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

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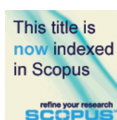

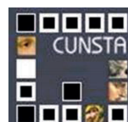

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Ovidius Pictus: Afterlives of the *Metamorphoses* in Europe, from Books to the Arts

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Ovidius Painted and Printed. The Influence of *Metamorphoses* Illustrations on Two Friezes in Marca di Ancona

Francesca Casamassima*

Abstract

This paper delves into the iconography of two friezes adorning the rooms of two *palazzi* located in the Marca di Ancona, a peripheral region within the Papal States. All the scenes portrayed in the two friezes are inspired by the Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the influence of the illustrations found in the vernacular translations of the *Metamorphoses*, which were spread around Italy from the end of the 15th century. Additionally, it aims to explore the impact of prints that circulated freely, reproducing models from renowned artists like Michelangelo. These prints disseminated iconographies throughout Italy, making them known even in the provincial areas. The clients used them in an attempt to adapt their taste to the prevailing fashions of the big centers. Meanwhile the artists – unable to rival their counterparts from the centers – were provided with models which, in some instances, they closely adhered to.

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1. *Introduction*

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* served as the primary source for artists commissioned to depict mythological subjects in Italian villas and palaces during the 16th century. Both clients and artists were familiar with the Ovidian narrative poem primarily through its vernacular translations, which gained popularity from the late fifteenth century and continued to be influential throughout the sixteenth century[1].

This paper delves into the iconography of two friezes adorning the rooms of two *palazzi* located in the Marca di Ancona, a region within the Papal States. The Marca di Ancona encompasses a territory between the rivers Esino and Tronto, and the Apennine mountains[2]. Both these friezes are almost unknown, particularly the one located in Palazzo Ottoni, Matelica, which has never been thoroughly studied before. These friezes predominantly depict episodes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It is worth noting that a significant portion of the iconography found in these friezes originated from prints, with many of them being sourced from vernacular translations and a few of them from freely circulating prints. The paper highlights the significance of these models, especially in peripheral areas, by examining the degree to which artists adhered to them and the extent to which they personalized and reworked these models in accordance with their individual preferences.

2. *Palazzo Ferretti: construction, commissioning, and attribution*

During the mid-16th century, Ancona thrived as a bustling commercial city, serving as a meeting point for diverse populations and religious groups. As an economic hub, it attracted not only Venetian and Florentine merchants, but it became a great cosmopolitan port, with Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and Dalmatian[3].

Palazzo Ferretti, located in the heart of the town's historic center, was built in the first half of the 16th century. Based on recent documents discovered by Maurizio Ricci, there is a possibility that the construction of the palace might be traced back to 1533[4]. The celebration – inside the palace – of Giovanna Ferretti's mar-

[1] On these themes see Guthmüller 1997, pp. 291-305; Cieri Via 2003.

[2] Mangani, Mariano 1998.

[3] Andreoni 2019, pp. 51-71; Fattori 2019.

[4] The earliest records of Palazzo Ferretti are documented by the historian Bartolomeo Alfeo, who dated the beginning of the work around 1543: Galeazzi 2021, p. 61; Ancona, Biblioteca Comunale Ancona, (henceforth BCA), *Croniche d'Ancona copiate da Giovanni Picchi-Tancredi*, ms. 238, f. 23. On the constructive events also in relation to Angelo's life see also Andreoni 2019, pp. 51-71; Fattori 2019; Ricci 2021, p. 79.

riage (Angelo's daughter) in 1551 provides additional evidence that the erection of the building was likely completed, or at least nearing completion, by that time[5].

In the late 15th century, the Ferretti family attained significant power and influence in Ancona due to a combination of factors. Firstly, their ancient nobility tracing back to illustrious origins, as well as the family's considerable wealth and financial prosperity, played a vital role in elevating their prominence and influence within Ancona's society[6]. The marriage of Angelo Ferretti to Girolama Landriani in 1528 played a significant role in further elevating his family's status and wealth. Moreover, Angelo wisely invested his father's inheritance, further increasing his wealth and influence in Ancona. The construction of Palazzo Ferretti, which is in a dominant position in the town and its port, can be ascribable to this rise[7]. Angelo's political and economic acumen is further demonstrated by the strategic marriages he orchestrated for his daughters: Giovanna married Nicolò Todini in 1551, and Medea married Giacomo Malatesta in 1565[8].

The earliest source to document the decorations of palazzo Ferretti, Carlo Cesare Malvasia, connects them to Pellegrino Tibaldi[9]. Nevertheless, there are currently considerable doubts regarding the attribution of the paintings to this artist. In fact, some scholars propose that the artworks might be the result of his pupils' and collaborators' efforts[10].

