps cis lucum Esquilinum*, *quinticeps cis lucum Poetelium*. The description of station one is also unintelligible in the manuscript, but the problem is slightly different. MS *F* has *princeps quilis ovis lacum facultalem*. Mueller emended *ovis* to *ouls* and interpreted it as a variant spelling of *uls*. So far as I can determine this is the only place in Latin where *uls* would have been written *ouls*. I therefore believe with Jordan that the reading should rather be *cis*. The copier read *cis* as *ois*, and pronounced and copied it *ovis*. Since the sequence of stations proceeds from south to north, station one of Regio II, on the brow of the hill above station I.6, lay south of the Fagutal grove.

The location of station I.6, in the Subura, to the southwest of the Oppian is further confirmed by its relation to I.4. Varro (*LL* 5.47) once must have read approximately as follows:¹⁸

Cum Caelio coniunctum Carinae et inter eas quem locum Ceroniensem appellatum apparet, quod primae regionis quartum sacrarium scriptum est:

“Cerolienses. quarticeps, circa Minervium qua in Caelium montem itur, in tabernola est.”

Cerulensis a Carinarum iunctu dictus; Carinae pote a caerimonia, quod hinc oritur caput Sacrae Viae ab Streniae sacello quae pertinet in arcem, qua sacra quotquot mensibus feruntur in arcem . . .

From the adjective *Ceroliensis* or *Ceroniensis*, most topographers have extrapolated a noun, *Cerolia* / *Ceronia*, or something similar, the name of

¹⁶Huelsen 257, and *Le Chiese di Roma nel medio evo* (Florence 1927) 271.

¹⁷H. Jordan, *Topographie der Stadt Rom in Altertum* I.2 (Berlin 1885) 242–43 (following Carrsen, *Kritische Nachträge* 302).

¹⁸*Ceroniensem*, *Cerolienses*, *Cerulensis* are readings of *F*. Otherwise the text is Collart’s.

a place to be put just south of the Oppian at its western end;¹⁹ but such a place-name is otherwise entirely unknown.

Immediately before this, in section 46, Varro mentions the story of Caele Vibenna, an Etruscan leader and ally of Romulus, who with his followers settled on the Caelian and gave it his name. After Caele's death some of these Etruscans came under suspicion because they held *nimis munita loca*, so that they were brought down and settled on lower ground; their second settlement gave the vicus Tuscus its name. However, says Varro, those of the Caelians (*de Caelianis*) who were freed from suspicion were transferred to that place which is called *Caeliolus* (or *Caeliolum*). I think that we may be a little skeptical about the tradition of a double relocation. The story of the removal to the vicus Tuscus looks suspiciously like an attempt to explain the name of that street. However, I see no reason to doubt that an early community of Etruscans was moved from the Caelian height to a less threatening position called thereafter the "Little Caelian." The Caeliolus which is mentioned by this name in no other Latin text, may have been familiar to contemporaries of Varro; Cicero (*de Har. Resp.* 15.32) speaks of a *Caeliculus* (or *Caeliculum*), and Martial (12.18.6) of a *Caelius Minor*. Since the first use of *Ceroliensis* / *Ceroniensis* occurs in the next sentence of Varro's text, the emendation to *Ceriolensis*=*Caeriolensis* seems not only easy but compelling,²⁰ and it is surprising that no topographer ever has seized upon its implications. *Caeriolense* in *Caeriolense. quarticeps*, etc. is clearly a demotic adjective. The phrase corresponds to *Germalense. quinticeps* . . . and *Veliense. sexticeps* . . . in section 54.²¹ *Caeriolense* is neuter because it modifies *sacrarium*, understood from the previous sentence, and it means "the shrine of the Caeliolus."

¹⁹A. Nibby, *Roma nel anno 1832* I (Rome 1838–41) 53; G. A. Guattini, *Roma descritta ed illustrata* II (Rome 1805) 3–4; O. Gilbert, *Geschichte und Topographie der Stadt Rom in Altertum* II (Leipzig 1883–90) 177; Huelsen (above, note 15) 221. But Otto Richter, *Topographie der Stadt Rom* (Munich 1901) 334, unaccountably puts this on the Caelian in the neighborhood of SS. Quattro Coronati.

²⁰Since Varro himself, as a countryman, seems sometimes to have pronounced and written "e" for "ae" (Collart XLII and R. G. Kent, *Varro on the Latin Language* I [Cambridge, Mass. and London 1938] xviii; Kent refers to *LL* 5.97 where Varro says that in the countryside of Latium the word for "kid" is not *haedus* but *hedus*), this is especially easy. B. ten Brink, *M. Terentius Varronis Locis de Urbe Roma* (Traiecti ad Rhenum 1855), corrects the text to *Caeliolensis*. R. G. Kent and Collart both read *Caeriolensis* and remark upon the connection between the adjective and *Caeliolus/um*; but neither draws any further significant topographical inference from this.

