

SUPPLEMENTI
S

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



IL CAPITALE CULTURALE
Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage

eum

Rivista fondata da Massimo Montella



IL CAPITALE CULTURALE
Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage
Supplementi 15 / 2023

eum

Il capitale culturale

Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage

Supplementi n. 15, 2023

ISSN 2039-2362 (online)

© 2010 eum edizioni università di macerata

Registrazione al Roc n. 735551 del 14/12/2010

Direttore / Editor in chief Pietro Petrarola

Co-direttori / Co-editors Tommy D. Andersson, Elio Borgonovi, Rosanna Cioffi, Stefano Della Torre, Michela di Macco, Daniele Manacorda, Serge Noiret, Tonino Pencarelli, Angelo R. Pupino, Girolamo Scullo

Coordinatore editoriale / Editorial coordinator Maria Teresa Gigliozzi

Coordinatore tecnico / Managing coordinator Pierluigi Feliciati

Comitato editoriale / Editorial board Giuseppe Capriotti, Mara Cerquetti, Francesca Coltrinari, Patrizia Dragoni, Pierluigi Feliciati, Costanza Geddes da Filicaia, Maria Teresa Gigliozzi, Chiara Mariotti, Enrico Nicosia, Emanuela Stortoni

Comitato scientifico - Sezione di beni culturali / Scientific Committee - Division of Cultural Heritage
Giuseppe Capriotti, Mara Cerquetti, Francesca Coltrinari, Patrizia Dragoni, Pierluigi Feliciati, Maria Teresa Gigliozzi, Susanne Adina Meyer, Marta Maria Montella, Umberto Moscatelli, Caterina Papparello, Sabina Pavone, Francesco Pirani, Mauro Saracco, Emanuela Stortoni, Carmen Vitale

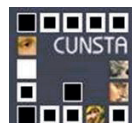
Comitato scientifico / Scientific Committee Michela Addis, Mario Alberto Banti, Carla Barbati †, Caterina Barilaro, Sergio Barile, Nadia Barrella, Gian Luigi Corinto, Lucia Corrain, Girolamo Cusimano, Maurizio De Vita, Fabio Donato †, Maria Cristina Giambruno, Gaetano Golinelli, Rubén Lois Gonzalez, Susan Hazan, Joel Heuillon, Federico Marazzi, Raffaella Morselli, Paola Paniccia, Giuliano Pinto, Carlo Pongetti, Bernardino Quattrococchi, Margaret Rasulo, Orietta Rossi Pinelli, Massimiliano Rossi, Simonetta Stopponi, Cecilia Tasca, Andrea Ugolini, Frank Vermeulen, Alessandro Zuccari

Web <http://riviste.unimc.it/index.php/cap-cult>, email: icc@unimc.it

Editore / Publisher eum edizioni università di macerata, Corso della Repubblica 51 – 62100 Macerata, tel. (39) 733 258 6081, fax (39) 733 258 6086, <http://eum.unimc.it>, info.ceum@unimc.it

Layout editor Oltrepagina srl

Progetto grafico / Graphics +crocevia / studio grafico



Rivista accreditata AIDEA
Rivista riconosciuta CUNSTA
Rivista riconosciuta SISMED
Rivista indicizzata WOS
Rivista indicizzata SCOPUS
Rivista indicizzata DOAJ
Inclusa in ERIH-PLUS

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

edited by
Giuseppe Capriotti, Fátima Díez Platas,
Francesca Casamassima

This publication is part of the research project PID2022-141345NB-I00 funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033/ “FEDER Una manera de hacer Europa”



Ovidian Secrets: An Unknown 17th-Century Cabinet in Santiago de Cuba and the Illustration of the *Metamorphoses*

Fátima Díez Platas*

Abstract

The aim of this article is to present an unknown Baroque cabinet from the collection of the Casa de Velazquez Museum in the city of Santiago de Cuba, probably made in Antwerp in the 17th century, with a figurative inlaid decoration inspired by contemporary illustrations of the *Metamorphoses*. Given the scarcity of documentation on this particular piece, and on this type of decorated furniture in general, this article aims to decipher the decorative program and its possible meaning. Methodologically, the research follows an iconographic and philological approach, carrying out a search for models and parallels in order, on the one hand, to determine the source of the figurative scenes that decorate the cabinet and, on the other hand, to hypothesize on the interpretation and function of the complex but irregular decoration.

* PhD, Associate Professor, University of Santiago de Compostela, Department of Art History, Praza da Universidade 1, 15703, Santiago de Compostela, e-mail: fatima.diez@usc.es.

This work belongs to the results of the research project funded by the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities *Biblioteca Digital Ovidiana: ediciones ilustradas de Ovidio, siglos XV-XIX (VI): Las bibliotecas de Baleares, Castilla-La Mancha, Comunidad Valenciana y Murcia* (PID2022-141345NB-100).

1. *Introduction*

Towards the end of the 15th century in Spain, a furniture type resembling a chest emerged, designed to store and safeguard documents, as well as precious objects such as jewelry, letters, or coins¹. Equipped with numerous drawers and compartments, some of them hidden, the *papeleras*, *escritorios* or *bar-gueños*, as they are referred to in Spanish, and commonly known in English as curiosa chests, curio cabinets or simply cabinets, were extensively manufactured in Spain and its territories, the Kingdom of Naples and the Netherlands, primarily in Antwerp, especially flourishing during the 17th century.

Functioning as furniture for studies, bedrooms, or *estrados* (living rooms), cabinets evolved into luxury items due to the high-quality materials and intricate embellishment techniques employed. Beyond material attributes, decorative elements were introduced to accentuate their opulence and, more importantly, as a means of personalization, rendering each piece distinctive and somewhat unique. These prestigious items found a place in aristocratic and bourgeois households, gaining extraordinary popularity in the 16th and 17th centuries², with the typology persisting into the 18th and 19th centuries³.