Between 1554 and 1555, Pellegrino Tibaldi worked on the St. Baptist Chapel in Loreto. Evidence of his association with Ancona first emerges from a payment record dated December 31, 1554, addressed to «mastro Pellegrino pittore in Ancona», with Tommaso Cornovi della Vecchia acting as the intermediary. This marks the initial connection of the artist to Ancona. Tommaso Cornavi, a Venetian merchant, commissioned Tibaldi to create the altar painting for the Church of San Domenico in Ancona in 1555. This commission further solidifies Tibaldi's presence and artistic activity in the city of Ancona during that period[11]. In 1559, both Tommaso Cornavi's brother and Angelo Ferretti requested Pellegrino Tibaldi to take over from another artist, likely Prospero Fontana, for the creation of the altar painting and the *ancona* in St. Ciriaco Cathedral[12]. In 1556, Pellegrino Tibaldi painted a depiction of the *Baptism of*

[5] Ricci 2021, p. 80.

[6] For more on this family see Minelli 1987; Natalucci 1960-61.

[7] Galeazzi 2021, pp. 57-61; Ricci 2019.

[8] *Ivi*, pp. 65-67.

[9] In 1678, Malvasia credited the artist with creating the frieze in the Great Hall and the frescoes in the room known as the *Camera d'Oro* (Golden Room): Balzarotti, Daniele 2021, p. 50.

[10] On Tibaldi's activity in Ancona see Balzarotti 2021, p. 33; Romani 2021, p. 15; Steen Hansen 2007, pp. 327-354; Massa 2005. On the artist more in general see Massa 1987, pp. 43-51; Ceccarelli, Lenzi 2011; Balzarotti 2018, pp. 205-208.

[11] Daniele 2021, p. 48.

[12] Ricci 2021, p. 74.

Christ for the Church of Sant'Agostino in Ancona. This artwork was commissioned by Giorgio Morato, an Armenian merchant[13]. One of the most significant works by Pellegrino Tibaldi in Ancona is the decoration of the *Loggia dei Mercanti*. In 1558, Angelo Ferretti took on the role of supporting Tibaldi and guaranteeing his involvement in this important project. This indicates that there was likely a pre-existing relationship between the nobleman and the artist, as Angelo's willingness to vouch for Tibaldi suggests familiarity and trust[14]. According to Maurizio Ricci's writings, Pellegrino Tibaldi's remarkable work in decorating the *Loggia dei Mercanti* likely caught the attention of Angelo Ferretti [15]. Unfortunately, these frescoes are lost so it is not possible to compare them to the ones in palazzo Ferretti. According to a letter written by Cardinal Carlo Borromeo in 1564, Tibaldi was working on the *Sala Regia* in Rome and on the defensive walls of Ancona in that same year. Additionally, a letter sent by Tibaldi to Borromeo on June 21, 1566, from Pavia reveals that the artist stayed in Ancona for nearly three months after Borromeo's departure. It appears that Tibaldi ultimately left Ancona permanently in 1566[16].

While these documents do illustrate the ongoing association of Tibaldi with Ancona, there is no concrete evidence to establish his work at Palazzo Ferretti. As a result, assigning specific names and dates to the frescoes in the palace Palazzo Ferretti remains a challenging task[17]. What can be confirmed from the existing records, however, is that Pellegrino Tibaldi was in Ancona during certain periods, such as around 1555-1556, 1559, and again in 1564 and 1566. These dates could potentially be linked to significant family events, which would provide a motivation for adorning the palace.

Firstly, it is likely that the patrons were Angelo Ferretti and his wife, as their nuptial coat of arms is depicted on the ceiling of the Great Hall. Furthermore, it is possible that the decorations in this place and the nearby rooms of Palazzo Ferretti were commissioned to commemorate the marriage of Angelo's daughter, Medea, to Giacomo Malatesta in 1565, an event officiated by Carlo Borromeo[18]. Indeed, the accounts of the time narrate that for Giovanna's wedding (the other daughter), Angelo organized «a memorable wedding in the Magna Sala which was so full that people were also put into nearby rooms» (*una pompa nuptiale che in memoria non se ne havea… nella magna sala ripiena quanto essere poteva… tanto che le persone erano allocate anche negli altri luoghi contigui*)[19]. Therefore, it is plausible that Angelo Ferretti also organized a grand

[13] Balzarotti 2021, p. 37.
[14] Balzarotti 2021, p. 38; Ricci 2021, pp. 74-75.
[15] Ricci 2021, p. 80.
[16] *Ivi* pp. 72, 78; Rocco 1939, p. 210.
[17] On the hypotesis of attribution see Romani 2021, pp. 17, 20-26; Coltrinari 2019, pp. 68-70.
[18] Galeazzi 2021, p. 65.
[19] Leoni 1815, p. 122.

celebration for his daughter Medea's marriage, commissioning the decorations of the Sala Magna (being a large space, it would have been well-suited for hosting feasts and banquets) and nearby rooms in Palazzo Ferretti. Due to the absence of archival records pertaining to the client, the artist, and the precise occasion for the frescoes – as supported by both my research and the work of other scholars like Pamela Galeazzi[20] – it's not feasible to establish definitive attributions. Consequently, considering the common attribution of the frieze to Tibaldi's pupils and the artist's presence in Ancona around the year of the wedding, it becomes credible, although not conclusively proven, that the frieze was indeed created for Medea's marriage celebration.