²¹So Collart 173 suggests. Palmer (above, note 10) 86 draws the parallel, but extrapolates from the adjective a noun "Caeriolum" (p. 126, note) which he does not associate with the Little Caelian.

The location of this *sacrarium* is as specific as any topographer could wish. The Caelian comes up close to the Carinae, says Varro, and between them is the place called Caeriolensis. The language, *cum Caelio coniunctum Carinae*, is a little surprising, and we may assume some exaggeration inspired by Varro's wish to connect *Caeriolensis* linguistically with *Carinae*. But an examination of the site itself shows that, where the Caelian stretches north toward the Carinae, at about the present position of the Colosseum, the gentle slope down from the Caelian reaches its lowest point close beneath the escarpment of the Oppian along a line just north of the Colosseum. There can hardly be any doubt that the *sacrarium* was near this lowest point. It was *circa Minervium, qua in Caelium montem itur*. The Minervium is most likely the shrine of Minerva Capta, the location of which is described by Ovid (*Fasti* 3.835–37) in very similar terms:²²

Caelius ex alto qua mons descendit in aequom,
hic, ubi non plana est, sed prope plana via
parva licet videas Captae delubra Minervae . . .

A. M. Colini observes in his monograph on the Caelian, that the hill is divided into two eminences, or lobes, by a depression running along the line of the old Via and Piazza della Navicella. The highest point of the eastern height is occupied by the church of SS. Quattro Coronati. It was suggested by Piale in 1834 that this hill is the one known to Varro as the Caeliolus.²³ This suggestion has found favor with modern topographers,²⁴ and while Colini admits that the hypothesis is supported by no ancient evidence, he argues that it is extremely probable, since the height of the Caelian which

²²The precise location of the shrine of Minerva Capta is not known. Platner-Ashby, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Oxford 1929) 343–44, suggest that it is further east than seems to me possible, near the church of SS. Quattro Coronati; but the two bits of evidence offered in support of this location prove, on examination, to be no evidence at all: a statue of Minerva found in 1923 in the cortile behind Via Caelimontana 25 lay between SS. Quattro Coronati and the Colosseum, but not much nearer to the former than the latter. This could not in any case point to the location of Minerva Capta, which Ovid puts almost at the bottom of the slope, being two full city blocks from the bottom of the slope. An inscription commemorating a dedication to Minerva (*CIL* VI. 524) was found even further up the slope, in the Orti Teofili. The representation of the Arcus ad Isis on the Haterii relief (*BCAR* 19–20 [1941], pl. 2 and 65–66, Castagnoli) shows a statue of Minerva in the central opening. This may be a reference to our shrine, but the relief, which shows the Colosseum west of the arch, would prove only that the shrine lay east of the Colosseum. I would put it immediately to the east.

²³S. Piale, *Della Parte meridionale del vero sito del Caeliolo e delle molte sviste fattevi di moderni* (Rome 1834), a work I know only at second hand.

²⁴L. Canina, *Indicazione topografica di Roma antica* (Rome 1850⁴) 76; Gilbert (above, note 19) 52 ff.; Richter (above, note 19) 334; Huelsen (above, note 15) 223; Platner-Ashby (above, note 22) 87.

ought to be more important is the height nearer to the heart of the city, later occupied by the temple of Claudius; that since this height offers a more commanding position, it ought to be considered the Caelian proper. The Caeliolus must then be the height occupied by SS. Quattro Coronati.²⁵

But the identification of *Caeriolensis* as the demotic adjective from Caeliolus makes a position further west necessary. Moreover, the location of the *sacrarium* itself, near the foot of the hill, indicates that the Caeliolus was not one of the two eminences of the Caelian, but rather the hill's lower slope. I therefore venture the following reconstruction, which, if suppositional in detail, may not be too far from historical reality. Varro's early "Caelians" occupied one of the heights of the Caelian, probably that of SS. Quattro Coronati, a position that even today seems the most defensible on the hill. They would have been in a position to descend from their stronghold on cattle pasturing in the *vallis Murcia*, only a short distance away, or on traffic between the Palatine and Esquiline, and return quickly and safely to their refuge. The residents of the Palatine village would have become nervous and suspicious, and eventually the Etruscans were moved to a more vulnerable position which may have been near the Forum. If we accept the tradition associating this community with the vicus Tuscus, subsequently some were allowed to return to the Caelian, but were settled, at least at the beginning, toward the foot of the moderate slope at the western end of the hill. This slope came to be known as the Caeliolus. Perhaps eventually they moved to safer ground on the height, but if so they could not have posed a serious threat, for this height is especially vulnerable along its gentle southwestern slope. And it may be that the name "Caeliolus" then came to be associated with this height, seeming appropriate because of its lesser circumference. But the Caelian community which belonged to the federation of the Septimontium originally had occupied the low land, or Subura, and continued to maintain its demotic shrine in this area; hence the appearance of Subura in the list of the Septimontium.

²⁵A. M. Colini, *Storia e topografia del Caelio nell' antichità*=*Atti della pontificia accademia Romana di archeologia. Memorie* 3rd ser. 7 (1944) 18.