

**VISUALIZING METAMORPHOSIS:
PICTURING THE *METAMORPHOSES* OF OVID IN FOURTEENTH-
CENTURY ITALY**

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ABSTRACT:

The present article focuses on the analysis of two manuscripts that seem to be symptomatic of the subtle and variegated reception of the Ovidian *Metamorphoses* in fourteenth-century Italy: on the one hand, the luxurious copy of the of *Ovidius Moralizatus* (Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, MS Membr. I 98) made ca. 1350-1360 for the Milanese aristocrat Bruzio Visconti and intended to be illustrated by 284 miniatures; on the other hand, the humble manuscript preserving the translation in volgare of the Ovidian work by the Florentine notary Arrigo Simintendi (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Panciatici 63), whose marginal drawings (added ca. 1360-1370) can be attributed to a group of “interactive readers” who tried to intensify their reading experience by giving visible form to their particular interpretations of the text. Despite their differences, both works betray an unprecedented attention to the representation of nature and witness to the existence of an ongoing debate –pervading both the courtly and urban realms– over the value of antique myths and the effects of the human passions so memorably described by the classical poet. This particular reception of the Ovidian work may have paved the way to another, new experience of subjectivity and, therefore, to an intensive intellectual engagement with emotions that would have marked a significant step in the history of the “Nachleben der Antike”.

Keywords: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, *Ovidius Moralizatus*, Arrigo Simintendi, history of emotions, gaze, landscape, visual narrative.

The *Metamorphoses*, written by Ovid at the time of Augustus, can be regarded as one of the most important books in European literary history after the Bible. The Roman poet included in his work a great variety of narratives related to the pagan gods and the myths associated with them, and even gave life to new figures that continue to hold an important place in our imagination. But the undisputed status enjoyed by the Ovidian works ever since its creation should not be considered as synonymous with a uniform appreciation of these texts throughout the centuries.

As it is well known, the *Metamorphoses* was read as a collection of exempla to improve the rhetorical skills of the students at school during the Middle Ages¹. This reception of text was particularly dominant during the twelfth century but around 1300 a new interest in the text can be perceived, involving the consolidation of a different reading public outside the traditional circles of scholarship². Rather than in its formal values, this renewed interest in the *Metamorphoses* was mostly focused on its narrative content, since the variegated ensemble of love-stories and their complex fictional development proved to be extremely attractive for these audiences. The transformation into an animal or a plant seemed to offer a kind of comforting conclusion to all these ill-fated passionate affairs by making possible a survival of the lovers in another way and, at the same time, presenting the reader with an unprecedented experience of nature. However, the way in which Ovid minutely described the emotions of the protagonists and, above all, those of his female characters should be taken into account as another appealing feature in the *Metamorphoses*. Therefore, for sensitive enough audiences, reading Ovid meant to be exposed to an intellectual discourse on emotions, and –I contend– it is precisely this reconsideration of the role of feelings and mental states in individual behavior and social life what may have triggered this new interest in the antique myths.

¹ See, in general, HEXTER, R. J., *Ovid and Medieval Schooling: Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid's Ars Amatoria, Epistulae ex Ponto, and Epistulae Heroidum*, München, Bei der Arbo-Gesellschaft, 1986; and COULSON, F. T., "Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the school tradition of France, 1180 – 1400", in J. G. Clark, F.T. Coulson, and K. L. McKinley (eds.), *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 48-82. Cf. the article by Irene Salvo included in this volume.

² Luca Barbieri's article in this same issue provides a complementary approach to this process.

But before delving into the analysis of these issues, it is necessary to offer a brief reference to several texts written in the first half of the fourteenth century that bear witness to the existence of this "modern" readership of Ovid and the new debate on the *Metamorphoses*. Some chronological references should suffice:

- Between 1315 and 1318 the anonymous *Ovide moralisé* was written in the vernacular, instead of Latin, at the request of the French queen Jeanne de Bourgogne³.

- In 1333 or 1334, the Florentine notary Arrigo Simintendi redacted a prose translation of the *Metamorphoses* in the Florentine *volgare*. The translation followed the Latin original fairly closely and was able to bring back part of the poetic allure of the Ovidian verses⁴.

- In 1320 Giovanni del Virgilio held such a successful course of lectures on the *Metamorphoses* at the University of Bologna that he was asked to lecture on the topic several times. He abandoned the scholastic subdivision of the Ovidian text in his exposition and, from the second book onwards, he retold the mythological episodes in full length. Placing his commentaries under scrutiny, one must conclude that Virgilio and his students were mainly interested in the erotic sections of the text, which were sometimes described with an array of detail that left the original Latin work behind⁵.

- Around 1340 Pierre Bersuire [Petrus Berchorius] wrote the *Ovidius moralizatus* at the Papal court of Avignon. Due to his novel interpretation the *Metamorphoses* reached a level of in-depth commentary as never before. In

³ See *Ovide moralisé: Poème du commencement du quatorzième siècle*, ed. by C. de Boer, Amsterdam, Johannes Müller, 1915-1938. See also MCKINLEY, K. L., *Reading the Ovidian heroine: "Metamorphoses" Commentaries, 1100 – 1618*, Leiden, Brill, 2001, p. 89 and ff.; and LORD, C., "Three Manuscripts of the *Ovide moralisé*", *The Art Bulletin*, 57 (1975), pp. 161-75.

⁴ Arrigo Simintendi was born in Prato and worked as a notary for the family of Frescobaldi. In addition to the *Metamorphoses*, he translated the *Pharsalia* of Lucan. See GUTHMÜLLER, B., *Ovidio metamorphoseos vulgare: Formen und Funktionen der volkssprachlichen Wiedergabe klassischer Dichtung in der italienischen Renaissance*, Boppard am Rhein, Harald Boldt Verlag, 1981, pp. 104 and ff.

⁵ MCKINLEY, *Reading the Ovidian heroine*, pp. 96 and ff.; HUBER-REBENICH, G. "Die *Metamorphosen-Paraphrase* des Giovanni del Virgilio", in C. Leonardi (ed.), *Gli umanissimi medievali. Atti del II Congresso dell'Internationale Mittellateinerkomitee (Firenze, Certosa del Galluzzo, 11-15 settembre 1993)*, Firenze, SISMEL, 1998, pp. 215-29; "A Lecture with Consequences: Tracing a Trecento's Commentary on the *Metamorphoses*", in R. Duits and F. Quiviger (eds.), *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: Papers of a Conference in Memory of Jean Seznec*, London-Turin, The Warburg Institute, 2010, pp. 177-198.

simple Latin prose Bersuire paraphrased each chapter of the work, further appended with a series of allegorical explanations that were the result of an exegetical procedure akin to that used in biblical commentaries. For Bersuire it was crucial to reveal all the possible meanings of the text –no matter how diverse and even contradictory–, since they were to contribute to a cohesive Christianized reading of the pagan myth. In that sense, the *Ovidius moralizatus* marks a later development in the appreciation of the Ovidian fables, also attested by its widespread circulation in different versions of which 80 manuscripts have been preserved⁶.

