

Ovid

Metamorphoses

Holkham Ms. 324, late 15th century

Notes written by Dr. W.O. Hassall

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MICROFORM ACADEMIC PUBLISHERS

Main Street

East Ardsley

Wakefield WF3 2AP

United Kingdom

MAP@microform.co.uk

microform.co.uk/academic

OVID METAMORPHOSES

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Author and Adviser: W. O. Hassall, M.A.,
D.Phil., F.S.A.

FOREWORD

No Latin poet is so well represented in the manuscript library at Holkham and the collection does not include illuminations for any other Latin poet comparable to those which illustrate Virgil. A Manuscript of Persius (MS. 318) illuminated in France or Flanders was indeed selected to yield one of the twenty-five Proof impressions of Engravings designed to illustrate Mr. Roscoe's catalogue of the manuscript library at Holkham, not published, 1835 (No. 23) and one of a group of texts of Horace is a good example of Florentine work (MS. 317) and another contains a circular map of the world (MS. 315) but it is only among the Ovids that really significant illustrations of antique mythological themes occur.

The Holkham library contains six manuscripts of Ovid. The text of MS. 320 was collated by Gronovius in 1639 and Heinsius in 1645, that of MS. 322 was collated by R. Ellis, S. G. Owen and Professor Alton of Trinity College, Dublin, who discussed it in Hermathera, xlvi, pp. 61-79, and MS. 319 is being collated by Mr. E. J. Kenney. MS. 320 includes among its former owners Queen Christina of Sweden. MS. 323 was begun in Cologne and completed in Vicenza by Albertus the notary and is illuminated but it is the illuminations of MS. 324 which demand detailed consideration.

No engraving was made from MS. 324 for Roscoe's Proof Impressions but Dorez selected two miniatures for inclusion in his Manuscrits a peintures de la Bibliotheque de Lord Leicester a Holkham Hall, 1908. These represent Creation from the frontispiece and the story of Seylla and Glaucus (introducing book xlv of the Metamorphoses). A third miniature showing the story of a Pallas and Arachne was exhibited in the exhibition of Flemish Art at Burlington House, 1953-4 and was accordingly reproduced in the Illustrated London News.

On the frontispiece occur the puzzling letterstyle and Dorez makes the interesting suggestion that as it occurs in a representation of Chaos there may be here an allusion to a phrase in St. Ambrose's Hexaemeron commenting on the first two verses of Genesis: "Haec est autem hyle, quae omne corpus mundi, quod ubicumque cernimus, ideis impressa formavit". This typifies the spirit of all the pictures in this manuscript. For though the subjects are drawn from antiquity they are interpreted by a mind steeped in the medieval background and innocent of any sympathy or understanding for the classical and pagan spirit.

A terminus post quem for the illumination is given on fol. 216v. and again on fol. 286 where it appears that the copyist was following texts of Ovid's De Arte Amandi and of Ausonius printed at Venice in 1494 in May and August respectively.

The first illustrated page and that facing it are framed by a rectangular border of foliage and flowers, surrounded by a red line and sprinkled with black dots and whisk red golden balls. Formal

scrolls of foliage are blue, rose and gold and the flowers include columbines, pansies, thistles and daisies. There are also strawberries. Such borders often occur in manuscripts executed for Marcatellis, and his arms with mitre and crozier adorn the margin which surrounds the opening lines of the first book of the Metamorphoses. Similar borders adorn the lower margins of the first page of each book contained in the volume, not merely of those pages which face the full page illustrations of the Metamorphoses and the De Arte Amandi and De Remedio Amoris. The initial letters of each book and of its accompanying commentary are also illuminated in gold, blue and rose and titles in red and paragraph marks in alternate red and blue make even the unilluminated pages gay with their wide white margins.

