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Ovid on Gozo? *Metamorphoses* as a source for the *Tristia ex Melitogaudo*

*Stephen J. Harrison**

Introduction

The recent publication in 2010 of a fine full edition of the so-called *Tristia ex Melitogaudo*, the Greek poem of more than four thousand iambic lines written by a Greek-Sicilian scholar of the twelfth century in exile on Gozo,[67] may lead to some reassessment of the reception history of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. An important preliminary study has already shown that the poet of the *Tristia* made use of a wide range of classical mythological stories, including some found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (H.C.R.Vella, 'The classical sources in the *Tristia ex Melitogaudo*: *lament in Greek verse of a 12th-century exile on Gozo'* in I.Volt and J. Päll (eds.), *Quattuor Lustra: papers celebrating the 20th anniversary of the re-establishment of classical studies at the University of Tartu*, Tartu, 2012, 209-244). This paper takes the argument a stage further, suggesting direct use of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* by the author of the *Tristia*.

Phaethon

The first relevant passage of the *Tristia* is at f.53.3 – 54.7. Here the poet compares himself to Phaethon as a model for his possible offence against his patron King Roger II, just as Ovid in the first of his *Tristia* implicitly compares his own punishment by Augustus to that of Phaethon by Jupiter for abuse of Apollo's chariot (*Tristia* 1.1.79-80; see also 4.3.66-7):

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[67] J. Busuttil, S. Fiorini and H.C.R. Vella (2010). I cite this excellent edition throughout.

And was I aiming at the divine rank,
just like the senseless Phaethon, son of the light-bearer
thanks to whom I have even been hurled into the midst of the sea?

Here the *Tristia* implies that it is Apollo who punished Phaethon rather than Jupiter, and indeed the *Tristia*'s version of the story keeps Jupiter out altogether, perhaps because of sensitivities about the possible equation of the pagan Jupiter and the Christian god. But there is no doubt that the subsequent scene is taken from Ovid (*fr*. 53.6-9):

But indeed that boy, born of Helius
and of Clymene, having been absurdly insulted[1]
as to be in no way counted as an offspring of the light-bearer,
opportunely hit with great grief, went away lamenting to his mother Clymene.

Having been encouraged by motherly words,
he visited his father, wishing to learn whether [he],
a child of Clymene, derived his existence from him.

Here we surely have a paraphrase of Ovid *Metamorphoses* 1.750-775, where Phaethon boasts of his divine paternity and is doubted by his schoolmate Epaphus, himself the son of Io and Zeus.

Sole satus Phaethon, quem quondam magna loquentem
nec sibi cedentem Phoeboque parente superbum
non tulit Inachides 'matri' que ait 'omnia demens
credis et es tumidus genitoris imagine falsi.'
erubuit Phaethon iramque pudore repressit *755*
et tulit ad Clymenen Epaphi convicia matrem
'quo' que 'magis doleas, genetrix' ait, 'ille ego liber,
ille ferox tacui! pudet haec opprobria nobis
et dici potuisse et non potuisse refelli.
at tu, si modo sum caelesti stirpe creatus, *760*

[1] J. Busuttil, S. Fiorini and H.C.r. Vella (2010) translate καθυβρισθεὶς as 'having acted arrogantly', but I interpret the participle as passive and modify their translation here. The difference is important for the potential Ovidian allusion, as will be clear below.

ede notam tanti generis meque adsere caelo!'
dixit et inplicuit materno bracchia collo
perque suum Meropisque caput taedasque sororum
traderet oravit veri sibi signa parentis.
ambiguum Clymene precibus Phaethontis an ira *765*
mota magis dicti sibi criminis utraque caelo
bracchia porrexit spectansque ad lumina solis
'per iubar hoc' inquit 'radiis insigne coruscis,
nate, tibi iuro, quod nos auditque videtque,
hoc te, quem spectas, hoc te, qui temperat orbem, *770*
Sole satum; si ficta loquor, neget ipse videndum
se mihi, sitque oculis lux ista novissima nostris!
nec longus labor est patrios tibi nosse penates.
unde oritur, domus est terrae contermina nostrae:
si modo fert animus, gradere et scitabere ab ipso!'

Note how in both texts Phaethon is introduced as the son of the Sun, in both he is said to be 'insulted' about his dubious paternity (καθυβρισθεὶς /convicia), and in both his mother encourages him to visit his father to learn the truth.

The links with Ovid continue in the *Tristia*'s account of Phaethon's visit to his father, the Sun (f.53.14 – 16):

[His father] provided words of assurance, swearing by the Styx,
at that time an unalterable oath of the gods,
that he was descended somehow from him,
and he said to him, 'If you wish to be persuaded,
ask further from me from things which are seen [to persuade you]'.