Cabinets possess a structure akin to an ark or chest, featuring drawers, shelves, and doors, often concealing secret compartments that open at the front. Unlike arks, cabinets rest on a base, typically a table, known as *bufete* in Spanish, often paired with them and sharing decorative elements. In addition to the luxurious materials employed – precious woods and costly materials like ivory, bone, and tortoiseshell – the furniture is distinguished by skillful design, incorporating figurative decoration through techniques such as painting, bone or ivory carving, and inlays⁴.

The distinctive quality of these sumptuous pieces lies in their suitability for showcasing splendid and sometimes significant decoration. This means that the decoration adhered to specific rules of decorum, incorporating motifs that transcended mere representations of animals or plants. Thematic decorations encompassed genre scenes, particularly those depicting hunting or war, as well as themes of love, religion, and mythology⁵. Therefore, cabinets display concise iconographic programs distributed across the doors and drawers. A feature that, on one hand, renders the piece of furniture a personalized object, projecting the tastes and desires of the owner who commissions it in a specific

¹ On the cabinet as Spanish type of furniture see Aguiló 1984; Aguiló 1987, pp. 128-153; Aguiló 2018. On the cabinets in general: Riccardi-Cubitt 1992.

² Riccardi-Cubitt 1992, pp. 47-97.

³ Ivi, pp. 97-170.

⁴ On the different types of cabinets and techniques Aguiló 1987, pp. 134-153.

⁵ On themes and decorative programs in cabinets see Aguiló 1988; Aguiló 1994; Aguiló 2008; Aguiló 2009.

manner, and, on the other hand, elevates the furniture to the status of a miniature museum, housing themes and ideas akin to an altarpiece, or even comparable to an illustrated book, displaying a compilation of motifs and themes interrelated that present the content of a poem or novel in images.

Obviously, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* became a source of images and themes for the decoration of cabinets through the illustrated editions that circulated in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Ovidian material, transformed into images and disseminated in various spaces in the modern age, ended up as decoration for this type of furniture, producing interesting examples of cabinets decorated with different techniques, especially in the 17th century, to which little attention has been paid.

This article presents an unknown Baroque cabinet from the collection of the Casa de Velazquez Museum in the city of Santiago de Cuba, which has a figurative inlaid decoration inspired by contemporary illustrations of the *Metamorphoses*. Given the scarcity of documentation on this particular piece, the primary aim of the contribution is to describe and analyze the figurative decoration, using an iconographic and philological approach to identify the Ovidian themes represented. Secondly, one of the main objectives of the research carried out on this piece of furniture was to search for the visual sources of the scenes, in order to identify the specific illustrated editions used by the artisans to produce the decoration.

2. *Ovidian echoes: recognizing the Metamorphoses in an unknown Baroque cabinet*

The Casa de Velazquez, a house museum situated in Parque Céspedes at the heart of Santiago de Cuba, traces its origins back to the 16th century when it served as the residence of the city's first governor, Diego Velazquez⁶. Recognized as the oldest building in the Americas, it has been transformed into a museum where rooms representing a typical colonial home⁷ have been meticulously reconstructed across various centuries, spanning from the 16th to the 19th. In one of the 17th century rooms, a typical Spanish Baroque cabinet is on display (Fig. 1). Likely crafted in Flanders⁸ and almost certainly in Antwerp, the cabinet is made of wood, possibly ebony⁹, and follows the structure of this

⁶ On the Casa de Velazquez as a house museum see Prat 1977.

⁷ On the furniture from 16th and 17th century in Cuba: Martin (2016).

⁸ On European furniture in the Americas in the modern era: Aguiló 2006.

⁹ Given the special characteristics of the country and the museum, it was not possible to carry out a complete and detailed inspection of the piece of furniture, which is also in a poor state of conservation.

type of furniture from the period. Its frontal section, comprised of drawers and doors, is divided into three segments. Both the left and right sections house four drawers each, while the middle section features a door at the front and a single drawer below. Designed as a kind of portable chest, it stands on four legs shaped like an eagle's claw, resting on a table or *bufete*, which includes drawers adorned in a manner consistent with the cabinet's decoration. The front, with its door and division into sections, gives it an architectural appearance typical of cabinets of the period¹⁰. Its summit is crowned by a balustrade-like crest, adorned with a sequence of small bronze vases filled with flowers.

Typical of cabinets from the latter part of the 17th century, the focal point lies in their ornate embellishments. The central body and drawers, enriched through the inlay technique¹¹, showcase figures intricately pyro-engraved onto bone surfaces. These figures, set within the plates forming the drawer fronts, create an appearance resembling, or at least imitating, tortoiseshell. While individual figures may not display an exceptionally high level of technical artistry, collectively, they form a group of sixteen scenes identifiable as part of the illustrations crafted for Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. A thorough examination has enabled the identification of fifteen out of the sixteen scenes constituting the distinct Ovidian «program». Additionally, potential models influencing the formulation of most episodes in the poem have been determined, many of which are readily recognizable at a glance.

Examining the scenes and commencing from the upper left corner (see Fig. 2), it is not difficult to recognize the depiction of the rape of Europa (Fig. 2, 1La)¹². This portrayal adheres to the conventional form of illustrating a girl, her hair flowing in the wind, atop a bull that turns its face toward the viewer. The drapery's movement implies motion, and Europa's figure securely clings to the bull Jupiter's horns.

Likewise, in the initial segment of the second drawer (Fig. 2, 2La), a knowledgeable observer of mythological imagery can readily identify the bearded figure, unmistakably possessing donkey ears, flanked by a hybrid figure combining man and goat, alongside a human figure holding a musical instrument. This figure is identified as King Midas, who faced punishment for misjudging the contest between Pan and the god Apollo¹³.

