

# NOTES ON OVID'S *EPISTULAE EX PONTO*

*Abstract:* Several passages of Ovid's *Epistulae Ex Ponto* are explained.

*Key-words:* Ovid, Textual criticism

*Resumen:* Se explican diversos pasajes de las *Epistulae Ex Ponto* de Ovidio.

*Palabras-clave:* Ovidio, crítica textual.

## I. 1. 67-74

*non igitur mirum, si mens mea tabida facta  
de nive manantis more liquescit aquae.  
estur ut occulta vitiata teredine navis,  
aequorei scopulos ut cavat unda salis,  
roditur ut scabra positum rubigine ferrum,  
conditus ut tineae carpitur ore liber,  
sic mea perpetuos curarum pectora morsus,  
fine quibus nullo conficiantur, habent.*

line 69 *teredine* : *putredine* v. l.

The reader will note that Gaertner<sup>1</sup> printed the reading *teredine* in line 69. I would like to suggest, however, that better sense is provided, in view of the preceding *tabida*, by the reading *putredine*. Ovid says that his mind has become rotten (*mens mea tabida facta*). He then compares his «rotten» mind to a *cunnius* (*navis*)<sup>2</sup>, which is eaten away (*estur*), since it has been infected (*vitiata*) by a hidden putridity (*occulto... putredine*)<sup>3</sup>.

## I. 1. 37-48

*ecquis ita est audax, ut limine cogat abire  
iactantem Pharia tinnula sistra manu?  
ante deum matrem cornu tibicen adunco  
cum canit, exiguae quis stipis aera negat?  
scimus ab imperio fieri nil tale Dianae;  
unde tamen vivat vaticinator habet.  
ipsa movent animos superiorum numina nostros,*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. F. Gaertner, *Ovid Epistulae ex Ponto*, Book 1, Oxford 2005, page 50.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s. v. *navis* B, I: «*pudenda muliebria*, Plaut. *Men.* 2, 3, 51 etc.» Lines 65-68 have been deleted by some scholars. It should be noted, however, that they make perfect sense and suit the context. There is therefore no reason to assume that they

are interpolations. Similarly I have attempted to show that Propertius does not contain any interpolations: cf. *Myrtia* 18, 2003, page 371 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Putredine*, a physiological term which refers to the metaphorical *navis*, was replaced with *teredine* by those who did not understand the metaphor.

*turpe nec est tali credulitate capi.  
 en ego pro sistro Phrygiique foramine buxi  
 gentis Iuleae nomina sancta fero.  
 vaticinor moneoque: «locum date sacra ferenti;  
 non mihi, sed magno poscitur ille deo.»*

line 41 *dianae* : *deorum* v. l.

The critics<sup>4</sup> have been puzzled by the text of line 41. I would like to point out that perfect sense can be restored to the transmitted text if we print the reading *deorum* and translate lines 41-44 as follows, putting a full stop after *tale*:

«We know that no such thing happens through your command. However, the prophet of the gods (*deorum* / ... *vaticinator*<sup>5</sup>) has something to live on. The will of the gods moves our spirits, and it is not dishonourable to be taken in by such credulity.»

Ovid stresses that he is able to survive financially, and that he is going to act as a prophet for Augustus and his family, who are of course all seen as gods<sup>6</sup>.

## I. 2. 1-12

*Maxime, qui tanti mensuram nominis imple  
 et geminas animi nobilitate genus,  
 qui nasci ut posses, quamvis cecidere trecenti,  
 non omnis Fabios abstulit una dies,  
 forsitan, haec a quo mittatur epistula, quaeras,  
 quisque loquar tecum, certior esse velis.  
 ei mihi, quid faciam? vereor, ne nomine lecto  
 durus et aversa cetera mente legas.  
 videris: audebo tibi me scripsisse fateri  
 .....  
 qui, cum me poena dignum graviore fuisse  
 confitear, possum vix graviora pati.* 7

line 10 *audebo et propriis ingemuisse malis* Bebls

At line 1 ff. Ovid states that Fabius Maximus is very grand. I would therefore like to suggest that in line 7 the words *nomine lecto* refer to Maximus' reputation. We should translate lines 7-8 as follows:

«Oh dear, what shall I do? I fear that, due to your excellent reputation (*nomine*<sup>7</sup> *lecto*<sup>8</sup>), you may read the rest of the letter with a hard and unfavourable mind».

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jan Felix Gaertner, *op. cit.*, page 115 f.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. lines 46 ff. (*gentis Iuleae* ... / *vaticinor*).

