

AMERICAN
JOURNAL OF PHILOLOGY

VOL. XLVI, 1

WHOLE No. 181

TOPICS FROM THE LIFE OF OVID.

Biographies of Ovid began to appear in the Middle Ages and became more and more numerous during and after the Renaissance until they culminated in the very careful and erudite *Vita* of ninety quarto pages by John Masson early in the eighteenth century. Masson's work, together with a number of the earlier efforts, which are always incomplete and often absurd, may be found in the Appendix of Burmann's edition, Amsterdam, 1727, a perusal of which will richly reward any scholar who wishes to interest his students in Ovid.

Among Roman poets Ovid is almost the only one of whom something approximating a full and reliable biography can be written, and yet very few modern editors have availed themselves of the opportunity. The accounts of Ovid's life contained in our modern editions are almost always perfunctory, incomplete, and inaccurate.¹ Masson's work is apparently no longer read.

The ancient evidence which must be used to reconstruct the life of Ovid consists chiefly of statements by the poet himself. There are, however, important remarks in other Latin writers, notably Seneca the Elder, and concerning the poet's name and racial affinities some help is derived from inscriptions. Practically all of the literary evidence was well known in the fifteenth century, and Masson prints and discusses almost every scrap of

¹ The best biography in English may be found in S. G. Owen's edition of *Tristia* I, Oxford, 1902, cf. the same scholar's article in the *Encycl. Britannica*, and, on the causes of Ovid's exile, his recent edition of *Tristia* II, Oxford, 1924. Mr. Owen's work is carefully based throughout upon the ancient material. Many of the editors who do not supply a good biographical sketch make partial amends by printing and annotating the *Autobiog.*, Tr. iv. 10.

it. It is not my purpose to thresh over again all of this old straw, but in a subject of this kind there are always opportunities for new interpretations, and long familiarity with the poems from exile, which contain a very large part of the evidence, has convinced me that here and there even the best of our handbooks can be corrected and supplemented. On some points the neglected views of early scholars can now be better supported and brought back into honor, on others new light can be thrown by considering factors hitherto unobserved, on still others I venture merely to summarize, for reasons of general interest, parts of the ancient evidence. In a few cases the results of recent philological work on other poets may be made to contribute something to the biography of Ovid.

BIRTHPLACE, NAME, RACE.

In the opening lines of his Autobiography Ovid tells us that he was born at Sulmo and, in a genuinely Ovidian periphrasis, that the date was March 20th, 43 B. C. He often mentions his native place, but this reference, Sulmo mihi patria est (Tr. iv. 10, 3), is of special interest because the letters S. M. P. E. have become a sort of municipal device for modern Sulmona, where they occur on public documents, on the façades of monuments, and on the book which is held in the hands of the so-called statue of the poet in the court of the Collegio Ovidio. The Italians delight in honoring their great dead and the poet's name lives not only in the Collegio Ovidio, the chief school of the town, but also in the Corso Ovidio, its main street. A few miles from the town on the steep flank of a mountain lie some Roman supporting walls which are called the Villa Ovidio. Not far away is the Fonte d'Amore, with which in the song and folklore of the region Ovid's name is connected. In the Middle Ages he was a great magician.²

In May, 1922, when the snow still clung to the higher slopes, it was my good fortune to visit the region, and a beautiful region it is. Probably no lovelier vale exists in the world. As one looks down upon it from the heights traversed by the railway,

² On this paragraph cf. M. Besnier in the *Mélanges Boissier* (1903), pp. 57-63.

earlier. Tibullus was pretty certainly in Rome at the time of Messalla's triumph, in September, 27 B. C., and the ode may very well be assigned to the years immediately following when Tibullus was engaged upon the elegies of his second book, which he left incomplete and did not himself publish. In this case the ode bears witness to a fit of melancholy some years before that illness of Tibullus which is implied by the epistle.

The foregoing comparative study has thrown new light, as I believe, upon the lives of the two leading poets of Messalla's circle from about 27 to 19 B. C. It is impossible, of course, to determine the exact sequence or the exact chronological limits of details to which we have such incomplete references, but it may be hoped that the conclusions arrived at are not lacking in probability.

