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# *Ovidius Pictus*: Afterlives of the *Metamorphoses* in Europe, from Books to the Arts

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# *Ovidius Pictus*: Afterlives of the *Metamorphoses* in Europe, from Books to the Arts

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# The Mythological Image in the Illuminated Manuscript of the *Metamorphoses* from the Marciana Library (Venice, Marciana Library, Lat. Z. 449a)

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*Abstract*

The *Metamorphoses* of the Italian Trecento preserved in the Marciana Library is one of the few manuscripts of the Ovid's poem that includes mythological themes illuminations. This paper aims to review the identifications proposed to date for its images so as to relate them to other miniatures of *Metamorphoses* cycle within the complex cultural environment of the Trecento in northern Italy.

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## 1. *Introduction*

Among the *Metamorphoses* illuminated manuscripts of the late Middle Ages[1], it is the copy in the Marciana Library in Venice (Venice, Marciana Library, Lat. Z. 449a) that is regarded as the most outstanding for art historians[2]. The interest lies on its rarity – being one of the few examples of the Latin poem illuminated on a mythological theme – and on its originality, showing three different types of illuminations, which come to a total of eighteen images: fifteen historiated capital letters, two images in the margin of two of the capital letters, and one smaller historiated letter.

These *Metamorphoses* unique illuminations were attributed to the Bolognese miniaturist Stefano degli Azzi by François Avril[3]. Later, Francesca Flores D'Arcais recovered this contribution by François Avril to also point out the likelihood that this manuscript was illuminated between Padua and Venice, during a documented stay of the miniaturist in this area during the Trecento final decades[4]. However, the tracking of a specific production time for this manuscript turns to be a tough task on the grounds of Stefano degli Azzi's poor stylistic evolution. His career remained stable for almost fifty

[1] This is the subject of my doctoral dissertation supervised by Fátima Díez Platas and Déborah González Martínez at the University of Santiago de Compostela. One of the main objectives of my research is to search for illuminated manuscripts of the *Metamorphoses* from the 14th century to compose a complete study corpus. So far, this corpus consists of 16 manuscripts, 7 of which were newly found during the preparation of this study.

[2] This manuscript has a title page printed on the first flyleaf (f. I) entitled "CODEX CCCCXLIX Bess. / in folio, membranaceus, foliorum 151. / saeculi circiter XV. / P. OVIDII NASONIS Metamorphoseon libri XV / in 4. mai. membranaceus, foliorum 56. / saeculi XV. / P. OVIDII NASONIS Heroides". The first four lines of the title correspond to the record of the manuscript itself in the catalogue regarding Marciana Library manuscripts compiled by Anton Maria Zanetti in 1741. The abbreviation "Bess" from the old catalogue signature in Anton Maria Zanetti's catalogue indicates that this copy of the *Metamorphoses* comes from the donation of the manuscripts that Cardinal Basilio Bessarion (1403-1472), made in 1468 to the Republic of Venice which forms the oldest and most important nucleus of the Marciana Library. Therefore, this codex was part of the Byzantine cardinal's library until 1468. This information was provided by the library itself and can be consulted in the catalogue of Anton Maria Zanetti. As for the data regarding illuminations see Lord 1969; Mattia 1985; Mattia 1990-1991; Avril 1991; Orofino 1995; Trapp 2003; Lord 2011; Flores D'Arcais 2012; Ponchia 2015; Venturini 2016; Pesavento 2016; Simeoni 2017; Otero 2021. This manuscript was recently digitized, and it is available in its entirety via the following link: <https://www.internetculturale.it/jmms/iccuviewer/iccu.jsp?id=oai%3A193.206.197.121%3A18%3AVE0049%3ACSTOR.243.14978>, 18.12.2023.

[3] The works of the art historian Francesco Malaguzzi Valeri (1867-1928) laid the basis to produce in the end of the last century a succession of studies on the main stylistic characteristics as well as inventories of Stefano degli Azzi production, such as the one of François Avril. Precisely regarding this manuscript, Eleonora Mattia also provided a stylistic study. Her research also relates the Marciana manuscript to another one preserved in the Malatestiana Library in Cesena (Cesena, Malatestiana Library, S.XXV.6), also attributed in the same way to Stefano degli Azzi. Cf. Avril 1991; Mattia 1990-1991.

[4] Flores D'Arcais 2012, p. 133.

years[5], producing mostly secular commissions with iconographies for educated people and often still little practised: for example, the *Metamorphoses* manuscripts or historical works such as the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à Cesar*, preserved in the French National Library (Paris, French National Library, Ms. Fr. 168), recently recognised as one of his earliest works[6], dated around 1354.

In addition to stylistic analyses, several publications have also attempted to offer identifications of the mythological themes[7], which resulted in disparate iconographic conclusions by their authors in some cases. Nevertheless, the various attempts to identify the themes have brought to light two important aspects that deserve to be highlighted[8]: on the one hand, the artist remarkable talent to attach illuminations to the mythological narrative, combined with an enormous care for both the details and references to the text; on the other hand, his ability to summarise the core subject in order to recall the main story, in close relation to the capitular letters. Finally, a third distinctive aspect can be mentioned: despite finding major recognisable themes in many depictions, the identification in some of them is not so obvious because their common thread is difficult to detect at first sight.

Some of these peculiarities derive from specific circumstances of the artistic scene where the illuminations were created[9], but others could be evidence of a possible process of circulation and reception of mythological images, especially from the *Metamorphoses* poem. It is true that illuminations with mythological themes are not only limited just to the manuscripts of the Latin poet as we have important examples in Seneca's *Tragedies*, the Trojan cycle or even in Dante's *Divine Comedy*[10], but even if parallels of specific mythological themes

[5] According to Daniele Guernelli, the first documentary evidence in which Stefano degli Azzi is mentioned working is in 1368, in connection with the payment for two missals made for the *Collegio di Spagna*. However, his first beginnings as a miniaturist can be traced in two manuscripts dated 1354 and containing *Decretalium librum novella commentaria* by Giovanni d'Andrea (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Ms. B. 42 inf) and *Speculum iudiciale* by Guglielmo Durante (Holkham Hall, Library of Earl of Leicester, Ms. 225), both also illuminated by Nicolò di Giacomo. Cf. Guernelli 2010.

[6] Avril and Gousset 2012, p. 144.

[7] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985; Mattia 1990-1991; Flores D'Arcais 2012; Venturini 2016; Pesavento 2016; Otero 2021.

[8] Venturini 2016; Otero 2021.

[9] The capacity for synthesis in capital letters is a usual feature in the illuminations from northern Italy. This new conception of the relationship between illumination and the written page can be traced in legal books in which some sections are introduced by historiated initials as Monaco *Decretals* (Monaco, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 14032) or even one *Divine Comedy* manuscript (Florence, Riccardina Library, Ricc. 1005). It can also be traced in manuscripts produced in Bologna or in the Veneto area dating back to the *Duecento* and containing texts of philosophy and courtly or profane literature and, above all, with some copies of confessionals. Gianluca Del Monaco provides abundant examples in the notes of his work. Cf. Del Monaco 2018, p. 123.

[10] Classical iconographic themes were widely disseminated throughout the Trecento in northern Italy, especially in the cities of Padua and Bologna and in the circles of the illuminators Nicolò di Giacomo and Stefano degli Azzi. Cf. Buonocore 1996; Fachechi 2000; Guernelli 2010.

can be traced in other works, the internal coherence of the *Metamorphoses* illuminations with the text perhaps allows for a more specific study of Ovidian images. This possible medieval iconographic circulation related to the Ovidian poem cycle, already suggested by Eleonora Mattia[11], could also help to explain the mechanisms of interaction between the mythological illumination and its viewer or reader.

Either the reconstruction or the rejection of this circulation of the Ovidian mythological images in the last centuries of the Middle Ages, based on the illuminations of the manuscript preserved in the Marciana Library, requires the opening of the line of research and the establishment of iconographic relationships with other manuscripts of the *Metamorphoses* cycle. It is therefore necessary to revise all the previously proposed identifications for each of the miniatures in the Marciana manuscript to compare them with the images in other contemporary manuscripts with Ovidian mythographic content. In addition to the manuscript of the *Metamorphoses* preserved in the Saxon State and University Library of Dresden (Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden, Mscr.Dresd.Dc.144)[12], and illuminated by Stefano degli Azzi[13], it is possible that similar iconographic themes can be traced in the three contemporary manuscripts of the *Ovide moralisé* illuminated in France[14] (Rouen,

[11] Mattia 1990-1991, p. 69.