<sup>6</sup> Like Theocritus, who was an ὑποφήτης (*Idyll* 16, 29) and who celebrated the deified Ptolemies (cf. Cholmeley's commentary, page 4 and *ad* 17, 58 ff.). The reading *Dianae*, accepted by André (Budé edition) and altered into *deorum* by Madvig, was created by someone who did not understand that *deorum* refers to the deified Roman emperors, and who did not comprehend the elegant enjambement *deorum* / ... *vaticinator*. Ovid writes as the *vaticinator deorum* e. g. at I, 2, 99-100. Whoever invented the variant *Dianae* did so because he wanted to

oppose a goddess (*Diana*) to those (Isis, v. 38; Cybele, v. 39) whose priests accepted donations. In reality, the only possible opposition, as the *Gedankengang* clearly shows, is between such goddesses (Isis and Cybele) and the Roman emperors. André (*op. cit.*, page 160) overlooked the fact that the mendicants of Aricia had nothing to do with the cult of Diana.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s. v. *nomen* II, A: «Name, fame, repute, reputation.»

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Lewis and Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *lego* II, C: «Also, *lectus* ... picked out, selected; choice, excellent.»

It should also be noted that perfect sense can be restored to lines 9-10 if we print them as follows:

*videris: audebo tibi me scripsisse fateri  
audebo et propriis ingemuisse malis.*

«You shall see; I will dare to tell you that I have written a letter, and I will dare to say that I have complained due to my continuous troubles (*propriis*<sup>9</sup> ... *malis*<sup>10</sup>).»

I. 2. 61-64:

*cum video, quam sint mea fata tenacia, frangor,  
spesque levis magno victa timore cadit,  
nec tamen ulterius quicquam sperove precorve,  
quam male munito posse carere loco.*

line 64 *munito* Watt : *mutato* mss.

The reader will note that Watt printed the alteration *munito* in line 64. I would like to point out, however, that the mss reading *mutato* makes good sense. Ovid states that he only hopes to escape from «a wretchedly (*male*) abandoned (*mutato*<sup>11</sup>) place. Cf. I. 2. 71 f. where Ovid says that Augustus does not know the nature of the remote place (*ultimus* ... *locus*) which he is forced to inhabit.

I. 2. 75-80

*nec vacat, in qua sint positi regione Tomitae,  
quaerere (finitimo vix loca nota Getae),  
aut quid Sauromatae faciant, quid Iazyges acres  
cultaque Orestee Taurica terra deae, 78  
quaeque aliae gentes, ubi frigore constitit Hister,  
dura meant celeri terga per amnis equo.*

Ovid states that Augustus does not know where Tomis is. In line 78 the cult of Artemis / Diana is mentioned. I would like to suggest that the words *cultaque Orestee Taurica terra deae* mean «and the revered (*cultaque*<sup>12</sup>) Taurian land of the Orestean goddess».

Note that Ovid has employed adjectival *enallage*<sup>13</sup>. The goddess Diana was herself revered in the Taurian land.

I. 2. 87-88:

*ira viri mitis non me misisset in istam,  
si satis haec illi nota fuisset humus.*

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *proprius* II, B: «Lasting, constant, permanent, perpetual.»

<sup>10</sup> For the text of lines 9-10, cf. Gaertner, *op. cit.*, pages 142 f.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s. v. *muto* II, D: «To forsake, abandon, leave ... *mutataque sidera* ..., i. e. forsaken or abandoned by the gods, Petr. poet. 124, 264.»

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s. v. *colo* II, B, I: «Most freq. of the reverence and worship of the gods ... *Phoebe silvarumque potens Diana ... o colendi semper et culti*, Hor. C. S. 2 and 3.»

<sup>13</sup> For a similar example of adjectival *enallage* cf. my *Studies In The Text Of Propertius*, Athens 2002, page 164.



Gaertner<sup>18</sup> was puzzled by the meaning of the verb *occidet*, in line 15. I would like to suggest that Ovid has employed an obscene pun. He states that rest is necessary, and then explains that a horse (*equus*<sup>19</sup>) which is constantly engaged in races in the circus (i. e. sexual intercourse) will die. He is alluding to sexual impotence, equated with death (cf. Catullus 3, 3 *passer mortuus est*), and which is caused by sexual excesses. Cf. moreover Martial 3, 75 and L. and P. Watson's useful commentary (Cambridge 2003), *ad loc.* Similarly the noun *navis* means both «ship» and «*pudenda muliebria*»<sup>20</sup>.

