

Ovid, *Epistulae ex Ponto* 3.8.6

Ovid opens his letter to Maximus with something very like a priamel (3.8.1-8):¹

*Quae tibi, quaerebam, memorem testantia curam
 dona Tomitanus mittere posset ager.
 dignus es argento, fuluo quoque dignior auro,
 sed te, cum donas, ista iuuare solent.
 nec tamen haec loca sunt ullo pretiosa metallo: 5
 hostis ab agricola uix sinit illa fodi.
 purpura saepe tuos fulgens praetexit amictus,
 sed non Sarmatico tingitur illa mari.
 6 illa **B C le bl** ista **e** ulla **lc**
 8 illa **X** ista **kb** ulla **va***

The third couplet is problematical in several ways. First, it certainly looks as if we want some word meaning «moreover» or «besides» rather than *tamen*. Second, even if that could be fixed, the lines would follow awkwardly on 3-4, since it seems tactless for Ovid to plead that he is unable to send gifts which Maximus would not wish to receive in any case.² Consequently, the couplet is likely to be interpolated. On the other hand, editors see no problem, and I will proceed (in outlining my own solution to a third problem) on the assumption that the couplet may be Ovidian, despite the methodological difficulties involved in offering to emend a passage that might be better deleted.

Whatever the other problems in lines 5-6, it seems to me that *illa* in 6 presents us with a quite separate difficulty. The word can be taken three different ways, none of them entirely satisfactory. First, it is possible that *illa* refers back to *metallo* in the previous line and denotes the mines which are not dug in the area around Tomis: in this case

¹ Text and apparatus are taken from J. A. RICHMOND's Teubner edition (Leipzig, 1990), omitting variants not pertinent to the question under discussion. In RICHMOND's notation, **X** is the consensus of the principal manuscripts, which are, in approximate order of value, first **A** (not available for this passage), next **B** and **C**, then **le**, **e**, and **bl**, then all the rest. Whether the addressee is Fabius Maximus (RICHMOND) or Cotta Maximus (R. SYME, *History in Ovid*, Oxford, 1978, 127-28) and whether the letter is as «elegant and negative» as the latter thinks, are interesting questions, but the answers are irrelevant to my argument.

² I owe both of these arguments to an anonymous referee for *Illinois Classical Studies*, whose objections to an earlier and worse version of this paper would certainly have caused me to give it up for lost, except that the journal's other referee found nothing amiss in the lines. Since both problems involve the con-

metallum of course means “mine” (*OLD* s.v. *metallum* 1.a) and *fodere* either «dig over, dig (land or sim., usu. in order to till it); to work (mines)» (*OLD* s.v. *fodio* 2.a, where this passage is cited) or «make by digging, dig (trenches), sink (wells), etc.» (*OLD* 3.a), which would be equally appropriate. Second, *illa* may again refer back to *metallo*, but denote the gold and silver which are not found in the nonexistent mines: in this case *metallum* means «metal» (*OLD* 2) and *fodere* «dig up, unearth» (*OLD* 4.a). Since both meanings of both words are Ovidian, it would be very difficult to decide between the two.³ Fortunately, it is also unnecessary, since neither is satisfactory. The use of *uix* rather than *non* shows that the construction is an *a fortiori*, and it is not farmers but miners who would be expected to find buried metals.⁴ In order to give point to *agricola* and *uix*, *illa* in line 6 (or the word which *illa* has replaced) should refer neither to mines nor to metals but to the croplands around Tomis. As D. Crispinus comments in the Delphin edition (Leiden, 1689): «*Fodi] Coli, Arari; ut multò minùs metalla, si qua essent, erui sinerent*».⁵ Ovid tells us elsewhere that farming is difficult in the environs of Tomis because of barbarian raids. An amusingly implausible example is *Tr.* 5.10.23-26:

*est igitur rarus, rus qui colere audeat, isque
hac arat infelix, hac tenet arma manu.
sub galea pastor iunctis pice cantat auenis, 25
proque lupo pauidae bella uerentur oues.*

It seems to me that the *a fortiori* interpretation is the correct one: the marauding Getae hardly allow the farmers of Tomis to plow their fields or dig for turnips, still less would they allow miners, if there were any, to work mine-shafts.

nection of the couplet to its context rather than the meaning of the couplet itself, it is conceivable that the lines are misplaced or that there is a lacuna between 4 and 5.

³ *Metallum* certainly means «mine» in *Met.* 15.701 (*Temeses . . . metalla* in an itinerary), «metal» in *Fasti* 4.785 (*omnia purgat edax ignis uitiumque metallis / excoquit*), while *fodere* means «dig up, unearth» (*OLD* 4.a) in *Fasti* 3.456 (*cum leuis Aonias ungula [sc. Pegasi] fodit aquas*), «dig over» (*OLD* 2.a) in *Met.* 11.33 (*dura lacertosi fodiebant arua coloni*). If it were necessary to decide between the two interpretations, the second probably fits better with the specific mention of gold and silver in line 3.

⁴ The second point is not absolutely compelling: it might be possible to argue that the primitive Tomitan economy had not progressed as far as the division of labor. But the first point stands: there is no reason to prefer *uix* to *non*, unless this is an *a fortiori*.

⁵ Although they are not as explicit as I would like, translators seem to support this third interpretation. J. ANDRÉ (Budé, 1977): «Pourtant ces lieux ne sont pas riches en métaux précieux: à peine l'ennemi laisse-t-il le paysan les labourer». A. L. WHEELER (Loeb, 1924): «Nor are these lands enriched by any

However, although this last interpretation seems inevitable, I do not think that it can be gotten out of our text.⁶ Besides the fact that *illa* is much too vague, not to mention ambiguous, as outlined above, I do not see how the environs of Tomis can be *haec loca* in one line and *illa* in the next, particularly when the following couplet uses *illa* (singular) to refer to something not found in Tomis. Consequently, although Crispinus' interpretation is, in my opinion, correct, his text, which is our text, must be emended. I suggest that *illa* in line 6 is an intrusion from line 8,⁷ and should be emended to a word meaning either arable land or some species of root-vegetable, depending on precisely how we take *fodi*. With the same word in the same *sedes* two lines below, palaeographical resemblance is not necessarily the primary consideration. None of the Latin words for particular root-vegetables seems to fit the space available, and in any case the specification of radishes or rutabagas would be more characteristic of a satirist. I suggest then that what Ovid (or perhaps pseudo-Ovid) wrote was:

*hostis ab agricola uix sinit arua fodi.*⁸

mine: scarce does the enemy allow the farmer to dig there». G. P. GOOLD (Loeb, 1988) does not revise at this point.

⁶ Hence, no doubt, the popularity of the first two interpretations. We might say that the first two are what the line must mean, if it is sound, the third what it ought to mean, though it cannot, unless emended.

⁷ This is most likely a simple case of anticipation and a good example of a vertically propagated corruption. However, the scribe may also have been misled by a spurious parallelism: if he thought that the word replaced by *illa* referred to the metals that are not found in Tomis, he may also have thought that *illa* would be the appropriate word to refer to them, as in line 8. Similarly, *lc*'s *ulla* may be an attempt to make the sentence into more of an *a fortiori*, or it may just be an unconscious reminiscence of *ullo* in the previous line. In any case, *ulla* seems excessively generalized, and particularly awkward in such proximity to *ullo*.

⁸ Nouns that are trochaic and begin and end with vowels in the accusative are not all that common. *Arua* are not just land but crop-land: Ovid uses the phrase *fodere arua* in *Met.* 11.33, the last of the passages quoted in note 3 above.