3. *The Metamorphoses Room in Palazzo Ferretti*

As mentioned earlier, many of the scenes depicted in the frieze of the Metamorphoses Room draw inspiration from the prints found in the vernacular translations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This connection indicates that the artist was familiar with these translated texts and the visual representations that accompanied them. Therefore, it is necessary to provide an overview of these editions and their illustrations.

In the 16th century, Ovid's poem was well-known among artists and clients, mainly due to the accessibility of vernacular translations that began to circulate from the late 15th century onwards. In 1497, the Venetian printer Lucantonio Giunta printed a translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the Italian vernacular[21]. Giunta's printed edition was decorated with 52 illustrations placed at the beginning of some of the chapters in which Bonsignori divided the fifteen Ovidian books[22]. In 1522, Niccolò Zoppino published a vernacular translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in Venice. This translation was authored by Niccolò degli Agostini and retained substantial connections to Bonsignori's re-written version. As thoroughly demonstrated by Bodo Guthmüller, Agostini did not translate directly from Ovid's Latin; instead, he re-wrote Bonsignori's prose translation into *ottava rima* verse form[23]. Zop-

[20] Galeazzi 2021.

[21] There are four complete manuscripts of this translation. The text published in 1497 presents additions both in the translation and in the allegories compared to the existing manuscript versions. It is not known whether these alterations were made by the curator who prepared the text for printing, or whether they were already present in the antigraphy used. The printed edition is therefore a text far from the manuscript tradition. See Ardissino 2001, pp. XLI-XLII.

[22] On the illustrations see Pesavento 2018a, p. 109. On Bonsignori and his translation see Ballistreri 1970, pp. 407-09; Guthmüller 2008, pp. 62-203.

[23] Guthmüller 2008, p. 219.

pino's 1522 edition is embellished with 72 woodcuts positioned at the beginning of some of the myths. A detailed examination of Zoppino's series reveals that, for the most part, it lacked innovation and was predominantly inspired by and derived from the woodcut series featured in Giunta's 1497 edition of Bonsignori's translation[24].

A notable improvement in the quality of the images is evident in the intricate illustrations adorning the 1553 edition of Lodovico Dolce's vernacular translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, published by Gabriele Giolito de Ferrari in Venice. Guthmüller's research has revealed that the engraver responsible for this series was the architect Giovanni Antonio Rusconi[25]. In contrast to earlier engravers and illustrators, Rusconi adopted a different approach by reducing the use of continuous narrative and focusing on creating mainly mono-scene illustrations for the series. Despite Rusconi's innovative compositional strategies and superior skills compared to his predecessors, the illustrations in Giolito's edition display certain resemblances with the woodcuts that accompanied previous translations by Bonsignori and Agostini. Guthmüller's research indicates that these similarities are attributed to the fact that Giolito commissioned the illustrations from Rusconi before Dolce had completed his translation[26]. As a result of the circumstances, Rusconi faced the challenge of working on his illustrations using a text different from the one that would ultimately accompany his woodcuts: he had to base his illustrations on Bonsignori's text[27]. Dolce's translation, aided by the captivating series of illustrations that accompanied it, achieved remarkable success, leading to multiple reprints during the 16th century[28].

The frieze in Palazzo Ferretti features a multitude of scenes, each enclosed within frames and separated by grotesque, mirroring the design seen in many Roman palaces of the same period.

The first scene, depicted above the door leading to the Great Hall, portrays the *Fall of Phaeton*. Apollo's son is falling down from the chariot, and he is portrayed upside down, as are the horses which are falling with him (fig. 1). Above the fall, Jupiter is represented riding his eagle, ready to throw another thunderbolt. On the ground, Phaeton's sisters look at the scene raising their arms to the sky. The artist adopts an iconographic scheme that gained popu-

[24] On Agostini's translation see Guthmüller 1997, p. 194. Guthmüller 2008, pp. 97-123.

[25] On Rusconi see Temanza 1966, pp. 362-69; Guthmüller 1983, pp. 771-79; Cellauro 2009, pp. 224-37; Capriotti 2013, pp. 31-32.

[26] Guthmüller 1997, pp. 255-274.

[27] Ivi, pp. 251-75; Capriotti 2013, pp. 43-71.