[12] No study has been devoted to it and it was one of the discoveries of my doctoral research on the manuscripts' illumination of the poem in the late Middle Ages. However, the researcher Franco Munari already included this manuscript in his well-known catalogue. Cf. Munari, 1957, p. 20. The manuscript is digitized on the library's own website: <https://digital.slub-dresden.de/werkansicht/dlf/12676/1/#>, 18.12.2023. For future references to this manuscript, I will use the abbreviation SLUB 144 will be used. On the other hand, a third manuscript of the *Metamorphoses* (Florence, Medicea Laurenziana Library, Plut. 36.8) from the same period and illuminated with mythological themes is preserved in the Laurenziana Medicea Library. However, although it is also illuminated in the same way in its capital letters, it has been decided to be discard for these comparisons because they are figural rather than historiated letters, and the illumination is simpler with more decorative features. Cf. Lord 1969; Mattia 1985; Orofino 1995; Lord 2011; Ponchia 2015; Venturini 2016; Pesavento 2016; Otero 2021.

[13] Zanichelli 2022, p. 201.

[14] It is a French translation of the *Metamorphoses* poem with moralizations and additions. What little we know about the composition of this commentary is that it may have been commissioned between 1316 and 1325 by Queen Joan of Burgundy (1293-1329), wife of Philip V of France. Nineteen manuscripts containing the text *Ovide moralisé* in verse with illuminations produced in the final centuries of the Middle Ages have survived. They present two different types of illumination: one that developed from the second half of the 14th century which consists of the figuration of the gods influenced by the text of Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus*; the other is an earlier one with illuminations directly related to the text of the *Ovide moralisé* which they accompany. These earlier manuscripts are the three that served as the subject of comparison in this paperwork. Cf. Lord 1975; Lord 1998. The working group "OEF. Ovide en français", set up in 2008 at the University of Zurich, provides working material and a rich collection of biographical references on its website: <https://www.rose.uzh.ch/de/forschung/forschungamrose/projekte/oef/manuscrits.html%C2%A>, 18.12.2023.

Bibliothèque municipale, Ms. O.4[15]; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arsenal 5069[16]; Lyon, Bibliothèque municipale, ms. 742[17]) and in those of the *Ovidius moralizatus*[18] (Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, Ms Membr. I 98; Bergamo, Biblioteca Civica, Ms. Cassaforte 3.04), illuminated in northern Italy[19].

## 2. *"Seeing" the Ovidian text through images: identification of the themes in the illuminations of the manuscript*

Authors tend to agree on the illumination topics because of their obvious thematic connection, such is the case of the first capital letter (f. 1r)[20]. It depicts (Fig. 1.1) a surface where animals or architecture submerge while two recog-

[15] This is a manuscript from the first quarter of the 14th century made for Queen Clemence of Hungary (1293-1328) with a total of 453 miniatures and attributed to the Master of Fauvel, active between 1314 and 1340. For future references to this manuscript, I will use the abbreviation BMR O4. The manuscript is digitized at the following link: <https://portail.biblissima.fr/fr/ark:/43093/mdata9a5108f8606eda5b95ad3e5e33dfd3cb362768bb>, 18.12.2023.

[16] This manuscript, also from the first quarter of the century, has 304 miniatures attributed to the Master of Fauvel. Eight torn miniatures are missing, as well as some leaves at the beginning and in the middle of the manuscript, which would also have illuminations. Future references to this manuscript will be BNF A5069. It is digitized at this link: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b525031179/f1.planchecontact>, 18.12.2023.

[17] This manuscript is later, dating from the end of the century. The text does not include moralizations and has 57 miniatures attributed to the Master of the Policratique. It belonged to the Duke of Berry, John I (1340-1416). Future references for this version will be BML 742. It is digitized at the following link: <https://portail.biblissima.fr/fr/ark:/43093/mdata5b0c43ce79f-42d790ccc6486227c4815d1f77565>, 18.12.2023.

[18] The *Ovidius moralizatus* was originally conceived as the penultimate of the sixteen books that comprised the encyclopedic work *Reductorium morale* by the Benedictine monk Pierre Bersuire. However, it soon circulated independently, with a double structure: a first chapter on the figure of the mythological gods known as *De formis figurisque deorum* and then the *Metamorphoses* with allegorical explanations. Five illuminated manuscripts have survived, three of them illuminated in northern Italy in the 14th century, recently studied by Giuseppa Zanichelli. The manuscript preserved in the Library of Treviso (Treviso, Biblioteca Comunale, Ms. 344) is not included in these comparisons because it only presents illuminations for the first chapter with the illuminations of the figures of the gods and not for the *Metamorphoses*. Cf. Lord, 1995; McLaughlin 2017; Venturini 2018; Zanichelli 2022.

[19] The manuscript preserved in Gotha, hereafter FB I98, is not digitized. It was commissioned by Bruzio Visconti (died in 1356) and its illuminations are attributed to the Bolognese miniaturist known as the Master of 1346. It may have been a luxurious manuscript, as it has been estimated that the design originally included 248 miniatures, of which 77 complete illuminations were made up to and including book 5 of the poem, 26 partially colored and three simply drawn. The other manuscript, preserved in the Biblioteca Civica Angelo Mai of Bergamo, and henceforth referred to as BCM 3.04, is digitized through this link: <https://www.bdl.servizirl.it/bdl/bookreader/index.html?path=fe&cdOggetto=3823#mode/2up>, 18.12.2023.

[20] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 378; Flores D'Arcais 2012, p.135; Pesavento 2016, p. 43; Venturini 2016, p. 55.

nisable figures are sailing in a boat. These, undoubtedly, turn out to be Deucalion and Pyrrha, the only human survivors from the Flood and who came in front of Goddess Themis. Ovid reveals that the rest are in the power of the sea, as Deucalion himself says: «O sister, O my wife, O only woman left on earth […] and whom now our very perils join: of all the lands which the rising and the setting sun behold, we two are the throng. The sea holds all the rest»[21].

Despite the undeniable identification of the characters, the specific moment of the episode seems less clear: it might be set on the situation prior to the couple arrival at Mount Parnassus to consult the ancient oracle of Themis[22]. The choice of this moment is evidenced not only by the figure of Themis with the pennant on the hill of Parnassus, but also by the fact that Stefano degli Azzi depicts the boat in one corner of the initial, incomplete, conveying the idea of both survivors setting foot on dry land. On the other hand, perhaps evoking the poem lines where it is stated that «there was no better man than he, none more scrupulous of right, nor than she was any woman more reverent of the gods»[23], Deucalion is depicted bearded, wearing a fur-lined cloak, and holding a censer, while Pyrrha holds a rosary in her hands.

This apparently recognisable theme, being uncommon for the illuminated manuscripts of the Latin poem in Italy, is frequently dealt in the *Ovide moralisé* illustrations. The first book of the Dresden manuscript is illuminated with the author's image (SLUB 144, f. 1r) while in the *Ovidius moralizatus*, in the case of the Bergamo manuscript Deucalion and Pyrrha repopulate humanity (BCM 3.04, f. 8v) and regarding the Gotha one (f. 9r) the entire story of both characters is summarized in a single illumination (Fig. 5). However, the Rouen manuscript (f. 27r), the Arsenal manuscript (f. 1r) and the Lyon manuscript (f. 14r), all have a specific illumination of Deucalion and Pyrrha, as the Marciana manuscript does. Similarly, the Rouen manuscript even shows buildings and figures submerged in water.

In the capital letter illumination of second Book (f. 10v) we can see an image whose colourful range suggest a sense of strength or warmth, especially due to the presence of the chariot or the tower (Fig. 1.2). A sound interpretation for this figure could be associate it with Phaethon, as it has been done so far[24]. However, no attention has been paid to the solemnity of the figure, wearing a crown and a red cloak lined with fur, something usually related to illustrious people. Only Cristina Venturini makes explicit reference to the

[21] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 351-355. The edition of Frank Justus Miller published in six volumes in 1977 has been used for this work. The volumes corresponding to the *Metamorphoses* are the third and fourth.

[22] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 315-320.

[23] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 322-223

[24] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 378; Flores D'Arcais 2012, p. 135; Venturini 2016, pp. 100-103; Pesavento 2016, p. 43.

crown, but just to confirm her identification of the figure with the unfortunate Phaethon on the grounds of the lines of the poem in which it is said that Sun places the hair of lightning on the young man's head. But apart from the splendour figure, the mayor interest lies on the chariot entering the palace: given the fact that Phaethon left in the chariot but did not return, this might be the key action to confirm Sun identity[25]. Precisely in the first verses of second book, Sun tries to convince his son Phaethon that asking him for his chariot is not a good idea, saying:

> The last part f the journey is precipitous [...]. Suppose thou hast my chariot. What wilt thou do? Wilt thou be able to make thy way against the whirling poles that their swift axis sweep thee not away? [...] And though thou shouldst hold the way, and not go straying from the course, still shalt thou pass the horned Bull full in thy path, the Haemonian Archer, the maw of the raging Lion, the Scorpion, curving his savage arms in long sweeps, and the Crab, reaching out in the opposite direction. Nor is it an easy thing for thee to control the steeds, hot with those strong fires which they have within their breast, which they breathe out from mouth and nostrils[26].