But Bersuire's *Ovidius moralizatus* was soon glossed by images too. The illustrations created in order to supplement the text will be the object of the present inquiry.

The earliest illustrated manuscript of the *Ovidius moralizatus* was copied in Bologna between 1350 and 1360. No less than 284 miniatures were intended to accompany Bersuire's work, even if only a third of this extremely ambitious project was finally accomplished. The examination of the manuscript reveals that the painters abruptly stopped their work. The manuscript –a very luxurious copy in a big format (365 x 260 mm) with generous use of gold throughout– is presently kept at the Forschungsbibliothek of Gotha in Eastern Germany (MS Membr. I 98)⁷.

Later possessors painted over the arms originally encircled by the bordures framing the beginning of each individual book and erased all trace of the emblems of the previous owners. However, Gude Suckale-Redlefsen has recently been able to recognize the climbing serpent of the Visconti after careful analysis of the surviving remains of the primitive blazons. On folio 25v, for

⁶ CHANCE, J., *Medieval Mythography. II. From the School of Chartres to the Court of Avignon, 1177-1350*, Miami, University Press of Florida, 2000, pp. 320 and ff.; SAMARAN Ch. and J. MONFRIN, "Pierre Bersuire", in *Histoire littéraire de la France*, 39, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1962, pp. 259-450. The text was edited by Joseph Engels. See PETRUS BERCHORIUS, *Ovidius moralizatus naar de Parijse druk van 1509*, Utrecht, Rijksuniversiteit-Instituut voor Laat Latin, 1962; and *De Formis Figurisque Deorum*, Utrecht, Rijksuniversiteit-Instituut voor Laat Latin, 1966.

⁷ The present author is preparing a comprehensive publication of this manuscript together with Christel Meier-Staubach (Münster) in the context of a research-project financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) and with the collaboration of Petra Korte, Caroline Smout and Anna Stenmans. In the meantime, see SUCKALE-REDLEFSEN, G., "Der Gothaer Ovid, eine Handschrift für Bruzio Visconti?: Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, Membr. I 98", *Codices Manuscripti. Zeitschrift für Handschriftenkunde*, 78-79 (2011), pp. 41-52; MEIER, Ch., "Metamorphosen und Theophanien, Zur Ovid-Illustration des späteren Mittelalters", *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 46 (2012), pp. 321-341.

example, the coils of the serpent under the golden triangle are even visible in photographic reproductions. Suckale-Redlefsen has also suggested Bruzio Visconti as the responsible patron, a very plausible hypothesis since this aristocrat was the natural son of Lucchino Visconti (1287-1349), *signore* of Milano, and worked as military commander and tyrant of Lodi⁸. He was an ambitious intellectual who wrote poetry in his native Italian, and some splendid manuscripts formerly belonging to his library still attest the array of his interests and his refined taste. Unfortunately, his fate changed after a failed conspiracy in 1356 against his cousin Giovanni II d' Oleggio, *signore* of Bologna. Bruzio was expropriated and exiled, and he died as a poor man in 1357 in the Veneto region. No surprise, then, that the ambitious and luxurious project of the illustrated Ovid came to an abrupt end.

In this extraordinary work, the miniatures are framed and appear inserted in the main body of the text, which is written in two columns. They are always placed before the passages they allude to, in such a way that the sequence accurately follows the text of the *Ovidius moralizatus*. It should be noted that Bersuire had divided the *Metamorphoses* into separate sections, paving the way for the artists of the Gotha manuscript to assign each of the mythological fables to its own miniature. On the other hand, it is also worth remarking that the illustrators dealt only with the narrative content of the myths; they did not attempt to visualize the allegorizations. Furthermore, the Bolognese painters paid special attention to the representation of the strange transformations and even to the faithful visual translation of the different steps of the metamorphosing process that turned the different characters into animals or plants.

An eloquent instance of this attitude can be found in the story of Jupiter and Io, which is illustrated in seven pictures displayed along three pages (Fig. 1)⁹. In the first image, Io raises out of the waters of the river-god, his father Inachos, to join together in a first kiss with Jupiter, who materializes from a blue breeze. With this singular image, the artist has been able to express in congenial terms how this love between unequal partners brings together very different worlds, the human and the divine. But as Juno discovers the adultery, Jupiter transforms Io into a cow in order to protect her from the wrath of his wife. However, he is urged to give the cow to Juno as a present. In this second miniature one cannot but notice the angry expression of the goddess and the

⁸ SUCKALE-REDLEFSEN, "Der Gothaer Ovid", pp. 47 and ff. For Bruzio Visconti see PICCINI, D., *Bruzio Visconti, Le Rime. Edizione critica*, Firenze, Accademia della Crusca, 2007, pp. 17-34.

⁹ Gotha, MS Membr. I 98, fols. 11r-12r.

way her face reveals the intense emotions. Golden letters indicate the name of the protagonists. Equally striking is the representation of the ongoing process of transformation. The head of the cow is already visible but the body is still that of the girl who, naked in the upper part, is falling down on her knees as she begins to adopt the position of a quadruped. What Ovid and Bersuire had described with few strokes, the painter had to show in full detail instead, in order to allow the reader to understand the change gradually undergone by Io. In doing so, he was able to confer a new tragic power on the event¹⁰. Even more subtle is the third miniature, where the artist depicted the instant when Io accords after her transformation and notices the mutation of her body after looking at her reflection in the river. As a consequence, she loudly laments and accuses Jupiter of her fate shown on the right-hand side of the picture. Yet she cannot speak anymore; only articulate the moo of cows. The image is full of extraordinary details, from the naturalistic way in which the fourteen-century miniaturist has been able to reproduce the mirror image in the water and the movements of the animal, to the careful figuration of diverse plants covering the rocky ground and evoking the impression of a fruitful valley. These details betray the strong interest of the artist in nature and in the diversity of natural phenomena. The following miniature confirms this intention because the transformed Io runs into her father, whose face is shown in the river with his long beard merging with the waves. However, as retold in the text, Io can only communicate with him by writing her name in the sandy ground.

