

Working Out Minerva: Narrative Formulation of Religious Divinity in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Scholarship on the Arachne narrative in book 6 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* focuses on the meta-poetic or meta-political implications of the two tapestries. Barbara Pavlock (2009), for example, suggests that one can identify Ovid's poetic persona within Arachne's weavings. Ellen Oliensis (2004) suggests that the competition between Arachne and Minerva represents a contest between Ovid and the Augustan regime. This paper will examine the link between Minerva's religious affiliation to weaving and crafting, and Ovid's narrative structure of the *Metamorphoses*. For this presentation, I will argue that the organization of Minerva's tapestry reflects the narrative organization of other stories in the *Metamorphoses* where Minerva's divinity is mentioned.

Ovid was well aware of Minerva's association with weaving and crafts—in the *Fasti* he refers to “the goddess of a thousand crafts” (3.833), a loose translation of the title of *Athena Ergane* who received cult worship from craftsmen and weavers alike at a shrine located on the Athenian acropolis (cf. Mikalson 2005). I will argue that Ovid's *ekphrasis* of Minerva's tapestry in *Metamorphoses* reflects her divine status as the goddess of crafting. In contrast to Arachne's tapestry, Ovid frames Minerva's work in a pattern which William Anderson (1972: 162) calls a “perfectly centered, balanced, and framed” formulation. Ovid begins the *ekphrasis* with the description of the tapestry's centerpiece. The *ekphrasis* starts with the twelve Olympians being present during the *certamen* between Minerva and Neptune (6.72-72). The description then pans down from the heavens to the future site of the *Erechtheum* where the two gods compete for the patronage of Athens (6.76-81). The description of the centerpieces ends with an allusion to the temple of *Athene Nike* (6.82). The narrative structure of Ovid's *ekphrasis* alludes to both

Minerva's association with weaving and the religious importance of the *certamen* in the centerpiece.

After indicating how Minerva's relation to crafting shapes the narrative structure of her tapestry, I will identify other examples where religious invocation of Minerva in the *Metamorphoses* reflects the narrative construction of Ovid's poem. When Perseus sacrifices to Minerva, Jupiter, and Mercury, the word order of the gods' names in the poem iconically reflects their relative position of the altar described in book 4; Mercury to the left, Jupiter in the middle, and Minerva to the right (4.753-755). Another example of a sacrificial context occurs in book 8, where an oil libation is given to Minerva (8.275). While there is no direct mention of weaving here, the line describing the libation offers an interlacing metrical formulation that mimics the process of weaving and therefore alludes to Minerva's affinity for the art. These examples demonstrate how Ovid incorporates the crafting aspect of Minerva's divinity into his usage of stylistic devices in the *Metamorphoses*. My paper illuminates the link between representations of Minerva and the stylistic devices implemented by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*. With the link as a basis, I offer a different perspective of the representation of Minerva. She serves not just as a symbol of Augustus's abuse of power in her treatment of Arachne, as discussed by Oliensis and Anderson at length, but also as a divinity governing both the weaving of tapestry and the "weaving" of poetic construction in the *Metamorphoses*.

Work Cited

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