OVID'S WIVES AND STEPDAUGHTER.

Ovid was married three times, cf. Tr. IV. 10, 69-74. The first wife was given to him, probably at his father's command, when he was hardly more than a boy (*paene . . . puero*) and he characterizes her as *nec digna nec utilis*. The union was soon broken. He praises his second wife rather faintly as *sine crimine*, but this union also did not endure. His words leave the manner of his separation from these wives quite uncertain; he mentions neither death nor divorce. Nothing more is known of them except that one came from Falerii (Am. iii, 13, 1) and one must have been the mother of Ovid's daughter—probably the second wife, for, as has been conjectured,³⁹ Ovid would hardly have wounded his daughter's feelings by calling her mother, in his published work, *nec digna nec utilis*.

For his third wife Ovid seems to have had a real affection. She is frequently addressed in the poems from exile, almost always in very affectionate terms. Very rarely there is a note of peevishness arising from the poet's despairing feeling that she was not doing her utmost to secure a mitigation of the terms of his exile. There is no reason to think, however, that she did not do her best.

There is some evidence, though it is by no means conclusive, by which to approximate the date of Ovid's third marriage. The fact that his third wife had been married before and had a

³⁹ Cf. Owen, Ed. Trist. I, p. xviii, citing Constantius Fanensis.

daughter by this marriage is of little service in the effort to infer her age at the time of her marriage to Ovid, since Roman girls were often brides when very young. She might have been still very young when she came to Ovid. There is, however, some reason to think that she was past the first bloom of youth. In *Pont.* I. 4, 47 ff. Ovid speaks of her as *iuvenis* at the time when he left Rome, adding that she may have aged, as he has, because of his misfortunes; that her hair, like his, may have turned gray. This letter was written 12 or 13 A. D. and Ovid had left Rome 8 A. D. If there is any reality beneath Ovid's words, if he is considering the possibility a real one that her hair may have become gray in four or five years, then we should probably picture her as a lady between thirty and forty at the time of Ovid's writing, and he may have married her twenty years earlier (say) 8 B. C. This is, of course highly conjectural, but we may reach approximately the same result by other evidence.

This wife's daughter (Ovid's stepdaughter) was married to Suillius (*P.* iv. 8, 11-12)—not later, therefore, than 16-17 A. D. Now if this step-daughter is, as I am convinced, the same as the *Perilla* to whom *Tr.* iii. 7 is addressed, she was old enough to write poetry which Ovid thought worth criticizing before the date of his exile, that is, she may have been fifteen or sixteen in 8 A. D. If this is true, her mother was, at the same date, thirty or more, so that Ovid's allusion c. 12-13 A. D. to her gray hair, some five years later, becomes quite intelligible. It becomes fairly probable, therefore, that Ovid's third marriage can hardly have taken place later than c. 9-8 B. C.

There are two common misstatements current about Ovid's third wife: that her name was *Fabia*, and that she was the mother of Ovid's daughter. The second statement has already been corrected by implication, and there is no evidence to support it. The evidence against it is negative but is very strong: in the numerous passages addressed to his third wife Ovid never alludes to 'our' daughter. He alludes thrice to his own daughter (*Tr.* IV. 10, 75-76, I. 3, 19-20, *F.* vi, 219 ff.). From these passages we learn that she was married twice in her early youth, had a child by each husband, and was absent in *Libya* at the time of Ovid's parting from his wife.

The passage from which the inference has been made that

Ovid's third wife was a Fabia is P. I, 2, 136, where, addressing Paullus Fabius Maximus, Ovid says,

ille ego de vestra cui data nupta domo est.

His wife, then, who is proved by the following lines to have been acquainted with Marcia, Fabius' wife, and Atia Minor, Augustus' aunt, was 'from the house' of the Fabii. This does not prove that her name was Fabia, but merely that she was connected with or dependent on the Fabii.⁴⁰

At any rate she was a lady of good social position, and both she and Ovid considered it wise that she should not share his exile, but should remain in Rome to work for his recall. They hoped that through Marcia and Atia she could influence Livia to appeal to Augustus.