Indeed, these words have been seemingly transferred to the image by the surrounding constellations and the fire coming out of the horses' mouths[27]. To the best of my knowledge, this could be an exceptional illumination since no example alike can be found even in the moral works: the illuminations in the moralised manuscripts used to show Phaethon in the house of the Sun, but not Sun or Phaethon in his chariot entering the palace[28].

What is more, it is the presence of a second female figure that provides the illumination a unique status: a woman is depicted raising her hand, breaking away from the letter and entering the pages. The figure turns towards the

[25] This possible identification with the Sun has been provided to me by Fátima Díez Platas in an oral communication. This proposition could perhaps be supported by a joint analysis of the iconographic program of the manuscript and in relation to its conceivable origin in the Veneto region. Particularly Padua was one of the most important cultural and scientific centers in Europe where astrology flourished like nowhere else in the Trecento Italy under the doctor and philosopher Pietro d'Abano. These ideas affected Paduan society and consequently the most important painters chose or were asked to evoke images of the stars, planets, and their properties, with some examples of the Sun and its chariot being collected in Giordana Mariana Canova's interesting research. However, for this possible identification with Sun it is still necessary to look for more parallels and analyse more data. Cf. Mariana Canova 2011.

[26] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* II, 67-86.

[27] Cristina Venturini provides abundant information in this regard. Cf. Venturini 2016, p. 102.

[28] The illuminated manuscripts of the *Ovide moralisé* present illuminations in relation to the theme of Phaethon in the house of Sun (BMR O4, f. 42r; BNF A5069, f. 9v; BML 742, f. 23v) or in relation to Phaethon's flight (BMR O4, f. 43r; BNF A5069, f. 10r). In the first case the chariot does not appear, but the architecture does in reference to the house of Sun as the environment in which the scene takes place. While in the second case the chariot is depicted, but not the architecture.

charioteer with flowing hair wearing a long dress and standing on a cushion under the tower (Fig. 1.3). Her identification is clear, however the element she is holding in her right hand which appears to be a branch cast doubts on this theory. Apart from Carla Lord and Eleonora Mattia[29], who associate her with the figure of the Earth, most authors tend to consider one Heliade as the most probable option[30]: Phaethon's sisters who mourn his premature death and become poplars. Cristina Venturini proposes the third of the Heliade sister as the most likely identity for this female figure because of her loose hair, which is stretched out to partially transform into leaves, and above all because she is described by Ovid as holding twigs in her hands[31]. However, it cannot be overlooked the fact that part of her hand seems to be deformed and red[32], a detail which could contribute to the identification and might be related to the flames of the chariot, putting an end to the tragic episode: after almost causing the orb to bur, Jupiter fulminates against the young Phaethon by letting him fall into the river Eridanus, where he drowns at the Earth's request[33].Therefore, in view of the evidence, the connection suggested by both Carla Lord and Eleonora Mattia regarding the Earth could be the most pertinent, not only because of what may be stalk of wheat in her hand, but above all, because she is who asks Jupiter to fulminate Phaethon for the burns she suffered.

In terms of image selection for the third book of the *Metamorphoses* it essentially tells the story of Cadmus. Ovid recounts how Cadmus, having arrived in Boetia, sent his companions to a spring in search for water for libations. They end up in a forest where there was a grotto inhabited by a serpent, Mars' daughter. Cadmus enters the forest and sees his companions' dead bodies who did not return as well as the victorious enemy, so he says:

> O ye poor forms, most faithful friends either. I shall avenge your death or be your comrade in it […] but the serpent went unscathed, protected against that strong stroke by his scales as by an iron doublet and by his hard, dark sink. But that hard skin cannot withstand the javelin too, which now is fixed in the middle fold of his tough back and penetrates with its iron head deep into his flank[34].

[29] Lord 1969; Mattia 1990-1991, p. 68.

[30] Flores D'Arcais 2012, pp. 135-136; Venturini 2016, p. 104; Pesavento 2016, p. 43.

[31] However, Cristina Venturi puts forward a second hypothesis which she argues is less likely. For the identification of this figure, she points out that one could posit the summer, which Ovid describes as a naked figure with a crown of thorns next to the Hours and the Seasons surrounding the throne of Sun. Precisely because of its lack of concordance with the Ovidian narrative, she favours the Heliad. Cf. Venturini 2016, p. 104.

[32] This expressionistic way of showing such specific parts of the Ovidian text can also be traced in other miniatures in the manuscript, such as the miniature for book four of Pyramus and Thisbe. In this miniature even the tears of blood appear on the characters.

[33] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II, 280-300.

[34] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III, 58-67.

The illumination (f. 21v) chosen for this book turns out to be particularly interesting because it shows Cadmus' companions under a serpent-dragon[35], as well as the figure of Cadmus characterised as a true warrior with his dart or spear (Fig. 1.4) ready to slay the creature[36]. The protagonist's knightly costume, the dragon he faces and the severed heads, all together inevitably suggest a parallel with the episode of Saint George's liberation of the captive princess, usually depicted with Saint George facing the dragon confronting the dragon which often also displays his previous victims underneath him. However, the initial scene of Cadmus facing the dragon in the fourth book does not appear in the capital letter of the Dresden *Metamorphoses*, which instead depicts the episode of the foundation of Thebes (SLUB 144, f. 22v). It reappears once again in the moralised works (BNF A5069, f. 28r; BML. 742, f. 41r; BCB 3.04, f. 30v; FB I98, f. 17v, Fig. 6).

Turning to the fourth book of the poem (f. 31r), it is also easy to recognise the tragic episode dedicated to the Babylonian lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe (Fig. 2.1), a creation attributed to be Ovid since it was not part of the earlier Greco-Latin myths. Stefano degli Azzi represents the final moment of the episode[37], narrated by Ovid through Thisbe's words as follows:

> I, too, have a hand brave for this one deed; I, too, have love. This shall give me stranght for the fatal blow. I will follow you in death, and men shall say that I was the most wretched cause and comrade of your fate. Whom death alone had power to part from me, not even death shall have power to part from me, not even death shall have power to part from me [...]. And do you, o tree, who now shade with your branches the poor body of one, and soon will shade two, keep the marks of our death and always bear your fruit of a dark colour, meet for mourning, as a memorial of our doble death[38].

This is the moment when Thisbe, with a dramatic gesture, learns of Pyramus' death. It is worth noting that this richly illustrated miniature provides details which allow us to set the fable in context such as the lion, the fountain, Nino monument, the mulberry tree as well as the nocturnal atmosphere in which the two youngsters decide to flee[39]. Moreover, by making use of a series of read strokes, the artist emphasises the blood not only on the mulberry tree but also on the two lovers. Also, Thisbe's tears may match the narrative of

[35] The tendency to represent the serpent as a dragon is recurrent throughout the Middle Ages. Cf. Pesavento 2016, pp. 63-71.

[36] Another manuscript of the *Metamorphoses* preserved in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Vat. lat. 2780, f. 24r) from the 15th century follows the poem more closely, in which it narrates how the serpent was nailed to the trunk of an oak tree by Cadmus' spear pressed against its throat.

[37] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 378; Flores D'Arcais 2012, p. 136; Venturini 2016, p. 123-125; Pesavento 2016, p. 43.

[38] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 149-162.

[39] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 84.

the poem which describes her despair, a sorrow which «fills his wounds with tears, mingling these with his blood»[40].

In the Dresden manuscript, this episode is also omitted and instead it has been chosen the image of a portrait or an academic figure (SLUB 144, f. 30v). However, the story does appear in the moralised works, but whereas in the two manuscripts of the *Ovidius moralizatus* (BCB 3.04, f. 40v; FB I98, f. 21r) the entire lovers' story is depicted in a single illumination (Fig. 7), the manuscripts of the *Ovide moralisé* have a specific illumination devoted to Thisbe's suicide (BMR O4, f. 96v; BNF A5069, f. 42v; BML 742, f. 59v), within a larger series of illuminations on the fable.

The iconographic scheme of the Marciana manuscript, however, differs slightly from the one we are accustomed to in Antiquity, and which follows the moralised tradition. After discovering her dying lover, Thisbe decides to take her own life by falling on her sword, as in the well-known Pompeian paintings[41] of the 1st century and the miniatures accompanying the *Ovide moralisé*. In the illumination by Stefano degli Azzi Thisbe appears raising her arms to heaven in an act of despair, as if these lines from the poem: «But when after a little while she recognizes her lover, she smites her innocent arms with loud blows of grief and tears her hair; and embracing the well-beloved form, she fills his wounds with tears, mingling these with his blood»[42]. This mythological episode inspired a considerable number of stories in medieval literature, especially in France[43], and overtime became one of the favourite motifs for wedding jewellery boxes manufactured in Venice by the Embriachi, and not by chance but because the fable symbolizes a love that triumphs over death. According to Giulia Simeoni[44], this workshop introduced as an iconographic novelty the depiction of Pyramus dying on Thisbe's knees, perhaps prompted by the popular *Vesperbild* or Virgins in mourning. If we turn to Francesca Flores D'Arcais's suggestions regarding a possible illumination of the manuscript in the Veneto region[45], the visual references as well as the text are likely to have had a decisive influence on the way the miniature was composed.