The large illustrations have flat expanses of grey, brown, rose or violet buildings and blue skies and stretches of water. The ground is generally a yellow green which sometimes is of varying shade which prevents monotony. Reproduction in black and white loses the fresh, bright and varied colours of the costumes, in which the highlights are touched with gold. Phaethon wears red with blue and green sleeves, mauve hose and black buskins, his mother is in blue-green, the colour of Phaethon's hat, and his father is blue with mauve sleeves and red hat ornamented with gold and a brown brim. Cadmus has brown and gold armour and a blue surcoat. His dead comrades are in blue, red and yellow-brown with yellow-brown and blue hose. Pyramus has a blue coat and mauve sleeves over a crimson and gold tunic and scarlet hose. Thisbe has a mauve dress and blue sleeves. The industrious ladies within wear red, mauve and green and the

worshipper wears rose (lib.4). -- Arachne wears blue with rose sleeves and her companion crimson with green sleeves. -- Pallas has first a violet gown and then a rose dress with blue sleeves and green epaulettes. -- Jason has a crimson surcoat and green hose, the king has gold over blue with a green collar and blue hat, his attendant has crimson with mauve hose and a green hat and Medea has a gold dress with mauve sleeves and hat of mauve and rose. -- Minos wears blue and Scylla mauve. Crimson, green, gold and mauve surcoats cover the armour which is always blue except for that of the mounted figure entering the city, which is gold. -- Hercules is in brown rags and Archelous in violet. -- Oeneus has crimson over blue with a violet hat with brown brim, his companions have one a red hat and other a violet hat with a blue tunic, red sleeves and violet hose, and Deianira has blue-green over crimson with rose sleeves and a mauve turban.

Euridice has blue with rose sleeves and a mauve and violet headdress. -- Orpheus wears violet over crimson and Pluto wears rose with violet collar and cuffs. -- Euridice's companions have rose with a mauve headdress and crimson with rose headdress and mauve sleeves. -- The devils are violet and steely blue. -- The Maenads wear mauve and blue with a mauve headdress. -- Midas has blue over mauve with brown collar and violet hat. The soldiers have red and blue with blue and brown hose and the figures with ermine collars wear mauve over green and green over crimson with black hose.

Hecuba has yellow-brown with green sleeves and Paris rose, with blue sleeves, mauve hose and green hat. Chalcas wears blue over mauve with mauve mitre. The leaders wear blue over mauve,

green, rose and yellow-brown over blue. The serpent attacking the nest in the tree is brown and the birds and tree grey. Ulysses wears crimson with gold sleeves and blue hose and hat. Palamedes is in blue over mauve with a green hat and Telemachus is in mauve. The audience are crimson, mauve, blue, green and crimson with violet, blue, gold, mauve and blue hose and violet, mauve, crimson, brown and blue hats. The surcoats are crimson, green, mauve and blue, with hose of contrasting colours. Two pairs are brown and one of black and white stripes, is worn with a tunic which has pleats of alternate red and blue below the waist.

Scylla wears blue, Glaucus crimson with blue sleeves, violet hose and mauve hat and his comrade mauve with a blue hat and black hose. Circe's dress is mauve and her attendants wear crimson with yellow-brown sleeves and mauve headdress and mauve with rose sleeves and orange headdress. Michilus wears red over blue and his companions yellow-brown with blue hat and hose, mauve with yellow-brown hat and black hose, red with blue hat, yellow-brown with black hose, and mauve with blue hat and black hose. The builders wear blue with mauve hose and vice versa and violet and red hats. Pythagoras wears blue over mauve and his clients wear red with black hose and blue hat and mauve over blue with red hats.

In the De Arte Amandi Ovid wears blue with a red cap. The young men wear rose over violet with black facings and red hat, brown over blue with red hose and black and rose hat, and red with black hat and hose. The young women wear red with black collar, mauve with red collar and vermilion sleeves and blue. The greybeard has

blue over red with black hose, collar and hat-brim. The top of his hat is red and the edge of his clothes is brown. His companion wears violet and white. Flowers and strawberries, mostly arranged in pairs, are a brilliant feature of the colouring of this page.

In the De Remedio Amoris Ovid wears blue over crimson, with black hose and an ermine and crimson cap. Leander has crimson, Thisbe rose, Sappho yellow and Phillis blue green. Pyramus has black hose, crimson cap and a blue tunic with pleated skirt of alternate red and blue. The male auditors wear brown with blue sleeves, rose hose and black hat, rose with black hose and crimson hat with brown and gold brim and black with yellow hose and black buskins with grey tops, crimson hat with brown and gold brim and similar collar and sash. The ladies wear brown, over mauve with mauve headdress, a dress which is blue in front merging into rose behind worn over yellow sleeves with a brown and gold hat, and yellow merging into orange with a yellow turban.