Allusion has just been made to the probable identity of Ovid's stepdaughter, the daughter of his third wife, with Perilla, the young poetess to whom Tr. iii. 7 is addressed. Great confusion still prevails, in editions of Ovid, concerning Perilla. All the editors see that she wrote poetry and many of them are content with that. A few warn the reader correctly that she was not Ovid's daughter, but this warning has sometimes fallen on deaf ears. None appear to be aware of the reasons for identifying her with Ovid's stepdaughter—indeed, they forget that he had a stepdaughter. It seems worth while, therefore, to bring back into notice the convincing but apparently forgotten disquisition⁴¹ of one of the Renaissance scholars, Constantius Fanensis, who died in 1490.

Constantius argued in brief that Ovid's words to Perilla (Tr. iii. 7, 18) *utque pater natae duxque comesque fui*, shows that she was not his daughter (some editors have been keen enough to see this!); that his (third) wife had a daughter of her own (Tr. V. 5, 19), and that Ovid would there say *nostra*, not *sua*, if the girl had been the daughter of both; and lastly that his step-

⁴⁰ Masson (p. 49) cites J. Lipsius' note on Tac. Ann. I. 2. Lipsius doubted whether she was related to Fabius or to Marcia; cf. also Némethy, Comment. ad Tristia, 1913, Excursus I. P. ii, 10, 10, *mea . . . coniunx non aliena tibi*, proves that she was related to Pompeius Macer with whom Ovid traveled in Asia and Sicily—probably through Macer's mother since his father or grandfather was Theophanes of Mytilene, a Greek; cf. Schanz, Röm. Litt., viii, ii, I, pp. 362-363.

⁴¹ Printed in Burmann's Appendix, pp. 5-7.

daughter married Suillius P. IV. 8, 11-12. These last lines are convincing, so far as concerns the point that Ovid had a step-daughter:

nam tibi quae coniunx, eadem mihi filia paene est,
et quae te generum, me vocat illa virum.⁴²

The only conclusion that can be drawn from these passages, says Constantius, is that **Perilla, Ovid's stepdaughter—the daughter of his third wife**—married Suillius.

In support of this conclusion we may add that, apart from members of the ruling family, Perilla is the only person at Rome whom Ovid addresses by name in the *Tristia*, since, as is well known, he did not wish anybody to incur possible danger by such open connection with an exile. He knew, however, that there was no danger to his wife and family. He does not name his wife, but the manner in which he addresses her leaves not the slightest doubt as to her identity.⁴³ **It is much more probable, therefore, that Perilla was a member of Ovid's family than that she was merely a young friend whose poetic gift he had fostered.** Everybody knew who she was just as everybody knew who his wife was, and so he could name her, whether Perilla is her real name or a pseudonym which he had been in the habit of applying to her. Sometime in the interval of about six years between the composition of Tr. iii. 7 and P. iv. 8 she married that accomplished but shifty politician, Suillius, so that in addressing him Ovid refers to the young wife as her who is 'almost my daughter' (P. iv. 8, 11).⁴⁴

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⁴² Cf. v. 90, pro socero paene . . . tuo.

⁴³ Uxor, coniunx, carissima, etc. His failure to name her has been attributed to metrical reasons. It seems more probable that he found the terms uxor, etc., more effective.

⁴⁴ The phrase non patrio carmina more canis (Tr. iii. 7, 12) has been interpreted 'not in native fashion,' i. e. Greek verses, or 'not in your father's fashion,' i. e. non-erotic verses. The word *patrius* occurs commonly in Ovid in both senses: 'native' and 'father's'; cf. Burmann's *Index*. But since Ovid adds at once, in explanation of this line, nam tibi cum fatis *mores natura pudicos* . . . dedit, and since he urges Perilla not to fear his own punishment provided her verse does not teach love (vv. 27-30), he seems clearly, in vv. 11-12, to be expressing the hope that she is continuing her poetic efforts, but not in his own erotic manner.