As with the previous illumination, the identification of the episode illuminating book five (f. 41r) is easy thanks to Perseus' distinctive feature (Fig.

[40] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 140.

[41] For more information on the mythological images in Pompeian paintings see Knox 2014.

[42] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 137-141.

[43] During the last centuries of the Middle Ages, works based on knowledge of Ovid were created in the vernacular. Some mythological fables were initially isolated from the whole and transliterated freely such as Pyramus and Thisbe. The origin of this vernacular story remains unclear. It appears in some manuscripts preserved in the Bibliothéque nationale de France (Fr. 837, f. 95-99r; Fr. 19152, f. 98v-101r). Cf. Ferlampin-Acher 2003; Simeoni 2017, pp. 43-50

[44] Simeoni 2017, pp. 49-50.

[45] Flores D'Arcais 2012, p. 133.

2.2)[46]: Medusa head with the characteristic beard[47]. In this capital letter, two fashionably dressed royal figures can be seen seated on a throne covered with a green tent. It is true that Perseus and Andromeda story is told at the end of book four, but the beginning of book five records Perseus' battle with Phineus, Andromeda's uncle to whom she was originally betrothed. In this fight, Perseus, seeing that his courage was failing in the face of the crowd, said: «Since you yourselves force me to it, I shall seek aid from my own enemy. Turn away your faces, if any friend be here» [48]. And it is precisely this admonition that Stefano degli Azzi depicts in the Marciana manuscript, with the group of soldiers gazing at Medusa's head.

Regarding the other Ovidian material used to illuminate this book, the Dresden *Metamorphoses* again resorts to the figure of the poet with no apparent connection with the content of the book he illuminates (SLUB 144, f. 40v), and it is the manuscripts of the *Ovide moralisé* that have similar illuminations[49], with the figure of Perseus showing the head of Medusa to his enemies (BMR O4, f. 135v; BNF A5069, f. 66v).

As for the episode chosen to illuminate the capital letter that opens book six (f. 49v), it clearly refers to Arachne fable (Fig. 2.3), but the problem posed by this miniature lies in the two superimposed scenes[50]: the interior of the letter P contains a female figure at the loom weaving along with a spider in the upper corner of the scene, while in the lower part of the letter there are three other similar female figures next to the distaff, one of whom offers a basket to the protagonist seated at the loom, thus completing the two scenes. This is one of the illuminations discussed by scholars. Francesca Flores d'Arcais concentrates on emphasising the everyday nature of the scene without giving clear interpretation of each of the figures apart from pointing out that it is the story of Arachne, while both Carla Lord and Eleonora Mattia identify the upper figure with Arachne and the lower figure with Pallas. Giulia Simeoni does not opt for either of the two weavers to identify the main figure proving that she could be both Arachne as well

[46] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 379; Flores D'Arcais 2012, p. 136; Venturini 2016, pp. 143-144. In this case, it turns out that Carla Lord is the only one to identify both characters in the appendix of her doctoral dissertation with Andromeda's parents, Cepheus and Cassiopeia.

[47] Erwin Panofsky noted how Arab illustrators, in assimilating classical mythology from astronomical models, misinterpreted certain episodes or figures such as Medusa's head. They understood her expression as a demonic attribute and the drops of blood as a beard. Cf. Panofsky, Saxls 2015, p. 46.

[48] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, V, 179-181.

[49] The two manuscripts of the *Ovide moralisé* also present an illumination of victorious Perseus and Andromeda (BMR O4, f. 138r; BNF A5069, f. 68r). For their part, the manuscripts of the *Ovidius moralizatus* again present an illumination of the story of Perseus and Andromeda, in its entirety (BCB 3.04, f. 51r; FB I98, f. 24v).

[50] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 379; Flores D'Arcais 2012, p.136; Simeoni 2017, pp. 53-54. According to Eleonora Mattia, Arachne is depicted on the inside of the initial, while the lower part shows Pallas with her handmaids. Cf. Mattia 1990-1991, p. 69.

as Minerva by virtue of her comparisons with the illustration on the *Metamorphoses* vulgarisation by Arrigo Simitendi da Prato of the same period (Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, ms. Panciatichi 63, f. 48v).

In any case, if we consider Ovid's poem, there is a competition between the goddess and Arachne with the exhortation of Pallas, «Let her but strive with me»[51]. This means that the apparent collaboration that the lower female shows with the upper one would not fit either figure. But beyond the figure identification problem, two points about the loom and the spider should be highlighted. Firstly, the loom is revealed as a central element of the Ovidian story for understanding the myth which the miniaturist recreates in the illumination with particular attention to the smallest detail. Secondly, the choice of depicting Arachne transformed on the loom has a precedent in the manuscripts of the *Divine Comedy* illuminated in the north of the peninsula[52], which proposed a very precise scheme to identify Arachne already transformed into a spider as a symbol of *hybris*.

The doubling of the figure – on a female figure and on a spider –, as suggested by Carla Lord and Eleonora Mattia, would not necessarily be strange as we will see a few pages further on. However, no earlier references or traditions which might account for this representation have been recorded, at least in Northern Italy. On the other hand, the identification with Pallas could also pose problems[53], since the real protagonist of the fable is Arachne, and moreover the figure has no insignia that could feature her as a goddess. If it were Pallas, perhaps the three women at the bottom could be associated with the nymphs and women of Migdonia who worship her divinity and to whom the Roman author refers in his poem. In any case, the choice of depicting the epilogue of the story with Arachne transformed into a spider at the loom cannot have been accidental, and probably has the symbolic intention of reminding the reader of the tragic end of the weaver who dare to defy divine power.

In the moralised works the fable of Arachne occupies several illuminations depicting the story (BCB 3.04, f. 62r; BML 742, f. 97v) and dispute between the weavers (BNF A5069, f. 77v; BMR O4, f. 156r), and finally the transformation of Arachne (BNF A5069, f. 78r; BMR O4, f. 157v), although the characteristic dispute is curiously omitted in the Dresden manuscript. Here (SLUB

[51] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI, 25.

[52] Giulia Simeoni provides useful information to reconstruct the panorama of the episode's representation with references in the figurative arts, especially in the Italian Trecento. Cf. Simeoni 2017, pp. 53-54.

[53] This scheme without the three nymphs, with Pallas at the loom and Arachne hanging transformed into a spider, appears in the illustrated manuscript Panciatichi 63 of the *Metamorphoses* vulgarized, preserved in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale of Florence (ms. Panciatichi 63, 48v). This manuscript is digitized in: <https://archive.org/details/panciatichiano-63>, 18.12.2023.

144, f. 49r), in the absence of the distinctive loom that easily identifies the episode, Stefano degli Azzi presents two figures, the smaller of whom might be undergoing a transformation.

As for the initial opening book seven (f. 58v) it can be seen a female figure on a sort of altar on the left, while in the foreground some bulls are depicted surrounded by flames. Just to the right of the scene, two crowned figures are seated side by side facing each other and holding hands. These bulls allow us to associate both main figures with Medea and Jason[54], particularly with those duties that Jason must carry out on his arrival in Colchis (Fig. 2.4), with the instructions and potions that Medea gives him: «I see what I am about to do, nor shall ignorance of the truth be my undoing, but love itself. You shall be preserved by my assistance; but when preserved, fulfil your promise. He swore he would be true by the sacred rites of the threefold goddess»[55].

The arrangement of the lovers holding hands, reminds of the initial words of the Jason's speech, taking her hand and asking for her help in a submissive voice, while he promises her marriage[56]. Next to Jason and Medea on the left side of the miniature is an altar, being the one the Roman poet refers to, when he speaks about the triform goddess. Apart from this, on the central part the miniaturist has placed perhaps deliberately a strip of starry sky with the crescent moon. Such detail noted by Giulio Pesavento[57], remains absent from Ovidian description where the exact moment of Medea coming to the sacred Hecate altars is not specified; but which could be deduced from the introductory words of the story immediately following the one depicted, namely the first trial that Jason undergoes:

> The next dawn had put to flight the twinkling starts. […] In the midst of the company sat the king himself, clad in purple, and conspicuous with his ivory sceptre - See! Here comes the brazen-footed bulls, breathing fire from nostrils of adamant. The very grass shrivels up at the touch of their hot breath; […] so did the bull's chest and parched throats rumble with the fires pent up with[58].

Once again, the miniaturist offers a visual synthesis of the story, evoking Medea and Jason's marriage as well as an allusion to the first trial with the dangerous bulls spewing fiery flames from their mouths as they approach the hero[59]. In this case, as for the manuscript preserved in Dresden the same epi-

[54] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 379; Flores D'Arcais 2012, p. 136; Pesavento 2016, pp. 97-100; Venturini 2016, p. 55.