Similarly, in the fourth drawer on the right side (Fig. 3), it is not difficult to identify the figure wielding a sword and holding the thick-haired female head in the right hand as Perseus (Fig. 3, 4Ra). With some understanding of the circumstances narrated by Ovid¹⁴, it becomes apparent that the winged horse

¹⁰ Lozoya, Claret 1962, p. 172.

¹¹ On the inlay techniques and cabinets see Aguiló 1993; Aguiló 2012.

¹² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II, 833-875.

¹³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XI, 85-193.

¹⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 604-803.

adorning the adjacent panel (Fig. 3, 4Rb) is Pegasus, born from the severed head of Medusa.

To identify several other scenes on both sides of the cabinet, a higher level of expertise is necessary. For instance, to recognize as Narcissus the figure gazing into a fountain in the first part of the third panel on the right side (Fig. 3, 3Ra) requires knowledge of the story of the handsome young hunter who fell in love with his own image reflected in the water¹⁵. Similarly, the identification of Eurydice in the girl standing with a basket at her side, bitten in the heel by what appears to be a snake, in the second panel of the first drawer on the right part of the cabinet (Fig. 3, 1Rb) requires some knowledge of Ovid's stories about the figure of Orpheus¹⁶. Familiarity with Ovid's tale of Cephalus and Procris¹⁷ is also essential to recognize it in the scene on the second panel of the third drawer on the left-hand part of the cabinet (Fig. 2, 3Lb), where a woman holds a dog by the collar while handing a large javelin to a man dressed as a warrior standing in front of her.

Similarly, comprehension of the scene in the second panel of the third drawer on the right, next to the Narcissus depiction (Fig. 3, 3Rb), requires recalling the second book of the *Metamorphoses*. In this scene, a small hybrid figure emerging from a basket, uncovered by a woman making a certain fuss, symbolizes the discovery of Erichthonius, one of the first kings of Athens and adopted son of Athena-Minerva, conceived by the earth with the seed of Hephaestus-Vulcanus¹⁸.

Lastly, deciphering the scene on the first panel of the first drawer in the upper part of the right body of the cabinet (Fig. 3, 1Ra), where a female figure accompanied by two children confronts the large figures of a frog and a half-human, half-batrachian figure, requires knowledge of the story of the Lycian peasants¹⁹. These people tried to prevent Latona from bathing her children, Apollo and Diana, and drinking from a spring. As a punishment for their lack of hospitality, the goddess transformed them into frogs, condemning them to swim and hop in the murky waters of the spring.

3. *After Tempesta: the use and misuse of an illustrated edition of the Metamorphoses*

However, the eight scenes that remain without an immediate interpretation pose a number of challenges. Primarily, we attribute the difficulty to the

¹⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III, 339-510.

¹⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X, 1-10.

¹⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII, 672-865.

¹⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II, 553-561.

¹⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI, 313-381.

subpar quality of the representations, particularly in terms of composition and coherence. These scenes appear to be nothing more than a loosely interpreted adaptation of the evident models used, specifically contemporary engravings from illustrated editions of the *Metamorphoses*. Consequently, the craftsmen, likely not fully comprehending the scenes, selectively incorporated certain figures from the plates while discarding others essential to the coherent portrayal of the narrative. To fully grasp the series of sixteen scenes, each corresponding to distinct episodes from the Ovidian poem, it becomes imperative to identify the original models that inspired these non-literal versions of the stories.

On closer examination of the figures and the scenes as a whole, it becomes clear that many formal details, gestures and objects of most of the figures reveal the source of inspiration for these free copies of the poem's illustrations, which can be found primarily in the series of engravings by Antonio Tempesta, the Italian engraver who published his prints of the *Metamorphoses* as a figural edition in Antwerp in 1606²⁰.

To begin with, a comparison of the scenes depicted on the cabinet with the engravings in the Flemish edition substantiates the initial identifications made upon first inspection. It is evident that the figure of Europa closely mirrors the one presented by Tempesta (Fig. 4). Two distinct details in the engraving corroborate this resemblance: firstly, Europa's hair remains unaffected by the directional movement of the air, as illustrated by the billowing of her cloak; and secondly, both Tempesta's Europa and that on our cabinet firmly grasp both horns with both hands, deviating from the conventional gesture of holding one horn while placing the other hand on the bull's rump – a characteristic pose recurring in depictions of the abduction since the 6th century BC. Additional relevant details include the hair parting, the C-shaped configuration of the cloak, the positioning of the legs, and the facial features of the bull Jupiter. However, the primary disparity lies in the reversed portrayal²¹.

The figure of Midas, adorned with a crown, ermine, and donkey's ears, is also unmistakably recognizable, accompanied by the figures of Pan and Apollo, identifiable by their gestures and attributes, even though not exact replicas (Fig. 2, 2La)²².

²⁰ Tempesta 1606. On Tempesta engravings of the *Metamorphoses* see Henkel 1926-1927, pp. 100-204. A study of the edition and the digitizing of the full series of engravings are available at the site of the *Biblioteca Digital Ovidiana*: <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/visualizacionejemplar.php?clave=329;?%3E>>, 25.01.2024.

²¹ Compare the figure with the original engraving: Tempesta 1606, n° 21: <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=3565>>, 25.01.2024.

²² Tempesta 1606, n° 102: <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=3646>>, 25.01.2024.

Although the image is not an exact duplicate, the representation of Narcissus perfectly mirrors the scene in the engraving²³, as is evident from the attire and the boy's posture leaning over a fountain with a lion's head as a spout, reinterpreted in the cabinet's image (Fig. 3, 3Ra). The comparison with the engraving²⁴ also affirms the inspiration behind the abridged version of the scene of Erichthonius emerging from his basket (Fig. 5).