[28] It was reprinted by Giolito two times in 1553 and again in 1555, 1557, 1558, 1561. Then it was printed in Venice by Francesco Sansovino in 1568 and again in the same city by Domenico Farri in 1570. On these editions and on Dolce's translation see Guthmüller 1997, pp. 251-74; Bongi 2006, pp. 395-401; Capriotti 2013.

larity through prints in the vernacular translations, such as the one decorating the *Transformationi*, where the fall is represented in a similar way. However, this scheme originates from a drawing created by Michelangelo for Tommaso de' Cavalieri in 1533[29]. This drawing has been copied multiple times by various engravers, including Nicolas Beatrizet, significantly contributing to the widespread dissemination of this iconography[30].

The subsequent scene in the frieze depicts the myth of Apollo and Daphne, presented in a simple manner reminiscent of the composition in the print found in Agostini's translation. In the painting, Apollo is shown chasing Daphne, who turns her head to look back at her pursuer while her arms undergo a transformation into a laurel tree. The depiction of the nymph in the painting is strikingly similar to the one in the print, including the clothing: the split in her dress reaching her thigh is reminiscent of the illustration, and although the figure in the print does not have her breasts exposed like the one in the painting, her dress outlines the shape of the woman, making the two Daphnes appear very much alike.

The following scene portrays the birth of Adonis, where a female character, likely Lucina, is pulling Adonis out from the tree of Myrrha, while the naiads are preparing his bath and cradle. Comparing this image with the print in Agostini's translation, some resemblance can be seen, but it is evident that the artist took considerable artistic freedom in this case.

The scene depicting the rescue of Andromeda is once again quite similar to the xylograph in Agostini's edition. The painting shows the girl standing naked in front of a rock, and the sea monster is portrayed in a way that resembles a basilisk, with a snaky tail, bird-like wings, and a beak. Even Perseus is depicted in quite a similar manner.

The next fresco presents Cybele on her chariot led by two lions (fig. 2), likely referring to the myth of Hippomenes and Atalanta. According to the story, the two lovers had intercourse inside Cybele's temple, leading her to transform them into lions. In the background, on the left, there is a temple with a golden sculpture reminiscent of the description found in Niccolo degli Agostini's translation of the *Metamorphoses*. He writes that the building houses simulacra, images, and trophies made of gold and marble (*simulacri, imagini, trophei de marmo e d'oro*)[31]. The figure of Cybele in the fresco bears a striking resemblance to a print by the Master of the Die, including even the smallest details such as the position of the two lions, the eagle's head beneath the zodiac sphere, the animals under Cybele's foot, the cornucopia emerging from the seat, and the spikes held by the goddess. This similarity suggests that

[29] Marongiu 2013.
[30] On Beatrizet see Bianchi 1990, pp. 2-9.
[31] Agostini 1538, p. 121v.

the artist was undoubtedly aware of this illustration or a copy of it, given that the fresco mirrors the print (fig. 3). The print itself originates from a drawing attributed with little doubt to Baldassare Peruzzi. Although the drawing was likely created around 1513, the print's date is estimated to be around 1530. Some differences between the print and the model suggest the possibility of an intermediate design by Peruzzi, as the Master of the Die typically reproduced his models with great precision[32].

The next painting in the frieze depicts the Rape of Proserpina. In this instance, if the artist referred to the prints found in the vernacular translations, he did so more liberally. He chose to portray the myth in a single, distinct scene, similar to Giovanni Antonio Rusconi's approach in the *Trasformationi*. Notably, there is a resemblance to a majolica plate from Urbino, as evidenced by the poses of the characters, the chariot adorned with human figures, and the color of the horses[33].

On the final wall, two scenes are depicted. Unfortunately, the first one is lost, and the other one is in poor condition, making it challenging to discern the subject clearly. In the foreground there is a male character sitting in a peculiar manner, resembling someone gazing at themselves in a mirror, akin to the figure of Narcissus. However, the setting does not fully support this hypothesis, as the ground under the figure does not look like water (fig. 4). On the other hand, the presence of a dog and a cupid in this fresco can be found in several representations of the Narcissus myth, such as in a majolica plate from Faenza. Despite the damage to the fresco, these elements provide valuable clues that suggest a connection to the story of Narcissus[34]. In addition, the two characters in the background, on the left, may be two of the many Narcissus' suitors.

The iconographic program of the frieze likely does not intend to convey a specific message from the client. Instead, it seems to have a more decorative purpose, employing familiar myths that are easily recognizable to viewers and incorporating established iconographic schemes that have become canonical through the circulation of prints and majolica. Indeed, the artist demonstrates to have a wide knowledge of not only the prints decorating the vernacular translations of the *Metamorphoses*, but also of the prints which circulated freely spreading the models of the greatest artists of the time. Furthermore, the choice of myths in this frieze adheres closely to the theory of *decorum*, which suggests that each room in a house should correspond to specific themes and subjects that are in harmony with its function and purpose[35]. In his *Trattato*

[32] Zenati 1983. The Master of the Die is known in particular for his prints of Cupid and Psyche inspired by Raffaello; see for instance Cavicchioli 2020.