[55] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII, 92-95.

[56] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII, 90-95.

[57] Pesavento 2016, p. 99.

[58] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII, 100-110.

[59] Someone in the past not only outlines the faces of the two protagonists but also reinforces the union of the lovers by drawing a ring on Jason's hand that clearly indicates the promise of

sode is depicted but the chosen moment is not: (f. 58r) here the golden fleece is illuminated. It is the reference to the bulls that appears in the illumination of Jason and the bulls in the Rouen manuscript (f. 182v), while in the Arsenal manuscript (f. 94v) an illumination is dedicated specifically to Jason and Medea. So far, we have not been able to locate an illumination in the Ovidian mythographical material which specifically depicts the couple holding hands in front of the temple of Hecate to announce their marriage. Perhaps the images of Jason and Medea in the illuminated manuscripts of the *Roman de Troie* or even the nuptial scenes reproduced in the illuminations of the legal manuscripts of the *Decretals* so widespread in northern Italy play an important role here[60].

The next capital letter of the Marciana manuscript regarding book eight (f. 69v) contains an octagonal tower that divides the scene: on the right side, a female figure cutting a lock of hair from a sleeping male figure, while on the left side the same female figure is giving the lock of hair to another male figure with a group of warriors in the background. This illumination (Fig. 3.1), which curiously reverses the narrative order, has been identified with the story of Scylla of Megara[61], the young woman who falls in love with Minos, the leader of her city's enemies. In order to contribute to Minos' victory, Scylla decides to cut off her father's purple lock of hair which gives him invincibility: «Through fire and sword would I dare go. And yet here there is no need of fire or sword. I need but my father's lock of hair. That is to me more precious than gold; that purple lock will make me blest, will give me my heart's desire»[62].

No researcher had noticed that the narrative order was reversed. It might be a device or figurative mechanism that allows the reader to concentrate first on the most important part of the fable and then to remember the cause of this end thanks to the second part of the picture. But the originality of this illumination lies on the fidelity to the text it accompanies. Thus, the Dresden manuscript (f. 69r) is regarded as the most consistent with the tradition of the tradition of the *Ovide moralisé* manuscripts[63], which show Scylla handing over the head of Minos instead of the hair (BMR O4, f. 202r; BNF A5069, f. 106r).

marriage made by the hero to the magician. In addition, this hand adds another figure next to the bulls with which he may have wanted to refer to the other of the fearsome creatures that Jason faced, the dragon that guarded the golden fleece. Cf. Pesavento 2016, p. 100.

[60] Del Monaco 2018.

[61] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 379; Flores D'Arcais 2012, pp. 136-137; Venturini 2016, p. 55; Pesavento 2016, p. 44.

[62] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VIII, 76-80.

[63] The reference in the *Ovide moralisé* text is made to the cut head and not to the lock, probably influenced by earlier commentaries already in circulation like those of Arnolfo d'Orleans or Giovanni del Virgilio. These textual references ended up influencing the images, and so in the *Ovide moralisé* manuscripts these scenes regarding Scylla episode the head cut off appears. *Ovide moralisé*, VIII, 221-228; Arnolfo d'Orleans, *Allegoriae,* VIII, 1; Giovanni del Virgilio, *Allegoriae*, VIII, 1. Cf. Fritz 2022.

The choice of subject for book nine (f. 80v) poses further identification doubts[64]. Not because of the warriors in medieval armor who, in the same way as in the illumination of book two, appear outside the initial and are easily be identified with Hercules and Achelous (Fig. 3.2) by the horn protruding from one of the warriors: Achelous, god of the river, confronts Hercules over his intended Deianira, who is transformed first into a serpent and then into a bull. In the end, Achelous is defeated, getting his forehead mutilated after being torn off by the horn. The topic of both these figures, and in particular Achelous' transformation into a bull, only appears this time in the Italian illuminated manuscripts, and not in the *Ovide moralisé*[65]. Thus, in the manuscript of the Dresden *Metamorphoses* (f. 80r), it is represented in the capital letter corresponding to Hercules tearing off a bull's horn whereas in the manuscript of the *Ovidius moralizatus* the complete sequence of the episode is present (BCB 3.04, f. 97r).

The main iconographic problem involves the two female figures in the initial (Fig. 3.2). Deianira has been mostly identified as the central female figure because of her association with Hercules and Achelous, and her mention in opening verses of book nine. However, the second female figure who accompanies her seems to be meaningless in relation to the Ovidian account. Eleonora Mattia suggests – contrary to the other identifications proposed – that both female figures are really Alcmene and Iole, which could also be a valid option not only because of the connection of both figures to Hercules, but also because some stories in book nine precisely reproduce part of a conversation between Alcmene and Iole. Nevertheless, Deianira would be the most logical explanation since the enthroned figure is watching the fight, a fight she triggered. If so, the second figure standing just behind Deianira and watching her might be inspired on the poem. Ovid tells us that it is Fama who informs Deianira that her beloved Hercules loves Iole, a gossip which will ultimately cause the hero's unfortunate death. In the poem, being the real words as follows:

> Returning victorious from Oechalia, he was preparing to pay his vows to Jove at Cenaeum, when tattling Rumour came on ahead to your ears, Deianira, Rumour, who loves to mingle false and true and, though very small at first, grows huge through lying, and she reported that the son of Amphitryon was enthralled by love of Iole[66].

As Philip Hardie points out in his seminal study[67], the Latin word *fama*

[64] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 380; Flores D'Arcais 2012, p. 137; Venturini 2016, p. 55; Pesavento 2016, p. 44.

[65] In the manuscript of Rouen's *Ovide moralisé* (f. 226r) this pair is illuminated, but Achelous is transformed into a dragon and not a bull.

[66] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IX, 136-140.

[67] This Marciana manuscript with the possible Fama figure is not referenced in Philipe Hardie's study, although pioneering. However, for this possible identification with Fama it is still necessary to look for more parallels and analyze more data. Cf. Hardie 2012.

means rumour. This accounts for the fact that the second figure accompanying Deianira should be Fama, since she is the one who gossips about Hercules' love affairs and thus brings about the denouement of the hero's story. Moreover, it can't be overlooked that this Marciana figure is holding and object in her hands that looks like a face, whose blurred and dim aspect makes it difficult to read.

Turning to book ten, the illumination selected (f. 90v) does not present any difficulty in terms of identification[68]. It is Eurydice (Fig. 3.3) being bitten by a small dragon while picking flowers in a meadow with the nymphs, as the Roman poet tells us putting these words into Orpheus' mouth as he descends into hell[69]: «the cause of my journey is my wife, into whose body a trodden serpent shot his poison and so snatched away her budding years»[70].

However, despite Eurydice's prominence in the storyline at the beginning of this book, the Dresden *Metamorphoses* once more has chosen a different episode, being Orpheus and the animals this time (SLUB 144, f. 90r). The illumination which bears the greatest similarity is again the Rouen manuscript with a depiction of Eurydice when she is bitten by a snake (BMR O4, f. 246v). Likewise, the Lyon manuscript also deals with this episode by illustrating Eurydice's death (BML 742, f. 166r); besides, the *Ovidius moralizatus* manuscript devotes an illumination to the whole Orpheus and Eurydice story (BCB 3.04, f. 108v) with a depiction focused on Eurydice's death in where the ladies who accompany her in the Marciana manuscript also appear on one side.

Orpheus story has a sequel in the next book (f. 100r) and the death of the singing poet at the hands of the Thracian women narrated in the opening verses becomes the subject matter of the capital letter (Fig. 3.4)[71]:

> "See, see the man who scorn us!" and hurled her spear straight at the tuneful mouth of Apollo's bard; but this, wreathed in leaves, marked without harming him. Another threw a stone, which, even as it flew through the air, was overcome by the sweet sound of voice and lyre and fell at his feet as if 'twouldask forgiveness for its mad attempt […]; and then at last the stones were reddened with the blood of the bard whose voice they could not hear. First away went the multitudinous birds still spellbound by the singer's voice with the snakes and the train of beasts, the glory of Orpheus' audience, harried by the Meaenads; then these turned bloody hands against Orpheus and flocked around like birds[72].

Orpheus is very originally presented in an academic professor costume, and again the scene is full of details evoking the poem, references which range

[68] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 380; Flores D'Arcais 2012, p. 137; Pesavento 2016, pp. 109-110; Venturini 2016, p. 55.

[69] Here again we have the usual confusion in the Middle Ages between the dragon and the serpent, which is also found in the illumination of Cadmus for book four.

[70] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X, 24-26.

[71] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 380; Flores D'Arcais 2012, p. 137; Pesavento 2016, pp. 44, 110-114; Simeoni 2017, p. 59. Venturini 2016, p. 55.