I. 5. 21-22

*torquet enim Fortuna parum, nisi Lixus in Hebrum  
confluat et frondes Alpibus addat Atho.*

line 21 *Lixus* : *Nilus* Heinsius

Scholars<sup>21</sup> have been puzzled by the meaning of these lines. I would like to suggest that a reference to the river Lixus<sup>22</sup>, in Mauretania, suits the context. Ovid mentions the Thracian river Hebrus, in the north-east, and the Lixus in Mauretania, in the south-west. Similarly at *Idyll* 7, 111-112 Theocritus contrasts the Hebrus with the Nile. Ovid then compares the Alps<sup>23</sup>, in the west, with Athos<sup>24</sup>, in the east. In other words, these lines contain references to the north, south, east and west. It should be noted that Augustus made Juba II the king of Mauretania in 25 B. C. Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s. v. *Juba II*.

I. 7. 43-52:

*ipse sed hoc vidit, qui pervidet omnia, Caesar,  
stultitiam dici crimina posse mea,  
quaque ego permisi, quaque est res passa, pepercit,  
usus et est modice fulminis igne sui.  
nec vitam nec opes nec ademit posse reverti,  
si sua per vestras victa sit ira preces.  
at graviter cecidi. quid enim mirabile, si quis  
a Iove percussus non leve vulnus habet?  
ipse suas etiam vires inhiberet Achilles,  
missa gravis ictus Pelias hasta daret.* 49

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Gaertner, *op. cit.*, page 283. Ovid mentions the fact that a horse may fall (*cadat*) at *Tristia* 4, 8, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s. v. *equus* I, C, 3: «In mal. part. «For the obscene meaning of ἵππος cf. my *New Chapters In Hellenistic poetry* (Athens 1996), page 31.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *navis* B, I. A *cunnius* which is constantly engaged in sexual intercourse will become slack (*solvetur*). At *Ars Amatoria* 3, 775 Ovid refers to the different positions which are adopted in sexual intercourse. He states that a small woman should «ride» a man.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Gaertner, *op. cit.*, page 316 f.

<sup>22</sup> Heinsius may have taken, the reading *Nilus* from a manuscript. Cf. I. 2. 9 *videris a*, Heinsius and I. 4. 6 *aetati* b1, Heinsius. Heinsius used manuscripts in order to correct the text of Propertius: cf. my *Studies*, page 166. It should be noted, however, that *Nilus* is an obvious trivialization, which replaces the rarer *Lixus*.

<sup>23</sup> For the fact that the Alps were imagined to be situated in the west cf. *Orpheus* 23, 2002, page 139.

<sup>24</sup> Gaertner notes that Athos is a mountain on the «most eastern of three peninsulae of Chalkidike.» Wheeler (in his Loeb edition) and André (in his Budé edition) accept the mss reading *Lixus*.

Ovid states that Augustus has been lenient and used his thunderbolt sparingly. Nevertheless Ovid says that he has suffered a heavy blow. He adds that even if the hero Achilles had moderated his force, still he would have caused damage. Lines 49-52 should be translated as follows:

«But I suffered a heavy blow. For why is it surprising if somebody who has been hit by Jupiter suffers from a severe wound? Even if famous Achilles were to moderate (*inhiberet*) his strength, the Pelian spear, once thrown, would still cause heavy blows.» Augustus has been lenient, but nevertheless has hurt the poet.

#### I. 7. 63-66

*quod si permittis nobis suadere, quid optes,  
ut des, quam reddas, plura, precare deos.  
idque facis, quantumque licet meminisse, solebas  
officii causae pluribus esse datis.*

line 66 *causae ... datis* Owen: *officii causa pluribus esse dati* le e bl

The critics<sup>25</sup> have been puzzled by the text of line 66. I would like to suggest that perfect sense can be restored to line 66 if we print it as follows: *officii causa*<sup>26</sup> *pluribus esse dati*.

Ovid states that Messalinus used to be the «cause (*causa*) of kindness (*officii*) which had been granted (*dati*) to the majority of people».

#### I. 8. 1-10

*A tibi dilecto missam Nasone salutem  
accipe, pars animae magna, Severe, meae,  
neve roga, quid agam. si persequar omnia, flebis;  
summa, sat est, nostri si tibi nota mali:  
vivimus assiduis expertes pacis in armis  
dura pharetrato bella movente Gete.  
deque tot expulsis sum miles in exule solus:  
tuta (neque invideo) cetera turba latet.  
quoque magis nostros venia dignere libellos,  
haec in procinctu carmina facta leges:*

Ovid explains that he has to endure the warfare of the Getans. He then says that he has written some poetry which he would like Severus to read. Gaertner<sup>27</sup> translates the words *haec in procinctu carmina facta* as «these verses which I have composed in full armour<sup>28</sup>». But Ovid is not taking part in any battle: he is writing poetry whilst the locals are fighting. I would like to suggest that the words *in*<sup>29</sup> *procinctu*<sup>30</sup> mean «during a battle». In other words, Ovid states that he has written some verses during the fighting which was taking place with the Getans. Cf. *in. armis*, line 5.