A larger picture following in which different episodes are combined in a single scene (Fig. 2). The story starts in the background—at the upper part of the miniature—and develops step-by-step down towards the foreground, at the bottom of the picture. This kind of continuous narrative is frequently displayed by the Bolognese artists in order to convey the complex plot of the mythical episodes illustrated. Juno gives the cow Io to Argus, who is recognizable by the plethora of eyes that cover his face. Further down, Mercury is depicted in a blue travel-coat, playing his flute and touching Argus with his rod so that the shepherd immediately falls asleep. At the end, the god kills the sleeping Argus and as their bodies are cut by the frame, he seems to fly away with Io¹¹.

The second transformation of Io back into a beautiful girl is the topic depicted in the following miniature (Fig. 3). Again the story develops from the background to the foreground. Jupiter caresses her chin and she rises up, her head and her breast recovering their human form. The final outcome of the

¹⁰ OV., *Met.* 1.611 and BERSUIRE 1509, I, XI. For what regards to the transformations back to the human figure, more details are offered by Ovid (1.738-744) and also Bersuire (I, XV).

¹¹ This is a narrative recourse often used by the painters in the manuscript.

process is shown on the left, where a beautiful Io is pictured in the same blue dress she wore in the first image, but this time surrounded by colorful flowers. New confirmation of the painter's talent is provided by the use of the landscape to clearly demarcate these two stages of the process. Yet the story reaches its end in the last picture, where we assist to the glorification of Io into a constellation. Her golden bust is shown as a shining star over the river, according to the explanation offered by Hyginus in his astronomical treatise where the origin of the zodiac sign of Taurus is mentioned¹². Although this aspect was not mentioned by Ovid, it had been included by Bersuire in his text in the course of his Christian reinterpretation of the myth.

The examples analyzed so far demonstrate the crucial role images had in the book. They supplemented the text by expanding the short paraphrases of the classical work included in the *Ovidius moralizatus* into a coherent set of detailed sequences that made the emotional charge of these stories even more present and vivid. Therefore, the diverse miniatures also helped to establish the connection between all these diverse episodes.

However, there are other episodes where these features are equally noticeable, as in a series of images related to Erichthonius. In the Ovidian re-elaboration of the myth, the story of the transformation of the monstrous child—born from the sperm spilled by Vulcan in his failed attempt to rape Minerva—is told through the dialogue between a raven and a crow. Originally, the feathers of the former had been white but their color changed as a punishment for revealing to Apollo the betrayal of his lover Coronis. Led by anger, the jealous god had killed his beloved with one of his arrows, only to regret his act almost immediately afterwards. Unable to bring her back to life, he decided to turn into black, the color of the insidious bird¹³. This complex sequence of events is encapsulated in just one illustration in the *Ovidius moralizatus* of Gotha (Fig. 4). The unfortunate Coronis is deadly wounded by the arrow in the center of the image, while on the left her other lover leaves the scene, unaware of her cruel fate¹⁴. But in the upper left section of the miniature the Apollonian revenge on the raven is depicted, since the feathers of the bird are already undergoing the color change. In a touch of genius, the artist has arranged his composition in a circle around Coronis to convey the causal link among these events.

¹² HYGINUS, *Astr.*, 2.21,1. The corresponding text can be found in fol. 12r of the Gotha-manuscript, at the top of the right column, although it is missing in the print of 1509.

¹³ Gotha, MS Membr. I 98, fol. 15r; OV., *Met.* 2.598-632; BERTHORUS 1509 II, XVI.

¹⁴ His figure is being cut by the frame in accordance with the narrative procedure already described.

The crow, for its part, had once been the beautiful daughter of Koroneus for whom Neptune had fallen in love as she was walking along the beach¹⁵. In the miniature illustrating this passage (Fig. 5) the god of the sea emerges out of water and shifts into human form in order to embrace the girl, an arrangement that evinces once more the talent of the artist in his quest for the most expressive and accurate visual translation of the Ovidian text. But the cries of the maiden seeking for help attract Minerva who saves the girl by transforming her into a crow and making the resulting bird part of her entourage. As in other examples discussed before, the water divides the land into two separate realms corresponding to the two phases of the event. And, again, the metamorphosis is depicted in a very imaginative way. The head of Koroneus is already that of the crow while the transformation of her arms into the legs of the bird is underway: the fingers are splayed like claws, even if the tail feathers still preserve the colors of the girl's dress.

However, the fable of Erichonius has been accorded a miniature of its own¹⁶. In the upper left section (Fig. 6) above the depiction of Minerva delivering the basket with the monstrous creature to the daughters of Cecrops, two birds are portrayed in a dialogue. Contravening Minerva's explicit orders, the girls decide to open the box but the discovery of the boy with serpentine legs causes such a horrified reaction in them that one of the girls flies away, as illustrated on the right. After witnessing the whole scene, the crow decides to notify Minerva about it, but his eagerness in betraying the maidens only gives the goddess a good reason to expel the crow out in disgust.

The visual account related to the fable of Diana and Actaeon spans through two miniatures¹⁷. The dramatic incident that seals the fate of the hero (Fig. 7) is set in a deep forest. The narrative here develops from the upper left side to the lower right section of the miniature. Therefore, the bath of Diana and her nymphs appears above while we find Actaeon as the center of the composition, as he stares in amazement at the naked goddess. Caught by surprise, the angered Diana squirts water into the eyes of the hunter. Since this detail is absent from Bersuire's text and only mentioned by Ovid himself, it should be concluded that the painters or the person who supervised them must have been familiar with the original classical work or at least with a more detailed paraphrase of the *Metamorphoses*. Nevertheless, this emphasis on the exchange of glances between Diana and Actaeon is probably an addition of the Trecento painter, since the erotics of the gaze played an important role in

¹⁵ Gotha, MS Membr. I 98, fol. 15v; Ov., *Met.* 2.569-95; BERCHORIUS 1509 II, XVII.

¹⁶ Gotha, MS Membr. I 98, fol. 15v; Ov., *Met.* 2.552-65; BERCHORIUS 1509 II, XVIII.

¹⁷ Gotha, MS Membr. I 98, fol. 18r; Ov., *Met.* 3.138-250; BERCHORIUS 1509 III, V-VI.

contemporary poetry¹⁸. The transformation of Actaeon is prompted by the water splashed on him and –as in most of the aforementioned illustrations– it starts with the head, to the extent that the antlers and the muzzle are already fully formed. As depicted on the right, Actaeon realizes his transformation only after discovering his reflection in a stream of water¹⁹. Not far from him, dogs and other hunters seem to have caught the scent of the deer, although the final outcome of this hunting scene can only be seen in the opposite column. In the second miniature, the dogs have finally found the deer and their furious attack will cause the death of Actaeon, portrayed on the right. It should be noted that the dogs have different colors, according to the long account in the *Metamorphoses*, where the hunting and the painful death of Actaeon are carefully described. It may well be that the special attention paid by Ovid to these issues could have evoked in the painter the idea of reserving a full miniature for this passage, and figuring exuberant and landscape with an extraordinary array of colorful birds. Besides, the idyllic quality of the setting, which stands in sharp contrast to the cruelty of the event depicted, seems to underline the emotional tension of the fable.