[72] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XI, 6-22.

from the musical instrument, the murder weapon, to the snakes and birds carried by the Tracian women. Hence Orpheus' characterization as a wise man wearing a small fur cloak and a headdress on his head turns out to be striking at first. However, this iconographic detail also appears in Ulysses figure, at the beginning of book thirteen of this manuscript. As we shall see, it could be the evidence of an attempt to update the Ovidian story by Stefano degli Azzi or the commissioner. All in all, Orpheus' outfit reveals his status as a poet, endowed with both rhetorical and artistic qualities. According to Giulia Simeoni, such characterization must be analysed in the light of the ideas transmitted by the literary tradition of Ovid's commentators, to whom we probably owe the later recovery of the myth by Dante in the *Convivio*. In this work by the Florentine, Giulia Simeoni notes how Orpheus becomes an allegory of the wise man who through his voice subjugates illiterate people to his will as they are like stones with no no knowledge[73].

This is the only illumination in the Marciana manuscript that can be traced in all the other manuscripts analysed, namely in the Dresden manuscript (f. 99r) and in the moralised works (BMR O4, f. 271r; BNF A5069, f. 206r; BML 742, f. 178v; BCB 3.04, f. 109v). So, in short, Orpheus' death seems to have been a widespread and soon consolidated topic in this environment.

As for the capital in the book twelve (f. 110r), it contains a two-side scene: on one part, a tree with a bird nest attacked by a green dragon; while on the other part, on the right there is a figure resembling the Pope with a papal tiara and a crozier, along with another figures who are likely to depict a priest and a kneeling woman. This is the prodigy of Aulide (Fig. 4.1) narrated by Ovid from the first to the thirty-eighth verse[74]: in this city near Troy, the Greeks celebrate a sacred rite, during which the tree with the birds and the serpent appears and the soothsayer Calchas performs a prophecy in favor of the Greek armies, saying: «We shall conquer. Rejoice, ye Greeks, Troy shall fall, but our task will be of long duration»[75].

Here, however, miniaturist Stefano degli Azzi not only reproduces the prophecy but even foreshadows the Iphigenia' slaughter, undertaken to ap-

[73] The Italian researcher provides interesting data to delve deeper into the iconography of Orpheus in the last centuries of the Middle Ages and begins her analysis by recalling that the poet had already been the subject of an allegorical reinterpretation by Boethius and Fulgentius. From the 12th century onwards, commentators on Ovid such as Arnolfo d'Orleans and Giovanni del Virgilio took up these reinterpretations in which Orpheus is described as a wise man capable of resisting the temptations of the earthly world to aspire to the higher one. Thus, in the Inferno of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, he appears in limbo alongside the great thinkers. Giulia Simeoni argues that the poet, interpreted as the father of poetry, is a legacy of the evemeristic tradition and demonstrates his importance as its patron and inventor. Cf. Simeoni 2017, p. 59.

[74] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 380; Flores D'Arcais 2012, p. 137; Venturini 2016, p. 55; Pesavento 2016, p. 44.

[75] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XII, 19-20.

pease the virgin goddess' anger[76], a rage which had caused the absence of the winds because Agamemnon had killed a doe consecrated to her. It is worth describing briefly the three figures for their originality and detail: from right to left, there is first a bearded male figure in distinguished clothing holding a dagger in one hand, while his other hand grasps the second figure by the head[77]. The second shape represents a female kneeling figure with her arms crossed over her chest. The third figure, also male, gloved and wearing a red cloak, clearly creates a solemn atmosphere. His resemblance to the papal image is obvious, with white gloves, tiara, crosier, and open book. In view of these descriptions and their characterization, the female figure was easily identified as Iphigenia, and the other shapes as Agamemnon and the soothsayer Calchas. Agamemnon is likely to be the bearded one, since he holds sort of dagger in his hand, an object obviously related to the sacrifice. Whatever the case, it constitutes the third exceptional illumination of the manuscript: no other manuscript in the *Metamorphoses* tradition depicts the scene of the prophecy[78] and only the two Italian manuscripts record the sacrifice of Iphigenia (SLUB 144, f. 109r; BCB 3.04, f. 123r).

As far as the depiction for the book thirteen (f. 118r) is concerned, it reproduces Ajax and Ulysses' contention for Achilles' armour[79]. This illustration stands out for its innovative features, breaking down different fundamental parts of the episode (Fig. 4.2). The capital letter contains five figures, two of them are wearing crowns and holding weapons, opposite the other three. If we date back to the Roman poet's words, Ulysses boasts of having persuaded Agamemnon to sacrifice Iphigenia in the following way:

> Through me illustrious Hector lies low! These arms I seek in return for those by which Achilles was discovered. Arms I gave the living; after his death I ask them back. "[…] Then a cruel oracle bade Agamemnon sacrifice his innocent daughter to pitiless Diana […]. It was I that turned the kind father-heart to a consideration of the public weal; I indeed had a difficult cause to plead, and that, too, before a partial judge"[80].

[76] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XII, 29-30.

[77] Specifically, this figure is depicted wearing a red cloak and a headdress or biretta, which is difficult to identify. For the moment, we have not been able to find parallels that would indicate either what type of headdress it is or where it comes from.

[78] The exception here could represent the manuscript of the *Metamorphoses* preserved in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana (ms. Plut. 36.8), already cited in note 10, which is simply illuminated in the capital letters with a representative mythological figure. Here the figure with a bird on its head in the initial on the book 12 (f. 146r) has been identified with Calchas. Cf. Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 377. Although Cristina Venturini and Giulio Pesavento in the tables of their respective works propose to identify the figure with Priam. See Venturini 2016, p. 56; Pesavento 2016, p. 44.

[79] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 380; Flores D'Arcais 2012, p. 138; Venturini 2016, p. 55; Pesavento 2016, p. 44.

[80] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XIII, 178-190.

Consequently, since eloquence is a trait usually attributed to Ulysses, the figure dressed like a university professor holding a smaller female figure has a good chance of being him. The dispute between Ajax and Ulysses is resolved precisely in favour of the latter, as Ovid states:

The company of chiefs was moved, and their decision proved the power of eloquence: to the eloquent man were given the brave man's arms […]. Then, snatching out his sword, he cried: "But this at least is mine; or does Ulysses claim this also for himself? This I must employ against myself; and the sword which has often reeked with Phrygian blood will now reek with its master's, lest any man save Ajax ever conquer Ajax"[81].

Therefore, the third smaller figure who is brandishing the sword can be identified as Ajax. However, more doubts may arise in the identification of the e small female shape standing beside Ulysses, whose garment consist of a golden robe with a kind of radiant halo emanating from her head. Indeed, she resembles the goddess Themis in the episode of Deucalion and Pyrrha just as she resembles the goddess Hecate in the fable of Jason and Medea. But if we consider the text and the arrangement of the figure of Ulysses figure in the scene, perhaps she can be associated with Minerva statue: «whatever else remains still to be done with wisdom, if still some bold and hazardous deed must be attempted, if you think aught still is lacking to the fate of Troy, I beg you remember me! Or if you do not give the arms to me, give them to her!! And he pointed to the fateful statue of Minerva»[82].

Therefore, despite its slight variations, the episode of the dispute has a presence in all the manuscripts (SLUB 144, f. 116v; BCB 3.04, f. 126v; BML 742, f. 224v) and it must be born in mind that those illuminations devoted to the contention in both *Ovide moralisé* manuscripts bear once again the greatest resemblance to each other (BMR O4, f. 324v; BNF A5069, f. 179v) since they depict or allude to weapons as the object of a dispute between the two figures.

As for the penultimate capital letter corresponding to the fourteenth book (f. 130r) we can observe two female figures who have been usually identified with Circe and Scylla[83], mainly because of the poison spread by the magician into the water where her rival Scylla is (Fig. 4.3), and who starts her transformation. Ovid narrates how the goddess had polluted such a chasm beforehand and corrupts it with her prodigious poisons:

This pool, before the maiden's coming, the goddess befouls and tinctures with her baleful poisons. When these had been poured out she sprinkles liquors brewed from noxious

[81] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XIII, 382-391.
[82] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XIII, 378-381.
[83] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 380; Flores D'Arcais 2012, p. 138; Venturini 2016, p. 55; Pesavento 2016, p. 44.

roots [...]. Then Scylla comes and wades waist-deep into the water; when all at once she sees her loins disfigured with barking monster-shapes[84].

From a narrative and visual point of view, we can highlight the singularity of the scene. It is represented in two parts linked by the poison that the magician spreads: Scylla appears in the upper part spreading the poison which falls into the fountain where Scylla stays, in the lower part of the letter. With regard to Scylla and her metamorphosis, the miniaturist surprisingly deviates from the text's description, since the lower part of the figure's body is not a dog-headed monster as Ovid narrates in verse seventy-one but a kind of feline's paws.