[33] On these ceramics, see Andreoli 2012.

[34] For more on these majolica plates see Ivi; *L'istoriato* 1993.

[35] Cieri Via 2003, pp. 31 and ff.

dell'Architettura, Filarete includes a list of myths that he deems particularly suitable for adorning palaces, and among them are the myths of Apollo and Daphne, the Fall of Phaeton, Pluto abducting Proserpina, and Perseus[36]. Most of them can also be considered as naturalist myths, such as Daphne's transformation into a laurel oak, the death of the Sun God's son, and the story of the origin of the changing of the seasons, which is Proserpina's episode. These myths linked to naturalist themes were also among the ones considered more suitable for the decoration of palaces[37].

4. *The Ottoni Family and its palace: a few considerations and the Coat of Arms Room*

The connection between the Ottoni family and the decoration of their palace presents some challenges. The only available information about Palazzo Ottoni comes from the commemorative stone placed in the atrium, stating that the construction was initiated by Giambattista and Costantino from Lugano in 1472[38]. According to the historian Alberto Bufali, the earliest information about the palace in archival documents dates back to 1478, when a notary deed mentions *in dominibus depictis et novis magnificorum Dominorum* ("in the new palace painted by the magnificent Lords"). In 1512, Giacomo Ottoni commissioned Cesare Onofrio Pacetti, an artist from Matelica, to decorate the walls of his building within two years, as he had already done for his cousin Giovanni. Since Giovanni took control of the family in 1510, the paintings he refers to, produced for Palazzo Ottoni, were likely done after this date. Today, the only decorated part remaining is the frieze of the so-called *Sala degli stemmi*, the Coats of Arms Room. Bufali suggests that Pacetti might have been the author of this frieze as well.[39] I reject this hypothesis because, as I will demonstrate, the frieze was not depicted before 1533 (most likely after 1541), while Pacetti died in 1531. Given the limited historical records and information about the Ottoni family and their palace, it remains difficult to determine the exact date of the frescoes and the likely owner of the palace at the time.

Ascanio Ottoni ruled the family between 1520 and 1537, and he was followed by five other family members until 1589, when Gianmaria Ottoni relinquished any rights on Matelica. The last decades were marked by troublesome events, including conflicts among brothers and cousins for the regency.

[36] Alberti 1966, pp. 788-789; Cieri Via 2003, p. 32.

[37] Cieri Via 2003, pp. 32-52.

[38] Antonelli, Biocco 2006, p. 22. For the description of the palace see Montironi, Mozzoni 1981, p. 118.

[39] Bufali 2007, pp. 82-84.

In 1564, Pirro Ottoni succeeded Antonmaria, but in 1566, he was imprisoned in Rome. He returned to Matelica in 1572, but due to the internal family conflicts, the capital resources suffered significantly. It is unlikely that they invested in decorations during these turbulent years.

In 1576, the Ottoni family sought permission from Pope Gregorio XIII to sell their rights on Matelica to the Duke of Sori. However, Gianmaria Ottoni did not sign the documents, nullifying the act. In 1578, the family failed to pay the fee to the Treasury of the Apostolic Chamber, leading the Pope to declare their bankruptcy. Despite Pirro's vigorous protest, Gianmaria, his successor, definitively declined any rights on Matelica in 1589[40].

The Coats of Arms Room features a frieze with mythological scenes, many of which are inspired by the *Metamorphoses*. In this instance, much like in Palazzo Ferretti, the distinct myths are enclosed within frames, which serve to demarcate one episode from the next. The cycle begins above the door: inside an octagon, there is a knight on his horse jumping over a moat, with two female figures on either side holding the Ottoni family's coat of arms. Throughout the frieze there are multiple knights depicted in various poses and armors, one on each wall.

The first mythological scene portrays the myth of Acteon and Diana. On the left, the young hunter emerges from the woods, holding both his bow and arrow with one hand while trying to protect himself from the water splashing from Diana's hand. The goddess is shown in a spring with her followers, splashing Acteon. On the right, Acteon transformed into a deer is seen fleeing from his own dogs. The fresco follows the same iconographic scheme as the woodcut in Agostini's 1522 vernacular translation, mirroring the position, movements, and gestures of the depicted figures.