OVID METAMORPHOSES

INTRODUCTION

In the Ovid a full page picture precedes each book (except book 5) of the *Metamorphoses*. A picture which nearly fills the page precedes the *Art of Love*. Of these two have been published in facsimile by Leon Dorez in his Manuscripts a peintures de la Bibliotheque de Lord Leicester a Holkham Hall, Norfolk, 1908. pl. lvi and lvii (nos. 1 and 13), but the others have never been described, even in Madden's great manuscript catalogue at Holkham, though the manuscript was sent to the British Museum in 1931 for examination of the text with the other five Holkham Ovids by R. H. Alton, Professor of Latin at Trinity College, Dublin.

The pictures are especially interesting as often revealing a medieval approach to Renaissance themes as reflected in a practical and rather pedestrian Flemish mind.

Frame 1 fol. 13v. A circle of angels, mauve, surrounding a circle, black, inscribed YLE. white. Between monograms, LYS, blue and gold. Above a larger series of concentric circles, blue, containing the sun, planets and Prometheus stealing fire, around a red circle of fire surrounding circles of air and water, blue within which is the world with a tree full of birds beneath which Prometheus gives fire to men. Initials RM in lower corners. A border of leaves and flowers. Reproduced by L. Dorez, pl. lvi

Frame 2 fol. 14v. On the opposite page is a similar border, with arms of Marcatellis.

fol. 25v. Phaethon talks to his mother, and to the Sun. His fall.

Frame 3 fol. 35v. Cadmus in the Temple. He follows the cow. A dragon kills his companions and he slays it.

Frame 4 fol. 44v. Alcithoe spinning and laundering while another worships. Thisbe hides from a lion. Pyramus dies. Thisbe stabs herself. Mulberries become dark instead of white.
(book 5 has no picture)

Frame 5 fol. 62v. Arachne boasts to a friend. Pallas, with fringed epaulettes, dressed as a crone, approaches her. Both darn patterns on an upright loom. One figures birds. Pallas turns Arachne into a spider.

Frame 6 fol. 71v. Arrival of Jason and departure with the golden fleece. He talks to Medes, with fringed epaulettes, and slays the dragon.

Frame 7 fol. 82v. Siege of Megara. Minos and Scylla. Somewhat like Delilah, she cuts off the king's lock of hair to betray the country. He is changed into a bird.

Frame 8 fol. 97v. Hercules fights Archelous, his rival champion, who becomes a 'serpent' (with four legs). Hercules

takes the bull by the horns, and is awarded the hand of Deianeira by Oeneus. The glorification of brute strength is unknown to the artist who has no Michel-angelesque appreciation of a Tarzan.

- Frame 9 Euridice bitten by a four-legged snake. ~~The three-headed dog.~~ Orpheus with his lyre before the King of Hell. A Gothic devil drags back Euridice.
- Frame 10 The charmed deer. Maenads stone Orpheus. Midas prays. His food turned to gold. He bathes in Pactolus.
- Frame 11 Hecuba dreams of a torch. Paris deported. The Greek fleet. Mitred Chalcas explaining heaven's will (an anachronistic rendering of priestly dress which recalls 'Bishop Caiaphas' in medieval drama). The prodigy of a serpent drawing birds up a tree.
- Frame 12 Ulysses sows salt to feign madness and thereby evade military service. Palamedes puts Telemachus in front of the plough as a psychological test. In revenge Ulysses plants gold in Palamedes' tent and secretes a forged letter from the enemy upon his person. He accuses Palamedes on a framed treason charge so that he is slain as a fifth-columnist.
- Frame 13 Scylla rejects Glaucus' love. Circe gives him a 'love-potion' which poisons Scylla's bath and makes dogs sprout from her.

- Frame 14 Croton builds a monument to Hercules.
Mithras dreams and tries to emigrate.
The verdict of the ballot about him
reversed by divine interposition.
Numa Pompilius seeks wisdom of Pythagoras.
- Frame 15 Ovid teaching four couples (one elderly)
the Art of Love in a flowery walled
garden. Daisies, pansies, strawberry
flower and fruit and perhaps speedwell.
- Frame 16 Four examples of love with fatal re-
sults (Leander, Pyramus, Thisbe,
Sappho, Phillis). Ovid lectures.