Since these two female figures are closely related to Glaucus and to other parallel figures throughout fourteenth book, the remaining manuscripts of the *Metamorphoses* tradition show a disparate selection of episodes[85]. None however has a miniature of Circe and Scylla, except this one. Even without the magician, the Rouen manuscript once again has a slightly similar illumination with the result of Scylla's transformation into a monster (BMR O4, f. 351r) as well as Bergamo (f. 132r).

Finally, when it comes to interpreting the capital letter of the last book (f. 140v), there seems to be no consensus (Fig. 4.4) about the scene depicted the scene[86]: Carla Lord, Francesca Flores d'Arcais, Cristina Venturini and Giulio Pesavento recognise the coronation of Numa on the grounds that it is the most common episode to illustrate book fifteen[87]. Eleonora Mattia, on the other hand, regards Cippus as the core shape in the scene, a general who sprouts horns on his head, announcing him as the next king of Rome, but being a figure of poor traceability in Ovidian illumination. Eleonora Mattia identifies Cippus twice in the kneeling figure in the foreground, which is also repeated in the field of the initial escaping from the crown[88]. It is precisely this posture that could be the key to identifying the scene with the story of Cippus, since he rejects his destiny: «Far, oh, far from me may the gods keep such a fate. Better

[84] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XIV, 55-61.

[85] This triangle love story is represented in various forms with different characters. For example, the Dresden (f. 128v) and the Bergamo manuscript (f.128v) are illuminated with the sorcerer Circe, Ulysses and his companions transformed into pigs, an illumination that also appears in the manuscript of the *Ovide moralisé* of the Arsenal (f. 204v) or to which the illumination of Circe and the animals in the Rouen manuscript (f. 366v) also refers. The pair of Glaucus and Scylla appear in two of the manuscripts of the *Ovide moralisé* (BMR O4, f. 349; BNF A5069, f. 195), while Glaucus and Circe appear in the Arsenal manuscript (f. 196v) and in the Lyon manuscript (f. 241v). Also, Bergamo (f. 132r) has a miniature of Glaucus, Circe and Scylla.

[86] Lord 1969; Mattia 1985, p. 380; Flores D'Arcais 2012, p. 138; Venturini 2016, p. 55; Pesavento 2016, p. 44.

[87] Otero 2021, p. 333.

[88] In this case there is also the possibility of duplicity also in the miniature of the Arachne episode, with the weaver on the loom and the weaver transformed into a spider.

far it is that I should spend my days exiled from home that that the Capitol should see me king»[89]. In the end, and one more time, the Rouen manuscript seems to be the only one in the *Metamorphoses* manuscript tradition to include this unusual figure in an illumination, presenting a scene of Cippus and a haruspex performing sacrifices in order to read the omens (BMR O4, f. 398r).

To conclude this section, my analysis of the mythological illuminations has enabled the identification of six original illuminations in the capital letters concerning books two, four, nine, twelve, thirteen and fifteen. Among these illuminations, those of the Sun in his chariot, the prophecy, and Circe and Scylla alone, have no parallel in any manuscript in the *Metamorphoses* cycle tradition; whereas the Cippus illumination despite being rare and not represented in the other manuscript of the *Metamorphoses* (SLUB 144) is exceptionally found in the manuscript of the *Ovide moralisé* preserved in Rouen. The Rouen manuscript also keeps at least a curious similarity with the Marciana manuscript: on the one hand, Deucalion and Pyrrha illumination, which depicts buildings and figures, are presented in the waters of the Flood. Nor should we downplay that Pyramus and Thisbe illumination is uncommon in the Latin manuscripts of the poem in spite of its important French tradition.

## 3. *Ovid in context*

So far, my analysis has focused on the links between the illuminations and the text, as well as on the criteria for the selection of certain episodes in contrast to other Ovidian manuscripts. But apart from that, I have also intended to offer an initial reflection on the purpose of its illuminations. Maybe, through further research, it would be possible to outline the circumstances of its creation and get to know its readership, who must have been cultured people. Whatever the case, there is no doubt that these illuminated capital letters function precisely as an anticipatory summary of the subject matter, a point that may lead the reader to assume a minimum knowledge of the work[90].

Bearing these questions in mind, we may be able to read a smaller initial at the lowest part of the first folio, in which both Joseph Trapp and Francesca Flores d'Arcais have recognized a master wearing an ermine cape with his disciples[91]. The fact that this image accompanies the mythological poem should come as no surprise considering the Bolognese origin of the miniaturist and

[89] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XIV, 587-589.
[90] Orofino 2016, p. 317.
[91] Trapp 2003, p. 357; Flores D'Arcais 2012, p. 135.

the fact that the *Studium* of Padua also exerted an important influence in the area[92]. The images that accompany the *Metamorphoses* can also respond to the value attached to the poem at any given time and are thus considered according to their context or origin.

With regard to its origin and in line with the beginning of this contribution, Stefano degli Azzi has usually been accepted as its creator and as already mentioned allegedly during his stay in the Veneto. From this area and most probably from Padua, stem at least three manuscripts of the *Roman de Troie* (Saint Peterburg, Rossijskaja Nacional'naja Biblioteka, Fr. F.V.XIV.3; Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, ms. 2571; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Fr. 782) whose pictorial narratives are likely to constitute another background for Stefano degli Azzi's depictions: this new scenario deserves further analysis, especially the Jason and Medea illuminations[93]. Susan L'Engle research concludes that the richness of their illuminations and their strong resemblance would indicate that the three of them had been commissioned by North Italian patrician families who knew each other[94].

With regard to the *Metamorphoses* manuscript, the hypothesis of a Venetian commissioner or the reference to this city may suggest a source embedded in the context already noted by Franco Munari[95] and Eleonora Mattia[96]. The Italian author pointed out in her publication the two *exlibris* that appear on the back flyleaf: one by Francesco Foscari (1373-1457) as Doge of Venice which reads "Francischus Foscari Dei Gratia Dux Venetiarum", and another by Marco Corner on which reads "Marcus Cornelius Habuit" without any indication of rank or social distinction, although it is likely to be the doge Mar-

[92] The meaning of "Bolognese" should be clarified because in some specific cases, such as this one, the correspondence between the Bolognese school and the activity carried out in Bologna is not so rigid. The miniaturists of the Bolognese workshops could work for other cities, and even move there for longer or shorter periods of time, as was the case of the move to Padua in connection with the papal interdicts or perhaps also to face the growing competition that had arisen in Emilia. These issues are dealt with in detail by Medica in some of his works. Cf. Medica 2012.

[93] Recent studies place the three manuscripts richly illuminated probably in Padua between 1320 and 1345. This well-established iconographical tradition may have been another point of reference for the program of the Marciana manuscript, especially for the themes shared by the two secular texts such as the prodigy of Aulide, Ulysses and Ajax's contest or Medea and Jason. Moreover, in the manuscript preserved in Saint Petersburg there is an illumination of Medea and Jason holding hands (f. 8r) very similar to the one in the Marciana manuscript, which would be very interesting for future researchers to explore further. Cf. L'Engle 2014.

[94] *Ibidem*.

[95] Franco Munari already linked this Latin name Marcus Cornelius with Marco Corner. In the absence of other evidence, the name "Corner" or "Cornaro" can be related to the family of the same name, which was a patrician family with considerable influence in the Venetian republic, not only in the last centuries of the Middle Ages but also in the Modern Age. Cf. Munari 1957, p. 40.

[96] Mattia 1990-1991, p. 63.

co Corner (1286-1368) who held the office between 1365 and 1368[97]. This historic person, Marco Corner, seems to have attended law courses at Padua University where he earned a doctorate. Holding the office of Padua twice and above all carrying out many diplomatic functions for the Republic of Venice, he could establish a close friendship with foreign princes, even with the Holy Roman Emperor. His election as a Doge seems to have been controversial as his opponents resented such foreign[98].

The plausible association of this manuscript with Marco Corner is worthy of additional research: if he was indeed the manuscript commissioner, it raises the question of his interest in Ovid's Latin poem. According to Massimo Medica[99], well-off families used to be keen on the study of law were often associated with the study of law. As a rule, their education was based on Latin, the arts and ancient culture which was expressed either through their poetry or his library. As a diplomat of such esteem everything suggest that Marco Corner might have been trained in the art of rhetoric, a pillar of the educational program promoted by the early humanists. It is therefore not surprising that this historic figure could have possessed a carefully illuminated *Metamorphoses* manuscript as a source of mythological knowledge, images and teachings related to the powers of imperial Rome. As Fátima Díez Platas and Juan Monterroso have rightly pointed out, perhaps the divine punishments compilation narrated by Ovid aimed to be a sort warning against abuses or transgressions, especially by the powerful men who ultimately decided on the humanity fate[100]. As far as Marco Corner is concerned, his frequent proximity to power encompassed communal, ducal, imperial authority and even papal power: so much so that, two years before his appointment as Doge, he had been sent to Avignon as an ambassador in order to congratulate Urban V on his election, and on behalf of the Republic.