<sup>25</sup> Gaertner, *op. cit.*, page 425.

<sup>26</sup> The nominative *causa* is not unmetrical. For metrical lengthening at the middle syllable of the pentameter cf. my *Studies In The Text Of Propertius*, page 150. Cf. also G. Giangrande, *R. F. Class.* 1968, pages 213-214.

<sup>27</sup> *Op. cit.*, page 81.

<sup>28</sup> «En tenue de combat» André, *op. cit.*, *ad loc.*; «on the field of battle» Wheeler, *op. cit.*, *ad loc.*

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s. v. *in* I, B: «In time, indicating its duration, in, during, in the course of.»

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *procinctus* II, B: «Esp., A battle, an engagement.»

## I. 8. 11-24

*stat vetus urbs, ripae vicina binominis Histri,  
moenibus et positu vix adeunda loci.  
Caspius Aegisos, de se si credimus ipsis,  
condidit et proprio nomine dixit opus.  
hanc ferus Odrysiis inopino Marte peremptis  
cepit et in regem sustulit arma Getes.  
ille memor magni generis, virtute quod auget,  
protinus innumero milite cinctus adest,  
nec prius abscessit, merita quam caede nocentum  
.....  
at tibi, rex aevo, detur, fortissime nostro,  
semper honorata sceptrata tenere manu,  
teque (quod et praestat - quid enim tibi plenius optem?)  
Martia cum magno Caesare Roma probet.*

line 20 *audaces animos contuderit populi* B C, *contuderat* Riese

In this passage Ovid describes how the Getans attacked the town of Aegisos, but were defeated by the local king. Perfect sense can be restored to the transmitted text if we place a full stop after *populi*, in line 20, and translate lines 19-22 as follows:

«and he (i. e. the king of Aegisos) did not depart until with deserved slaughter he had beaten down (*contuderat*) the daring spirit of the guilty. But may it be granted to you, bravest king of the people (*populi ... rex*<sup>31</sup> ... *fortissime*), always to hold in our time the sceptre with your honoured hand.»

## I. 8. 27-28

*ut careo vobis Stygias detrusus in oras,  
quattuor autumnos Pleias orta facit.*

At line 27 Ovid states that he has been banished to the shores of the Styx. I would like to suggest that there is a reference here to the fact that the entrance to Hades was near Cyzicus<sup>32</sup>, which was not far from Tomi. Ovid mentions Cyzicus at *Tristia* I. 10. 30.

At *Tristia* 4. 5. 21-22 Ovid says that he hopes to be saved from the Stygian water (*Stygia ... aqua*). At *Ex Ponto* 2. 3. 41 ff. Ovid complains that his life is like death. He asks how far his death is from the Stygian water.

## I. 8. 29-34

*nec tu credideris urbanae commoda vitae  
quaerere Nasonem (quaerit et illa tamen),  
nam modo vos animo, dulces, reminiscor, amici,*

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s. v. *rex* I, A: «*rex populi Romani*, i. e. Caesar (Cic. *Off.* 3, 21, 83).»

<sup>32</sup> Cf. G. I. F. LI, 1999, page 101. For Cyzicus, cf. also my *Studies In The Text Of Propertius*, page 112 f.

Propertius mentions cool Cyzicus together with Dindymus and the «fashioned girl of sacred Cybele» (*sacrae fabricata iuvenca Cybelae*).

*nunc mihi cum cara coniuge nata subit,  
aque domo rursus pulchrae loca vertor ad Urbis  
cunctaque mens oculis pervidet illa suis.*

Gaertner<sup>33</sup> notes that the critics have been puzzled by the text of lines 33-34. Perfect sense can, however, be restored to this passage if we understand that the words *aque domo*<sup>34</sup> mean «and from my family». Ovid states in line 33 that he thinks of his wife and daughter, and then adds that from his family (*aque domo*) his thoughts turn towards the different localities of Rome, which he still sees in his mind.