The next painting represents the Flaying of Marsyas and shows some similarity with the print from Bonsignori's translation. Apollo is depicted as a young blonde boy, removing Marsyas' skin, while the victim is shown as a red, bloody body with exposed muscles. On the left, both Apollo's lyre and Marsyas' flute are placed on a trunk. In the print, the engraver, adhering to Bonsignori's text, replaced the instruments originally described by Ovid with more contemporary counterparts: a violin and a bagpipe (fig. 5). Furthermore, Marsyas is depicted as an ordinary human rather than a satyr, in alignment with the translator's characterization of him as a "peasant" (*villano*), deviating from Ovid's portrayal of him as a satyr. Both the fresco and the print include a circular temple in the top right corner, where Marsyas' skin is hung by Apollo to serve as a reminder to mortals not to challenge the gods[41].

[40] Litta (1781-1851), Tab. III, IV. On the history of Ottoni family also see Barbini 1988, pp. 63-91.

[41] Bonsignori 1497, pp. XLIXr- Lr. Pesavento already wrote about this image in Pesavento 2018b, pp. 45-51.

The next fresco depicts Narcissus. The boy is shown gazing at his own reflection in a pond, while Echo stands beside him, portrayed as a statue (fig. 6). It is noteworthy what Agostini writes about Echo: "the pain was so intense that she was transformed into stone" (*E tanto fu il dolore che gli penetra la miser alma, a la misera amante che finalmente si converte in pietra*)[42]. Indeed, Agostini's version of the metamorphosis of Echo in the fresco suggests a more literal transformation, where her entire body is turned into stone, as depicted in the painting. This phrasing perfectly conveys the idea of Echo becoming stone as shown in the artwork, differing from Ovid's formulation where only her bones are transformed into stones[43].

The frescoes continue with the depiction of the myth of Jupiter and Europa: the figurative scheme reminds of the xylograph found in Giovanni Bonsignori's translation. In both images, the bull is lying on the floor while Europa and her companions are placing a garland between its horns, and the princess is mounting the animal's back. In the background, Europa is shown riding the bull on the water, holding one of its horns with one hand while the other hand is on Jupiter's back.

Next, there is a fresco depicting the Rape of Proserpina, but with a unique iconography. Pluto is holding the girl in his arms and taking her into the Underworld, which is depicted as a dark shadow with red stripes. Notably, the male character has a horn on his head, which is an unusual attribute for Pluto (fig. 7). This representation might have been influenced by the iconography of another myth, that of Orpheus and Eurydice. In some depictions, the final part of this myth – when Orpheus looks back to Eurydice and she disappears – is shown as a kidnapping by infernal figures. For example, in a majolica plate from the early 16th century, originating from Faenza, a figure with two long horns is seen pulling the girl towards the door of the Underworld[44]. This scene is reminiscent of our fresco, but there are a few elements that suggest that the myth might represent the rape of Proserpina. The first consideration is that Orpheus is not depicted in the fresco. Additionally, the presence of flowers below the girl, as described in Ovid's account of Proserpina's myth, further supports this interpretation.

Moving on to the next wall, the myth of Apollo and Daphne is represented. The right part of the fresco, with Daphne running away from Apollo, reflects a simple scheme typically found in prints. This portrayal aligns with the illustration decorating Bonsignori's translation of the *Metamorphoses*, where laurel branches are shown growing from Daphne's hands and head, and both protagonists are dressed similarly. On the left side of the fresco there is the

[42] Agostini 1538, p. 28v.

[43] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III, 398-399.

[44] The author would like to thank Fatima Diez who suggested the relation with Orpheus' episode.

personification of a river, indicating Daphne's father, a character also presents in the engraving depicting this episode in the *Trasformationi*.

Moving forward, the following fresco represents the Rescue of Andromeda (fig. 8). If the artist drew inspiration from a print, he did so more freely. He may have been influenced by Piero di Cosimo's painting, created for Giovan Battista Strozzi in 1513, and by Perino del Vaga's depiction of the stories of Perseus in the Farnese Apartment at Castel Sant'Angelo in 1546. The painting by Piero di Cosimo was reproduced by the so-called Maestro di Serumida in his series dedicated to Perseus, now housed in Palazzo Davanzati in Florence. A copy of this painting is also found in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, as a part of the Albani collection[45]. These examples illustrate the widespread adoption of this model and how artists employed it as a reference.

The last wall depicts the scene of Hercules resting. This is followed by one of the most interesting scenes of the cycle: both Venus and Cupid are portrayed using a popular iconography reminiscent of the famous painting created by Pontormo after Michelangelo (fig. 9). This painting was completed in 1533 and was immediately acquired by Alessandro de' Medici. It quickly gained great popularity, as mentioned in a comment by Benedetto Varchi, who compared it to Praxiteles' Venus. Throughout the 16th century, the painting was recorded multiple times in the "Guardaroba", and in 1563, with the establishment of the Academy of Drawing, it became a model for young artists of the *maniera moderna*. Consequently, it was drawn and evoked through several versions[46]. It appears that the painting in Matelica, and hence the entire frieze, was executed after 1533, and most probably some years later, when prints of this subject started to circulate widely.