Certainly, this well-known relationship between classical mythology and influential people can be traced back to the figure of the soothsayer Calchas, who appears in book twelve as the Pope. More important, however, is the striking resemblance to Urban V portrait (1310-1370) by Simone dei Crocifissi, painted around 1375 and now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna. The figure features and the garment being almost identical, make us wonder

[97] The reference for this second *exlibris* by Marco Corner is drastically reduced if we consider that this manuscript is part of the oldest core of the Biblioteca Marciana coming from the donation made in 1468 by the Byzantine cardinal Basilio Bessarion (1403-1472). Few years before it was in the possession of the doge Francesco Foscari. For more on this, see note 3. The *exlibris* of Francesco Foscari as a doge must have been written between 1423 and 1457 so that the Venetian doge Marco Corner is much more likely to have been in possession of the manuscript. Cf. Ravegnani 1983.

[98] Ivi, p. 250

[99] Medica 2012.

[100] Díez Platas, Monterroso Montero 1998, p. 457.

whether this is really a deliberate portrayal of Pope Urban V through a mythological figure, and whether it has anything to do with Marco Corner and his circle of power.

## 4. *Conclusion*

The idea that literature and image circulation in Italian Trecento was not restricted has lingered for years. In fact, the Marciana manuscript might have some connection with the French *Ovide moralisé* preserved in Rouen or another lost copy seems to be somewhat probable in the light of the comparisons proposed in the first part of this work. Nevertheless, the patron or the *concepteur* did not abandon either the text or the context, although in some cases they may have been inspired by the illuminations of the moralized poem. While the images attached to the *Ovide moralisé* text often deviate from Ovid's poem to follow the moralisation as in the case of the illumination of Minos and Scylla, the Marciana manuscript follows the mythological narrative of the poem in an unexpected way. But this fact did not prevent the miniaturist from updating the images in order to let the reader know that he was in the Veneto area, most probably in Padua or Venice.

Looking closely at the illuminations, it is wise to analyze, firstly, the reason why the artist selected Pyramus and Thisbe as well as Medea and Jason illuminations, holding hands, and their possible link with the growing popularity of these themes at that time. Such topics would later reach the wedding chests of the Venetian workshop of the Embriachi in the late Trecento. Secondly, it is worth examining whether the diffusion of astrological traditions in Padua and secular texts such as the *Roman de Troie* may have had an impact on these *Metamorphoses*. The question also arises as to if one of the architectures seen flooded by the Deluge in the illumination of Deucalion and Pyrrha could in fact be the Campanile di San Marco, or if the Prodigy of Aulide illustration, with Calchas as Urbano V, could be understood in some political sense.

Thus, on the grounds of the contextual evidence, we can infer that the Marciana manuscript was clearly illuminated in Veneto region, most probably Padua. However, the relationship between the famous Bolognese miniaturist and the possible patron Marco Corner could have delayed the production of the codex, which has been dated to the late Trecento. If his possession is confirmed, it might have been produced between 1362 and 1368, since Marco Corner died in 1368 and the allegedly Pope Urban V depiction appears in book twelve. Although these hypotheses are beyond the scope of this study and further analysis would be required to shed light on this supposition, it must be born in mind that other works by Stefano degli Azzi were also significantly delayed, for instance the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César* preserved in

the Bibliothèque nationale de France, previously mentioned. Ultimately, this information makes the Marciana manuscript be regarded as a priceless copy of the *Metamorphoses* which is still worth studying, knowing, and looking at.

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## *Appendix*

Fig. 1. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Venice, Marciana Library, Lat. Z. 449a. 1. *Deucalion and Pyrrha* (f. 1r). 2. *The Sun* (f. 10v). 3. *The Earth* (f. 10v). 4. *Cadmus and the dragon* (f. 21v)

Fig. 2. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Venice, Marciana Library, Lat. Z. 449a. 1. *Pyramus and Thisbe* (f. 31). 2. *Perseus and Andromeda* (f. 41r). 3. *Palas and Arachne* (f. 49v). 4. *Medea and Jason* (f. 58v)

Fig. 3. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Venice, Marciana Library, Lat. Z. 449a. 1. *Minos and Scylla* (f. 69v). 2. *Deianira and Fama / Hercules and Achelous* (f. 80v). 3. *Eurydice bitten by a snake* (90v). 4. *The Death of Orpheus* (f. 100r)

Fig. 4. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Venice, Marciana Library, Lat. Z. 449a. 1. *The prodigy of Aulide* (f. 110r). 2. *The contention of Ajax and Ulysses for the armour of Achilles* (118r). 3. *Circe and Scylla* (f. 130r). 4. *Cippus* (f. 140v)

Fig. 5. *Deucalion and Pyrrha*, Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, Ms Membr. I 98, f. 9r

Fig. 6. *Cadmus and the dragon*, Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, Ms Membr. I 98, f. 17v

Fig. 7. *Pyramus and Thisbe episode*, Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, Ms Membr. I 98, f. 21r

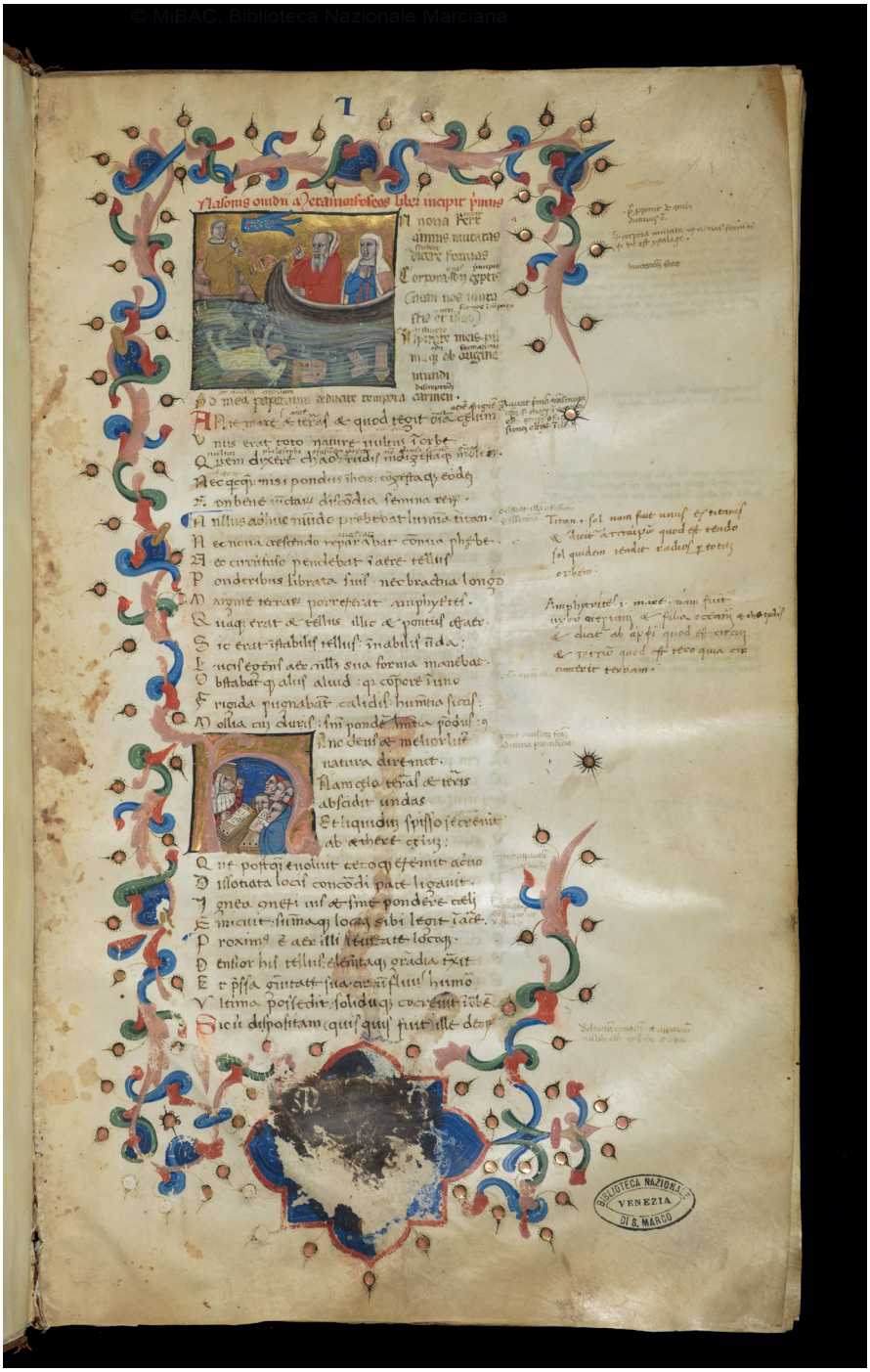



Fig. 8. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Academic figures, Venice, Marciana Library, Lat. Z. 449a, f. 1r

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