Similar emotional experience would have been aroused by the contemplation of the miniature allusive to the story of Salmacis²⁰. As in previous examples, the continuous narrative unfolds from the background to the foreground (Fig. 8). The story begins with the encounter of Hermaphroditus, child of Mercury and Venus, and the nymph Salmacis. When he decides to take a bath, she suddenly falls in deep love at the sight of his beautiful and young naked body. As it is well known, her violent desire finds the refusal of Hermaphroditus, even if, as a result of her desperate plea to the gods the couple will be joined into one being, half man and half woman. In the accompanying miniature the hybrid nature of the resulting creature is clearly conveyed by means of a dividing line that preserves the individuality of each half of the compound body. The embracing gesture is still visible, but otherwise the fusion is nearly complete. Again is the figuration of the landscape is remarkable, with a dark forest out of which Hermaphroditus emerges in the upper section of the miniature, and the lovely bank of the river where a shadowing tree and bushes have been depicted next to the walls of a small town.

¹⁸ Cf. ZEINER, M., *Der Blick der Liebenden und das Auge des Geistes: die Bedeutung der Melancholie für den Diskurswandel der Scuola Siciliana und im Dolce Stil Nuovo*, Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006.

¹⁹ This is other Ovidian motif without equivalent in the *Ovidius moralizatus*.

²⁰ Gotha, MS Membr. I 98, fol. 22v; Ov., *Met.* 4.288-388; BERCHORIUS 1509 IV, VIII.

These and other elements in the miniature were not included in the short summaries of the fables written by Bersuire, of course. As it was already mentioned, this is one of the features in the manuscript that suggest that the character who planned and oversaw the creation of this remarkable picture cycle must have been familiar with the Ovidian text in addition to that of the *Ovidius moralizatus*. It is not obvious, though, whether he had access to the Latin original or if, conversely, he was using a translation in *volgare* or even the lectures by Giovanni del Virgilio. The possibility that Bruzio Visconti had played a major role in the design of this extraordinary visual translation should also be considered. As I have tried to argue, these miniatures assume the challenge of visualizing the Ovidian narrative in such a way that they not only allow readers to follow the complex actions retold in the fables but also to internalize their dramatic and emotional content. Moreover, these illustrations can be regarded as the product of an extremely ambitious meditation over the ancient myths, prompted by the very idea of metamorphosis and the fascination provoked by these extraordinary transformations that abolish the boundaries among humans, animals and plants. Not by chance, the allure of the myth is combined with an equally strong interest in natural phenomena and in the great variety of emotions provoked by their fateful powers. These were the ingredients that made these fables so exciting for fourteenth-century readers and that contributed to shape the extensive cycle of miniatures analyzed here. On the other hand, we should also be reminded that this book was probably owned and even designed by Bruzio Visconti, so it would be advisable to contextualize this artistic enterprise into the intellectual *milieu* of the North-Italian courts of princes and *signori* as well. At these courts, attention to profane literature and a taste for luxurious manuscripts were prevalent. And, even if Bruzio Visconti played only a minor role in politics, he was very ambitious and determined not to be overshadowed by his father and uncle, above all as far as his personal library and the exquisite design of his books were concerned.

The singularity of this approach to the *Metamorphoses* can be assessed by examining a completely different reading of Ovid offered in a Florentine manuscript which contains the translation in *volgare* of the Florentine notary Arrigo Simintendi, produced around 1333. This manuscript is written on paper and its dimensions are close to that of an *in quarto* volume (285 x 210 mm)²¹.

²¹ Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Panciatichi 63. For this manuscript see DEGENHART, B. and A. SCHMITT, *Corpus der italienischen Zeichnungen 1300 - 1450, Teil II Venedig*, München, Gebrüder Mann, 1980, II, no. 710, pp. 359-369; MATTIA, E., "L'illustrazione delle *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio nel codic Panciatichi 63 della Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze", *Rivista di Storia della Miniatura*, 1-2 (1996-1997), pp. 45-54; BUONOCORE, M. (ed.), *Vedere i classici, L'illustrazione libraria di testi antichi dall'eta romana al tardo Medioevo*, Exhibition-

The text is displayed in one column, evenly and neatly throughout the manuscript, although the initials at the beginning of the books were never executed. Many traces of use and handling attest that this codex was intensively read and that it passed from hand to hand, as a cheap book made for the middle class and, as such, devoid of any superfluous decoration. On the margins, however, drawings from different hands can be found that roughly date from 1360 to 1370. These drawings cannot be considered as part of a systematic illustration plan carried out by professionals. Quite to the contrary, an apparent insecurity in the use of the available space and other details convey the impression that these images were produced by a group of amateurs, despite the fact that some of them are of remarkable quality. Strikingly enough, these marginal drawings seem to encapsulate a personal response to the reading experience, due to the detail in which several elements in the text have been accurately figured in them.

In some cases, the creative efforts of these "interactive readers" focus only on the results of the metamorphosing process, like the wolf into which the cruel Lycaon was transformed or the anemone flower that bloomed from the blood of Adonis²². But nowhere as in the sketch, where the city of Fiesole has been represented, can we have a glimpse of the individualized personality of one of these dilettanti. Although it is never mentioned in the Ovidian text, the city is placed between two hills and encircled by the rivers Mugnone and Mensola²³. Nonetheless, there is a long speech inserted in the fifteenth book of the *Metamorphoses* where Pythagoras disserts about the uncertainty of all things and the always fickle world. There, the exemplary fate of some fallen cities such as Sparta, Mycenae, Thebes and Athens is remembered, and I would dare to say that these erudite references were what brought to mind the memory of Fiesole for the Florentine reader. According to the famous chronicle by Giovanni Villani, the Tuscan city was the first town in Italy to be encircled by walls, even if this defensive measure was not enough to prevent its destruction by Caesar in the year 72 BC. He will subsequently build a new city –Florence– beside the river Arno²⁴. Hence, by bridging the gulf between the ancient text

Catalogue, Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1996, no. 249, pp. 249-51; FRANCIANI CIARANFI, A. M., "Appunti su antichi disegni fiorentini per la *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio", in M. G. Ciardi Dupré dal Poggeto and P. dal Poggeto (eds.), *Scritti di storia dell' arte in onore di Ugo Procacci*, Milano, Electa, 1977, I, pp. 177-183. For Arrigo Simintendi see note 4.