Here we have clear paraphrase of the Sun's words to Phaethon when they meet (*Metamorphoses* 2.42-46):

'nec tu meus esse negari
dignus es, et Clymene veros' ait 'edidit ortus,
quoque minus dubites, quodvis pete munus, ut illud
me tribuente feras! promissi testis adesto *45*
dis iuranda palus, oculis incognita nostris!'

In both passages, the Sun swears by the Styx to Phaethon that he is his father (note the antiquarian note in the *Tristia* on the oath by the Styx), and grants him any request he would like to make. Phaethon, of course, chooses to drive the Sun's chariot for a day, as the *Tristia* recounts (53v.1-5):

> The undeceiving child foolishly asked
> to have this seal [to his query]
> the chariot-drive of just one day, the anchor of his life.
> [His father], if even he was scarcely grieved, gave it [to him]
> knowing what would happen to the thrice-unhappy youth.

Again, this is a paraphrase in the same sequence of the following Ovidian scene, where Phaethon asks for the same favour (2.47-8):

> *vix bene desierat, currus rogat ille paternos*
> *inque diem alipedum ius et moderamen equorum*.

The two texts clearly diverge in the presentation of the Sun's attitude to the request. In the *Tristia* the Sun knows what will happen, is mildly grieved but does not attempt to dissuade Phaethon, whereas in Ovid the god makes an extensive speech outlining the extreme risks of his choice (2.49-102), making clear that he knows the likely mortal consequences. This modification may reflect a choice to present the pagan gods as careless of mortals in Homeric manner, lacking Christian charity and consequently less dangerously attractive.

Several details in the *Tristia*'s highly abbreviated account of Phaethon's ride and its fatal end look to the much longer Ovidian model (*Metamorphoses* 2.150-328). In both texts the horses react disastrously to the lighter burden of their new driver (f.53v.10 ~ 2.161-66), throw Phaethon from the chariot (f.53v.11 ~ 2.319-22), and the young man ends up dead in the river Eridanus/Po (f.53v.13 ~ 2.324), stressed as far in the West (fr.53v.12 ~ 2.325). In the *Tristia*, it is Clymene and Phaethon's sisters who bury his body with much lamentation (f.53v.14-15); in the *Metamorphoses*, it is the local Naiads who perform the burial (2.325), but there is much emphasis on the lamentations of Clymene, who goes to the tomb (2.333-39), and of Phaethon's sisters (2.340-346), who are transformed into trees, and whose tears are transformed into the amber

supposed to be found in the Po (in fact reflecting the function of the Po as an important stage on the amber trade route from northern Europe). Most strikingly, in both texts Phaethon is given a formal epitaph marked off from the main narrative in capitals. For once, the *Tristia* is longer than the *Metamorphoses* here (f.54.1-4 ~ 2.327-8):

> HERE LIES PHAETHON, THE CHARIOT-DRIVER
> WRETCHEDLY DESTINED TO THE PITEOUS FATE,
> NOT HAVING EVEN ENJOYED A COMPLETE DAY
> OF THE ILL-STARRED, FATAL CHARIOT-DRIVE.
>
> HIC : SITVS : EST : PHAETHON : CVRRVS : AVRIGA : PATERNI
> QVEM : SI : NON : TENVIT : MAGNIS : TAMEN : EXCIDIT : AVSIS

Both begin with the same epitaphic formula and a reference to chariot-driving.

Overall, it seems beyond doubt that the *Tristia* is directly using the *Metamorphoses* in its narrative of Phaethon.

Daphne

Another, longer, episode in the *Tristia* which undoubtedly owes much to the *Metamorphoses* is the extensive narrative of the story of Daphne at f.91v.5-f.95.7, clearly reflecting *Metamorphoses* 1.452-567. Here the two episodes are in fact the same length (116 lines each), and though we are not dealing with a translation, there is clearly close engagement with the Latin text by the Greek author. Both episodes begin with a description of the two types of arrow wielded by Eros/Cupid, love-inducing and aversion-inducing (f.91v.5-11 ~ 1.463-71), and both recount how Eros/Cupid wounds Apollo with one type of arrow and Daphne with the other (f.91v.12-14 ~ 1.463-76). Both texts also stage a competition between Apollo and Eros/Cupid, though the *Tristia*-poet places it after rather than before the wounding as a flashback narrative. These two scenes are clearly close to each other – cf. f.91v.15-90.10 and 1.454-65:

> For while Apollo, returning from his victory
> at the time when he, death-bearing,
> with his sharp arrows killed Python, the beast fearless of man,

who oppressed the lands not a little,
struck fittingly in his belly,
he, having been! excited at the victory over the contested beast,
observed Eros in possession of a bow.
'What does the bow mean to you', he says, 'O young one?
What does this [bow], the arrows mean [to you], O stupid one?
These weapons are certainly not for your limbs!
Hand these things over to me, child, you who [play] with toys,
for they are in harmony with my muscles.
But you, child, use playthings such as befit younger children'.