Lastly, the connection between the Tempesta engraving portraying Cephalus and Procris²⁵ and its representation on the cabinet is apparent. In this scene (Fig. 2, 3Lb), Procris, returning from her time with Diana, bringing the infallible javelin and the hunting dog that always catches its prey, gives both gifts to Cephalus – an act that will ultimately prove fatal for her²⁶. Once again, though not an exact reproduction of the engraving, the details of Procris' attire and the gesture of handing over the javelin and holding the dog unmistakably indicate the influence of Tempesta's edition in the workshop responsible for decorating this piece of furniture.

Nonetheless, the distinctive details of Tempesta's exquisite prints enable us to recognize another set of scenes that are less apparent and somewhat challenging to identify. This difficulty arises from the absence of the landscape setting and the omission of key figures in certain scenes, rendering them less comprehensible.

For instance, in the second scene of the first panel in the left-hand part of the cabinet (Fig. 2, 1Lb), a woman in a chariot drawn by birds, possibly pigeons, descends through the clouds to a land where a dog seems to be running after a wild boar that is fleeing parallel to the buildings that form the background of a landscape scene marked by the tree on the left. Upon examining the engraving that served as its inspiration (Fig. 6), we come to realize that the depicted scene is that of Adonis' death, with the central focus on the goddess Venus²⁷. In this poignant representation²⁸, Venus arrives in her chariot, drawn by doves, desperately discovering the lifeless body of her beloved Adonis, wounded by a boar and pursued by hunting dogs. However, a notable discrepancy arises in our piece of furniture's rendition of the scene – the creator has omitted the crucial character, Adonis, thus reducing the narrative to the presence of Venus. Moreover, this Venus, who bares her breasts, is entangled in a somewhat rustic

²³ Tempesta 1606, n° 28: <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=3572>>, 25.01.2024.

²⁴ Tempesta 1606, n° 14: <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=3558>>, 25.01.2024.

²⁵ Tempesta 1606, n° 70: <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=3614>>, 25.01.2024.

²⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII, 835-853.

²⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X, 710-739.

²⁸ Tempesta 1606, n° 98: <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=3642>>, 25.01.2024.

setting that does not align with the expected divine backdrop. Additionally, her gesture of grief remains puzzling and lacks full comprehension.

Similarly, in the first part of the third drawer of the left body (Fig. 2, 3La), a generic scene of a couple embracing is initially challenging to identify. Only the presence of two fish-tailed horses, typical of the marine attendants of the god Neptune, hints that the male figure could be the god. Referring to *Tempesta* prints²⁹ reveals that the scene is a depiction of the relationship between Neptune and Caenis (Fig. 7). This episode, recounted by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*³⁰, involves a gender transformation that is conspicuously absent from visual representation. The scene subtly implies an amorous encounter of a somewhat violent nature, with the added element of the god's mounts being severed from their aqueous medium, creating the illusion that they are suspended in mid-air.

The reduction of figures also complicates the scene in the first part of the fourth drawer of the left-hand body (Fig. 2, 4La). The scene on this plate depicts a long-haired male figure pointing³¹ to a winged dragon that turns its head backwards, baring its teeth. Referring to the engraving³² (Fig. 8) clarifies that this scene represents the moment in the story of Orpheus when his severed head, carried by the waters of the Hebro, is threatened by a serpent halted by Apollo, who turns it into stone³³. However, the absence of Orpheus' head renders the iconographic interpretation extremely difficult.

Finally, in the second part of the fourth drawer from the left-hand part (Fig. 2, 4Lb), a singular duel between a mounted warrior and a foot warrior unfolds. A comparison with the engraving³⁴ (Fig. 9) depicting the violent encounter between Greeks and Trojans reveals that only the foreground warriors have been selected from the tumultuous group, losing their contextual elements.

In short, identifying the source of inspiration for the scenes on the drawer's plates in *Tempesta's* engravings enables us to understand most of the scenes in the left-hand part of the Cuban cabinet (Fig. 2): the abduction of Europa (1La), the death of Adonis and the grief of Venus (1Lb), the judgment of Midas (2La), the story of Neptune and Caenis (3La), Procris giving Cephalus the gifts of Diana (3Lb), Apollo saving Orpheus' head (4La), and the Ovidian illustration for the Trojan War (4Lb). Nevertheless, the scene in the second part of the second drawer (Fig. 2; 2Lb) remains unidentified. The composition consists of

²⁹ *Tempesta* 1606, n° 115: <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=3659>>, 25.01.2024.

³⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XII, 168-209.

³¹ The hand is mutilated because or by the poor preservation of the piece.

³² *Tempesta* 1606, n° 100: <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=3644>>, 25.01.2024.

³³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XI, 51-61.

³⁴ *Tempesta* 1606, n° 113: <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=3657>>, 25.01.2024.

two figures, one holding a torch and the other walking towards what appears to be a bonfire, a scene that has no parallel in the Tempesta engraving series.

As for the scenes in the right-hand part of the cabinet (Fig. 3), the use of Tempesta's engravings as inspiration is far less clear, since only three of them can be linked to the versions of the Antwerp edition: the already commented representations of Narcissus at the fountain (Fig. 3, 3Ra) and the discovery of Erichthonius (Fig. 3, 3Rb and Fig. 5), which faithfully reflect Tempesta's depictions of the stories, and the first scene in the second drawer (Fig. 3, 2Ra), which is badly damaged but unmistakably represents a moment in the episode of Mercury and Argus³⁵. Tempesta's rendition of the death of Argus by Mercury³⁶ showcases a godly figure attired similarly to the one on the furniture. However, in the engraving, the god wields a sword against the slumbering Argus, intending to decapitate him. In contrast, the scene in the drawer seems to portray the god engaged in playing a musical instrument, while the other figure, nearly obscured, appears to be peacefully asleep against the tree.