²² For Lycaon: Florence, BNCF, MS Panc. 63, fol. 10r; cf. Ov., *Met.* 1.211-39. For Adonis: Florence, BNCF, MS Panc. 63, fol. 93r, Ov., *Met.* 10.708-39.

²³ Florence, BNCF, MS Panc. 63, fol. 133r; cf. Ov., *Met.* 15.422 and ff.

²⁴ GIOVANNI VILLANI, *Nuova Cronica*, ed. by G. Porta, Parma, Fondazione Pietro Bembo, 1990, I, 7 and I, 37-38.

and the present, the drawing of our anonymous reader would have also helped to bring the mythological episode closer to his personal experience.

Most of these improvised illustrations are inserted at the lower margin of the page and show the dramatic culmination of the story. One of them depicts Apollo killing Python, although this event is regarded mainly as a prelude for the fable of Daphne in the Ovidian text. If we turn the page at this point, we can see Daphne fleeing from the sun god (Fig. 9)²⁵. In spite of the laurel tree or the mutating body of the naiad figured in the Gotha manuscript, the drawing represents the chase instead. Being the poetic centerpiece in the *Metamorphoses*, the poet describes in rich detail the course of the pursuit and the speech of the almost victorious god. In the accompanying image, Apollo is identifiable by a radiating halo and his hands are outstretched in order to depict his pleading, whereas a horrified Daphne runs away, looking backwards with repugnance. Ovid delicately describes the floating garment and the flying hair, details that excited the desire of Apollo and were also included in the miniature so as to create a precise visual rendition of the erotic and emotional tension of the hunting evoked by the Ovidian narrative.

The tale of the infatuation of the river god Alpheus with the nymph Arethusa is illustrated nearly in the same way (Fig. 10)²⁶. The episode had been described at length in the *Metamorphoses*, where Ovid dramatically referred how Arethusa—more and more tired after a whole day trying to escape from the god—could even feel the puffing breath of the pursuer in her neck and see the long shadow casted by his legs in front of her. This hopeless situation forced Arethusa to call Diana for help, who transformed the nymph into a fountain and showed her an escape to Sicily underneath the earth. Nevertheless, the draughtsman seemed to have preferred once more to depict the chase instead of the metamorphosis itself, paying special attention to the rendering of the breath exhaled by the river god that is represented as rays of light emanating from his mouth. Aiming at a faithful translation of this passage into images, the anonymous reader even sketched the sun as it went down behind the two figures. Unfortunately, the cutting of the margins due to the rebinding of the volume prevents us from confirming that the shadows projected by the bodies were also originally included in the drawing in order to further adhere to the Ovidian narrative. It should be noted that this is one of the earliest depictions of

²⁵ Florence, BNCF, MS Panc. 63, fol. 12v; cf. Ov., *Met.* 1.452-566. The inscriptions identifying the characters involved are due to a slightly later hand, responsible also for the headings of the chapters. All the pages are cut on the lower margins and, therefore, the feet of the figures are missing now.

²⁶ Florence, BNCF, MS Panc. 63, fol. 46v; cf. Ov., *Met.* 5.572-641.

the shadows of moving figures, something that seems to reveal a sensibility for natural phenomena in these Florentine amateur artists akin to that of the painters of the Gotha manuscript.

These anonymous readers were not only interested in natural phenomena, as the two images devoted to the sad story of Callisto, placed in opposing pages, suggest²⁷. The first of them depicts her abduction by Jupiter, who is shown from the back (Fig. 11) in such a way that the viewer is confronted with the face of the nymph, full of despair. Her bow is falling down, conveying the sense of immediacy of the event. But it is the main scene figuring the bath of Diana and the nymphs when they discover Callisto's pregnancy what constitutes the climax of the story (Fig. 12). The episode is set within a minimal landscape whose main feature is a chapel at the top of a hill, no doubt inspired by the Ovidian allusion to a holy fountain. The group of nymphs is about to run after Callisto, who half naked leaves the pool looking backwards for the last time, trying to avoid the goddess' accusing gesture. It is symptomatic of the draughtsman's interests in the erotic allure of the myth that he preferred to depict this scene instead of other more substantial episodes of the story, such as Callisto's transformation into a bear, her lonely wanderings or the encounter of the nymph with her son who, unaware of her true identity, almost killed her.

This approach is even more evident in the illustration related to the fable of Actaeon, set in an elaborate landscape (Fig. 13)²⁸. The bath of Diana is the focus of the composition, flanked by a dark cave on the right and a deep forest on the left. The goddess stands erect, exposing herself to the beholder, while the nymphs pour water over her body as described by the poet. Actaeon secretly observes the scene hidden among the thick vegetation, one hand leaning against a tree and his head peering forward. One of the nymphs has discovered him but the narrative is suspended at the moment that precedes Diana's reaction and her cruel punishment. As in previous illustrations, the draughtsman has decided not to represent the consequences of Actaeon's transgression—the crying of the nymphs, his transformation into a deer and his cruel death—the elements that were granted the most detailed narrative treatment in the text. Per contra, the sight of the naked goddess and the eroticized gaze of the male character are the central features in this illustration, to the extent that the viewer is invited to contemplate what Actaeon was seeing before his punishment even if nothing in the *Metamorphoses* refers explicitly to

²⁷ Florence, BNCF, MS Panc. 63, fol. 19v and 20r; cf. Ov., *Met.* 2.401-532. In fol. 20v a drawing of the bear was also included on the left margin.

²⁸ Florence, BNCF, MS Panc. 63, fol. 26r; Ov., *Met.* 3.138-252.

the hero's voyeuristic attitude²⁹. The analysis of this particular reading of the Ovidian text should be considered in conjunction with the preeminent role accorded to the erotic power of the gaze and the dynamics of looking and being looked in contemporary poetry³⁰. In fact, it must have been the conspicuous presence of this literary motif –permeating the sensibility of the anonymous draughtsman who, presumably, was a well-read man– what suggested this subtle reformulation of the fable, turning a secondary trait of the narrative into the central argument of the story of Actaeon.

This interpretation is confirmed by the analysis of the illustration related to the story of Hermaphroditos (Fig. 14), where the erotic overtones are further highlighted³¹. Ovid describes in detail the beauty of the fountain of Salmacis, which is figured in the drawing with special care. Not only the rocky well and a lake, but also shading trees and disparate birds have been included in the illustration that serves as a background for the embrace of the naked pair of lovers. However, the Florentine reader has reversed roles in his depiction, giving the active part to the male figure. As a consequence, the disturbing classical fable has been translated into a more conventional image of male desire fulfilled, if only at the cost of completely misrepresenting the Ovidian text. It is merely in the merging of the two bodies from hip downwards that the original sense of the fable is preserved. Ironically, it may have been that same carnality what suggested this atypical re-elaboration of the myth, although any assertion on the ultimate meaning of this image is problematical due to the loss of the lower section of the miniature as the result of the rebinding of the manuscript.