Delius hunc nuper, victa serpente superbus,
viderat adducto flectentem cornua nerv *455*
'quid' que 'tibi, lascive puer, cum fortibus armis?'
dixerat: 'ista decent umeros gestamina nostros,
qui dare certa ferae, dare vulnera possumus hosti,
qui modo pestifero tot iugera ventre prementem
stravimus innumeris tumidum Pythona sagittis. *460*
tu face nescio quos esto contentus amores
inritare tua, nec laudes adsere nostras!'

Both episodes have the same narrative sequence, with Apollo encountering Cupid when fresh from his victory over the serpent Python. The Greek text closely matches Apollo's opening contemptuous question to Cupid in Ovid about the bow (repeated for good measure), his reference to his more manly physique and its greater suitability for the bow, and his instruction to Cupid to go away and play with his own childish toys rather than Apollo's mighty weapon. Many further details in the two narratives also match: Daphne is said to live the life of Artemis as virgin huntress (f.90.15-17 ~ 1.475-7), the wedding torch is mentioned as a symbol of the marriage she is trying to avoid (f.90.17 ~ 1.483), Apollo is set alight with the fire of love (f.90v.11 ~ 1.492-6), the nymph runs away from the god in a wild landscape (f.90v.15 ~ 1.502-3), the god makes an elaborate speech in his own favour as he chases her, boasting of his divine identity, his mastery of Delphi and Tenedos and his role as the divine healer who in this instance cannot heal himself (f.89.5-89v.16 ~1.504-523). In both cases too Apollo's passion is increased by Daphne's loose

hair in flight (f.96.4-5 ~ 1.529-30). Interestingly, the *Tristia*-poet edits out the role of Daphne's father Peneus: in Ovid it is he who intervenes to save his daughter from Apollo by changing her into the bay-tree (1.544-552), but in the *Tristia* it is Artemis who accomplishes the metamorphosis (f.96v.5-8). Finally, just as in Ovid, the final element of the narrative is the aetiology which links the mythical story to the writer's own world: in Ovid the bay-garland is said to be the decoration of Roman *triumphatores* and of the house of Augustus himself (1.557-63), while the *Tristia*-poet marks the bay-garland as belonging to the celebrations of elite Greeks (f.96v.17ff), an appropriate cultural modification of the Roman material.[2] This series of detailed intertextual allusions again leaves it in no doubt that the author of the *Tristia* is using the text of Ovid.

Conclusion

I hope to have shown that the poet of the *Tristia ex Melitogaudo* takes up details of narrative and other content from two famous episodes from the first two books of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the stories of Phaethon and of Daphne.[3] Unless there was a lost Greek translation of the *Metamorphoses* circulating in the twelfth century which is otherwise unattested, the most probable conclusion must be that the *Tristia*-poet is alluding to the *Metamorphoses* direct. This use of the Latin poem itself would make good sense given the clear indications that the poet of the *Tristia* knows Latin and even uses Latin loan-words.[4] It would also fit the plausible suggestion that the poet is in fact identical with Eugenius of Palermo (1130-1202),

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[2] The reference may be to the Theban festival of Daphnephoria, known in Byzantine culture – cf. Photius *Bibliotheca* 239 321a-322b; for more on this see Schachter (2000).

[3] It may be that the *Tristia*-poet had read only the first few books of the *Metamorphoses*. Three other stories told in the *Tristia* which also occur prominently in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are that of Syrinx (f.66v.3ff), Philomela (f.64.15ff) and Daedalus (f.103v.1ff), none of which has such undeniable links with Ovid's text.

[4] J. Busuttil, S. Fiorini and H.C.R. Vella (2010), xxxix.

the author of similar extant iambics [5] with some knowledge of Latin (he translated Ptolemy's *Optics* from Arabic into Latin).[6]

This would have significant consequences for the medieval reception of Ovid's poem. Current studies of this topic either concentrate wholly on the Western reception of Ovid in the period[7] or suggest that the first reappearance of Ovid in Greek texts after late antiquity occurs in the thirteenth century in the work of Maximus Planudes, who translated the *Metamorphoses* into Greek prose towards the end of the thirteenth century.[8] Direct use of Ovid's poem in the *Tristia* would take its Byzantine reception history more than a century further back, and give Gozo an unlikely place in the reception of one of the most important Latin poets.

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5 M. Gigante (1964).

6 For a text, see A. Lejeune (1956)

7 So P. Gatti (2014).

8 So E. Fisher (2011).

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