#### I. 8. 39-44

*at, puto, sic Urbis misero est erepta voluptas,  
quolibet ut saltem rure frui liceat.  
non meus amissos animus desiderat agros  
ruraque Paeligno conspicienda solo,  
nec quos piniferis positos in collibus hortos  
spectat Flaminiae Clodia iuncta viae,*

Scholars<sup>35</sup> have been puzzled by the meaning of lines 39-40. I would like to suggest that Ovid has employed the historical<sup>36</sup> present. We should translate as follows:

«But, I thought (*puto*), the delight of the city had been taken away from wretched me in such a fashion that I could at least enjoy life in the country.»

Ovid means that when he left Rome he thought that he would be able to enjoy a peaceful rural existence. Instead he has to endure life in a land which is exposed to Getan warfare: cf. I. 8. 6.

#### I. 8. 51-52

*ipse ego pendentis, liceat modo, rupe capellas,  
ipse velim baculo pascere nixus oves.*

Ovid says that he would like to act as a shepherd. The goats are described as «loitering» (*pendentis*<sup>37</sup>) on a rock. Similarly at Virgil, *Ecl.* I, 76 goats are said to «loiter» (*pendere*) far off «due to a bushy rock» (*dumosa ... de*<sup>38</sup> *rupe*).

#### I. 8. 63-72

*at tibi nascenti, quod toto pectore laetor,  
nerunt fatales fortia fila deae:*

<sup>33</sup> *Op. cit.*, page 448 f.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s. v. *domus* II, B: «A household, family, race.»

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Gaertner, *op. cit.*, page 451 ff.

<sup>36</sup> For other examples of the historical present cf. my *Studies In The Text Of Propertius*, page 118. For the historical present in Ovid cf. *Habis* 36, 2005, page 214 (note 13). At Ovid, *Met.* 15, 381 *capit* is a historical present. The female bear is said to lick her cub into the

same shape that she took when her own mother licked her into shape.

Cf. *Epist.* III, 2, 93 f. *rapiunt ... feruntur.*

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s. v. *pendeo* I, B, 3: «To hang about, loiter, tarry, linger anywhere: *nostroque in limine pendes* Verg. A. 6, 151».

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *op. cit.*, s. v. *de* C, 5: «To indicate the producing cause or reason, *on account of, because of.*»

*te modo Campus habet, densa modo porticus umbra,  
 nunc, in quo ponis tempora rara, forum;  
 Umbria nunc revocat, nec non Albana petentem* 67  
*Appia ferventi ducit in arva rota.  
 forsitan hic optes, ut iustam supprimat iram*  
*Caesar et hospitium sit tua villa meum.* 70  
*a, nimium est, quod, amice, petis: moderatius opta,  
 et voti, quaeso, contrahe vela tui.*

line 67 *petentem* : *potentem* v. l.

In line 67 Gaertner, following Wheeler and André (op. cit.), printed the reading *petentem*. Perfect sense is, however, provided by the reading *potentem*. *Potentem* underlines that Severus owns the «estate near Alba» (Wheeler *ad loc.*): cf. Lewis And Short, s. v. *potens*, B, 1. For *potens* used absolutely = «be the owner of» (metaph.) cf. e. g. Ovid, *Met.* 8, 56. The words *hic ... tua villa* indicate that Severus owns the place and demonstrate that *petentem* is a trivialization. In other words, Ovid states that Severus is taken to his estate in the *Albanus ager*.

#### I. 10. 1 -6

*Naso suo profugus mittit tibi, Flacce, salutem,  
 mittere rem si quis, qua caret ipse, potest.  
 longus enim curis vitiatum corpus amaris  
 non patitur vires languor habere suas.  
 nec dolor ullus adest, nec febris uror anhelis,  
 et peragit soliti vena tenoris iter.*

Ovid tells Flaccus that his health is not good, and that he lacks strength. Nevertheless, he has no pain and is not burnt by fevers. I would like to suggest that, in line 6, Ovid adds that he is not impotent. Thus the words *et peragit soliti vena tenoris iter* mean «and my *membrum virile* (*vena*)<sup>39</sup> follows the path of its usual course.»

*Conclusion.* In this paper I hope to have solved various textual and interpretative problems which puzzled the commentators and which have been discussed by Gaertner. The reader will also note that I have attempted to show that Ovid's *Epistulae Ex Ponto* contain, not surprisingly, several obscenities which previous critics have failed to understand. Thus at I. 1. 69 the noun *navis* means *cunnius*, at I. 4. 11 ff. the noun *equus* alludes to sexual intercourse, and at I. 10. 6 the noun *vena* refers to the «*membrum virile*».

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Lewis And Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s. v. *vena* I, 6: «= *membrum virile*, Mart. 4, 66, 12 etc.» Ovid mentions Venus and love-making at I. 10. 33-34.