The evidence gathered so far attests how intensely the owners of this copy of the *Metamorphoses* reacted to the reading of the text and how the addition of these drawings shaped the perception of its contents for subsequent audiences. Other interventions were not so remarkable but still indicative of the interest of these readers in the Ovidian fables. For instance, these illustrations were completed by a different hand with the inclusion of inscriptions that identify the characters represented and further elucidate the correlation between texts and images. In one way or another, all of them were interactive readers who responded to the arresting writing of Ovid in a way that does not differ so

²⁹ The text describes his entry into the cave and the horrified reaction of the nymphs, who start crying and beating their breasts at his sight.

³⁰ See ZEINER, *Der Blick der Liebenden*; and also a more detailed discussion on this literary motif in BLUME, D., "Ingegno – Inganno – Diletto. Reden über Kunst bei Dante, Boccaccio und Petrarca", *Deutsches Dantes-Jahrbuch*, 87-88 (2013), pp. 19-47 (20-22).

³¹ Florence, BNCF, MS Panc. 63, fol. 35r; cf. Ov., *Met.* 4.274-388.

much from that of Arrigo Simintendi with his translation. These images were made by readers who tried to intensify their reading experience by giving visible form to their particular interpretations of the text and, at the same time, to condition the reception of the Ovidian work by their friends, who would have borrow the book at some point. Given the fact that at least two or three hands can be identified throughout the manuscript, I would suggest that this copy of the Latin poem circulated among a group of Florentine intellectuals, probably notaries like Simintendi, who read and discussed its content while those who had some artistic talent attempted to enrich the book with these images. Therefore, the illustrations of MS Panc. 63 should be regarded as part of a vibrant and multifaceted discourse on Ovid, antique myths and the expression of erotic sensibilities that pervaded this intellectual milieu in mid-fourteenth-century Florence³².

As it was already described, these Florentine readers focused their drawings on those moments in the fables in which the emotional tension reached its peak, most of the times using one picture to refer to a whole series of events. Only in very scarce occasions the results of these metamorphoses were depicted, although the transformation processes as such were never displayed. By contrast, the Bolognese painters who illustrated the *Ovidius moralizatus* for Bruzio Visconti preferred to develop comprehensive narrative cycles with multiple scenes to show these episodes step by step and a degree of detail that equated that of the textual source. Besides, these artists were specifically interested in the process of transformation, in the passing from one state into another and the shifting of form from a human being into an animal or a plant.

In conclusion, we have here two intrinsically divergent concepts of Ovidian illustration that were intended for different audiences too: on the one hand, a courtly audience capable of reading and writing in Latin; on the other, urban readers who preferred to get access to the classical work in the *volgare*. Even if courts and cities should not be placed in a simplistic binary opposition –in fact, these audiences stand in a very complex, mutually formative, relationship–, I feel that some of the differences discussed so far were symptomatic of two different intellectual cultures that, far from being opposed, should be considered as the two sides of a same coin. Both manuscripts were part of an ongoing debate –over the value of antique myths and the effects of the human passions so impressively described by the Roman poet– that paved the way to another, new experience of subjectivity and, therefore, to an

³² Some important remarks on these issues can be found in COCCIA, E. and S. PIRON, "Poésie, Sciences et Politique, Une Génération d'Intellectuels Italiens (1290 – 1330)", *Revue de synthèse*, T. 129, 6. Ser., No. 4 (2008), pp. 549-586.

intensive intellectual engagement with emotions that was more complex and diversified. By taking the antique myths as a case-study, it was possible to discuss emotions in a fictive and imaginary context that fostered a wider debate over these issues. The *Metamorphoses* offered a much broader and subtle spectrum of expressive registers than the sentimental novel written under the rules of "Minne", the courtly love. The reception of troubadour lyric from the French courts into the world of the Italian cities in the second half of the thirteenth century cannot be disregarded, though, since it had been an important prerequisite for the re-reading of Ovid I have tried to describe. However, it is my contention that this new understanding of Ovid was a very important and significant step in the history of the "Nachleben der Antike", as Aby Warburg once called it. It is in the new mastering of the classical text and in the new use of images that we can grasp the specific modernity which is so characteristic for the intellectual culture of the Italian Trecento.

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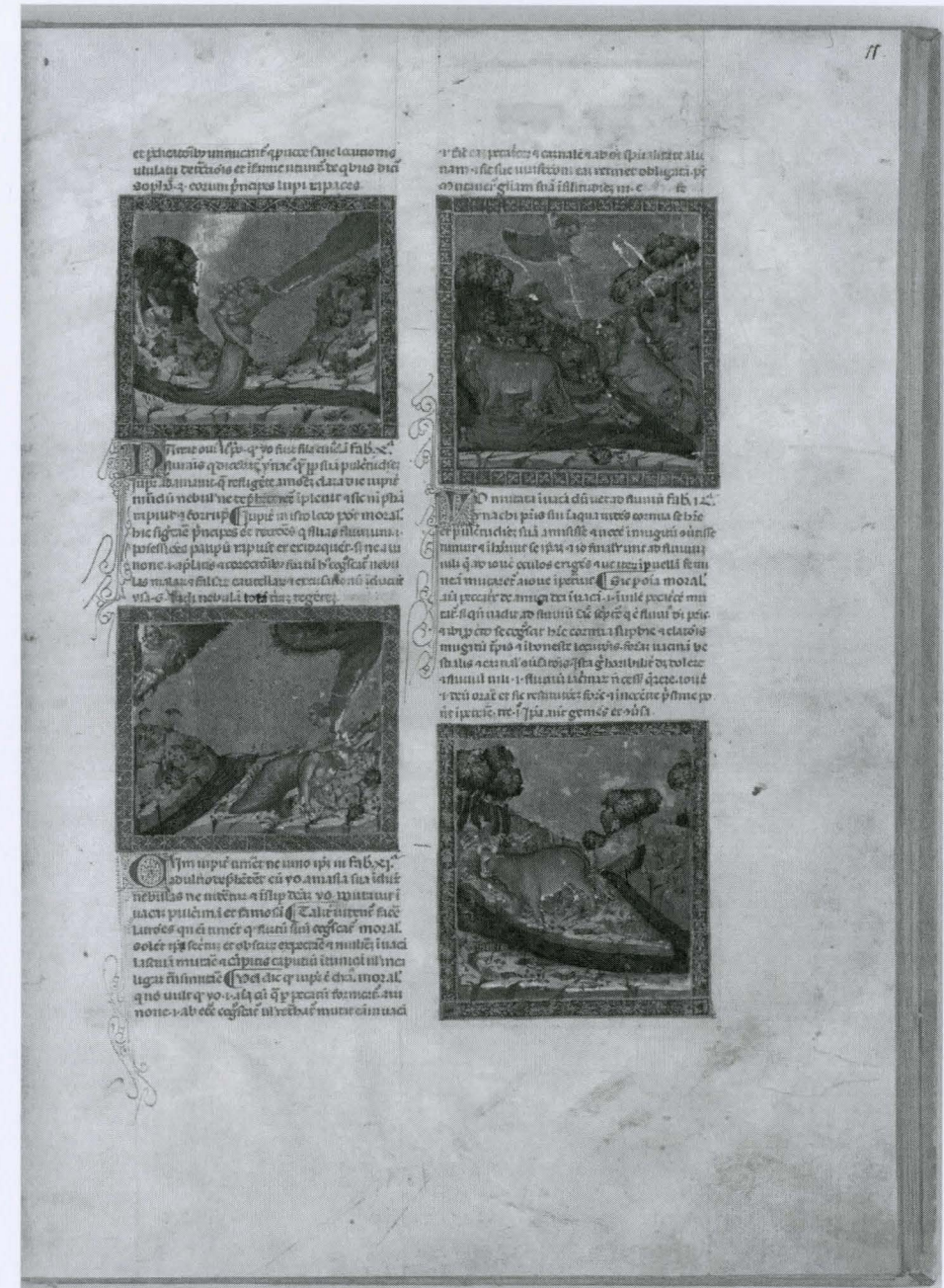