In the subsequent scene, the artist depicts Venus and Mars (fig.10), once again using a print as the model. A comparison with a print by Enea Vico, attributed with uncertainty to Parmigianino, reveals similarities between them. This print is typically dated after 1541 and no later than the mid-16th century[47]. The similarity with the fresco is evident, even in the smallest details. For instance, Mars' sandals are represented exactly in the same way, as well as the shape of Venus' abdomen and the way her hair is curled up around one of her breasts. All these points of contact suggest that our fresco was probably executed after this print.

The next scene represents Nessus, Hercules, and Deianira. The artist freely evokes the scene portrayed in the background of the print decorating Bonsignori's translation, where Hercules, covered only by his lion skin, is pointing

[45] *Entry 47*, in Forlani Tempesti, Capretti 1996, pp. 140-141.

[46] Negro 2001, pp. 13-17; Falletti, Nelson 2002; G. Badino, in Falciani, Natali 2014, pp. 320-321.

[47] *Entry 292*, in Spike 1985, p. 31. There is a monography on Enea Vico which focuses almost only on his antiquarian activity: Bodon 1997.

his bow against Nessus, who is kidnapping Deianira, shown sitting naked on the centaur's back. The last scene, on the left of Ottoni's arm, on the wall above the door, probably depicts Apollo with one of his lovers, perhaps the muse Calliope.

Since the archival fund of the Ottoni family does not contain any documents regarding these frescoes or any information about the clients, it is only possible to provide a timeframe in which the frieze was likely painted. Based on the comparison with the prints used as models by the artist, it can be concluded that the frescoes can be dated between the 1540s and the 1570s. Similar to Palazzo Ferretti, the artist exhibits a deep familiarity with both the prints from editions of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the prints derived from visual models. In this context, it appears probable that the client's objective was not to convey a particular message through this series of frescoes. Instead, the selection of these myths was likely driven by their decorative qualities, aligning once more with the principle of *decorum*.

5. *Final considerations*

The systematic and extensive use of prints, especially when employed in a derivative manner with limited originality, may indicate that the artists responsible for these frescoes were not entirely comfortable with inventing their own compositions. Considering the Marca di Ancona's status as a peripheral region within the Papal States, the employment of lesser-known artists is understandable. Nonetheless, the artists and/or clients also demonstrate a willingness to update the frescoes to contemporary fashion.

The use of friezes began with the depiction of the frieze of Villa Farnesina and became more widespread in the following decades. One of its primary functions was to delineate the hierarchy of the palace rooms, distinguishing smaller halls which still had a representative function. This arrangement can also be observed in places like Castel Sant'Angelo, a location well-known to Tibaldi. Friezes were not only less expensive and quicker to execute, but they also provided a more harmonious visual effect, especially in smaller rooms where extensive wall decorations might overwhelm the space. In Roman palaces, friezes became popular during the 1550s and 1560s. However, they differed from the earlier examples such as that of Villa Farnesina, as the friezes in Palazzo Farnese, Palazzo Spada, and Palazzo Sacchetti, for example, are not continuous, but the scenes are interrupted by decorations[48].

This is perfectly in line with what we see in Ancona and in Matelica. In-

[48] Boschloo 1981, pp. 134, 136; Amadio 2016, pp. 63-64.

deed, the episodes in Palazzo Ferretti are contained within oval frames, which are separated from each other by grotesque decorations, whereas the scenes in Palazzo Ottoni are inscribed inside rectangular frames. From this point of view, clients and artists seem to demonstrate an aspiration to be updated to the taste of the larger centers.

In the case of both Palazzo Ferretti and Palazzo Ottoni, it is evident that the artists' iconographic background is not limited to the prints found in vernacular translations, but it also includes a number of freely circulating prints which copied the masterpieces of that time. Indeed, as Lisa Pon states, prints were the most powerful technique to send images through time and space[49]. From the artists' point of view, it was an efficient way to spread their own models around, to promote themselves and their works, like Raphael broadly did[50]. In some cases, the same artists prepared drawings specifically earmarked for printing, but often engravers appropriated the drawings not made to be printed, like the one of the *Fall of Phaeton* by Michelangelo[51]. Usually, if an engraver received the model directly from the artist, he was more interested in making the work as similar as possible to the original. However, if it was not the case, the artist might take greater stylistic and iconographic liberties[52]. The engravings which inspired the frescoes in palazzo Ferretti and palazzo Ottoni were obtained indirectly, leading the artists to take certain stylistic and iconographic liberties. Based on the various sources used by the artists, it seems that they had access to a diverse range of illustrations, allowing them to combine different iconographies in their works. For instance, in the painting of Apollo and Daphne in Matelica, the artist might not have known the prints from both Bonsignori's and Dolce's translations, but he had memory of multiple versions of this myth.

