

REVIEW

MAKING TIME FOR OVID:
RENAISSANCE READINGS OF THE *FASTI*

Angela Fritsen, *Antiquarian Voices. The Roman Academy and the Commentary Tradition on Ovid's Fasti*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2015. Pp. xvi + 239. Hardback, \$69.95; paperback, \$32.95. ISBN 978-0-8142-1284-4 (Hbk); 978-0-8142-5212-3 (Pbk).

This is, as the promotion declares, ‘a work of serious scholarship’. It is well written, and most attractively produced by the University Press. It will be of great interest to scholars both of Ovid, and of Humanistic scholarship in the fifteenth century. Its prime focus is the commentaries of Paolo Marsi (1482) and Antonio Costanzi (1489), against the background of the fascinating Accademia Romana founded by Pomponio Leto, but the web of the analysis is much more complicated than that.

Ovid was one of the favourite Renaissance classics, but, of course, for his *Metamorphoses*, not the much more difficult, and, as we increasingly recognize, more intriguing, *Fasti*. The author (henceforth F.) draws our attention to the new importance of the calendar in the Rome of the *princeps*, as a vital propaganda tool. And Ovid’s poem is encyclopaedic in its range: mythology, topography of the city, natural history, and astronomy, to name just a few of the specialist fields in which the commentator had to be competent. That did not diminish the anguish over the relative worth of commentator vis-à-vis author (22)! The beginning of ‘modern’ interest in Ovid’s *Fasti* is shown to be in Orleans in the twelfth century (Arnulf and William). So many well-known traits were already present in scholarship: plagiarism (15), and feuds (20–1), but with much more colourful language than now!

One cannot avoid the problem of the missing six months of the *Fasti*. Just as with Livy’s lost books, many hunted for them—and others obliged by supplying them! Ovid’s own statement in *Tristia* 2.549 could not be clearer. The most suggestive supporting evidence is the fact that he would have been deliberately holding back the fateful months of July and August (28), for which Augustus must have been panting.

Chap. 2 fills out the background to Marsi and Costanzi and other commentators, including Angelo Poliziano, recreating their professional and intellectual worlds, and bringing them vividly to life. A new and major difficulty with the *Fasti* appears: the technicalities of the calendar, which were beyond most commentators. And F. stresses other traps: even the dedication of the

poem to Germanicus—who was mostly confused with Tiberius until the publication of Tacitus, *Ann.* 1–6 in 1515!

Chap. 3 resumes the art of the commentators and their rivalries. The precariousness of university appointments, the ubiquitous problem of plagiarism, and the disruptions caused by egotism (for example Marsi, 81) and the resulting polemics are all described (*quid novi?*). The ideal conditions in Rome for intellectual work in the 1480s (87) should be noted. This is a fascinating chapter. It is followed by placing all this work in the broader context of the Accademia Romana. Even the first Vatican librarian, Bartolomeo Platina, was a member, and its classical enthusiasms were to lead its members into the gravest dangers.

Ovid's poem had been the only classical source for the *Mirabilia*, and was a major source for Biondo. F. now moves back to the 'earlier generation' and discusses Petrarch, Bracciolini, Ciriaco, Alberti, and Biondo.

The *Fasti* is a quintessential Roman text, and this, F. suggests, spurred archaeological enquiry. Only one important example is adduced: the colossal bronze statue of Hercules from the Forum Boarium c. 1474, and that seems to be all there was. More inspiring, perhaps, was the establishment of the Capitoline Museum in 1471. Epigraphy also was used by the commentators: Leto ingeniously invented one inscription from Livy (139)! And finally personal observation was called in: Marsi's hilarious test of the curative effect of the supposed Lacus Juturnae on a student (141), and Leto's proud references to his European travels (143). Sometimes all failed: as an example of the inexplicable misreading of a text, it would be hard to surpass the 'hard feather' of the swan (144)!

The last chapter begins with another example: the long and silly argument over the date of Rome's birthday, when Ovid, Pliny, and Plutarch all agreed on 21 April! F. seems to me contradictory here, calling Marsi's tricks to uphold 20 April plausible and logical (163). This chapter finally confronts the 'elephant in the room': how to reconcile a pagan text like Ovid with the commentators' own Christian world? Marsi's date of 20 April was for a Christian synchronism with the patron saints of the Accademia. F. shows also how Costanzi of Fanum's commentary had a double use, also promoting the papal vicariate of Senigallia. There were even more worlds to bridge: Marsi published not in Rome, but in Venice, rival to Rome in history and values (nobles, not brigands as founders!).

Without wishing to be mean, some problems should be noted. The Latin quotations are always given, preceded by a translation. This is often rather heavily literal, and sometimes not quite right: 'partam libertatem', for example, is not 'freedom borne' (74). Suillus (59) is Suillius. Further on names, F. generally and properly identifies in full the old scholars she so rightly respects, save J. L. Vives (65), E. H. Alton (72), P. M. Amiani (283), and she has a strange predilection for Battista (sic). On Ovid's situation in Tomis (8) she follows Holzberg (2002)—as those who have never suffered cruel exile. The major

question of the date of Ovid's death is inconclusively discussed (59, fn.). No one talks of the 'Capene gate' (129), and the Sacra Via is repeatedly called Via Sacra, although Horace is quoted (130–1). There are occasional solecisms: 'with regards [greetings] to' for 'with regard to' (123); and Sigismondo Maltesta was 'canonized' to Hell (176)—what a way to go! There are strange abbreviations: Varro, DLL (sic). The press has made the bad decision to print Arabic I as Roman I, so II creates real problems, e.g. Livy 29.II.3 (139)! Dates are also old-fashioned, with the numeral of the day after the month.

The complexity of the analysis has been noted. One often has, however, a sense of *déjà lu*. Themes tend to reappear, such as the importance of the calendar in Augustan Rome (3–5, 64), and many biographical details of Marsi and Costanzi. Decisions have always to be made where any topic is to be located.

It is always a bad idea to divide a bibliography into sections. The so-called Primary Sources are highly lacunose. Not even Costanzi or Marsi are there! Nor are Alberti, Biondo, Bracciolini, Petrarch, or Rucellai; also missing is Merula (29), Guarino's *dissertatio* (66), and Valla's *Elegantiae* (68). And Bembo's *de culice* appears only in a footnote (101).

When all is said and done, however, this reviewer would like to stress the great enjoyment derived from this rich text by a dedicated expert in the difficult field of fifteenth-century studies.

University of Melbourne

RONALD T. RIDLEY
r.ridley@unimelb.edu.au