Fig. 1: Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, MS Membr. I 98, fol. 11r. Jupiter and Io.



Fig. 2: Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, MS Membr. I 98, fol. 11v. Mercury and Argus.

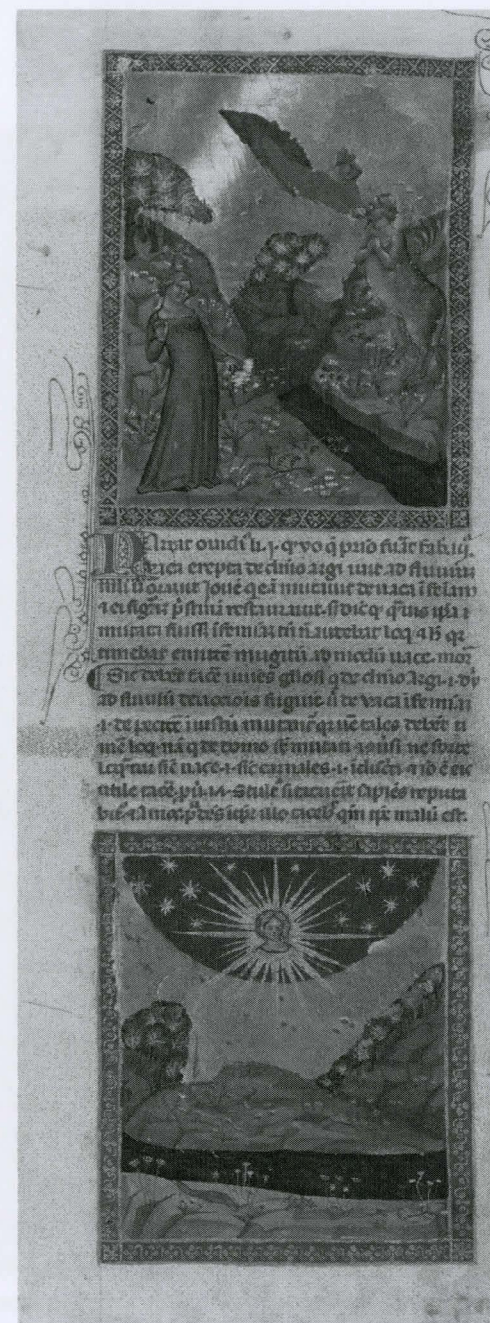


Fig. 3: Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, MS Membr. I 98, fol. 12r. Castasterism of Io.



Fig. 4: Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, MS Membr. I 98, fol. 15r. Apollo and Coronis.



Fig. 5: Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, MS Membr. I 98, fol. 15v. Neptune and the daughter of Coroneus.



Fig. 6: Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, MS Membr. I 98, fol. 15v. Erichthonius.

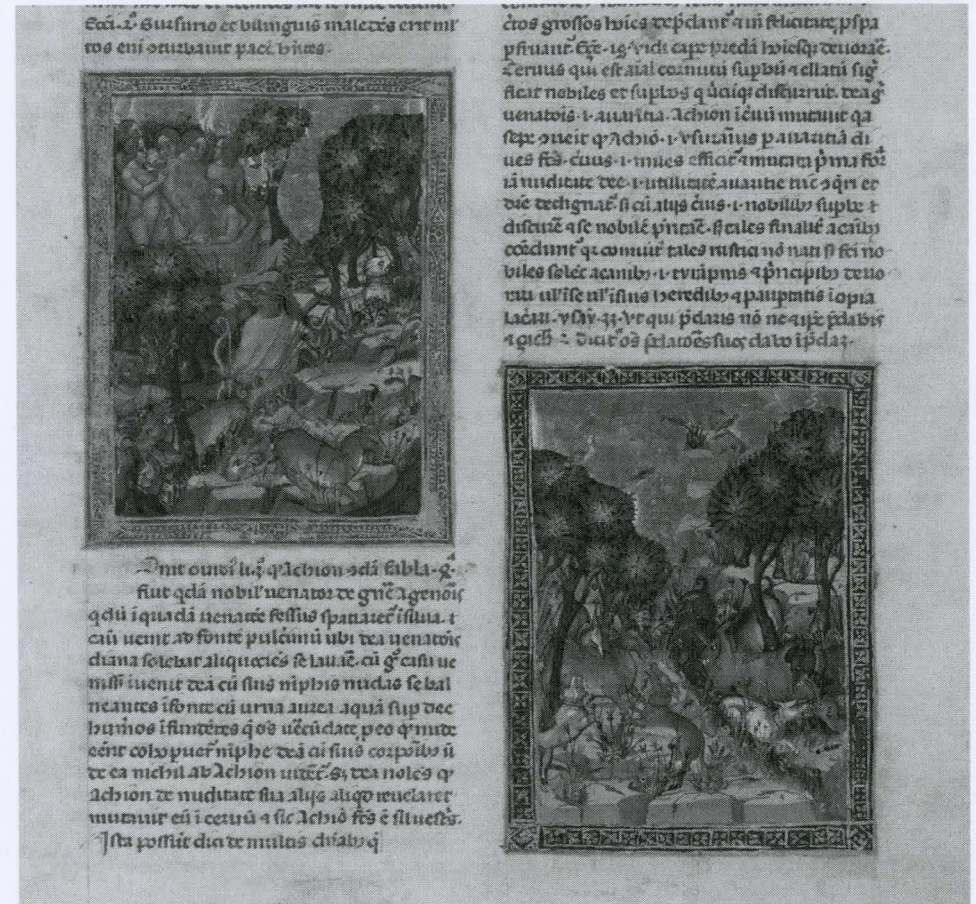


Fig. 7: Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, MS Membr. I 98, fol. 18r. Diana and Actaeon.