4. *Interpretations of Ovid: looking for inspiration in illustrated editions of the Metamorphoses*

As for the models for the remaining scenes of the right side of the cabinet (Fig. 3), the first of them, the scene of Latona and the Lycians (1Ra), may combine distant inspiration in the Tempesta engraving³⁷ with details from other sources. The most significant feature of the scene is the hybrid figure raising his arms at the moment of his transformation into a frog, which could actually be related to one of the figures in the Tempesta edition but is also present in other Ovidian illustrations such as the Virgil Solis prints³⁸, which could also be a source for these scenes on the cabinet³⁹.

³⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, 713-723.

³⁶ Tempesta 1606, n° 10: <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=3554>>, 25.01.2024.

³⁷ Tempesta 1606, n° 56: <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=3600>>, 25.01.2024.

³⁸ Virgil Solis' xylography of the episode of Latona and the Lycian peasants, copy from Bustamante 1595, fol 86v: <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=2037>>, 25.01.2024.

³⁹ The actual source could have been an illustrated edition with a Spanish version of the *Metamorphoses*, printed in Antwerp in 1595 that is adorned with 175 xylographies, which served as mythological and iconographical handbook for artists and craftsmen, as it is stated in the title: *Las transformaciones de Ovidio en lengua española, repartidas en quinze libros con las Alegorias al fin dellos, y sus figuras, para provecho de los Artífices*. The engravings accompanying the text are faithful copies of the plates by the German engraver Virgil Solis (1514-1562), which in turn are a reworking of the creations of the French engraver Bernard Salomon (c.

In the same way, it is necessary to refer to other series of illustrations from the *Metamorphoses* to explain the scene of Eurydice being bitten by the snake (1Rb), which it is not represented by Tempesta. If we compare it with the illustration of the episode in other editions that would have been available as models for the furniture craftsmen, we can relate this to the illustrated *Metamorphoses* published in 1591 in Antwerp by the *Officina Plantiniana*⁴⁰. The engraving by Peter van der Borcht, unlike the Solis version⁴¹, shows Eurydice running away from the snake and with a basket in front of her⁴². It is clear, however, that the model is probably no more than an inspiration for the informal interpretation of the story, crafted by the artisans, who selectively included the essential elements depicting the moment: the presence of Eurydice, the basket of flowers she was picking, the conspicuous snake biting her heel, and a female figure representing Eurydice's companions.

Similarly, the two scenes depicting the heroic exploits of Perseus, one showing him riding on Pegasus as if pursuing a rampant dragon in the second part of second drawer of the right side of the cabinet (Fig. 3, 2Rb), and the scene depicting the beheading of Medusa, distributed across the two parts of the fourth drawer, may have been an interpretation made by the artisans, drawing inspiration from Solis' engravings of both stories.

On the one hand, the scene of Perseus' flight closely resembles Solis' depiction⁴³ of the encounter with Atlas and his transformation into a mountain due to the power of Medusa's head⁴⁴. In both versions, the head is absent, replaced by the face on the shield symbolizing the Gorgon. However, some alterations are present in the furniture version: Atlas' figure has disappeared, and the dragon that Perseus confronts in a small scene in the rear of the engraving has transformed into a massive creature. Nevertheless, the inclusion of similar

1508-1561) for *La Métamorphose d'Ovide figurée* printed in Lyon by Jean de Tournes in 1557. The complete set of 178 engravings by Solis was first used in 1563 to accompany three different editions of the *Metamorphoses* printed in Frankfurt am Main by the publishing house founded by Sigmund Feyerabend, Georg Rab (Corvinus) and the heirs of Weigand Han (Gallus): the Latin edition by J. Mycillus, the abridged and allegorised Latin version by J. Spreng and the *Tetrasticha* by J. Posthius. The digitizing of the full series of engravings and a study of the edition and of the copies in Spanish libraries is available at the site of the *Biblioteca Digital Ovidiana*: <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/listadoejemplares.php?de=edicion&clave=142>>, 25.01.2024. On this edition see Díez Platas 2003; Díez Platas 2017. On Solis see Stahlberg 1984; Henkel 1926-1927, pp. 88-89. On Virgil Solis engraving used in furniture see Humphrey 2015.

⁴⁰ The digitizing of the full series of xylographies of this edition is available at the site in the University of Virginia, *Ovid Illustrated: The Reception of Ovid's Metamorphoses in Image and Text*: <<https://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/ovidillust.html#cycles>>, 25.01.2024. On van der Borcht xylographies see Henkel 1926-1927, pp. 112-113.

⁴¹ <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=2083>>, 25.01.2024.

⁴² <<https://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/1591/OviNa239.html>>, 25.01.2024.

⁴³ <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=2025>>, 25.01.2024.

⁴⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 605-664.

architectural elements in the background is highly significant in establishing a connection between the two renditions.

On the other hand, the extended scene on the bottom drawer (Fig. 3, 4Ra and 4Rb), depicting the most famous deed of Perseus⁴⁵, shows the hero holding the sword in his right hand and Medusa's severed head in his left hand, next to the beheaded corpse of the monster and, at a distance, Pegasus walking towards him beside a tree as the sole element of the landscape. As already said, this composition appears to be another adaptation influenced by Solis' engraving of the story⁴⁶, which is the only version of the Ovidian story of Perseus and Medusa – ultimately derived from Salomon's formulation⁴⁷ – where we find the hero accompanied by Pegasus, seamlessly integrated into the scene, replicating the identical gesture of raising his sword with the monster's head in his hand.

Lastly, additional scenes within the decorative scheme of the Cuban cabinet deserve interpretation and a meticulous exploration for potential models⁴⁸, introducing new and intricate challenges. The upper section of the central body (Fig. 1) features a central door adorned with a warrior-clad figure wearing a helmet and carrying a sword, alongside various panels with inlaid decorations (*candelieri*, a dog, and a rabbit), likely concealing secrets⁴⁹. Directly beneath, another drawer exhibits two decorated panels with three figures, identified as part of an Ovidian scene (Fig. 10).