Prints from the vernacular *Metamorphoses* were also used many years later in Bologna in a room of palazzo Fava, which was decorated by Ludovico, Agostino and Annibale Carracci between 1583 and 1593. In the *camerino* and in the nearby room, the artists read the translation written by Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara, published for the first time in 1561 and then repeatedly reprinted in the course of the 16th century. Clara Robertson and Sonia Cavicchioli demonstrated that for some scenes of the second room, depicted with the stories of Jason, the artists drew inspiration from the illustrations which decorate two different editions of Anguillara's translation[53]. According to extensive studies by Sonia Cavicchioli herself, after developing in Rome, the frieze spread especially in Bologna, mostly in the 17th century[54]. It shows

[49] Pon 2004, p. 15.
[50] Acanfora 2022, p. 209.
[51] Borea 1980, p. 233.
[52] Borea 1979, pp. 362-363.
[53] Cavicchioli 2016, pp. 234-239; Robertson 1993, pp. 271-305.
[54] Boschloo 1984; Cavicchioli 2008.

that the use of prints from books was recurring also in big centers and among skilled artists such as the Carracci.

Jan De Long, reading Giovanni Battista Armenini's *Dei veri precetti de' la pittura*, suggests that the subjects of the friezes were often chosen by artists themselves, and not necessarily by the clients. Therefore, the artists represented themes which were familiar to them, explaining the frequent occurrence of scenes from the myth of Perseus in the circle of artists around Perino del Vaga[55]. It is notable that Pellegrino Tibaldi worked with Perino in Rome and that Perseus' adventures are present both in Ancona and in Matelica.

In the two cases investigated in this paper, the analysis suggests that the choice of myths was not linked to a specific iconographic program, indeed the clients were more interested in showcasing their cultural knowledge and updated taste by using iconographies inspired by popular prints. It indicates that the artists could partially choose the myths and the scenes which they would depict, selecting them among the most famous topics and the ones they knew better. The illustrations from vernacular translations and prints derived from recognized artists like Michelangelo and Baldassarre Peruzzi were widely known and utilized by artists.

These prints played a significant role in disseminating popular models from centers such as Florence and Venice – where the editions of the *Metamorphoses* originated – to peripheral cities in the Papal States, where copies were reproduced with simplified forms and meanings to align with the preferences of the lords of the Marca di Ancona. Indeed, even though these clients and artists tried in some way to adapt to the current taste of the centers, both these cases confirm that the periphery was lagging behind from stylistic point of view[56]. Furthermore, as Alessandro Nova explained for the city of Brescia in relation to Romanino's art, the center-periphery relationship largely depends on the observer[57]: the frieze of palazzo Ferretti shows a more updated style in comparison to the one in Matelica, which was in turn a province of Ancona.

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[55] De Long p. 34.
[56] Castelnuovo, Ginzburg 2019.
[57] Nova 2006, p. 48.

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Appendix

Fig. 1. Pellegrino Tibaldi (workshop of), *Fallen of Phaeton*, Ancona, Palazzo Ferretti (with permission of Ministero della Cultura – Direzione regionale Musei Marche – Museo Archeologico Nazionale delle Marche)

Fig. 2. Pellegrino Tibaldi (workshop of), *Ciybeles*, Ancona, Palazzo Ferretti (with permission of Ministero della Cultura – Direzione regionale Musei Marche – Museo Archeologico Nazionale delle Marche)

Fig. 3. Maestro di Die, *Cybeles*, from Peruzzi's drawing, London, British Museum (Dept. of Prints and Drawings)

Fig. 4. Pellegrino Tibaldi (workshop of), *Narcissus (?)*, Ancona, Palazzo Ferretti (with permission of Ministero della Cultura – Direzione regionale Musei Marche – Museo Archeologico Nazionale delle Marche)

Fig. 5. Unknown artist, *Flaying of Marsyas*, Matelica (MC) Palazzo Ottoni (with permission of Comune di Matelica)

Fig. 6. Unknown artist, *Narcissus*, Matelica (MC) Palazzo Ottoni (with permission of Comune di Matelica)

Fig. 7. Unknown artist, *Proserpina rape*, Matelica (MC) Palazzo Ottoni (with permission of Comune di Matelica)

Fig. 8. Unknown artist, *Andromeda's rescue,* Matelica (MC) Palazzo Ottoni (with permission of Comune di Matelica)

Fig. 9. Unknow artist, *Venus and Cupid,* Matelica (MC) Palazzo Ottoni (with permission of Comune di Matelica)

Fig. 10. Unknown artist, *Venus and Mars*, Matelica (MC) Palazzo Ottoni (with permission of Comune di Matelica)

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