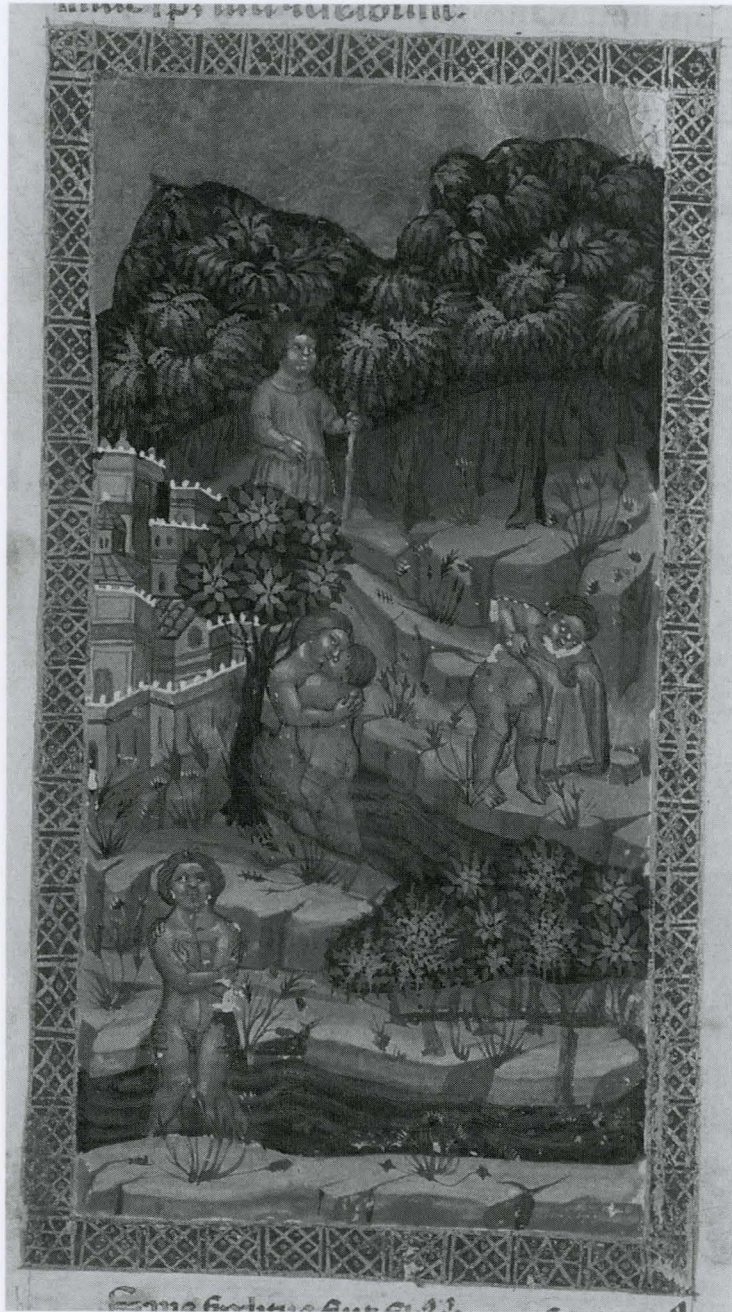


Fig. 8: Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, MS Membr. I 98, fol. 22v.
Hermaphroditus and Salamacis



Fig. 9: Florence, BNCF, MS Panc. 63, fol. 12v, Apollo and Daphne.

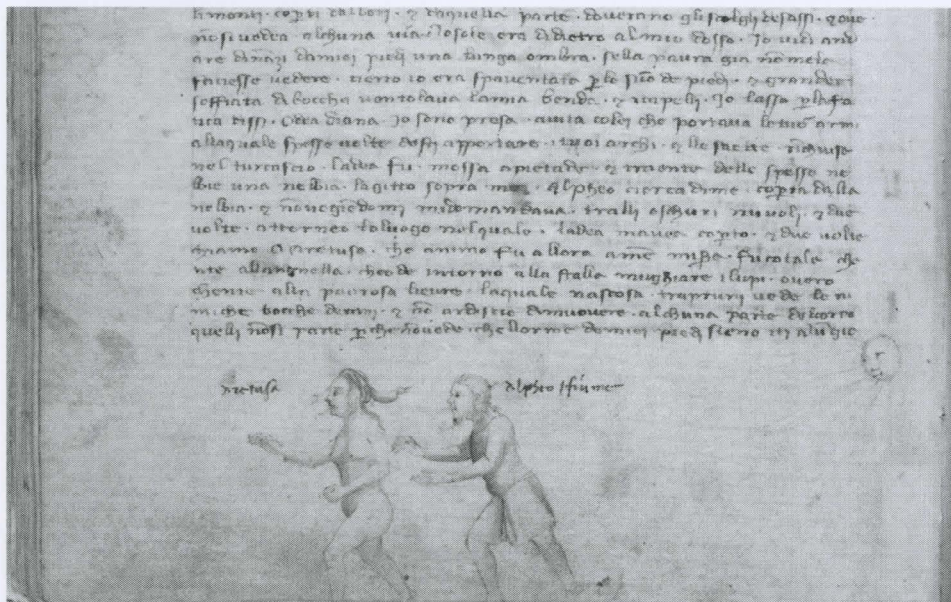


Fig. 10: Florence, BNCF, MS Panc. 63, Fol.46v. Alpheus and Arethusa.



Fig. 11: Florence, BNCF, MS Panc. 63, Fol. 19v. Jupiter and Calisto.



Fig. 12: Florence, BNCF, MS Panc. 63, Fol. 20r. Diana and Calisto.



Fig. 13: Florence, BNCF, MS Panc. 63, Fol. 26r. Diana and Actaeon.

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Fig. 14: Florence, BNCF, MS Panc. 63, Fol. 35r. Hermaphroditus and Salamacis.

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