On the left part of the drawer, a centaur, facing backward, races to the left while holding a woman expressing despair. The right panel showcases a nude male figure drawing a bow, poised to shoot the centaur. Identifying the Ovidian story of Hercules, Nessus, and Deianira⁵⁰ becomes relatively uncomplicated – the episode of the centaur's attempted rape of Deianira, Hercules' new wife. Hercules, in retaliation, kills the wicked centaur. In his dying moments, Nessus deceives Deianira by offering the cloak stained with his poisonous blood to use it as a love potion, an action that ultimately will cause Hercules' demise. The figures in this scene differ from those in the side drawers and Hercules' position and the centaur's movement exhibit somewhat archaic characteristics. Nonetheless, their gestures and postures render the narrative unmistakable, resembling versions found in various illustrative images across different media.

⁴⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IV, 772-794.

⁴⁶ <<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=2027>>, 25.01.2024.

⁴⁷ See above n. 40. On Salomon see Henkel 77-81; Díez Platas 2003; Díez Platas 2015.

⁴⁸ The table on which the cabinet rests has four drawers, also decorated with inlaid figures. The subjects depicted are a challenge, although they could be interpretations of episodes from the last books of the *Metamorphoses*. A revision of the scenes, one of which appears to be an interpretation of an engraving by Tempesta, is pending further research.

⁴⁹ See above n. 10.

⁵⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IX, 98-133.

One intriguing feature, however, prompts a challenging question regarding the inspiration behind this particular version in the cabinet: both Hercules and Nessus are depicted with horns. To the best of our knowledge, horned centaurs appear in two illustrated editions of the *Metamorphoses* that could have served as figurative models for this specific image of Nessus. The first is the German edition of the poem published in Mainz in 1545⁵¹, and the second is Crispin de Passe's edition published in Cologne⁵². In De Passe's engraving of the story, Nessus is portrayed as a horned centaur (Fig. 10). However, the presence of horns on the head of the Theban hero remains unexplained.

5. Conclusions

While the art of cabinet-making achieved a pinnacle of artistic sophistication during the Renaissance and Baroque periods, with numerous surviving examples housed in palaces, significant private residences, and museums, it has received relatively little attention from art history. Despite some noteworthy pieces being studied, the majority of known cabinets are merely documented and described in museum and auction catalogues. Consequently, the unpublished cabinet from the Casa de Velazquez is no exception. It stands out as a somewhat overlooked piece, hindered by limited chances of recognition due to the lack of documentation regarding the Cuban Museum's collection.

Being a unique piece without known exact parallels, the analysis of its decoration and the identification of models for the scenes from the *Metamorphoses* selected for adornment depend significantly on expert knowledge of the illustration of Ovid's poem in the modern era. This expertise has become crucial in identifying the series of engravings of the *Metamorphoses* by Antonio Tempesta, published in Antwerp around 1606, as the undeniable inspiration for the majority of the figures and scenes inlaid in the Cuban cabinet. A challenging task due to the fact that most of the versions of the episodes crafted by the Flemish artisans exhibit a notable lack of fidelity to the compositions of Tempesta's engravings. On the other hand, the analysis has also proved the use of other illustrated editions as a source of inspiration for another group of scenes that do not seem to depend on the Italian engraver's creations. The pro-

⁵¹ The edition is adorned with forty-seven xylographies by Jörg Wickram from Colmar. The illustration of the encounter of Lapiths and centaurs (page CXXVIII) depicts two horned centaurs that are medieval hippopodes: <<http://visualiseur.bnf.fr/CadresFenetre?O=IFN-2200026&I=36&M=imageseule>>, 25.01.2024. The edition is digitized in *Gallica*: <<http://visualiseur.bnf.fr/CadresFenetre?O=IFN-2200026&I=1&M=imageseule>>, 25.01.2024. On Wickram see Henkel 1926-1927, pp. 105-106; Blattner 1998.

⁵² De Passe 1607. On this edition see Henkel 1926-1927, pp. 1117-1118.

posed use of the 1591 and 1595 editions, both of which were also published in Antwerp, seems to provide a clue to the Flemish environment in which the Cuban cabinet was probably produced.

It is difficult, though, to draw conclusions about the meaning behind the selection of the sixteen subjects in our cabinet. Despite the difficulty of determining the overarching meaning, it is clear that certain associations exist. Tragic or challenging love scenes, such as the rape of Europa or the death of Adonis, are juxtaposed, while the exchange of gifts for Cephalus foreshadows impending tragedy. The melancholy tale of Narcissus at the fountain, the death of Eurydice and Neptune's unwanted love for Caenis, which leads to a subsequent metamorphosis to avoid rape, add to the thematic complexity. On the one hand, the scenes derived from Tempesta's engravings and other sources, which intricately decorate the furniture, offer only glimpses of classical mythology. On the other hand, the selection and loose adaptation of these scenes reveal the artistic choices and interpretative decisions of the craftsmen. This sometimes results in scenes that deviate from their original depictions, potentially obscuring the original meaning.

In essence, we can conclude that the use of images reflecting the stories of the *Metamorphoses*, especially from well-known and widely circulated editions, served as a form of cultural exhibition – a showcase of shared knowledge. Moreover, it acted as a means of integrating Ovid into domestic spaces, demonstrating familiarity with the classical tradition on a smaller scale. Unlike tapestries or frescoes, which require ample spaces, cabinets offer a more fitting size, also adequate for feminine spaces such as the *estrado* or the bedroom. Perhaps these adorned cabinets, displayed in both public and, to some extent, private spaces, akin to illustrated books, fostered an intimate relationship with Ovid's poem.

References

- Aguiló Alonso M.P. (1984), *En torno al bargueño*, «Antiquaria», 12, pp. 36-41.
- Aguiló Alonso M.P. (1987), *El mueble clásico español*, Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra.
- Aguiló Alonso M.P. (1988), *Un programa iconográfico político-moralizante en un mueble del siglo XVII*, «Archivo Español de Arte», 243, pp. 299-306.
- Aguiló Alonso M.P. (1993), *La taracea, una constante en la producción española. En el mueble de los siglos XVI y XVII*, «Galería Antiquaria», 110, pp. 36-43.
- Aguiló Alonso M.P. (1994), *Los temas de la Antigüedad Clásica aplicados al mobiliario. Interpretaciones*, in *Los clasicismos en el arte español. Actas del X Congreso del CEHA*, UNED: Madrid, pp. 501-506.

- Aguiló Alonso M.P. (2006), *¿Regalos Virreinales? A propósito de un mueble napolitano de 1609*, «Archivo Español de Arte», 316, pp. 412-421.
- Aguiló Alonso M.P. (2008), *Imágenes y textos: la transmisión de la antigüedad clásica a mediados del siglo XV*, in *Modelos, intercambios y recepción artística (de las rutas marítimas a la navegación en red): XV Congreso Nacional de Historia del Arte* (Palma de Mallorca, 20-23 de octubre de 2004), Palma: Universitat de les Illes Balears, vol. 1, pp. 29-36.
- Aguiló Alonso M.P. (2009), *En busca de la sabiduría. Un programa iconográfico en un mueble alemán de marquetería del siglo XVI*, «Boletín del Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao», 5, pp. 15-63.
- Aguiló Alonso M.P. (2012), *Alemania-España. Marquetería y taracea*, in *El mueble del siglo XVI: mueble per a l'edat moderna*, edited by M. Piera Miquel, X. Nadal, Barcelona: Associació per a l'Estudi de] Mueble, pp. 42-52.
- Aguiló Alonso M.P. (2018), *Escritorios y bargueños españoles (Spanish 'bargueños' and writing chests)*, Madrid: Ministerio de Economía y Empresa.
- Blattner E. (1998), *Holzschnittfolgen zu den "Metamorphosen" des Ovid, Venedig 1497 und Mainz 1545*, München: scaneg.
- Bustamante J. (1595) *Las transformaciones con las allegorias al fin dellos y sus figuras para provecho de los artifices*, Antwerpen: Pedro Bellerio.
- De Passe C. (1607), *Metamorphoseon librorum figurae elegantissime a Crispiano Passaeo Iamoionis aenis incisae*, Colonia: Crispin de Passe.
- Díez Platas F., Monterroso Montero J. (1998), *Mitología para poderosos: las 'Metamorfosis' de Ovidio. Tres ediciones ilustradas del siglo XVI en la Biblioteca Xeral de Santiago*, «Sémata» 10, pp. 451-472.
- Díez Platas F. (2003), *Tres maneras de ilustrar a Ovidio: una aproximación al estudio iconográfico de las 'Metamorfosis' figuradas del XVI*, *Memoria Artis*, edited by M.C. Folgar, A. Goy, J.M. López, Santiago de Compostela: Xunta de Galicia, vol I. pp. 247-267.
- Díez Platas F. (2015), *'Et per omnia saecula imagine vivam': The completion of a figurative corpus for Ovid's 'Metamorphoses' in the XVth and XVIth century book illustrations*, in *The afterlife of Ovid*, edited by P. Mack, J. North, BICS Supplement 130, London, pp. 115-135.
- Díez Platas F. (2017), *Desde la imagen: la 'Biblioteca Digital Ovidiana' como instrumento de estudio e investigación iconográfica del libro ilustrado*, «Studia Aurea», 11, pp. 55-72.
- Henkel M.D. (1926-1927), *Illustrierte Ausgaben von Ovids Metamorphosen im XV., XVI. und XVII. Jahrhundert*, «Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg», pp. 53-144.
- Humphrey N. (2015), *Printed Sources for a South German Games Board*, «V&A Online Journal», 7 Summer 2015, <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/research-journal/issue-no.-7-autumn-2015/printed-sources-for-a-south-german-games-board>>, 21.01.2024.

- Lozoya M. de, Rubira J.C. (1962), *Muebles de estilo español. Desde el gótico hasta el siglo XIX*, Barcelona: Gustavo Gili.
- Martín Brito L. (2016), *El mueble de los siglos XVI y XVII en Cuba (16th and 17th centuries Cuban furniture)*, «Res Mobilis», 5 (6, I), pp. 56-75, <<https://doi.org/10.17811/rm.5.2016.56-75>>.
- Ovidius Naso P. (1545), *P. Ovidius Nasonis dess aller sinreichsten Poeten Metamorphosis*, Mainz: Ivo Schöffer.
- Ovidius Naso P. (1591), *Metamorphoses. Argumentis reuiribus ex Luctatio Grammatico collectis expósita: una cum vivuis singularum Transformationum iconibus in aes incisus*, Antwerpen: ex officina Plantiniana, apud viduam, & Ioannem Moretum.
- Prat Puig F. (1977), *La casa de Diego Velazquez y el Museo de Ambiente Histórico Cubano*, in *España entre el Mediterráneo y el Atlántico. Actas del XXIII Congreso Internacional de Historia del Arte. Granada, 1973*, vol. 2, Comité Español de Historia del Arte - Universidad de Granada: Granada, pp. 533-543.
- Riccardi-Cubitt M. (1992), *The Art of the Cabinet*, London: Thames&Hudson.
- Stahlberg K. (1984), *Virgil Solis und die Holzschnitte zu den Metamorphosen des Ovid*, «Marginalien», 95, pp. 29-35.
- Tempesta A. (1606), *Metamorphoseon sive transformationum Ovidianarum libri quindecim, aeneis formis ab Antonio Tempesta florentini incisi et in pictorum antiquistatistique studiosorum gratiam nunc primum exquisitissimis sumptibus a Petro de Iode Antverpiano in lucem editi*, Antwerpen: Petrus de Iode.

Appendix

Fig. 1. Cabinet. Casa de Velazquez, Santiago de Cuba. Second half of the 17th Century. Probably made in Antwerp (Low Countries). (Photo: Fátima Díez Platas)



1La. Rape of Europa.



1Lb. Death of Adonis (Venus)



2La. Apollo, Pan and Midas



2Lb. Unidentified subject



3La. Neptunus and Caenis



3Lb. Procris' gifts to Cephalus



4La. Apollo, the serpent and the head of Orpheus



4Lb. Greeks and Trojans

Fig. 2. Scenes on the drawers of the left-hand side. Cabinet. Casa de Velazquez, Santiago de Cuba. Second half of the 17th Century. Probably made in Antwerp (Low Countries). (Photo: Fátima Díez Platas)

1Ra. *Leto and the Lician peasants*1Rb. *Eurydice bitten by the snake*2Ra. *Mercurius and Argos*2Rb. *Perseus*3Ra. *Narcissus at the well*3Rb. *Erichthonius released from his basket*4Ra. *Perseus and Medusa*4Rb. *Pegasus*

Fig. 3. Scenes on the drawers of the right-hand side. Cabinet. Casa de Velazquez, Santiago de Cuba. Second half of the 17th Century. Probably made in Antwerp (Low Countries). (Photo: Fátima Díez Platas)



Fig. 4. Left: scene of the Rape of Europa (Detail of the first drawer of the left-hand side of the cabinet from Casa de Velazquez). Right: the Rape of Europa. Reversed image of the engraving by Antonio Tempesta (n° 21). *Biblioteca Digital Ovidiana* (<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=3565>)

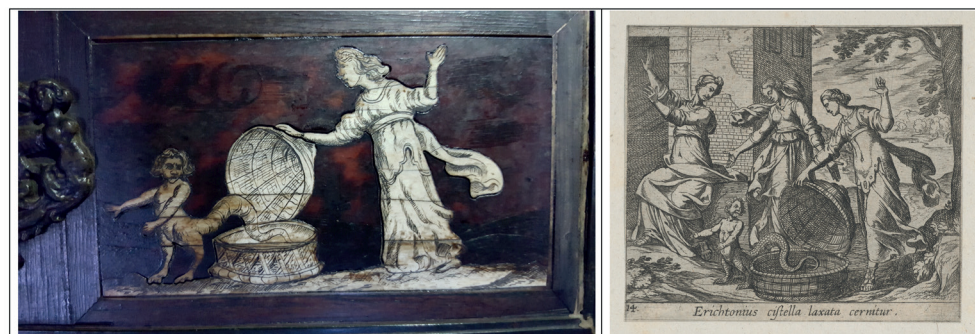


Fig. 5. Left: scene of the Discovery of Erichthonius (Detail of the third drawer of the right-hand side of the cabinet from Casa de Velazquez). Right: the Discovery of Erichthonius. Engraving by Antonio Tempesta (n° 14). *Biblioteca Digital Ovidiana* (<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenejemplar.php?clave=3558>)



Fig. 6. Left: scene of the Death of Adonis and the grief of Venus (Detail of the first drawer of the left-hand side of the cabinet from Casa de Velazquez). Right: the Death of Adonis, engraving by Antonio Tempesta (n° 98). *Biblioteca Digital Ovidiana* (<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenemplar.php?clave=3642>)



Fig. 7. Left: scene of Neptunus and Caenis (Detail of the third drawer of the left-hand side of the cabinet from Casa de Velazquez). Right: Neptunus and Caenis, engraving by Antonio Tempesta (n° 115). *Biblioteca Digital Ovidiana* (<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenemplar.php?clave=3659>)



Fig. 8. Left: scene of Apollo and the serpent-dragon (Detail of the fourth drawer of the left-hand side of the cabinet from Casa de Velazquez). Right: Apollo turns the serpent that threatens the head of Orpheus into a stone, engraving by Antonio Tempesta (n° 100). *Biblioteca Digital Ovidiana* (<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenemplar.php?clave=3644>)



Fig. 9. Left: scene of the Trojan War (Detail of the fourth drawer of the left-hand side of the cabinet from Casa de Velazquez). Right: battle between Greeks and Trojan, engraving by Antonio Tempesta (n° 113). *Biblioteca Digital Ovidiana* (<http://www.ovidiuspictus.es/imagenemplar.php?clave=3657>)



Fig. 10. Above: scene of Hercules, Nessus and Deyanira (Bottom drawer of the central body of the cabinet from Casa de Velazquez). Below: engraving from Crispin de Passe, *Metamorphoseon librorum figuræ elegantissime a Crispiano Passaeo Iamoionis aenis incisæ* (Cologne, 1607), n° 79. (Photo: Fátima Diez Platas)

JOURNAL OF THE DIVISION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE
Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism
University of Macerata

Direttore / Editor
Pietro Petrarola

Co-direttori / Co-editors
Tommy D. Andersson, Elio Borgonovi, Rosanna Cioffi, Stefano Della Torre,
Michela di Macco, Daniele Manacorda, Serge Noiret, Tonino Pencarelli,
Angelo R. Pupino, Girolamo Sciullo

Edited by
Giuseppe Capriotti, Fátima Díez Platas, Francesca Casamassima

Texts by
Jonathan Barnes, Giuseppe Capriotti, Francesca Casamassima, Claudia Cieri
Via, Erin Daly, Fátima Díez Platas, Rieke Dobsław, Gyöngyvér Horváth, Barbara
Hryszko, Caroline Koncz, Anne-Sophie Laruelle, Bar Leshem, Patricia Meilán
Jácome, Elena Moscara, Radka Nokkala Miltova, Brianda Otero Moreira, Ilaria
Ottria, Pablo Piqueras Yagüe, Laura Stagno

<http://riviste.unimc.it/index.php/cap-cult/index>

